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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House: A Play* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Dramatis Personae

TORVALD HELMER

NORA, his wife

DOCTOR RANK

MRS LINDE

NILS KROGSTAD

The HELMER CHILDREN

ANNE-MARIE, their nurse

A MAID

A PORTER

ACT I

[The Helmers' sitting room. It is winter. The room is warm and pleasant, and there is a fire in the stove. A bell rings in the hall. Soon the front door opens, and NORA comes in. She is wearing outdoor clothes and carries many parcels. A PORTER follows with a Christmas tree and a basket. The MAID has opened the door for them.]

NORA.

Hide the Christmas tree carefully, Helen. The children must not see it before this evening, when it is dressed and lighted. [To the PORTER.] How much do I owe you? Tell me at once, and I will pay you now.

PORTER.

Sixpence, ma'am.

NORA.

Here is a shilling. Keep the rest for yourself. It is Christmas, after all.

[The PORTER thanks her and goes out. NORA shuts the door, smiling to herself. She takes off her hat and coat, then quickly pulls a small bag of macaroons from her pocket. She eats one or two, wipes her mouth, and listens at the door of HELMER'S study.]

NORA.

Yes, he is in there. He is working as always. Still, today I am happy enough for both of us.

HELMER.

[Calling from his room.] Is that my little lark singing outside?

NORA.

Yes, it is. I have just come home.

HELMER.

Is it my little squirrel running about the house?

NORA.

Yes, your squirrel is very busy. She has many things to do today.

HELMER.

And when did my little squirrel come back?

NORA.

Only this moment. Come out and look, Torvald. I have bought such a lot of things.

HELMER.

Don't disturb me. [A moment later he opens the door and comes into the room, holding a pen.] What is all this? So many parcels? Has my little spendthrift been using money again?

NORA.

Yes, but this year we may spend a little more. This is the first Christmas when we do not need to count every coin. We can breathe more freely now.

HELMER.

Even so, we must not be careless. We still have to think before we spend. A home cannot stand on foolish habits.

NORA.

But only a very little, Torvald. Only a tiny little bit more than before. Soon you will have your new position at the Bank, and then you will earn much more money.

HELMER.

Yes, after the New Year. But my salary will not come at once. We must still wait some time before the money is really in my hand.

NORA.

Then we can borrow until that time comes. It would only be for a short while. Surely that cannot matter very much.

HELMER.

Nora! There you are again. [He goes to her and touches her ear in play.] Always the same little featherhead. Suppose I borrowed money today, and you spent it all during Christmas. Then suppose something fell on my head on New Year's Eve, and I died. What then?

NORA.

Oh, do not say such ugly things. Put such thoughts away. I cannot bear to hear them.

HELMER.

But answer me. If that happened, what would become of everything? What would become of the money?

NORA.

If that happened, I do not think I would care about debts. I would care about nothing at all. Such people would mean nothing to me then.

HELMER.

And what about the people who lent it? They would still exist, I suppose. They would still want their money.

NORA.

I would not even know who they were. Why should I trouble myself about strangers at such a time?

HELMER.

That is like a woman, Nora. But I am serious now. No debt and no borrowing. There is no freedom and no beauty in a home built on money that belongs to other people. We have gone the right way until now, and we must go on like that.

NORA.

As you wish, Torvald. I know you always think this way.

HELMER.

Come, come, my little skylark must not look sad. Is my squirrel angry now? [He

takes out his purse.] Look what I have here. Can you guess?

NORA.

Money! It must be money. Give it to me and let me see.

HELMER.

There you are. I know Christmas costs a good deal. I am not blind, even if you think I am.

NORA.

[Counting.] Ten shillings, one pound, two pounds. Thank you, Torvald. This will help me for a long time. I can do a great deal with this.

HELMER.

It must help for a long time. That is exactly what it is meant to do. You must not make it disappear at once.

NORA.

I will show you what I bought. See, here is a new suit for Ivar, and here are a sword and a horse and a trumpet for Bob. For Emmy, I bought a doll and a little bed. They are simple things, but she will love them. And here are cloth and handkerchiefs for the maids, and something for old Anne too.

HELMER.

And what is in that parcel there? You cried out when I looked at it. Is it some great secret?

NORA.

Yes, that one is a secret. You must not see it before this evening. It will be much nicer then.

HELMER.

Very well. But tell me what you want for yourself. My little wasteful lady must have something too. You cannot say you want nothing.

NORA.

I truly do not need anything. I have enough already. It is much more fun to buy things for the others.

HELMER.

No, that will not do. You must tell me something. Say one reasonable thing that you would like to have.

NORA.

[Playing with the buttons of his coat.] If you really wish to give me something, then perhaps you could give me money. Only as much as you can spare. Then later I could buy what I need most.

HELMER.

Money again, Nora? That is always your answer. I know that game very well.

NORA.

Oh, please do. Then I can wrap the money in pretty gold paper and hang it on the Christmas tree. That would be such fun. And then I can think carefully before I use it.

HELMER.

Do you know what people call little persons who always use money too fast? They call them spendthrifts. I know one very well.

NORA.

Yes, yes, I know the word. But your plan is sensible. I will wait, and then I will

choose wisely. That sounds like a very good wife, does it not?

HELMER.

It would be sensible if you really saved it. But if you spend it on the house and on twenty small things, then in the end I still pay for it all. That is what always happens.

NORA.

You are unfair, Torvald. I save whenever I can. You should at least believe that.

HELMER.

Yes, you save all you can. The trouble is that you cannot save anything. Still, you are sweet, and I forgive you. Little skylarks and squirrels are costly creatures.

NORA.

You have no idea how many little expenses there are. A house does not run by itself. And Christmas comes only once a year.

HELMER.

You are a strange little soul. Very like your father in some ways. You always find a new way to get money from me, and as soon as you have it, it melts away. But I would not have you different. Still, today you look a little strange to me.

NORA.

Strange? Do I? I thought I looked as I always do.

HELMER.

Look at me. Yes, you do look uneasy. Tell me now, has Miss Sweet Tooth been in town doing something forbidden?

NORA.

No. Why should you think that? I have done nothing wrong.

HELMER.

Has she been to the sweet shop? Has she been tasting sugar things? Has she eaten macaroons?

NORA.

No, Torvald, certainly not. I would never do that after promising you. You must believe me.

HELMER.

Very good, very good. I was only joking. Keep your little Christmas secrets until tonight. When the tree is lighted, all will be shown.

NORA.

Did you remember to invite Doctor Rank? He usually comes, and it would seem strange if you forgot.

HELMER.

I did not need to invite him. He will come here as he always does. Still, I shall speak to him when he arrives. I am looking forward to tonight very much.

NORA.

So am I. The children will be so happy. It will be a lovely evening.

HELMER.

Yes, it is a fine thing to feel safe. It is a fine thing to have good work and a good future. Do you remember last Christmas, when you worked every night making surprises for us?

NORA.

I remember it very well. I was busy, but I was happy.

HELMER.

I was lonely and bored, and in the end the cat ruined everything. Still, you meant well. And now our hard days are over.

NORA.

Yes, it is wonderful to hear you say that. I feel light and full of joy. We can think about the future now.

