A Doll’s House

Henrik Ibsen

Translated by Kenneth McLeish
Characters

HELMER
NORA, his wife
ANNE-MARIE, their nanny
DOCTOR RANK
MRS LINDE
KROGSTAD

The action takes place in Helmer's apartment.
Act One

Room in HELMER's apartment. The decoration is not extravagant, but comfortable and stylish. Back right, door to the hall; back lift, door to HELMER's study. Between the doors, a piano. Centre lift, a door, and beyond it a window; beside the window a round table, easy chairs and a small sofa. Upstage right, a door, and below it a stove, two easy chairs and a rocking chair. Between the door and the stove, a side-table. Engravings on the walls. A cabinet filled with china and other small objects; a small bookcase with expensively-bound books. Carpet on the floor, fire in the stove. Winter.

Extract 1: Nora and Torvald

HELMER. And what about my own little spendthrift? What would she like, herself?

NORA. Oh fiddle. Me? I don't want anything.

HELMER. Of course you do. Tell me some little thing you'd like more than all the world.

NORA. I really don't ... Unless ... Torvald ...

HELMER. Yes?

NORA (playing with his buttons, not looking at him). If you really want to give me something, you could ... you could ...

HELMER. Out with it.

NORA (blurting it). Give me some pennies of my own. Just what you can spare. I could keep them till I really wanted something ...

HELMER. Oh, Nora -

NORA. Please, Torvald, please. I'll wrap them in pretty paper and hang them on the tree. They'll be so pretty.

HELMER. What do they call little birds that are always wasting money?

NORA. Featherbrains. I know. But why don't we try it, Torvald, try it? Give me time to think what I'd really like? It would be a good idea.
HELMER *smiling*. Of course it would - if you really did manage to save it, to spend on yourself. But it'll just go into the housekeeping, you'll spend it on this or that, and I'll end up forking out again.

NORA. No, Torvald.

HELMER. Darling Nora, yes.
*He puts his arm round her waist.*

What a sweet little featherbrain it is. But it swallows up so many pennies. It costs a lot of pennies, to keep a little featherbrain.

NORA. Don't be horrid. I do save, all I can.

HELMER *with a laugh*. All you can. That's right. The whole trouble is, you can't.

NORA *smiling gently and playfully*. Oh Torvald, songbirds, squirrels, you know how we spend and spend.

HELMER. What a funny little thing it is. Daddy's daughter. A thousand little ways of wheedling pennies - and as soon as you've got them, they melt in your hands. You never know where they've gone. It's in the blood, little Nora, it's inherited.

NORA. I wish I'd inherited some of Daddy's other qualities.

HELMER. I wouldn't have you any different. Dear little bird, little darling. But what is it? There's something, isn't there?

There is.

NORA. What?

HELMER. Look at me.

NORA *looking at him*. There.

HELMER *wagging his finger*. Was little Miss Sweet-tooth naughty in town today?

NORA. What d'you mean?

HELMER. Did she visit the sweetie-shop?

NORA. No, Torvald. I promise.
HELMER. She's not been nibbling?

NORA. No. No.

HELMER. Not one tiny macaroon?

NORA. Torvald, I swear -

HELMER. It's all right. I was only joking.

NORA (crossing to the table right). You told me not to. You don't really think I'd - ?

HELMER. Of course not. You promised.

He goes to her.

*He goes to her.*

Darling Nora, keep all your Christmas secrets to yourself. They'll all come out this evening, when we decorate the tree.

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**Extract 2: Nora and Kristine**

NORA. You don't take me seriously. You should. Aren't you proud of all you did, all that hard work for your mother?

MRS LINDE. I take everyone seriously. Of course I'm proud, I made my mother's last months a little easier.

NORA. And your brothers - you're proud of what you did for them.

MRS LINDE. I've a right to be.

NORA. Of course you have. And so do I. I've a right to be proud too.

MRS LINDE. Why? What d'you mean?

NORA. Sh! Torvald must never hear. He mustn't ever – no one in the world must ever know, except you, Kristine.

MRS LINDE. Know. what?
NORA. Come over here.  
_She pulls her to the sofa and sits beside her._  
_I have_ got something to be proud of. The person who saved Torvald's life - it was me.

MRS LINDE. Saved his life? How?

NORA. The trip to Italy. I told you. If he hadn't gone

MRS LINDE. But your father -

NORA (smiling). That's what everyone thought. Torvald ... everyone.

MRS LINDE. But-

NORA. We didn't have a penny from Daddy. I paid. I got the money.

MRS LINDE. All of it?

NORA. All of it.

MRS LINDE. Nora, how? Did you win the at the bingo?

NORA (scornfully). The bingo! Pff! That wouldn't have been clever.

