**A Doll’s House: Henrik Ibsen**

**Play Summary**

Nora Helmer once secretly borrowed a large sum of money so that her husband could recuperate from a serious illness. She never told him of this loan and has been secretly paying it back in small installments by saving from her household allowance. Her husband, Torvald, thinks her careless and childlike, and often calls her his doll. When he is appointed bank director, his first act is to relieve a man who was once disgraced for having forged his signature on a document. This man, Nils Krogstad, is the person from whom Nora has borrowed her money. It is then revealed that she forged her father's signature in order to get the money. Krogstad threatens to reveal Nora's crime and thus disgrace her and her husband unless Nora can convince her husband not to fire him. Nora tries to influence her husband, but he thinks of Nora as a simple child who cannot understand the value of money or business. Thus, when Torvald discovers that Nora has forged her father's name, he is ready to disclaim his wife even though she had done it for him. Later when all is solved, Nora sees that her husband is not worth her love and she leaves him.

About ***A Doll's House***

Once the subject of public controversy, defended only by the *avant-garde*theater critics of the nineteenth century, Ibsen's prose dramas now appear as successful television plays and are an essential part of the repertory theaters all over the world. No longer inflaming audience reactions, the dramas are now acceptable fare to the most conservative theatergoer.

Because Ibsenite drama has become part of the history of the theater, a study of his work gives us a special insight into contemporary writings. The modern "theater of the absurd," for instance, expressing a personal alienation from society, is merely another form of the social criticism which Ibsen first inspired.

Although the plays are interesting for their social message, Ibsen's dramas would not survive today were it not for his consummate skill as a technician. Each drama is carefully wrought into a tight logical construction where characters are clearly delineated and interrelated, and where events have a symbolic as well as actual significance. The symbolism in Ibsen's plays is rarely overworked. Carefully integrated to unify the setting, events, and character portrayals, the symbols are incidental and subordinate to the truth and consistency of his picture of life.

Having been interested in painting as a youth, Ibsen was always conscious of making accurate observations. As a dramatist, he considered himself a photographer as well, using his powers of observation as a lens, while his finished plays represented the proofs of a skilled darkroom technician. The realism of his plays, the credibility of his characters, the immediacy of his themes attest to these photographic skills at which Ibsen so consciously worked. Among his countless revisions for each drama, he paid special heed to the accuracy of his dialogue. Through constant rewriting, he brought out the maximum meaning in the fewest words, attempting to fit each speech into the character of the speaker. In addition, Ibsen's ability as a poet contributed a special beauty to his terse prose.

The problems of Ibsen's social dramas are consistent throughout all his works. Georg Brandes, a contemporary critic, said of Ibsen, as early as the 1860s, that "his progress from one work to the other is not due to a rich variety of themes and ideas, but on the contrary to a perpetual scrutiny of the same general questions, regarded from different points of view." In *A Doll's House,*he especially probed the problems of the social passivity assigned to women in a male-oriented society. After considering the plight of Nora Helmer, he then investigated what would happen had she remained at home. The consequence of his thoughts appear in *Ghosts.*Professor Koht sums up the dramatist's investigations:

"The thing which filled [Ibsen's] mind was the individual man, and he measured the worth of a community according as it helped or hindered a man in being himself. He had an ideal standard which he placed upon the community and it was from this measuring that his social criticism proceeded."

Secondary to, and in connection with, his idea that the individual is of supreme importance, Ibsen believed that the final personal tragedy comes from a denial of love. From this viewpoint we see that Torvald is an incomplete individual because he attaches more importance to a crime against society than a sin against love.

In an age where nations were striving for independence, Ibsen's sense of democracy was politically prophetic. He believed not that "right" was the prerogative of the mass majority, but that it resided among the educated minority. In the development and enrichment of the individual, he saw the only hope of a really cultured and enlightened society.

Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, theater remained a vehicle of entertainment. Insights into the human condition were merely incidental factors in the dramatist's art. Ibsen, however, contributed a new significance to drama which changed the development of modern theater. Discovering dramatic material in everyday situations was the beginning of a realism that novelists as different as Zola and Flaubert were already exploiting. When Nora quietly confronts her husband with "Sit down, Torvald, you and I have much to say to each other," drama became no longer a mere diversion but an experience closely impinging on the lives of the playgoers themselves. With Ibsen, the stage became a pulpit, and the dramatist exhorting his audience to reassess the values of society became the minister of a new social responsibility.

**Character List**

**Nora Helmer** The central character, who is a "doll" for her husband to dress up, show off, and give direction to. She is childlike, romping easily with her three children.

