MRS. ELVSTED enters through the curtains of the middle doorway.

MRS. ELVSTED.
[Going towards him.] Ah, Lovborg! At last—!

LOVBORG.
Yes, at last. And too late!

MRS. ELVSTED.
[Looks anxiously at him.] What is too late?

LOVBORG.
Everything is too late now. It is all over with me.

MRS. ELVSTED.
Oh no, no—don't say that!

LOVBORG.
You will say the same when you hear—

MRS. ELVSTED.
I won't hear anything!

HEDDA.
Perhaps you would prefer to talk to her alone? If so, I will leave you.

LOVBORG.
No, stay—you too. I beg you to stay.

MRS. ELVSTED.
Yes, but I won't hear anything, I tell you.

LOVBORG.
It is not last night's adventures that I want to talk about.

MRS. ELVSTED.
What is it then—?

LOVBORG.
I want to say that now our ways must part.

MRS. ELVSTED.
Part!

HEDDA.
[Involuntarily.] I knew it!

LOVBORG.
You can be of no more service to me, Thea.

MRS. ELVSTED.
How can you stand there and say that! No more service to you! Am I not to help you now, as before? Are we not to go on working together?

LOVBORG.
Henceforward I shall do no work.

MRS. ELVSTED.
[Despairingly.] Then what am I to do with my life?

LOVBORG.
You must try to live your life as if you had never known me.

MRS. ELVSTED.
But you know I cannot do that!

LOVBORG.
Try if you cannot, Thea. You must go home again—

MRS. ELVSTED.
[In vehement protest.] Never in this world! Where you are, there will I be also! I will not let myself be driven away like this! I will remain here! I will be with you when the book appears.

HEDDA.
[Half aloud, in suspense.] Ah yes—the book!

LOVBORG.
[Looks at her.] My book and Thea's; for that is what it is.

MRS. ELVSTED.
Yes, I feel that it is. And that is why I have a right to be with you when it appears! I will see with my own eyes how respect and honour pour in upon you afresh. And the happiness—the happiness—oh, I must share it with you!

LOVBORG.
Thea—our book will never appear.

HEDDA.
Ah!

MRS. ELVSTED.
Never appear!

LOVBORG.
Can never appear.

MRS. ELVSTED.
[In agonised foreboding.] Lovborg—what have you done with the manuscript?

HEDDA.
[Looks anxiously at him.] Yes, the manuscript—?

MRS. ELVSTED.
Where is it?

LOVBORG.
The manuscript—. Well then—I have torn the manuscript into a thousand pieces.

MRS. ELVSTED.
[Shrieks.] Oh no, no—!

HEDDA.
[Involuntarily.] But that's not—

LOVBORG.
[Looks at her.] Not true, you think?

HEDDA.
[Collecting herself.] Oh well, of course—since you say so. But it sounded so improbable—

LOVBORG.
It is true, all the same.

MRS. ELVSTED.
[Wringing her hands.] Oh God—oh God, Hedda—torn his own work to pieces!

LOVBORG.
I have torn my own life to pieces. So why should I not tear my life-work too—?

MRS. ELVSTED.
And you did this last night?

LOVBORG.
Yes, I tell you! Tore it into a thousand pieces—and scattered them on the fiord—far out. There there is cool sea-water at any rate—let them drift upon it—drift with the current and the wind. And then presently they will sink—deeper and deeper—as I shall, Thea.

MRS. ELVSTED.
Do you know, Lovborg, that what you have done with the book—I shall think of it to my dying day as though you had killed a little child.

LOVBORG.
Yes, you are right. It is a sort of child-murder.

MRS. ELVSTED.
How could you, then—! Did not the child belong to me too?

HEDDA.
[Almost inaudibly.] Ah, the child—

MRS. ELVSTED.
[Breathing heavily.] It is all over then. Well well, now I will go, Hedda.

HEDDA.
But you are not going away from town?

MRS. ELVSTED.
Oh, I don't know what I shall do. I see nothing but darkness before me. [She goes out by the hall door.