

# A Doll's House



## BACKGROUND INFO

### AUTHOR BIO

**Full Name:** Henrik Ibsen

**Date of Birth:** 20 March 1828

**Place of Birth:** Skien, Norway

**Date of Death:** 23 May 1906

**Brief Life Story:** Henrik Ibsen was born into a wealthy family in Skien, Norway. His father, a merchant, was successful early on in life, but when Ibsen was seven his father's business suffered a great financial loss. This caused Ibsen's father to become jaded and an alcoholic; he took out his troubles on his children and wife, who Ibsen's sister described as loving and self-sacrificing. Ibsen began writing plays at the age of fifteen; he did not pass the entrance exams to university, but decided he would rather focus on writing anyway. He was at first a very unsuccessful playwright, and he and his wife Suzannah Thoresen were extremely poor. In 1864 he left Thoresen and their five-year-old son, Sigurd (who grew up to become the Prime Minister of Norway, and moved to Sorrento, Italy. He later moved to Dresden, Germany (where he wrote *A Doll's House*), not returning to Norway until 1891. After his initial unsuccessful years, Ibsen became more popular as a writer, although his plays were considered to be very scandalous. He died in Oslo in 1906, after suffering several strokes. He is now one of the world's most famous playwrights, and his work is performed more often than that of any other playwright except Shakespeare. He is often considered to be "the father of realism" in drama, and is also thought of as a pioneer of Modernism.

### KEY FACTS

**Full Title:** *A Doll's House* (Norwegian: *Ett dukkehjem*)

**Genre:** Realist modern prose drama

**Setting:** A town or city in Norway

**Climax:** When Torvald discovers the letter from Krogstad revealing Nora's secret

**Protagonist:** Nora

**Antagonist:** At first Krogstad, then Torvald

### HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

**When Written:** 1879

**Where Written:** Dresden, Germany

**When Published:** Published and first performed in December 1879

**Literary Period:** Realism; modernism

**Related Literary Works:** Another significant playwright working in the realist tradition was the Russian writer Anton Chekhov, whose plays also provide a critical examination of family, society, and morality. The Swedish playwright August Strindberg was influenced by Ibsen; Strindberg's plays are in the naturalist style, a theatrical movement that grew out of and responded to realism.

**Related Historical Events:** The 1870s were dominated by strict Victorian social codes and laws that severely restricted the rights of all women, and married women in particular. Governments throughout Europe used the Napoleonic Code, which prevented women from engaging in financial transactions. Many women who conducted their own business or earned their own wages chose not to marry because the laws regarding what married women could do when it came to finances were so limiting. By the beginning of the 20th century, things were beginning to change as the female suffrage movement swept over Europe and the world and women were awarded rights

such as the right to own property and the right to vote. However, for most people in the late 1870s, such eventualities were not yet even a distant dream.

### EXTRA CREDIT

**A True Story:** *A Doll's House* is based on the life of Ibsen's family friend Laura Kieler, whose actions inspired the story of Nora's secret debt. In reality, however, Kieler did not forge a signature, and when her husband, Victor, discovered her secret, he divorced her and forced her to be committed to an insane asylum. Ibsen, appalled by Kieler's committal, wrote *A Doll's House* in part as a way of defending her. After two years in the asylum Kieler returned to live with her husband and children and became a famous author in Denmark.

**Scandalous:** When it was first performed and for many years afterwards, *A Doll's House* caused quite the scandal for its criticism of 19th-century marriage customs and portrayal of a woman abandoning her family in order to gain a sense of self. Pressured by several theatres and even the actress who was supposed to play Nora in a German production of the play, Ibsen wrote an alternative ending, in which Nora, upon seeing her children, changes her mind and stays with Torvald. He later regretted doing this, calling the adapted ending "a barbaric outrage."



## PLOT SUMMARY

**Nora Helmer**, a young woman, enters her house carrying packages. It is Christmas Eve, and a **porter** delivers a **Christmas tree**. Nora's husband, **Torvald**, emerges from his study and greets her. She shows off the Christmas gifts she has bought for their children, and although Torvald chastises her for spending too much, he is also very affectionate towards her, calling her his "little skylark" and "little squirrel." The two of them celebrate the fact that Torvald has recently been promoted to Bank Manager, meaning they can have a more comfortable life. **Mrs. Linde** and **Dr. Rank** arrive. Dr. Rank and Torvald exit to talk in his study. Mrs. Linde, who hasn't seen Nora for eight years, tells her that she had an unhappy marriage and is now a widow hoping to find a job. Nora promises her that she will ask Torvald to give her a job. Nora then reveals a secret she has been hiding: when she and Torvald were first married, she borrowed money in order to finance a trip to Italy that was necessary to save Torvald's life, as he had grown ill. She has paid off the debt in installments, secretly taking jobs and saving money from her allowance from Torvald.

**Nils Krogstad**, an employee at the bank, arrives and talks to Torvald in Torvald's study. Dr. Rank comes out to talk to Nora and says that Krogstad is morally corrupt. Torvald enters, and after a brief conversation with Mrs. Linde, says he can give her a job at the bank. Torvald, Mrs. Linde, and Dr. Rank exit, and Nora plays happily with her **children**. Krogstad enters, and Nora tells the children to go to their **nursemaid** and not tell anyone about Krogstad's visit. It is revealed that Krogstad is the person who Nora borrowed money from. He explains that he is being fired by Torvald, and that Nora must stop this happening or else Krogstad will tell everyone her secret. He adds that he has evidence that Nora forged her father's signature in an IOU. Krogstad exits, and Torvald returns. Nora tries to persuade him not to fire Krogstad, but is unable to.

Act Two begins the next day, on Christmas Day. Nora, alone on stage, worries about her fate. Mrs. Linde arrives to help Nora sew her costume for a fancy dress ball that is being held on Boxing Day. Nora is dressing as an Italian fisher girl and plans on dancing the **tarantella**. Mrs. Linde asks to know more about Nora's secret, but Nora refuses to tell her anything for the moment. Torvald enters and Nora tries again to convince him not to fire Krogstad. However, the harder Nora tries, the angrier Torvald gets, and he eventually decides to send Krogstad's notice immediately.

Dr. Rank arrives and is depressed, telling Nora he will die soon. She flirts with him and seems to be considering whether to ask him for money. He reveals that he is in love with her, and Nora gives up the idea of asking him for help. Dr.

Rank leaves and Krogstad returns, asking if Nora had told Torvald her secret and telling her his ambition to eventually run the bank. He leaves a letter explaining the secret debt and forgery in Torvald's letterbox and exits. Mrs. Linde returns and Nora explains the situation to her. Mrs. Linde tells Nora that she and Krogstad used to be in love, and asks that Nora distract Torvald while Mrs. Linde attempts to talk to Krogstad. Mrs. Linde leaves, and Nora begs Torvald to help her rehearse the tarantella. She dances in a crazed, uninhibited way, puzzling Torvald about what has gotten into her. Mrs. Linde returns, saying Krogstad was not in but that she left him a note. The Act ends with Nora declaring that she has thirty-one hours left to live.

Act Three opens on the next day. Krogstad comes to meet Mrs. Linde at the Helmers' house while they are at the ball. It is revealed that the two of them once loved each other but that their relationship ended when Mrs. Linde chose to marry a richer man because that was the only way to support her family. Mrs. Linde suggests that, now that their respective spouses have both died, she and Krogstad marry so that she can take care of his children and they can live a happier life together. Krogstad is thrilled, and offers to ask for his letter to Torvald back, as he now regrets his earlier actions. Mrs. Linde, however, tells him to leave it, saying that the truth must come out.

Krogstad leaves, and Nora and Torvald return from the ball. Mrs. Linde urges Nora to tell her husband the truth, and then she leaves as well. Torvald tells Nora how much he desires her, but Nora stubbornly resists his advances. Dr. Rank arrives and talks happily about how much he enjoyed the party, especially the wine. He leaves and Torvald discovers two visiting cards that Dr. Rank put in his letterbox, indicating that he is about to die. Nora says goodnight to Torvald and sneaks out to the hall, preparing to escape and commit suicide. However Torvald stops her, having discovered the letter from Krogstad. He is furious with her, saying she has ruined his life and that, although they will keep living together to preserve appearances, they cannot be happy and he won't let her raise their children.

The **maid** brings a note from Krogstad saying he no longer wishes to blackmail Nora; the IOU is enclosed. Torvald rejoices, saying he is saved and that he forgives Nora. However, Nora reveals that she was going to kill her husband because she thought that Torvald would step forward and defend her, ruining his life and career. She explains that she has realized that she can no longer live with Torvald, whom she considers to be a stranger to her, and wishes to leave in order to discover a sense of who she is. Torvald at first calls her stupid and insane, before changing his tone and promising to change so that she will stay. Nora, resolute, says she must leave. Torvald is left alone onstage in despair. The play ends with the sound of the slam of the front door as Nora exits.



## CHARACTERS

**Nora Helmer** – **Nora Helmer** is the heroine of the play. Still a young woman, she is married to **Torvald Helmer** and has three **children**. At the play's outset, she is bubbly and carefree, excited about Christmas and her husband's recent promotion. Although she is frustrated by the fact that the other characters believe she is a "spendthrift," she does not seem to really mind, and happily plays along with Torvald's pet names for her, which include "skylark," "songbird," "squirrel," and "pet." Torvald also regularly refers to her and treats her as a child, for example, by forbidding her from eating **macaroons**, something she does anyway despite her promises of total obedience to him. The animal and child imagery both reflect Nora's apparently innocent, carefree nature, and suggest that her husband does not think of her as a proper adult because she is a woman. As the play progresses, it is revealed that Nora's disobedience consists of more than simply eating the occasional macaroon: at the beginning of her marriage, she secretly borrowed money from **Nils Krogstad** and forged her father's signature in order to finance a trip to Italy that was necessary to save Torvald's life. When Torvald finds out about the debt and fails to forgive her until he is sure that his reputation is safe, Nora realizes that her understanding of herself, her husband, her marriage, and even her society was all wrong. She decides that she can no longer be happy in her life and marriage, and resolves to leave Torvald and her home in order to find a sense of self and learn about the world. The play's final image of Nora is of an embittered yet sophisticated, intelligent, and newly empowered woman boldly escaping the infantilizing clutches of her old life.

**Torvald Helmer** – **Torvald Helmer** is a lawyer who at the play's outset has recently been promoted to Bank Manager. He is married to **Nora Helmer**, with whom he has three **children**. He does not seem particularly fond of his children, even once saying that their presence makes the house "unbearable to anyone except mothers." Straightforward and traditional in his beliefs about marriage and society, he loves and is very affectionate towards Nora, but often treats her more as a pet, child, or object than as a real person. His best friend is **Dr. Rank**, who visits him every day. However, towards the end of the play this friendship is revealed to be something of a façade, as Torvald seems untroubled and even a little relieved at the thought of Dr. Rank's death. A similar occurrence happens when he finds out about Nora's secret debt and instantly turns on her until he realizes that his reputation is safe. Torvald's focus on status and being treated as superior by people like **Nils Krogstad**, highlights his obsession with reputation and appearances. When Nora tells him she is leaving him, Torvald at first reacts by calling her mad and saying she is acting like a stupid child. However, when he realizes how resolute she is in her decision, Torvald offers to change and desperately searches for a way to stay with her. His despair as Nora exits at the very end of the play suggests that, despite his patronizing and unjust treatment of her, Torvald really does love Nora (or at least the idea of her).

**Kristine Linde** – **Mrs. Linde**, as she is generally known to the other characters, is an old friend of Nora's. She is a woman whose marriage was loveless, and based on a need for financial security, and who doesn't have any children. She and Krogstad had been in love at the time, but he was too poor to support her family. She arrives in town in search of a job in order to earn money and survive independently. In this way, she is a fairly modern woman; towards the end of the play, she explains to **Krogstad** that she finds joy and meaning in work. However, in other ways she is more traditional. She tells both Krogstad and **Nora** that she is miserable without other people to take care of, thereby fitting into the traditional role of women as caretakers and nurturers. It is this conviction that causes her to marry Krogstad towards the end of the play. She believes very deeply in honesty and stops Krogstad from taking the letter he wrote to **Torvald** back, thereby ensuring that Torvald find out about Nora's secret. Although this at first seems like a betrayal of Nora, it turns out to ultimately be a decision to Nora's benefit as it is after Torvald finds out about the debt that Nora is able to see the true nature of her marriage. This twist confirms Mrs. Linde's belief that honesty is always better than deceit, even if Mrs. Linde's expectation was that it was Nora's deceit that needed to be exposed, not the shallowness of Torvald's feelings.

**Nils Krogstad** – **Nils Krogstad** is, at least at the beginning, the antagonist of the play. Known to the other characters as unscrupulous and dishonest, he blackmails **Nora**, who borrowed money from him with a forged signature, after learning that he is being fired from his job at the bank. In the past, he too committed the crime of forgery, an act that he did not go to prison for but that nonetheless ruined his reputation and made it extremely difficult to find a respectable job. Later in the play it is revealed that he was once in love with **Kristine Linde**, who ended up marrying another man in order to have enough money to support her dying mother and young brothers. This left Krogstad lost and embittered, unhappy in his own marriage, and is presented as the reason behind his moral corruption. At first he treats Nora without mercy on the basis that no mercy has been shown to him in life; however, after he and Mrs. Linde decide to marry, he becomes happier and rescinds his threats to Nora, saying he regrets his behavior. He is one of several examples in the play of a person being forced into morally questionable action as a result of the rigid and unmerciful forces of society.

**Dr. Rank** – **Dr. Rank** is a doctor who is best friends with **Torvald** and **Nora**, who he visits every day. Dr. Rank suffers from spinal tuberculosis, a condition he believes was caused by his father's vices, which included having extramarital affairs and consuming too much luxurious food and drink. Dr. Rank is unmarried and lonely, and over the course of the play it is revealed that he is in love with Nora. Cynical about life, he rejoices when he finds out that his illness is terminal, and insists that neither Torvald nor Nora visit him in his dying days. As he predicted, he is not particularly missed by the other characters.

**The nursemaid** – Nurse to both **Nora** and Nora's **children**, the **nursemaid**, whose name is Anne Marie, is a kind woman who was forced to give up her own child, who it is suggested was born out of wedlock. The nursemaid is an example of a woman in bad circumstances forced to do anything in order to

survive. When Nora first thinks of leaving she considers the fact that her children will be raised by the nursemaid and, remembering what a good mother the nursemaid had been to her, decides that she would also raise Nora's children well.

**The maid** – The **maid**, whose name is Helene, is a servant in the Helmers' household.

**The porter** – The **porter** delivers the Helmers' **Christmas tree**.

**The children** – **Nora** and **Torvald** have three **children**, whose names are **Ivar**, **Bobby**, and **Emmy**. Still fairly young, they delight in playing with their mother. Although they are referred to by the others very frequently, they are only once seen on stage.



## THEMES

### LOVE AND MARRIAGE

As a play focused around the marriage between **Nora** and **Torvald**, *A Doll's House* can be seen as an exploration of love and marriage, or even, more profoundly, on whether there can be love in marriage. At the beginning of the play, Nora and Torvald appear to be very happily married, even to themselves. Nora talks joyfully about her love for Torvald, and Torvald refers to Nora using affectionate pet names. Their loving marriage stands in stark contrast with the lives of the other characters: the marriages of **Krogstad** and **Mrs. Linde** were based on necessity rather than love, and were unhappy. While **Dr. Rank** was never married, and, it is revealed, has silently loved Nora for years. Yet although Nora and Torvald's marriage is based on love (as opposed to necessity, as was the case with Krogstad and Mrs. Linde), it is nonetheless still governed by the strict rules of society that dictated the roles of husband and wife. It is clear that Nora is expected to obey Torvald and allow him to make decisions for her; meanwhile, it is important for Torvald's career that he is able to show off a successful marriage to a dutiful woman.