HELMER.

And you no longer need to sit up late and hurt your pretty eyes and hands. That is over now. We may live more easily.

NORA.

No, I do not need to do that now. Oh, Torvald, I am so glad. I wanted to speak to you about what we should do after Christmas—

[A bell rings in the hall. NORA stops and quickly looks toward the door.]

NORA.

There is someone at the door. What a bother, just now of all times.

HELMER.

If it is a caller, remember that I am not at home. I do not want to be disturbed.

[The MAID appears in the doorway.]

MAID.

A lady wishes to see you, ma'am. She says you do not know she is coming.

NORA.

Ask her to come in. We shall soon see who it is.

MAID.

And the doctor has come too, sir. He went straight into your room.

HELMER.

Good. Let him stay there. [He goes back into his study.]

[The MAID brings in MRS LINDE. She is wearing travelling clothes and looks tired from the journey. The MAID goes out and closes the door.]

MRS LINDE.

How do you do, Nora?

NORA.

How do you do? I beg your pardon, but I do not quite— Wait. Yes. Can it be? Christine! Is it really you?

MRS LINDE.

Yes, Nora. It is I. I have come at last.

Part 2

MRS LINDE.

Yes, Nora. It is I. I have come at last. The years have gone by, and they have changed me more than I knew. Still, I hoped you would remember me in the end.

NORA.

Of course I remember you now. At first I only saw a tired stranger from a winter

journey, and then suddenly your old face came back to me. Dear Christine, how different you look now. You have become thinner and paler, and there is something serious in your eyes.

MRS LINDE.

Yes, that is true enough. Nine or ten years do not pass lightly over a woman's life. A great deal can happen in that time.

NORA.

Is it really so long since we saw each other? It must be, though it does not feel like it to me at first. These last eight years have gone by quickly and happily in this house. And you came all this way in winter too, which was brave of you.

MRS LINDE.

I came by steamer this morning. The journey was cold and long, and I was very tired when I landed. But I wanted to come at once.

NORA.

Then you must sit down and get warm as soon as possible. Take off your things, and let me help you. We will sit by the stove and talk quietly, just as we used to do. Yes, there, now you look a little more like the Christine I knew.

MRS LINDE.

I am much older, Nora. One can see that plainly enough. Life has a way of writing on the face.

NORA.

Perhaps a little older, yes, but not so much as you say. Still—oh, how foolish I am to chatter like this. I should have thought first of what has happened to you. Forgive me, dear Christine.

MRS LINDE.

There is nothing to forgive. You have always spoken quickly when you were glad or surprised. I know your ways well enough.

NORA.

But I know what happened. I read it in the papers, and I told myself many times that I must write to you. I meant to do it, truly I did, but one day passed and then another, and somehow I never wrote. It was wrong of me, and I am ashamed of it now.

MRS LINDE.

I understand it better than you think. People who are living busy lives let such things slip. There is no use speaking more of it.

NORA.

Still, it was hard for you, was it not? Your husband died and left you nothing. No money, no children, no one to care for. How terribly lonely that must have been.

MRS LINDE.

Yes, he left nothing at all. And there were no children either. At first there was sorrow, of course, but afterwards there was only work. A person cannot live on sorrow forever.

NORA.

That sounds so strange to me. I always think grief must stay in the heart like a heavy stone. Yet you speak as if emptiness can be worse than pain. Perhaps it can.

MRS LINDE.

It can indeed. When there is no one to work for, and nothing waiting for you in the morning except more effort, life becomes dry. That has been my life for years now.

NORA.

And I sit here talking of myself and my children. How selfish I must sound. But you must tell me everything now, from the beginning. I want to know how you have lived all these years.

MRS LINDE.

No, first I want to hear about you. I can already see that life has been kind to you in many ways. This house is warm, and you have the look of a person who has been loved.

NORA.

Yes, I have been happy. And do you know, we have just had the best good luck of all. Torvald has been made manager of the Bank. Everything is changing for us now.

MRS LINDE.

Your husband? Then that is indeed very good news. It must mean a great deal to you both.

NORA.

It means everything. A lawyer's life is so uncertain, especially when he will not take ugly cases that go against his feelings. Torvald has always been like that, and I admire him for it. But it has often made life hard for us. Now all that will change, and I feel as if a great weight has lifted from my heart.

MRS LINDE.

Yes, I can understand that. To have enough for one's needs is a comfort. There is peace in that alone.

NORA.

Not only enough, Christine. We shall have plenty. We shall not need to think of every little cost before spending a coin. We shall be able to live as we please, and that makes me so happy I can hardly sit still.

MRS LINDE.

[Smiling faintly.] You were always free with money, even at school. Some things do not change. Perhaps you are still the same in that way.

NORA.

That is what Torvald says too, but he does not know everything. He thinks I am only a little foolish thing who likes ribbons and sweets and pretty presents. Yet we have not always had an easy life. We have both had to work harder than people know.

MRS LINDE.

You too? I would not have guessed it. Your hands still look soft enough.

NORA.

Oh, I did all sorts of little things. Needlework, embroidery, small pieces of work that women can do at home. And there were other things too, though I do not speak of them to everyone. When we were first married, Torvald had to leave his old office because there was no future for him there. He had to find more money somehow, and he worked far too much.

MRS LINDE.

I remember hearing that he had been very ill once. Was that in those first years?

NORA.

Yes, in the very first year. He worked from early morning until late at night and tried every possible way to earn more. He never stopped, because he thought only of his duty and of our future. At last his strength gave way, and he became

dangerously ill. Then the doctors said that if he wished to live, he must go south at once.

MRS LINDE.

So that was when you went to Italy. I remember people speaking of it at the time. It must have seemed a great adventure then.

NORA.

Adventure? Yes, perhaps it looked like that from far away. But for us it was fear first and beauty afterwards. I had just had little Ivar, and everything was difficult, yet we had to go. Still, the journey saved his life, and for that reason I can never think of it without gratitude.

MRS LINDE.

A whole year in Italy must have cost a great deal. Travel, doctors, rooms, food—none of it can have been cheap. I do not know how you managed it.

NORA.

It cost a very great deal indeed. About two hundred and fifty pounds, perhaps more when all was counted. To people like us, that was an enormous sum. Even now I feel it in my heart when I say the number aloud.

MRS LINDE.

Yes, that is a large amount. In such a moment it is fortunate if one has money ready. Otherwise fear becomes even heavier.

NORA.

Yes, one must have money then. Without it, a person can do nothing. When the one you love is sick, every hour seems to ask for more courage and more coins.

MRS LINDE.

Still, you had the help you needed. Your father was alive then, was he not? I suppose he gave you what was necessary.

NORA.

[Looking at her for a moment, then speaking more softly.] People think that, yes. Everyone has believed it for years. It seemed the simplest thing to believe.

MRS LINDE.

And was it not so? I thought that was understood by all your friends. It happened near the time of his death, if I remember rightly.

NORA.

Yes, it was near that time, and that made everything sadder. I could not go to him, because I was waiting for Ivar to be born and had poor Torvald to care for day and night. My dear father died, and I never saw him again. That was the bitterest sorrow of my married life.

