

A DOLL'S HOUSE

by Henrik Ibsen

MRS Linden, Nora, Ellen, Krogstad

[ELLEN ushers in MRS.LINDEN, in travelling costume, and goes out, closing the door.]

MRS. Linden: How do you do, Nora?

Nora: How do you do?

MRS. Linden: I see you don't recognise me!

Nora: No, I don't think- oh yes! - I believe - What, Christina! Is it really you?

MRS. Linden: Yes; really I!

Nora: Christina! And to think I didn't know you! But how could I- How changed you are; Christina!

MRS. Linden: Yes, no doubt. In nine or ten years-

Nora: Is it really so long since we met? Yes, so it is. Oh, the last eight years have been a happy time, I can tell you. And now you have come to town? All that long journey in midwinter! How brave of you!

MRS. Linden: I arrived by this morning's steamer.

Nora: To have a merry Christmas, of course. Oh, how delightful! Yes, we will have a merry Christmas. Do take your things off. Aren't you frozen? There; now we'll sit cosily by the fire. No, you take the armchair; I shall sit in this rocking-chair. Yes, now I can see the dear old face again. It was only at the first glance But you're a little paler, Christina- and perhaps a little thinner.

MRS. Linden: And much, much older, Nora.

Nora: Yes, perhaps a little older- not much - ever so little. Oh, what a thoughtless wretch I am! Here I sit chattering on, and- Dear, dear Christina, can you forgive me!

MRS. Linden: What do you mean, Nora?

Nora: Poor Christina! I forgot: you are a widow.

MRS. Linden: Yes; my husband died three years ago.

Nora: I know, I know; I saw it in the papers. Oh, believe me, Christina, I did mean to write to you; but I kept putting it off, and something always came in the way.

MRS. Linden: I can quite understand that, Nora dear.

Nora: No, Christina; it was horrid of me. Oh, you poor darling! How much you must have gone through! - And he left you nothing?

MRS. Linden: Nothing.

Nora: And no children?

MRS. Linden: None.

Nora: Nothing, nothing at all?

MRS. Linden: Not even a sorrow or a longing to dwell upon.

Nora: My dear Christina, how is that possible?

MRS. Linden: Oh, it happens so sometimes, Nora.

Nora: So utterly alone! How dreadful that must be! I have three of the loveliest children. I can't show them

to you just now; they're out with their nurse. But now you must tell me everything.

MRS. Linden: No, no; I want you to tell me-

Nora: No, you must begin; I won't be egotistical to day. To-day I'll think only of you. Oh! but I must tell you one thing- perhaps you've heard of our great stroke of fortune?

MRS. Linden: No. What is it?

Nora: Only think! My husband has been made manager of the Joint Stock Bank.

MRS. Linden: Your husband! Oh, how fortunate!

Nora: Yes; isn't it? A lawyer's position is so uncertain, you see, especially when he won't touch any business that's the least bit shady, as of course Torvald never would; and there I quite agree with him. Oh! you can imagine how glad we are. He is to enter on his new position at the New Year, and then he'll have a large salary, and percentages. In future we shall be able to live quite differently- just as we please, in fact. Oh, Christina, I feel so light hearted and happy! It's delightful to have lots of money, and no need to worry about things, isn't it?

MRS. Linden: Yes; at any rate it must be delightful to have what you need.

Nora: No, not only what you need, but heaps of money - heaps!

MRS. Linden: Nora, Nora, haven't you learnt reason yet? In our school days you were a shocking little spendthrift

Nora: Yes; that's what Torvald says I am still. But "Nora, Nora" is not so silly as you all think. Oh! I

haven't had the chance to be much of a spendthrift. We have both had to work.

MRS. Linden: You too?

Nora: Yes, light fancy work: crochet, and embroidery, and things of that sort; and other work too. You know, of course, that Torvald left the Government service when we were married. He had little chance of promotion, and of course he required to make more money. But in the first year after our marriage he overworked himself terribly. He had to undertake all sorts of extra work, you know, and to slave early and late. He couldn't stand it, and fell dangerously ill. Then the doctors declared he must go to the South.

