

A DOLL'S HOUSE

Henrik Ibsen

translated by

MICHAEL MEYER

When you read a play, you have the chance to "direct" a performance in your own head. As you read, visualize the set, and imagine the tone of voice and the gestures the actors might use. If you like, "rehearse" several voices for the same line of dialogue until you find the one that best reveals the character.



In the Winter Garden, Edouard Manet, 1879.

Archiv Für Kunst Und Geschichte, Berlin

CHARACTERS

Torvald Helmer, a lawyer

Nora, his wife

Dr. Rank

Mrs. Linde

Nils Krogstad, also a lawyer

The Helmers' Three Small Children

Anne-Marie, their nurse

Helen, the maid

A Porter

The action takes place in the Helmers' apartment.

ACT 1

A comfortably and tastefully, but not expensively furnished room. Backstage right a door leads to the hall; backstage left, another door to HELMER's study. Between these two doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left-hand wall is a door, with a window downstage of it. Near the window, a round table with armchairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, slightly upstage, is a door; downstage of this, against the same wall, a stove lined with porcelain tiles, with a couple of armchairs and a rocking chair in front of it. Between the stove and the side door is a small table. Engravings on the wall. A what-not with china and other bric-a-brac; a small bookcase with leather-bound books. A carpet on the floor; a fire in the stove. A winter day.

[A bell rings in the hall outside. After a moment we hear the front door being opened. NORA enters the room, humming contentedly to herself. She is wearing outdoor clothes and carrying a lot of parcels, which she puts down on the table right. She leaves the door to the hall open; through it, we can see a PORTER carrying a Christmas tree and a basket. He gives these to the MAID, who has opened the door for them.]

Nora. Hide that Christmas tree away, Helen. The children mustn't see it before I've decorated it this evening. (*to the PORTER, taking out her purse*) How much?

Porter. A shilling.¹

Nora. Here's ten shillings. No, keep it.

[The PORTER touches his cap and goes. NORA closes the door. She continues to laugh happily to herself as she removes her coat, etc. She takes from her pocket a bag containing macaroons and eats a couple. Then she tiptoes across and listens at her husband's door.]

Nora. Yes, he's here. (*starts humming again as she goes over to the table, right.*)

Helmer (*from his room*). Is that my skylark twittering out there?

Nora (*opening some of the parcels*). It is!

Helmer. Is that my squirrel rustling?

Nora. Yes!

Helmer. When did my squirrel come home?

Nora. Just now. (*pops the bag of macaroons in her pocket and wipes her mouth*) Come out here, Torvald, and see what I've bought.

Helmer. You mustn't disturb me!

[Short pause; then he opens the door and looks in, his pen in his hand.]

1. shilling: a coin of little value.

Helmer. Bought, did you say? All that? Has my little squanderbird been overspending again?

Nora. Oh, Torvald, surely we can let ourselves go a little this year! It's the first Christmas we don't have to scrape.

Helmer. Well, you know, we can't afford to be extravagant.

Nora. Oh yes, Torvald, we can be a little extravagant now. Can't we? Just a tiny bit? You've got a big salary now, and you're going to make lots and lots of money.

Helmer. Next year, yes. But my new salary doesn't start till April.

Nora. Pooh; we can borrow till then.

Helmer. Nora! (*goes over to her and takes her playfully by the ear*) What a little spendthrift² you are! Suppose I were to borrow fifty pounds today, and you spent it all over Christmas, and then on New Year's Eve a tile fell off a roof onto my head—

Nora (*puts her hand over his mouth*). Oh, Torvald! Don't say such dreadful things!

Helmer. Yes, but suppose something like that did happen? What then?

Nora. If anything as frightful as that happened, it wouldn't make much difference whether I was in debt or not.

Helmer. But what about the people I'd borrowed from?

Nora. Them? Who cares about them? They're strangers.

Helmer. Oh, Nora, Nora, how like a woman! No, but seriously, Nora, you know how I feel about this. No debts! Never borrow! A home that is founded on debts and borrowing can never be a place of freedom and beauty. We two have stuck it out bravely up to now; and we shall continue to do so for the few weeks that remain.

Nora (*goes over towards the stove*). Very

well, Torvald. As you say.

Helmer (*follows her*). Now, now! My little songbird mustn't droop her wings. What's this? Is little squirrel sulking? (*takes out his purse*) Nora; guess what I've got here!

Nora (*turns quickly*). Money!

Helmer. Look. (*hands her some bank notes*) I know how these small expenses crop up at Christmas.

Nora (*counts them*). One—two—three—four. Oh, thank you, Torvald, thank you! I should be able to manage with this.

Helmer. You'll have to.

Nora. Yes, yes, of course I will. But come over here, I want to show you everything I've bought. And so cheap! Look, here are new clothes for Ivar—and a sword. And a horse and a trumpet for Bob. And a doll and a cradle for Emmy—they're nothing much, but she'll pull them apart in a few days. And some bits of material and handkerchiefs for the maids. Old Annie-Marie ought to have had something better, really.

Helmer. And what's in that parcel?

Nora (*cries*). No, Torvald, you mustn't see that before this evening!

Helmer. Very well. But now, tell me, my little spendthrift, what do you want for Christmas?

Nora. Me? Oh, pooh, I don't want anything.

Helmer. Oh yes, you do. Now tell me, what within reason would you most like?

Nora. No, I really don't know. Oh, yes—Torvald—!

Helmer. Well?

Nora (*plays with his coat buttons; not looking at him*). If you really want to give me something, you could—you could—

Helmer. Come on, out with it.

Nora (*quickly*). You could give me money, Torvald. Only as much as you feel you can afford; then later I'll buy something with it.

Helmer. But, Nora—

2. **spendthrift:** someone who spends money carelessly or wastefully.

Nora. Oh yes, Torvald dear, please! Please! Then I'll wrap up the notes in pretty gold paper and hang them on the Christmas tree. Wouldn't that be fun?

Helmer. What's the name of that little bird that can never keep any money?

Nora. Yes, yes, squanderbird; I know. But let's do as I say, Torvald; then I'll have time to think about what I need most. Isn't that the best way? Mm?

Helmer (*smiles*). To be sure it would be, if you could keep what I give you and really buy yourself something with it. But you'll spend it on all sorts of useless things for the house, and then I'll have to put my hand in my pocket again.

Nora. Oh, but Torvald—

Helmer. You can't deny it, Nora dear. (*puts his arm around her waist*) The squanderbird's a pretty little creature, but she gets through an awful lot of money. It's incredible what an expensive pet she is for a man to keep.

Nora. For shame! How can you say such a thing? I save every penny I can.

Helmer (*laughs*). That's quite true. Every penny you can. But you can't.

Nora (*hums and smiles, quietly gleeful*). Hm. If you only knew how many expenses we larks and squirrels have, Torvald.

Helmer. You're a funny little creature. Just like your father used to be. Always on the lookout for some way to get money, but as soon as you have any it just runs through your fingers and you never know where it's gone. Well, I suppose I must take you as you are. It's in your blood. Yes, yes, yes, these things are hereditary, Nora.

Nora. Oh, I wish I'd inherited more of Papa's qualities.

Helmer. And I wouldn't wish my darling little songbird to be any different from what she is. By the way, that reminds me. You look awfully—how shall I put it?—

awfully guilty today.

Nora. Do I?

Helmer. Yes, you do. Look me in the eyes.

Nora (*looks at him*). Well?

Helmer (*wags his finger*). Has my little sweet tooth been indulging herself in town today, by any chance?

Nora. No, how can you think such a thing?

Helmer. Not a tiny little digression into a pastry shop?

Nora. No, Torvald, I promise—

Helmer. Not just a wee jam tart?

Nora. Certainly not.

Helmer. Not a little nibble at a macaroon?

Nora. No, Torvald—I promise you, honestly!—

Helmer. There, there. I was only joking.

Nora (*goes over to the table, right*). You know I could never act against your wishes.

Helmer. Of course not. And you've given me your word—(*goes over to her*) Well, my beloved Nora, you keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself. They'll be revealed this evening. I've no doubt, once the Christmas tree has been lit.

Nora. Have you remembered to invite Dr. Rank?

Helmer. No. But there's no need; he knows he'll be dining with us. Anyway, I'll ask him when he comes this morning. I've ordered some good wine. Oh, Nora, you can't imagine how I'm looking forward to this evening.

Nora. So am I. And, Torvald, how the children will love it!

Helmer. Yes, it's a wonderful thing to know that one's position is assured and that one has an ample income. Don't you agree? It's good to know that, isn't it?

Nora. Yes, it's almost like a miracle.

Helmer. Do you remember last Christmas? For three whole weeks you shut yourself away every evening to make flowers for the

Christmas tree, and all those other things you were going to surprise us with. Ugh, it was the most boring time I've ever had in my life.

Nora. I didn't find it boring.

Helmer (*smiles*). But it all came to nothing in the end, didn't it?

Nora. Oh, are you going to bring that up again? How could I help the cat getting in and tearing everything to bits?

Helmer. No, my poor little Nora, of course you couldn't. You simply wanted to make us happy, and that's all that matters. But it's good that those hard times are past.

Nora. Yes, it's wonderful.

Helmer. I don't have to sit by myself and be bored. And you don't have to tire your pretty eyes and your delicate little hands—

Nora (*claps her hands*). No, Torvald, that's true, isn't it? I don't have to any longer! Oh, it's really all just like a miracle. (*takes his arm*) Now I'm going to tell you what I thought we might do, Torvald. As soon as Christmas is over—

[*A bell rings in the hall.*]

Oh, there's the doorbell. (*tidies up one or two things in the room*) Someone's coming. What a bore.

Helmer. I'm not at home to any visitors.

Remember!

Maid (*in the doorway*). A lady's called, madam. A stranger.

Nora. Well, ask her to come in.

Maid. And the doctor's here too, sir.

Helmer. Has he gone to my room?

Maid. Yes, sir.

[*HELMER goes into his room. The MAID shows in MRS. LINDE, who is dressed in traveling clothes; then closes the door.*]

Mrs. Linde (*shyly and a little hesitantly*).

Good morning, Nora.

Nora (*uncertainly*). Good morning—



Midland Community Theatre at Theatre Midland

Still from a production of *A Doll's House* by the Midland Community Theatre, Midland, Texas.

Mrs. Linde. I don't suppose you recognize me.

Nora. No, I'm afraid I—Yes, wait a minute—surely—I—(*exclaims*) Why, Christine! Is it really you?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, it's me.

Nora. Christine! And I didn't recognize you! But how could I—? (*more quietly*) How you've changed, Christine!

Mrs. Linde. Yes, I know. It's been nine years—nearly ten—

Nora. Is it so long? Yes, it must be. Oh, these last eight years have been such a happy time for me! So you've come to town? All that way in winter! How brave of you!

Mrs. Linde. I arrived by the steamer this morning.

Nora. Yes, of course, to enjoy yourself over Christmas. Oh, how splendid! We'll have to

celebrate! But take off your coat. You're not cold, are you? (*helps her off with it*) There! Now let's sit down here by the stove and be comfortable. No, you take the armchair. I'll sit here in the rocking chair. (*clasps MRS. LINDE's hands*) Yes, now you look like your old self. Just at first I—you've got a little paler, though, Christine. And perhaps a bit thinner.

Mrs. Linde. And older, Nora. Much, much older.

Nora. Yes, perhaps a little older. Just a tiny bit. Not much (*checks herself suddenly and says earnestly*) Oh, but how thoughtless of me to sit here and chatter away like this! Dear, sweet Christine, can you forgive me?

Mrs. Linde. What do you mean, Nora?

Nora (*quietly*). Poor Christine, you've become a widow.

Mrs. Linde. Yes. Three years ago.

Nora. I know, I know—I read it in the papers. Oh, Christine, I meant to write to you so often, honestly. But I always put it off, and something else always cropped up.

Mrs. Linde. I understand, Nora dear.

Nora. No, Christine, it was beastly of me. Oh, my poor darling, what you've gone through! And he didn't leave you anything?

Mrs. Linde. No.

Nora. No children, either?

Mrs. Linde. No.

Nora. Nothing at all, then?

Mrs. Linde. Not even a feeling of loss or sorrow.

Nora (*looks incredulously at her*). But, Christine, how is that possible?

Mrs. Linde (*smiles sadly and strokes NORA's hair*). Oh, these things happen, Nora.

Nora. All alone. How dreadful that must be for you. I've three lovely children. I'm afraid you can't see them now, because they're out with Nanny. But you must tell me everything—

Mrs. Linde. No, no, no. I want to hear about you.

Nora. No, you start. I'm not going to be selfish today. I'm just going to think about you. Oh, but there's one thing I *must* tell you. Have you heard of the wonderful luck we've just had?

Mrs. Linde. No. What?

Nora. Would you believe it—my husband's just been made vice-president of the bank!

Mrs. Linde. Your husband? Oh, how lucky—!

Nora. Yes, isn't it? Being a lawyer is so uncertain, you know, especially if one isn't prepared to touch any case that isn't—well—quite nice. And of course Torvald's been very firm about that—and I'm absolutely with him. Oh, you can imagine how happy we are! He's joining the bank in the new year, and he'll be getting a big salary, and lots of percentages too. From now on we'll be able to live quite differently—we'll be able to do whatever we want. Oh, Christine, it's such a relief! I feel so happy! Well, I mean, it's lovely to have heaps of money and not to have to worry about anything. Don't you think?

Mrs. Linde. It must be lovely to have enough to cover one's needs, anyway.

Nora. Not just our needs! We're going to have heaps and heaps of money!

Mrs. Linde (*smiles*). Nora, Nora, haven't you grown up yet? When we were at school you were a terrible little spendthrift.

Nora (*laughs quietly*). Yes, Torvald still says that. (*wags her finger*) But "Nora, Nora" isn't as silly as you think. Oh, we've been in no position for me to waste money. We've both had to work.

Mrs. Linde. You too?

Nora. Yes, little things—fancywork, crocheting, embroidery and so forth. (*casually*) And other things, too. I suppose you know Torvald left the Ministry when we got married? There were no prospects of promotion in his department, and of course he needed

more money. But the first year he over-worked himself dreadfully. He had to take on all sorts of extra jobs, and worked day and night. But it was too much for him, and he became frightfully ill. The doctors said he'd have to go to a warmer climate.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, you spent a whole year in Italy, didn't you?

Nora. Yes. It wasn't easy for me to get away, you know. I'd just had Ivar. But, of course, we had to do it. Oh, it was a marvelous trip! And it saved Torvald's life. But it cost an awful lot of money, Christine.

Mrs. Linde. I can imagine.

Nora. Two hundred and fifty pounds. That's a lot of money, you know.

Mrs. Linde. How lucky you had it.

Nora. Well, actually, we got it from my father.

Mrs. Linde. Oh, I see. Didn't he die just about that time?

Nora. Yes, Christine, just about then. Wasn't it dreadful, I couldn't go and look after him. I was expecting little Ivar any day. And then I had my poor Torvald to care for—we really didn't think he'd live. Dear, kind Papa! I never saw him again, Christine. Oh, it's the saddest thing that's happened to me since I got married.

Mrs. Linde. I know you were very fond of him. But you went to Italy—?

Nora. Yes. Well, we had the money, you see, and the doctors said we mustn't delay. So we went the month after Papa died.

Mrs. Linde. And your husband came back completely cured?

Nora. Fit as a fiddle!

Mrs. Linde. But—the doctor?

Nora. How do you mean?

Mrs. Linde. I thought the maid said that the gentleman who arrived with me was the doctor.

Nora. Oh yes, that's Dr. Rank, but he doesn't come because anyone's ill. He's our

best friend, and he looks us up at least once every day. No, Torvald hasn't had a moment's illness since we went away. And the children are fit and healthy and so am I. (*jumps up and claps her hands*) Oh, God, oh God, Christine, isn't it a wonderful thing to be alive and happy! Oh, but how beastly of me! I'm only talking about myself. (*sits on a footstool and rests her arms on MRS. LINDE's knee*) Oh, please don't be angry with me! Tell me, is it really true you didn't love your husband? Why did you marry him, then?

Mrs. Linde. Well, my mother was still alive; and she was helpless and bedridden. And I had my two little brothers to take care of. I didn't feel I could say no.

Nora. Yes, well, perhaps you're right. He was rich then, was he?

Mrs. Linde. Quite comfortably off, I believe. But his business was unsound, you see, Nora. When he died it went bankrupt and there was nothing left.

Nora. What did you do?

Mrs. Linde. Well, I had to try to make ends meet somehow, so I started a little shop, and a little school, and anything else I could turn my hand to. These last three years have been just one endless slog for me, without a moment's rest. But now it's over, Nora. My poor dead mother doesn't need me any more; she's passed away. And the boys don't need me either; they've got jobs now and can look after themselves.

Nora. How relieved you must feel—

Mrs. Linde. No, Nora. Just unspeakably empty. No one to live for any more. (*gets up restlessly*) That's why I couldn't bear to stay out there any longer, cut off from the world. I thought it'd be easier to find some work here that will exercise and occupy my mind. If only I could get a regular job—office work of some kind—

Nora. Oh but, Christine, that's dreadfully exhausting; and you look practically fin-



GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE, WASSILI DMITRIJEWITSCH POLENOW (1844–1927).

Archiv Für Kunst Und Geschichte, Berlin

ished already. It'd be much better for you if you could go away somewhere.

Mrs. Linde (*goes over to the window*). I have no papa to pay for my holidays, Nora.