MRS LINDE. How did you get it, then?

NORA (smiling mysteriously, humming). Hm, hm, hm.

MRS LINDE. You didn't - _borrow_ it?

NORA. Why not?

MRS LINDE. A wife can't borrow without her husband's permission.

NORA (tossing her head). Unless she knows about business ... knows her way around.

MRS LINDE. I don't understand.

NORA. Never mind. I didn't say I did borrow it. There are plenty of other ways.  
_She stretches out on the sofa._  
Perhaps it was one of my admirers. I'm such a pretty little thing ... 

MRS LINDE. You are silly.
NORA. And you're nosy.

MRS LINDE. Nora. Are you sure you haven't done something... rash?

NORA (sitting up straight). Saving my husband's life?

MRS LINDE. I mean rash, if he didn't know - ?

NORA. That's the whole point. He wasn't to know. Don't you understand? He was never to know how ill he was. The doctors came to me, to me, and told me his life depended on it. Time in the sun. D'you think I didn't try to wheedle him? I told him it was for me, how lovely it would be to go abroad, like other young wives. I begged, I cried. I told him to think of my condition, he had to be kind to me, humour me. I hinted that he took out a loan. Kristine, he almost lost his temper. He said I was featherbrained, and his duty as a husband was not to indulge my ... my little whims, he called them. Right, right, I thought. If you won't save yourself ... So I ... found a way myself.

MRS LINDE. Torvald never knew the money wasn't from your father? .

NORA. Of course not. Daddy died about that time. I'd wanted to tell him, to ask him to help. But first he was too ill, then it was too late.

MRS LINDE. And you've never told your husband?

NORA. For heaven's sake! When he thinks the way he does. In any case, Torvald, a man, proud to be a man - how d'you imagine he'd feel if he knew he owed anything to me? It would break us apart. Our lovely home, our happiness - all gone.

MRS LINDE. You won't ever tell him?

NORA (thoughtfully, with a light smile). One day. Perhaps. When I'm not quite such a pretty little thing.

Extract 3: Nora and Krogstad

KROGSTAD (closer). Mrs Helmer. Pay attention. Either you've a very bad memory, or you know nothing of business. I'd better remind you.

NORA. What?
KROGSTAD. Your husband was ill. You came to me for a loan. A substantial loan.

NORA. Where else was I to turn?

KROGSTAD. I said I'd find the money.

NORA. You did find it.

KROGSTAD. - on certain conditions. You were so upset about your husband, so eager for the money to cure him, I don't think you noticed the conditions. So I'd better remind you. I said I'd find the money; I wrote a contract.

NORA. And I signed it.

KROGSTAD. That's right. But underneath your signature was a clause saying that your father would guarantee the repayments. Your father should have signed that clause.

NORA. He did.

KROGSTAD. I left the date blank. Your father was to fill it in: the date he signed the document. You remember that, Mrs Helmer?

NORA. I think so.

KROGSTAD. I gave you the contract, to post to your father. You remember that?

NORA. Yes.

KROGSTAD. You must have done it immediately, because you brought it back in less than a week, with your father's signature. Then I gave you the money.

NORA. And I've been paying it back, haven't I? As arranged?

KROGSTAD. Let's keep to the point, Mrs Helmer. That must have been a very difficult time for you.

NORA. Yes.

KROGSTAD. Your father was desperately ill.

NORA. Yes.

KROGSTAD. In fact he died soon after?
NORA. Yes.

KROGSTAD. Mrs Helmer, can you remember the exact date? The date he died? *He takes out a paper.*

So hard to explain . . .

NORA. What's hard to explain?

KROGSTAD. The fact that your father signed this document three days after he died.

NORA. What d'you mean?

KROGSTAD. Your father died on the 29th September. But he dated his signature - here, look - on the 2nd October.

As I say, Mrs Helmer: extraordinary.

NORA says nothing.

Can you explain it?

*No answer.*

NORA. 29th September.

KROGSTAD. Yes indeed. I checked. That's what makes it so extraordinary . . . Even more extraordinary: the words 2nd October, and the year, aren't in your father's writing, but in someone else's. I think I know whose. It's easily explained. Your father forgot to date his signature, so someone else dated it, someone who didn't know the date he died. But none of that's important. What's important is that the signature's genuine. There's no doubt about that, is there, Mrs Helmer? This is your father's signature?

*Short pause. Then NORA lifts her head and looks defiantly at him.*

NORA. No, it isn't. I signed father's name.
Act Two

Extract 4: Nora and Anne-Marie

The same. In the corner beside the piano, the Christmas tree stands stripped of its decorations and with its candles burned to stumps. On the sofa, NORA's evening cape. NORA, alone in the room, is pacing restlessly. She picks up her cape, then puts it down again.