**Torvald Helmer** Nora's husband, a bank manager, who was once gravely ill and needed to go to a southern climate to improve his health.

**Dr. Rank** A family friend of the Helmers; he is gravely ill.

**Christine Linde** An old family friend of Nora's, Christine is a widow who was once engaged to Nils Krogstad.

**Nils Krogstad** A lawyer and moneylender who is a former acquaintance of Torvald's and works at his bank; his position is tenuous there, because he ruined his reputation and career by committing forgery. Dr. Rank calls Krogstad "morally diseased."

**Anne**  The children's nurse.

**Key Facts**

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**At a Glance:**

**Full Title** *A Doll’s House*

**Author** Henrik Ibsen

**Type Of Work** Play

**Genre** Realistic, modern prose drama

**Language** Norwegian

**Time And Place Written** 1879, Rome and Amalfi, Italy

**Date Of First Publication** 1879

Advertisement

**Tone** Serious, intense, somber

**Setting (Time)** Presumably around the late1870s

**Setting (Place)** Norway

**Protagonist** Nora Helmer

**Major Conflict**

Nora’s struggle with Krogstad, who threatens to tell her husband about her past crime, incites Nora’s journey of self-discovery and provides much of the play’s dramatic suspense. Nora’s primary struggle, however, is against the selfish, stifling, and oppressive attitudes of her husband, Torvald, and of the society that he represents.

**Rising Action**

Nora’s first conversation with Mrs. Linde; Krogstad’s visit and blackmailing of Nora; Krogstad’s delivery of the letter that later exposes Nora.

**Climax**

Torvald reads Krogstad’s letter and erupts angrily.

**Falling Action**

Nora’s realization that Torvald is devoted not to her but to the idea of her as someone who depends on him; her decision to abandon him to find independence.

**Themes**

The sacrificial role of women; parental and filial obligations; the unreliability of appearances

**Motifs** Nora’s definition of freedom; letters

**Symbols** The Christmas tree; New Year’s Day

**Foreshadowing** Nora’s eating of macaroons against Torvald’s wishes foreshadows her later rebellion against Torvald.

**Summary and Analysis Act I**

Very cheerful, the pretty and girlish Nora Helmer enters from the outdoors, humming a tune while she deposits her parcels on the hall table. "Is that my little lark twittering out there?" calls her husband, Torvald, from the study, and he emerges to greet her. They talk about their improved income because Torvald has just been appointed as bank manager, and Nora chatters about Christmas presents she has just purchased for the children. Torvald suspects that his "Miss Sweet Tooth" has been "breaking rules" by indulging herself in prohibited confection. Nora denies the accusation, but the audience has seen her pop macaroons in her mouth as she came in. Deftly, Nora changes the subject and talks about decorating the tree.

The maid tells Torvald that their family friend, Dr. Rank, awaits him in his room. When Torvald has gone, another visitor arrives to see Nora, and the two women, who have not seen each other for the past ten years, are alone onstage. Christine Linde, having just returned to her hometown, tells Nora all about her unfortunate life. Married unlovingly, widowed for the past three years, Christine experienced the hardships of a woman who was forced to make her own way. She points out that her toilsome life has aged her, while Nora is as innocent and childlike as ever. Nora declares that she too has worked and sacrificed all these years. Her toil has saved someone she loves, she boasts, and she tells Christine how she borrowed 250 pounds when Torvald's health was in such danger that he needed to go to a southern climate to improve his condition. She describes how she secretly repaid installments of the debt by stinting on her personal expenses and taking in copying work to do at night. Christine is amazed that Nora has not mentioned the matter to her husband in all these years. He would never consent to borrowing money, Nora explains, and involuntarily she exposes the real reason for the deception — to save face for Torvald:

"How painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything [says Nora]. It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now."

Christine, still amazed, asks if Nora will ever reveal her secret to Torvald. Some day she shall, answers the girl with a half-smile. It may be good to "have something in reserve" in future years when she is no longer as attractive as now, "when my dancing and dressing-up and reciting have palled on him," Nora says.

The maid announces another visitor for Torvald. The newcomer, Nils Krogstad, is a lawyer and moneylender who now works at the bank. Nora seems relieved when he says he has come merely to talk with Torvald about "dry business matters." Leaving the study to allow Krogstad a private talk with his chief, Dr. Rank emerges to greet the ladies. Obsessed with thoughts of illness, the physician characterizes Krogstad as "morally diseased." Like many of his physically diseased patients, he continues, the lawyer refuses to submit to his fate, despite great agony, in the hopes of a change in his position.