MRS LINDE.

I know how much you loved him. That must have been a cruel blow. Yet after that you went south with your husband and came back with him well again.

NORA.

Yes, we went a month later because the doctors would wait no longer. Torvald returned as strong as ever, and since then he has scarcely had an hour of illness. The children are healthy too, and so am I. Sometimes I feel so full of life that I want to laugh and cry at once.

MRS LINDE.

Then you have much to thank Heaven for. But do not forget that not everyone has had your good fortune. It is easier to speak lightly when one sits by a warm fire.

NORA.

No, no, I do not forget it. I was foolish again just now, thinking only of myself. Come, tell me about your own life, about your husband and your family. Was it really true that you did not love the man you married?

MRS LINDE.

My mother was living then, and she was helpless and sick. I had two younger brothers besides, and someone had to feed them. I did not feel free to refuse a rich man, even if my heart was elsewhere. That is the plain truth.

NORA.

Then perhaps you did right. When duty stands before us, love cannot always choose for itself. But it must have been a hard road all the same. And after his death you had to work alone for all of them.

MRS LINDE.

Yes, for my mother and my brothers. First a little shop, then a little school, and then any other work I could find. The years passed like one long working day with no rest in it. Now my mother is dead, and my brothers have their own places, so I am no longer needed by anyone.

NORA.

That is sad in another way. To lose those burdens may be a kind of freedom, but freedom can feel cold when no one wants you. You came here because you could not bear that emptiness any longer, did you not?

MRS LINDE.

Yes. I need work still, and I need some purpose. That is why I came.

NORA.

Then you did right to come. And I am very glad you came—to me, and at this

moment too. There is so much I still want to tell you, Christine. There is more in my life than people think.

Part 3

MRS LINDE.

Is there really? Then tell me, Nora. You look almost proud, and yet at the same time you look as if you are afraid someone may hear you. What is this hidden thing that means so much to you?

NORA.

Yes, I am proud of it. Everyone thinks I have never done anything serious, and that I am only a little foolish wife who plays and laughs. You are like the others too, Christine, though you do not mean to be unkind. But I have had my own burden, and I have carried it quietly for years.

MRS LINDE.

My dear Nora, I did not wish to hurt you. I only thought your troubles were the small troubles of a pleasant house and a loving husband. If I have been wrong, tell me so plainly.

NORA.

You were wrong, and I want you to know it. You are proud because you worked for your mother and your brothers, and you have the right to be proud. Very well, I also have something that makes me proud. I too once did something brave and difficult for the person I loved most.

MRS LINDE.

Then I am ready to hear it. But speak softly if it is really a secret. Your husband is in the next room, and this house is not large.

NORA.

Yes, that is just why you must come nearer. Sit down beside me here. No one in the world must know of this except you. Not Torvald, not Doctor Rank, no one. If Torvald were to hear of it now, everything would change.

MRS LINDE.

You make me more curious with every word. What can it be that would matter so much? Tell me at once, Nora.

NORA.

It was I who saved Torvald's life. When the doctors said he must go south at once, it was I who made that possible. If I had done nothing, he would have stayed here and grown worse and worse. I knew then that I had to act.

MRS LINDE.

But the money came from your father, did it not? That was what everyone thought at the time, and you yourself said so a moment ago. Surely that was the whole story.

NORA.

That is what everyone believes, yes, and that is what Torvald still believes. But it is not true. Father did not give us a single coin for that journey. It was I who got the money, I who found it, and I who took the responsibility.

MRS LINDE.

You? That whole large sum? Nora, that is impossible. A woman in your position could not suddenly produce such an amount. How could such a thing happen?

NORA.

Ah, there you are, just like the rest. You all open your eyes and think a little wife

cannot understand such matters. But a wife can sometimes think, and when she loves deeply enough she can find strength she did not know she had. That is exactly what happened to me.

MRS LINDE.

Did you win it somehow? Was there a prize, or a gift, or some help that came by chance? I cannot see another road. You surely cannot mean that you borrowed it.

NORA.

Why should I not mean that? If a woman has a little wit and a little courage, there may be ways open to her too. Men are not the only people in the world who can act when action is needed. Still, I did not say the matter was simple.

MRS LINDE.

But a wife cannot borrow without her husband's knowledge. Everyone knows that. There are rules about such things. That is why I cannot understand you.

NORA.

Rules, yes. Men are always speaking of rules, as if rules were made by Heaven itself. But I was not thinking of rules when Torvald's life was in danger. I was thinking only that he must live. When a person stands before such a need, she does not first sit down and ask what is proper.

MRS LINDE.

Even so, Nora, it sounds rash. You were very young then, and you were alone with your fear. It was a dangerous path for you to take in secret.

NORA.

Dangerous perhaps, but necessary. The doctors came to me and told me the truth, not to him. They said his life was in danger and that only the south could save him. Do you think I did not first try every honest and open way? I begged and

pleaded as if I myself wanted the journey for pleasure.

MRS LINDE.

And what did he say? I can almost hear his answer already. He must have refused at once.

NORA.

He grew almost angry. He said it was his duty as my husband not to give in to my foolish wishes. He spoke of whims and caprices, as if I were a child asking for a toy. He never guessed what stood behind my words, and I could not tell him. So I made my own plan.

MRS LINDE.

Then your father never learned the truth either? He never knew that the money was not really his gift to you? It seems strange that both men remained in the dark.

NORA.

No, Father never knew. I meant to tell him and ask him to keep silent, but he became very ill at that same time. Then he died, and the moment was gone forever. After that, there was no need to tell him, and no one remained who knew everything.

MRS LINDE.

And since then you have never told Torvald? Not once, in all these years? You have carried it alone the whole time?

NORA.

Never. How could I? Torvald has such strong ideas about honour and debt and a man's independence. If he learned that he owed his life and health to me, and that I had managed money matters without his knowledge, he would feel hurt and ashamed. Our happy home would no longer look the same to him.

MRS LINDE.

Yet someday he must know, must he not? A secret like that cannot stay buried forever. Would it not be better for him to hear it from your own lips?

NORA.

Perhaps one day, much later, when we are older. Perhaps when he is no longer so taken up with how pretty I look, how I dance, how I dress, how I amuse him. Then it might be useful to have something in reserve, something that would show him I am worth more than he thinks. But that time has not come.

MRS LINDE.

You speak half in play and half in earnest, and I do not know which part is stronger. Still, I can see that this matter has been a heavy one for you. Secrets always grow heavier with the years.

NORA.

Yes, it has been heavy. Do not think it was easy to pay it back bit by bit. There are interest payments and other sums that come due, and every time one is settled another waits behind it. I have had to save from everywhere I could, quietly and carefully, without letting anyone notice.

MRS LINDE.

Then you have been denying yourself things all these years. Poor Nora, that is a hard task in a house where one must always seem bright and easy and pretty. You have been smiling with a weight under your dress.

NORA.

I could not take much from the housekeeping money, because Torvald likes things done properly. The table must be good, and the children must be well dressed, and the house must look pleasant. So I saved from my own little needs whenever I

could. Sometimes I even took on extra copying at night and wrote until I was tired to the bone.