At first it seems that Nora and Torvald both enjoy playing the roles of husband and wife in a way that is considered respectable by society. However, Nora soon reveals to Mrs. Linde that she went behind Torvald's back by borrowing the money from Krogstad, and therefore has already broken both the law and the rules of marriage at the time. This creates a dilemma: Nora broke the rules of marriage, yet did so in order to save her husband's life—a true act of love. Yet this is an act of love that society condemns, thereby placing the rules of marriage above love. In the final moments of the play, it's revealed that Nora's fear of the secret getting out is not a fear that *she* will end up shamed and punished, but rather is based on her certainty that Torvald will protect her by taking the blame, and in so doing will ruin himself.

Nora is certain that beneath the role Torvald is playing, that he loves her just as deeply as she loved him when she secretly broke the rules of society. Of course, Torvald's reaction reveals that he's not in fact "playing a role" at all—he really does put his reputation first, and he would never sacrifice it to protect Nora. What Nora thought was role-playing was in fact the entire reality. This cements Nora's disillusionment with her marriage, and with marriage in general—she comes to the conclusion that not only does Torvald not love her, but that the institution of marriage, as it is conceived and practiced in her society, may make love impossible. While Krogstad and Mrs. Linde's joyous choice to marry may suggest that the play does not entirely share Nora's view, it is important to note that their marriage does not at all conform to the norms of society. Mrs. Linde yearns for the purpose she would get by truly caring for someone she loves, while Krogstad sees Mrs. Linde not as some ornament to augment his reputation but as the source of the salvation of his integrity.

### GENDER

*A Doll's House* exposes the restricted role of women during the time of its writing and the problems that arise from a drastic imbalance of power between men and women. Throughout the play, **Nora** is treated like a child by the other characters. **Torvald** calls her his "pet" and his "property," and implies that she is not smart or responsible enough to be trusted with money. Neither **Krogstad** nor **Dr. Rank** take her seriously, and even **Mrs. Linde** calls her a "child." While this treatment does seem to mildly frustrate Nora, she plays

along with it, calling herself "little Nora" and promising that she would never dream of disobeying her husband. However, there are clues that she is not entirely happy with the limited position she has as a woman. When revealing the secret of how she borrowed money to finance the trip to Italy, she refers to it as her "pride" and says it was fun to be in control of money, explaining that it was "almost like being a man." Although she comes to regret her decision to borrow money, Nora's dissatisfaction with her status as a woman intensifies over the course of the play. In the final scene she tells Torvald that she is not being treated as an independent person with a mind of her own. Her radical solution to this issue is to leave domestic life behind, despite Torvald's declaration that he will change. Nora's decision suggests that she, and the play, see the issue as only partially with Torvald. The more fundamental issue is with domestic life as it was conceived and lived at the time, in the way it legally and culturally infantilized women and made it impossible for them to be recognized or treated as full individuals.

Meanwhile, the men of the play are also expected to fill a certain role. Both Torvald and Krogstad are very ambitious, driven not only by the need to provide for their families but also by a desire to achieve higher status. Respectability is of great concern to both of them; when Nora's borrowing is revealed, Torvald's first thoughts are for his reputation. Meanwhile, Krogstad is fixated on achieving success now that he has "gone straight," and intends to one day take over Torvald's job and run the bank.

### MONEY AND WORK

A need for money affects all the major characters in *A Doll's House*. In the beginning of the play it is revealed that **Torvald** was recently promoted and will receive "a big fat income," however he still chastises **Nora** for spending too much, arguing that they need to be cautious financially. **Mrs. Linde** is in desperate need of a job following the death of her husband, and after her replacement of **Krogstad** at the bank leaves him threatening to turn Nora in in order to get his job back. Indeed, the bank works as a symbol for the pervasive presence of money in the characters' lives.

In the play, money symbolizes the power that the characters have over one another. In the first scene, Torvald's ability to dictate how much Nora spends on Christmas presents shows his power over her. Meanwhile, the debt that Nora owes Krogstad allows him to have power over her and Torvald. Both Nora and Mrs. Linde cannot earn large incomes because they are women; their inability to access significant amounts of money is one way that they are oppressed by the sexism of the time. The play also shows that, while earning money leads to power, it can also be dangerous. In the beginning of the play, Nora is proud of the fact that she "raised" the money for her and Torvald's trip to Italy herself—however the debt she owes soon becomes a source of terror, dread, and shame. The thrill of obtaining money is therefore shown to have a downside.

### DECEIT

At the beginning of the play, **Nora** appears to be a dutifully obedient and honest wife, however it is quickly revealed that she is hiding a serious secret from him—the fact that she borrowed money from **Krogstad** to finance a trip to Italy that she claims saved **Torvald's** life. This renders all her statements about never disobeying him or hiding anything from him deceitful. When she reveals her dishonesty to **Mrs. Linde**, Mrs. Linde insists that she ought to confess to Torvald immediately, insisting that a marriage cannot succeed when husband and wife are not completely honest with each other.

A parallel occurs between Nora and Krogstad when it is revealed that they both committed forgery. Their acts of deception spark the unravelling of both their lives—Krogstad's reputation is ruined, and Nora is forced to re-evaluate everything about herself and the society around her, eventually leading her decision to leave her husband and family at the end of the play. In some ways, deceit is presented as a corrupting and corroding force in the people's lives; however, in Nora's case, it is clear that the motivation for her dishonesty was love—she lied in order to save her husband's life. Furthermore, her actions wouldn't have had to be deceitful if it weren't for societal law dictating that women were not allowed to handle financial matters independently. Therefore Nora's deceit was not the result of a personal flaw, but rather the only means necessary of overcoming restrictions in order to commit a noble act.

## INDIVIDUAL VS. SOCIETY

Nora, a dutiful mother and wife, spends most of the play putting others before herself. She thinks little of how her act of forgery and debt to **Krogstad** affect her personally, opting instead to worry about how they might impact the lives of her husband and children. Even when she plans to kill herself near the end of the play, it is not to hide her shame but rather because she thinks that if she is alive then **Torvald** will ruin himself in trying to protect her. In a similar vein, **admits** that, without a husband or any family members to care for, she feels that her life is pointless. Therefore both women find a sense of meaning in their lives through serving others and performing the caring, obedient role that society requires of them. During the play, however, Nora learns that prioritizing her duty as a wife and mother cannot lead to real happiness. She realizes, when it becomes clear that Torvald would never have sacrificed his reputation to protect her, that while she thought she was sacrificing herself to protect her love, that in fact no such love existed, and that the structure of society makes the love she had imagined to be real to actually be an impossibility. She therefore decides to leave him in order to develop a sense of her own identity. The play ends with Nora choosing to put herself as an individual before society's expectations of her.

Throughout most of the play it seems that Krogstad cares more about his reputation than anything else. Punished by society for his act of forgery, he is desperate to reclaim respectability in the eyes of others. However, his conversation with Mrs. Linde in the third act shows him that he will only achieve happiness through truly reforming himself and regaining the personal integrity that he lost rather than the outward respectability. In a similar way to Nora, Krogstad learns that society's view of him is meaningless if he doesn't respect himself as an individual.

Torvald that both he and her father treated her like a doll, and cites this as one of the reasons why she has become dissatisfied and disillusioned with her life with him.



## QUOTES

### ACT ONE

Nora! Just like a woman. Seriously though, Nora, you know what I think about these things. No debts! Never borrow! There's always something inhibited, something unpleasant, about a home built on credit and borrowed money.

—Torvald



I would never dream of doing anything you didn't want me to.

—Nora



Oh, what a glorious feeling it is, knowing you've got a nice, safe job, and a good fat income.

—Torvald



Oh, sometimes I was so tired, so tired. But it was tremendous fun all the same, sitting there working and earning money like that. Almost like being a man.

—Nora



Oh, I think I can say that some of us have a little influence now and again. Just because one happens to be a woman, doesn't mean... People in subordinate positions, ought to take care they don't offend anybody... who... hm...

—Nora



I am not so heartless that I would necessarily want to condemn a man for a single mistake like that.

—Torvald



Just think how a man with a thing like that on his conscience will always be having to lie and cheat and dissemble; he can never drop the mask, not even with his own wife and children. And the children—*that's* the most terrible part of it, Nora... A fog of lies like that in a household, and it spreads disease and infection to every part of it. Every breath the children take in that kind of house is reeking evil germs.

—Torvald



### ACT TWO

When a poor girl's been in trouble she must make the best of things.

—Nursemaid



You see Torvald is so terribly in love with me that he says he wants me all to himself. When we first married, it even used to make him sort of jealous if I only as much as mentioned any of my old friends back home. So of course I stopped doing it.



## SYMBOLS

### THE CHRISTMAS TREE

The **Christmas tree** is delivered in **Nora's** flurry of excitement for Christmas. It symbolizes family happiness and unity, as well as the joy Nora takes in making her home pleasant and attractive. At the beginning of Act Two, the tree has been stripped and the candles burned out; the stage directions dictate that it should look "bedraggled." This represents the end of Nora's innocence and foreshadows the Helmer family's eventual disintegration.

### MACAROONS

**Torvald** has banned **Nora** from eating **macaroons**. Although Nora claims that she never disobeys Torvald, this is proved false in the very opening of the play when Nora eats macaroons while she was alone in the living room. The macaroons come to represent Nora's disobedience and deceit. She lies to **Dr. Rank** about having been given some by **Mrs. Linde**, and after giving a particularly tempestuous performance of the **tarantella** asks that macaroons be served at dinner, indicating a relationship between the macaroons and Nora's inner passions, both of which she must hide within her marriage.

### THE TARANTELLA

Like the **macaroons**, the **tarantella** symbolizes a side of **Nora** that she cannot normally show. It is a fiery, passionate dance that allows Nora to drop the façade of the perfect mild-mannered Victorian wife. Throughout the play, Nora uses performance to please **Torvald**, and the tarantella is no exception; he admits that watching her perform it makes her desire her. However, this is only under very controlled circumstances, and Torvald seems to enjoy the fact that it is a performance that impresses other people more than anything.

### THE DOLL'S HOUSE

There are a few mentions of **doll's houses** early on in the play, for example when **Nora** shows **Torvald** the dolls she bought for her daughter, and says that the fact that they are cheap doesn't matter because she will probably break them soon anyway. This is interesting as it suggests that Nora is raising her daughter for a life similar to Nora's own, yet simultaneously foreshadows Nora breaking up her family life by leaving Torvald. When Nora plays with her children she also refers to them as her "little dollies." However, it is not until the end of the play that the metaphor becomes explicitly clear. Nora tells

—Nora



A man's better at coping with these things than a woman...

—Nora



If it ever got around that the new manager had been talked over by his wife... As long as the little woman gets her own stubborn way...! Do you want me to make myself a laughing stock in the office? Give people the idea that I am susceptible to any kind of outside pressure? You can imagine how soon I'd feel the consequences of that!

—Torvald



Now Dr. Rank, cheer up. You'll see tomorrow how nicely I can dance. And you can pretend I'm doing it just for you—and for Torvald as well, of course.

—Nora



I want to get on my feet again, Mrs. Helmer; I want to get to the top... For the last eighteen months I've gone straight; all that time it's been hard going; I was content to work my way up, step by step. Now I'm being kicked out, and I won't stand for being taken back again as an act of charity. I'm going to get to the top, I tell you... It'll be Nils Krogstad, not Torvald Helmer, who'll be running the bank.

—Krogstad



You can't frighten me! A precious little pampered thing like you...

—Krogstad



Tell me what to do, keep me right—as you always do.

—Nora



But my dear darling Nora, you are dancing as though your life depended on it.

—Torvald



## ACT THREE

What else is there to understand, apart from the old, old story? A heartless woman throws a man over the moment something more profitable offers itself.

—Krogstad



Without work I couldn't live. All my life I have worked, for as long as I can remember; that has always been my one great joy. But now I'm completely alone in the world, and feeling horribly empty and forlorn. There's no pleasure in working only for yourself. Nils, give me somebody and something to work for.

—Mrs. Linde



Helmer must know everything. This unhappy secret must come out. Those two must have the whole thing out between them. All this secrecy and deception, it just can't go on.

—Mrs. Linde



His suffering and his loneliness seemed almost to provide a background of dark cloud to the sunshine of our lives.

—Torvald



The thing must be hushed up at all costs. And as far as you and I are concerned, things must appear to go on exactly as before. But only in the eyes of the world, of course... From now on, there can be no question of happiness. All we can do is save the bits and pieces from the wreck, preserve appearances...

—Torvald



I wouldn't be a proper man if I didn't find a woman doubly attractive for being so obviously helpless.

—Torvald



For a man, there is something indescribably moving and very satisfying in knowing that he has forgiven his wife—forgiven her, completely and genuinely, from the depths of his heart. It's as though it made her his property in a double sense: he has, as it were, given her a new life, and she becomes in a way both his wife and at the same time his child.

—Torvald



I have been your doll wife, just as at home I was Daddy's doll child. And the children in turn have been my dolls. I thought it was fun when you came and played with me, just as they thought it was fun when I went to play with them. That's been our marriage, Torvald.

—Nora



I believe that first and foremost I am an individual, just as much as you are—or at least I'm going to try to be. I know most people agree with you, Torvald, and that's also what it says in books. But I'm not content anymore with what most people say, or what it says in books. I have to think things for myself, and get things clear.

—Nora





## SUMMARY &amp; ANALYSIS

## ACT ONE

The play opens to a nicely decorated living room. The doorbell rings. **Nora Helmer** enters through the front door, dressed in her outdoor clothes and carrying lots of parcels. She is humming happily to herself. A **porter** enters behind her and delivers a **Christmas tree**; Nora tells the **maid** to hide it so it is a surprise for the children, and gives the porter a large tip. The porter and the maid leave, and Nora eats some macaroons from her pocket. She goes and listens at the door of her husband **Torvald's** study, noting to herself that he is in.

**Torvald Helmer** calls from his study, asking if **Nora** has just returned home and calling her his "little sky-lark" and "little squirrel." Nora beckons him to enter the living room, quickly hiding the macaroons. She has been shopping and asks to show Torvald what she has bought. Torvald gently scolds her for spending too much. Nora replies that now Torvald is earning a large salary they can afford to spend more at Christmas; however, Torvald argues that, because his first paycheck won't come for three months, they must still be careful with money.

**Nora** suggests they could borrow money and pay it back after **Torvald** receives his paycheck. Torvald replies that this is a typical way of thinking for a woman, and delivers an impassioned speech about the dangers of debt, urging Nora to "never borrow!"

**Nora** concedes: "just as you say, Torvald." **Torvald**, not wanting to see her sulk, gives her more money. She is thrilled and thanks him enthusiastically.

*The Helmers' house is decorated tastefully, showing the importance of money and respectability. Nora's happiness as she returns with the Christmas shopping reveals that she enjoys both spending money and doing nice things for her husband and children. At the same time, it will soon become clear that eating the macaroons is a small act of deceit and disobedience, as Torvald forbids them.*



*Torvald's nicknames for Nora suggest that he thinks of her almost as a child or a pet. This impression is emphasized when Nora hides the macaroons, like a mischievous child afraid of getting caught. Torvald's parent-like attitude is highlighted by the gently scolding way he talks to Nora about money, implying that he thinks she's not intelligent enough to be financially responsible.*



*This introduces the theme of debt and shows Nora and Torvald's wildly different views on the subject. Torvald's command, "never borrow!" is ironic because, as will be revealed, it's already too late.*



*Torvald's rewards Nora for her obedience; his control of the money gives him power in the marriage, though Nora's obedience also allows her to manipulate him. And, of course, she has already borrowed money once, early in their marriage. So her obedience is somewhat shallow, and seems more a role she is playing, happily, than something she truly believes in.*



**Nora** shows off the presents she has bought for the children (a **doll** for her daughter; a sword and a horse for the boys) and the maids, which she admits were cheap. She hides **Torvald's** present for later. Torvald asks what she got for herself and Nora admits that she didn't get anything. When Torvald asks what she wants she says she would simply like some money, so she can have longer to think about what she wants and buy herself something later on. Torvald calls her a "spendthrift" and claims that she is irresponsible with money, arguing that it is a trait inherited from her father.

**Torvald** says that **Nora** is looking guilty and asks several times if she went to the candy store. Nora lies and says she didn't, saying she would "never dream of doing" anything Torvald did not want her to.

**Torvald** and **Nora** look forward to the evening, while recalling earlier Christmases when they didn't have as much money and Nora had to make decorations herself. Torvald repeatedly expresses his happiness that those times are over now that he has a larger income.