NORA. Someone's coming.

She goes to the door and listens.
No one. Of course not, it's Christmas Day. Not tomorrow, either. Unless -

She opens the door and looks out.
No. No letters. The box is empty. (Pacing.) Stupid. Of course he didn't mean it. Things like that don't happen. They don't. I've got three small children.

ANNE-MARIE comes from the room lift, with a large cardboard box.

ANNE-MARIE. I've found it. The box with the fancy dress.

NORA. Thanks. Put it on the table.

ANNE-MARIE (as she does so). It needs mending.

NORA. I wish I'd torn it to pieces.

ANNE-MARIE. You can fix it. Just a little patience.

NORA. I'll ask Mrs Linde to help.

ANNE-MARIE. Out again? In this weather? You'll catch a chill, make yourself poorly.

NORA. Never mind that ... Are the children all right?

ANNE-MARIE. Playing with their Christmas presents. If only-
NORA. Are they still asking for me?

ANNE-MARIE. They're used to having their Mummy there.

NORA. No, Anne-Marie. I've no time any more.

ANNE-MARIE. Well, little ones get used to anything.

NORA. D'you think so? D'you think if their Mummy went far away, they'd forget her?

ANNE-MARIE. Far away!

NORA. Anne-Marie, I want to ask you something. I've often wondered. How could you do it? How could you bear it?

To give your own child to be fostered.

ANNE-MARIE. I'd no choice. How else could I have been nurse to baby Nora?

NORA. But did you want to?

ANNE-MARIE. To get such a good position? A poor girl in trouble. He wasn't about to help.

NORA. I suppose your daughter's long forgotten you.

ANNE-MARIE. No, no. She wrote to me, when she was confirmed, and when she got married.

NORA (hugging her). Dear old Anne-Marie. You were such a good mother to me when I was little.

ANNE-MARIE. Poor baby, you'd no one else.

NORA. I know if my little ones had no one else, you'd ... Tsk, tsk. (opening the box.) Go back to them. I must ...

Tomorrow you'll see how pretty I'll look.
ANNE-MARIE. You'll be the prettiest one there.

**Extract 5: Nora and Dr Rank**

Doctor Rank, sit down here. I want to show you something.

RANK *(sitting).* What?

NORA. These.

RANK. Silk stockings.

NORA. Aren't they pretty? It's dark now, but tomorrow ... No no, look at the feet. Oh well, the legs as well.

RANK. Hm-

NORA. What's the matter? Don't you think they'll fit?

RANK. I've no possible way of telling.

NORA *(glancing at him).* Tut tut! *She flicks his ear with the stockings.*

Bad boy!

RANK. What other delights am I to see?

NORA. None at all, you're far too naughty. *Humming, she turns the things over. Short pause.*

RANK. When I sit here with you, so friendly, I can't ... it's hard to ... what would my life have been like if I'd never known this house?

NORA *(smiling).* You really feel at home here.

RANK *(low, looking straight ahead).* To have to leave it forever.
NORA. Fiddlededee. You don't.

RANK (as before). To have to leave without a single token of what it's meant to me ... hardly a backward glance ... just an empty place for the next person, anyone, to fill . . .

NORA. What if I asked you ... No!

RANK. Asked what?

NORA. For a token. Of friendship ...

RANK. Go on.

NORA. I mean, a really big favour.

RANK. I'd be delighted -

NORA. You don't know what it is, yet.

RANK. Tell me.

NORA. I can't. It's too much. Advice, help, a favour.

RANK. The bigger the better. I can't imagine what you mean. Tell me. Don't you trust me?

NORA. You're my truest, dearest friend. You know you are. Doctor, it's something you can help me prevent. You know how Torvald loves me ... deeply, beyond words ... he'd give his life . . .

RANK (leaning forward to her). Nora. D'you think he's the only one?

NORA (starting). What?

RANK. The only one who'd give his life for you?

NORA (heavily). Ah.

RANK. I swore I'd tell you before I ... went. Now. Nora, now you know. And you know that you can rely on me, as on no one else.
NORA: Doctor, dear Doctor, that was uncalled for.

RANK (getting up). To love you as much as ... another man? Uncalled for?

NORA. To tell me. There was no need.

RANK. You knew?

Nora ... Mrs Helmer ... are you saying you knew?

NORA. I don't know what I knew. How could you be so ... clumsy?

RANK. All that matters is, you know I'm at your service, body and soul. Tell me what it is.
Act Three

Extract 6: Krogstad and Kristine

The same. The table and chairs have been moved centre. There is a lighted lamp on the table. The hall door is open, and dance-music can be heard from the upstairs apartment. Mrs Linde is sitting at the table, turning the pages of a book. She is trying to read, but finds it hard to concentrate. She looks at her watch.