MRS LINDE.

That was real work, then, not merely small amusement. It was hard labour, and you hid it from everyone. I begin to understand you better now.

NORA.

Yes, now you see. And I was glad while doing it, glad because I knew what the money had done. Each payment meant that I had once acted like a real person, not merely a doll who smiles when spoken to. That is why I can be proud, even if no one ever thanks me.

MRS LINDE.

I do not laugh now, Nora. I see courage in it, but I also see danger. A matter like this can turn against you if the wrong person knows of it. Who lent you the money?

NORA.

[Starts slightly, then lowers her voice.] I would rather not say more than is needed. The important thing is that the money was found and that Torvald lived. Let us leave the name alone for the moment.

MRS LINDE.

As you wish. Still, I cannot help feeling uneasy. When money and secrecy are tied together, trouble has a way of waiting nearby. You may have done a noble thing, but it may yet ask a price from you.

[There is laughter and noise from the next room. The CHILDREN are heard, and NORA turns quickly toward the sound. Her face softens at once.]

NORA.

Hush, they are coming back. They always burst in like a little storm. I cannot be solemn long when they are near me.

[The CHILDREN run in, laughing, and NORA kneels on the floor to play with them. She hides behind a chair, then catches at them, and the room is full of cheerful movement. During the game there is a knock at the outer door, but no one notices it at first. Then the door opens a little, and KROGSTAD appears.]

KROGSTAD.

Excuse me, Mrs Helmer.

NORA.

[Gives a small cry and rises quickly.] Ah! What do you want here? You frightened me.

KROGSTAD.

I beg your pardon. The outer door was not properly shut, so I came in. I thought perhaps the maid had forgotten it in the holiday confusion. I did not mean to alarm you.

NORA.

My husband is not at home to visitors, Mr Krogstad. He is occupied in his room, and I do not think he wishes to be disturbed. You should come another time.

KROGSTAD.

I know your husband is here. Still, I did not come to speak with him. It is with you that I wish to have a few words.

NORA.

With me? [To the CHILDREN, gently.] Go to nurse now, little ones. No, no, the

strange man will not hurt mother. Go in, and when he has gone we shall play again.
Run along.

[She leads the CHILDREN into the room on the left and shuts the door. Then she turns back to KROGSTAD, and her face is no longer cheerful.]

NORA.

Well, now speak. But be brief. Today is Christmas Eve, and I have no time for unpleasant business. The first of the month has not yet come.

KROGSTAD.

We can leave that for the moment. What happens at the first of the month is not the matter I came to discuss first. Today's question is a different one, and it concerns you more closely than you may think.

NORA.

Then say it. You are making me uneasy by standing there and looking at me in that way. What do you want?

KROGSTAD.

I was at a restaurant a little while ago and saw your husband walking in the street with a lady. Am I right in thinking that the lady was Mrs Linde, the friend who has just arrived in town?

NORA.

Yes, it was Mrs Linde. What of it? I do not understand why that should matter to you.

KROGSTAD.

I once knew Mrs Linde. Long ago, but well enough. That is why I ask. And since you understand that much, I may as well ask plainly whether she is to receive an

appointment at the Bank.

NORA.

What right have you to ask me such a thing? You are one of my husband's clerks. Still, since you ask so directly, I will answer directly. Yes, Mrs Linde is to have work there, and it was I who spoke for her.

KROGSTAD.

I thought as much. Then I was correct. Thank you, Mrs Helmer. That is all I needed to know.

NORA.

[Walking restlessly.] A woman may have a little influence now and then, I suppose. People should remember that and be careful how they behave. When a man stands below another, he ought not to offend those who may help or harm him.

KROGSTAD.

Those who have influence, you mean? Very well. Then let me speak plainly too. Mrs Helmer, you must use that influence on my behalf.

Part 4

NORA.

What do you mean by that? Speak plainly, and do not stand there making dark threats. I have had enough of fear for one day.

KROGSTAD.

Plainly, then. You will use your influence so that I may keep my small post at the Bank. That is all I ask at present, and you are in a position to help me.

NORA.

Who says you are to lose it? No one has told me such a thing. You cannot expect me to answer for every change my husband makes in his office.

KROGSTAD.

There is no need to pretend with me. Your friend has come to town seeking work, and I can guess very well whose place she is expected to take. I know whom I have to thank for my danger, Mrs Helmer, and I advise you to stop it while there is still time.

NORA.

You are mistaken if you think I rule my husband in such matters. I may speak, and he may smile, but that does not mean I command him. You are giving my words a meaning they did not have.

KROGSTAD.

Really? A moment ago you sounded less helpless. I have known Helmer since our student days, and I do not imagine him to be different from other husbands. Men who seem firm in public may still bend at home.

NORA.

If you speak of my husband in that tone again, I shall send you out at once. Do not think that because I am a woman I must listen quietly to insults. I have endured enough from you already.

KROGSTAD.

You are bolder than you were before. Perhaps that is because you believe you will soon be free of your debt. But listen to me carefully now, because I am in earnest.

NORA.

I am not afraid of you as I was at first. When the New Year comes, the account

will soon be finished, and then your hold over me will be gone. That is what I have told myself again and again.

KROGSTAD.

If it is necessary, I shall fight for my position in the Bank as a man fights for his life. Money is not the chief thing with me now. Long ago I made one false step, and from that hour every road seemed closed to me.

NORA.

Yes, I have heard something of that. People speak very easily when another man has fallen. They never ask what need or fear may have driven him.

KROGSTAD.

Whether they ask or not, the result is the same. I had to do business of all kinds to live, and perhaps it has not all been clean. But I have sons growing up, and for their sake I must win back respect. This post in the Bank was the first step upward, and your husband is about to kick me down again into the mud.

NORA.

You must believe me when I say it is not in my power to help you. I cannot promise what I do not control. It would be useless to force me.

KROGSTAD.

Then it is not because you cannot, but because you will not. In that case I must use other means. I have something that gives me power over you, and I do not hesitate to use it.

NORA.

You cannot mean that you would tell my husband I borrowed money from you. You would not dare to do something so mean. It would be shameful beyond words.

KROGSTAD.

Suppose I did. What then? You speak as if the matter would end with a scene between husband and wife.

NORA.

It would be a cruel and ugly thing. That secret has been my joy and my pride, because I saved him with it. To have him learn of it from you would be unbearable, and it would place me in a hateful position before him.

KROGSTAD.

Only hateful? Only awkward and unpleasant? You still do not understand how serious the matter truly is. You speak as though this were only a family quarrel.

NORA.

Well then, tell him if you must. He will pay you the rest at once, and after that we shall have nothing more to do with you. If you hoped to bind me forever, you were mistaken.

KROGSTAD.

Listen carefully, Mrs Helmer. Either you remember very badly, or else you know very little of business and law. I think it will be useful to remind you of a few facts.

NORA.

What facts? What are you trying to drag into the light now? I have paid what I could, and I have broken no promise in that.

KROGSTAD.

When your husband was ill, you came to me for two hundred and fifty pounds. You had nowhere else to turn, and I agreed to get the money. But I did so only on certain conditions.

NORA.