This idea draws a parallel between Krogstad's situation and that of Dr. Rank. The lawyer feels his job is threatened now that Torvald is his chief, while Rank, ill with a congenital disease, is close to losing his life. With this in mind, Ibsen indicates that Krogstad clings to his respectability, or moral health, just as Dr. Rank clings to whatever physical life he has left.

Now that he has dismissed his visitor, Torvald emerges from the study and meets Christine for the first time. Recommending that Torvald find a job for Christine, Nora makes up a little story to push her point. Her friend rushed to town, the wife relates, just as soon as she heard of Torvald's promotion in hopes of finding a place at the bank. "She is frightfully anxious to work under some clever man so as to perfect herself," concludes Nora despite Christine's remonstrances. "Very sensible," approves Torvald, and with a well-favored "we'll see what we can do" he resumes his visit with Rank in the study. Now that Christine has left to seek lodgings, Nora admits the nurse and loudly greets her three children.

During the noisy romp, Nora crawls under the table to play hide and seek. She emerges growling and the children shriek with laughter. No one has heard Krogstad's knock on the door. He enters, and when Nora emerges from under the table again, she gives a stifled cry at discovering her villain. Ushering the children out of the room, Nora is alone with Krogstad.

He has come, he says, to ask her to intercede with Torvald on his behalf, for only her influence can protect the job which Christine Linde might take from him. He tells her that, for the sake of his growing sons, he has been working to restore his fallen position in society and is prepared to fight for this small post in the bank as if he were "fighting for his life." Nora shows little interest until he says he is able to compel her to comply with his request. Krogstad reveals that he can prove she borrowed the 250 pounds from him by forging her father's signature. Her situation was desperate when she needed the money, Nora explains. Her father, who died soon afterward, was too ill at the time to be consulted about such matters. Surely it is no crime for a woman to do everything possible to save her husband's life, Nora declares. Forgery is a criminal act, Krogstad reminds her, and the law cares nothing about motivation. He tells her that the one false step in his own life, the one that ruined his reputation and his career "was nothing more nor nothing worse than what you have done." This is Nora's first confrontation with the harsh inflexibility of lawful society. For the last time, Krogstad asks Nora to help him keep his post. If necessary, he says, he would produce the forged bond in court. His parting words frighten Nora, and she tries to distract herself by considering her Christmas decorations.

Interrupting her thoughts, Torvald comes to ask what Krogstad wanted. He is angry at Nora's evasive answer, but she finally admits that the lawyer begged her to say a good word in his behalf. Torvald becomes agreeable after Nora coaxes him to be her supervisor in choosing her costume for the fancy dress party they are to attend the next evening. Then she slowly leads the talk back to Krogstad. He once committed a forgery, Torvald tells her. "Out of necessity?" asks Nora, and he nods. Any man is allowed one false move, Torvald continues, so long as he openly confesses and accepts his punishment. But Krogstad, by his cunning, avoided the consequences of his guilt.

"Just think," says Torvald, "how a guilty man like that has to lie and play the hypocrite with everyone, how he has to wear a mask in the presence of those near and dear to him, even before his own wife and children. And about the children, that is the most terrible part."

He goes on to describe how "infection and poison" pollutes the very atmosphere breathed in such a home. While Nora becomes increasingly agitated, Torvald continues his lecture. In his career as a lawyer, her husband affirms, he has discovered that everyone who has "gone bad early in life" had a deceitful mother since it is she whose influence dictates the children's moral character. He leaves Nora, stunned with horror at his words. When the nurse enters with the children, she refuses to see them. "No, no, no! Don't let them come in to me," Nora pleads. It can't possibly be true, she says to herself, "Deprave my little children? Poison my home?" She is pale with terror at her thoughts while the curtain descends.

**Analysis**

By the end of this first act, Nora is emerging from the protection of her married life to confront the conditions of the outside world. Although she has been content in being a protected and cared-for housewife during the past eight years, and has once averted a crisis by finding a way to borrow money for the sake of Torvald's health, Nora has never learned to overtly challenge her environment.

Christine, on the other hand, has independently faced life's challenge, although she too sought protection by marrying for the sake of financial convenience. Her harsh experience as a widow who was forced to earn her own livelihood stands in sharp contrast to the insulated and frivolous life which Nora leads. Having learned, through suffering, the value of truthful human relationships, Christine is the first person to recognize that Nora's marriage is based on deception.