**Dr. Rank** and an unnamed **lady** arrive. **Torvald** says he does not want to receive visitors, but it is too late as **Dr. Rank** is already in his study. Meanwhile, the lady is waiting to see **Nora**.

**Torvald** exits to meet **Dr. Rank** in his study, while the lady, wearing traveling clothes, is shown in to see Nora in the living room. The lady greets Nora, who at first doesn't recognize her. Soon, however, Nora realizes it is **Mrs. Linde**. Nora remarks that Mrs. Linde has changed a great deal in the eight years since they last saw each other and tells her how happy she has been in the time that has passed. Nora is surprised and impressed that Mrs. Linde traveled to town in wintertime. She helps Mrs. Linde get comfortable and says that now Mrs. Linde looks like her old self again, only paler and thinner. Mrs. Linde notes that she is also a lot older. Nora interrupts the conversation and scolds herself for "chattering on" and remarks with sympathy that Mrs. Linde is now a widow. Mrs. Linde confirms that her husband died three years ago.

*Christmas represents family, and Nora's happiness shows she enjoys performing the role of a wife and mother. Her choice of toys suggests she buys into traditional gender roles: the girl must be a nurturing wife and mother, and the boys strong and powerful. At the same time, Nora's request for money to buy something for herself suggests she does want the ability to make decisions for herself. Torvald not entrusting Nora with the money for her own present demonstrates the imbalance of power in their marriage.*



*Even though Torvald and Nora appear to be in love, Torvald does not trust her, and Nora's sworn obedience is a lie; she was eating macaroons earlier.*



*Money is central to Torvald and Nora's happiness. Torvald's emphasis on their new prosperity suggests how important money is to him as well.*



*The guests are separated by gender, showing a gulf between the sexes.*



*Mrs. Linde has been visibly changed by her life experiences; meanwhile, Nora's questioning is childlike. Nora's happiness in the last eight years has left her remaining girlishly innocent and naive, whereas Mrs. Linde seems much older. Mrs. Linde's decision to travel alone was unusual for women at the time, and Nora's admiration of her "courage" suggests a desire for independence. Mrs. Linde's status as a widow adds to the impression that she is much older than Nora.*



Nora asks if Mrs. Linde's husband left her any money or children, and Mrs. Linde confirms that she was left nothing, and that their marriage was loveless. Nora asks in disbelief if that is possible, and Mrs. Linde explains that it "sometimes happens." Nora remarks how sad it is that Mrs. Linde is now completely alone, and tells Mrs. Linde about her own three children.

*This conversation shows the two sides to marriage: on the one hand, Nora's marriage to Torvald seems to be full of love, happiness, and security. Yet Mrs. Linde's marriage was unhappy and has left her alone and struggling to survive. Nora's comment about her children is tactless, showing naiveté.*



Nora asks to hear about Mrs. Linde's life, but before Mrs. Linde can say anything, Nora shares the news about Torvald's promotion to Bank Manager. She explains that Torvald's increased salary will allow them to live a better life. She tells Mrs. Linde how wonderful it is to have lots of money and not have to worry. Mrs. Linde replies that it must be nice to have enough money, to which Nora retorts, "not just enough, but pots and pots of money."

*In this part of the play Nora is childishly impolite. Mrs. Linde is obviously in a bad situation following the death of her husband, yet instead of listening to her Nora begins to insensitively boast about her and Torvald's good fortune. Her speech also shows that she believes money leads to freedom and happiness.*



Mrs. Linde says she remembers Nora being a "spendthrift" in their school days, and Nora admits that Torvald still calls her that. However, she says that she is smarter than that, and explains that she couldn't have spent a lot as they haven't had much money, and that she and Torvald have both had to work. Mrs. Linde is surprised. Nora says she did "odd jobs" such as sewing, embroidery, "and one or two other things besides." She says that after they got married Torvald worked so hard that he became very sick, and that the doctors said he had to travel South in order to get better.

*Torvald's idea that Nora is irresponsible with money is here backed up by Mrs. Linde. However, the fact that Nora worked suggests that she is more responsible than others may think. It was rare at the time for middle class women like Nora to work, and the "one or two other things" she mentions is suspicious—suggesting that there is more to her story than meets the eye. This is true, of course, because she also borrowed money.*



Mrs. Linde says she knows that Nora and Torvald spent a year in Italy, and Nora explains that, although it saved Torvald's life, it wasn't easy to go because it cost so much money. Mrs. Linde notes that it was lucky they had the money given the circumstances, and Nora says that they got it from her father, who died around the time that they left. Nora explains that, because she was heavily pregnant and taking care of Torvald, who was sick, she was unable to look after her father in his final days, and that this was the saddest thing that had happened to her during her marriage. Immediately after Nora's father's death, they left for Italy, and by the time they returned Torvald was completely cured and healthy again.

*This passage shows the importance of money: not only does it afford freedom and comfort, but it saved Torvald's life. Nora's explanation that they borrowed the money is a lie, an act of deceit that no one knows about apart from Nora herself. However, the story of her father's death also shows that she was putting others before herself: both Torvald and her son, who she was pregnant with. The fact that she took care of Torvald instead of her beloved father shows that her marriage was her priority above everything.*



Mrs. Linde asks about Dr. Rank, wondering if his visit means Torvald is still in bad health. Nora explains that Dr. Rank is her and Torvald's best friend and that he visits once a day, and that she herself, Torvald, and their children are all perfectly healthy. She exclaims that she is so happy to be alive, before once again scolding herself for talking too much about herself.

*The way Nora delights in her own family's health and good fortune in front of Mrs. Linde, whose husband has died and who is clearly struggling, is naïve and insensitive. She seems to be aware that it is impolite to talk so much about her own life, but is unable to stop herself.*



Nora asks if it is really true that Mrs. Linde did not love her husband, and why she married him. Mrs. Linde explains that she had to take care of her bedridden mother and two younger brothers and therefore felt she didn't have a choice. She tells Nora that her husband had been wealthy, but following his death his business fell apart and thus she was left with nothing. She says that she has spent the last three years struggling to survive by opening a shop and running a school, but that this is now over as her mother has died and her brothers are working themselves.

*Mrs. Linde's story shows how difficult it was for women to survive without the financial support of men. The need for money effectively forced her to marry her husband, and after his death her struggle to support her family highlights the obstacles women faced in earning a reasonable income. Indeed, both Nora and Mrs. Linde's attempts to earn money were confined to work deemed appropriate for women—embroidery, working in a school, etc.*



Nora says Mrs. Linde must feel relieved, but Mrs. Linde says she feels empty and purposeless because she has "nobody to live for any more." She says she wanted to move in order to find a steady job, maybe in an office. Nora says that that kind of work is exhausting and Mrs. Linde would be better off taking a holiday, to which Mrs. Linde replies that she doesn't have a father she can fall back on for money. Mrs. Linde laments how easy it for someone in her position to become bitter and says she ends up only thinking about herself. She admits that she was happy to hear about Torvald's promotion because she hopes that he will help her find a job.

*Both Nora and Mrs. Linde's lives show that women were supposed to find a sense of purpose in serving others. Without a husband and family to take care of, Mrs. Linde feels empty and worries about being selfish. Mrs. Linde's hope of working in an office shows a desire for independence not normally afforded to women. Nora's comment that this would be "exhausting" suggests she believes that such work is not appropriate for women.*



Nora promises to help persuade Torvald to give Mrs. Linde a job. Mrs. Linde thanks her, saying Nora's behavior is exceptionally kind considering Nora hasn't had to struggle much herself. Nora is shocked by the accusation and says that she has had to put up with more than Mrs. Linde may realize. She says Mrs. Linde is just like everyone else who doesn't think she is responsible enough to handle serious matters. She reveals that in everything she has told Mrs. Linde there is a "big thing" that she has concealed.

*Nora is clearly frustrated with not being taken seriously by others. Ironically, this frustration leads her to act rather irresponsibly, as she decides to tell Mrs. Linde the secret she has been concealing from everyone else.*



Nora mentions that **Mrs. Linde** is proud of having been able to look after her mother and brothers, and says that she too has something to be proud of. Before revealing what it is, Nora implores Mrs. Linde to be quiet and says that nobody must find out about it. She then explains that she was the one who saved Torvald's life. Although everyone thinks that the money for the trip to Italy came from Nora's father, Nora reveals that it was in fact she herself who raised it. Mrs. Linde is shocked and asks how it was possible, wondering if Nora won a sweepstake.

*Both Nora and Mrs. Linde find joy in being able to provide for their families; this is both an adherence to the traditional role of women as selfless nurturers and a rejection of the notion that women shouldn't have financial independence. Nora's revelation of the truth of how she got the money is a crucial turning point in the play; it is the first step in the total unraveling of her secret.*



**Nora** at first won't reveal how she acquired the money, delighting in keeping **Mrs. Linde** in suspense. Mrs. Linde says it can't be possible for Nora to have borrowed the money, because a woman cannot do that without her husband's consent. Nora hints that if the woman has "a sense for business" it might be possible, but also says that she may or may not have borrowed it. She says that, considering how attractive she is, an admirer could have given it to her. Mrs. Linde chastises her for being silly.

*Nora's joy in slowly and mysteriously revealing her secret suggests that she does not in fact take the matter that seriously, undermining her claim of being responsible. Mrs. Linde's guesses at how she may have got the money show how limited the options were for women who wished to earn money independently of their husbands.*



**Mrs. Linde**, worried, asks if **Nora** has done something rash. Nora says that she saved her husband's life, something that couldn't be considered rash. Mrs. Linde replies that, regardless of circumstances, acting behind her husband's back is a rash move. Nora explains that the "whole point" was that **Torvald** wasn't supposed to know how ill he was nor how Nora acquired the money for the Italy trip. She says she tried to convince him to go without revealing the gravity of his illness, but that **Torvald** thought she was being frivolous and refused.

*Mrs. Linde's adamant condemnation of any deceit between husband and wife, no matter the circumstances, reflects society's inflexible rules regarding marriage and gender roles. From Nora's perspective, her deceit was justified, as it saved Torvald's life. Her difficulty in getting Torvald to agree to the trip suggests he does not trust her intelligence and ability to make rational decisions.*



**Mrs. Linde** asks if **Torvald** ever found out about the money, and if **Nora** ever confided in him. Nora says he never found out, and that she would never say anything because **Torvald** is proud and would be humiliated by the thought that he owed his wife something. She explains that it would destroy their marriage. Mrs. Linde asks if she will ever tell **Torvald** the truth. At first, Nora says she may, but only after many years, when she is less attractive and **Torvald** is less in love with her. However, she cuts herself off, saying that would never happen.

*Nora clearly believes it is quite possible to keep living with Torvald with the secret between them, and certainly a better option than revealing the truth. The suggestion that the truth would destroy their marriage is foreboding, and the first time Nora and Torvald's marriage seems anything less than perfectly secure.*



**Nora** asks what **Mrs. Linde** thinks of her now that she knows about her secret, and seems to think that Mrs. Linde's opinion of her will have improved. Before Mrs. Linde can answer, though, Nora explains that there is something that has been worrying her. She says that she's always been able to meet the installment deadlines for paying back the debt by saving money out of her own allowance. She was not able to take money out of the housekeeping or the children's clothes, as both these needed to be of high quality. She explains that whenever **Torvald** gave her money to spend on herself, she always only spent half of what he gave her, and admits that was difficult.

*Nora expects Mrs. Linde to respect her more now that she knows about the money, yet Mrs. Linde's shock at the fact that Nora lied to her husband suggests this might not be the case. Nora's explanation of how she got the money does show that she is not as much of a "spendthrift" as the other characters seem to think, and the fact that she only took the money from her own allowance highlights a sense of self-sacrifice that shows her act of deceit was truly selfless.*



**Nora** goes on to explain that she supplemented the savings from her allowance by doing copying work at night. She says that it made her very tired but that it was nonetheless fun to work and earn money and that it was "almost like being a man." **Mrs. Linde** asks how much Nora has been able to pay off and Nora admits that she's not sure; she has simply focused on paying the installments when she needs to. She then tells Mrs. Linde that she would daydream about inheriting the fortune of a rich old man who was in love with her. Mrs. Linde, confused, asks who the man is, and Nora explains it is only a fantasy. She goes on to say that she doesn't bother thinking about a rich old man anymore as her troubles have ended. She talks about how wonderful it would be to be carefree and only have to think about doing things for **Torvald** and enjoying her time with the children.

*Nora has mixed feelings about her decision to borrow money. On the one hand, she tells Mrs. Linde about how much she has suffered and the stress of finding secret ways of paying it back; on the other, she is very proud of her own resourcefulness and enjoys earning her own money. She seems to envy the independence that men have. The fact that she doesn't know how much she has paid off, as well as her dream about the rich old man, show that she is not dealing with the debt in an entirely responsible way. Her description of what she hopes her life will soon be like shows that at this point, what she wants most is to carry out her duties as a wife and mother without worry.*



The doorbell rings. The **maid** announces that it is someone to see **Torvald**, but that she isn't sure whether to show him in yet as **Torvald** is still with **Dr. Rank**. **Nora** asks who it is, and **Nils Krogstad** announces himself. **Mrs. Linde** gasps and turns away. Nora asks in a tense murmur what Krogstad wants with **Torvald**. Krogstad replies that he wants to talk to **Torvald** about bank matters as they both work at the bank. Nora hesitates, but after Krogstad insists that he is here on routine business matters only, Nora tells him to go to **Torvald's** study.

*Both Mrs. Linde and Nora have strange and suspicious reactions to Krogstad's arrival. Thus when Krogstad claims he is here on "routine" business matters, we are inclined to believe there is more to the story.*





Mrs. Linde asks Nora who it was at the door. Nora replied that it was Krogstad. Mrs. Linde reveals that she used to know Krogstad many years before and says he's changed a lot since then. Nora explains that his marriage wasn't happy, that his wife has died and that he has many children. Mrs. Linde asks Nora if it's true that Krogstad does business "on the side." Nora answers vaguely, saying she doesn't know and that they should change the subject.

*There are several parallels between Krogstad and Mrs. Linde. Both had unhappy marriages, which have now ended after the death of their partner. Additionally, both have been visibly changed by their past. Nora's vagueness about Krogstad's side business dealings shows she is not ready to tell Mrs. Linde everything yet.*



Dr. Rank enters. Nora introduces him to Mrs. Linde. Mrs. Linde says they came in to the house together, but that she went slower than him as she has difficulty carrying things up the stairs. Dr. Rank asks if she has a disability, to which Mrs. Linde replies that she is only a little run down. Dr. Rank asks if she has come to town for a holiday, but Mrs. Linde says she is here to work. Dr. Rank jokingly asks if work is a "sovereign remedy" for being run down. Mrs. Linde replies: "One must live, Doctor."

*Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde's conversation reveals tensions to do with class and gender between them. Like Nora, Dr. Rank believes that Mrs. Linde should be taking a holiday. They fail to realize that it is necessary for her to work in order to survive, a situation women were not supposed to find themselves in.*



Nora, breaking the tension, says that Dr. Rank is as keen to live as anybody. Dr. Rank says yes, that he, along with all his patients, wish to "let things drag on as long as possible," even if they are miserable. He notes that one example of someone who thinks like this is the man with Torvald. Nora asks what he means and Dr. Rank replies that it is a man called Krogstad who is "rotten to the core," and that Nora wouldn't know him. Nora asks what he is talking to Torvald about, and Dr. Rank replies that it was something to do with the bank. Nora says she didn't know that Krogstad worked at the bank, and Dr. Rank says that there is a phenomenon of finding people who are morally corrupt and giving them decent jobs in order to keep an eye on them.

*Dr. Rank's speech about life and "letting things drag on" foreshadows his eventual death. His description of Krogstad reveals society's harsh judgment of Krogstad—that he is completely "rotten" and that he does not deserve to have a decent job. Nora, meanwhile, pretends to not really know who Krogstad is, which further reveals the extent of her deceit.*



Nora suddenly bursts out laughing and Dr. Rank inquires what she is laughing about, asking if she knows what society is. Nora replies that she was laughing about something entirely different, and asks if everyone who works at the bank is now under Torvald's control. Dr. Rank, shocked, asks if that is what Nora is laughing about. Nora, smiling, tells Dr. Rank not to mind, but keeps talking happily to herself about how amusing it is that Torvald has power over so many people.