Yes, and you did get it for me. I have never denied that. I was desperate then, and I thought only of saving Torvald.

KROGSTAD.

Exactly. Your mind was so full of his illness and of the journey that you paid too little attention to the agreement. I drew up a bond, and below your own name there were lines in which your father was named as security for the loan. Those lines were to be signed by him.

NORA.

They were signed. The paper came back to you, and you accepted it. You cannot deny that now.

KROGSTAD.

Yes, but there was one more point. I had left the date blank so that your father himself could write the date beside his signature. Do you remember that part of the matter?

NORA.

I think I do. It is all so mixed in my mind, because that was a dark and hurried time. Everything seemed to happen at once.

KROGSTAD.

I gave you the bond to send to your father by post, and some days later you brought it back with his name written on it. After that I handed over the money. All this is correct so far, is it not?

NORA.

Yes, and since then I have paid and paid, little by little. Every spare coin has gone toward it. Surely that should count for something.

KROGSTAD.

It counts for something, but not for everything. Tell me now, your father was very ill at that time, was he not? And he died soon afterwards?

NORA.

Yes. He was already close to death, and soon after that he was gone. Why do you make me speak of it in this cold way?

KROGSTAD.

Because dates are cold things, and dates matter here. Can you tell me on what day of the month your father died? I mean the exact day.

NORA.

On the twenty-ninth of September. I remember it clearly. That day will never leave me.

KROGSTAD.

Just so. I have made certain of that point for myself. And because it is certain, there is a difficulty in this paper that you must explain.

NORA.

I do not know what you mean. What difficulty can there be now, after all these years? You speak as if paper were stronger than human need.

KROGSTAD.

The difficulty is simple. Your father's name on this bond is dated the second of October. That means the signature is dated three days after your father was dead.

NORA.

That cannot be what you mean. You must be mistaken in some way. I do not

understand how such a thing can matter beside everything else that happened then.

KROGSTAD.

I am not mistaken. Your father did not write that date, and he did not write his name. Someone else did it. I ask you now, who wrote your father's name on that bond?

NORA.

[After a short silence.] I did. I wrote my father's name. I could not wait for letters and answers while Torvald's life was slipping away. I thought there was no other road left open to me.

KROGSTAD.

Then you admit it yourself. You forged the signature and put a false date upon the paper. Do you understand now why your position is dangerous?

NORA.

Dangerous? I did it to save my husband's life. Is there no law for that? Is there no mercy in the world for a daughter who will not trouble a dying father, and for a wife who must save the man she loves?

KROGSTAD.

The law does not ask why. It asks only what was done. Your reason may move a heart, perhaps, but it does not change the paper.

NORA.

Then the law must be stupid and unjust. I know very little of such things, but I cannot believe there is no right in what I did. Surely somewhere it must be written that love may act in an hour of need.

KROGSTAD.

Perhaps I am a bad man, but I know enough law for this case. If I place this paper in the hands of the proper people, you will be judged by what stands there and not by the tears in your eyes. So do not speak to me of fairness.

NORA.

[Breathing quickly.] No. No, you would not go so far. You could not wish to destroy a woman and a mother for one act done in fear and love. Even you must see what that would mean.

KROGSTAD.

I see very clearly what it would mean. But I also see what it means for me to be pushed down again when I have just begun to climb. So I say this to you: if I am thrown out of the Bank, you shall not get rid of me so easily. Remember that.

[KROGSTAD bows slightly and goes out through the hall. NORA stands still for a few moments without moving. Then she gives a little shake of the head, as though trying to throw off a nightmare, and goes to the Christmas tree.]

NORA.

No, it is impossible. It cannot be true that such a thing can ruin me. A candle here, and flowers there, and everything must look bright. The horrible man only wished to frighten me, that is all. The tree shall be beautiful, and tonight I shall smile and sing and dance for Torvald. I will keep every shadow away from him if I can.

[HELMER comes in from his study with some papers under his arm.]

HELMER.

Back again, and still busy, I see. Has anyone been here? I thought I saw a man going out at the gate just now.

NORA.

Here? No—no one of importance. I have only been working at the tree and trying to make everything ready.

HELMER.

That is strange. I was almost sure I saw Krogstad leaving the house. You did not forget and let him in, surely?

NORA.

Oh yes, I forgot. He was here for only a moment. It was nothing, and he has gone now.

HELMER.

I can see from your face that he came begging you to speak for him. And he wished you to make it seem as though the idea came from yourself, did he not? He wanted me kept in the dark.

NORA.

Yes, Torvald, but I did not know what else to say. He pressed and pressed, and I wanted only to have him gone. That is the whole truth.

HELMER.

Nora, Nora, to speak with such a man at all is bad enough. But to promise him anything, and then to tell me no one had been here—that must never happen again. A little songbird must have a clean beak, with no false notes in it.

NORA.

A lie? Was it really a lie if I only wished to keep trouble away from you for a few minutes? I did not mean evil by it.

HELMER.

We will say no more now. But remember what I say. Falsehood in small things is

still falsehood, and I will not have it in this house. Let us leave the matter and think of warmer, pleasanter things.

[NORA turns away from him and busies herself again with the tree. HELMER sits down by the stove and looks over his papers.]

NORA.

Torvald, I am looking forward so much to the fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs'. I wanted to surprise you, but all my ideas seem silly now. Everything I think of looks poor and small.

HELMER.

So my little Nora admits she cannot manage without help after all. Very well, I shall rescue you. We will decide together what you shall wear and how you shall look.

NORA.

That is kind of you. But tell me one thing first. Was what Krogstad did really so very bad? Could there not have been need behind it, as there may be behind many wrong acts?

HELMER.

He forged a name. Do you understand what that means? A man may fall once and still rise again, if he confesses openly and takes his punishment. But Krogstad saved himself by cunning, and so he sank lower. That is the worst kind of fall.

NORA.

And after that there is no way back? No act of good work, no years of effort, no care for one's children can cleanse such a stain? Must it poison everything forever?

HELMER.

The most terrible thing is what such a man brings into his home. He must lie and hide and wear a mask before wife and children. In a house like that, the whole air becomes infected, and the children breathe in falsehood with every breath.

NORA.

[Coming a little nearer.] Are you quite sure of that? Do you truly believe children can be hurt by the secret life of their parents? It sounds so cruel when you say it.

HELMER.

I have seen it often in my work. Nearly every person who goes wrong early in life has had deceit in the home, and most often it begins with the mother. That is why my sweet little Nora must never plead Krogstad's cause again. Give me your hand on it, and let the matter end there.

Part 5

NORA.

Yes, yes, let the matter end there. I will say nothing more for him. Please go back to your work, Torvald. I have no wish to speak of that man again.

HELMER.

Good. That is the wise choice. I have papers to read before dinner, and I must also think about your dress for tomorrow night. Perhaps I may even find some little thing wrapped in gold paper for the tree. [He gently touches her head.] My dear little singing bird. [He goes into his room and shuts the door.]

NORA.

[After a pause, in a low voice.] No. No, it cannot be true. It must not be true. Such a thing is too terrible to believe.

[The NURSE opens the door on the left.]

NURSE.

The children are asking very hard to come in to mamma. They have been begging me again and again.