Nora (*gets up*). Oh, please don't be angry with me.

Mrs. Linde. My dear Nora, it's I who should ask you not to be angry. That's the worst thing about this kind of situation—it makes one so bitter. One has no one to work for; and yet one has to be continually sponging for jobs. One has to live; and so one becomes completely egocentric. When

you told me about this luck you've just had with Torvald's new job—can you imagine?—I was happy not so much on your account, as on my own.

Nora. How do you mean? Oh, I understand. You mean Torvald might be able to do something for you?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, I was thinking that.

Nora. He will too, Christine. Just you leave it to me. I'll lead up to it so delicately, so delicately; I'll get him in the right mood. Oh, Christine, I do so want to help you.

Mrs. Linde. It's sweet of you to bother so much about me, Nora. Especially since you

know so little of the worries and hardships of life.

Nora. I? You say I know little of—?

Mrs. Linde (*smiles*). Well, good heavens—those bits of fancywork of yours—well, really! You're a child, Nora.

Nora (*tosses her head and walks across the room*). You shouldn't say that so patronizingly.

Mrs. Linde. Oh?

Nora. You're like the rest. You all think I'm incapable of getting down to anything serious—

Mrs. Linde. My dear—

Nora. You think I've never had any worries like the rest of you.

Mrs. Linde. Nora dear, you've just told me about all your difficulties—

Nora. Pooh—that! (*quietly*) I haven't told you about the big thing.

Mrs. Linde. What big thing? What do you mean?

Nora. You patronize me, Christine; but you shouldn't. You're proud that you've worked so long and so hard for your mother.

Mrs. Linde. I don't patronize anyone, Nora. But you're right—I am both proud and happy that I was able to make my mother's last months on earth comparatively easy.

Nora. And you're also proud at what you've done for your brothers.

Mrs. Linde. I think I have a right to be.

Nora. I think so, too. But let me tell you something, Christine. I, too, have done something to be proud and happy about.

Mrs. Linde. I don't doubt it. But—how do you mean?

Nora. Speak quietly! Suppose Torvald should hear! He mustn't, at any price—no one must know, Christine—no one but you.

Mrs. Linde. But what is this?

Nora. Come over here. (*pulls her down onto the sofa beside her*) Yes, Christine—I,

too, have done something to be happy and proud about. It was I who saved Torvald's life.

Mrs. Linde. Saved his—? How did you save it?

Nora. I told you about our trip to Italy. Torvald couldn't have lived if he hadn't managed to get down there—

Mrs. Linde. Yes, well—your father provided the money—

Nora (*smiles*). So Torvald and everyone else thinks. But—

Mrs. Linde. Yes?

Nora. Papa didn't give us a penny. It was I who found the money.

Mrs. Linde. You? All of it?

Nora. Two hundred and fifty pounds. What do you say to that?

Mrs. Linde. But, Nora, how could you? Did you win a lottery or something?

Nora (*scornfully*). Lottery? (*sniffs*) What would there be to be proud of in that?

Mrs. Linde. But where did you get it from, then?

Nora (*hums and smiles secretly*). Hm; tra-la-la-la!

Mrs. Linde. You couldn't have borrowed it.

Nora. Oh? Why not?

Mrs. Linde. Well, a wife can't borrow money without her husband's consent.

Nora (*tosses her head*). Ah, but when a wife has a little business sense, and knows how to be clever—

Mrs. Linde. But Nora, I simply don't understand—

Nora. You don't have to. No one has said I borrowed the money. I could have got it in some other way. (*throws herself back on the sofa*) I could have got it from an admirer. When a girl's as pretty as I am—

Mrs. Linde. Nora, you're crazy!

Nora. You're dying of curiosity now, aren't you, Christine?

Mrs. Linde. Nora dear, you haven't done anything foolish?

Nora (*sits up again*). Is it foolish to save one's husband's life?

Mrs. Linde. I think it's foolish if without his knowledge you—

Nora. But the whole point was that he mustn't know! Great heavens, don't you see? He hadn't to know how dangerously ill he was. It was me they told that his life was in danger and that only going to a warm climate could save him. Do you suppose I didn't try to think of other ways of getting him down there? I told him how wonderful it would be for me to go abroad like other young wives; I cried and prayed; I asked him to remember my condition, and said he ought to be nice and tender to me; and then I suggested he might quite easily borrow the money. But then he got almost angry with me, Christine. He said I was frivolous, and that it was his duty as a husband not to pander to my moods and caprices—I think that's what he called them. Well, well, I thought, you've got to be saved somehow. And then I thought of a way—

Mrs. Linde. But didn't your husband find out from your father that the money hadn't come from him?

Nora. No, never. Papa died just then. I'd thought of letting him into the plot and asking him not to tell. But since he was so ill—! And as things turned out, it didn't become necessary.

Mrs. Linde. And you've never told your husband about this?

Nora. For heaven's sake, no! What an idea! He's frightfully strict about such matters. And besides—he's so proud of being a man—it'd be so painful and humiliating for him to know that he owed anything to me. It'd completely wreck our relationship. This life we have built together would no longer exist.

Mrs. Linde. Will you never tell him?

Nora (*thoughtfully, half-smiling*). Yes—sometime, perhaps. Years from now, when I'm no longer pretty. You mustn't laugh! I mean, of course, when Torvald no longer loves me as he does now; when it no longer amuses him to see me dance and dress up and play the fool for him. Then it might be useful to have something up my sleeve. (*breaks off*) Stupid, stupid, stupid! That time will never come. Well, what do you think of my big secret, Christine? I'm not completely useless, am I? Mind you, all this has caused me a frightful lot of worry. It hasn't been easy for me to meet my obligations punctually. In case you don't know, in the world of business there are things called quarterly installments and interest, and they're a terrible problem to cope with. So I've had to scrape a little here and save a little there, as best I can. I haven't been able to save much on the housekeeping money, because Torvald likes to live well; and I couldn't let the children go short of clothes—I couldn't take anything out of what he gives me for them. The poor little angels!

Mrs. Linde. So you've had to stint yourself, my poor Nora?

Nora. Of course. Well, after all, it was my problem. Whenever Torvald gave me money to buy myself new clothes, I never used more than half of it; and I always bought what was cheapest and plainest. Thank heaven anything suits me, so that Torvald's never noticed. But it made me a bit sad sometimes, because it's lovely to wear pretty clothes. Don't you think?

Mrs. Linde. Indeed it is.

Nora. And then I've found one or two other sources of income. Last winter I managed to get a lot of copying to do. So I shut myself away and wrote every evening, late into the night. Oh, I often got so tired, so tired. But it was great fun, though, sitting there working and earning money. It was

almost like being a man.

Mrs. Linde. But how much have you managed to pay off like this?

Nora. Well, I can't say exactly. It's awfully difficult to keep an exact check on these kind of transactions. I only know I've paid everything I've managed to scrape together. Sometimes I really didn't know where to turn. (*smiles*) Then I'd sit here and imagine some rich old gentleman had fallen in love with me—

Mrs. Linde. What! What gentleman?

Nora. Silly! And that now he'd died and when they opened his will it said in big letters: "Everything I possess is to be paid forthwith to my beloved Mrs. Nora Helmer in cash."

Mrs. Linde. But, Nora dear, who was this gentleman?

Nora. Great heavens, don't you understand? There wasn't any old gentleman; he was just something I used to dream up as I sat here evening after evening wondering how on earth I could raise some money. But what does it matter? The old bore can stay imaginary as far as I'm concerned, because now I don't have to worry any longer! (*jumps up*) Oh, Christine, isn't it wonderful? I don't have to worry any more! No more troubles! I can play all day with the children, I can fill the house with pretty things, just the way Torvald likes. And, Christine, it'll soon be spring, and the air'll be fresh and the skies blue—and then perhaps we'll be able to take a little trip somewhere. I shall be able to see the sea again. Oh, yes, yes, it's a wonderful thing to be alive and happy!

[*The bell rings in the hall.*]

Mrs. Linde (*gets up*). You've a visitor. Perhaps I'd better go.

Nora. No, stay. It won't be for me. It's someone for Torvald—

Maid (*in the doorway*). Excuse me, madam,

a gentleman's called who says he wants to speak to the master. But I didn't know—seeing as the doctor's with him—

Nora. Who is this gentleman?

Krogstad (*in the doorway*). It's me, Mrs. Helmer.

[*MRS. LINDE starts, composes herself and turns away to the window.*]

Nora (*takes a step towards him and whispers tensely*). You? What is it? What do you want to talk to my husband about?

Krogstad. Business—you might call it. I hold a minor post in the bank, and I hear your husband is to become our new chief—

Nora. Oh—then it isn't—?

Krogstad. Pure business, Mrs. Helmer. Nothing more.

Nora. Well, you'll find him in his study.

[*Nods indifferently as she closes the hall door behind him. Then she walks across the room and sees to the stove.*]

Mrs. Linde. Nora, who was that man?

Nora. A lawyer called Krogstad.

Mrs. Linde. It was him, then.

Nora. Do you know that man?

Mrs. Linde. I used to know him—some years ago. He was a solicitor's³ clerk in our town, for a while.

Nora. Yes, of course, so he was.

Mrs. Linde. How he's changed!

Nora. He was very unhappily married, I believe.

Mrs. Linde. Is he a widower now?

Nora. Yes, with a lot of children. Ah, now it's alight.

[*She closes the door of the stove and moves the rocking chair a little to one side.*]

Mrs. Linde. He does—various things now, I hear?

3. **solicitor:** lawyer.

Nora. Does he? It's quite possible—I really don't know. But don't let's talk about business. It's so boring.

[DR. RANK enters from HELMER's study.]

Dr. Rank (*still in the doorway*). No, no, my dear chap, don't see me out. I'll go and have a word with your wife. (*closes the door and notices MRS. LINDE*) Oh, I beg your pardon. I seem to be *de trop*⁴ here, too.

Nora. Not in the least. (*introduces them*)

Dr. Rank. Mrs. Linde.

Rank. Ah! A name I have often heard in this house. I believe I passed you on the stairs as I came up.

Mrs. Linde. Yes. Stairs tire me. I have to take them slowly.

Rank. Oh, have you hurt yourself?

Mrs. Linde. No, I'm just a little run down.

Rank. Ah, is that all? Then I take it you've come to town to cure yourself by a round of parties?

Mrs. Linde. I have come here to find work.

Rank. Is that an approved remedy for being run down?

Mrs. Linde. One has to live, Doctor.

Rank. Yes, people do seem to regard it as a necessity.

Nora. Oh, really, Dr. Rank. I bet you want to stay alive.

Rank. You bet I do. However wretched I sometimes feel, I still want to go on being tortured for as long as possible. It's the same with all my patients; and with people who are morally sick, too. There's a moral cripple in with Helmer at this very moment—

Mrs. Linde (softly). Oh!

Nora. Whom do you mean?

Rank. Oh, a lawyer fellow called Krogstad—you wouldn't know him. He's crippled all

right, morally twisted. But even he started off by announcing, as though it were a matter of enormous importance, that he had to live.

Nora. Oh? What did he want to talk to Torvald about?

Rank. I haven't the faintest idea. All I heard was something about the bank.

Nora. I didn't know that Krog—that this man Krogstad had any connection with the bank.

Rank. Yes, he's got some kind of job down there. (*to MRS. LINDE*) I wonder if in your part of the world you too have a species of creature that spends its time fussing around trying to smell out moral corruption? And when they find a case they give him some nice, comfortable position so that they can keep a good watch on him. The healthy ones just have to lump it.

Mrs. Linde. But surely it's the sick who need care most?

Rank (shrugs his shoulders). Well, there we have it. It's that attitude that's turning human society into a hospital.

[NORA, *lost in her own thoughts, laughs half to herself and claps her hands.*]

Rank. Why are you laughing? Do you really know what society is?

Nora. What do I care about society? I think it's a bore. I was laughing at something else—something frightfully funny. Tell me, Dr. Rank—will everyone who works at the bank come under Torvald now?

Rank. Do you find that particularly funny?

Nora (smiles and hums). Never you mind! Never you mind! (*walks around the room*) Yes, I find it very amusing to think that we—I mean, Torvald—has obtained so much influence over so many people. (*takes the paper bag from her pocket*) Dr. Rank, would you like a small macaroon?

Rank. Macaroons! I say! I thought they were forbidden here.

4. *de trop* (*de trō*): French for "in the way."

Nora. Yes, well, these are some Christine gave me.

Mrs. Linde. What? I—?

Nora. All right, all right, don't get frightened. You weren't to know Torvald had forbidden them. He's afraid they'll ruin my teeth. But, dash it—for once! Don't you agree, Dr. Rank? Here! (*pops a macaroon into his mouth*) You, too, Christine. And I'll have one, too. Just a little one. Two at the most. (*begins to walk round again*) Yes, now I feel really, really happy. Now there's just one thing in the world I'd really love to do.

Rank. Oh? And what is that?

Nora. Just something I'd love to say to Torvald.

Rank. Well, why don't you say it?

Nora. No, I daren't. It's too dreadful.

Mrs. Linde. Dreadful?

Rank. Well then, you'd better not. But you can say it to us. What is it you'd so love to say to Torvald?

Nora. I've the most extraordinary longing to say: "Bloody hell!"

Rank. Are you mad?

Mrs. Linde. My dear Nora—!



Midland Community Theatre at Theatre Midland

Rank. Say it. Here he is.

Nora (*hiding the bag of macaroons*). Ssh!
Ssh!

[*HELMER, with his overcoat on his arm and his hat in his hand, enters from his study.*]

Nora (*goes to meet him*). Well, Torvald dear, did you get rid of him?

Helmer. Yes, he's just gone.

Nora. May I introduce you—? This is Christine. She's just arrived in town.

Helmer. Christine—? Forgive me, but I don't think—

Nora. Mrs. Linde, Torvald dear. Christine Linde.

Helmer. Ah. A childhood friend of my wife's, I presume?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, we knew each other in earlier days.

Nora. And imagine, now she's traveled all this way to talk to you.

Helmer. Oh?

Mrs. Linde. Well, I didn't really—

Nora. You see, Christine's frightfully good at office work, and she's mad to come under some really clever man who can teach her even more than she knows already—

Helmer. Very sensible, madam.

Nora. So when she heard you'd become head of the bank—it was in her local paper—she came here as quickly as she could and—Torvald, you will, won't you? Do a little something to help Christine? For my sake?

Helmer. Well, that shouldn't be impossible. You are a widow, I take it, Mrs. Linde?

Mrs. Linde. Yes.

Helmer. And you have experience of office work?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, quite a bit.

Helmer. Well, then, it's quite likely I may be able to find some job for you—

Nora (*claps her hands*). You see, you see!

Helmer. You've come at a lucky moment, Mrs. Linde.

Mrs. Linde. Oh, how can I ever thank you—?

Helmer. There's absolutely no need. (*puts on his overcoat*) But now I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me—

Rank. Wait. I'll come with you.

[*He gets his fur coat from the hall and warms it at the stove.*]

Nora. Don't be long, Torvald dear.

Helmer. I'll only be an hour.

Nora. Are you going, too, Christine?

Mrs. Linde (*puts on her outdoor clothes*). Yes, I must start to look round for a room.

Helmer. Then perhaps we can walk part of the way together.

Nora (*helps her*). It's such a nuisance we're so cramped here—I'm afraid we can't offer to—

Mrs. Linde. Oh, I wouldn't dream of it. Goodbye, Nora dear, and thanks for everything.

Nora. *Au revoir.*⁵ You'll be coming back this evening, of course. And you too, Dr. Rank. What? If you're well enough? Of course you'll be well enough. Wrap up warmly, though.

[*They go out, talking, into the hall. CHILDREN's voices are heard from the stairs.*]

Nora. Here they are! Here they are!

[*She runs out and opens the door. The NURSE, ANNE-MARIE, enters with the CHILDREN.*]

Nora. Come in, come in! (*stoops down and kisses them*) Oh, my sweet darlings—! Look at them, Christine! Aren't they beautiful?

Rank. Don't stand here chattering in this draft!

5. *Au revoir* (ō' rō-vwär'): French for "goodbye."

Helmer. Come, Mrs. Linde. This is for mothers only.

[DR. RANK, HELMER, and MRS. LINDE go down the stairs. The NURSE brings the CHILDREN into the room. NORA follows, and closes the door to the hall.]

Nora. How well you look! What red cheeks you've got! Like apples and roses!

[The CHILDREN answer her inaudibly as she talks to them.]

Nora. Have you had fun? That's splendid. You gave Emmy and Bob a ride on the sledge? What, both together? I say! What a clever boy you are, Ivar! Oh, let me hold her for a moment, Anne-Marie! My sweet little baby doll! (takes the SMALLEST CHILD from the NURSE and dances with her) Yes, yes, mummy will dance with Bob, too. What? Have you been throwing snowballs? Oh, I wish I'd been there! No, don't—I'll undress them myself, Anne-Marie. No, please let me; it's such fun. Go inside and warm yourself; you look frozen. There's some hot coffee on the stove.

[The NURSE goes into the room on the left. NORA takes off the CHILDREN's outdoor clothes and throws them anywhere while they all chatter simultaneously.]

Nora. What? A big dog ran after you? But he didn't bite you? No, dogs don't bite lovely little baby dolls. Leave those parcels alone, Ivar. What's in them? Ah, wouldn't you like to know! No, no; it's nothing nice. Come on, let's play a game. What shall we play? Hide-and-seek? Yes, let's play hide-and-seek. Bob shall hide first. You want me to? All right, let me hide first.