*Nora's behavior here is rather childish; while Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde are having a serious conversation, she bursts out laughing at her own thoughts. Dr. Rank responds by asking her patronizingly if she knows what society is, showing he, like the other characters, does not really respect her.*



Nora offers Dr. Rank a macaroon. He says he thought they were forbidden in Nora's house. Nora lies that Mrs. Linde gave them to her, and when Mrs. Linde acts surprised, Nora quickly assures her that it's all right because she wasn't to know that Torvald banned them. Nora eats a macaroon and walks happily around the room, saying there's one thing she'd like to do at that moment. She says it's something she'd like to say to Torvald, something "not very nice." After probing from Mrs. Linde and Dr. Rank, she reveals that she would like to say "damn." Both Mrs. Linde and Dr. Rank are extremely shocked.

*The macaroons are a symbol of Torvald's strictness and Nora's disobedience and deceit. The fact that Torvald has banned Nora from eating them in the first place shows that he thinks of her like a child, not capable of making good decisions and in need of an external presence to moderate her behavior. Nora's desire to say "damn" suggests she wants the freedom to disobey both Torvald and the rules of society.*



Torvald enters and Nora quickly hides the macaroons. Nora asks if Torvald "got rid of" Krogstad, and Torvald replies that yes, Krogstad has left. Nora introduces Torvald to Mrs. Linde and says that Mrs. Linde has come all the way to town to talk to Torvald. Mrs. Linde, embarrassed, tries to explain that that wasn't exactly true, but Nora interrupts her to say that Mrs. Linde would like a job, and that having heard Torvald had been made Bank Manager set off straight away. Nora asks if Torvald will give her a job, and, after checking that she is a widow and that she has business experience, Torvald says it is likely he can find something. Mrs. Linde thanks him.

*When Nora hides the macaroons it is clear that she is not as daring around Torvald as she would like to be. Nora introduces Mrs. Linde to Torvald in her usual blunt, childlike way, causing Mrs. Linde to feel embarrassed. The fact that Torvald checks if Mrs. Linde is a widow reminds us that only unmarried or widowed women are allowed the independence of being able to work in an office.*



Mrs. Linde, Torvald, and Dr. Rank all go to leave. As they go, Nora asks that they return that evening. The nursemaid and the children enter, and Nora runs excitedly to let them in. Nora kisses her children and asks Mrs. Linde: "aren't they lovely?" Before Mrs. Linde replies, Torvald ushers her and Dr. Rank out, saying that the house is now "unbearable for anybody except mothers."

*Nora is clearly a very loving and devoted mother, which is a big contrast to Torvald's attitude towards the children. His belief that their presence makes the house "unbearable" shows that his role as a father does not carry the expectation of showing any love or affection to his children.*



Nora talks to her children, who tell her what they've been doing outside. The nursemaid offers to take the children's coats and hats off but Nora says she will do it, throwing the garments on the floor. Her children all talk at once to her. They play hide and seek; Nora hides under the table and pretends to frighten the children.

*Nora's joy in playing with the children show that she is both a loving and devoted mother and that she is still somewhat childlike herself.*



The door half opens. **Krogstad** stands in the doorway, waiting. Eventually he announces himself. **Nora** jumps up, startled, and asks what he wants. He says that someone left the door open to the house by accident. She tells him **Torvald** isn't home. Krogstad replies that he wants to talk to Nora. Nora tells her **children** to go to the **nursemaid**, and assures them that the "strange man" won't do anything to her. Once the children are gone, she asks what Krogstad wants, as it is not the first of the month. He replies that it is Christmas Eve, and it depends on Nora what kind of Christmas she has.

*Krogstad's ominous, threatening presence is a stark contrast to the carefree delight of Nora and the children playing. This contrast shows the pervasive presence of Nora's secret and the negative effect that it could have on her life, even as she does not seem to know it. Nora's happy, childlike manner changes instantly as soon as she is talking to Krogstad; she becomes far more cold and serious.*



**Krogstad** says that he saw **Torvald** walking down the street earlier with a lady. **Nora** asks if the lady was **Mrs. Linde**; **Krogstad** says it was, and explains that he used to know her. Nora says that she knew that, and Krogstad replies: "Oh, so you know all about it." He asks if **Torvald** is giving **Mrs. Linde** a job at the bank. At first Nora is offended, asking how dare Krogstad interrogate her, given that he is one of **Torvald's** subordinates. Eventually, however, she reveals that **Torvald** is indeed giving **Mrs. Linde** a job. She boasts that she influenced the decision, arguing that just because she is a woman doesn't mean that she doesn't have influence.

*There is some irony in the fact that Nora expects Krogstad to treat her with respect as she is above him in terms of class, while also telling him that just because she is a woman doesn't mean she is incapable of having influence. After all, there is a parallel between the two of them, as they are both subordinate to Torvald, and have been denied power by society.*



**Krogstad** asks in a more polite tone if **Nora** will use her influence to his advantage. He explains that he needs **Nora's** help to keep his job at the bank. **Nora**, confused, asks who wants to take it from him. Krogstad, thinking she is playing ignorance, implies he is aware that **Mrs. Linde** is getting his job and says that he therefore knows who to thank for the fact that he is being fired. He asks **Nora** to use her influence to stop the whole thing happening. **Nora** insists that she has no influence. Krogstad points out that she just claimed to have influence, to which **Nora** replies that she didn't mean it and that she of course doesn't have influence over her husband.

*This is the second time in a day that Nora has been asked to use her influence with Torvald in order to secure someone a job at the bank, showing the importance of the bank as a symbol of money, security and respectability in the lives of the characters. Her contradictory statements about whether or not she has "influence" highlight the ambiguous status of married women at the time; even Nora is not sure to what extent she can affect Torvald's decisions.*



**Krogstad** says he knew **Torvald** in their student days and is sure he is no more "steadfast" than other married men. **Nora**, outraged, tells Krogstad he must leave if he talks disrespectfully of **Torvald**. Krogstad remarks that she has courage, and **Nora** replies that she's not frightened of him anymore, as after New Year the whole "business" between them will be over. Krogstad says he will fight with his life for his job, but explains that it is not for the money. He tells **Nora** that a few years ago he got mixed up in "a bit of trouble." He says although he didn't get in legal trouble it has made it difficult to get a job, and therefore he has been forced to do business on the side, like lending money to **Nora**. He explains that the job at the bank was the first step on the ladder of respectability, and that by firing him **Torvald** is kicking him off that ladder.

**Nora** says she cannot help **Krogstad**; he insists that this is only because she doesn't want to, and that he has a way of forcing her. **Nora**, shocked, asks if he would tell **Torvald** about the debt. Krogstad suggests that he might, and **Nora** begins to cry, saying that the secret is her "pride and joy" and that it would be "horribly unpleasant" if **Torvald** heard about it from Krogstad. Krogstad asks if it would be merely unpleasant, and **Nora** tells him that if **Torvald** found out he would certainly not give Krogstad a job, but rather just pay off the rest of the money immediately.

*Several characters in A Doll's House espouse the idea that a husband's job is to be "steadfast" in providing reason and keeping control of his wife's irrational whims. The suggestion that Torvald isn't "steadfast" is even taken as a terrible insult by Nora. Krogstad's story about the trouble he got into and his subsequent struggle to regain respectability shows the importance within society of having a decent job. This is also the first time that the other major example of deceit, the fraud committed by Krogstad, is introduced to the play.*



*Nora's mixed feelings about her secret are reflected in her confused reaction to the thought of Torvald finding out about it. On the one hand, she calls the secret her "pride and joy"; however, she is aware that there would be negative consequences if Torvald found out. This confusion is the result of the fact that Nora is both proud of saving Torvald's life and worried about having gone behind his back.*



**Krogstad** remarks that either **Nora** doesn't have a good memory or she doesn't know much about business. He then recalls each step of the story of how Nora got the loan from him. He reminds Nora that he promised to find the money to lend her on the condition that she and her father signed an IOU. Nora says yes, she and her father did sign the IOU. Krogstad agrees that Nora did bring back the IOU with the two signatures and that therefore he gave her the money. But he then reminds her that it had been at a difficult time for her, when her father was very ill, shortly before he died. Krogstad then asks Nora on what date her father died, and she tells him the 29 September. Krogstad reveals that the date next to Nora's father's signature was 2 October, three days after he died. Krogstad says the handwriting on the date was also not Nora's father's, but another, familiar handwriting. He suggests that perhaps Nora's father forgot to add a date and that someone else added the date afterwards, which he says would be acceptable, but asks her if the signature is truly her father's. Nora replies defiantly that no, it had in fact been her who signed her father's name.

*Here, Krogstad reveals that there is another layer to Nora's deceit; not only did she lie to Torvald (and everyone else) about where the money came from—a domestic matter—but she also committed forgery, an illegal act. This increases the stakes of anyone discovering her secret. It is also significant that Nora's act of fraud involved impersonating a man. In order to save Torvald's life, she had to act beyond the restrictions imposed on women and even had to pretend to be a man in order to secure her loan. This highlights the powerlessness of women in society at the time.*



**Krogstad** tells **Nora** how dangerous it was for her to admit to signing her father's name, and says it would have been better if she had never gone on the trip. Nora protests, saying she didn't have a choice as **Torvald's** life was on the line. Krogstad asks her if she ever realized she was committing fraud; Nora replies that it wouldn't have mattered to her. Krogstad insists that she has no idea what she's done. He tells her that he committed a similar offence, and that it destroyed his reputation. Nora asks if Krogstad also risked everything to save his wife's life, but Krogstad only replies that the law doesn't take motives into account. Nora cannot believe that the law wouldn't make an exception for the fact that her father was dying and that Torvald could also have died. Krogstad tells her that he knows about business transactions, and that if he is "pitched out" again, Nora will be going down with him. He exits.

*In this passage, the central moral dilemma of the play is put forward: was Nora right to lie and commit forgery if it saved her husband's life? Nora certainly believes that in this instance, the ends justified the means. However, as Krogstad points out, the law and the opinion of society are inflexible. At this point, Krogstad is certainly the antagonist of the play, manipulating and threatening Nora with the same unforgiving attitude of the rest of society. However, his motivation for doing so is that he has also been punished for committing fraud—showing that society's harsh judgment causes people to turn against each other.*



**Nora**, alone, tells herself that **Krogstad** is just trying to scare her. **The children** stand in the doorway and tell her Krogstad has left. Nora urges them not to tell anyone about his visit. The children ask if she will play with them again, and Nora tells them she can't, ushering them out of the room. Alone again, she picks up her embroidery for a moment, before throwing it back down. She calls to **the maid** and asks her to bring her the **Christmas tree**. She mutters to herself: "No, really, it's quite impossible!" The maid brings the Christmas tree into the room, and Nora dismisses her.

*The web of Nora's deceit grows larger as she asks her children to keep Krogstad's visit a secret. The fact that she says she can't play with the children is symbolic of the end of her carefree innocence. She is clearly working hard to convince herself that Krogstad is wrong and that she is not scared by what he has said. However, her fretful movements about the room and worried muttering to herself suggest she is actually very frightened.*



**Nora** decorates the **tree**, still talking to herself, saying everything **Krogstad** has said is nonsense and that she will do anything **Torvald** wants her to. Torvald enters and asks if anybody has visited the house. Nora says there hasn't been anybody, and Torvald replies that he just saw Krogstad leaving the house. Nora says that yes, Krogstad was there for a moment, and Torvald says he can tell that Krogstad has asked Nora to put in a good word for him and pretend it was her idea. Nora admits that Torvald is right. Torvald, incredulous, asks why Nora made promises to "a person like that," and why she lied to him. He tells her she must never do anything like it again: "Little song-birds must keep their pretty little beaks out of mischief." He concludes that they won't talk about it anymore.

*Nora feels reassured by promising herself that she will be totally obedient to Torvald. However, as soon as he enters, she lies to him. His discovery of the lie creates tension as it seems momentarily that Nora's whole secret may unravel—however, Torvald hardly lets Nora speak, instead dominating the conversation by scolding Nora and telling her what to do. His statement that they won't talk about the matter anymore shows he doesn't suspect there is any more to the situation that what he knows, which creates an atmosphere of suspense.*



**Nora** continues to decorate the **Christmas tree** and tells **Torvald** she is excited for the Stenborgs' fancy dress ball on Boxing Day. Torvald replies that he is excited to see what "surprise" Nora got for him. Nora brushes it off, saying it's silly and that everything seems absurd and pointless. Torvald is surprised. Nora asks him if he's busy and what papers he's working on; Torvald replies he has been given authority to make changes in the bank's organization and personnel over the Christmas week. Nora begins to say that that is why "poor **Krogstad**" is losing his job, but is interrupted by an annoyed "Hm!" from Torvald.

*Nora finds solace in the Christmas tree and the thought of the fancy dress ball, both symbols of innocent happiness. Torvald's question about the "surprise" Nora has for him has a double meaning; Torvald is referring to the present Nora has got him, however another "surprise" is the impending revelation of Nora's secret. The fact that Torvald is getting to work immediately on reorganizing the bank staff—and firing Krogstad—creates suspense.*



**Nora** strokes **Torvald's** hair and says that if he weren't so busy she'd ask him to give her advice on what her costume should be for the fancy dress ball, as no one has as good taste as him. Torvald replies that his "impulsive little woman" is asking to be rescued, and Nora says she never gets anywhere without Torvald's help. Torvald agrees to help her.

*Nora in her distress retreats into the role of the beautiful and submissive wife. By assuring Torvald how helpless she is and how she depends on him for everything, she ensures that she is in his good favor.*



Nora casually asks what **Krogstad's** crime was. **Torvald** replies that it was forgery, and asks if Nora knows what that means. Nora suggests that perhaps Krogstad was forced by circumstances to commit his crime. Torvald replies that this is possible, but that it is more likely that he just "didn't think," and that he would not condemn a man for a single mistake if he were to honestly confess and receive his punishment. However, Torvald explains that Krogstad dodged the consequences of his crime by a "cunning trick."

*Here the parallel between Nora and Krogstad becomes unquestionably clear. Nora advocates the same lack of judgment towards Krogstad that she hopes will be applied to her. At first, Torvald seems forgiving, however his abhorrence at the fact that Krogstad was dishonest about his crime creates suspense, as Nora has done the same thing.*



**Torvald** says a man like **Krogstad** will forever have to lie, even to his own family, and that the worst part is the fact that "a fog of lies like that" spreads and infects children. He claims that as a lawyer he knows that most juvenile delinquents are the children of dishonest mothers. **Nora** asks why it is mothers in particular who have this affect. Torvald admits that fathers can have the same influence, but that it is mostly mothers. He says that Krogstad has been "poisoning" his own children for years with lies and deceit, and that he feels sick in the presence of people like that. He asks that Nora shake hands on a promise not to put in any more good words for Krogstad. At first she hesitates, but eventually shakes Torvald's hand.

*Torvald's speech is obviously terrifying to Nora, who treasures her children and her role as a wife and mother above anything. It also makes clear the extent to which deceit was seen as a poison in society at the time. It is worth noting that Torvald talks about the children of corrupt mothers in particular, even though he is referring to Krogstad, a man. This shows the extent to which the responsibility of being a good parent lay far more on women than men.*



**Nora** backs away from **Torvald**, saying she feels hot. Torvald gets up and says he must do some work, as well as think about Nora's costume, before dinner. He also implies that he will wrap up some money in gold paper to hang on the **Christmas tree** for Nora, as she requested. After laying his hand affectionately on her head, he exits.

*Nora is visibly shaken from what Torvald has said and what she now imagines will happen if her secret is revealed. Torvald's affection to her creates further suspense, as it shows how oblivious he is to the reality of the situation.*



**Nora** repeats to herself "it's impossible." The **nursemaid** calls saying that the **children** keep asking if they can be let in to see their mother. Nora tells the nursemaid to not let them in, and the nursemaid closes the door. Alone and "pale with terror," Nora cries out about poisoning her children and corrupting her home. She exclaims: "It could never, never be true!"

