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opening extract from

An Enemy of the People

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AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

[*En Folkefiende*]

PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

(1882)

CHARACTERS

DR. THOMAS STOCKMANN, doctor at the Baths

MRS. KATHERINE STOCKMANN, his wife

PETRA, their daughter, a teacher

EJLIF
MORTEN } their sons, 13 and 10 years old

PETER STOCKMANN, the doctor's elder brother, Mayor, Chief of Police, Chairman of the Board of the Baths, &c.

MORTEN KIIL, owner of a tannery, Mrs. Stockmann's foster-father

HOVSTAD, editor of the *People's Herald*

BILLING, a journalist

CAPTAIN HORSTER

ASLAKSEN, a printer

Attending a public meeting are: men of all classes, some women and a group of schoolboys

The action takes place in a coastal town in Southern Norway

ACT ONE

Evening. DR. STOCKMANN'S *living-room, simply but tastefully furnished. In the side-wall, right, are two doors, one of which upstage leads to the hall, and the other to the doctor's study. On the opposite wall and directly facing the hall door, another door leads to the rest of the house. In the middle of this wall stands a stove; downstage of it is a sofa; above it hangs a mirror and in front of it is an oval table covered with a cloth. On the table, a shaded lamp is burning. In the back wall, the door to the dining-room stands open. Within, the table is laid for supper; a lighted lamp stands on the table.*

BILLING, *a napkin tucked under his chin, is seated within at the supper table.* MRS. STOCKMANN *stands by the table and hands him a serving dish on which is a large joint of beef. The other places at table are empty, and the table is in disarray as though after a meal.*

MRS. STOCKMANN. Well, if you will arrive an hour late, Mr. Billing, you'll have to put up with everything being cold.

BILLING [*eating*]. It's absolutely delicious, really excellent.

MRS. STOCKMANN. You know how strict my husband is about keeping punctually to his mealtimes. . . .

BILLING. It doesn't matter to me in the least. In fact I almost believe it tastes better, sitting down like this to it, alone and undisturbed.

MRS. STOCKMANN. Ah well, as long as you enjoy it. . . . [*Turns to the hall door and listens.*] That's probably Hovstad.

BILLING. Quite likely.

[PETER STOCKMANN, *the Mayor, enters; he is wearing an overcoat and his mayor's hat, and he carries a stick.*]

MAYOR. A very good evening to you, Katherine.

MRS. STOCKMANN [*coming into the living-room*]. Oh. It's you! Good evening. How nice of you to drop in like this.

MAYOR. I happened to be passing, so . . . [*With a glance towards the dining-room.*] Oh, but it seems you have company.

MRS. STOCKMANN [*rather embarrassed*]. No, not really. He just happened to drop in. [*Quickly.*] Wouldn't you like to join him and let me get you something to eat?

MAYOR. Who, me? No thank you. Heavens above! A cooked meal in the evening! Not with my digestion.

MRS. STOCKMANN. Oh, couldn't you just for once. . . ?

MAYOR. Bless you, no. I stick to my tea and bread and butter. It's better for one's health in the long run . . . as well as being more economical.

MRS. STOCKMANN [*smiles*]. Now you mustn't get the idea that Thomas and I are terribly extravagant, either.

MAYOR. Not *you*, Katherine. I'd never think that of you. [*Points to the doctor's study.*] Isn't he at home?

MRS. STOCKMANN. No, he's gone for a little walk after his supper . . . with the boys.

MAYOR. I wonder if that really does one any good? [*Listens.*] That's him now.

MRS. STOCKMANN. No, I don't think it's him. [*There is a knock on the door.*] Come in!

[HOVSTAD *comes in from the hall.*]

MRS. STOCKMANN. Oh, it's Mr. Hovstad.

HOVSTAD. Yes, you must excuse me, but I got held up at the printer's. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR [*bowing rather stiffly*]. Good evening! A business call, no doubt?

HOVSTAD. Partly. It's in connection with something for the paper.

