A Doll's House : a play

Henrik Ibsen

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by Henrik Ibsen

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Torvald Helmer.
Nora, his wife.
Doctor Rank.
Mrs Linde.
Nils Krogstad.
Helmer’s three young children.
Anne, their nurse.
A Housemaid.
A Porter.

[The action takes place in Helmer’s house.]

A DOLL’S HOUSE

ACT I

_[SCENE.—A room furnished comfortably and tastefully, but not extravagantly. At the back, a door to the right leads to the

entrance-hall, another to the left leads to Helmer's study. Between the doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left-hand wall is a door, and beyond it a window. Near the window are a round table, arm-chairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, at the farther end, another door; and on the same side, nearer the footlights, a stove, two easy chairs and a rocking-chair; between the stove and the door, a small table. Engravings on the walls; a cabinet with china and other small objects; a small book-case with well-bound books. The floors are carpeted, and a fire burns in the stove. It is winter._

A bell rings in the hall; shortly afterwards the door is heard to open. Enter NORA, humming a tune and in high spirits. She is in outdoor dress and carries a number of parcels; these she lays on the table to the right. She leaves the outer door open after her, and through it is seen a PORTER who is carrying a Christmas Tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID who has opened the door.]

NORA. Hide the Christmas Tree carefully, Helen. Be sure the children do not see it until this evening, when it is dressed. _[To the PORTER, taking out her purse.]_ How much?

PORTER. Sixpence.

NORA. There is a shilling. No, keep the change. _[The PORTER thanks her, and goes out. NORA shuts the door. She is laughing to herself, as she takes off her hat and coat. She takes a packet of macaroons from her pocket and eats one or two; then goes cautiously to her husband's door and listens.]_ Yes, he is in. _[Still humming, she goes to the table on the right.]_

HELMER.
[calls out from his room]. Is that my little lark twittering out

there?

NORA. _[busy opening some of the parcels]_. Yes, it is!

HELMER. Is it my little squirrel bustling about?

NORA. Yes!

HELMER. When did my squirrel come home?

NORA. Just now. _[Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.]_ Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought.

HELMER. Don’t disturb me. _[A little later, he opens the door and looks into the room, pen in hand.]_ Bought, did you say? All these things? Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?

NORA. Yes but, Torvald, this year we really can let ourselves go a little. This is the first Christmas that we have not needed to economise.

HELMER. Still, you know, we can’t spend money recklessly.

NORA. Yes, Torvald, we may be a wee bit more reckless now, mayn’t we? Just a tiny wee bit! You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money.

HELMER.
Yes, after the New Year; but then it will be a whole quarter before the salary is due.

NORA. Pooh! we can borrow until then.

HELMER. Nora! _[Goes up to her and takes her playfully by the ear.]_ The same little featherhead! Suppose, now, that I borrowed

fifty pounds today, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me, and—

NORA. _[putting her hands over his mouth]_. Oh! don't say such horrid things.

HELMER. Still, suppose that happened,—what then?

NORA.
If that were to happen, I don't suppose I should care whether I owed money or not.

HELMER. Yes, but what about the people who had lent it?

NORA. They? Who would bother about them? I should not know who they were.

HELMER. That is like a woman! But seriously, Nora, you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt. We two have kept bravely on the straight road so far, and we will go on the same way for the short time longer that there need be any struggle.

NORA. _[moving towards the stove]_. As you please, Torvald.

HELMER. _[following her]_. Come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings. What is this! Is my little squirrel out of temper? _[Taking out his purse.]_ Nora, what do you think I have got here?

NORA. _[turning round quickly]_. Money!

HELMER. There you are. _[Gives her some money.]_ Do you think I don't know what a lot is wanted for housekeeping at Christmas-time?

NORA. _[counting]_. Ten shillings—a pound—two pounds! Thank you, thank you, Torvald; that will keep me going for a long time.

HELMER. Indeed it must.