MRS. Linden: You spent a whole year in Italy, didn't you?

Nora: Yes, we did. It wasn't easy to manage, I can tell you. It was just after Ivar's birth. But of course we had to go. Oh, it was a wonderful, delicious journey! And it saved Torvald's life. But it cost a frightful lot of money, Christina.

MRS. Linden: So I should think.

Nora: Twelve hundred dollars! Four thousand eight hundred crowns! * Isn't that a lot of money?

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* The dollar (4s. 6d.) was the old unit of currency in Norway. The crown was substituted for it shortly before the date of this play.
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MRS. Linden: How lucky you had the money to spend!

Nora: We got it from father, you must know.

MRS. Linden: Ah, I see. He died just about that time, didn't he?

Nora: Yes, Christina, just then. And only think! I couldn't go and nurse him! I was expecting little Ivar's birth daily; and then I had my poor sick Torvald to attend to. Dear, kind old father! I never saw him again, Christina. Oh! that's the hardest thing I have had to bear since my marriage.

MRS. Linden: I know how fond you were of him. But then you went to Italy?

Nora: Yes; you see, we had the money, and the doctors said we must lose no time. We started a month later.

MRS. Linden: And your husband came back completely cured.

Nora: Sound as a bell

MRS. Linden: But - the doctor?

Nora: What do you mean?

MRS. Linden: I thought as I came in your servant announced the doctor-

Nora: Oh, yes; Doctor Rank. But he doesn't come professionally. He is our best friend, and never lets a day pass without looking in. No, Torvald hasn't had an hour's illness since that time. And the children are so healthy and well, and so am I. Oh, Christina, Christina, what a wonderful thing it is to live and to be happy! Oh, but it's really too horrid of me! Here am I talking about nothing but my own concerns. Oh. don't be angry with me! Now tell me, is it really true that you didn't love your husband? What made you marry him, then?

MRS. Linden: My mother was still alive, you see, bedridden and helpless; and then I had my two younger brothers to think of. I didn't think it would be right for me to refuse him.

Nora: Perhaps it wouldn't have been. I suppose he was rich then?

MRS. Linden: Very well off, I believe. But his business was uncertain. It fell to pieces at his death, and there was nothing left.

Nora: And then- ?

MRS. Linden: Then I had to fight my way by keeping a shop, a little school, anything I could turn my hand to. The last three years have been one long struggle for me. But now it is over, Nora. My poor mother no longer needs me; she is at rest. And the boys are in business, and can look after themselves.

Nora: How free your life must feel!

MRS. Linden: No, Nora; only inexpressibly empty. No one to live for! That's why I could not bear to stay any longer in that out-of-the-way corner. Here it must be easier to find something to take one up to occupy one's thoughts. If I could only get some settled employment - some office work.

Nora: But, Christina, that's such drudgery, and you look worn out already. It would be ever so much better for you to go to some watering place and rest.

MRS. Linden: I have no father to give me the money, Nora.

Nora: Oh, don't be vexed with me.

MRS. Linden: My dear Nora, don't you be vexed with me. The worst of a position like mine is that it makes one so

bitter. You have no one to work for, yet you have to be always on the strain. You must live; and so you become selfish. When I heard of the happy change in your fortunes - can you believe it? - I was glad for my own sake more than for yours.

Nora: How do you mean? Ah, I see! You think Torvald can perhaps do something for you.

MRS. Linden: Yes; I thought so.

Nora: And so he shall, Christina. Just you leave it all to me. I shall lead up to it beautifully! - I shall think of some delightful plan to put him in a good humour! Oh, I should so love to help you.

MRS. Linden: How good of you, Nora, to stand by me so warmly! Doubly good in you, who knows so little of the troubles and burdens of life.

Nora: I? I know so little of - ?

MRS. Linden: Oh, well - a little fancy-work, and so forth.- You're a child, Nora.

Nora: Oh, come, you mustn't be so patronising!