MAYOR. That I can imagine. From all accounts, my brother is a prolific contributor to the *People's Herald.*

HOVSTAD. Yes, whenever he wants to get any particular home-truths off his chest, he writes a piece for the *Herald.*

MRS. STOCKMANN [*to* HOVSTAD]. But won't you . . . ? [*She points to the dining-room.*]

MAYOR. Indeed, and why not? Who am I to blame him if he decides to write for the class of reader he can expect the greatest response from! And in any case, there's no reason for me to feel any personal animosity towards your paper, Mr. Hovstad.

HOVSTAD. No, I don't think there is.

MAYOR. All in all, there is an admirable spirit of tolerance in our little town . . . a sense of civic pride. That's what comes of having a great communal undertaking to unite us . . . an undertaking which concerns all right-thinking citizens in equal measure. . . .

HOVSTAD. The Baths, you mean.

MAYOR. Exactly. We have our splendid new Baths. Mark my words! The prosperity of the town will come to depend more and more on the Baths, Mr. Hovstad. No doubt about it!

MRS. STOCKMANN. Thomas says the same.

MAYOR. Just look at the quite extraordinary way things have improved, even in the last year or two. People have more money! There's more life, more things going on. Land and property are going up in value every day.

HOVSTAD. And unemployment falling.

MAYOR. Yes, that too. The burden of the poor-rate on the propertied classes has, I am happy to say, been considerably reduced—and it will be even less if only we have a really good summer this year . . . with plenty of visitors, and lots of convalescents to help to give the place a reputation.

HOVSTAD. And things are looking pretty promising in that way, they tell me.

MAYOR. The prospects are very encouraging. Every day we receive more inquiries about accommodation and things like that.

HOVSTAD. Well then, I suppose the doctor's article will just come in nicely.

MAYOR. Has he been writing something else?

HOVSTAD. This is something he wrote during the winter, giving an account of the Baths and recommending the place generally as a very healthy spot. But I didn't use the article at the time.

MAYOR. Aha! I expect there was a snag in it somewhere.

HOVSTAD. No, it wasn't that. But I thought it might be better to hold it over till the spring; now's the time when people start thinking about their summer holidays. . . .

MAYOR. Very sensible, very sensible indeed, Mr. Hovstad.

MRS. STOCKMANN. Yes, Thomas is quite indefatigable if it's anything to do with the Baths.

MAYOR. Well, as he's one of its officials it's only natural.

HOVSTAD. Besides, he was the one who started the whole thing.

MAYOR. *He* was! Indeed! Yes, this isn't the first time I've heard of people getting that idea. But I rather imagined *I* too had had a modest part in this enterprise.

MRS. STOCKMANN. Yes, that's what Thomas is always saying.

HOVSTAD. Of course, who would want to deny that, Mr. Mayor. It was you who got things moving, got it going as a practical concern, we all know that, of course. All I meant was that the idea came first from Dr. Stockmann.

MAYOR. Yes, my brother's always had plenty of ideas—more's the pity. But when it's a matter of getting things done, you have to look round for a different type of man, Mr. Hovstad. I should at least have thought that the members of *this* household would . . .

MRS. STOCKMANN. My dear Peter . . .

HOVSTAD. But Mr. Mayor, how can you . . . ?

MRS. STOCKMANN. You go and get yourself something to eat, Mr. Hovstad. My husband is sure to be back by the time you're finished.

HOVSTAD. Thanks. Perhaps just a bite.

[*He goes into the dining-room.*]

MAYOR [*lowering his voice*]. Funny, these people from peasant stock! They never have any tact.

MRS. STOCKMANN. But there's no point in upsetting yourself about it! Can't you and Thomas share the credit like brothers!

MAYOR. Yes, one would have thought so. But apparently it isn't everybody who is content to share.

MRS. STOCKMANN. Oh, nonsense. You and Thomas get on perfectly well together on this point. [*Listens.*] That's him now, I think.

[*She goes over and opens the door into the hall.*]

DR. STOCKMANN [*laughing and talking outside*]. Here we are, another visitor for you, Katherine. Isn't this fun, eh! Come in, Captain Horster. Hang your coat on that peg there. You don't bother with an overcoat, eh? You know, Katherine, I ran into him on the street. . . . Had a terrible job persuading him to come along.