NORA.

No, no, do not let them come to me now. Stay with them, Anne. Keep them with you a little longer.

NURSE.

Very well, ma'am. I will stay with them. [She goes out and shuts the door.]

NORA.

[Pale and shaking.] Spoil my children? Poison my home? No, that cannot be true. It is impossible. It must be one of those ugly ideas men say without knowing what they mean.

ACT II

[The same room, on the next day. The Christmas tree stands near the piano. It is stripped and untidy now, and the candles are burned down. NORA'S cloak and hat lie on the sofa. NORA is alone and walks up and down in deep anxiety. She stops, takes up her cloak, then lets it fall again.]

NORA.

Someone is coming now. [She goes to the door and listens.] No, there is no one. Of course no one will come today, Christmas Day, and not tomorrow either. But perhaps— [She opens the hall door and looks out.] No, nothing. The letter-box is empty. What nonsense I am thinking. He cannot truly mean to do it. A thing like

that cannot happen. I have three little children.

[The NURSE enters from the room on the left, carrying a large cardboard box.]

NURSE.

At last I found the box with your dress for the ball. It was hidden behind a trunk, and I had almost given it up.

NORA.

Thank you. Put it on the table there. We must look at it at once, even if I can hardly bear the sight of it.

NURSE.

[Putting it down.] It needs a good deal of mending, I am afraid. Some of the trimming is loose, and one part is almost torn away.

NORA.

I feel as if I should like to tear the whole thing into a hundred thousand pieces. It looks foolish and hateful to me now.

NURSE.

What a strange idea, ma'am. A little patience and a needle will put it right. There is nothing here that cannot be fixed.

NORA.

Yes, perhaps. I will go and ask Mrs Linde to come and help me with it. She has quick hands and a calm head, and I need both today.

NURSE.

Go out again in this weather? The wind is cold, and the streets are wet. You will catch cold and make yourself ill.

NORA.

Something worse than that may happen, Anne. A cold would be nothing. Tell me, how are the children now?

NURSE.

The poor little things are playing happily with their Christmas toys. They laugh one moment and quarrel the next, as children always do. But—

NORA.

But do they ask much for me? Do they look for me when I do not come? Tell me the truth.

NURSE.

They are used to having their mother with them, that is all. They notice it when you keep away. Children always know when something is different.

NORA.

Yes, but perhaps I shall not be able to be with them as much from now on. Perhaps it will have to be less and less. Things may change here.

NURSE.

Oh, young children get used to anything in time. They cry for a little while, and then life carries them onward.

NORA.

Do you really think so? Do you think children forget their mother if she goes away altogether? If she is no longer beside them every day?

NURSE.

Good heavens, ma'am. Go away altogether? Why do you speak in such a manner?

It gives me a chill to hear it.

NORA.

Tell me, Anne. You once had to leave your own little child and come among strangers to work. How could you do that?

NURSE.

I had to. I was a poor girl and had no choice. Someone had been unkind to me, and I had to earn my bread somehow. When a hungry child is in your arms, you do what you must.

NORA.

But your daughter forgot you after that, did she not? She grew up away from you. She belonged to another life.

NURSE.

No, she did not forget me completely. A daughter never forgets her mother entirely. But she had a good home, and that was what mattered most. A poor girl like me must be thankful for that much.

NORA.

Yes, I suppose one must. You have always been kind, Anne. The children are safe with you. If—if anything should happen, you would be good to them, would you not?

NURSE.

Why, of course I would. I have loved them from the first day. But nothing is going to happen. You must not frighten yourself with wild thoughts.

NORA.

No, perhaps not. Go back to them now. I may go out for a little while, and if

anyone asks for me, say I am busy with my dress.

NURSE.

Very well, ma'am. I will remember. [She goes out with the empty box lid in her hand.]

NORA.

If only the danger would pass like a bad dream. If only the letter-box would stay empty forever. No, I must keep moving. If I stand still, fear catches me by the throat.

[There is a knock. NORA starts violently. Then MRS LINDE enters, having taken off her outer things in the hall.]

MRS LINDE.

So you really sent for me, Nora. I came as quickly as I could. Is there no one else here?

NORA.

No one. Thank heaven it is only you, Christine. Come in, come in. It was kind of you to come so soon. I need your hands, and perhaps I need your eyes too.

MRS LINDE.

I heard you were out asking for me. You look tired and restless today. Have you slept badly?

NORA.

Sleep? I hardly know what that word means now. But let us sit down. Tomorrow evening there is to be a fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs' upstairs, and Torvald wants me to go as a Neapolitan fisher-girl and dance the tarantella, the dance I learned in Capri.

MRS LINDE.

Ah, I see. So you are to play a bright southern girl while the snow lies outside. Your husband likes pretty pictures around him.

NORA.

Yes, he does. Here is the dress. Torvald had it made for me there, but now it is all torn in places, and I do not know where to begin with it. Everything slips from my hands today.

MRS LINDE.

We can set it right easily enough. It is only the trimming that has come loose here and there. Needle, thread, and a little time will do it. Sit quietly, and let me look.

NORA.

You are good to me. I am grateful for even small help today. Every kind hand feels like a blessing.

MRS LINDE.

[Begins to sew.] I shall come tomorrow too and see you in your bright feathers, if you wish. And now that I think of it, I forgot to thank you for the pleasant evening yesterday.

NORA.

Pleasant? No, yesterday was not pleasant as other evenings used to be. You ought to have come to town earlier, Christine. Then you would have seen this house in happier days. Torvald does know how to make a home neat and beautiful.

MRS LINDE.

And you too, it seems to me. But tell me something. Is Doctor Rank always so dark in mood? Yesterday he seemed more troubled than the others.

NORA.

No, yesterday it showed more than usual. Poor man, he suffers from a very serious disease. His back is ruined, and he has been weak since childhood. They say it comes from his father's wild and ugly life.

MRS LINDE.

My dear Nora, how do you come to know about such private matters? It surprises me to hear you speak of them so calmly.

NORA.

Oh, married women hear all sorts of things. When one has children, people talk openly before one, especially about illness and doctors. Little by little you learn things whether you wish to or not.

MRS LINDE.

[Sewing in silence for a moment.] Does Doctor Rank come here every day? Is he really so close to the family?

NORA.

Every single day. He is Torvald's closest friend, and a great friend of mine as well. He is almost like one of the house. We are used to seeing him as naturally as the fire or the piano.

MRS LINDE.

Then let me ask another thing. Is he always perfectly sincere? I do not mean wicked, only perhaps too eager to please. There are men who become agreeable for their own reasons.

NORA.

Not Doctor Rank. What makes you think anything of that kind? You are looking

at me in a very strange way.

MRS LINDE.

When you introduced me yesterday, he said he had often heard my name in this house. But afterwards I saw clearly that your husband did not even know who I was. Then how could Doctor Rank know so much?

NORA.

That is easy enough to explain. Torvald is absurdly fond of me, and he likes to keep me all to himself. At first he even seemed jealous if I spoke much of people from my old home, so naturally I stopped. But I often speak of such things with Doctor Rank, because he likes hearing them.

MRS LINDE.