The device Ibsen uses to describe the Torvalds' deceptive marital relationship is the problem of Nora's debt. To prevent Torvald from discovering her secret, he shows how Nora has developed the manner of an evasive, charming adolescent whose whims and caprices her grown-up husband must indulge. This bolsters Torvald's self-image as a protector of the weak, the head of a dependent household, and the instructor of the mentally inferior.

The audience is immediately aware of Torvald's shallowness as he utters his first condescending words to his wife. Nora herself provides further evidence: when she says that Torvald might one day tire of her "reciting and dressing-up and dancing," she unknowingly describes the decadence of her marital relationship. Pedantic and pompous, Torvald sometimes seems like a father who enjoys the innocence of a favorite daughter. Setting up rules of behavior (prohibiting Nora's macaroons, for instance), instructing his wife even in her very dress, Torvald shows that he regards her as a plaything or a pet rather than an independent person. These attitudes suggest the baldly sexual nature of Torvald's marriage; the theme is later expanded in following acts until Nora recognizes her position and finds her role repulsive as well as humiliating.

Krogstad shows Nora another deceptive quality about the nature of the world: an individual is responsible for his own acts. Society punishes its lawbreaker; the innocent wife acting to save the life of her loved one is equally as guilty as the unscrupulous opportunist who acts out of expediency. Once recognizing the parallel between the "morally diseased" Krogstad and herself, Nora begins to confront the realities of the world and with this new knowledge must draw the inevitable conclusions.

**[Summary and Analysis Act II](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)**

[It is later in the same day. Nora has avoided her children, fearing to pollute them. In a conversation with her old nurse, she tells the servant that the children will have to get used to seeing less of their mother from now on. This is Nora's first suggestion of withdrawing from the life she has lived up until now.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[While Nora unpacks her costume from the box — the Italian fisher girl dress which reminds Torvald of their Italian honeymoon trip — Christine enters and busies herself in sewing a tear in the garment. They discuss Dr. Rank, and Christine is shocked by Nora's knowledge of inherited disease, a subject usually shielded from innocent ears. Being herself far from naive, she reproaches Nora for having borrowed the money from Dr. Rank to pay for Torvald's rest cure in Italy. Emphatically the girl denies it, for, she says, she would never allow herself placed in such a "horribly painful position" toward their old friend.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[Torvald's appearance interrupts the conversation. Nora goes to greet him and then, very prettily, coaxes her husband once more to allow Krogstad to keep his position in the bank. Nora says she is afraid he might write malicious slander about Torvald in the newspapers, threatening his new position just as her father had once been threatened. This is the part of their dialogue which illuminates the character and circumstances of Nora's father, who was once a government official. Sent by the department to investigate the truth of the newspaper charges against her father, Torvald cleared his name; as a conquering hero, he then married the grateful daughter.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[Torvald admits that Krogstad's moral failings can be overlooked, but he is most annoyed at the moneylender's embarrassingly familiar manner toward him when there are other people around. Because they were once intimate friends, Krogstad presumes familiarity, and by this attitude, Torvald says, "he would make my position in the bank intolerable." Nora is surprised and insults Torvald by remarking how unlike him it is to take such "a narrowminded way of looking at things." He is so peeved at her estimation that he calls the maid to immediately post the letter of Krogstad's dismissal.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