[CAPTAIN HORSTER *enters and bows to* MRS. STOCKMANN.]

DR. STOCKMANN [*in the doorway*]. In you go, lads. They are absolutely ravenous again, my dear. Come along, Captain Horster, what do you say to a bit of roast beef. . . ?

[*He urges* HORSTER *into the dining-room;* EJLIF *and* MORTEN *go in also.*]

MRS. STOCKMANN. But Thomas, don't you see . . . ?

DR. STOCKMANN [*turns in the doorway*]. Oh, it's you, Peter. [*Walks across and shakes hands.*] Well, this is very pleasant.

MAYOR. Unfortunately I can only stay a minute or two. . . .

DR. STOCKMANN. Rubbish! There'll be some hot toddy coming up soon. You haven't forgotten the toddy, Katherine, have you?

MRS. STOCKMANN. Of course not! I've got the kettle on.

[*She goes into the dining-room.*]

MAYOR. Toddy as well!

DR. STOCKMANN. Yes, sit yourself down and we'll make an evening of it.

MAYOR. Thanks, but I don't care for drinking parties.

DR. STOCKMANN. This isn't a drinking party.

MAYOR. It seems to me . . . [*He looks into the dining-room.*] It's incredible the amount of food they manage to put away.

DR. STOCKMANN [*rubbing his hands*]. Yes, isn't it grand to see young people eating well? Such an appetite they've got! That's as it ought to be. They need food . . . need to build up their strength. They'll be the ones to stir things up a bit in the coming years, Peter.

MAYOR. And what, if I may ask, is it that requires 'stirring up', as you put it?

DR. STOCKMANN. Ah, you'll have to ask the younger generation about that—when the time comes. We just can't see it, of course. Stands to reason! A couple of old fogies like you and me . . . !

MAYOR. Well, really! That's a most extraordinary description. . . .

DR. STOCKMANN. Oh, you mustn't take me too seriously, Peter. Thing is, I feel so full of the joy of everything, you see. I can't tell you how happy I feel, surrounded by all this growing, vigorous life. What a glorious age this is to live in! It's as if a whole new world were springing up all around.

MAYOR. Do you really think so?

DR. STOCKMANN. Well, you can't see it as clearly as I can, of course. All your life you've lived amongst this kind of thing, and it doesn't make the same sharp impression on you. But think of me, living all those years in the North, cut off from everything, hardly ever seeing a new face, never the chance of any decent conversation . . . for me it's like coming to some great throbbing metropolis.

MAYOR. Huh! Metropolis. . . !

DR. STOCKMANN. Well, I know everything's on a small scale compared with a lot of other places. But there's life here . . . and promise . . . and innumerable things to work and strive for. *That's* what counts. [*Shouts.*] Katherine, has the postman been?

MRS. STOCKMANN [*in the dining-room*]. No, nobody's been.

DR. STOCKMANN. And then what it is to have a decent income, Peter! That's something one learns to appreciate after living on a starvation wage as we did. . . .

MAYOR. Surely now . . .

DR. STOCKMANN. Oh yes we did. Let me tell you, things were often pretty tight up there. But now I can live like a gentleman. Today, for instance, we had a joint of beef for dinner; it did us for supper, too. Wouldn't you like a taste? Or let me show it to you, anyway. Come here. . . .

MAYOR. No, no, it's not necessary. . . .

DR. STOCKMANN. Well, come here then. Look, we've got a new table-cloth.

MAYOR. So I noticed.

DR. STOCKMANN. And we've got a lampshade. See? Katherine managed to save all that. Don't you think it makes the room look cosy? Just stand over here—no, no, not there—here, that's right! See? How it directs the light down like that. . . ? I think it looks really elegant, don't you?

MAYOR. Yes, for those who can afford such luxuries. . . .

DR. STOCKMANN. Oh, yes! Of course I can afford it. Katherine says I earn very nearly as much as we spend.

MAYOR. Nearly . . . yes!