*Nora is terrified to the point that she even seems to be going mad. Her decision not to let the children in shows that she now believes she is a bad influence on them. Despite repeating "it's not true," it is clear that Nora has taken to heart what Torvald has said.*



## ACT TWO

The curtain opens to the same room, with the **Christmas tree** now stripped and "bedraggled." **Nora's** outdoor clothes are on the sofa, and Nora, who is alone, walks around restlessly, before picking up her coat. She says aloud that somebody is coming, listens, and then says that it is nobody. She tells herself that nobody will come that day, Christmas day, or the next. She checks the letterbox and finds nothing in there. She mutters to herself that "he" didn't mean it seriously, and that "things like that can't happen." She adds, "I have three small children."

*In the opening of the second act, the stripped Christmas tree not only shows that time has passed, but also symbolizes a negative spiral from the domestic joy of Christmas to a sense of ruin and chaos. Nora's obsessive checking to see if any person or letter has arrived and assurances that no one will come for two days gives a sense of time running out and impending disaster.*



The **nursemaid** enters, carrying a large cardboard box. She announces that it is the box of fancy dress costumes and admits they are in a mess. **Nora** exclaims, "if only I could rip them up into a thousand pieces!" The nursemaid, taken aback, says they can be easily mended, and Nora says she will go and get **Mrs. Linde** to help. The nursemaid says if Nora goes out she will catch her death of cold, to which Nora replies "worse things might happen."

*Nora's behavior has become increasingly pessimistic and irrational, occasionally veering on resembling the Victorian archetype of the "hysterical," or insane woman. Nora's reply to the nursemaid's concern that she will catch her death of cold shows that the stress of her secret has caused her to will her own destruction.*



**Nora** asks how the **children** are, and the **nursemaid** replies that they are playing with their presents, and asking for their mother. Nora tells her she can't be with them as often as she was before, and asks if the nursemaid thinks they would forget about her if she went away for good. Nora asks the nursemaid how it was possible for her to hand over her children to strangers. The nursemaid replies that "there was nothing else for it" when she was offered the job of nursing Nora, and says, "When a poor girl's been in trouble she must make the best of things." She also refers to a man who didn't help her. Nora asks if the nursemaid's daughter has forgotten her, and the nursemaid responds that she hasn't, that she wrote to her when she was confirmed and again when she married. Nora hugs the nursemaid and tells her how good a mother she was, and the nursemaid remarks that Nora never had another mother. Nora begins to say: "If my little ones only had you, I know you would..." but cuts herself off, saying she doesn't know what she's talking about. She opens the cardboard box and tells the nursemaid to go to the children. The nursemaid exits, saying Nora will be the prettiest person at the ball.

*The fact that Nora feels she can't be around her children "as much as before" shows that she has taken to heart Torvald's statement about dishonest mothers corrupting their children. The implication within the nursemaid's story is that the nursemaid was impregnated by an unnamed man who then refused to help her take care of the baby, thereby forcing her to give the child up while accepting the job as Nora's nurse. This narrative is another example, like Mrs. Linde's experience, of women being forced by circumstances to sacrifice their own happiness for others. The fact that Nora trusts the nursemaid to raise her children foreshadows her eventual decision to leave them and shows that she is not acting entirely selfishly when she does leave, as she has already ensured they will be well taken care of.*



**Nora** begins unpacking the box, but quickly throws it down. She mutters to herself about wanting to go out but feeling worried that something would happen at home while she was gone. She tells herself not to think about it, and counts out the “pretty gloves” to try and take her mind off it. She hears a sound, screams, and exclaims “they are coming.” She goes off towards the door, stops, and sees **Mrs. Linde** in the hall, taking off her outdoor clothes. Nora greets her and asks if anyone else is there. She says she is glad Mrs. Linde has come.

*Nora cannot think of anything else but her secret and the possibility of someone finding out. She tries to distract herself with the clothes—significant because they are objects representing femininity—but is unable to.*



**Nora** tells **Mrs. Linde** she would like her help with her costume for the fancy dress party. She tells her that **Torvald** wants her to go as a Neopolitan fisher lass and dance the **tarantella**, which she learned while she was in Italy. She shows her the costume that Torvald had made for her in Italy, and says that it's torn. Mrs. Linde says she can fix it, and says she will stop by to see Nora in her finery. She thanks Nora for a pleasant time the previous evening, but Nora replies that she doesn't think it was as pleasant “as things normally are,” and that Mrs. Linde should have come to town a little earlier.

*Nora often talks about how much Torvald likes to see her sing and dance, and the fact that Torvald calls her his “skylark” and “songbird” and wants her to dance the Tarantella shows that to a certain extent Nora “performs” her role in the marriage. Nora’s comment that the previous night wasn’t as pleasant as things normally are shows the threads of her ordinary life are unraveling.*



**Nora** remarks that **Torvald** knows how to make the home nice, and **Mrs. Linde** says that Nora does too, suggesting it is a trait she inherited from her father. Mrs. Linde then comments on how depressed **Dr. Rank** seemed the night before, and Nora explains that he has tuberculosis of the spine. She says that his father was a terrible man who had mistresses and that Dr. Rank has always been unwell, ever since childhood. Mrs. Linde asks how she knows this, and Nora pauses, before telling her she heard it from the gossiping nurses who came to the house to care for her when she gave birth.

*Mrs. Linde’s comment about Nora and her father and Nora’s story about Dr. Rank and his father shows how strong the influence of parents was believed to be on children. Nora’s unsure answer to Mrs. Linde’s question about where she heard about Dr. Rank’s story suggests she may be lying again.*



**Nora** explains that **Dr. Rank** was **Torvald’s** best friend as a boy and is also a good friend of hers, with emphasis on the word *mine*. **Mrs. Linde** asks if Dr. Rank is genuine, explaining that when they met he told her that he'd heard her name around the house often, but that this couldn't be true as Torvald didn't know who she was. Nora explains: “Torvald is so terribly in love with me that he wants me all to himself.” She says it used to make him jealous to hear her mention her old friends. She adds that Dr. Rank likes hearing about them, though, so she talks to him.

*As the play progresses, it becomes more and more clear how possessive Torvald is. Nora’s pride at saying Dr. Rank is “her” friend suggests she doesn’t really have many friends now that she is married. Nora believes that the reason that Torvald is so controlling is because he is so in love with her; this shows there is a tenuous distinction between a loving marriage and a controlling one.*



**Mrs. Linde** chastises **Nora**, saying she is still a child and that she must stop “all this business with **Dr. Rank**.” Mrs. Linde recalls Nora's dream about having a rich old admirer. She asks if Dr. Rank has money, and Nora says that he does. Mrs. Linde reveals that she believes Dr. Rank lent her the money for the Italy trip. Nora is shocked, saying it would be intolerable to owe Dr. Rank money, given that he is a friend and comes over every day. She says he didn't inherit money until more recently, and that it never would have occurred to her to ask him for the loan. She begins to wonder what would happen if she did ask Dr. Rank for money, but Mrs. Linde interrupts her, exclaiming: “Behind your husband’s back?” Nora says she must get herself out of the first debt, which is also behind her husband's back. She remarks that men are better at coping with “these things” than women.

*Mrs. Linde’s belief that Nora must have borrowed the money from Dr. Rank shows that there was a certain degree of suspicion surrounding friendships between people of the opposite gender. Mrs. Linde’s continued shock at the fact that Nora is acting behind Torvald’s back shows the extent to which society would condemn Nora’s behavior. Nora attributes her confusion and sense of helplessness to the fact that she is out of her depth as a woman, showing that, at least to a certain extent, she believes in the idea that women are less capable than men.*



**Mrs. Linde** points out that **Nora’s** own husband would be able to cope with the matter, but Nora responds: “Nonsense!” She asks Mrs. Linde if, after a debt is repaid, the IOU is returned to the payer. Mrs. Linde tells her yes, and Nora cries out that then one can tear it up into a thousand pieces and burn it. Mrs. Linde says to Nora that she knows there's something Nora is not telling her. Nora asks if it's that obvious, and seems like she is about to tell Mrs. Linde more, but is interrupted by the sound of **Torvald** returning. She tells Mrs. Linde to wait in the other room with the **children**, because Torvald can't stand to see mending lying around the house. Mrs. Linde gathers her things together and tells Nora she won't leave until she's found out what Nora is hiding from her. She exits.

*Nora, despite having claimed that men cope better with matters of business than women, still feels that she needs to hide the issue of the debt from Torvald, in what is almost a protective gesture. The fact that Mrs. Linde can so easily tell that Nora is keeping something from her does not bode well for Nora’s desire to keep her secret from Torvald and the rest of society. Torvald’s dislike of seeing mending lying around relates to his earlier comment about the children making the house unbearable; he seems to have a dislike for everything related to femininity.*



**Nora** goes to meet **Torvald** and says she's been “longing” for him to come back. She explains that **Mrs. Linde** was helping her with her outfit and Torvald asks what a good idea of his it was for Nora to wear that costume. Nora agrees, and adds it was nice of her to let him have his way. Torvald holds Nora's chin, calling her a “little rogue” and acting surprised that she would think of it as “nice,” considering he is her husband. He says he knows she didn't mean it that way, however, and says he won't disturb her anymore. He says he also has work to do, and turns to go to his study.

*Nora has an almost sycophantic attitude towards Torvald at this stage in the play; the way she acts around him is, at the very least, unnatural. Their marriage begins to seem more and more like a performance, and the connection between them less and less genuine. Meanwhile, Torvald continues to treat Nora like a child; the gesture of grabbing her chin is similar to the body language between parent and child.*



Nora stops him, and asks that if “a little squirrel” (referring to herself) asked nicely would he do something for “it.” Torvald replies that he would first need to know what the favor was, but Nora ignores him, saying that if he let her have her way she would scamper and do “marvelous tricks” and sing. She adds that she would pretend to be an elfin child and dance “a moonlight dance.”

*Nora attempts to manipulate Torvald using the kind of play-language he adopts when he is speaking affectionately to her. Her comments about singing and dancing and doing tricks add to the idea of performing her role as a wife, and the reference to the elfin child shows she is willing to adopt the role of a child.*



Torvald says he hopes Nora is not referring to the conversation they had that morning about letting Krogstad keep his job. Nora says she is, and begs Torvald to let her have her way. She asks that Torvald give Mrs. Linde somebody else's job. Torvald, outraged, says he will not act on Nora's “thoughtless promise” to Krogstad. Nora replies that she is terrified of Krogstad, who can do Torvald harm because he writes in all the “nastiest” papers. Torvald asks if it is the memory of what happened to her father that is making Nora scared and Nora, at first uncertainly, agrees, saying that rumors about her father almost cost him his career. Torvald replies that Nora's father's professional life was “not entirely above suspicion,” which is unlike the conduct of Torvald himself, and that therefore Nora need not worry.

*Nora, trapped in more and more layers of lying and deceit, is unable to properly communicate with Torvald. Meanwhile, Torvald clearly has no interest in taking Nora's opinion seriously, saying whatever promise she made was “thoughtless”. Instead, he only wishes to calm and reassure her, like a child. Further, he is unafraid of admitting in front of Nora that he believes her father was not totally honorable in his business career, showing a disregard for her feelings.*



Nora insists that Krogstad is capable of great evil, implying he could destroy the peace and happiness of hers and Torvald's home. Torvald says that the more Nora tries to persuade him, the less likely it is he will agree. He tells her about the embarrassment he would experience if anyone found out that he had been influenced by his wife, saying it would make him “the laughing stock of the office.”

*The implication here is that Torvald cares more about his reputation within society than about Nora's thoughts and feelings. The low status of women at the time is conveyed by the fact that if a man was thought to have been influenced by his wife he would be made a laughing stock.*



Torvald says that there is another reason, separate from Krogstad's history of bad behavior that makes him unable to let him keep his job. He tells Nora that he and Krogstad were friends in their youth, which he says was rash and now embarrasses him. Torvald explains that, because of their past friendship, Krogstad treats him with familiarity and “as an equal” in public. He tells Nora that this makes it intolerable to have Krogstad working at the Bank. Nora, surprised, remarks that this seems petty. Torvald, infuriated, calls the maid and gives her a letter from his papers and instructs her to deliver it immediately. The maid exits, and Torvald tells a panicked Nora that the letter was Krogstad's notice.

*Torvald's speech about his embarrassment about being treated as an equal by Krogstad is rather irrational—it is Nora who provides reason when she accuses him of being petty. It also reveals how important it is to Torvald to feel like he has a high status in society and power over other people, which explains much of his behavior to Nora. Thus a connection is made between Torvald's bad treatment of Nora and his bad treatment of Krogstad—they are both oppressed by either their gender or class.*



Nora desperately begs Torvald to get the letter back, for the sake of himself and the children. She tells him he doesn't know what the letter could do. Torvald replies that it is too late, and says he is slightly insulted that Nora believes that Krogstad—“this miserable pen-pusher”—would have any power over him. However, he concedes that he finds it sweet because it shows how much Nora loves him, and assures her that he is “man enough” to handle everything himself. Nora says that that is something he will never do, to which Torvald affectionately responds that they will share it, man and wife. He caresses her and asks if she is happy, remarking that she looks like a frightened dove. He suggests she run through the tarantella while he is in his study with both doors shut so he can't hear anything. He tells her that when Dr. Rank arrives she should tell him to go to Torvald's study, and exits.

Nora, alone and “wild-eyed with terror,” talks to herself, trying to decide whether Krogstad is capable of acting on his threat. She cries out “help” and asks aloud if there is a way out. The doorbell rings, and she sees that it is Dr. Rank. She lets Dr. Rank in and tells him that Torvald is busy at the moment and not to go into his study yet, but says that she always has time for him.

Dr. Rank says he will keep taking advantage of the ability to talk to Nora as long as he is able. Nora, taken aback, asks what he means, and Dr. Rank explains that his health is declining. Nora breathes a sigh of relief at the knowledge that it is Dr. Rank himself who he is suggesting will not be around for much longer. Dr. Rank explains that he is very ill, and that within a month he will probably be dead. Dr. Rank asks a favor of Nora, telling her that Torvald is sensitive and he does not want him to visit him as he dies. He promises to send his visiting card with a black cross on it when he knows he is in his final days.

*In this passage Torvald clearly has no understanding of the actual situation, but is so intent on being in control and asserting his capability as a man to handle everything that he is unable to perceive that there is actually a great deal at stake. While he does seem to want to make Nora happy, even willing to offer the concession of saying that they will deal with problems together as a couple, he fails to take her terror seriously or believe anything she says to him. Again, the tarantella—a dance—occurs as a symbol of Nora happily performing her role in their marriage.*



*Nora seems increasingly desperate and crazed. Her mutterings to herself when she is alone punctuate the scenes with other characters, showing the effect that concealing her secret in front of others is having on her. She lies easily to Dr. Rank, showing how natural lying has become.*



*Nora's relief when she finds out that Dr. Rank is saying he will die soon, and not that anything bad will happen to her, is childish and shows her selfish side. At this stage in the play, her fixation with her own fate makes her unable to properly connect with the world or feel any sympathy for Dr. Rank. Dr. Rank's request that Torvald not see him as he dies is another instance of someone feeling the need to protect Torvald—showing Torvald may not be as strong as he claims.*



Nora tells **Dr. Rank** he is being absurd, saying she hoped he would be in a good mood. Dr. Rank replies that it is unlikely he would be in a good mood with death looming. He adds that he no longer wants to suffer for another man's sins, and that a similar situation must be happening in every family. Nora stops her ears and exclaims that Dr. Rank is talking nonsense. But Dr. Rank continues, saying he and his spine are having to pay for his father's hedonist life. He lists all the lavish foods his father ate, including oysters, truffles, and champagne, and Nora says it's a shame that such delicious foods attack the spine.