["Call her back, Torvald. Do you hear me, call her back," Nora pleads in panic. Taking her in his arms, he says he is not afraid of a "starving quilldriver's vengeance." Whatever happens, Torvald declares, "you may be sure that I am man enough to take everything upon myself." Nora reads much more meaning into this. "You will never have to do that," she vows. Alone onstage, Nora desperately thinks of some way to pay off the last part of the debt and free herself from Krogstad.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[At this point, Dr. Rank arrives. He has come, he says, to tell her that he has one more month left to live. When the final "horrors of dissolution" begin, he will send her a card marked with a black cross, for he intends to remain alone like a sick animal when it is time to die. A victim of tuberculosis of the spine, Rank denounces the "inexorable retribution'' that innocent children must pay for their parent's excesses, and Nora covers her ears to prevent hearing the references to her own life and her own children.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[To avoid the serious talk, Nora chatters about her dress, flirtatiously showing Rank her silk stockings. The doctor becomes serious again, expressing sorrow at being unable to leave her a token of gratitude for the friendship he enjoyed in this house. Nora, about to ask him to lend her money as a "big proof of friendship," never makes her request, for Rank responds to her hint with a passionate declaration of love. Nora rises and quietly calls the servant to bring them more light.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[As their conversation continues in the brightened room, she lapses into her former friendliness. Rank points out that she seems even more relaxed in his company than with Torvald. Nora explains that "there are some people one loves best and others whom one would almost always rather have as companions." When living with Papa, she used to steal into the maids' rooms because "they never moralized at all and talked to each other about such interesting things." She concludes with unconscious significance that "being with Torvald is a little like being with Papa."](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[At this point, the maid hands her Krogstad's visiting card. Finding some pretext, Nora excuses herself from Dr. Rank and confronts the moneylender, who has just received Torvald's letter of dismissal. Krogstad informs Nora that he has no further interest in the money and will keep the bond in a gesture of blackmail. With this weapon, he will have the power to make Torvald guarantee his employment at the bank and to eventually attain a higher position.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[Nora declares that her husband would never submit to such humiliation and hints she would rather sacrifice her life than have Torvald suffer blame for her crime. She is sure his protective nature would make him assume all the guilt, but Krogstad has a much lower opinion of Torvald's character. Turning to go, he tells her that he is leaving a letter informing Torvald of the forgery. Nora listens breathlessly as the footsteps pass downstairs. As they pause, she hears something drop into the letterbox, then the steps gradually diminish.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[Returning to Christine, Nora tells of the forgery and the letter. She begs her friend to act as a witness "if anything should happen to me." Were someone to take all the blame, all the responsibility, Christine must "remember that I alone did the whole thing." With mounting emotion, Nora says, "A wonderful thing is going to happen. But it is so terrible, Christine, it mustn't happen, not for all the world." Christine insists upon paying Krogstad a visit right away. On the strength of their past love, she will ask him to recall the letter.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[Torvald is accustomed at this hour to read his mail, and Nora tries to distract him. She tells him that she is so nervous about dancing the tarantella for the party that he must help her practice until the last minute. Agreeing to do nothing but instruct her dancing — not even open his mail — Torvald watches as Nora begins her dance, Rank playing the piano accompaniment. Despite her husband's instructions, Nora moves more and more violently, dancing "as if her life depended on it." Torvald suddenly cries "Stop! This is sheer madness. You have forgotten everything I've taught you." He embraces his nervous wife, suspecting that she is afraid of a letter Krogstad may have written. He promises not to look in the letterbox. "The child shall have her way," murmurs the comforting amorous husband. "But tomorrow night after you have danced — " "Then you will be free," she answers significantly.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[Christine returns and tells Nora that Krogstad is out of town, but she left a letter for him. Alone, Nora resigns herself to suicide, reckoning that, until the end of the party, she has thirty-one hours left to live. "Where's my little skylark?" calls Torvald returning from the dining room to fetch her. As Nora stretches her arms out to him, the curtain falls.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

**[Analysis](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)**

[In this act, Nora learns that she alone must face the consequences of her guilt. Refusing to allow Torvald to take the blame, she prepares to kill herself.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[The theme of death in this scene suggests a parallel between Nora and Dr. Rank, for the knowledge of his death coincides with her decision to commit suicide. Her tarantella is then a symbolic death dance which Rank, fittingly, plays for her on the piano. At the same time, since Torvald has chosen her dance costume to be that of a Capri fisher girl, the tarantella symbolizes their wedding, for Nora and Torvald learned the dance while honeymooning in Italy. Her dancing will be her final mortal performance, for Nora views the end of the party not only as the termination of her marriage, but as the last moments of her life.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[The scene between Nora and Dr. Rank is a significant one. Not only does it underscore the "pollution and infection" which a guilty parent can pass on to his children — Nora being the guilt-ridden parent, Rank the victim of venereal disease — but it shows the youthful innocence of Nora. Accustomed to approaching her husband in a mood of adolescent flirtatiousness, Nora treats Dr. Rank the same way as she shows him her leg dressed in the new silk stockings. When Rank responds with a declaration of love instead of amused paternity, Nora recognizes for the first time the underlying sexual nature of her relationship with Torvald. This sudden understanding prevents her asking Dr. Rank for the "big proof of friendship" which she would have been able to accept innocently from a family friend. Knowing that receiving payment from a lover places one in a "horribly painful position" reminds Nora how she has always cajoled Torvald to give her little presents of money. With this understanding, she begins to recognize how Torvald, regarding her as a romantic object, violates her personal independence.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