[NORA and the CHILDREN play around the room, and in the adjacent room to the right, laughing and shouting. At length NORA hides under the table. The CHILDREN rush in, look, but cannot find her. Then they hear her half-stifled laughter, run

to the table, lift up the cloth and see her. Great excitement. She crawls out as though to frighten them. Further excitement. Meanwhile, there has been a knock on the door leading from the hall, but no one has noticed it. Now the door is half opened and KROGSTAD enters. He waits for a moment; the game continues.]

Krogstad. Excuse me, Mrs. Helmer—

Nora (turns with a stifled cry and half jumps up). Oh! What do you want?

Krogstad. I beg your pardon—the front door was ajar. Someone must have forgotten to close it.

Nora (gets up). My husband is not at home, Mr. Krogstad.

Krogstad. I know.

Nora. Well, what do you want here, then?

Krogstad. A word with you.

Nora. With—? (to the CHILDREN, quietly) Go inside to Anne-Marie. What? No, the strange gentleman won't do anything to hurt mummy. When he's gone we'll start playing again.

[She takes the CHILDREN into the room on the left and closes the door behind them.]

Nora (uneasy, tense). You want to speak to me?

Krogstad. Yes.

Nora. Today? But it's not the first of the month yet.

Krogstad. No, it is Christmas Eve. Whether or not you have a merry Christmas depends on you.

Nora. What do you want? I can't give you anything today—

Krogstad. We won't talk about that for the present. There's something else. You have a moment to spare?

Nora. Oh, yes. Yes, I suppose so—though—

Krogstad. Good. I was sitting in the café down below and I saw your husband cross the street—

Nora. Yes.

Krogstad. With a lady.

Nora. Well?

Krogstad. Might I be so bold as to ask; was not that lady a Mrs. Linde?

Nora. Yes.

Krogstad. Recently arrived in town?

Nora. Yes, today.

Krogstad. She is a good friend of yours, is she not?

Nora. Yes, she is. But I don't see—

Krogstad. I used to know her, too, once.

Nora. I know.

Krogstad. Oh? You've discovered that. Yes, I thought you would. Well then, may I ask you a straight question: is Mrs. Linde to be employed at the bank?

Nora. How dare you presume to cross-examine me, Mr. Krogstad? You, one of my husband's employees? But since you ask, you shall have an answer. Yes, Mrs. Linde is to be employed by the bank. And I arranged it, Mr. Krogstad. Now you know.

Krogstad. I guessed right, then.

Nora (*walks up and down the room*). Oh, one has a little influence, you know. Just because one's a woman it doesn't necessarily mean that—When one is in a humble position, Mr. Krogstad, one should think twice before offending someone who—hm—!

Krogstad. —who has influence?

Nora. Precisely.

Krogstad (*changes his tone*). Mrs. Helmer, will you have the kindness to use your influence on my behalf?

Nora. What? What do you mean?

Krogstad. Will you be so good as to see that I keep my humble position at the bank?

Nora. What do you mean? Who is thinking of removing you from your position?

Krogstad. Oh, you don't need to play the

innocent with me. I realize it can't be very pleasant for your friend to risk bumping into me. And now I also realize whom I have to thank for being hounded out like this.

Nora. But I assure you—

Krogstad. Look, let's not beat about the bush. There's still time, and I'd advise you to use your influence to stop it.

Nora. But, Mr. Krogstad, I have no influence!

Krogstad. Oh? I thought you just said—

Nora. But I didn't mean it like that! I? How on earth could you imagine that I would have any influence over my husband?

Krogstad. Oh, I've known your husband since we were students together. I imagine he has his weaknesses like other married men.

Nora. If you speak impertinently⁶ of my husband, I shall show you the door.

Krogstad. You're a bold woman, Mrs. Helmer.

Nora. I'm not afraid of you any longer. Once the new year is in, I'll soon be rid of you.

Krogstad (*more controlled*). Now listen to me, Mrs. Helmer. If I'm forced to, I shall fight for my little job at the bank as I would fight for my life.

Nora. So it sounds.

Krogstad. It isn't just the money—that's the last thing I care about. There's something else. Well, you might as well know. It's like this, you see. You know of course, as everyone else does, that some years ago I committed an indiscretion.

Nora. I think I did hear something—

Krogstad. It never came into court; but from that day, every opening was barred to me. So I turned my hand to the kind of

6. **impertinently:** insolently; without the proper respect or manners.

business you know about. I had to do something; and I don't think I was one of the worst. But now I want to give up all that. My sons are growing up; for their sake, I must try to regain what respectability I can. This job in the bank was the first step on the ladder. And now your husband wants to kick me off that ladder back into the dirt.

Nora. But, my dear Mr. Krogstad, it simply isn't in my power to help you.

Krogstad. You say that because you don't want to help me. But I have the means to make you.

Nora. You don't mean you'd tell my husband that I owe you money?

Krogstad. And if I did?

Nora. That'd be a filthy trick! (*almost in tears*) This secret that is my pride and my joy—that he should hear about it in such a filthy, beastly way—hear about it from you! It'd involve me in the most dreadful unpleasantness—

Krogstad. Only—unpleasantness?

Nora (*vehemently*). All right, do it! You'll be the one who'll suffer. It'll show my husband the kind of man you are, and then you'll never keep your job.

Krogstad. I asked you whether it was merely domestic unpleasantness you were afraid of.

Nora. If my husband hears about it, he will of course immediately pay you whatever is owing. And then we shall have nothing more to do with you.

Krogstad (*takes a step closer*). Listen, Mrs. Helmer. Either you've a bad memory or else you know very little about financial transactions. I had better enlighten you.

Nora. What do you mean?

Krogstad. When your husband was ill, you came to me to borrow two hundred and fifty pounds.

Nora. I didn't know anyone else.

Krogstad. I promised to find that sum for you—

Nora. And you did find it.

Krogstad. I promised to find that sum for you on certain conditions. You were so worried about your husband's illness and so keen to get the money to take him abroad that I don't think you bothered much about the details. So it won't be out of place if I refresh your memory. Well—I promised to get you the money in exchange for an I.O.U., which I drew up.

Nora. Yes, and which I signed.

Krogstad. Exactly. But then I added a few lines naming your father as security for the debt. This paragraph was to be signed by your father.

Nora. Was to be? He did sign it.

Krogstad. I left the date blank for your father to fill in when he signed this paper. You remember, Mrs. Helmer?

Nora. Yes, I think so—

Krogstad. Then I gave you back this I.O.U. for you to post to your father. Is that not correct?

Nora. Yes.

Krogstad. And of course you posted it at once; for within five or six days you brought it along to me with your father's signature on it. Whereupon I handed you the money.

Nora. Yes, well. Haven't I repaid the installments as agreed?

Krogstad. Mm—yes, more or less. But to return to what we are speaking about—that was a difficult time for you just then, wasn't it, Mrs. Helmer?

Nora. Yes, it was.

Krogstad. Your father was very ill, if I am not mistaken.

Nora. He was dying.

Krogstad. He did in fact die shortly afterwards?

Nora. Yes.

Krogstad. Tell me, Mrs. Helmer, do you by any chance remember the date of your father's death? The day of the month, I mean.

Nora. Papa died on the twenty-ninth of September.

Krogstad. Quite correct; I took the trouble to confirm it. And that leaves me with a curious little problem—(*takes out a paper*)—which I simply cannot solve.

Nora. Problem? I don't see—

Krogstad. The problem, Mrs. Helmer, is that your father signed this paper three days after his death.

Nora. What? I don't understand—

Krogstad. Your father died on the twenty-ninth of September. But look at this. Here your father has dated his signature the second of October. Isn't that a curious little problem, Mrs. Helmer?

[*NORA is silent.*]

Krogstad. Can you suggest any explanation?

[*She remains silent.*]

Krogstad. And there's another curious thing. The words "second of October" and the year are written in a hand which is not your father's, but which I seem to know. Well, there's a simple explanation to that. Your father could have forgotten to write in the date when he signed, and someone else could have added it before the news came of his death. There's nothing criminal about that. It's the signature itself I'm wondering about. It is genuine, I suppose, Mrs. Helmer? It was your father who wrote his name here?

Nora (*after a short silence, throws back her head and looks defiantly at him*). No, it was not. It was I who wrote Papa's name there.

Krogstad. Look, Mrs. Helmer, do you realize this is a dangerous admission?

Nora. Why? You'll get your money.

Krogstad. May I ask you a question? Why didn't you send this paper to your father?

Nora. I couldn't. Papa was very ill. If I'd asked him to sign this, I'd have had to tell him what the money was for. But I couldn't have told him in his condition that my husband's life was in danger. I couldn't have done that!

Krogstad. Then you would have been wiser to have given up your idea of a holiday.

Nora. But I couldn't! It was to save my husband's life. I couldn't put it off.

Krogstad. But didn't it occur to you that you were being dishonest towards me?

Nora. I couldn't bother about that. I didn't care about you. I hated you because of all the beastly difficulties you'd put in my way when you knew how dangerously ill my husband was.

Krogstad. Mrs. Helmer, you evidently don't appreciate exactly what you have done. But I can assure you that it is no bigger nor worse a crime than the one I once committed and thereby ruined my whole social position.

Nora. You? Do you expect me to believe that you would have taken a risk like that to save your wife's life?

Krogstad. The law does not concern itself with motives.

Nora. Then the law must be very stupid.

Krogstad. Stupid or not, if I show this paper to the police, you will be judged according to it.

Nora. I don't believe that. Hasn't a daughter the right to shield her father from worry and anxiety when he's old and dying?

Hasn't a wife the right to save her husband's life? I don't know much about the law, but there must be something somewhere that says that such things are allowed. You ought to know that, you're meant to be a lawyer, aren't you? You can't be a very good lawyer, Mr. Krogstad.

Krogstad. Possibly not. But business, the

kind of business we two have been transacting—I think you'll admit I understand something about that? Good. Do as you please. But I tell you this. If I get thrown into the gutter for a second time, I shall take you with me.

[He bows and goes out through the hall.]

Nora (stands for a moment in thought, then tosses her head). What nonsense! He's trying to frighten me! I'm not that stupid. (busies herself gathering together the children's clothes; then she suddenly stops.) But—? No, it's impossible. I did it for love, didn't I?

Children (in the doorway, left). Mummy, the strange gentleman has gone out into the street.

Nora. Yes, yes, I know. But don't talk to anyone about the strange gentleman. You hear? Not even to Daddy.

Children. No, Mummy. Will you play with us again now?

Nora. No, no. Not now.

Children. Oh but, Mummy, you promised!

Nora. I know, but I can't just now. Go back to the nursery. I've a lot to do. Go away, my darlings, go away.

[She pushes them gently into the other room, and closes the door behind them. She sits on the sofa, takes up her embroidery, stitches for a few moments, but soon stops.]

Nora. No! (throws the embroidery aside, gets up, goes to the door leading to the hall and calls) Helen! Bring in the Christmas tree! (She goes to the table on the left and opens the drawer in it; then pauses again.) No, but it's utterly impossible!

Maid (enters with the tree). Where shall I put it, madam?

Nora. There, in the middle of the room.

Maid. Will you be wanting anything else?

Nora. No, thank you. I have everything I need.

[The MAID puts down the tree and goes out.]

Nora (busy decorating the tree). Now—candles here—and flowers here. That loathsome man! Nonsense, nonsense, there's nothing to be frightened about. The Christmas tree must be beautiful. I'll do everything that you like, Torvald. I'll sing for you, dance for you—

[HELMER, with a bundle of papers under his arm, enters.]

Nora. Oh—are you back already?

Helmer. Yes. Has anyone been here?

Nora. Here? No.

Helmer. That's strange. I saw Krogstad come out of the front door.

Nora. Did you? Oh yes, that's quite right—Krogstad was here for a few minutes.

Helmer. Nora, I can tell from your face, he has been here and asked you to put in a good word for him.

Nora. Yes.

Helmer. And you were to pretend you were doing it of your own accord? You weren't going to tell me he'd been here? He asked you to do that too, didn't he?

Nora. Yes, Torvald. But—

Helmer. Nora, Nora! And you were ready to enter into such a conspiracy? Talking to a man like that, and making him promises—and then, on top of it all, to tell me an untruth!

Nora. An untruth?

Helmer. Didn't you say no one had been here? (wags his finger) My little songbird must never do that again. A songbird must have a clean beak to sing with. Otherwise she'll start twittering out of tune. (puts his arm around her waist) Isn't that the way we want things? Yes, of course it is. (lets go of her) So let's hear no more about that. (sits down in front of the stove) Ah, how cosy and peaceful it is here! (glances for a few moments at his papers)

Nora (*busy with the tree; after a short silence*). Torvald.

Helmer. Yes.

Nora. I'm terribly looking forward to that fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs on Boxing Day.⁷

Helmer. And I'm terribly curious to see what you're going to surprise me with.

Nora. Oh, it's so maddening.

Helmer. What is?

Nora. I can't think of anything to wear. It all seems so stupid and meaningless.

Helmer. So my little Nora has come to that conclusion, has she?

Nora (*behind his chair, resting her arms on its back*).

Are you very busy, Torvald?

Helmer. Oh—

Nora. What are those papers?

Helmer. Just something to do with the bank.

Nora. Already?

Helmer. I persuaded the trustees to give me authority to make certain immediate changes in the staff and organization. I want to have everything straight by the new year.

Nora. Then that's why this poor man Krogstad—

Helmer. Hm.

Nora (*still leaning over his chair, slowly strokes the back of his head*). If you hadn't been so busy, I was going to ask you an enormous favor, Torvald.

Helmer. Well, tell me. What was it to be?

Nora. You know I trust your taste more than anyone's. I'm so anxious to look really beautiful at the fancy-dress ball. Torvald, couldn't you help me to decide what I shall go as, and what kind of costume I ought to wear?

Helmer. Aha! So little Miss Independent's



7. **Boxing Day**: the first weekday after Christmas.

in trouble and needs a man to rescue her, does she?

Nora. Yes, Torvald. I can't get anywhere without your help.

Helmer. Well, well, I'll give the matter thought. We'll find something.

Nora. Oh, how kind of you! (*goes back to the tree; pauses*) How pretty these red flowers look! But, tell me, is it so dreadful, this thing that Krogstad's done?

Helmer. He forged someone else's name. Have you any idea what that means?

Nora. Mightn't he have been forced to do it by some emergency?

Helmer. He probably just didn't think—that's what usually happens. I'm not so heartless as to condemn a man for an isolated action.

Nora. No, Torvald, of course not!

Helmer. Men often succeed in reestablishing themselves if they admit their crime and take their punishment.

Nora. Punishment?

Helmer. But Krogstad didn't do that. He chose to try and trick his way out of it. And that's what has morally destroyed him.

Nora. You think that would—?

Helmer. Just think how a man with that load on his conscience must always be lying and cheating and dissembling—how he must wear a mask even in the presence of those who are dearest to him, even his own wife and children! Yes, the children. That's the worst danger, Nora.

Nora. Why?

Helmer. Because an atmosphere of lies contaminates and poisons every corner of the home. Every breath that the children draw in such a house contains the germs of evil.

Nora (*comes closer behind him*). Do you really believe that?

Helmer. Oh, my dear, I've come across it so often in my work at the bar. Nearly all

young criminals are the children of mothers who are constitutional liars.

Nora. Why do you say mothers?

Helmer. It's usually the mother—though of course the father can have the same influence. Every lawyer knows that only too well. And yet this fellow Krogstad has been sitting at home all these years poisoning his children with his lies and pretenses. That's why I say that, morally speaking, he is dead. (*stretches out his hand towards her*) So my pretty little Nora must promise me not to plead his case. Your hand on it. Come, come, what's this? Give me your hand. There. That's settled, now. I assure you it'd be quite impossible for me to work in the same building as him. I literally feel physically ill in the presence of a man like that.

Nora (*draws her hand from his and goes over to the other side of the Christmas tree*). How hot it is in here! And I've so much to do.

Helmer (*gets up and gathers his papers*). Yes, and I must try to get some of this read before dinner. I'll think about your costume, too. And I may even have something up my sleeve to hang in gold paper on the Christmas tree. (*lays his hand on her head*) My precious little songbird!

[*He goes into his study and closes the door.*]

Nora (*softly, after a pause*). It's nonsense. It must be. It's impossible. It *must* be impossible!

Nurse (*in the doorway, left*). The children are asking if they can come in to Mummy.

Nora. No, no, no—don't let them in. You stay with them, Anne-Marie.

Nurse. Very good, madam. (*closes the door*)

Nora (*pale with fear*). Corrupt my little children—! Poison my home! (*short pause; she throws back her head*) It isn't true! It couldn't be true!

First Thoughts

Do you believe that Nora is as happy as she claims to be? Why or why not?

Identifying Facts

1. Why do Nora and Torvald feel Christmas is going to be especially happy this year?
2. Who is Mrs. Linde, and why does she visit Nora? How is her life different from Nora's?
3. Why did Nora borrow money? From whom did she borrow it? What was illegal about the way she borrowed the money?
4. What does Krogstad want Nora to do for him? How does he try to persuade her?
5. How does Torvald respond to Nora's request to help Mrs. Linde? To help Krogstad?