Mrs Linde. Still not. It's almost time. Perhaps he won't - She listens again. Here he is. She goes into the hall and carefully opens the main door. Light steps can be heard on the stairs outside. She whispers: Come in. There's no one here.

Krogstad (in the doorway). You left me a note. What is it?

Mrs Linde. I must talk to you.

Krogstad. Here?

Mrs Linde. Come in. There's no one here. The servants are asleep, and the Helmers are upstairs at a party.

Krogstad (coming in). A party? Tonight of all nights?

Mrs Linde. Why shouldn't they?

Krogstad. No reason.

Mrs Linde. Nils, we've got to talk.

Krogstad. Do we?

Mrs Linde. It's important.

Krogstad. Really?

Mrs Linde. You've never understood.
KROGSTAD. What's to understand? It was obvious to anyone. A heartless woman, jilting a man as soon as a better chance turned up.

MRS LINDE. Heartless? D'you really think so? You think it was easy?

KROGSTAD. Wasn't it?

MRS LINDE. You really thought so?

KROGSTAD. If it wasn't, why did you write ... what you wrote?

MRS LINDE. What else could I do? I had to break with you. It was essential to kill everything you felt for me.

KROGSTAD (wringing his hands). Yes. I see. And all that ... for money.

MRS LINDE. I'd a bedridden mother and two small brothers. We couldn't wait for you, Nils. You'd no prospects then.

KROGSTAD. You'd no right to throw me away for someone else.

MRS LINDE. Who can judge?

KROGSTAD (slowly). When I lost you, it was like being shipwrecked. Look: I'm drowning.

MRS LINDE. Help may be near.

KROGSTAD. It was near, until you came and interfered.

MRS LINDE. Until today, I'd no idea it was your job they were giving me.

KROGSTAD. If you say so. But now you know. What will you do now - turn it down?

MRS LINDE. That wouldn't help you.

KROGSTAD. What's help to do with it?

MRS LINDE. You said you were drowning.

KROGSTAD. It's true.

MRS LINDE. Well, so am I. No one to weep for, to care for.
KROGSTAD. You chose it.

MRS LINDE. I had to - then.

KROGSTAD. What d'you mean?

MRS LINDE. Nils, two drowning people - can't we help each other?

**Extract 7: Nora and Torvald**

HELMER. Nora.

NORA *(scream)*. Ah!

HELMER. You know what this letter says?

NORA. I know Let me go. Let me out.

HELMER. Where are you going? 
*He holds her back. She struggles.*

NORA. You won't save me, Torvald.

HELMER *(stumbling)*. It's true? What he writes, it's true? Unbearable. It's not, it can't be -

NORA. It's true. You were more than all the world to me.

HELMER. Never ... mind ... that.

NORA *(going to him)*. Torvald!

HELMER. How could you?

NORA. Let me go. Don't help me. Don't take it over. Please.

HELMER. Stop playing games.
*He locks the hall door.*

You're staying. You have to come to terms. D'you understand what you've done? Do you understand?

NORA *(looking straight at him frost forming in her voice)*. Now, I understand.
HELMER (pacing). To wake up to this! Eight years ... my joy, my life, my wife . . . Lies, deceit . . . a criminal. No way out. No end. 

_He stops and looks at her. She returns his gaze, without a word._

I should have expected it. I should have known. Like father - sh! -like daughter. No religion, no ethics, no sense of duty. I shut my eyes to what he was like - for your sake, for you and this is what I get. This is how you repay me.

NORA. This is how I repay you.

HELMER. You've killed my happiness. You've destroyed my future. I'm trapped, in his claws.. He'll do whatever he likes to me, demand, insist, I can't refuse. No way out. A silly, empty-headed woman - and now I'm dead.

NORA. When I'm out of your way, you'll be free of it.

HELMER. Don't ... talk. Your father was just the same. Talk! Even if you're out of the way, as you put it, what good is that to me? He'll tell his tale. They'll think I knew what you were doing, that I was part of it. Behind it, even - that the whole thing was my idea. And this from you, the wife I supported and cherished throughout our marriage. Now d'you understand what you've done to me?

NORA (icy). Entirely.

HELMER. It's beyond belief. I can't believe it. But it's happened; we have to cope with it. Take off that coat. Take it off! I must try and calm him. It _must_ be hushed up. Whatever it costs. As for you and me, we must go on as if nothing had changed between us. In public. You'll stay on here, obviously. But I won't have you near the children. I can never trust you again. Fancy having to say that to you - the woman I loved, I still ... no. It's gone. Happiness is gone. Rags, crumbs, pretence ...

_Doorbell, off. He jumps._

At this hour? It can't be, not _him_. Nora, hide yourself. Say you're ill.