MRS. Linden: No?

Nora: You're like the rest. You all think I'm fit for nothing really serious -

MRS. Linden: Well, well -

Nora: You think I've had no troubles in this weary world.

MRS. Linden: My dear Nora, you've just told me all your troubles.

Nora: Pooh - those trifles! I haven't told you the great thing.

MRS. Linden: The great thing? What do you mean?

Nora: I know you look down upon me, Christina; but you have no right to. You are proud of having worked so hard and so long for your mother.

MRS. Linden: I am sure I don't look down upon any one; but it's true I am both proud and glad when I remember that I was able to keep my mother's last days free from care.

Nora: And you're proud to think of what you have done for your brothers, too.

MRS. Linden: Have I not the right to be?

Nora: Yes indeed. But now let me tell you, Christina - I, too, have something to be proud and glad of.

MRS. Linden: I don't doubt it. But what do you mean?

Nora: Hush! Not so loud. Only think, if Torvald were to hear! He mustn't- not - mustn't - not for worlds! No one must know about it, Christina no one but you.

MRS. Linden: Why, what can it be?

Nora: Come over here. Yes, Christina I, too, have something to be proud and glad of. I saved Torvald's life.

MRS. Linden: Saved his life? How?

Nora: I told you about our going to Italy Torvald would have died but for that.

MRS. Linden: Well - and your father gave you the money.

Nora: Yes, so Torvald and every one believes; but

MRS. Linden: But - ?

Nora: Papa didn't give us one penny. It was I that found the money.

MRS. Linden: You? All that money?

Nora: Twelve hundred dollars. Four thousand eight hundred crowns. What do you say to that?

MRS. Linden: My dear Nora, how did you manage it? Did you win it in the lottery?

Nora: In the lottery? Pooh! Any one could have done that!

MRS. Linden: Then wherever did you get it from?

Nora: H'm; tra-la-la-la!

MRS. Linden: Of course you couldn't borrow it.

Nora: No? Why not?

MRS. Linden: Why, a wife can't borrow without her husband's consent.

Nora: Oh! when the wife has some idea of business, and knows how to set about things

MRS. Linden: But, Nora, I don't understand

Nora: Well, you needn't. I never said I borrowed the money. There are many ways I may have got it. I may have got it from some admirer. When one is so - attractive as I am -

MRS. Linden: You're too silly, Nora.

Nora: Now I'm sure you're dying of curiosity,
Christina-

MRS. Linden: Listen to me, Nora dear: haven't you been a
little rash?

Nora: Is it rash to save one's husband's life?

MRS. Linden: I think it was rash of you, without his
knowledge-

Nora: But it would have been fatal for him to know!
Can't you understand that? He wasn't even to suspect
how ill he was. The doctors came to me privately and
told me his life was in danger- that nothing could save
him but a winter in the South. Do you think I didn't try
diplomacy first? I told him how I longed to have a trip
abroad, like other young wives; I wept and prayed; I
said he ought to think of my condition, and not to
thwart me; and then I hinted that he could borrow the
money. But then, Christina, he got almost angry. He
said I was frivolous, and that it was his duty as a
husband not to yield to my whims and fancies so he
called them. Very well, thought I, but saved you must
be; and then I found the way to do it.

MRS. Linden: And did your husband never learn from your
father that the money was not from him?

Nora: No; never. Papa died at that very time. I
meant to have told him all about it, and begged him to
say nothing. But he was so ill - unhappily, it wasn't
necessary.

MRS. Linden: And you have never confessed to your
husband?

Nora: Good heavens! What can you be thinking of? Tell him when he has such a loathing of debt And besides- how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly self-respect, to know that he owed anything to me! It would utterly upset the relation between us; our beautiful, happy home would never again be what it is.

MRS. Linden: Will you never tell him?