NORA. Yes, yes, it will. But come here and let me show you what I have bought. And all so cheap! Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and dolly's bedstead for Emmy,—they are very plain, but anyway she will soon break them in pieces. And here are dress-lengths and handkerchiefs for the maids; old Anne ought really to have something better.

HELMER. And what is in this parcel?

NORA. _[crying out]_. No, no! you mustn't see that until this evening.

HELMER.
Very well. But now tell me, you extravagant little person, what would you like for yourself?

NORA. For myself? Oh, I am sure I don't want anything.

HELMER.
Yes, but you must. Tell me something reasonable that you would particularly like to have.

NORA. No, I really can't think of anything—unless, Torvald—

HELMER. Well?

NORA. _[playing with his coat buttons, and without raising her eyes to his]_. If you really want to give me something, you might—you might—

HELMER. Well, out with it!

NORA. _[speaking quickly]_. You might give me money, Torvald. Only just as much as you can afford; and then one of these days I will buy something with it.

HELMER. But, Nora—

NORA. Oh, do! dear Torvald; please, please do! Then I will wrap it up in beautiful gilt paper and hang it on the Christmas Tree. Wouldn't that be fun?

HELMER. What are little people called that are always wasting money?

NORA. Spendthrifts—I know. Let us do as you suggest, Torvald, and then I shall have time to think what I am most in want of. That is a very sensible plan, isn't it?

HELMER. _[smiling]_. Indeed it is—that is to say, if you were really to save out of the money I give you, and then really buy something for yourself. But if you spend it all on the housekeeping and any number of unnecessary things, then I merely have to pay up again.

NORA. Oh but, Torvald—

HELMER. You can't deny it, my dear little Nora. _[Puts his arm round her waist.]_ It's a sweet little spendthrift, but she uses up a deal of money. One would hardly believe how expensive such little persons are!

NORA. It's a shame to say that. I do really save all I can.

HELMER.
[laughing]. That's very true,—all you can. But you can't save

anything!

NORA.
[smiling quietly and happily]. You haven’t any idea how many expenses
we skylarks and squirrels have, Torvald.

HELMER. You are an odd little soul. Very like your father. You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me, and, as soon as you have got it, it seems to melt in your hands. You never know where it has gone. Still, one must take you as you are. It is in the blood; for indeed it is true that you can inherit these things, Nora.

NORA. Ah, I wish I had inherited many of papa’s qualities.

HELMER. And I would not wish you to be anything but just what you are, my sweet little skylark. But, do you know, it strikes me that you are looking rather—what shall I say—rather uneasy today?

NORA. Do I?

HELMER. You do, really. Look straight at me.

NORA. _[looks at him]_. Well?

HELMER.
[wagging his finger at her]. Hasn’t Miss Sweet Tooth been breaking rules in town today?

NORA. No; what makes you think that?

HELMER. Hasn’t she paid a visit to the confectioner’s?

NORA. No, I assure you, Torvald—

HELMER. Not been nibbling sweets?

NORA. No, certainly not.

HELMER. Not even taken a bite at a macaroon or two?

NORA. No, Torvald, I assure you really—

HELMER. There, there, of course I was only joking.

NORA.
[going to the table on the right]. I should not think of going against your wishes.

HELMER. No, I am sure of that; besides, you gave me your word—_[Going up to her.]_ Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling. They will all be revealed tonight when the Christmas Tree is lit, no doubt.

NORA. Did you remember to invite Doctor Rank?

HELMER. No. But there is no need; as a matter of course he will come to dinner with us. However, I will ask him when he comes in this morning. I have ordered some good wine. Nora, you can't think how I am looking forward to this evening.

NORA. So am I! And how the children will enjoy themselves, Torvald!

HELMER. It is splendid to feel that one has a perfectly safe appointment, and a big enough income. It's delightful to think of, isn't it?

NORA. It's wonderful!

HELMER. Do you remember last Christmas? For a full three weeks

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