Interpreting Meanings

1. What do Torvald's nicknames for Nora, such as "skylark," "squirrel," and "squanderbird" tell you about their relationship? How does Nora react to these nicknames? How do Torvald's nicknames and Nora's reactions to them help to **characterize** them and reveal the nature of their marriage?
2. On page 1091, Torvald describes Krogstad as a man who "must wear a mask even in the presence of those who are dearest to him." Because of this, Tor-

vald says, "an atmosphere of lies contaminates and poisons" Krogstad's home. How do you know that this statement applies to the Helmers' home as well?

3. Compare and contrast the way Nora interacts with Dr. Rank and with Torvald. What does this behavior tell you about her **character**?
4. Based on what she says about Krogstad and how she reacts to the mention of his name, how do you think Mrs. Linde feels about Krogstad?

Applying Meanings

Do you think the marriage of Nora and Torvald Helmer could be used as the basis of a play about a modern American couple? What aspects of their relationship would you change in order to update it? What aspects of their relationship could be kept unchanged?

Creative Writing Response

Adopting a Character's Point of View.
Write a one-page narrative from the point of view of Torvald, Mrs. Linde, Krogstad, or Dr. Rank, in which you discuss Nora's personality and behavior. Your narrative might take the form of a journal entry, a letter, or any other first-person narrative form. In your narrative, have the character whose point of view you have adopted predict what will happen to Nora. Remember that not every character knows everything about Nora at this point in the play.



Midland Community Theatre at Theatre Midland

— ACT 2 —

The same room. In the corner by the piano the Christmas tree stands, stripped and disheveled, its candles burned to their sockets. NORA's outdoor clothes lie on the sofa. She is alone in the room, walking restlessly to-and-fro. At length she stops by the sofa and picks up her coat.

Nora (drops the coat again). There's someone coming! (goes to the door and listens) No, it's no one. Of course—no one'll come today, it's Christmas Day. Nor tomorrow. But perhaps—! (opens the door and looks out) No. Nothing in the letter box. Quite empty. (walks across the room) Silly, silly. Of course he won't do anything. It couldn't happen. It isn't possible. Why, I've three small children.

[The NURSE, carrying a large cardboard box, enters from the room on the left.]

Nurse. I found those fancy dress clothes at last, madam.

Nora. Thank you. Put them on the table.

Nurse (does so). They're all rumpled up.

Nora. Oh, I wish I could tear them into a million pieces!

Nurse. Why, madam! They'll be all right. Just a little patience.

Nora. Yes, of course. I'll go and get Mrs. Linde to help me.

Nurse. What, out again? In this dreadful weather? You'll catch a chill, madam.

Nora. Well, that wouldn't be the worst. How are the children?

Nurse. Playing with their Christmas presents, poor little dears. But—

Nora. Are they still asking to see me?

Nurse. They're so used to having their mummy with them.

Nora. Yes, but, Anne-Marie, from now on I shan't be able to spend so much time with them.

Nurse. Well, children get used to anything in time.

Nora. Do you think so? Do you think they'd forget their mother if she went away from them—forever?

Nurse. Mercy's sake, madam! Forever!

Nora. Tell me, Anne-Marie—I've so often wondered. How could you bear to give your child away—to strangers?

Nurse. But I had to when I came to nurse my little Miss Nora.

Nora. Do you mean you wanted to?

Nurse. When I had the chance of such a good job? A poor girl what's got into trouble can't afford to pick and choose. That good-for-nothing didn't lift a finger.

Nora. But your daughter must have completely forgotten you.

Nurse. Oh no, indeed she hasn't. She's written to me twice, once when she got confirmed and then again when she got married.

Nora (*hugs her*). Dear old Anne-Marie, you were a good mother to me.

Nurse. Poor little Miss Nora, you never had any mother but me.

Nora. And if my little ones had no one else, I know you would—no, silly, silly, silly! (*opens the cardboard box*) Go back to them, Anne-Marie. Now I must—! Tomorrow you'll see how pretty I shall look.

Nurse. Why, there'll be no one at the ball as beautiful as my Miss Nora.

[*She goes into the room, left.*]

Nora (*begins to unpack the clothes from the box, but soon throws them down again*). Oh, if only I dared go out! If I could be sure no one would come and nothing would happen while I was away! Stupid, stupid! No one will come. I just mustn't think about it. Brush this muff. Pretty gloves, pretty gloves! Don't think about it, don't think about it! One, two, three, four, five, six—(*cries*) Ah—they're coming—!

[*She begins to run towards the door, but stops uncertainly.* MRS. LINDE enters from

the hall, where she has been taking off her outdoor clothes.]

Nora. Oh, it's you, Christine. There's no one else outside, is there? Oh, I'm so glad you've come.

Mrs. Linde. I hear you were at my room asking for me.

Nora. Yes, I just happened to be passing. I want to ask you to help me with something. Let's sit down here on the sofa. Look at this. There's going to be a fancy-dress ball tomorrow night upstairs at Consul Stenborg's, and Torvald wants me to go as a Neapolitan fisher-girl and dance the tarantella. I learned it in Capri.

Mrs. Linde. I say, are you going to give a performance?

Nora. Yes, Torvald says I should. Look, here's the dress. Torvald had it made for me in Italy—but now it's all so torn, I don't know—

Mrs. Linde. Oh, we'll soon put that right—the stitching's just come away. Needle and thread? Ah, here we are.

Nora. You're being awfully sweet.

Mrs. Linde (*sews*). So you're going to dress up tomorrow, Nora? I must pop over for a moment to see how you look. Oh, but I've completely forgotten to thank you for that nice evening yesterday.

Nora (*gets up and walks across the room*). Oh, I didn't think it was as nice as usual. You ought to have come to town a little earlier, Christine. . . . Yes, Torvald understands how to make a home look attractive.

Mrs. Linde. I'm sure you do, too. You're not your father's daughter for nothing. But, tell me—is Dr. Rank always in such low spirits as he was yesterday?

Nora. No, last night it was very noticeable. But he's got a terrible disease—he's got spinal tuberculosis, poor man. His father was a frightful creature who kept mistresses and so on. As a result Dr. Rank has

been sickly ever since he was a child—you understand—

Mrs. Linde (*puts down her sewing*). But, my dear Nora, how on earth did you get to know about such things?

Nora (*walks about the room*). Oh, don't be silly, Christine—when one has three children, one comes into contact with women who—well, who know about medical matters, and they tell one a thing or two.

Mrs. Linde (*sews again; a short silence*). Does Dr. Rank visit you every day?

Nora. Yes, every day. He's Torvald's oldest friend, and a good friend to me too. Dr. Rank's almost one of the family.

Mrs. Linde. But, tell me—is he quite sincere? I mean, doesn't he rather say the sort of thing he thinks people want to hear?

Nora. No, quite the contrary. What gave you that idea?

Mrs. Linde. When you introduced me to him yesterday, he said he'd often heard my name mentioned here. But later I noticed your husband had no idea who I was. So how could Dr. Rank—

Nora. Yes, that's quite right, Christine. You see, Torvald's so hopelessly in love with me that he wants to have me all to himself—those were his very words. When we were first married, he got quite jealous if I as much as mentioned any of my old friends back home. So naturally, I stopped talking about them. But I often chat with Dr. Rank about that kind of thing. He enjoys it, you see.

Mrs. Linde. Now listen, Nora. In many ways you're still a child; I'm a bit older than you and have a little more experience of the world. There's something I want to say to you. You ought to give up this business with Dr. Rank.

Nora. What business?

Mrs. Linde. Well, everything. Last night you were speaking about this rich admirer

of yours who was going to give you money—

Nora. Yes, and who doesn't exist—unfortunately. But what's that got to do with—?

Mrs. Linde. Is Dr. Rank rich?

Nora. Yes.

Mrs. Linde. And he has no dependants?

Nora. No, no one. But—

Mrs. Linde. And he comes here to see you every day?

Nora. Yes, I've told you.

Mrs. Linde. But how dare a man of his education be so forward?

Nora. What on earth are you talking about?

Mrs. Linde. Oh, stop pretending, Nora. Do you think I haven't guessed who it was who lent you that two hundred pounds?

Nora. Are you out of your mind? How could you imagine such a thing? A friend, someone who comes here every day! Why, that'd be an impossible situation!

Mrs. Linde. Then it really wasn't him?

Nora. No, of course not. I've never for a moment dreamed of—anyway, he hadn't any money to lend then. He didn't come into that till later.

Mrs. Linde. Well, I think that was a lucky thing for you, Nora dear.

Nora. No, I could never have dreamed of asking Dr. Rank— Though I'm sure that if ever I did ask him—

Mrs. Linde. But of course you won't.

Nora. Of course not. I can't imagine that it should ever become necessary. But I'm perfectly sure that if I did speak to Dr. Rank—

Mrs. Linde. Behind your husband's back?

Nora. I've got to get out of this other business—and that's been going on behind his back. I've got to get out of it.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, well, that's what I told you yesterday. But—

Nora (*walking up and down*). It's much

easier for a man to arrange these things than a woman—

Mrs. Linde. One's own husband, yes.

Nora. Oh, bosh. (*stops walking*) When you've completely repaid a debt, you get your I.O.U. back, don't you?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, of course.

Nora. And you can tear it into a thousand pieces and burn the filthy, beastly thing!

Mrs. Linde (*looks hard at her, puts down her sewing and gets up slowly*). Nora, you're hiding something from me.

Nora. Can you see that?

Mrs. Linde. Something has happened since yesterday morning. Nora, what is it?

Nora (*goes towards her*). Christine! (*listens*) Ssh! There's Torvald. Would you mind going into the nursery for a few minutes? Torvald can't bear to see sewing around. Anne-Marie'll help you.

Mrs. Linde (*gathers some of her things together*). Very well. But I shan't leave this house until we've talked this matter out.

[*She goes into the nursery, left. As she does so, HELMER enters from the hall.*]

Nora (*runs to meet him*). Oh, Torvald dear, I've been so longing for you to come back!

Helmer. Was that the dressmaker?

Nora. No, it was Christine. She's helping me mend my costume. I'm going to look rather splendid in that.

Helmer. Yes, that was quite a bright idea of mine, wasn't it?

Nora. Wonderful! But wasn't it nice of me to give in to you?

Helmer (*takes her chin in his hand*). Nice—to give in to your husband? All right, little silly, I know you didn't mean it like that. But I won't disturb you. I expect you'll be wanting to try it on.

Nora. Are you going to work now?

Helmer. Yes. (*shows her a bundle of papers*) Look at these. I've been down to the

bank—(*turns to go into his study*)

Nora. Torvald.

Helmer (*stops*). Yes.

Nora. If little squirrel asked you really prettily to grant her a wish—

Helmer. Well?

Nora. Would you grant it to her?

Helmer. First I should naturally have to know what it was.

Nora. Squirrel would do lots of pretty tricks for you if you granted her wish.

Helmer. Out with it, then.

Nora. Your little skylark would sing in every room—

Helmer. My little skylark does that already.

Nora. I'd turn myself into a little fairy and dance for you in the moonlight, Torvald.

Helmer. Nora, it isn't that business you were talking about this morning?

Nora (*comes closer*). Yes, Torvald—oh, please! I beg of you!

Helmer. Have you really the nerve to bring that up again?

Nora. Yes, Torvald, yes, you must do as I ask! You must let Krogstad keep his place at the bank!

Helmer. My dear Nora, his is the job I'm giving to Mrs. Linde.

Nora. Yes, that's terribly sweet of you. But you can get rid of one of the other clerks instead of Krogstad.

Helmer. Really, you're being incredibly obstinate. Just because you thoughtlessly promised to put in a word for him, you expect me to—

Nora. No, it isn't that, Helmer. It's for your own sake. That man writes for the most beastly newspapers—you said so yourself. He could do you tremendous harm. I'm so dreadfully frightened of him—

Helmer. Oh, I understand. Memories of the past. That's what's frightening you.

Nora. What do you mean?

Helmer. You're thinking of your father, aren't you?

Nora. Yes, yes. Of course. Just think what those dreadful men wrote in the papers about Papa! The most frightful slanders. I really believe it would have lost him his job if the Ministry hadn't sent you down to investigate, and you hadn't been so kind and helpful to him.

Helmer. But, my dear little Nora, there's a considerable difference between your father and me. Your father was not a man of unassailable reputation. But I am. And I hope to remain so all my life.

Nora. But no one knows what spiteful people may not dig up. We could be so peaceful and happy now, Torvald—we could be free from every worry—you and I and the children. Oh, please, Torvald, please—!

Helmer. The very fact of your pleading his cause makes it impossible for me to keep him. Everyone at the bank already knows that I intend to dismiss Krogstad. If the rumor got about that the new vice-president had allowed his wife to persuade him to change his mind—

Nora. Well, what then?

Helmer. Oh, nothing, nothing. As long as my little Miss Obstinate gets her way—! Do you expect me to make a laughingstock of myself before my entire staff—give people the idea that I am open to outside influence? Believe me, I'd soon feel the consequences! Besides—there's something else that makes it impossible for Krogstad to remain in the bank while I am its manager.

Nora. What is that?

Helmer. I might conceivably have allowed myself to ignore his moral obloquies¹—

Nora. Yes, Torvald, surely?

Helmer. And I hear he's quite efficient at his job. But we—well, we were school



Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

friends. It was one of those friendships that one enters into overhastily and so often comes to regret later in life. I might as well confess the truth. We—well, we're on Christian name terms. And the tactless idiot makes no attempt to conceal it when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives him the right to be familiar with me. He shows off the whole time, with "Torvald this" and "Torvald that." I can tell you, I find it damned annoying. If he stayed, he'd make my position intolerable.

Nora. Torvald, you can't mean this seriously.

Helmer. Oh? And why not?

Nora. But it's so petty.

Helmer. What did you say? Petty? You think I am petty?

Nora. No, Torvald dear, of course you're not. That's just why—

Helmer. Don't quibble! You call my motives petty. Then I must be petty too. Petty!

1. obloquies (äb'lé-kwēz): verbal abuse; censure.

I see. Well, I've had enough of this. (*goes to the door and calls into the hall*) Helen!

Nora. What are you going to do?

Helmer (*searching among his papers*). I'm going to settle this matter once and for all.

[*The MAID enters.*]

Helmer. Take this letter downstairs at once. Find a messenger and see that he delivers it. Immediately! The address is on the envelope. Here's the money.

Maid. Very good, sir. (*goes out with the letter*)

Helmer (*putting his papers in order*). There now, little Miss Obstinate.

Nora (*tensely*). Torvald—what was in that letter?

Helmer. Krogstad's dismissal.

Nora. Call her back, Torvald! There's still time. Oh, Torvald, call her back! Do it for my sake—for your own sake—for the children! Do you hear me, Torvald? Please do it! You don't realize what this may do to us all!

Helmer. Too late.

Nora. Yes. Too late.

Helmer. My dear Nora, I forgive you this anxiety. Though it is a bit of an insult to me. Oh, but it is! Isn't it an insult to imply that I should be frightened by the vindictiveness of a depraved hack journalist? But I forgive you, because it so charmingly testifies to the love you bear me. (*takes her in his arms*) Which is as it should be, my own dearest Nora. Let what will happen, happen. When the real crisis comes, you will not find me lacking in strength or courage. I am man enough to bear the burden for us both.

Nora (*fearfully*). What do you mean?

Helmer. The whole burden, I say—

Nora (*calmly*). I shall never let you do that.

Helmer. Very well. We shall share it, Nora—as man and wife. And that's as it

should be. (*caresses her*) Are you happy now? There, there, there; don't look at me with those frightened little eyes. You're simply imagining things. You go ahead now and do your tarantella, and get some practice on that tambourine. I'll sit in my study and close the door. Then I won't hear anything, and you can make all the noise you want. (*turns in the doorway*) When Dr. Rank comes, tell him where to find me. (*He nods to her, goes into his room with his papers and closes the door*.)

Nora (*desperate with anxiety, stands as though transfixed, and whispers*). He said he'd do it. He will do it. He will do it, and nothing'll stop him. No, never that. I'd rather anything. There must be some escape—Some way out—!

[*The bell rings in the hall.*]

Nora. Dr. Rank—! Anything but that! Anything, I don't care—!

[*She passes her hand across her face, composes herself, walks across and opens the door to the hall. DR. RANK is standing there, hanging up his fur coat. During the following scene it begins to grow dark.*]

Nora. Good evening, Dr. Rank. I recognized your ring. But you mustn't go in to Torvald yet. I think he's busy.

Rank. And—you?

Nora (*as he enters the room and she closes the door behind him*). Oh, you know very well I've always time to talk to you.

Rank. Thank you. I shall avail myself of that privilege as long as I can.

Nora. What do you mean by that? As long as you *can*?

Rank. Yes. Does that frighten you?

Nora. Well, it's rather a curious expression. Is something going to happen?

Rank. Something I've been expecting to happen for a long time. But I didn't think it would happen quite so soon.

Nora (*seizes his arm*). What is it? Dr. Rank, you must tell me!

Rank (*sits down by the stove*). I'm on the way out. And there's nothing to be done about it.

Nora (*sighs with relief*). Oh, it's you—?

Rank. Who else? No, it's no good lying to oneself. I am the most wretched of all my patients, Mrs. Helmer. These last few days I've been going through the books of this poor body of mine, and I find I am bankrupt. Within a month I may be rotting up there in the churchyard.

Nora. Ugh, what a nasty way to talk!