[Nora learns more about Torvald's weakness of character in this act although she does not realize the full significance of this insight until the following scene. When Torvald tells her that he wishes to get rid of Krogstad, not because he judges him morally incompetent but because he is ashamed to admit friendship with a man held to be disreputable, Nora observes that Torvald is quite different from the moralizing and respectable husband she has admired for eight years. Despite this insight, she still believes, as she tells Christine, that the "wonderful thing" will still take place — the proud terrible moment when Torvald discovers the forgery and takes all the guilt upon himself.](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/a-dolls-house/summary-and-analysis/act-ii)

**Summary and Analysis Act III**

Krogstad and Christine are alone onstage, for the Helmers and Dr. Rank are upstairs at the masquerade party. Bitterly Krogstad reproaches Christine for renouncing their betrothal, years ago, sacrificing him in order to marry a man better able to support her and her family. After wrecking his hopes the first time, she appears again to stand in his way by taking over his hard-won position at the bank. Christine denies the charge. She says she returned to town to seek him and renew their love. Krogstad, deeply moved, is grateful for her love and faith. He says he will ask Torvald to return his letter, but Christine has changed her mind. Torvald must find out the truth; she says all this concealment and falsehood must be exposed in order for Nora and Torvald to realize a true marriage.

After Krogstad has gone, Torvald enters, drawing Nora into the room while she struggles and protests that she wants to remain at the party a little longer. He is annoyed to find Christine waiting up for them, and while he fetches candles, Christine tells Nora of her talk with Krogstad and counsels that "you must tell your husband all about it." With quiet resolve Nora answers, "Now I know what I must do."

Torvald is relieved when Christine finally leaves them alone. Flushed with champagne and romantic desires, he tells Nora that all this night, "I have longed for nothing but you." Unable to endure his desire after watching her dance, he dragged her home. Nora twists out of his embrace. Before he can be angry, Dr. Rank enters to wish them good night, and Nora quickly senses the real reason for his visit. Turning to go, Rank says good-bye with unmistakable finality. "Sleep well," says Nora gently, adding, to his surprise, "Wish me the same."

To Nora's dismay, Torvald now goes to the letterbox. Dr. Rank has left them a visiting card marked with black; "as if he were announcing his own death," murmurs Torvald. After Nora tells him of Rank's condition, he clasps her tightly. Now that their closest friend is gone, he says, they must hold on to each other even more closely. "Do you know, Nora [Torvald whispers], I have often wished that you might be threatened by some great danger, so that I might risk my life's blood and everything for your sake."

She firmly disengages herself. "Now you must read your letters, Torvald," Nora declares. In deference to their friend's death, Torvald agrees to retire to his own room. Alone, Nora prepares to rush out to meet her own death "in the icy depths." Ready to leave her house, she gains the hall when Torvald meets her at the door of his room brandishing the letter. "You shan't save me, Torvald," cries Nora, struggling from him. In a paroxysm of self-pity and indignation, Torvald struts and shouts, vulgarly abusing his wife for bringing this shame upon him, for putting him into Krogstad's power. People might even suspect that he was responsible for the whole thing, that he prompted Nora to do the deed. At all costs, the matter must be hushed up; Krogstad must be pacified. He renounces Nora as his wife. Although for the sake of appearance she may still live in the house, she will not be allowed to raise the children and shall share no intimacy with her husband. Nora's answers are quieter and colder as Torvald talks.

Suddenly a maid, half-dressed, brings Nora a letter. Torvald grabs it, tears it open. A moment later he shouts with joy, "I am saved, Nora! I am saved," and he tears the enclosed bond into small pieces. Exultantly he forgives his wife, repeating all the platitudes he has always uttered about the cozy home he has with his skylark. "Here I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from a hawk's claws," and he goes on to say that by freely forgiving and accepting her once more as his own, he has recreated his wife, giving her a new life.

By this time Nora has changed her party dress and appears in everyday clothes. "Sit down, Torvald," she says, "You and I have much to say to each other." Torvald shows surprise. "Nora, this cold set face — what is this?" Confronting her husband across a table, Nora proceeds to the "settling of accounts." First of all, she says, this is the first time in eight years "that we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation. . . . We have never sat down in earnest together to try and get at the bottom of things." Over Torvald's sputtered objections, she outlines the life she has been living in the "doll's house."

First she lived with her father who treated her as a toy, whose opinions and tastes she followed because he would be displeased with any disagreement, any sign of independence. "He played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you I was simply transferred from Papa's hands to yours." Torvald made all the arrangements in their life, she goes on to say, and so she never developed her own tastes or her own ideas:

"When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I have been living here like a poor woman — just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and Papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault I have made nothing of my life."

