

# A DOLL'S HOUSE

*by Henrik Ibsen*

Nora, Helmer

**Helmer:** ..... What is this? Not gone to bed? Have you changed your things?

**Nora** (*in everyday dress*): Yes, Torvald, I have changed my things now.

**Helmer:** But what for?--so late as this.

**Nora:** I shall not sleep tonight.

**Helmer:** But, my dear Nora--

**Nora:** It is not so very late. Sit down here, Torvald. You and I have much to say to one another.

**Helmer:** Nora--what is this?--this cold, set face?

**Nora:** Sit down. It will take some time; I have a lot to talk over with you.

**Helmer:** You alarm me, Nora--and I don't understand you.

**Nora:** No, that is just it. You don't understand me, and I have never understood you either--before tonight. No, you mustn't interrupt me. You must simply listen to what I say. Torvald, this is a settling of accounts.

**Helmer:** What do you mean by that?

**Nora:** Isn't there one thing that strikes you as strange in our sitting here like this?

**Helmer:** What is that?

**Nora:** We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?

**Helmer:** What do you mean by serious?

**Nora:** In all these eight years-longer than that-from the very beginning of our acquaintance, we have never exchanged a word on any serious subject.

**Helmer:** Was it likely that I would be continually and forever telling you about worries that you could not help me to bear?

**Nora:** I am not speaking about business matters. I say that we have never sat down in earnest together to try and get at the bottom of anything.

**Helmer:** But, dearest Nora, would it have been any good to you?

**Nora:** That is just it; you have never understood me. I have been greatly wronged, Torvald-first by papa and then by you.

**Helmer:** What! By us two--by us two, who have loved you better than anyone else in the world?

**Nora:** You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me.

**Helmer:** Nora, what do I hear you saying?

**Nora:** It is perfectly true, Torvald. When I was at home with papa, he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his dollchild, and he played

with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you-

**Helmer:** What sort of an expression is that to use about our marriage?

**Nora:** I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as your else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which-I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman-just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.

**Helmer:** How unreasonable and how ungrateful you are, Nora! Have you not been happy here?

**Nora:** No, I have never been happy. I thought I was, but it has never really been so.

**Helmer:** Not-not happy!

**Nora:** No, only merry. And you have always been so kind to me. But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald.

**Helmer:** There is some truth in what you say-exaggerated and strained as your view of it is. But for the future it shall be different. Playtime shall be over, and lesson-time shall begin.

**Nora:** Whose lessons? Mine, or the children's?

**Helmer:** Both yours and the children's, my darling Nora.

**Nora:** Alas, Torvald, you are not the man to educate me into being a proper wife for you.

**Helmer:** And you can say that!

**Nora:** And I--how am I fitted to bring up the children?

**Helmer:** Nora!

**Nora:** Didn't you say so yourself a little while ago- that you dare not trust me to bring them up?

**Helmer:** In a moment of anger! Why do you pay any heed to that?

**Nora:** Indeed, you were perfectly right. I am not fit for the task. There is another task I must undertake first! I must try and educate myself--you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now.

**Helmer:** What do you say?

**Nora:** I must stand quite alone, if I am to understand myself and everything about me. It is for that reason that I cannot remain with you any longer.

**Helmer:** Nora, Nora!

**Nora:** I am going away from here now, at once. I am sure Christine will take me in for the night--

**Helmer:** You are out of your mind! I won't allow it! I forbid you!

**Nora:** It is no use forbidding me anything any longer. I will take with me what belongs to myself. I will take nothing from you, either now or later.

**Helmer:** What sort of madness is this!

**Nora:** Tomorrow I shall go home- I mean, to my old home. It will be easiest for me to find something to do there.

**Helmer:** You blind, foolish woman!

**Nora:** I must try and get some sense, Torvald.

**Helmer:** To desert your home, your husband and your children! And you don't consider what people will say!

**Nora:** I cannot consider that at all. I only know that it is necessary for me.

**Helmer:** It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

**Nora:** What do you consider my most sacred duties?

**Helmer:** Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

**Nora:** I have other duties just as sacred.

**Helmer:** That you have not. What duties could those be?

**Nora:** Duties to myself.

**Helmer:** Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

**Nora:** I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are- or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people

would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.

**Helmer:** Can you not understand your place in your own home? Have you not a reliable guide in such matters as that?—have you no religion?

**Nora:** I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is.

**Helmer:** What are you saying?

**Nora:** I know nothing but what the clergyman said, when I went to be confirmed. He told us that religion was this, and that, and the other. When I am away from all this, and am alone, I will look into that matter too. I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events if it is true for me.

**Helmer:** This is unheard of in a girl of your age! But if religion cannot lead you aright, let me try and awaken your conscience. I suppose you have some moral sense? Or— answer me— am I to think you have none?

**Nora:** I assure you, Torvald, that is not an easy question to answer. I really don't know. The thing perplexes me altogether. I only know that you and I look at it in quite a different light. I am learning, too, that the law is quite another thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband's life. I can't believe that.

