

## Ibsen's "A Doll's House"

NORA. Sit down. It will take some time. I have much to talk over with you.

[HELMER sits at the other side of the table.]

HELMER. You alarm me, Nora. I don't understand you.

NORA. No, that is just it. You don't understand me; and I have never understood you- till to-night. No, don't interrupt. Only listen to what I say.- We must come to a final settlement, Torvald.

HELMER. How do you mean?

NORA. [After a short silence.] Does not one thing strike you as we sit here?

HELMER. What should strike me?

NORA. We have been married eight years. Does it not strike you that this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife, have talked together seriously?

HELMER. Seriously! What do you call seriously?

NORA. During eight whole years, and more- ever since the day we first met- we have never exchanged one serious word about serious things.

HELMER. Was I always to trouble you with the cares you could not help me to bear?

NORA. I am not talking of cares. I say that we have never yet set ourselves seriously to get to the bottom of anything.

HELMER. Why, my dearest Nora, what have you to do with serious things?

NORA. There we have it! You have never understood me.- I have had great injustice done me, Torvald; first by father, and then by you.

HELMER. What! By your father and me?- By us, who have loved you more than all the world?

NORA. [Shaking her head.] You have never loved me. You only thought

it amusing to be in love with me.

HELMER. Why, Nora, what a thing to say!

NORA. Yes, it is so, Torvald. While I was at home with father, he used to tell me all his opinions, and I held the same opinions.

If I had others I said nothing about them, because he wouldn't have liked it. He used to call me his doll-child, and played with me as I played with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house-

HELMER. What an expression to use about our marriage!

NORA. [Undisturbed.] I mean I passed from father's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your taste; and I got the same tastes as you; or I pretended to- I don't know which- both ways, perhaps; sometimes one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it now, I seem to have been living here like a beggar, from hand to mouth. I lived by performing tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and father have done me a great wrong. It is your fault that my life has come to nothing.

HELMER. Why, Nora, how unreasonable and ungrateful you are! Have you not been happy here?

NORA. No, never. I thought I was; but I never was.

HELMER. Not- not happy!

NORA. No; only merry. And you have always been so kind to me. But our house has been nothing but a play-room. Here I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I used to be papa's doll-child. And the children, in their turn, have been my dolls. I thought it fun when you played with me, just as the children did when I played with them. That has been our marriage, Torvald.

HELMER. There is some truth in what you say, exaggerated and overstrained though it be. But henceforth it shall be different.

Play-time is over; now comes the time for education.

NORA. Whose education? Mine, or the children's?

HELMER. Both, my dear Nora.

NORA. Oh, Torvald, you are not the man to teach me to be a fit wife for you.

HELMER. And you can say that?

NORA. And I- how have I prepared myself to educate the children?

HELMER. Nora!

NORA. Did you not say yourself, a few minutes ago, you dared not

trust them to me?

HELMER. In the excitement of the moment! Why should you dwell upon that?

NORA. No- you were perfectly right. That problem is beyond me.

There is another to be solved first- I must try to educate myself. You are not the man to help me in that. I must set about it alone. And that is why I am leaving you.

HELMER. [Jumping up.] What- do you mean to say-?

NORA. I must stand quite alone if I am ever to know myself and my surroundings; so I cannot stay with you.

HELMER. Nora! Nora!

NORA. I am going at once. I daresay Christina will take me in for to-night-

HELMER. You are mad! I shall not allow it! I forbid it!

NORA. It is of no use your forbidding me anything now. I shall take with me what belongs to me. From you I will accept nothing, either now or afterwards.

HELMER. What madness this is!

NORA. To-morrow I shall go home- I mean to what was my home. It will be easier for me to find some opening there.

HELMER. Oh, in your blind inexperience-

NORA. I must try to gain experience, Torvald.

HELMER. To forsake your home, your husband, and your children! And you don't consider what the world will say.

NORA. I can pay no heed to that. I only know that I must do it.

HELMER. This is monstrous! Can you forsake your holiest duties in this way?

NORA. What do you consider my holiest duties?

HELMER. Do I need to tell you that? Your duties to your husband and your children.

NORA. I have other duties equally sacred.

HELMER. Impossible! What duties do you mean?

NORA. My duties towards myself.

HELMER. Before all else you are a wife and a mother.

NORA. That I no longer believe. I believe that before all else I am a human being, just as much as you are- or at least that I should try to become one. I know that most people agree with you,

Torvald, and that they say so in books. But henceforth I can't be satisfied with what most people say, and what is in books. I must think things out for myself, and try to get clear about them.

HELMER. Are you not clear about your place in your own home? Have you not an infallible guide in questions like these? Have you not religion?

NORA. Oh, Torvald, I don't really know what religion is.

HELMER. What do you mean?

NORA. I know nothing but what Pastor Hansen told me when I was confirmed. He explained that religion was this and that. When I get away from all this and stand alone, I will look into that matter too. I will see whether what he taught me is right, or, at any rate, whether it is right for me.

HELMER. Oh, this is unheard of! And from so young a woman! But if religion cannot keep you right, let me appeal to your conscience- for I suppose you have some moral feeling? Or, answer me: perhaps you have none?

NORA. Well, Torvald, it's not easy to say. I really don't know- I am all at sea about these things. I only know that I think quite differently from you about them. I hear, too, that the laws are different from what I thought: but I can't believe that they can be right. It appears that a woman has no right to spare her dying father, or to save her husband's life! I don't believe that.

HELMER. You talk like a child. You don't understand the society in which you live.