*Nora's refusal to deal with the reality of the fact that Dr. Rank is dying is further example of her childish behavior. Dr. Rank's speech about how he is paying for his father's sins aggressively reinforces the guilt Nora is experiencing—however, the passage about the different foods highlights the illogicality and unscientific basis of the belief that the behavior of parents can so drastically affect their children.*



Suddenly, **Nora** asks **Dr. Rank** why he smiled, and Dr. Rank replies that it was in fact Nora who laughed. Dr. Rank calls her a "rascal" and Nora admits she is feeling mischievous that day. Nora asks Dr. Rank not to "go and die on **Torvald** and me." Dr. Rank says he won't be missed for long, and speaks with jealousy of the fact that **Mrs. Linde** seems like a replacement of him, as she is now in the house so often. Nora urges him not to talk so loud as Mrs. Linde is in the other room; Dr. Rank argues that this proves his point.

*Nora is behaving in a cheekily childish way, however there is also an element of flirtation between her and Dr. Rank. Dr. Rank's jealousy at how often Mrs. Linde is around mirrors the jealousy Nora describes Torvald experiencing when she spoke about her old friends, highlighting a shared possessiveness between the two men.*



**Nora** tells **Dr. Rank** to cheer up and promises that he'll see her dance tomorrow and he can pretend that she is dancing just for him, before quickly adding, "and for **Torvald** as well, of course." She brings him over to the costume box and shows him the flesh-colored silk stockings, at first saying that he may only look at the feet before adding that maybe he can look higher up and asking if he thinks they'll fit. Dr. Rank says he cannot answer, and Nora slaps him playfully with the stockings. Dr. Rank asks if there are other "delights" he can see, but Nora replies he's "too naughty" to see anything else.

*Here the level of flirtation between Nora and Dr. Rank reaches a level that would have been fairly scandalous at the time. When Nora teases Dr. Rank with the stockings, this can be taken as an explicitly sexual gesture. Her promise to dance for him likewise betrays a disregard for the boundaries of her marriage and a delight in flaunting her femininity and sexuality.*



**Dr. Rank** muses that he couldn't imagine what would have happened to him if he'd never encountered **Torvald** and **Nora** and become a regular visitor in their house. He laments the fact that he will soon no longer be able to see them and that he has no way of expressing his gratitude to them. At first, Nora responds by saying it is nonsense to suggest that Dr. Rank is going to leave. However, she soon begins to hesitantly ask if he would do her a large favor. Dr. Rank responds that he would do anything. Nora is unsure, but Dr. Rank assures her that the bigger the favor the better, and asks if Nora trusts him. Nora admits that she trusts him more than anyone else she knows.

*Suddenly, Dr. Rank's impending death has become an opportunity for Nora to acquire his assistance in preventing Torvald finding out about the debt, something she had earlier sworn to Mrs. Linde that she would never do. Nora's statement that she trusts Dr. Rank more than anyone she knows is surprising, as it suggests she trusts him more than Torvald; Nora's and Torvald's marriage seems less and less solid by the minute.*



**Nora** tells **Dr. Rank** that there is something he must help her prevent happening. She tells him how passionately **Torvald** loves her and says he would surely lay down his life for her. Before she can continue, Dr. Rank asks if Nora thinks Torvald is the only one who would give his life for her. Nora is upset, but Dr. Rank says he promised himself he would tell her before he died. Nora gets up and moves away from Dr. Rank, asking the **maid** to bring a lamp in. She tells Dr. Rank it was "horrid" of him to say what he just said.

*Nora is on the brink of asking Dr. Rank to help with keeping the secret of the debt from Torvald, yet is stopped by his confession of love. The confession changes her demeanor entirely; where she perhaps thought flirtation was harmless, the fact that Dr. Rank seems to genuinely love her becomes too much to handle, and she retreats in a rather childlike way.*



The **maid** enters with the lamp, before exiting again. **Dr. Rank** asks if **Nora** knew that he loved her, and she replies that she can't tell whether she knew or not. Dr. Rank says that now she knows that he will do anything for her, but Nora says she can't tell him anything now. Dr. Rank begs her to let him help her, but she refuses, eventually claiming that she never needed help. She asks if Dr. Rank feels ashamed of himself in the light of the lamp. He says no, but asks if he should go and not return. Nora tells him to keep visiting them as usual, as she and **Torvald** would both miss him otherwise.

*Nora's manner of speaking in a self-contradictory way becomes more and more obvious in this scene. She is first flirtatious with Dr. Rank, asking him for a favor; she then says she cannot tell him anything or ask for his help. She then further contradicts herself by saying that she never needed help in the first place. She seems upset and offended by Dr. Rank's confession of love, but when he asks to go, she tells him not to.*



**Dr. Rank** explains that he can't figure **Nora** out, and that it's often felt to him that she'd just as rather be with him as with **Torvald**. Nora responds by saying that "there are those people you love and those people you'd almost rather be with." She explains that when she was younger, she loved her father best, but would also love to sneak into the maid's room because they didn't preach at her and talked about interesting things. She admits that living with Torvald is in some ways like living with her father.

*Dr. Rank's comments suggest that Nora has a history of flirting with him, and that she is perhaps not as committed to Torvald as it may have seemed. The comparison Nora draws between being married to Torvald and living with her father shows the extent of Torvald's paternalistic control of her, and indicates that Nora is frustrated by this treatment.*



The **maid** enters, whispers something to **Nora** and hands her a visiting card. Nora, looking at the card, exclaims. When **Dr. Rank** asks if something is wrong, she says it is her new costume. Dr. Rank, confused, says he thought her costume was in the other room. Nora says she's ordered another one and that **Torvald** must not know about it. She tells Dr. Rank to go and see Torvald and keep him distracted. Dr. Rank promises to do so and exits.

*Although momentarily it seemed like Nora was going to confide in Dr. Rank, this exchange reveals that he is now merely another person who she must lie to and who she feels she cannot trust. As the play progresses, Nora becomes increasingly isolated as a character, separated by more and more secrets.*



**Nora** asks the **maid** if "he" (**Krogstad**) is in the kitchen. The maid replies that he came up the back stairs and that even though she told him nobody was home he refused to leave until he saw Nora. Nora instructs the maid to let Krogstad in but not to tell anybody about it as it's a surprise for **Torvald**. The maid agrees and exits.

*Krogstad's determination and disregard for etiquette is alarming, as it shows he is desperate. Meanwhile, Nora must cover her tracks in front of everyone—even the maid—increasing her isolation.*



Nora remarks to herself that **Krogstad** is coming and that this is what she has been dreading. She locks the door to **Torvald's** study. Krogstad enters in a fur coat and cap. Nora tells him to keep his voice down as Torvald is at home. She asks Krogstad what he wants with her, and he replies "to find out something." He tells her he's been given his notice, and Nora replies that she tried to prevent it but there was nothing she could do. Krogstad asks if Torvald doesn't care about Nora, considering he knows what would happen if Krogstad is fired. Nora replies that Torvald doesn't know, and Krogstad says that that makes sense as it would be unlike Torvald to be so courageous.

*It is becoming increasingly clear that Nora's adamant refusal to tell Torvald the truth is not going to work in her favor. Her secretiveness is clearly unsustainable, and Krogstad's comments show that he does not believe she will be able to keep the secret any longer. Krogstad's low opinion of Torvald, instead of seeming merely insulting, may now seem indicative of Torvald's true nature.*



**Krogstad** asks if **Nora** has a clearer idea of her crime than she did yesterday. She replies bitterly that she does, and Krogstad says that he just wanted to check where things stood. He mentions that even he is not unfeeling, and Nora asks him in that case to show mercy and think of her children. He suggests that neither she nor **Torvald** thought of his children when Torvald fired him. He says that he won't make any moves at the moment, that everything can be settled in a friendly way, and that only he, Torvald, and Nora must know. Nora remains adamant that her husband won't know, but Krogstad explains that unless Nora herself has the money to pay off the rest of what she owes him, Torvald will have to find out.

*This passage shows us that there is perhaps a more reasonable side to Krogstad than we may have earlier thought. When Nora asks him for mercy and to think of her children, his point that neither she nor Torvald thought of his children is fairly valid. His offer to resolve the matter between him, Nora and Torvald is also not in itself particularly unreasonable; however, Nora's steadfastness makes her unable to see this.*



**Krogstad** explains that, even if the remainder of the debt is paid off, he will still keep the IOU. He tells **Nora** that if she is thinking of running away, or doing something worse, that she should forget it, as he will be in the possession of the IOU and, by implication, Nora's reputation. Nora asks how he knew that she was considering "anything worse" (suicide)? Krogstad says that everyone in situations like this thinks of that, including himself, but that he wasn't brave enough to go through with it. Nora admits that she isn't either. Krogstad seems relieved.

*This part of the conversation shows the importance of reputation in society at the time. A person's reputation is seen as the most valuable thing; in some ways even more valuable than their life. Krogstad's revelation that he also considered suicide further emphasizes the parallel between him and Nora.*



**Krogstad** reveals that he has a letter already written to **Torvald** explaining the situation. **Nora** insists that Torvald must never read the letter and tells Krogstad to tear it up. She asks how much money Krogstad is asking of Torvald, and Krogstad explains that he's not asking for any money; instead he wants to be on his feet again and to "get to the top." He says he's been going straight for a year and a half, but after being fired is no longer content to work his way slowly to the top. He tells Nora that Torvald must make a new vacancy at the bank, a better job than Krogstad had before, and offer it to him. Nora cries out that Torvald would never do that, but Krogstad is confident Torvald would "without so much as a whimper." He promises that in a year he will be Torvald's right hand man and will eventually be running it instead of Torvald.

*Krogstad's determination to keep his respectability and stay on the "straight and narrow" at first seem justified and almost admirable; however, his desire to oust Torvald and get to the top shows that he is struck by the same ambition and greed for money and status that affects Torvald. Krogstad's premonition that Torvald will give in to his demands "without a whimper" is correct—Torvald even uses this exact phrase after reading the letter from Krogstad in the third act. Ironically, it turns out to be Krogstad who knows Torvald's character better than Nora.*



**Nora** tells **Krogstad** that he will never live to see himself run the bank. Krogstad asks if Nora is threatening to kill him, and says he couldn't be afraid of "a precious pampered little thing" like her. He teases her about the idea of murder or suicide, before saying that nobody actually does things like that and that it wouldn't be of any use if Nora killed herself because her reputation would still be in Krogstad's hands, and Krogstad could use that to manipulate **Torvald**. Krogstad tells Nora not to do anything silly, and that he expects to hear from Torvald when he gets Krogstad's letter. He says he will never forgive Torvald for "forcing me off the straight and narrow again," and says goodbye to Nora.

*There are some elements to Nora's protectiveness of Torvald that might be thought of as masculine, for example, her threat to kill Krogstad. However, because she is a woman, Krogstad does not take her seriously, implying that she doesn't know what she's talking about and could never be scary or violent.*



**Nora** watches **Krogstad** exit and sees him drop the letter in the letter box. She cries out **Torvald's** name and exclaims that it is hopeless. **Mrs. Linde** enters and announces that Nora's costume is mended. Nora beckons Mrs. Linde in a horse voice and shows her the letter in the letterbox, saying that it is from Krogstad. Mrs. Linde realizes that Krogstad lent Nora the money. Nora laments that now Torvald will know everything, and Mrs. Linde says it is better that way. Nora adds that she committed forgery; Mrs. Linde cries out in shock.

*Krogstad's exit triggers a new sense of inevitability to the eventuality of Torvald finding out about the debt. This provokes Nora to share the whole story with Mrs. Linde, giving the impression that she believes she has nothing to lose. As Mrs. Linde is the first one to know the whole story, this moment can be taken as the beginning of the gradual unwinding of Nora's deceit.*





Nora asks Mrs. Linde to be her witness in case she goes mad or anything else happens which meant she couldn't be there anymore. Mrs. Linde, shocked, asks if Nora is out of her mind. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that if someone tries to take responsibility for her crime when Nora isn't there that Mrs. Linde must testify that it was Nora alone who was responsible. She insists that she is sane now and tells Mrs. Linde to remember what she said. Mrs. Linde says she will, even though she doesn't understand. Nora says something miraculous will happen, but that it would also be terrible. She then contradicts herself, saying it must never happen, no matter what.

Mrs. Linde announces that she is going to talk to Krogstad. Nora asks her not to, saying Krogstad can only do her harm. Mrs. Linde responds that there was a time when he would have done anything for her, and asks where he is. Nora checks his card to see the address, but is interrupted by the sound of Torvald knocking on the door and saying Nora's name. Nora, terrified, asks what he wants. Torvald tells her not to be afraid and asks if she's trying the costume on, as she's locked the door. Nora replies that she is and that it looks great on her. Mrs. Linde, reading the card, remarks that Krogstad lives very nearby. Nora replies that it's hopeless, as the letter is already in the box and Torvald keeps the key. Mrs. Linde says that Krogstad must find an excuse to get the letter back unread. She tells Nora to distract Torvald, and quickly exits.

Nora opens the door to Torvald's study. Torvald asks if he can return to his own living room again. He is surprised to see that Nora has not undergone some "marvelous transformation." Dr. Rank, standing in the doorway, said he also expected this. Nora says she will not show herself off before the ball. She says she has completely forgotten the dance, and that she is useless without Torvald's help. She asks him to promise to help her, and to devote himself exclusively to her. Torvald promises, calling her a "helpless little thing."

*Nora's behavior is indeed becoming increasingly strange, and her belief that she may go mad shows the extent to which the association between women and madness was ingrained in people at the time. Her mention of the vague miraculous event that she both does and doesn't want to happen increases the impression that she cannot envision a good ending to the situation.*



*This is the first time that the nature of Mrs. Linde's and Krogstad's relationship begins to be revealed, and Mrs. Linde's confession that Krogstad would have once done anything for her provides hope and foreshadows their eventual marriage. Meanwhile, Nora continues to retreat into talk of the ball as a symbol of happiness, security in her marriage, and respectability in the eyes of society.*



*The following section of the play is filled with double meaning that Nora seems aware of but that is not intended by Torvald. Much of what he says in reference to the ball—for example, the "marvelous transformation"—has an additional, different meaning in the context of Nora's secret. Meanwhile, Nora manipulates him by over-exaggerating her performance of the role of the perfect wife.*



Torvald stops himself, saying before he forgets he should look to see if he has any letters. Nora desperately asks him not to, but he persists. Nora begins to play the opening bars of the tarantella on the piano. Torvald stops to listen. Nora tells him that she won't be able to dance the next day if she doesn't rehearse with Torvald just then because she is so nervous. She asks him to play for her and tell her what to do. Torvald agrees, and Nora grabs a tambourine and drapes a colored shawl around herself. Torvald plays and Nora begins to dance, with Dr. Rank watching. Torvald tells her to slow down and be less wild, but Nora laughs and says this is how it must be. Torvald gets up to better instruct her, swapping with Dr. Rank, who now plays instead. Torvald gives Nora repeated instructions but she doesn't seem to hear them, only dancing more and more wildly. Her hair even becomes undone but she keeps dancing.

Mrs. Linde enters "as though spellbound." Nora asks her to see what fun they are having, but Torvald says that Nora is dancing as if her life depended on it. Nora replies that it does, and Torvald tells Dr. Rank to stop playing, causing Nora to come to a sudden stop. Torvald says Nora has forgotten everything he has ever told her. Nora agrees, saying this is why she needs extra practice and instruction, right up until the last minute before the ball. Torvald promises that Nora can rely on him.

Nora urges Torvald not to open any letters, and Torvald says he can tell that there is already a letter from Krogstad in the box, and that that is why Nora is frightened. Nora says there may be, but that Torvald shouldn't open it because she wouldn't want anything to come between them before the ball is over. Torvald concedes: "the child must have her way." Nora tells him that the next night, after the dance, he will be "free." The maid enters and announces that dinner is ready. Nora tells her that they'll have champagne and asks for lots of macaroons. Torvald takes Nora's hands and tells her not to be so wild and to be his own singing bird again. Nora ushers Torvald, Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde to go and eat. Dr. Rank murmurs to Torvald if there is anything "impending," but Torvald replies that it is only Nora's childish fears.