Rank. The facts aren't exactly nice. But the worst is that there's so much else that's nasty that's got to come first. I've only one more test to make. When that's done I'll have a pretty accurate idea of when the final disintegration is likely to begin. I want to ask you a favor. Helmer's a sensitive chap, and I know how he hates anything ugly. I don't want him to visit me when I'm in hospital—

Nora. Oh but, Dr. Rank—

Rank. I don't want him there. On any pretext. I shan't have him allowed in. As soon as I know the worst, I'll send you my visiting card with a black cross on it, and then you'll know that the final filthy process has begun.

Nora. Really, you're being quite impossible this evening. And I did hope you'd be in a good mood.

Rank. With death on my hands? And all this to atone for someone else's sin? Is there justice in that? And in every single family, in one way or another, the same merciless law of retribution is at work—

Nora (*holds her hands to her ears*). Nonsense! Cheer up! Laugh!

Rank. Yes, you're right. Laughter's all the damned thing's fit for. My poor innocent spine must pay for the fun my father had as a gay young lieutenant.

Nora (*at the table, left*). You mean he was too fond of asparagus and *foie gras*?²

Rank. Yes; and truffles too.

Nora. Yes, of course, truffles, yes. And oysters too, I suppose?

Rank. Yes, oysters, oysters. Of course.

Nora. And all that port and champagne to wash them down. It's too sad that all those lovely things should affect one's spine.

Rank. Especially a poor spine that never got any pleasure out of them.

Nora. Oh yes, that's the saddest thing of all.

Rank (*looks searchingly at her*). Hm—

Nora (*after a moment*). Why did you smile?

Rank. No, it was you who laughed.

Nora. No, it was you who smiled, Dr. Rank!

Rank (*gets up*). You're a worse little rogue than I thought.

Nora. Oh, I'm full of stupid tricks today.

Rank. So it seems.

Nora (*puts both her hands on his shoulders*). Dear, dear Dr. Rank, you mustn't die and leave Torvald and me.

Rank. Oh, you'll soon get over it. Once one is gone, one is soon forgotten.

Nora (*looks at him anxiously*). Do you believe that?

Rank. One finds replacements, and then—

Nora. Who will find a replacement?

Rank. You and Helmer both will, when I am gone. You seem to have made a start already, haven't you? What was this Mrs. Linde doing here yesterday evening?

Nora. Aha! But surely you can't be jealous of poor Christine?

Rank. Indeed I am. She will be my successor in this house. When I have moved on, this lady will—

Nora. Ssh—don't speak so loud! She's in there!

2. *foie gras* (fwä grä): a pâté, or spread, made from goose liver.

Rank. Today again? You see!

Nora. She's only come to mend my dress. Good heavens, how unreasonable you are! (*sits on the sofa*) Be nice now, Dr. Rank. Tomorrow you'll see how beautifully I shall dance; and you must imagine that I'm doing it just for you. And for Torvald, of course; obviously. (*takes some things out of the box*) Dr. Rank, sit down here and I'll show you something.

Rank (sits). What's this?

Nora. Look here! Look!

Rank. Silk stockings!

Nora. Flesh-colored. Aren't they beautiful? It's very dark in here now, of course, but tomorrow—! No, no, no; only the soles. Oh well, I suppose you can look a bit higher if you want to.

Rank. Hm—

Nora. Why are you looking so critical? Don't you think they'll fit me?

Rank. I can't really give you a qualified opinion on that.

Nora (*looks at him for a moment*). Shame on you! (*flicks him on the ear with the stockings*) Take that. (*puts them back in the box*)

Rank. What other wonders are to be revealed to me?

Nora. I shan't show you anything else. You're being naughty.

[She hums a little and looks among the things in the box.]

Rank (*after a short silence*). When I sit here like this being so intimate with you, I can't think—I cannot imagine what would have become of me if I had never entered this house.

Nora (smiles). Yes, I think you enjoy being with us, don't you?

Rank (*more quietly, looking into the middle distance*). And now to have to leave it all—

Nora. Nonsense. You're not leaving us.

Rank (as before). And not to be able to leave even the most wretched token of gratitude behind; hardly even a passing sense of loss; only an empty place, to be filled by the next comer.

Nora. Suppose I were to ask you to—?

No—

Rank. To do what?

Nora. To give me proof of your friendship—

Rank. Yes, yes?

Nora. No, I mean—to do me a very great service—

Rank. Would you really for once grant me that happiness?

Nora. But you've no idea what it is.

Rank. Very well, tell me, then.

Nora. No, but, Dr. Rank, I can't. It's far too much—I want your help and advice, and I want you to do something for me.

Rank. The more the better. I've no idea what it can be. But tell me. You do trust me, don't you?

Nora. Oh, yes, more than anyone. You're my best and truest friend. Otherwise I couldn't tell you. Well then, Dr. Rank—there's something you must help me to prevent. You know how much Torvald loves me—he'd never hesitate for an instant to lay down his life for me—

Rank (leans over towards her). Nora—do you think he is the only one—?

Nora (with a slight start). What do you mean?

Rank. Who would gladly lay down his life for you?

Nora (sadly). Oh, I see.

Rank. I swore to myself I would let you know that before I go. I shall never have a better opportunity. . . . Well, Nora, now you know that. And now you also know that you can trust me as you can trust nobody else.

Nora (rises; calmly and quietly). Let me pass, please.

Rank (makes room for her but remains seated). **Nora**—

Nora (*in the doorway to the hall*). Helen, bring the lamp. (*goes over to the stove*) Oh, dear Dr. Rank, this was really horrid of you.

Rank (*gets up*). That I have loved you as deeply as anyone else has? Was that horrid of me?

Nora. No—but that you should go and tell me. That was quite unnecessary—

Rank. What do you mean? Did you know, then—?

[*The MAID enters with the lamp, puts it on the table and goes out.*]

Rank. **Nora**—Mrs. Helmer—I am asking you, did you know this?

Nora. Oh, what do I know, what did I know, what didn't I know—I really can't say. How could you be so stupid, Dr. Rank? Everything was so nice.

Rank. Well, at any rate now you know that I am ready to serve you, body and soul. So—please continue.

Nora (*looks at him*). After this?

Rank. Please tell me what it is.

Nora. I can't possibly tell you now.

Rank. Yes, yes! You mustn't punish me like this. Let me be allowed to do what I can for you.

Nora. You can't do anything for me now. Anyway, I don't need any help. It was only my imagination—you'll see. Yes, really. Honestly. (*sits in the rocking chair, looks at him and smiles*) Well, upon my word you are a fine gentleman, Dr. Rank. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, now that the lamp's been lit?

Rank. Frankly, no. But perhaps I ought to say—*adieu*?

Nora. Of course not. You will naturally continue to visit us as before. You know quite well how Torvald depends on your company.

Rank. Yes, but you?

Nora. Oh, I always think it's enormous fun having you here.

Rank. That was what misled me. You're a riddle to me, you know. I'd often felt you'd just as soon be with me as with Helmer.

Nora. Well, you see, there are some people whom one loves, and others whom it's almost more fun to be with.

Rank. Oh yes, there's some truth in that.

Nora. When I was at home, of course I loved Papa best. But I always used to think it was terribly amusing to go down and talk to the servants; because they never told me what I ought to do; and they were such fun to listen to.

Rank. I see. So I've taken their place?

Nora (*jumps up and runs over to him*). Oh, dear, sweet Dr. Rank, I didn't mean that at all. But I'm sure you understand—I feel the same about Torvald as I did about Papa.

Maid (*enters from the hall*). Excuse me, madam. (*whispers to her and hands her a visiting card*)

Nora (*glances at the card*). Oh! (*puts it quickly in her pocket*)

Rank. Anything wrong?

Nora. No, no, nothing at all. It's just something that—it's my new dress.

Rank. What? But your costume is lying over there.

Nora. Oh—that, yes—but there's another—I ordered it specially—Torvald mustn't know—

Rank. Ah, so that's your big secret?

Nora. Yes, yes. Go in and talk to him—he's in his study—keep him talking for a bit—

Rank. Don't worry. He won't get away from me. (*goes into HELMER's study*)

Nora (*to the MAID*). Is he waiting in the kitchen?

Maid. Yes, madam, he came up the back way—

Nora. But didn't you tell him I had a visitor?

Maid. Yes, but he wouldn't go.

Nora. Wouldn't go?

Maid. No, madam, not until he'd spoken with you.

Nora. Very well, show him in; but quietly. Helen, you mustn't tell anyone about this. It's a surprise for my husband.

Maid. Very good, madam. I understand.

(goes)

Nora. It's happening. It's happening after all. No, no, no, it can't happen, it mustn't happen.

[She walks across and bolts the door of HELMER's study. The MAID opens the door from the hall to admit KROGSTAD, and closes it behind him. He is wearing an overcoat, heavy boots and a fur cap.]

Nora (goes towards him). Speak quietly. My husband's at home.

Krogstad. Let him hear.

Nora. What do you want from me?

Krogstad. Information.

Nora. Hurry up, then. What is it?

Krogstad. I suppose you know I've been given the sack.

Nora. I couldn't stop it, Mr. Krogstad. I did my best for you, but it didn't help.

Krogstad. Does your husband love you so little? He knows what I can do to you, and yet he dares to—

Nora. Surely you don't imagine I told him?

Krogstad. No, I didn't really think you had. It wouldn't have been like my old friend Torvald Helmer to show that much courage—

Nora. Mr. Krogstad, I'll trouble you to speak respectfully of my husband.

Krogstad. Don't worry, I'll show him all the respect he deserves. But since you're so anxious to keep this matter hushed up, I presume you're better informed than you were yesterday of the gravity of what you've done?

Nora. I've learned more than you could ever teach me.

Krogstad. Yes, a bad lawyer like me—

Nora. What do you want from me?

Krogstad. I just wanted to see how things were with you, Mrs. Helmer. I've been thinking about you all day. Even duns and hack journalists have hearts, you know.

Nora. Show some heart, then. Think of my little children.

Krogstad. Have you and your husband thought of mine? Well, let's forget that. I just wanted to tell you, you don't need to take this business too seriously. I'm not going to take any action, for the present.

Nora. Oh, no—you won't, will you? I knew it.

Krogstad. It can all be settled quite amicably. There's no need for it to become public. We'll keep it among the three of us.

Nora. My husband must never know about this.

Krogstad. How can you stop him? Can you pay the balance of what you owe me?

Nora. Not immediately.

Krogstad. Have you any means of raising the money during the next few days?

Nora. None that I would care to use.

Krogstad. Well, it wouldn't have helped anyway. However much money you offered me now I wouldn't give you back that paper.

Nora. What are you going to do with it?

Krogstad. Just keep it. No one else need ever hear about it. So in case you were thinking of doing anything desperate—

Nora. I am.

Krogstad. Such as running away—

Nora. I am.

Krostad. Or anything more desperate—

Nora. How did you know?

Krogstad. —just give up the idea.

Nora. How did you know?



ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER, JOHN SINGER SARGENT
(1856-1925).

Krogstad. Most of us think of that at first. I did. But I hadn't the courage—

Nora (dully). Neither have I.

Krogstad (relieved). It's true, isn't it? You haven't the courage, either?

Nora. No. I haven't. I haven't.

Krogstad. It'd be a stupid thing to do anyway. Once the first little domestic explosion is over . . . I've got a letter in my pocket here addressed to your husband—

Nora. Telling him everything?

Krogstad. As delicately as possible.

Nora (quickly). He must never see that letter. Tear it up. I'll find the money somehow—

Krogstad. I'm sorry, Mrs. Helmer. I thought I'd explained—

Nora. Oh, I don't mean the money I owe you. Let me know how much you want from my husband, and I'll find it for you.

Krogstad. I'm not asking your husband for money.

Nora. What do you want, then?

Krogstad. I'll tell you. I want to get on my feet again, Mrs. Helmer. I want to get to the top. And your husband's going to help me. For eighteen months now my record's been clean. I've been in hard straits all that time: I was content to fight my way back inch by inch. Now I've been chucked back into the mud, and I'm not going to be satisfied with just getting back my job. I'm going to get to the top, I tell you. I'm going to get back into the bank, and it's going to be higher up. Your husband's going to create a new job for me—

Nora. He'll never do that!

Krogstad. Oh yes, he will. I know him. He won't dare to risk a scandal. And once I'm in there with him, you'll see! Within a year I'll be his right-hand man. It'll be Nils Krogstad who'll be running that bank, not Torvald Helmer!

Nora. That will never happen.

Krogstad. Are you thinking of—?

Nora. Now I have the courage.

Krogstad. Oh, you can't frighten me. A pampered little pretty like you—

Nora. You'll see! You'll see!

Krogstad. Under the ice? Down in the cold, black water? And then, in the spring, to float up again, ugly, unrecognizable, hairless—?

Nora. You can't frighten me.

Krogstad. And you can't frighten me. People don't do such things, Mrs. Helmer. And anyway, what'd be the use? I've got him in my pocket.

Nora. But afterwards? When I'm no longer—?

Krogstad. Have you forgotten that then your reputation will be in my hands?

[She looks at him speechlessly.]

Krogstad. Well, I've warned you. Don't do anything silly. When Helmer's read my letter, he'll get in touch with me. And remember, it's your husband who has forced me to act like this. And for that I'll never forgive him. Goodbye, Mrs. Helmer. (He goes out through the hall.)

Nora (runs to the hall door, opens it a few inches and listens). He's going. He's not going to give him the letter. Oh, no, no, it couldn't possibly happen. (opens the door, a little wider) What's he doing? Standing outside the front door. He's not going downstairs. Is he changing his mind? Yes, he—!

[A letter falls into the letter box. KROGSTAD's footsteps die away down the stairs.]

Nora (with a stifled cry, runs across the room towards the table by the sofa; a pause). In the letter box. (steals timidly over towards the hall door) There it is! Oh, Torvald, Torvald! Now we're lost!

Mrs. Linde (enters from the nursery with NORA's costume). Well, I've done the best I can. Shall we see how it looks—?

Nora (whispers hoarsely). Christine, come here.

Mrs. Linde (throws the dress on the sofa). What's wrong with you? You look as though you'd seen a ghost!

Nora. Come here. Do you see that letter? There—look—through the glass of the letter box.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, yes, I see it.

Nora. That letter's from Krogstad—

Mrs. Linde. Nora! It was Krogstad who lent you the money!

Nora. Yes. And now Torvald's going to discover everything.

Mrs. Linde. Oh, believe me, Nora, it'll be best for you both.

Nora. You don't know what's happened. I've committed a forgery—

Mrs. Linde. But, for heaven's sake—!

Nora. Christine, all I want is for you to be my witness.

Mrs. Linde. What do you mean? Witness what?

Nora. If I should go out of my mind—and it might easily happen—

Mrs. Linde. Nora!

Nora. Or if anything else should happen to me—so that I wasn't here any longer—

Mrs. Linde. Nora, Nora, you don't know what you're saying!

Nora. If anyone should try to take the blame, and say it was all his fault—you understand—?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, yes—but how can you think—?

Nora. Then you must testify that it isn't true, Christine. I'm not mad—I know exactly what I'm saying—and I'm telling you, no one else knows anything about this. I did it entirely on my own. Remember that.

Mrs. Linde. All right. But I simply don't understand—

Nora. Oh, how could you understand? A—miracle—is about to happen.

Mrs. Linde. Miracle?

Nora. Yes. A miracle. But it's so frightening. Christine. It mustn't happen, not for anything in the world.

Mrs. Linde. I'll go over and talk to Krogstad.

Nora. Don't go near him. He'll only do something to hurt you.

Mrs. Linde. Once upon a time he'd have done anything for my sake.

Nora. He?

Mrs. Linde. Where does he live?

Nora. Oh, how should I know?—Oh yes, wait a moment! (*feels in her pocket*) Here's his card. But the letter, the letter!—

Helmer (*from his study, knocks on the door*). Nora!

Nora (*cries in alarm*). What is it?

Helmer. Now, now, don't get alarmed. We're not coming in—you've closed the door. Are you trying on your costume?

Nora. Yes, yes—I'm trying on my costume. I'm going to look so pretty for you, Torvald.

Mrs. Linde (*who has been reading the card*). Why, he lives just round the corner.

Nora. Yes; but it's no use. There's nothing to be done now. The letter's lying there in the box.

Mrs. Linde. And your husband has the key?

Nora. Yes, he always keeps it.

Mrs. Linde. Krogstad must ask him to send the letter back unread. He must find some excuse—

Nora. But Torvald always opens the box at just about this time—

Mrs. Linde. You must stop him. Go in and keep him talking. I'll be back as quickly as I can.

[*She hurries out through the hall.*]

Nora (*goes over to HELMER's door, opens it and peeps in*). Torvald!

Helmer (*offstage*). Well, may a man enter his own drawing room again? Come on, Rank, now we'll see what—(*in the doorway*) But what's this?

Nora. What, Torvald dear?

Helmer. Rank's been preparing me for some great transformation scene.

Rank (*in the doorway*). So I understood. But I seem to have been mistaken.

Nora. Yes, no one's to be allowed to see me before tomorrow night.

Helmer. But, my dear Nora, you look quite worn out. Have you been practicing too hard?

Nora. No, I haven't practiced at all yet.

Helmer. Well, you must.

Nora. Yes, Torvald, I must, I know. But I can't get anywhere without your help. I've completely forgotten everything.

Helmer. Oh, we'll soon put that to rights.

Nora. Yes, help me, Torvald. Promise me you will? Oh, I'm so nervous. All those people!— You must forget everything except me this evening. You mustn't think of business—I won't even let you touch a pen. Promise me, Torvald?