Torvald is forced to admit of some truth — though "strained and exaggerated" — in what she says. It shall be different in the future, he vows, "playtime shall be over and lesson time shall begin." She answers that he is not the man to educate her into being a proper wife. Neither is she ready to bring up her children, Nora continues, for there is another task she must first undertake. "I must try and educate myself," she says, "and I must do that for myself." That is why she is leaving him now. Finding her husband a stranger, Nora chooses to seek lodging with Christine rather than spend another night with him. Torvald points out that she has no right to neglect her most sacred duties — duties to her husband and children:

NORA: I have other duties just as sacred. Duties to myself.

TORVALD: Before all else you are a wife and mother.

NORA: I don't believe that any longer, I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being just as you are — or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quiet well, Torvald, that most people would think you right and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.

Torvald accuses her of loving him no longer. She nods, explaining that tonight "when the wonderful thing did not happen, then I saw you were not the man I had thought you." For such a long time she suffered with the guilty secret of her borrowed money, feeling certain that eventually the "wonderful thing" would happen. The chance came with Krogstad's letter, for Nora never imagined Torvald could submit to that man's conditions. She expected him to say proudly, "publish the thing to the whole world," and come forward to take the guilt upon himself. This expected sacrifice was the "wonderful thing" she had awaited, and to prevent it, she planned suicide.

Torvald says he is willing to toil for her day and night, bear any suffering, "but no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves." "It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have always done," Nora quietly points out. She tells him that after his fear was over — "not the fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you" — and she became once more his little skylark, his doll, whose fragility demanded "doubly gentle care" in the future, she then realized that for eight years "I had been living with a strange man and had borne him three children." She cannot bear to think of this humiliation, Nora says, and will leave him without accepting money to live on and without communicating.

Torvald begs her to say when they can live together again. Nora sighs. "Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen," she answers. They must both be so changed that "our life together would be a real wedlock." She turns to go, leaving Torvald, face in hands, repeating her name. Then he rises as a hope flashes across his mind. "The most wonderful thing of all —?" he murmurs. There is a noise of a door slamming shut.

Analysis

Clearly explaining the reasons for her sudden departure, Nora summarizes the entire play during her last speeches with Torvald. Discovering that her husband confuses appearance with values, that he is more concerned with his position in society than with the emotional needs of his wife, Nora is forced to confront her personal worthlessness. Rather than remain part of a marriage based on an intolerable lie, she chooses to leave her home and discover for herself the individuality which life with Torvald has denied her.

Central to this act, and in fact to the whole play, is Nora's concept of the "wonderful thing," the moment when she and Torvald would achieve a "real wedlock." In the course of the drama, she has learned that the ideal union takes place when husband and wife regard each other as rational individuals who are aware of society's demands and can fulfill their separate responsibilities with sophistication and mutual respect.

In another sense, the "wonderful thing" is merely a code word for a relationship whose values are freed from the mystique which society has attached to marriage with concepts like "duty," "respectability," "cozy home," "happy family," and the rest of the stereotyped images such phrases suggest. A "real wedlock" can only be attained when a couple, deeply committed to respect each other's personal worth, work naturally and thoughtfully to fulfill ideals which their separate individualities require. Torvald, by striving for goals which have been thrust upon him in the course of an education based on social morality and verbal commitment to goals empty of feeling or commitment, deprives Nora of her sense of identity. To discover the essence of personal truth is, then, the "wonderful thing" which Nora Helmer, unable to find in her marriage, must seek through her own resources.

Character Analysis

 Nora Helmer

Nora is by far the most interesting character in the play. Many critics have pointed out that such an immature, ignorant creature could never have attained the understanding and revolutionary qualities that Nora has at the time she leaves her home. Ibsen, however, has carefully constructed Nora so that her independence and farsightedness have always shown through her adolescent capriciousness. Although her father and husband have seriously injured her practical education, Nora has retained enough native wisdom to confront an emergency. That she bungles the situation by a careless forgery provides further credence to her independence of thought as well as to her lack of sophistication. This mixture of wisdom and childishness is Nora's strongest quality. It enables her to oppose the knowledge of books and the doctrines of her worldly husband and to test by experience the social hypothesis which declares that duties to the family are the most sacred. Only an innocent creature can brave the perils of the outside world to find her identity.