**Helmer:** You talk like a child. You don't understand the conditions of the world in which you live.

**Nora:** No, I don't. But now I am going to try. I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I.

**Helmer:** You are ill, Nora; you are delirious; I almost think you are out of your mind.

**Nora:** I have never felt my mind so clear and certain as tonight.

**Helmer:** And is it with a clear and certain mind that you forsake your husband and your children?

**Nora:** Yes, it is.

**Helmer:** Then there is only one possible explanation.

**Nora:** What is that?

**Helmer:** You do not love me anymore.

**Nora:** No, that is just it.

**Helmer:** Nora!--and you can say that?

**Nora:** It gives me great pain, Torvald, for you have always been so kind to me, but I cannot help it. I do not love you any more.

**Helmer:** Is that a clear and certain conviction too?

**Nora:** Yes, absolutely clear and certain. That is the reason why I will not stay here any longer.

**Helmer:** And can you tell me what I have done to forfeit your love?

**Nora:** Yes, indeed I can. It was tonight, when the wonderful thing did not happen; then I saw you were not the man I had thought you were.

**Helmer:** Explain yourself better. I don't understand you.

**Nora:** I have waited so patiently for eight years; for, goodness knows, I knew very well that wonderful things don't happen every day. Then this horrible misfortune came upon me; and then I felt quite certain that the wonderful thing was going to happen at last. When Krogstad's letter was lying out there, never for a moment did I imagine that you would consent to accept this man's conditions. I was so absolutely certain that you would say to him: Publish the thing to the whole world. And when that was done-

**Helmer:** Yes, what then?--when I had exposed my wife to shame and disgrace?

**Nora:** When that was done, I was so absolutely certain, you would come forward and take everything upon yourself, and say: I am the guilty one.

**Helmer:** Nora--!

**Nora:** You mean that I would never have accepted such a sacrifice on your part? No, of course not. But what would my assurances have been worth against yours? That was the wonderful thing which I hoped for and feared; and it was to prevent that, that I wanted to kill myself.

**Helmer:** I would gladly work night and day for you, Nora-- bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves.

**Nora:** It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done.

**Helmer:** Oh, you think and talk like a heedless child.



**Nora:** Maybe. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could bind myself to. As soon as your fear was over--and it was not fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you--when the whole thing was past, as far as you were concerned it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so brittle and fragile. Torvald--it was then it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living here with a strange man, and had borne him three children -. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself into little bits!

**Helmer:** I see, I see. An abyss has opened between us-- there is no denying it. But, Nora, would it not be possible to fill it up?

**Nora:** As I am now, I am no wife for you.

**Helmer:** I have it in me to become a different man.

**Nora:** Perhaps-- if your doll is taken away from you.

**Helmer:** But to part!--to part from you! No, no, Nora, I can't understand that idea.

**Nora** (*going out*): That makes it all the more certain that it must be done. (*She comes back with her cloak and hat and a small bag*)

**Helmer:** Nora, Nora, not now! Wait until tomorrow.

**Nora:** I cannot spend the night in a strange man's room.

**Helmer:** But can't we live here like brother and sister?

**Nora:** You know very well that would not last long. Goodbye, Torvald. I won't see the little ones. I know

they are in better hands than mine. As I am now, I can be of no use to them.

**Helmer:** But some day, Nora— some day?

**Nora:** How can I tell? I have no idea what is going to become of me.

**Helmer:** But you are my wife, whatever becomes of you.

**Nora:** Listen, Torvald. I have heard that when a wife deserts her husband's house, as I am doing now, he is legally freed from all obligations towards her. In any case, I set you free from all your obligations. You are not to feel yourself bound in the slightest way, any more than I shall. There must be perfect freedom on both sides. See, here is your ring back. Give me mine.

**Helmer:** That too?

**Nora:** That too.

**Helmer:** Here it is.

**Nora:** That's right. Now it is all over. I have put the keys here. The maids know all about everything in the house— better than I do. Tomorrow, after I have left her, Christine will come here and pack up my own things that I brought with me from home. I will have them sent after me.

**Helmer:** All over! All over!—Nora, shall you never think of me again?

**Nora:** I know I shall often think of you, the children, and this house.

**Helmer:** May I write to you, Nora?

**Nora:** No—never. You must not do that.

**Helmer:** But at least let me send you-

**Nora:** Nothing--nothing--

**Helmer:** Let me help you if you are in want.

**Nora:** No. I can receive nothing from a stranger.

**Helmer:** Nora--can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?

**Nora:** Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

**Helmer:** Tell me what that would be!

**Nora:** Both you and I would have to be so changed that--. Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

**Helmer:** But I will believe in it. Tell me! So changed that--?  
?

**Nora:** That our life together would be a real wedlock.  
Goodbye.  
*(She goes out through the hall.)*

**Helmer:** Nora! Nora! Empty. She is gone. The most wonderful thing of all--?

*(The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.)*