DR. STOCKMANN. But a man of science ought to have a decent standard of living. I bet you there's many a civil servant spends more in a year than I do.

MAYOR. Well, I dare say there is. A civil servant, a senior executive. . . .

DR. STOCKMANN. Well, an ordinary businessman then. I'm sure that sort of person spends very much more. . . .

MAYOR. That depends on circumstances.

DR. STOCKMANN. Anyway, I don't go throwing my money away on any old thing, Peter. But I feel I can't deny myself the pleasure of having people in. I need something like that, you see, after being out of things for so long. For me it's like one of the necessities of life—to enjoy the company of eager young people, with initiative and minds of their own. That's the kind of person you'll find sitting at my table, enjoying their food. I wish you knew Hovstad a bit better. . . .

MAYOR. Ah, Hovstad, that's right. He was telling me he's going to print another one of your articles.

DR. STOCKMANN. One of my articles?

MAYOR. Yes, about the Baths. An article you'd apparently written during the winter.

DR. STOCKMANN. Oh, that one! Well, I don't want that one in just now.

MAYOR. Don't you? This seems to me to be exactly the right time for it.

DR. STOCKMANN. Yes, that's right . . . in ordinary circumstances. . . .

[*He walks about the room.*]

MAYOR [*watching him*]. And what's so extraordinary about the present circumstances?

DR. STOCKMANN [*halts*]. In point of fact, Peter, that's something I can't tell you for the moment. Not this evening, anyway. There might be quite a lot that's unusual about the present state of affairs; on the other hand, it might be nothing at all. It might very well be just my imagination.

MAYOR. I must admit it all sounds very mysterious. What's going on? Why am I being kept out of it? I would remind you that, as Chairman of the Board of the Baths, I . . .

DR. STOCKMANN. And I would remind you that I . . . Oh, let's not jump down each other's throats, Peter.

MAYOR. Heaven forbid! I'm not in the habit of jumping down people's throats, as you put it. But I must insist most emphatically that all matters be considered and dealt with through the proper channels and by the appropriate authorities. I cannot permit any dubious or underhand methods.

DR. STOCKMANN. Since when have *I* used dubious or underhand methods?

MAYOR. You have a chronic disposition to take things into your own hands, at least. And in a well-ordered community, that can be equally reprehensible. The individual must be ready to subordinate himself to the community as a whole; or, more precisely, to the authorities charged with the welfare of that community.

DR. STOCKMANN. That may well be. But what the devil has that got to do with me?

MAYOR. Everything. Because, my dear Thomas, that's just the thing you don't seem to want to learn. But mark my words; one of these days you'll pay for it . . . sooner or later. I'm telling you. Goodbye.

DR. STOCKMANN. Have you gone stark, staring mad? You are barking up the wrong tree altogether. . . .

MAYOR. I'm not in the habit of doing that. And now if I may be excused. . . . [*He calls into the dining-room.*] Goodbye, Katherine. Goodbye, gentlemen.

[*He leaves.*]

MRS. STOCKMANN [*comes into the living-room*]. Has he gone?

DR. STOCKMANN. Yes, he has; and in high dudgeon.

MRS. STOCKMANN. Thomas, my dear, what have you been doing to him this time?

DR. STOCKMANN. Absolutely nothing. He can't expect an account from me before the proper time.

MRS. STOCKMANN. What are you expected to give him an account of?

DR. STOCKMANN. Hm! Don't bother me about that now, Katherine.— Funny the postman doesn't come.

[HOVSTAD, BILLING *and* HORSTER *have risen from the table and come into the living-room.* EJLIF *and* MORTEN *follow them after a while.*]

BILLING [*stretches himself*]. Ah! A supper like that and, damn me, if it doesn't make you feel like a new man!

HOVSTAD. Our Mayor wasn't in the best of moods this evening.

DR. STOCKMANN. It's his stomach. Digestion's none too good.

HOVSTAD. It was mainly us two from the *Herald* he couldn't stomach, I reckon.

MRS. STOCKMANN. I thought you seemed to be getting on quite nicely with him.

HOVSTAD. Oh yes, but it's only a kind of armistice.