*Nora disguises her desperation that Torvald not open the letterbox, as well as her generally unhinged disposition, underneath a façade of stress about her impending performance of the tarantella. In turn, the tarantella is a way of Nora releasing her wild emotions and momentarily casting off her display of composure and respectability in a way that is still considered appropriate by society. We can see her dancing the tarantella as a way of embodying through performance her inner turmoil and desire for freedom.*



*Nora and Torvald's comments about Nora dancing as if her life depends on it foreshadows her later statement to Torvald that she did tricks for him in order to live. Torvald's claim that Nora has forgotten everything he has taught her again has a double meaning, as she has also secretly acted against Torvald's beliefs about marriage and gender roles.*



*Even though there are clearly signs indicating that something more serious is afoot, Torvald ignores them, dismissing Nora's odd behavior as simply her childish fears. Torvald's belief that Nora is a child prevents him from really listening to her or understanding the meaning behind her actions. Nora's request for macaroons shows she is, to a certain extent, unwilling to keep going along with Torvald's strict rules and desire for her to be like a dependent and obedient child, foreshadowing the final scene of the play when she leaves.*



Nora asks Mrs. Linde what happened when she went out. Mrs. Linde replies that Krogstad has left town, but is coming back the next evening and that she left a note for him. Nora tells her she shouldn't have done that because things must take their course, but that waiting for the miracle is really a cause for rejoicing. Mrs. Linde asks what she's waiting for, but Nora says she wouldn't understand. Mrs. Linde exits to the dining room, leaving Nora a moment alone. Nora counts out the hours until the tarantella and until midnight the next evening, eventually pronouncing: "Thirty-one hours to live." Torvald calls from the doorway for his little skylark, and Nora runs to him.

*Nora's behavior here is, again, confusing and contradictory: she seems both unwilling to be what Torvald wants her to and desperate to behave exactly as he wills, both completely hopeless and filled with a strange optimism regarding the miracle she keeps referring to. What will come next in Act Three is therefore in some ways completely unpredictable; however, her pronunciation that she has "thirty-one hours to live" gives a sense of impending disaster.*



### ACT THREE

The act opens on the same room, this time only occupied by Mrs. Linde, who is trying to read a book but doesn't seem able to concentrate. Dance music is heard from the floor above. Mrs. Linde listens for a sound at the front door, checks her watch, obviously waiting for someone. Eventually, she sees that someone is there, and goes out to let them in.

*Mrs. Linde's behavior in the opening moments of the act build suspense. Her decision to make Krogstad use the back entrance to the Helmers' house shows that, despite being the play's biggest advocate for honesty, she is also willing to employ secrecy and deception when she deems it necessary.*



Krogstad enters, saying he found a note from her, and asking what it means. Mrs. Linde explains that she had to talk to him and that it had to be at the Helmers' house as her house doesn't have a back entrance. She explains that the Helmers are at the ball, and Krogstad is shocked that they are out dancing.

*Mrs. Linde's assertion that Krogstad never understood her is significant as this is what Nora also says to Torvald in the final scene of the play; the parallel suggests that perhaps men at the time were unable to understand women. This is backed up by the fact that Krogstad judges Mrs. Linde so harshly for having married someone else. He seems to fail to understand the concept of sacrificing one's own happiness for the sake of others, something that both women in the play are forced to do.*



Mrs. Linde addresses Krogstad by his first name and asks that the two of them talk. Krogstad asks if they have anything to talk about. Mrs. Linde insists that they do; Krogstad disagrees, but Mrs. Linde says that's because he never understood her. Krogstad says there is nothing more to understand of the "old, old story" of a "heartless woman" leaving a man as soon as she gets an offer from someone richer. Mrs. Linde asks if Krogstad truly believes it was easy for her or that she is heartless. She explains that there was nothing else she could do and that she felt bound by duty to break things off with Krogstad. Krogstad angrily remarks that it all happened for money, but Mrs. Linde points out that she had to take care of a helpless mother and two brothers. Krogstad maintains that Mrs. Linde still did not have the right to throw him over for someone else, and Mrs. Linde says she's spent a lot of time wondering if she was justified.

Krogstad tells Mrs. Linde that when he lost her it felt as if the ground slipped away from under his feet, and that he is now "a broken man clinging to the wreck of my life." Mrs. Linde says that help might be near, but Krogstad argues that Mrs. Linde has got in the way of help. He tells Mrs. Linde to withdraw from the position at the bank. She says she won't because it wouldn't benefit Krogstad if she did. He tells her to do it anyway, but she replies that life has taught her to be cautious.

*This is one of the first times that we see a more human side to Krogstad. The fact that he has led a corrupt and dishonest life because he was heartbroken makes him more likeable as well as more complex. Indeed, one message within the play is that, even when people behave badly, there is often a good reason for behind it.*



Mrs. Linde points out that both she and Krogstad are struggling alone in bad situations. She laments that she has "nobody to care about, and nobody to care for." Krogstad says it was Mrs. Linde's own choice, but she insists that she had no choice. She then offers for the two of them to "join forces," as together they would have a better chance than if they were each on their own. She suggests to Krogstad that she came to town because of him. She explains that she has worked all her life and that this has been a source of joy, but without anyone to work for but herself she feels empty. At first, Krogstad resists, saying Mrs. Linde is suffering from "women's hysteria" and that she only wants to be "self-sacrificing."

*Mrs. Linde clearly finds a genuine sense of joy and purpose in being of service to others, and feels that her life is completely without meaning if she cannot do so. Thus Krogstad is correct in some ways when he accuses her of being self-sacrificing; however, what he fails to understand is that this is what Mrs. Linde truly wants. Mrs. Linde believes selfishness is not good for her; this stands in contrast to Nora's proclamations at the end of the play that she needs to honor herself as an individual above anyone else.*



Krogstad, still uncertain, asks if Mrs. Linde knows about his past, and what people think of him. Mrs. Linde replies that Krogstad had just suggested that he would be a different person with her. Krogstad asks Mrs. Linde if she knows what she's doing and if she has the courage to go through with it. Mrs. Linde tells him that the two of them need each other, that Krogstad's children need a mother, and that she needs someone to mother. Krogstad takes her hands and thanks her, promising that soon he will have everybody looking up to him.

*Here, Mrs. Linde and Krogstad conjure for themselves an unlikely version of the fairytale happy ending. By disregarding society's judgment of Krogstad and allowing him the opportunity to change, Mrs. Linde ensures that they both have a chance at happiness.*



Mrs. Linde interrupts Krogstad, saying that she can hear the **tarantella**. She explains this means the dance is about to end and that he must go. He says he will, but tells her she doesn't know the things he's done against the Helmers. Mrs. Linde tells him she does know. He is surprised that she still wants to go through with being with him, but Mrs. Linde explains that she knows what despair does to people. Krogstad regrets that he can't undo his actions, and Mrs. Linde points out that he can, that the letter is still in the box. Krogstad becomes briefly suspicious that Mrs. Linde's whole promise to marry him is only to save **Nora**, but she insists that it isn't, saying after a person has sold themselves once for other people's sake, they don't do it again.

*Mrs. Linde's claim that nobody sells themselves twice for other people's sake is interesting, as it calls into question the idea of duty and self-sacrifice. Although Mrs. Linde does not regret her first marriage as it allowed her to support her family, she has emerged from that experience with the belief that she has the right to her own happiness. This is similar to Nora's situation; having risked everything to save Torvald's life, she realizes at the end of the play that she cannot sacrifice her own happiness by continuing to live with him when she doesn't love him anymore.*



**Krogstad** resolves to ask for his letter back unread, but **Mrs. Linde** asks him not to. Krogstad, confused, asks if that wasn't the whole reason Mrs. Linde asked him to come. She says that it was, but having seen what she has seen in the past twenty-four hours she has come to the conclusion that **Torvald** has to know everything, saying that "all this secrecy and deception must end at once." Krogstad tells Mrs. Linde that he won't ask for his letter back but says that if there is anything he can do he will do it. Mrs. Linde hears the **tarantella** ending and tells Krogstad to go. He says he will wait for Mrs. Linde downstairs, and exits saying he has never felt so happy in his life.

*Here, Mrs. Linde radically disrupts the course of events in the play. While it would have been easier for her to ask Krogstad to get his letter back, thereby ensuring that life between the Helmers went on as normal, Mrs. Linde's steadfast belief in honesty triumphs over her promise to Nora. This ultimately benefits Nora, as Torvald's behavior when he reads the letter allows her to see the reality of her situation and that she no longer wants to remain in her marriage.*



**Mrs. Linde** tidies the room and talks to herself about how things can change and how happy she is that she has people to work for and to live for. She gets her coat and hat ready and waits excitedly for the Helmers to return. They enter, **Torvald** pushing **Nora**, who is dressed in the Italian costume, "almost forcibly" into the hall. Nora stands in the doorway, saying she wants to stay longer at the ball. She begs Torvald for another hour there, but he refuses, leading her "gently but firmly" into the room.

*In a somewhat ironic twist, Mrs. Linde and Krogstad's happiness now stands in contrast to what is now shown to be Nora and Torvald's unhealthy relationship. Torvald's physical manipulation of Nora shows his disregard for her autonomy and the way he handles her like a doll.*



**Mrs. Linde** greets them, and both **Nora** and **Torvald** are shocked to see her there so late. Mrs. Linde says she was too late to catch them before they went upstairs but says she wanted to see them before leaving. Torvald says that Nora is indeed "worth looking at." He says that everybody at the party thought she was lovely, but adds that she is stubborn, and that he had to use force to get her to leave. Nora says that Torvald will soon be sorry he didn't let her stay longer. Torvald recalls the evening, saying Nora danced the **tarantella** well and was wildly applauded, although the dance was perhaps too realistic. He explains that he then wanted to take Nora immediately after so as not to "spoil the effect," saying that exits must be dramatic, but that Nora doesn't understand this.

*In this passage it is clear that Torvald is thinking of Nora far more as a possession that he can flaunt in order to impress other people than a real person with her own thoughts and feelings. To him, Nora was at the party merely to perform for the enjoyment of him and others, not to have a good time herself.*



**Torvald** notices that it is dark and goes in to light candles. While he is out of earshot, **Nora** asks **Mrs. Linde** what has happened. Mrs. Linde replies that she has spoken to Krogstad and that Nora has nothing to fear from him, but that Nora must tell Torvald everything. Nora responds: "I knew it" and says she won't tell Torvald. Mrs. Linde says that then the letter will tell Torvald for her. Nora thanks her and says she now knows what must happen.

*Nora's bitter reaction to the fact that Mrs. Linde did not get Krogstad to retrieve the letter shows that she has cut herself off even from her close friends in her obsession with the secret of the debt. All the hope and innocence seems to have drained out of her, and she has become a much more serious, grave person.*



**Torvald** returns and asks if **Mrs. Linde** has finished admiring **Nora**. Mrs. Linde says she has and that she must go. Torvald reminds her to take her knitting, and suggests that she should embroider instead, as embroidery is prettier than knitting. Mrs. Linde bids them goodnight and tells Nora to stop being so stubborn. Once she is gone, Torvald remarks that she is "a frightful bore."

*Torvald's harsh judgment of Mrs. Linde and recommendation that she embroider because it's "prettier" suggests he thinks women's value lies in their looks.*



**Nora** asks **Torvald** if he is tired, but he says he is extremely lively. Nora admits that she is very tired and wants to go to sleep, and Torvald asks if he wasn't then right that they shouldn't have stayed longer. Nora tells him that everything he does is right, but says it without much conviction. Torvald points out that now she is talking common sense again, and asks her if she noticed how happy Dr. Rank seemed. Nora says she didn't get a chance to talk to him.

*This exchange suggests that Nora is beginning to see the emptiness of her role as a woman who always obeys her husband unquestioningly. Torvald doesn't seem to notice her increasing disillusionment, showing his obliviousness to her thoughts.*



**Torvald** says how happy he is to be alone with **Nora**. Nora asks that he not look at her “like that,” and Torvald responds by asking if he can’t look at his “most treasured possession.” He says that he can tell she still has the **tarantella** in her blood and that makes her even more desirable. He delivers a speech explaining that when they are out at a party together he does not talk to Nora much, instead pretending that they are secretly in love and engaged. He then says that when they leave he pretends that they have just got married and that he is taking Nora to their new home for the first time. He tells her that as he was watching her perform the tarantella his “blood was on fire” and that was why he took her downstairs immediately after. Nora continues to refuse him, telling him to leave her alone. Torvald asks if this is a game Nora is playing, and reminds her that he is her husband.

*In this speech we see that Torvald's love and desire for Nora relies more on a fantasy than an appreciation for who she truly is as a person. He talks about his sexual desire for her with no consideration of whether she is feeling the same way at the moment; indeed, when she tells him that she doesn't want to be with him that night, he dismisses her feelings by saying she must be playing a game. In reminding her that he is her husband, Torvald is suggesting that their marriage means Nora does not have the right to refuse sex with him, a commonly held belief at the time.*



There is a knock at the door, and **Dr. Rank** announces himself. **Torvald** is annoyed by the intrusion, but greets Dr. Rank in a friendly way. Dr. Rank explains that he heard the sound of their voices and just wanted to stop by. He tells them what a good time he had upstairs and talks about how excellent the wine and champagne were. **Nora** remarks that Torvald also drank a lot of champagne. Dr. Rank says he was celebrating the best possible results of a laboratory test, saying that he now has “certainty.” Nora comments that he is fond of masquerades, and asks what she and Torvald should go as next time. Torvald remarks that it is “frivolous” that Nora is already thinking about the next time, but Dr. Rank responds that she should go as Lady Luck and simply wear her everyday clothes. Nora asks what Dr. Rank will be, and he replies “invisible.” He asks Torvald for a cigar, lights it, and bids them goodnight. Nora tells him “sleep well” and asks that he tell her the same. He does, and exits. Torvald remarks that he seemed drunk, and Nora absently agrees.

*The source of Dr. Rank's joy seems to not only lie in the fact that he is now certain of his impending death but also his newfound ability to indulge in earthly pleasures such as cigars and alcohol without worry. This is ironic, as he is convinced that his father's consumption of luxurious food and alcohol was what caused his spinal tuberculosis. Although Dr. Rank drops several quite obvious hints that he is about to die, Torvald and, to a lesser extent, Nora seem fairly oblivious, revealing the extent to which they are too wrapped up in their own lives to truly notice anything around them.*



**Torvald** goes to the letter box and says he must empty it. He notices that somebody has tried to open the lock, and finds one of **Nora's** hairpins. She says it must have been the **children**, and Torvald instructs her to tell them not to play with it. Looking through the mail, he finds two visiting cards from **Dr. Rank** with black crosses above his name. He remarks that it is as if Dr. Rank is announcing his death, and Nora replies that he is, explaining that Dr. Rank told her that he would not see them when he died. Nora says she thinks it's best when that sort of thing happens without words. Torvald, not paying much attention to her, gives a speech about how he can't imagine Dr. Rank gone, saying that his suffering provided a background that made Torvald and Nora's happiness even brighter. He says that it may be for the best that Dr. Rank's suffering will end, for Rank himself and for Nora and Torvald, as it will now be just the two of them.

*The momentary distraction of the appearance of Dr. Rank's symbolic visiting cards builds suspense for Torvald's eventual discovery of the letter from Krogstad. Torvald's reaction to learning that he will never see Dr. Rank again is unfeeling and selfish. His view that Dr. Rank's suffering made his own life seem even happier suggests that the basis of his happiness is highly superficial and dependent on the idea that he has a better life than others. Torvald's lack of sadness at Dr. Rank's death shows that he must not have been a very good friend.*



**Torvald** holds **Nora** and says that he sometimes wishes her life were in danger so that he could risk everything to save her. Nora tears herself away and tells Torvald to read his letters. At first Torvald says he will leave them until the morning because he just wants to be with Nora that night, but Nora asks if he can do that knowing that **Dr. Rank** is dying. Torvald concedes that he does feel unsettled and that “an ugly thing” has come between them because now they are thinking of death. He resolves that they go to sleep separately and kisses Nora goodnight. She puts her arms around his neck and bids him goodnight too.

*Torvald's supposed desire to risk everything for Nora's sake is revealed as false at the end of the play when the “miracle” she was hoping for—that he take the blame for her crime—does not happen. At this point, Nora's embrace with Torvald before she goes to bed shows that she does have a small lingering affection for him, but we get the sense that this is disappearing fast.*



**Torvald** takes the letters into his study. **Nora**, wild-eyed, wraps Torvald's cloak around herself and whispers about never seeing him and the **children** again. She talks of black icy water and wishes it were all over. She says goodbye out loud to Torvald and her children and goes to leave. However, she is stopped by Torvald pushing open the door of his study.