Helmer. I promise. This evening I shall think of nothing but you—my poor, helpless little darling. Oh, there's just one thing I must see to—(*goes towards the hall door*)

Nora. What do you want out there?

Helmer. I'm only going to see if any letters have come.

Nora. No, Torvald, no!

Helmer. Why what's the matter?

Nora. Torvald, I beg you. There's nothing there.

Helmer. Well, I'll just make sure.

[*He moves towards the door. NORA runs to the piano and plays the first bars of the Tarantella.*]

Helmer (*at the door, turns*). Aha!

Nora. I can't dance tomorrow if I don't practice with you now.

Helmer (*goes over to her*). Are you really so frightened, Nora dear?

Nora. Yes, terribly frightened. Let me start

practicing now, at once—we've still time before dinner. Oh, do sit down and play for me, Torvald dear. Correct me, lead me, the way you always do.

Helmer. Very well, my dear, if you wish it.

[He sits down at the piano. NORA seizes the tambourine and a long multicolored shawl from the cardboard box, wraps the shawl hastily around her, then takes a

quick leap into the center of the room and cries:]

Nora. Play for me! I want to dance!

[HELMER plays and NORA dances. DR. RANK stands behind HELMER at the piano and watches her.]

Helmer (as he plays). Slower, slower!

Nora. I can't!



Helmer. Not so violently, Nora.

Nora. I must!

Helmer (*stops playing*). No, no, this won't do at all.

Nora (*laughs and swings her tambourine*). Isn't that what I told you?

Rank. Let me play for her.

Helmer (*gets up*). Yes, would you? Then it'll be easier for me to show her.

[**RANK** sits down at the piano and plays. **NORA** dances more and more wildly. **HELMER** has stationed himself by the stove and tries repeatedly to correct her, but she seems not to hear him. Her hair works loose and falls over her shoulders; she ignores it and continues to dance. **MRS. LINDE** enters.]

Mrs. Linde (*stands in the doorway as though tongue-tied*). Ah—!

Nora (*as she dances*). Oh, Christine, we're having such fun!

Helmer. But, Nora darling, you're dancing as if your life depended on it.

Nora. It does.

Helmer. Rank, stop it! This is sheer lunacy. Stop it, I say!

[**RANK** ceases playing. **NORA** suddenly stops dancing.]

Helmer (*goes over to her*). I'd never have believed it. You've forgotten everything I taught you.

Nora (*throws away the tambourine*). You see!

Helmer. I'll have to show you every step.

Nora. You see how much I need you! You must show me every step of the way. Right to the end of the dance. Promise me you will, Torvald?

Helmer. Never fear. I will.

Nora. You mustn't think about anything but me—today or tomorrow. Don't open any letters—don't even open the letter box—

Helmer. Aha, you're still worried about that fellow—

Nora. Oh, yes, yes, him too.

Helmer. Nora, I can tell from the way you're behaving, there's a letter from him already lying there.

Nora. I don't know. I think so. But you mustn't read it now. I don't want anything ugly to come between us till it's all over.

Rank (*quietly to HELMER*). Better give her her way.

Helmer (*puts his arm round her*). My child shall have her way. But tomorrow night, when your dance is over—

Nora. Then you will be free.

Maid (*appears in the doorway, right*). Dinner is served, madam.

Nora. Put out some champagne, Helen.

Maid. Very good, madam. (*goes*)

Helmer. I say! What's this, a banquet?

Nora. We'll drink champagne until dawn! (*calls*) And, Helen! Put out some macaroons! Lots of macaroons—for once!

Helmer (*takes her hands in his*). Now, now, now. Don't get so excited. Where's my little songbird, the one I know?

Nora. All right. Go and sit down—and you, too, Dr. Rank. I'll be with you in a minute. Christine, you must help me put my hair up.

Rank (*quietly, as they go*). There's nothing wrong, is there? I mean, she isn't—er—expecting—?

Helmer. Good heavens no, my dear chap. She just gets scared like a child sometimes—I told you before—

[*They go out, right.*]

Nora. Well?

Mrs. Linde. He's left town.

Nora. I saw it from your face.

Mrs. Linde. He'll be back tomorrow evening. I left a note for him.

Nora. You needn't have bothered. You can't

stop anything now. Anyway, it's wonderful really, in a way—sitting here and waiting for the miracle to happen.

Mrs. Linde. Waiting for what?

Nora. Oh, you wouldn't understand. Go in and join them. I'll be with you in a moment.

[MRS. LINDE goes into the dining room.]

Nora (stands for a moment as though collecting herself. Then she looks at her

watch). Five o'clock. Seven hours till midnight. Then another twenty-four hours till midnight tomorrow. And then the tarantella will be finished. Twenty-four and seven? Thirty-one hours to live.

Helmer (*appears in the doorway, right*). What's happened to my little songbird?

Nora (*runs to him with her arms wide*). Your songbird is here!

First Thoughts

How do you think Torvald will respond when he reads the letter from Krogstad?

Identifying Facts

1. What does Nora learn from Dr. Rank that changes her mind about asking him for help?
2. When Krogstad visits Nora, he reveals that he does not want more money. What does he want?
3. What offer does Mrs. Linde make that encourages Nora? What makes Mrs. Linde think she has the power to help?

Interpreting Meanings

1. Do you agree with Nora that Torvald's reasons for firing Krogstad are "petty"? Why or why not?
2. Dr. Rank has inherited a fatal illness from his father. Bitterly, he tells Nora that "in every single family, in one way or another, the same merciless law of retribution is at work." In what way is retribution for past deeds at work in the Helmer family?
3. Near the end of Act 2, Nora believes that a "miracle" will happen. What is the miracle that she hopes for?

4. **Foreshadowing** is the use of clues to hint at what is going to happen later in the plot. What do you anticipate will happen?

Applying Meanings

Nora desperately thinks of ways to postpone the time when her husband will read the letter from Krogstad. Think of a time when you, or someone you know, tried to avoid accepting consequences for something unpleasant. Do you believe that the truth should always come out?

Critical Writing Response

Interpreting Symbolism. Letters and letter boxes play an important part in *A Doll's House*. State three or more ways in which letters or messages help build **suspense** in *A Doll's House*. How does Ibsen use letters as a **symbol**—a physical representation of something abstract—of the fact that Nora and Torvald have not communicated honestly over the years? Think about the way Nora repeatedly tries to keep messages from being sent or received.



Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Act 3 opens with a sense of tension and anticipation.

Do you think Nora's "miracle" will occur? Do you think she will be saved from the consequences of her actions?

Act 3

The same room. The table which was formerly by the sofa has been moved into the center of the room; the chairs surround it as before. A lamp is burning on the table. The door to the hall stands open. Dance music can be heard from the floor above. MRS. LINDE is seated at the table, absent-mindedly glancing through a book. She is trying to read, but seems unable to keep her mind on it. More than once she turns and listens anxiously towards the front door.

Mrs. Linde (*looks at her watch*). Not here yet. There's not much time left. Please God he hasn't! (*listens again*) Ah, here he is.

[*Goes out into the hall and cautiously opens the front door. Footsteps can be heard softly ascending the stairs.*]

Mrs. Linde (*whispers*). Come in. There's no one here.

Krogstad (*in the doorway*). I found a note from you at my lodgings. What does this mean?

Mrs. Linde. I must speak with you.

Krogstad. Oh? And must our conversation take place in this house?

Mrs. Linde. We couldn't meet at my place; my room has no separate entrance. Come in. We're quite alone. The maid's asleep, and the Helmers are at the dance upstairs.

Krogstad (*comes into the room*). Well, well! So the Helmers are dancing this evening? Are they indeed?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, why not?

Krogstad. True enough. Why not?

Mrs. Linde. Well, Krogstad. You and I must have a talk together.

Krogstad. Have we two anything further to discuss?

Mrs. Linde. We have a great deal to discuss.

Krogstad. I wasn't aware of it.

Mrs. Linde. That's because you've never really understood me.

Krogstad. Was there anything to understand? It's the old story, isn't it—a woman chucking a man because something better turns up?

Mrs. Linde. Do you really think I'm so utterly heartless? You think it was easy for me to give you up?

Krogstad. Wasn't it?

Mrs. Linde. Oh, Nils, did you really believe that?

Krogstad. Then why did you write to me the way you did?

Mrs. Linde. I had to. Since I had to break with you, I thought it my duty to destroy all the feelings you had for me.

Krogstad (*clenches his fists*). So that was it. And you did this for money!

Mrs. Linde. You mustn't forget I had a helpless mother to take care of, and two little brothers. We couldn't wait for you, Nils. It would have been so long before you'd have had enough to support us.

Krogstad. Maybe. But you had no right to

cast me off for someone else.

Mrs. Linde. Perhaps not. I've often asked myself that.

Krogstad (*more quietly*). When I lost you, it was just as though all solid ground had been swept from under my feet. Look at me. Now I'm a shipwrecked man, clinging to a spar.¹

Mrs. Linde. Help may be near at hand.

Krogstad. It was near. But then you came, and stood between it and me.

Mrs. Linde. I didn't know, Nils. No one told me till today that this job I'd found was yours.

Krogstad. I believe you, since you say so. But now you know, won't you give it up?

Mrs. Linde. No—because it wouldn't help you even if I did.

Krogstad. Wouldn't it? I'd do it all the same.

Mrs. Linde. I've learned to look at things practically. Life and poverty have taught me that.

Krogstad. And life has taught me to distrust fine words.

Mrs. Linde. Then it has taught you a useful lesson. But surely you still believe in actions?

Krogstad. What do you mean?

Mrs. Linde. You said you were like a shipwrecked man clinging to a spar.

Krogstad. I have good reason to say it.

Mrs. Linde. I'm in the same position as you. No one to care about, no one to care for.

Krogstad. You made your own choice.

Mrs. Linde. I had no choice—then.

Krogstad. Well?

Mrs. Linde. Nils, suppose we two shipwrecked souls could join hands?

Krogstad. What are you saying?

1. *spar:* a pole or mast that supports or extends the sail of a ship.

Mrs. Linde. Castaways have a better chance of survival together than on their own.

Krogstad. Christine!

Mrs. Linde. Why do you suppose I came to this town?

Krogstad. You mean—you came because of me?

Mrs. Linde. I must work if I'm to find life worth living. I've always worked, for as long as I can remember. It's been the greatest joy of my life—my only joy. But now I'm alone in the world, and I feel so dreadfully lost and empty. There's no joy in working just for oneself. Oh, Nils, give me something—someone—to work for.

Krogstad. I don't believe all that. You're just being hysterical and romantic. You want to find an excuse for self-sacrifice.

Mrs. Linde. Have you ever known me to be hysterical?

Krogstad. You mean you really? Is it possible? Tell me—you know all about my past?

Mrs. Linde. Yes.

Krogstad. And you know what people think of me here?

Mrs. Linde. You said just now that with me you might have become a different person.

Krogstad. I know I could have.

Mrs. Linde. Couldn't it still happen?

Krogstad. Christine—do you really mean this? Yes—you do—I see it in your face. Have you really the courage?

Mrs. Linde. I need someone to be a mother to; and your children need a mother. And you and I need each other. I believe in you, Nils. I am afraid of nothing—with you.

Krogstad (*clasps her hands*). Thank you, Christine—thank you! Now I shall make the world believe in me as you do! Oh—but I'd forgotten—

Mrs. Linde (*listens*). Ssh! The tarantella! Go quickly, go!

Krogstad. Why? What is it?

Mrs. Linde. You hear that dance? As soon as it's finished, they'll be coming down.

Krogstad. All right, I'll go. It's no good, Christine. I'd forgotten—you don't know what I've just done to the Helmers.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, Nils. I know.

Krogstad. And yet you'd still have the courage to?

Mrs. Linde. I know what despair can drive a man like you to.

Krogstad. Oh, if only I could undo this!

Mrs. Linde. You can. Your letter is still lying in the box.

Krogstad. Are you sure?

Mrs. Linde. Quite sure. But—

Krogstad (*looks searchingly at her*). Is that why you're doing this? You want to save your friend at any price? Tell me the truth. Is that the reason?

Mrs. Linde. Nils, a woman who has sold herself once for the sake of others doesn't make the same mistake again.

Krogstad. I shall demand my letter back.

Mrs. Linde. No, no.

Krogstad. Of course I shall. I shall stay here till Helmer comes down. I'll tell him he must give me back my letter—I'll say it was only to do with my dismissal, and that I don't want him to read it—

Mrs. Linde. No, Nils, you mustn't ask for that letter back.

Krogstad. But—tell me—wasn't that the real reason you asked me to come here?

Mrs. Linde. Yes—at first, when I was frightened. But a day has passed since then, and in that time I've seen incredible things happen in this house. Helmer must know the truth. This unhappy secret of Nora's must be revealed. They must come to a full understanding. There must be an end of all

these shiftings and evasions.

Krogstad. Very well. If you're prepared to risk it. But one thing I can do—and at once—

Mrs. Linde (*listens*). Hurry! Go, go! The dance is over. We aren't safe here another moment.

Krogstad. I'll wait for you downstairs.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, do. You can see me home.

Krogstad. I've never been so happy in my life before!

[*He goes out through the front door. The door leading from the room into the hall remains open.*]

Mrs. Linde (*tidies the room a little and gets her hat and coat*). What a change! Oh, what a change! Someone to work for—to live for! A home to bring joy into! I won't let this chance of happiness slip through my fingers. Oh, why don't they come? (*listens*) Ah, here they are. I must get my coat on.

[*She takes her hat and coat. HELMER's and NORA's voices become audible outside. A key is turned in the lock and HELMER leads NORA almost forcibly into the hall. She is dressed in an Italian costume with a large black shawl. He is in evening dress, with a black coat.*]

Nora (*still in the doorway, resisting him*). No, no, no—not in here! I want to go back upstairs. I don't want to leave so early.

Helmer. But my dearest Nora—

Nora. Oh, please, Torvald, please! Just another hour!

Helmer. Not another minute, Nora, my sweet. You know what we agreed. Come along, now. Into the drawing room. You'll catch cold if you stay out here.

[*He leads her, despite her efforts to resist him, gently into the room.*]

Mrs. Linde. Good evening.

Nora. Christine!



Helmer. Oh, hullo, Mrs. Linde. You still here?

Mrs. Linde. Please forgive me. I did so want to see Nora in her costume.

Nora. Have you been sitting here waiting for me?

Mrs. Linde. Yes. I got here too late, I'm afraid. You'd already gone up. And I felt I really couldn't go home without seeing you.

Helmer (*takes off NORA's shawl*). Well, take a good look at her. She's worth looking at, don't you think? Isn't she beautiful, Mrs. Linde?

Mrs. Linde. Oh, yes, indeed—

Helmer. Isn't she unbelievably beautiful? Everyone at the party said so. But dreadfully stubborn she is, bless her pretty little heart. What's to be done about that? Would you believe it, I practically had to use force to get her away!

Nora. Oh, Torvald, you're going to regret not letting me stay—just half an hour longer.

Helmer. Hear that, Mrs. Linde? She dances her tarantella—makes a roaring success—and very well deserved—though possibly a trifle too realistic—more so than was aesthetically necessary, strictly speaking. But never mind that. Main thing is—she had a success—roaring success. Was I going to let her stay on after that and spoil the impression? No, thank you! I took my beautiful little Capri signorina—my capricious little Capricienne,² what?—under my arm—a swift round of the ballroom, a curtsey to the company, and, as they say in novels, the beautiful apparition disappeared! An exit should always be dramatic, Mrs. Linde. But unfortunately that's just what I can't get Nora to realize. I say, it's hot in here. (*throws his cloak on a chair and opens the door to his study*) What's this? It's dark in here. Ah, yes, of course—excuse me. (*goes in and lights a couple of candles*)

Nora (*whispers softly, breathlessly*). Well?

Mrs. Linde (*quietly*). I've spoken to him.

Nora. Yes?

Mrs. Linde. Nora—you must tell your husband everything.

Nora (*dully*). I knew it.

Mrs. Linde. You have nothing to fear from Krogstad. But you must tell him.

Nora. I shan't tell him anything.

Mrs. Linde. Then the letter will.

Nora. Thank you, Christine. Now I know what I must do. Ssh!

Helmer (*returns*). Well, Mrs. Linde, finished admiring her?

Mrs. Linde. Yes. Now I must say good night.

² 2. **Capri . . . Capricienne:** "Capri signorina" and "Capricienne" both refer to a lady from Capri, a small island off the coast of Italy. Helmer is playing on the similarities in the words *capricious* and *Capricienne*.

Helmer. Oh, already? Does this knitting belong to you?

Mrs. Linde (*takes it*). Thank you, yes. I nearly forgot it.

Helmer. You knit, then?

Mrs. Linde. Why, yes.

Helmer. Know what? You ought to take up embroidery.

Mrs. Linde. Oh? Why?

Helmer. It's much prettier. Watch me, now. You hold the embroidery in your left hand, like this, and then you take the needle in your right hand and go in and out in a slow, easy movement—like this. I am right, aren't I?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, I'm sure—

Helmer. But knitting, now—that's an ugly business—can't help it. Look—arms all huddled up—great clumsy needles going up and down—I say that really was a magnificent champagne they served us.

Mrs. Linde. Well, good night, Nora. And stop being stubborn! Remember!

Helmer. Quite right, Mrs. Linde!

Mrs. Linde. Good night, Mr. Helmer.

Helmer (*accompanies her to the door*). Good night, good night! I hope you'll manage to get home all right? I'd gladly—but you haven't far to go, have you? Good night, good night.