BILLING. That's it. That describes it exactly.

DR. STOCKMANN. We mustn't forget that Peter's a lonely person, poor chap. He hasn't any proper home where he can relax. Business, nothing but business! And all that damned weak tea he keeps pouring into himself. Now then, lads, pull your chairs up to the table. Katherine, don't we get any toddy?

MRS. STOCKMANN [*makes for the dining-room*]. I'm just going to get it.

DR. STOCKMANN. Come and sit beside me on the sofa, Captain Horster. It's so rarely we see you. Do sit down, my friends.

[*The men seat themselves round the table.* MRS. STOCKMANN *enters with a tray on which there is a kettle, glasses, decanters and so on.*]

MRS. STOCKMANN. There we are. This is Arrack, and this is rum, and this is cognac. Everybody just help themselves.

DR. STOCKMANN [*takes a glass*]. Ah, we will that! [*Whilst the toddy is being mixed.*] Let's have the cigars out, too. Ejlif, you know where the box is kept. And you, Morten, can bring my pipe. [*The boys go into the room on the right.*] I have a suspicion Ejlif helps himself to a cigar now and then, but I don't let on I know. [*Calls.*] My smoking-cap as well, Morten! Katherine, could you tell him where I've put it. Ah! he's got it. [*The boys bring the various articles.*] Help yourselves, my friends. I'll stick to my pipe. Many's the time this one's done the rounds with me, fair weather and foul, up there in the North. [*They clink glasses.*] Your health! Ah, it's much better to be sitting nice and snug in here.

MRS. STOCKMANN [*sits knitting*]. Will you be sailing soon, Captain Horster?

HORSTER. I reckon we'll be ready by next week.

MRS. STOCKMANN. And then you're off to America?

HORSTER. That's the intention.

BILLING. Then you won't be able to vote in the municipal election.

HORSTER. Is there going to be an election?

BILLING. Didn't you know?

HORSTER. No, I don't bother about things like that.

BILLING. But you take an interest in public affairs, I suppose?

HORSTER. No, I don't know the first thing about them.

BILLING. I think people ought to vote, all the same.

HORSTER. Even those who have no idea what it's all about?

BILLING. No idea? What do you mean? Society's like a ship; everybody must help to steer it.

HORSTER. That might be all very well on dry land; but it wouldn't work very well at sea.

HOVSTAD. It's strange how little most seafaring people care about what goes on ashore.

BILLING. Quite remarkable.

DR. STOCKMANN. Sailors are like birds of passage, equally at home in the north or in the south. All the more reason for the rest of us to be even more active, Mr. Hovstad. Is there anything of public interest in the *Herald* tomorrow?

HOVSTAD. Nothing about municipal affairs. But I thought of putting in your article the day after. . . .

DR. STOCKMANN. Oh damn it, yes! That article. Listen, you must hold it over for a while.

HOVSTAD. Really! It just happens we have room for it now, and it seemed to be the right time for it. . . .

DR. STOCKMANN. Yes, yes, maybe you are right; but you'll have to wait all the same. I'll explain later. . . .

[PETRA, *wearing a hat and a cloak, comes in from the hall, a pile of exercise books under her arm.*]

PETRA. Good evening.

DR. STOCKMANN. Is that you, Petra? Good evening!

[*Greetings all round.* PETRA *takes off her things and puts them, along with the exercise books, on a chair beside the door.*]

PETRA. So you've all been sitting here enjoying yourselves while I've been out slaving.

DR. STOCKMANN. Now *you* come and enjoy yourself too, then.

BILLING. Can I get you something to drink?

PETRA [*comes over to the table*]. Thanks. But I'd rather do it myself. You always make it too strong. But I'm forgetting, Father, I have a letter for you.

[*Goes over to the chair where her things are.*]

DR. STOCKMANN. A letter? Who from?

PETRA [*feels in her coat pocket*]. The postman gave me it just as I was going out. . . .

DR. STOCKMANN [*gets up and goes across to her*]. And you haven't brought it out before now!

PETRA. I hadn't time to run back again with it. Here it is.