*Nora is preparing to kill herself, perhaps the ultimate symbol of self-sacrifice. Her whispering murmurs on the stage suggests that she is descending into madness, and her resemblance to the many other literary heroines who go mad before killing themselves is clear.*



**Torvald** holds up the letter and asks if **Nora** knows what's in it. She admits that she does, and asks that he let her go, insisting that he not try to save her. **Torvald** asks in disbelief if what **Krogstad** writes is true, and **Nora** says it is, saying she loved **Torvald** more than anything in the world. He says this is a "paltry excuse," calls her a "miserable woman" and asks what it is she's done. **Nora** tells him again to let her go and not to try and take the blame for her. He tells her to stop play-acting, locks the front door, and says she must stay to give an account of herself.

**Torvald** paces up and down, saying that in the eight years they have been married, **Nora** has been "a hypocrite, a liar, worse than that, a criminal!" He says he should have realized something like this would happen because her father had no religion, morals, or sense of duty. He claims that this is his punishment for turning a blind eye to **Nora's** father. He says that **Nora** has ruined his happiness and jeopardized his future, as he is now at the mercy of **Krogstad**. He says he must now do whatever **Krogstad** wants, and all because of **Nora**, who he calls "a feather-brained woman."

**Nora** promises **Torvald** that after she dies, he will be free. **Torvald** says she is pretending and says it would not do him any good if she died, because **Krogstad** could still tell other people about **Nora's** crime and that people might even suspect **Torvald** was an accomplice, or that he was behind it. He asks if **Nora** understands what she has done to him, and adds that it is after he has taken care of her so well all through their marriage. **Nora** replies coldly that she understands.

**Torvald** tells **Nora** to take her shawl off and begins to talk about what he plans to do next. He says he will try to find a way of appeasing **Krogstad**, and will make sure that nobody finds out about the whole situation. He tells **Nora** that things must appear to be the same between them, but that he will not let her raise the children, as he can't trust her to do so. He insists that they must preserve appearances.

*Nora's repeated insistence that Torvald not take the blame reveals a misguided and, it turns out, overly optimistic belief that he would do that. His reaction to Krogstad's letter suggests that he has lost all his love and respect for her in an instant, and his totally unforgiving attitude shows the precariousness and superficiality of their relationship.*



*Here is another example of the belief in how parents influence children, with the specific idea that moral corruption is passed from parent to child. The fact that Torvald doesn't even consider standing up to Krogstad shows that Krogstad was right to suggest that Torvald didn't have "courage" and wouldn't defend Nora.*



*Torvald's reaction to the knowledge that Nora wants to kill herself is harsh and entirely self-centered, suggesting he doesn't care for Nora at all. Throughout this whole section of the play Torvald only thinks of himself and doesn't pause to consider the way Nora has been and will be affected by Krogstad's threats, or that Nora did what she did purely out of love for him.*



*Torvald's thoughts about preserving appearances reveal that respectability matters more to him than his own happiness, the happiness of others, or love. It also suggests that he believes that, no matter how badly he treats Nora, she will continue to obey him and play along with whatever plan he devises.*



The doorbell rings. **Torvald** tells **Nora** to hide, but she doesn't move. The **maid** enters and says there is a note for **Nora**. **Torvald** snatches it and says **Nora** cannot read it. He announces that it is from **Krogstad**. He reads it, and cries out that he is saved. **Nora** asks about herself, and he adds that she is also saved. He reveals that **Krogstad** has sent **Nora's** IOU back, saying his circumstances have improved and that he regrets what he did. **Torvald** rips up the IOU and throws it in the fire, telling **Nora** that nobody can do anything to her now. He says that in the note **Krogstad** has written that **Nora** knew about the forgery and **Krogstad's** threat since Christmas eve, and **Torvald** says how hard it must have been for her. **Nora** says that yes, it has been hard.

**Torvald** talks about the "agonies" that **Nora** must have suffered, but then declares that they should forget all about it. He says they can rejoice because the whole thing is over. He asks **Nora** why she still looks down, and before she can reply says it must be because she can't believe **Torvald** has forgiven her. He tells her that he has forgiven her because he knows that she did what she did because she loved him, and that she simply didn't have the experience to know what to do. He says that he doesn't love her any less for that, and that she need only rely on him for guidance. He tells her he wouldn't really be a man if he didn't find women more attractive when they are helpless. He tells her to forget about what he said when he first found out about the debt, because now he has forgiven her. **Nora** thanks him for his forgiveness, and goes to leave.

**Torvald** asks **Nora** where she is going, and she answers that she is going to take off her dress from the dance. He tells her that's a good idea, and that she should get some rest. He uses imagery of **Nora** as a hunted dove who he has rescued and will look after, saying that tomorrow she will see things differently and that everything will seem like it once was. He asks her if she really thought he was going to turn her out, saying that that is not what a real man would do. He says that it is a satisfying feeling for a man to know he has forgiven his wife, because it makes her his property in two senses: she is now both his wife and his child. He tells her not to worry about anything, and that he will make all the decision for her.

*Torvald's snatching of the note addressed to Nora shows that he doesn't believe she has the right to privacy. The fact that his first words after reading it are "I'm saved" is telling; Torvald has only considered this situation in light of his own fate, with Nora barely even existing as an afterthought.*



*Torvald's sudden, more forgiving way of talking to Nora highlights the fact that he understood as soon as he first read the letter from Krogstad that she had been forced to borrow the money and couldn't really be blamed for the consequences. This makes his initial reaction to the situation even more awful. His belief that he is doing her a great kindness in forgiving her—and doing so only after the consequences of forgiving her are no longer dire—conveys how deluded he is. His statement about finding a helpless woman doubly as attractive highlights the warped effect ideas about gender at the time had on marriage and relationships.*



*Torvald, rather than foreseeing that the unfolding events will be the destruction of his marriage, is so deluded that he believes his and Nora's relationship will emerge even stronger and more to his liking. His comment that Nora is now doubly his property and like a child to him reveals explicitly the extent to which he does not believe she is an autonomous adult, and that treating her like a child and his property is the proper way to behave within a marriage.*



Nora returns, wearing her everyday clothes. **Torvald**, surprised, asks why she's not in bed. Nora replies that she won't sleep that night, and asks Torvald to sit down so they can talk. Torvald says he is frightened and doesn't understand, and Nora replies that this is exactly her point; he does not understand her. She asks that he doesn't interrupt and simply listens to her. She asks if it is striking to him that, in their eight years of marriage, this is the first time they have had a serious conversation together. Torvald says it depends what she means by serious, and says he wouldn't have wanted to get her involved in things that would worry her. Nora, however, replies that she is not talking about things that would worry her.

*Nora has evidently undergone a transformation both visually and in the way she speaks to Torvald. For the first time, she is addressing him as an equal and demanding that he treat her with respect by listening and not interrupting.*



Nora explains that **Torvald** has never understood her and that she has been wronged both by him and her father. Torvald, shocked, asks how that can be true of the two people who loved her more than anyone else. Nora replies that neither of them really loved her, only thought how nice it was to be in love with her. She explains that she felt pressured to think the exact same way as her father. She adds that he played with her as she played with her dolls, and that it is the same now she is married to Torvald. She says she has survived by doing "tricks" for Torvald, and that it is his fault she has never made anything of herself.

*Nora's sudden insight into her relationships with Torvald and her father is surprising and cathartic. The fact that she claims to have lived by doing "tricks" for Torvald is certainly backed up by all their talk of her singing, dancing, and otherwise performing for him. To blame Torvald and her father for the fact that she has never become the person she wants to be would have been an extremely radical and shocking claim at the time.*



**Torvald**, infuriated, says that **Nora** is being ungrateful. He asks if she was happy in their marriage, and Nora replies that she only thought she was happy, but in reality she wasn't. She explains that, although Torvald has been kind to her, she has only ever been his doll-wife, just as she was her father's doll-child, saying she found it fun when Torvald came to play with her. Torvald concedes that although Nora is speaking in an "exaggerated and hysterical" way, there is some truth to what she says. He adds that now it will be different, promising that playtime will end and there will now be lessons for both her and the children. Nora tells him that he is not able to teach her how to be a good wife to him, and that she is not able to teach the children, as he pointed out only a moment ago. Torvald tells her to ignore what he said earlier, but she says he was right, and that she must now go about educating herself.

*This is the first time that the metaphor of the doll's house becomes explicitly clear in the play. Nora's comments about being a doll-wife suggest that every marriage in which the wife is in some way controlled by the husband is comparable to a doll's house, a daring assertion at the time. It is significant that Torvald does not disagree with her, but rather agrees and yet sees nothing wrong with the idea of having a doll-wife. This reveals the extent to which such relationships were accepted and even encouraged by society as healthy and normal.*



**Nora** reveals to **Torvald** that she is planning to leave him immediately, and that she will go to stay with **Mrs. Linde** for the night. Torvald forbids her, but Nora says there's no use, and that she will take only her personal belongings and nothing of his. She tells him that the next day she will go back to her old home, where it will be easier for her to find something to do. Torvald says that this is madness and that Nora is blind and inexperienced. Nora points out that she is trying to get experience.

*Mrs. Linde and Nora's childhood home both (at least for now) symbolize the status of being an unmarried woman, an identity that Nora believes will afford her more freedom.*



**Torvald** asks if she cares about leaving her husband and children, or what people will say. **Nora** replies that she has no interest in what people say, and that leaving is necessary for her, with an emphasis on the word "me." Torvald says that she is betraying her "most sacred duty" to her husband and children. Nora replies that she has an equally sacred duty to herself. Torvald refutes this, saying she is "first and foremost a wife and mother." But Nora says that even though this is what most people think, she no longer believes it, arguing that she is primarily an individual and must think for herself.

*For Torvald, a woman's duty to her husband and children and her reputation within society are clearly interlinked. Because Nora now has little interest in her reputation, she is able to overcome the idea of a duty to others and focus on herself. Torvald clearly considers women to be wives and mothers before they are even people; it is only after much struggle that Nora is able to refute this belief.*



**Torvald** asks if **Nora** does not have an infallible guide to the question of her position in the home and in life: her religion. Nora replies that she doesn't really know what religion is, and intends to figure out her thoughts on the subject when she goes away. Torvald replies that if religion cannot keep Nora "on the right path," then he will try to awaken her moral conscience, if she has one. Nora replies that she doesn't know, and that it's not an easy thing to judge. She says she knows that her morals are different from Torvald's, and also different from the law's, which she believes must be wrong as it did not preserve her right to protect her husband and father on his deathbed. Torvald replies that she is talking like a child and doesn't understand society. Nora replies that she doesn't, but wants to learn.

*Nora's radically modern view of religion would have been highly scandalous at the time. She also seems to be an advocate of moral relativism, the belief that there are no fixed, objective moral rules but rather that morality means different things to different people. This, along with her criticism of the law, are all sophisticated ideas, but Torvald responds to them by saying she is talking like a child. However, Torvald's refusal to critically evaluate the rules of society suggests that it is actually he who is naive and ignorant, not Nora.*



**Torvald** says **Nora** is ill and delirious. **Nora** replies that she has never felt so calm and collected, and **Torvald** says that the only explanation behind what she is doing then must be that she doesn't love him anymore. **Nora** confirms that this is true, that she is sorry because he has always been kind to her, but that she can't help not loving him. She explains that she fell out of love with **Torvald** when the miracle she was waiting for didn't happen, and that **Torvald** is therefore not the man she thought he was. She says that she hoped that when **Torvald** learned of **Krogstad's** demands, he would not give in and tell **Krogstad** to tell the whole world. She hoped he would then step forward and take the blame for everything. However, **Torvald** was not willing to sacrifice himself for her.

*In this section, it becomes clear that **Nora** has an additional reason for leaving **Torvald**, related but nevertheless distinct from her thoughts on religion, society, and individuality: she no longer loves **Torvald**. The fact that she has both an emotional and intellectual basis for deciding to leave proves that it is not the rash, insane decision that **Torvald** is making it out to be, but rather, as **Nora** claims, a rather rational one. **Nora** had expected **Torvald** to "act like a man" and offer to protect her even if it ruined him, but in discovering that he would do no such thing she realized that she had misunderstood the entire structure of their marriage. She had thought that there was love beneath the roles, but in fact there were just the roles.*



**Torvald** tells **Nora** that nobody sacrifices his honor for the person he loves, but **Nora** replies that thousands of women have done so. **Torvald** repeats that **Nora** thinks and talks like "a stupid child." **Nora** responds that **Torvald** thinks like someone she would not want to spend her life with. She points out that once he received the IOU back from **Krogstad**, he wanted to go on pretending that nothing had happened, except to protect **Nora** even more because he had realized how weak she supposedly was. She says that this made her realize she had been married to a stranger. She says she cannot bear to even think about it, and that the thought makes her want to tear herself to shreds.

***Nora** and **Torvald's** exchange about honor and love is interesting: it highlights a disparity between the genders in that men were expected to put their reputation first, whereas women were often forced to disregard their own honor for the sake of others. **Nora's** comment that she is married to a "stranger" shows the extent to which her view of the world as changed; her old life is unfamiliar and even repulsive to her.*



**Torvald** acknowledges sadly that there is a "tremendous gulf" between them, and asks if there is any way to bridge it. He even promises to change, but **Nora** says the only way that would be possible were if his "doll" were to be taken away. **Torvald** says he cannot imagine being separated from her, and **Nora** replies that this is why she must go. She gets her things ready, and **Torvald** begs her to at least wait until the morning. She insists that she can't spend the night in a strange man's room. He asks that they stay living together "as brother and sister," but **Nora** says it couldn't last. She bids him goodbye and says she doesn't want to see the **children**, knowing they are in better hands.

*This is a turning point in **Torvald's** attitude to **Nora**. While at first he—perhaps convinced that she would not really go—called her actions insane and childish, he is now taking what she says seriously and even offering to change for her. This suggests that there is a part of **Torvald** that does perhaps truly love **Nora**. **Nora's** cold attitude towards both him and the children, which would have been considered outrageous at the time, reveals the intensity of her convictions, and that **Torvald** himself isn't the sole problem—the institution of marriage itself is.*



**Torvald** asks if some day things might change. **Nora** says she cannot know what she will be in the future, and **Torvald** says she will always be his wife. **Nora** points out that when a wife leaves her husband, he is absolved of responsibility of her, and that this is necessary for both of them to feel free. She gives him her wedding ring, and asks for his. **Nora** says the maids know the house better than she does, and that **Mrs. Linde** will come the next day to have **Nora's** belongings packed and shipped. **Torvald** asks if **Nora** will think of him, and **Nora** replies that she reckons she will think of him and her **children** often. He asks if he can write to her but she refuses. He asks if he can offer to help her, but **Nora** replies that she does not accept help from strangers.

*Here **Nora** conducts what can be considered an unofficial divorce ceremony. Although **Torvald** doesn't want her to go, the fact that he agrees to give her his ring and not to write or try to help her shows that he finally respects her wishes and ability to make decisions for herself. **Nora's** comment that the maids know the house better than she does suggests that the role of wives of **Nora's** social class was something of a façade, and that this is perhaps one of the reasons why she feels she has to escape her marriage.*



**Torvald** asks if there is any way that he could one day be more than a stranger to **Nora**. **Nora** replies only by "a miracle of miracles," if both of them would change. **Torvald** seems hopeful, but **Nora** says she no longer believes in miracles. **Torvald** says he does believe, and asks how he must change. **Nora** said he would have to change to a point where they could make their marriage work. She bids him goodbye and exits. **Torvald** sinks to a chair with his face in his hands and cries out **Nora's** name. He looks around at the room and exclaims that it is empty. He looks up with sudden hope, saying: "the miracle of miracles?" The play ends with the sound of the door slamming shut.

*The final moments of the play deal with the theme of the destruction of hope. **Nora's** capacity for hope has already been destroyed, as shown by the fact that she says she no longer believes in miracles. Meanwhile, the devastated **Torvald** has one final moment of hope at the very end of the play; however, the decisive slam of the door brings this moment to an abrupt end, finally shattering the illusion of his and **Nora's** marriage.*