Listen to me, Nora. In some things you are still like a child, and I am older and have seen more of life. So I will tell you openly that you should put an end to this with Doctor Rank.

NORA.

Put an end to what? What are you talking about? I do not follow you at all.

MRS LINDE.

To two things, perhaps. Yesterday you spoke foolishly about a rich admirer who might leave you money one day. It sounded like a joke, but jokes often hide a thought.

NORA.

An admirer who does not exist, sadly enough. But what of that? You cannot mean to be serious.

MRS LINDE.

Is Doctor Rank a man with money? Has he means of his own? And has he no wife or children who depend on him?

NORA.

Yes, he has money now, and no, he has no one to provide for. But what possible meaning can that have? You are building castles out of smoke.

MRS LINDE.

And he comes here every day. Then tell me, how can such a well-bred man be so tactless unless he believes he stands in a special place with you? I am not blind, Nora.

NORA.

I do not understand you in the least. Speak more clearly if you wish me to answer. You are hinting at something ugly.

MRS LINDE.

Then I will speak clearly. Do you think I cannot guess who lent you the two hundred and fifty pounds? Was it not Doctor Rank?

NORA.

Are you out of your senses? How could you think such a thing? A close friend who comes here every day? Do you understand what a painful and shameful position that would have been?

MRS LINDE.

Then it was not he? You deny it plainly? If so, I am glad, because such a debt would have been dangerous in another way.

NORA.

No, certainly not. It never entered my mind to ask him. And besides, he had no

money then. He only came into it later. So you see how wrong you are.

MRS LINDE.

That is fortunate for you, then. I am relieved to hear it. Still, there is something in your face that tells me the danger is not over.

NORA.

I would never have gone to Doctor Rank for such a thing. And yet—I am sure that if I told him everything now— No, no, that is foolish. I must finish with the other man instead.

MRS LINDE.

Yes, that is what I told you yesterday. But the way you speak makes me think matters are worse than you first admitted. There is more under this than a simple loan.

NORA.

A man can often put such a thing right more easily than a woman. That is the truth of it. The world is built to forgive him more quickly.

MRS LINDE.

One's husband, yes. A husband can often carry what a wife cannot. That is why I told you to tell him.

NORA.

Nonsense. [She stops suddenly.] When a debt is paid, the paper is returned, is it not? One gets back the bond and can tear it up and burn it, the ugly dirty thing.

MRS LINDE.

[Looks at her closely, lays down her sewing, and rises slowly.] Nora, you are hiding something from me. There is another part of this story, and you have not

told it.

Part 6

MRS LINDE.

Nora, you are hiding something from me. I can see it plainly now. Since yesterday morning, something has happened, and you have not told me the truth. Your face changes every moment, and your hands cannot keep still.

NORA.

Do I really look like that? I thought I had hidden it better. But perhaps fear shows itself even when one tries to smile.

MRS LINDE.

Yes, it does. Tell me what it is at once, because I am not going away until we have spoken openly to each other. I did not come back into your life to sit here and watch you suffer in silence.

NORA.

Christine— [She listens suddenly.] Hush! Torvald has come home. Go in to the children for a little while. He does not like dressmaking going on before his eyes, and Anne can help you there.

MRS LINDE.

Very well, I will go for the moment. But remember what I said: I shall not leave this house until I know the truth. [She gathers up some of the sewing things and goes into the room on the left.]

[HELMER enters from the hall, carrying a bundle of papers.]

NORA.

Torvald, I have wanted you so much. I have been waiting and thinking of you all this time. It seemed such a long afternoon.

HELMER.

Was that the dressmaker who was here? I thought I heard women's voices and the sound of work. You are not over-tiring yourself, I hope.

NORA.

No, it was only Christine. She is helping me put my costume in order. You shall see tomorrow how pretty I shall look. I want to please you more than anyone there.

HELMER.

Was it not a good idea of mine? You did not care for it at first, but now you see that I was right. My little Nora is always safest when I choose for her.

NORA.

Yes, and do you not think it is nice of me too, to do exactly as you wish? I am trying very hard to be everything you want. Surely that deserves a little reward.

HELMER.

That depends on the reward. I know that tone in your voice. You are preparing some request, and I must first hear it before I promise anything.

NORA.

If your little squirrel were to ask most sweetly, and run about and do all her tricks, and sing and dance if needed, would you then say yes? Would you be kind for once without asking too many questions?

HELMER.

Speak plainly, Nora. Your tricks will not save you from that. What is it you want?

NORA.

You must let Krogstad keep his place at the Bank. Do not send him away, Torvald. I beg you with all my heart.

HELMER.

Ah, so that is it. And after this morning too? Have you really the courage to raise that question again? My dear Nora, his place has already been arranged for Mrs Linde.

NORA.

Yes, and that was kind of you. But you could dismiss some other clerk instead. Surely there must be someone else less useful than he is.

HELMER.

This is incredible stubbornness. Because you gave that man some foolish promise, I am to change my decision and make myself ridiculous? Do you know what people would say?

NORA.

It is not for his sake only. It is for yours. He writes for ugly papers, and he can do great harm. You have said so yourself, and I am terribly afraid of what he may do.

HELMER.

Ah, now I understand. It is the memory of what was written about your father that frightens you. You are thinking of those old scandals.

NORA.

Yes, yes, of course. Those cruel people said horrible things about Papa. If the department had not sent you to examine the matter, and if you had not been kind to him, things might have gone much worse. I cannot bear the thought of such

attacks again.

HELMER.

There is a great difference between your father's case and mine. His public name was not entirely free from suspicion. Mine is, and I intend to keep it so as long as I live and work.

NORA.

But these men invent things. They twist words and make lies sound like truth. We have such a quiet home here, Torvald. We have the children and our peace and our future. That is why I beg you so earnestly not to provoke him.

HELMER.

And it is exactly your pleading that makes it impossible. It is already known in the Bank that I mean to dismiss Krogstad. Shall people now say that the new manager changes his decisions at his wife's request?

NORA.

And if they did? What would that truly matter compared with real danger? Surely a little talk is less important than safety.

HELMER.

A little talk? You do not understand these things. I will not make myself a laughing-stock before the entire staff. And there is another reason too. Krogstad makes my position intolerable.

NORA.

What reason can be so serious? Tell me that, at least. I want to understand you.

HELMER.

His past faults I might perhaps have overlooked, if necessary. I am told he works

well enough. But when we were boys we knew each other too closely, and now he thinks that gives him the right to speak to me as an equal before others. Every moment it is “Helmer, old friend,” and such things. It is unbearable.

NORA.

I do not believe you mean that. It sounds so small, so unlike the large and generous man you wish to be. Surely that cannot be the true cause.

HELMER.

Small? Are you calling me small-minded? Very well, then I shall end the whole matter this moment. Helen! [The MAID enters.] Take this letter at once. Find a messenger, pay him, and have it delivered quickly. Do not delay a single minute.

MAID.

Yes, sir. I will take it at once. [She goes out with the letter.]

NORA.

Torvald, what was that? Tell me at once. You have done something terrible.

HELMER.

It was Krogstad’s dismissal, of course. Now let us hear no more of him. The matter is settled.