NORA. No, I do not. But now I shall try to learn. I must make up my mind which is right- society or I.

HELMER. Nora, you are ill; you are feverish; I almost think you are out of your senses.

NORA. I have never felt so much clearness and certainty as to-night.

HELMER. You are clear and certain enough to forsake husband and children?

NORA. Yes, I am.

HELMER. Then there is only one explanation possible.

NORA. What is that?

HELMER. You no longer love me.

NORA. No; that is just it.

HELMER. Nora!- Can you say so!

NORA. Oh, I'm so sorry, Torvald; for you've always been so kind to me. But I can't help it. I do not love you any longer.

HELMER. [Mastering himself with difficulty.] Are you clear and certain on this point too?

NORA. Yes, quite. That is why I will not stay here any longer.

HELMER. And can you also make clear to me how I have forfeited your love?

NORA. Yes, I can. It was this evening, when the miracle did not happen; for then I saw you were not the man I had imagined.

HELMER. Explain yourself more clearly; I don't understand

NORA. I have waited so patiently all these eight years. for of course I saw clearly enough that miracles don't happen every day. When this crushing blow threatened me, I said to myself so confidently, "Now comes the miracle!" When Krogstad's letter lay in the box, it never for a moment occurred to me that you would think of submitting to that man's conditions. I was convinced that you would say to him, "Make it known to all the world"; and that then-

HELMER. Well? When I had given my own wife's name up to disgrace and shame-?

NORA. Then I firmly believed that you would come forward, take everything upon yourself, and say, "I am the guilty one."

HELMER. Nora-!

NORA. You mean I would never have accepted such a sacrifice? No, certainly not. But what would my assertions have been worth in opposition to yours?- That was the miracle that I hoped for and dreaded. And it was to hinder that that I wanted to die.

HELMER. I would gladly work for you day and night, Nora- bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man sacrifices his honour, even for one he loves.

NORA. Millions of women have done so.

HELMER. Oh, you think and talk like a silly child.

NORA. Very likely. But you neither think nor talk like the man I can share my life with. When your terror was over- not for what threatened me, but for yourself- when there was nothing more to

fear- then it seemed to you as though nothing had happened. I was your lark again, your doll, just as before- whom you would take twice as much care of in future, because she was so weak and fragile. [Stands up.] Torvald- in that moment it burst upon me that I had been living here these eight years with a strange man, and had borne him three children.- Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself to pieces!

HELMER. [Sadly.] I see it, I see it; an abyss has opened between us.- But, Nora, can it never be filled up?

NORA. As I now am, I am no wife for you.

HELMER. I have strength to become another man.

NORA. Perhaps- when your doll is taken away from you.

HELMER. To part- to part from you! No, Nora, no; I can't grasp the thought.

NORA. [Going into room on the right.] The more reason for the thing to happen.

[She comes back with out-door things and a small travelling-bag, which she places on a chair.

HELMER. Nora, Nora, not now! Wait till to-morrow.

NORA. [Putting on cloak.] I can't spend the night in a strange man's house.

HELMER. But can we not live here, as brother and sister-?

NORA. [Fastening her hat.] You know very well that wouldn't last long. [Puts on the shawl.] Good-bye, Torvald. No. I won't go to the children. I know they are in better hands than mine. As I now am, I can be nothing to them.

HELMER. But some time, Nora- some time-?

NORA. How can I tell? I have no idea what will become of me.

HELMER. But you are my wife, now and always!

NORA. Listen, Torvald- when a wife leaves her husband's house, as I am doing, I have heard that in the eyes of the law he is free from all duties towards her. At any rate, I release you from all duties. You must not feel yourself bound, any more than I shall. There must be perfect freedom on both sides. There, I give you back your ring. Give me mine.

HELMER. That too?

NORA. That too.

HELMER. Here it is.

NORA. Very well. Now it is all over. I lay the keys here. The servants know about everything in the house- better than I do. To-morrow, when I have started, Christina will come to pack up the things I brought with me from home. I will have them sent after me.

HELMER. All over! all over! Nora, will you never think of me again?

NORA. Oh, I shall often think of you, and the children, and this house.

HELMER. May I write to you, Nora?

NORA. No- never. You must not.

HELMER. But I must send you-

NORA. Nothing, nothing.

HELMER. I must help you if you need it.

NORA. No, I say. I take nothing from strangers.

HELMER. Nora- can I never be more than a stranger to you?

NORA. [Taking her travelling-bag.] Oh, Torvald, then the miracle of miracles would have to happen-

HELMER. What is the miracle of miracles?

NORA. Both of us would have to change so that- Oh, Torvald, I no longer believe in miracles.

HELMER. But I will believe. Tell me! We must so change that-?

NORA. That communion between us shall be a marriage. Good-bye.

[She goes out by the hall door.

HELMER. [Sinks into a chair by the door with his face in his hands.] Nora! Nora! [He looks round and rises.] Empty. She is gone. [A hope springs up in him.] Ah! The miracle of miracles-?!

[From below is heard the reverberation of a heavy door closing.

<http://www.classicnote.com/ClassicNotes/Titles/dollshouse/shortsumm.html>

Summary of the scene

Nora, seeing Torvald's true character for the first time, sits her husband down to tell him that she is leaving him. After protestations from Torvald, she explains that he does not love her and, after tonight, she does not love him. She tells him that, given the suffocating life she has led until now, she owes it to herself to become fully independent and to explore her own character and the

world for herself. As she leaves, she reveals to Torvald that she was hoping that they would be able to unite in real wedlock, but that she has lost all hope. The play ends with the door slamming on her way out.