Nora: Yes, some time perhaps - many, many years hence, when I'm- not so pretty. You mustn't laugh at me! Of course I mean when Torvald is not so much in love with me as he is now; when it doesn't amuse him any longer to see me dancing about, and dressing up and acting. Then it might be well to have something in reserve. Nonsense! nonsense! That time will never come. Now, what do you say to my grand secret, Christina? Am I fit for nothing now? You may believe it has cost me a lot of anxiety. It has been no joke to meet my engagements punctually. You must know, Christina, that in business there are things called instalments, and quarterly interest, that are terribly hard to provide for. So I've had to pinch a little here and there, wherever I could. I couldn't save much out of the housekeeping, for of course Torvald had to live well. And I couldn't let the children go about badly dressed; all I got for them, I spent on them, the blessed darlings!

MRS. Linden: Poor Nora! So it had to come out of your own pocket-money.

Nora: Yes, of course. After all, the whole thing was my doing. When Torvald gave me money for clothes, and so on, I never spent more than half of it; I always bought the simplest and cheapest things. It's a mercy that everything suits me so well- Torvald never had any suspicions. But it was often very hard, Christina

dear. For it's nice to be beautifully dressed now, isn't it?

MRS. Linden: Indeed it is.

Nora: Well, and besides that, I made money in other ways. Last winter I was so lucky- I got a heap of copying to do. I shut myself up every evening and wrote far into the night. Oh, sometimes I was so tired, so tired. And yet it was splendid to work in that way and earn money. I almost felt as if I was a man.

MRS. Linden: Then how much have you been able to pay off?

Nora: Well, I can't precisely say. It's difficult to keep that sort of business clear. I only know that I've paid everything I could scrape together. Sometimes I really didn't know where to turn. Then I used to sit here and pretend that a rich old gentleman was in love with me

MRS. Linden: What! gentleman?

Nora: Oh, nobody!- that he was dead now, and that when his will was opened, there stood in large letters: "Pay over at once everything of which I die possessed to that charming person, Mrs. Nora Helmer."

MRS. Linden: But, my dear Nora- what gentleman do you mean?

Nora: Oh dear, can't you understand? There wasn't any old gentleman: it was only what I used to dream and dream when I was at my wits' end for money. But it doesn't matter now - the tiresome old creature may stay where he is for me. I care nothing for him or his will; for now my troubles are over. Oh, Christina, how glorious it is to think of! Free from all anxiety! Free, quite free. To be able to play and romp about with the children; to have things tasteful and pretty in the

house, exactly as Torvald likes it! And then the spring will soon be here, with the great blue sky. Perhaps then we shall have a little holiday. Perhaps I shall see the sea again. Oh, what a wonderful thing it is to live and to be happy!

[The hall-door bell rings.]

MRS. Linden: There's a ring. Perhaps I had better go.

Nora: No; do stay. No one will come here. It's sure to be some one for Torvald.

Ellen: If you please, ma'am, there's a gentleman to speak to Mr. Helmer.

Nora: Who is the gentleman?

Krogstad: It is I, Mrs. Helmer.

Nora: You? What is it? What do you want with my husband?

Krogstad: Bank business- in a way. I hold a small post in the Joint Stock Bank, and your husband is to be our new chief, I hear.

Nora: Then it is - ?

Krogstad: Only tiresome business, Mrs. Helmer; nothing more.

Nora: Then will you please go to his study.
[KROGSTAD goes.] She bows indifferently while she closes the door into the hall. Then she goes to the stove and looks to the fire.

MRS. Linden: Nora- who was that man?

Nora: A Mr. Krogstad- a lawyer.

MRS. Linden: Then it was really he?

Nora: Do you know him?

MRS. Linden: I used to know him - many years ago. He was in a lawyer's office in our town.

Nora: Yes, so he was.

MRS. Linden: How he has changed!

Nora: I believe his marriage was unhappy.

MRS. Linden: And he is a widower now?

Nora: With a lot of children. There! Now it will burn up.

MRS. Linden: His business is not of the most creditable, they say?

Nora: Isn't it? I daresay not. I don't know. But don't let us think of business- it's so tiresome.

[DR. RANK comes out of HELMER'S room.]