DR. STOCKMANN [*seizing the letter*]. Let me see it. Let me see it, child. [*Looks at the address.*] Yes, that's it. . . .

MRS. STOCKMANN. Is *that* the one you have been waiting for, Thomas?

DR. STOCKMANN. Yes, that's the one. Excuse me if I take it straight into . . . Where can I find a light, Katherine? Is there still no lamp in my study!

MRS. STOCKMANN. Yes, of course. There's a lamp already lit on your desk.

DR. STOCKMANN. Good, good. Excuse me a minute. . . .

[*He goes into his room, right.*]

PETRA. What can that be, Mother?

MRS. STOCKMANN. I don't know. He's done nothing else these last few days but ask whether the postman's been.

BILLING. Presumably some country patient.

PETRA. Poor Father! All this work, it's getting too much for him. [*She mixes her drink.*] Ah, I'm going to enjoy this!

HOVSTAD. Have you been taking Evening Classes again today?

PETRA [*sipping her glass*]. Two hours.

BILLING. And four hours this morning at the Institute.

PETRA [*sits at the table*]. Five hours.

MRS. STOCKMANN. And tonight I see you have essays to correct.

PETRA. A whole bundle of them.

HORSTER. You've got plenty of work to do yourself, it seems.

PETRA. Yes, but that's all right. It makes you feel so gloriously tired afterwards.

BILLING. Do you like that?

PETRA. Yes, it makes you sleep so well.

MORTEN. You must be a dreadful sinner, Petra!

PETRA. Sinner?

MORTEN. Working as hard as you do. Mr. Rörlund says that work is a punishment for our sins.

EJLIF. Puh! You must be stupid, believing a thing like that!

MRS. STOCKMANN. Now, now, Ejlif!

BILLING [*laughs*]. Oh, that's good, that is!

HOVSTAD. Don't you want to work as hard as that, Morten?

MORTEN. No, I don't.

HOVSTAD. Well, what *do* you want to be when you grow up?

MORTEN. I want to be a Viking.

EJLIF. Well, you'd have to be a heathen.

MORTEN. All right, I'll be a heathen.

BILLING. I'm with you there, Morten. I say exactly the same.

MRS. STOCKMANN [*making signs*]. I'm sure you wouldn't really do anything of the kind.

BILLING. Yes I would, so help me! I *am* a heathen, and proud of it. You watch, we'll all be heathens before long.

MORTEN. And *then* can we do exactly what we like?

BILLING. Well, you see, Morten . . .

MRS. STOCKMANN. Now, boys, off you go now; I'm sure you've got some homework for tomorrow.

EJLIF. Couldn't *I* just stay on a little bit longer. . . ?

MRS. STOCKMANN. No. Off you go now, both of you.

[*The boys say good night and go into the room, left.*]

HOVSTAD. Do you really think it's bad for the boys to listen to things like that?

MRS. STOCKMANN. Oh, I don't know. But I don't much like it.

PETRA. Oh, Mother! I think you're quite mistaken there.

MRS. STOCKMANN. Yes, that's quite possible. But I *don't* like it, not in my own home.

PETRA. All this hypocrisy, both at home and at school. At home one mustn't say anything; and at school we have to stand there and lie to the children.

HORSTER. Lie to them?

PETRA. Yes. Can't you see we have to teach all sorts of things we don't even believe in ourselves?

BILLING. That's only too true.

PETRA. If only I had the money, I'd start a school myself, where things would be run very differently.

BILLING. Huh! The money!

HORSTER. Well, if you've got anything like that in mind, Miss Stockmann, I'd be glad to offer you the necessary accommodation. My father's big old house is standing there practically empty; there's an enormous dining-room on the ground floor. . . .

PETRA [*laughs*]. Thanks, thanks very much. But nothing's likely to come of it.

HOVSTAD. No, I think Miss Petra's much more likely to join the ranks of the journalists. By the way, have you had any time to look at that English story you promised to translate for us?

PETRA. No, not yet. But you'll have it in good time.

[DOCTOR STOCKMANN *comes out of his room, with the open letter in his hand.*]