Shocked audiences who objected to Nora's solution of her marital impasse and critics who considered her character unable to withstand the severe trial neglected to take account of the artistic truthfulness of the slammed door and its aftermath. One of the most common themes enduring in folklore and in less spontaneous works of art is this notion of the innocent journeying through the world to discover basic human values. The significance of these mythic themes is that only an innocent, fearless creature has the power of vision to see through the false values of sophisticated society. In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,*the story of Siegfried, Fielding's *Tom Jones,*and even in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain,*we find the recurrent idea of youthful inquiry prevailing over worldly experience. Ibsen's Nora, though deriving from a much closer and realistic setting, is raised to a mythic level as she too accepts her inevitable quest, the sacred pursuit of her identity.

In brief;

Nora Helmer is

* Protagonist, ife to Helmer , friend to Mrs Linde and a confidante of Dr, Rank and a mother of three
* Loving and caring
* Bold and courageous
* Reliable and dependable
* Sacrificial
* Cheerful intelligent
* Focused and steadyfast

Torvald Helmer

Torvald is shallow enough to be a mere foil for the character of Nora. Unfortunately, he is depicted with enough detail to appear a very plausible type of man, typical of many contemporary heads-of-the-family. He is a well-constructed social product, a proud specimen of a middle-class husband. Because Nora has been so sheltered all her life, Torvald represents all the outside world she knows. Not only does he stand for the world of men and the world of business which has no place in her house-bound life, but he represents society at large, including all the community and legal ethics which do not concern her and religious ethics in which she has had no training. Ironically Ibsen sets up Torvald according to the same representation. For the author, Torvald stands for all the individual-denying social ills against which Ibsen has dedicated all his writing.

As a victim of his narrow view of society, Torvald inspires sympathy rather than reproach. When a man mistakes appearance for values, the basic blame must be attributed to his social environment. Ibsen, however, drives home the loathsome qualities of such a character by attributing to him a personal decadence. Implying that Torvald considers Nora merely an ornamented sex object, the author shows how he maintains amorous fantasies toward his wife: he dresses her as a Capri fisher girl and encourages her to dance in order to arouse his desires. As Torvald reinforces her girlish and immature ways, Ibsen implies an incest relationship, for Nora is made to observe that she was merely transferred from her father's tutelage to that of her husband without any change in her emotional life. It is with this final touch of perversion that Ibsen makes the character of Torvald thoroughly reprehensible to the audience.

In brief:

Torvald Helmer is

* Nora’s husband, bank manager at the start of the play
* Self-centred
* Disrespectful
* Pretentious
* Abusive, arrogant
* Male chauvinist
* Unrealistic

Christine Linde

Christine Linde, Nora Helmer's contemporary, serves as a direct comparison with Ibsen's heroine. By recounting how she denied her rights to love and self-determination by marrying for financial security, Christine foreshadows how Nora will confront a bitter future after learning that her marriage is based on deception. Nora, according to Christine's example, must eventually conclude, through her own sufferings, that the only way of life which can survive crises is one based on truthful relationships. The ability for Christine to rebuild her life with Krogstad can be accepted as a note of hope in Nora's case. Perhaps in the years to come, Nora and Torvald will also be able to restore their marriage.

 Dr. Rank

Dr. Rank's function in the play also refers to a past occasion in Nora's life. Just as she used to seek the conversation of the maids as a refreshing change from the moralizing of her father, Nora finds amusement in Rank's companionship as a change from the tiresome cant of Torvald.

Rank's illness also serves as the physical counterpart of the moral illness of Krogstad and, by extension, of Torvald. An innocent victim of a social disease, the physician is as deeply concerned as Torvald in maintaining an exterior of well-being. Rather than allow anyone to witness the degrading aspects of his "final dissolution," Rank bids farewell to his friends and prepares to die in private. Torvald, by the same token, wishes to maintain appearances "at any cost" when he discovers Nora's disease, of which he is the victim.

In Brief:

* Dr. Rank is Torvald’s best friend
* Cheerful and lively
* Pleasant and charming
* Outgoing/friendly
* Courageous
* carefree

**Themes for discussion**

* Deception/appearance v Reality
* Quest for gender equity/women emancipation
* Quest for freedom/independent mindedness
* Male chauvinism
* The sacrificial role of women
* Love and marriage

**Dramatic techniques**

* Symbolism
* Irony
* Use of letters
* Use disguise
* Use of contrast
* Foreshadowing
* Soliloquy

**Question for discussion**

1. Explain the meaning of the title A Doll’s House
2. How is the play A doll’s House a replica of your contemporary society?
3. what important lesson do you draw from A Doll’s House
4. Discuss the conflicts in the play A Doll’s House