[*She goes. He closes the door behind her and returns.*]

Helmer. Well, we've got rid of her at last. Dreadful bore that woman is!

Nora. Aren't you very tired, Torvald?

Helmer. No, not in the least.

Nora. Aren't you sleepy?

Helmer. Not a bit. On the contrary, I feel extraordinarily exhilarated. But what about you? Yes, you look very sleepy and tired.

Nora. Yes, I am very tired. Soon I shall sleep.

Helmer. You see, you see! How right I was not to let you stay longer!

Nora. Oh, you're always right, whatever you do.

Helmer (*kisses her on the forehead*). Now my little songbird's talking just like a real big human being. I say, did you notice how cheerful Rank was this evening?

Nora. Oh? Was he? I didn't have a chance to speak with him.

Helmer. I hardly did. But I haven't seen him in such a jolly mood for ages. (*looks at her for a moment, then comes closer*) I say, it's nice to get back to one's home again, and be all alone with you. Upon my word, you're a distractingly beautiful young woman.

Nora. Don't look at me like that, Torvald!

Helmer. What, not look at my most treasured possession? At all this wonderful beauty that's mine, mine alone, all mine.

Nora (*goes round to the other side of the table*). You mustn't talk to me like that tonight.

Helmer (*follows her*). You've still the tarantella in your blood, I see. And that makes you even more desirable. Listen! Now the other guests are beginning to go. (*more quietly*) Nora—soon the whole house will be absolutely quiet.

Nora. Yes, I hope so.

Helmer. Yes, my beloved Nora, of course you do! You know—when I'm out with you among other people like we were tonight, do you know why I say so little to you, why I keep so aloof from you, and just throw you an occasional glance? Do you know why I do that? It's because I pretend to myself that you're my secret mistress, my clandestine little sweetheart, and that nobody knows there's anything at all between us.

Nora. Oh, yes, yes, yes—I know you never think of anything but me.

Helmer. And then when we're about to go, and I wrap the shawl round your lovely young shoulders, over this wonderful curve of your neck—then I pretend to myself that you are my young bride, that we've just come from the wedding, that I'm taking you to my house for the first time—that, for the first time, I am alone with you—quite alone with you, as you stand there young and trembling and beautiful. All evening I've had no eyes for anyone but you. When I saw you dance the tarantella, like a huntress, a temptress, my blood grew hot, I couldn't stand it any longer! That was why I seized you and dragged you down here with me—

Nora. Leave me, Torvald! Get away from me! I don't want all this.

Helmer. What? Now, Nora, you're joking with me. Don't want, don't want—? Aren't I your husband?

[*There is a knock on the front door.*]

Nora (*starts*). What was that?

Helmer (*goes towards the hall*). Who is it?

Dr. Rank (*outside*). It's me. May I come in for a moment?

Helmer (*quietly, annoyed*). Oh, what does he want now? (*calls*) Wait a moment. (*walks over and opens the door*) Well! Nice of you not to go by without looking in.

Rank. I thought I heard your voice, so I felt I had to say goodbye. (*His eyes travel swiftly around the room.*) Ah, yes—these dear rooms, how well I know them. What a happy, peaceful home you two have.

Helmer. You seemed to be having a pretty happy time yourself upstairs.

Rank. Indeed I did. Why not? Why shouldn't one make the most of this world? As much as one can, and for as long as one can. The wine was excellent—

Helmer. Especially the champagne.

Rank. You noticed that, too? It's almost incredible how much I managed to get down.

Nora. Torvald drank a lot of champagne, too, this evening.

Rank. Oh?

Nora. Yes. It always makes him merry afterwards.

Rank. Well, why shouldn't a man have a merry evening after a well-spent day?

Helmer. Well-spent? Oh, I don't know that I can claim that.

Rank (*slaps him across the back*). I can, though, my dear fellow!

Nora. Yes, of course, Dr. Rank—you've been carrying out a scientific experiment today, haven't you?

Rank. Exactly.

Helmer. Scientific experiment! Those are big words for my little Nora to use!

Nora. And may I congratulate you on the finding?

Rank. You may indeed.

Nora. It was good then?

Rank. The best possible finding—both for the doctor and the patient. Certainty.

Nora (*quickly*). Certainty?

Rank. Absolute certainty. So aren't I entitled to have a merry evening after that?

Nora. Yes, Dr. Rank. You were quite right to.

Helmer. I agree. Provided you don't have to regret it tomorrow.

Rank. Well, you never get anything in this life without paying for it.

Nora. Dr. Rank—you like masquerades, don't you?

Rank. Yes, if the disguises are sufficiently amusing.

Nora. Tell me. What shall we two wear at the next masquerade?

Helmer. You little gadabout! Are you thinking about the next one already?

Rank. We two? Yes, I'll tell you. You must go as the Spirit of Happiness—

Helmer. You try to think of a costume that'll convey that.

Rank. Your wife need only appear as her normal, everyday self—

Helmer. Quite right! Well said! But what are you going to be? Have you decided that?

Rank. Yes, my dear friend. I have decided that.

Helmer. Well?

Rank. At the next masquerade, I shall be invisible.

Helmer. Well, that's a funny idea.

Rank. There's a big, black hat—haven't you heard of the invisible hat? Once it's over your head, no one can see you any more.

Helmer (*represses a smile*). Ah yes, of course.

Rank. But I'm forgetting what I came for. Helmer, give me a cigar. One of your black Havanas.

Helmer. With the greatest pleasure. (*offers him the box*)

Rank (*takes one and cuts off the tip*). Thank you.

Nora (*strikes a match*). Let me give you a light.

Rank. Thank you. (*She holds out the match for him. He lights his cigar.*) And now—goodbye.

Helmer. Goodbye, my dear chap, goodbye.

Nora. Sleep well, Dr. Rank.

Rank. Thank you for that kind wish.

Nora. Wish me the same.

Rank. You? Very well—since you ask. Sleep well. And thank you for the light. (*He nods to them both and goes*.)

Helmer (*quietly*). He's been drinking too much.

Nora (*abstractedly*). Perhaps.

[*HELMER takes his bunch of keys from his pocket and goes out into the hall.*]

Nora. Torvald, what do you want out there?

Helmer. I must empty the letter box. It's absolutely full. There'll be no room for the newspapers in the morning.

Nora. Are you going to work tonight?

Helmer. You know very well I'm not. Hullo, what's this? Someone's been at the lock.

Nora. At the lock—

Helmer. Yes, I'm sure of it. Who on earth—? Surely not one of the maids? Here's a broken hairpin. Nora, it's yours—

Nora (*quickly*). Then it must have been the children.

Helmer. Well, you'll have to break them of that habit. Hm, hm. Ah, that's done it.

(*takes out the contents of the box and calls into the kitchen*) Helen! Helen! Put out the light on the staircase. (comes back into the drawing room and closes the door to the hall)

Helmer (*with the letters in his hand*). Look at this! You see how they've piled up? (*glances through them*) What on earth's this?

Nora (*at the window*). The letter! Oh no, Torvald, no!

Helmer. Two visiting cards—from Rank.

Nora. From Dr. Rank?

Helmer (*looks at them*). Peter Rank, M.D. They were on top. He must have dropped them in as he left.

Nora. Has he written anything on them?

Helmer. There's a black cross above his name. Rather gruesome, isn't it? It looks just as though he was announcing his death.

Nora. He is.

Helmer. What? Do you know something? Has he told you anything?

Nora. Yes. When these cards come, it means he's said goodbye to us. He wants to shut himself up in his house and die.

Helmer. Ah, poor fellow. I knew I wouldn't be seeing him for much longer. But so soon—! And now he's going to slink away

and hide like a wounded beast.

Nora. When the time comes, it's best to go silently. Don't you think so, Torvald?

Helmer (*walks up and down*). He was so much a part of our life. I can't realize that he's gone. His suffering and loneliness seemed to provide a kind of dark background to the happy sunlight of our marriage. Well, perhaps it's best this way. For him, anyway. (*stops walking*) And perhaps for us too, Nora. Now we have only each other. (*embraces her*) Oh, my beloved wife—I feel as though I could never hold you close enough. Do you know, Nora, often I wish some terrible danger might threaten you, so that I could offer my life and my blood, everything, for your sake.

Nora (*tears herself loose and says in a clear, firm voice*). Read your letters now, Torvald.

Helmer. No, no. Not tonight. Tonight I want to be with you, my darling wife—

Nora. When your friend is about to die—?

Helmer. You're right. This news has upset us both. An ugliness has come between us; thoughts of death and dissolution. We must try to forget them. Until then—you go to your room; I shall go to mine.

Nora (*throws her arms round his neck*).

Good night, Torvald! Good night!

Helmer (*kisses her on the forehead*). Good night, my darling little songbird. Sleep well, Nora. I'll go and read my letters.

[*He goes into the study with the letters in his hand, and closes the door.*]

Nora (*wild-eyed, fumbles around, seizes HELMER's cloak, throws it round herself and whispers quickly, hoarsely*). Never see him again. Never. Never. Never. (*throws the shawl over her head*) Never see the children again. Them, too. Never. Never. Oh—the icy black water! Oh—that bottomless—that—! Oh, if only it were all over! Now he's got it—he's reading it. Oh no, no! Not yet! Goodbye, Torvald! Goodbye, my darlings!

[She turns to run into the hall. As she does so, HELMER throws open his door and stands there with an open letter in his hand.]

Helmer. Nora!

Nora (*shrieks*). Ah—!

Helmer. What is this? Do you know what is in this letter?

Nora. Yes, I know. Let me go! Let me go!

Helmer (*holding her back*). Go? Where?

Nora (*tries to tear herself loose*). You mustn't try to save me, Torvald!

Helmer (*staggers back*). Is it true? Is it true, what he writes? Oh, my God! No, no—it's impossible, it can't be true!

Nora. It is true. I've loved you more than anything else in the world.

Helmer. Oh, don't try to make silly excuses.

Nora (*takes a step towards him*). Torvald—

Helmer. Wretched woman! What have you done?

Nora. Let me go! You're not going to suffer for my sake. I won't let you!

Helmer. Stop being theatrical. (*locks the front door*) You're going to stay here and explain yourself. Do you understand what you've done? Answer me! Do you understand?

Nora (*looks unflinchingly at him and, her expression growing colder, says*). Yes. Now I am beginning to understand.

Helmer (*walking round the room*). Oh, what a dreadful awakening! For eight whole years—she who was my joy and pride—a hypocrite, a liar—worse, worse—a criminal! Oh, the hideousness of it! Shame on you, shame!

[NORA is silent and stares unblinkingly at him.]

Helmer (*stops in front of her*). I ought to have guessed that something of this sort would happen. I should have foreseen it. All your father's recklessness and instability—be quiet—I repeat, all your father's recklessness and instability he has handed on to you! No religion, no morals, no sense of duty! Oh, how I have been punished for closing my eyes to his faults! I did it for your sake. And now you reward me like this.

Nora. Yes. Like this.

Helmer. Now you have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined my whole future. Oh, it's too dreadful to contemplate! I am in the power of a man who is completely without scruples. He can do what he likes with me, demand what he pleases, order me to do anything—I dare not disobey



EDOUARD MANET, HENRI FANTIN-LATOUR (1836–1904).

him. I am condemned to humiliation and ruin simply for the weakness of a woman.
Nora. When I am gone from this world, you will be free.

Helmer. Oh, don't be melodramatic. Your father was always ready with that kind of remark. How would it help me if you were "gone from this world," as you put it? It wouldn't assist me in the slightest. He can still make all the facts public; and if he does, I may quite easily be suspected of having been an accomplice in your crime. People may think that I was behind it—that it was I who encouraged you! And for all this I have to thank you, you whom I have carried on my hands through all the years of our marriage! Now do you realize what you've done to me?

Nora (*coldly calm*). Yes.

Helmer. It's so unbelievable I can hardly credit it. But we must try to find some way out. Take off that shawl. Take it off, I say! I must try to buy him off somehow. This thing must be hushed up at any price. As regards our relationship—we must appear to be living together just as before. Only *appear*, of course. You will therefore continue to reside here. That is understood. But the children shall be taken out of your hands. I dare no longer entrust them to you. Oh, to have to say this to the woman I once loved so dearly—and whom I still!—Well, all that must be finished. Henceforth there can be no question of happiness, we must merely strive to save what shreds and tatters—

[*The front door bell rings. HELMER starts.*]
Helmer. What can that be? At this hour? Surely not? He wouldn't? Hide yourself, Nora. Say you're ill.

[*NORA does not move. HELMER goes to the door of the room and opens it. The MAID is standing half-dressed in the hall.*]

Maid. A letter for madam.

Helmer. Give it me. (*seizes the letter and shuts the door*) Yes, it's from him. You're not having it. I'll read this myself.

Nora. Read it.

Helmer (*by the lamp*). I hardly dare to. This may mean the end for us both. No. I must know. (*tears open the letter hastily; reads a few lines; looks at a piece of paper which is enclosed with it; utters a cry of joy*) Nora! (*She looks at him questioningly.*) Nora! No—I must read it once more. Yes, yes, it's true! I am saved! Nora, I am saved!

Nora. What about me?

Helmer. You too, of course. We're both saved, you and I. Look! He's returning your I.O.U. He writes that he is sorry for what has happened—a happy accident has changed his life—oh, what does it matter what he writes? We are saved, Nora! No one can harm you now. Oh, Nora, Nora—no, first let me destroy this filthy thing. Let me see—! (*glances at the I.O.U.*) No, I don't want to look at it. I shall merely regard the whole business as a dream. (*He tears the I.O.U. and both letters into pieces, throws them into the stove and watches them burn.*) There. Now they're destroyed. He wrote that ever since Christmas Eve you've been—oh, these must have been three dreadful days for you, Nora.

Nora. Yes. It's been a hard fight.

Helmer. It must have been terrible—seeing no way out except—no, we'll forget the whole sordid business. We'll just be happy and go on telling ourselves over and over again: "It's over! It's over!" Listen to me, Nora. You don't seem to realize. It's over! Why are you looking so pale? Ah, my poor little Nora, I understand. You can't believe that I have forgiven you. But I have, Nora. I swear it to you. I have forgiven you everything. I know that what you did you did for your love of me.

Nora. That is true.

Helmer. You have loved me as a wife



Do you think Nora deserves Torvald's forgiveness? How would you describe Torvald's feelings for his wife?

Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

should love her husband. It was simply that in your inexperience you chose the wrong means. But do you think I love you any the less because you don't know how to act on your own initiative? No, no. Just lean on me. I shall counsel you. I shall guide you. I would not be a true man if your feminine helplessness did not make you doubly attractive in my eyes. You mustn't mind the hard words I said to you in those first dreadful moments when my whole world

seemed to be tumbling about my ears. I have forgiven you, Nora. I swear it to you; I have forgiven you.

Nora. Thank you for your forgiveness. (*She goes out through the door, right.*)

Helmer. No, don't go—(*looks in*) What are you doing there?

Nora (*offstage*). Taking off my fancy dress.

Helmer (*by the open door*). Yes, do that. Try to calm yourself and get your balance again, my frightened little songbird. Don't be afraid. I have broad wings to shield you. (*begins to walk around near the door*) How lovely and peaceful this little home of ours is, Nora. You are safe here; I shall watch over you like a hunted dove which I have snatched unharmed from the claws of the falcon. Your wildly beating little heart shall find peace with me. It will happen, Nora; it will take time; but it will happen, believe me. Tomorrow all this will seem quite different. Soon everything will be as it was before. I shall no longer need to remind you that I have forgiven you; your own heart will tell you that it is true. Do you really think I could ever bring myself to disown you, or even to reproach you? Ah, Nora, you don't understand what goes on in a husband's heart. There is something indescribably wonderful and satisfying for a husband in knowing that he has forgiven his wife—for given her unreservedly, from the bottom of his heart. It means that she has become his property in a double sense; he has, as it were, brought her into the world anew; she is now not only his wife but also his child. From now on that is what you shall be to me, my poor, helpless, bewildered little creature. Never be frightened of anything again, Nora. Just open your heart to me. I shall be both your will and your conscience. What's this? Not in bed? Have you changed?

Nora (*in her everyday dress*). Yes, Torvald. I've changed.

Helmer. But why now—so late—?

Nora. I shall not sleep tonight.

Helmer. But, my dear Nora—

Nora (*looks at her watch*). It isn't that late. Sit down there, Torvald. You and I have a lot to talk about.

[*She sits down on one side of the table.*]

Helmer. Nora, what does this mean? You look quite drawn—

Nora. Sit down. It's going to take a long time. I've a lot to say to you.

Helmer (*sits down on the other side of the table*). You alarm me, Nora. I don't understand you.

Nora. No, that's just it. You don't understand me. And I've never understood you—until this evening. No, don't interrupt me. Just listen to what I have to say. You and I have got to face facts, Torvald.

Helmer. What do you mean by that?

Nora (*after a short silence*). Doesn't anything strike you about the way we're sitting here?

Helmer. What?

Nora. We've been married for eight years. Does it occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife, have ever had a serious talk together?

Helmer. Serious? What do you mean, serious?

Nora. In eight whole years—no, longer—ever since we first met—we have never exchanged a serious word on a serious subject.

Helmer. Did you expect me to drag you into all my worries—worries you couldn't possibly have helped me with?

Nora. I'm not talking about worries. I'm simply saying that we have never sat down seriously to try to get to the bottom of anything.

Helmer. But, my dear Nora, what on earth has that got to do with you?

Nora. That's just the point. You have never understood me. A great wrong has been done to me, Torvald. First by Papa, and then by you.

Helmer. What? But we two have loved you more than anyone in the world!

Nora (*shakes her head*). You have never loved me. You just thought it was fun to be in love with me.

Helmer. Nora, what kind of a way is this to talk?

Nora. It's the truth, Torvald. When I lived with Papa, he used to tell me what he thought about everything, so that I never had any opinions but his. And if I did have any of my own, I kept them quiet, because he wouldn't have liked them. He called me his little doll, and he played with me just the way I played with my dolls. Then I came here to live in your house—

Helmer. What kind of a way is that to describe our marriage?

Nora (*undisturbed*). I mean, then I passed from Papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything the way you wanted it, so that I simply took over your taste in everything—or pretended I did—I don't really know—I think it was a little of both—first one and then the other. Now I look back on it, it's as if I've been living here like a pauper, from hand to mouth. I performed tricks for you, and you gave me food and drink. But that was how you wanted it. You and Papa have done me a great wrong. It's your fault that I have done nothing with my life.

Helmer. Nora, how can you be so unreasonable and ungrateful? Haven't you been happy here?

Nora. No; never. I used to think I was. But I haven't ever been happy.

Helmer. Not—not happy?

Nora. No. I've just had fun. You've always been very kind to me. But our home has never been anything but a playroom. I've been your doll-wife, just as I used to be

Papa's doll-child. And the children have been my dolls. I used to think it was fun when you came in and played with me, just as they think it's fun when I go in and play games with them. That's all our marriage has been, Torvald.

Helmer. There may be a little truth in what you say, though you exaggerate and romanticize. But from now on it'll be different. Playtime is over. Now the time has come for education.

Nora. Whose education? Mine or the children's?

Helmer. Both yours and the children's, my dearest Nora.

Nora. Oh, Torvald, you're not the man to educate me into being the right wife for you.

Helmer. How can you say that?

Nora. And what about me? Am I fit to educate the children?

Helmer. Nora!

Nora. Didn't you say yourself a few minutes ago that you dare not leave them in my charge?

Helmer. In a moment of excitement. Surely you don't think I meant it seriously?

Nora. Yes. You were perfectly right. I'm not fitted to educate them. There's something else I must do first. I must educate myself. And you can't help me with that. It's something I must do by myself. That's why I'm leaving you.

Helmer (*jumps up*). What did you say?

Nora. I must stand on my own feet if I am to find out the truth about myself and about life. So I can't go on living here with you any longer.

Helmer. Nora, Nora!

Nora. I'm leaving you now, at once. Christine will put me up for tonight—

Helmer. You're out of your mind! You can't do this! I forbid you!

Nora. It's no use your trying to forbid me

any more. I shall take with me nothing but what is mine. I don't want anything from you, now or ever.

Helmer. What kind of madness is this?

Nora. Tomorrow I shall go home—I mean, to where I was born. It'll be easiest for me to find some kind of a job there.

Helmer. But you're blind! You've no experience of the world—

Nora. I must try to get some, Torvald.

Helmer. But to leave your home, your husband, your children! Have you thought what people will say?

Nora. I can't help that. I only know that I must do this.

Helmer. But this is monstrous! Can you neglect your most sacred duties?

Nora. What do you call my most sacred duties?

Helmer. Do I have to tell you? Your duties towards your husband, and your children.

Nora. I have another duty which is equally sacred.

Helmer. You have not. What on earth could that be?

Nora. My duty towards myself.

Helmer. First and foremost you are a wife and mother.

Nora. I don't believe that any longer. I believe that I am first and foremost a human being, like you—or anyway, that I must try to become one. I know most people think as you do, Torvald, and I know there's something of the sort to be found in books. But I'm no longer prepared to accept what people say and what's written in books. I must think things out for myself, and try to find my own answer.

Helmer. Do you need to ask where your duty lies in your own home? Haven't you an infallible guide in such matters—your religion?

Nora. Oh, Torvald, I don't really know what religion means.

Helmer. What are you saying?

Nora. I only know what Pastor Hansen told me when I went to confirmation. He explained that religion meant this and that. When I get away from all this and can think things out on my own, that's one of the questions I want to look into. I want to find out whether what Pastor Hansen said was right—or anyway, whether it is right for me.

Helmer. But it's unheard of for so young a woman to behave like this! If religion cannot guide you, let me at least appeal to your conscience. I presume you have some moral feelings left? Or—perhaps you haven't? Well, answer me.

Nora. Oh, Torvald, that isn't an easy question to answer. I simply don't know. I don't know where I am in these matters. I only know that these things mean something quite different to me from what they do to you. I've learned now that certain laws are different from what I'd imagined them to be; but I can't accept that such laws can be right. Has a woman really not the right to spare her dying father pain, or save her husband's life? I can't believe that.

Helmer. You're talking like a child. You don't understand how society works.

Nora. No, I don't. But now I intend to learn. I must try to satisfy myself which is right, society or I.

Helmer. Nora, you're ill. You're feverish. I almost believe you're out of your mind.

Nora. I've never felt so sane and sure in my life.

Helmer. You feel sure that it is right to leave your husband and your children?

Nora. Yes, I do.

Helmer. Then there is only one possible explanation.

Nora. What?

Helmer. That you don't love me any longer.

Nora. No, that's exactly it.

Helmer. Nora! How can you say this to me?

Nora. Oh, Torvald, it hurts me terribly to have to say it, because you've always been so kind to me. But I can't help it. I don't love you any longer.

Helmer (*controlling his emotions with difficulty*). And you feel quite sure about this, too?

Nora. Yes, absolutely sure. That's why I can't go on living here any longer.

Helmer. Can you also explain why I have lost your love?

Nora. Yes, I can. It happened this evening, when the miracle failed to happen. It was then that I realized you weren't the man I'd thought you to be.

Helmer. Explain more clearly. I don't understand you.

Nora. I've waited so patiently, for eight whole years—well, good heavens, I'm not such a fool as to suppose that miracles occur every day. Then this dreadful thing happened to me, and then I knew: "Now the miracle will take place!" When Krogstad's letter was lying out there, it never occurred to me for a moment that you would let that man trample over you. I knew that you would say to him: "Publish the facts to the world!" And when he had done this—

Helmer. Yes, what then? When I'd exposed my wife's name to shame and scandal—

Nora. Then I was certain that you would step forward and take all the blame on yourself, and say: "I am the one who is guilty!"

Helmer. Nora!

Nora. You're thinking I wouldn't have accepted such a sacrifice from you? No, of course I wouldn't! But what would my word have counted for against yours? That was the miracle I was hoping for, and dreading. And it was to prevent it happening that I wanted to end my life.

Helmer. Nora, I would gladly work for you

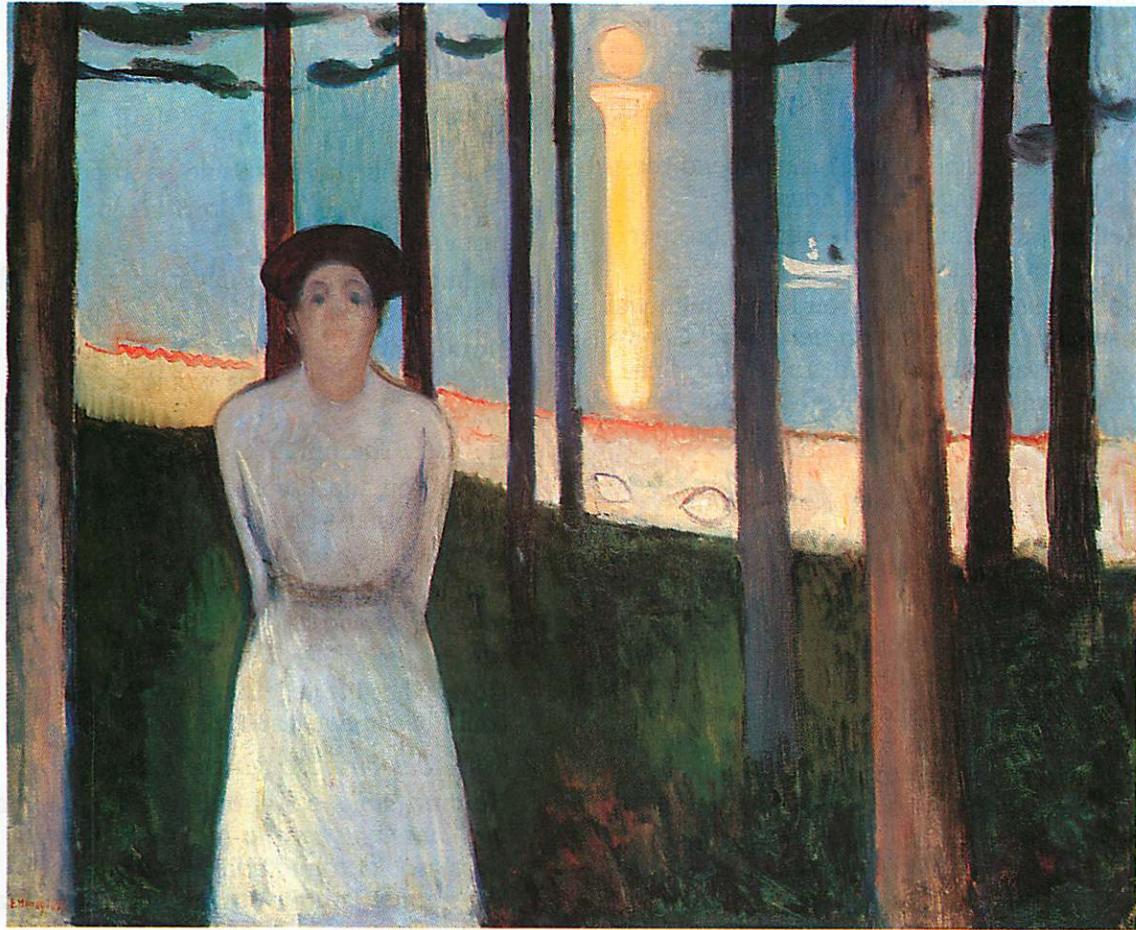
night and day, and endure sorrow and hardship for your sake. But no man can be expected to sacrifice his honor, even for the person he loves.

Nora. Millions of women have done it.

Helmer. Oh, you think and talk like a stupid child.

Nora. That may be. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could share my life with. Once you'd got over your fright—and you weren't frightened of what might threaten me, but only of what threatened

you—once the danger was past, then as far as you were concerned it was exactly as though nothing had happened. I was your little songbird just as before—your doll whom henceforth you would take particular care to protect from the world because she was so weak and fragile. (*gets up*) Torvald, in that moment I realized that for eight years I had been living here with a complete stranger, and had borne him three children—! Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself to pieces!



Ernest Wadsworth Longfellow Fund. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

SUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (THE VOICE), EDVARD MUNCH, 1893.

Do you think that Nora has succeeded in finding her voice, that is, her independence?

Helmer (*sadly*). I see it, I see it. A gulf has indeed opened between us. Oh, but Nora—couldn't it be bridged?

Nora. As I am now, I am no wife for you.

Helmer. I have the strength to change.

Nora. Perhaps—if your doll is taken from you.

Helmer. But to be parted—to be parted from you! No, no, Nora. I can't conceive of it happening!

Nora (*goes into the room, right*). All the more necessary that it should happen.

[*She comes back with her outdoor things and a small traveling bag, which she puts down on a chair by the table.*]

Helmer. Nora, Nora, not now! Wait till tomorrow!

Nora (*puts on her coat*). I can't spend the night in a strange man's house.

Helmer. But can't we live here as brother and sister, then—?

Nora (*fastens her hat*). You know quite well it wouldn't last. (*puts on her shawl*) Good-bye, Torvald. I don't want to see the children. I know they're in better hands than mine. As I am now, I can be nothing to them.

Helmer. But some time, Nora—some time—?

Nora. How can I tell? I've no idea what will happen to me.

Helmer. But you are my wife, both as you are and as you will be.

Nora. Listen, Torvald. When a wife leaves her husband's house, as I'm doing now, I'm told that according to the law he is freed of any obligations towards her. In any case, I release you from any such obligations. You mustn't feel bound to me in any way however small, just as I shall not feel bound to you. We must both be quite free. Here is your ring back. Give me mine.

Helmer. That too?

Nora. That too.

Helmer. Here it is.

Nora. Good. Well, now it's over. I'll leave the keys here. The servants know about everything to do with the house—much better than I do. Tomorrow, when I have left town, Christine will come to pack the things I brought here from home. I'll have them sent on after me.

Helmer. This is the end, then! Nora, will you never think of me any more?

Nora. Yes, of course. I shall often think of you and the children and this house.

Helmer. May I write to you, Nora?

Nora. No. Never. You mustn't do that.

Helmer. But at least you must let me send you—

Nora. Nothing. Nothing.

Helmer. But if you should need help—?

Nora. I tell you, no. I don't accept things from strangers.

Helmer. Nora—can I never be anything but a stranger to you?

Nora (*picks up her bag*). Oh, Torvald! Then the miracle of miracles would have to happen.

Helmer. The miracle of miracles!

Nora. You and I would both have to change so much that—oh, Torvald, I don't believe in miracles any longer.

Helmer. But I want to believe in them. Tell me. We should have to change so much that—!

Nora. That life together between us two could become a marriage. Goodbye.

[*She goes out through the hall.*]

Helmer (*sinks down on a chair by the door and buries his face in his hands*). Nora! Nora! (*looks round and gets up*) Empty! She's gone! (*a hope strikes him*) The miracle of miracles—?

[*The street door is slammed shut downstairs.*]

First Thoughts

Do you think that Nora made the right decision? Will a reconciliation between Nora and Torvald be possible in the future?

Identifying Facts

1. What agreement do Mrs. Linde and Krogstad come to that makes them both happy? How does their agreement affect the Helmers?
2. What message does Dr. Rank convey by leaving a calling card with a black cross written on it?
3. What do the first and second letters from Krogstad say? How does Torvald react to each letter?
4. What major action does Nora take at the end of Act 3? What are her plans as the play closes? What violent alternative had she been considering while Torvald was reading the first letter?

Interpreting Meanings

1. Mrs. Linde could stop Krogstad's letter from reaching Torvald, but she decides that Torvald should know the truth about Nora's actions. What is her motive? Do you approve or disapprove of her decision?
2. A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that compares one thing to another without using the words *like* or *as*. When a metaphor is developed over several lines, it is called an **extended metaphor**. Ibsen creates an extended metaphor in Act 3—the “doll’s house”—which gives the play its title. What does this metaphor suggest about Nora’s relationships with her father, husband, and children?
3. Torvald and Nora have very different ideas about what is moral and just. What do their opinions about the forged note reveal about their attitudes toward law and society?

4. Why does Nora call her husband “a strange man”? Do you think she is justified in using that term? Why or why not?
5. In Act 2, Nora hopes that a “miracle” will take place. Near the end of Act 3, she tells Torvald that in order for their marriage to be restored, “the miracle of miracles” will have to take place. What does Nora mean by “the miracle of miracles”? How does it differ from the miracle she hoped for earlier?
6. Briefly summarize Nora’s reasons for leaving Torvald. What has Nora gained that might make up for the loss of her marriage and her children?

Applying Meanings

Act 3 ends with the sound of the front door slamming as Nora leaves her husband. Some critics have said that the echo of that slamming door is still sounding in our world today. Explain the comment, and state whether you agree or disagree, and why.

Creative Writing Response

1. **Writing a Fourth Act.** Write a brief Act 4 for *A Doll’s House*, showing what happens to Nora and Torvald after the breakup of their marriage. In order to explain what is happening to Torvald in his household and what is happening to Nora elsewhere, you may need to convey some information through dialogue about absent characters. You may use the same set used for the first three acts, or create an entirely different one. Use any characters from Ibsen’s play, or, if you wish, create new characters.
2. **Analyzing a Character.** You are an actress preparing to play the role of Nora. Write a page of notes about her character to help you portray Nora effectively. Consider some or all of the following points: What are Nora’s thoughts and

feelings at the beginning of the play? How do they change by the end? How are the things she says sometimes different from her inner thoughts and feelings? When other characters are speaking and Nora is onstage, how does she react? Include specific lines of dialogue, and describe what tone of voice, gestures, or bits of stage business you would use in order to bring out the characterization in each passage.

Critical Writing Response

1. **Interpreting a Passage.** In Act 3, we find the following exchange between Torvald and Nora:

Helmer. Nora, I would gladly work for you night and day, and endure sorrow and hardship for your sake. But no man can be expected to sacrifice his honor, even for the person he loves.

Nora. Millions of women have done it. In two or more paragraphs, give your interpretation of this passage. Begin by **paraphrasing** it—restating its meaning in your own words. Then, to focus your interpretation, consider some or all of

the following questions: What are Torvald and Nora saying about the differences between men and women? What does Torvald mean by “honor”? What does Nora mean by it? How, in Nora’s view, have millions of women sacrificed their honor for love?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements in the passage? What is your view of honor, and of whether people should sacrifice it for love? Do you feel that men and women today have essentially different views of love and honor?

2. **Identifying Theme.** **Theme** is the central idea or insight in a work of literature. A statement of theme is not a plot summary; nor does it mention specific events or characters. In one sentence, state the theme of *A Doll’s House*. In a two- to three-paragraph essay, provide evidence from the play that supports your theme statement. Finally, state whether or not you agree with the theme, and explain the reason for your opinion.