NORA.

Call her back! There is still time. For your sake, for my sake, for the children’s sake, call her back. You do not know what may come of that letter. You do not know what you have done.

HELMER.

It is too late now. The letter is gone, and with it the whole silly dispute. You are in a strange state, my dear Nora.

NORA.

Yes, too late. Too late. [She presses her hands together.] Oh, if only time would stop for one moment.

HELMER.

My poor frightened little darling. I forgive you your fear, although it does insult me a little. You speak as if I should be afraid of a starving writer's revenge. Still, I forgive you, because it shows how much you love me.

NORA.

What do you mean? What is it you think you can do? Your words sound strange to me.

HELMER.

I mean that if danger truly came, I am man enough to take it all upon myself. You need not tremble. I would stand before any storm for you.

NORA.

No! Never that! You must never do such a thing. I could not bear it.

HELMER.

We would share it, of course, as husband and wife should. But enough now. You must practise your tarantella. Go and dance, and make as much noise as you please. When Rank comes, tell him I am in the inner room. [He takes his papers and goes into his room.]

NORA.

He is capable of it. He would truly do it. He would take everything on himself, and that must never happen. Never. Any other ending in the world would be better than that.

[The bell rings. NORA starts, then goes quickly to open the door. RANK enters, taking off his coat.]

NORA.

Good day, Doctor Rank. I knew your ring at once. But you must not go in to Torvald now. He is busy with papers, and I do not want him disturbed.

RANK.

And you? Are you busy too, or may I stay with you a little? I always hope for a place beside the fire in this house.

NORA.

You know very well that I always have time for you. Come in and sit down. I am glad to see you today.

RANK.

Thank you. Then I shall use as much of your time as I can. One becomes selfish when one fears there may not be much left.

NORA.

That is a strange way to speak. Have you found out something? Is anything the matter?

RANK.

Yes. It is all over with me, and there is nothing to be done. I have looked closely at myself, and I know now where I stand.

NORA.

[With sudden relief.] Oh, is it only about yourself? You frightened me. For one moment I thought—no matter. Tell me what you mean.

RANK.

Yes, about myself. I am the poorest patient I know. Within a month, perhaps sooner, I shall lie in the churchyard and be done with doctors and visitors and polite talk.

NORA.

What an ugly thing to say. You should not speak so in this room. We are trying to keep cheerful here.

RANK.

The truth is uglier than the words. And there is worse still. I will not have Helmer in my sick-room when the end begins. He hates everything ugly, everything broken. I know him too well to let him see me like that.

NORA.

Oh, Doctor Rank, do not talk so bitterly. It hurts me to hear it. You make death sound like an insult.

RANK.

It is an insult. To pay in one's own body for another man's sins—what justice is there in that? My poor back has had to suffer for my father's wild pleasures. That is the whole story.

NORA.

Then let us speak of something cheerful instead. We shall not improve your health by discussing old sins and graves. Sit here and be kind and sensible.

RANK.

[Looking at her.] When I sit here and talk to you like this, I cannot imagine what my life would have been if I had never come into this house. It has been my one

true place of rest.

NORA.

I believe you do feel at home with us. We are always glad when you come. That is why you must not speak of leaving.

RANK.

And yet I must leave it all, without even being able to leave behind any real sign of gratitude. At most there will be an empty chair that another person can fill tomorrow. That is all a life becomes in the end.

NORA.

If I asked you now for a very great proof of friendship— No, I should not. I do not know whether I ought.

RANK.

Then ask it. The greater the thing, the better. You know there is nothing I would not do for you if it lay in my power.

NORA.

I mean something very large indeed. Advice, help, a favour beyond reason. That is why I hesitate.

RANK.

There is no reason to hesitate with me. Have I not your full confidence? Tell me what you need, and let me be of use to you at last.

NORA.

More than anyone else's. That is just why I almost spoke. You know how deeply Torvald loves me. He would give his life for me without a moment's thought.

RANK.

[Leaning toward her.] Nora—do you think he is the only one? Do you think there is no one else in this house who would gladly do the same?

NORA.

[Stares at him, then grows quiet.] Is that what you mean? Is that the thing you wished to say before you go away?

RANK.

Yes. I wanted you to know it before the end came. There will never be a better moment than this. Now you know that you may trust me more deeply than anyone else alive.

NORA.

[Rises quietly.] Let me pass, Doctor Rank. You should not have said that. There was no need.

RANK.

Nora—was it so terrible to hear? Was it wrong to love you? Tell me that, at least.

NORA.

No, not to feel it perhaps. But to say it aloud—yes, that was clumsy and cruel. We were getting on so well, and now everything has changed. Please do not make it worse.

Part 7

NORA.

[Giving him her hand.] Yes, Torvald. I will say no more about him. Let the whole matter rest now. Only do not be angry with me any longer.

HELMER.

That is right. My little frightened bird must grow calm again. Think instead of tomorrow evening and of how beautiful you shall look. I shall shut myself in with my papers for a while before dinner. [He goes into his room and closes the door.]

NORA.

[Standing still.] Poison the children. Fill the home with lies. No, it cannot be true. It must not be true. If that were so, the whole world would be wrong.

[MRS LINDE comes quietly out from the room on the left with the dress in her hands.]

MRS LINDE.

He has gone in again. Now speak. I heard enough to know that your fear has not lessened. Tell me everything without hiding anything more.

NORA.

Yes, now you shall hear the rest. Krogstad was the man who lent me the money. He knows that I wrote my father's name on the bond, and he says the law calls it forgery. He threatens to tell all if Torvald dismisses him.

MRS LINDE.

Then the matter is indeed more serious than I thought. He has a paper in his hand, and men with papers believe they hold life and death. Still, you must not lose all courage.

NORA.

Courage? I feel as if I am sinking every moment. Torvald says that a lying mother poisons her children, and those words have gone into me like ice. If he speaks truly, then I am not fit to be near my own little ones.

MRS LINDE.

Do not let one frightened thought become your whole truth. Men talk in large hard words when they wish to sound certain. Your act came from love, not from corruption.

NORA.

The law will not ask that. Krogstad told me so. The paper is against me, and Torvald would never forgive such a thing if he knew it. He would think first of honour and shame, not of the reason for it.

MRS LINDE.

Then there is only one wise road. You must tell your husband yourself before Krogstad speaks. The truth from your own lips is still better than the truth in an enemy's letter.

NORA.

No, not yet. If Torvald knows now, he will take the whole blame on himself. I know him. He would try to protect me before the world, and I cannot allow that. I would rather die than see him brought down for my sake.

MRS LINDE.

You are thinking wildly. Secrets do not become safer because one fears the truth. But I see that I cannot force you now. At least let me think whether I can speak with Krogstad myself.

NORA.

Perhaps later. Not yet. Oh, Christine, if only someone would do a miracle and stop time itself.

[The MAID enters from the hall and comes close to NORA.]

MAID.

If you please, ma'am. A gentleman has come by the back stairs. He gave me this card and says he must see you.

NORA.

[Glances at the card and hides it quickly.] Yes. Very well. No one must know. Ask Doctor Rank to stay with my husband in the other room, and then let the gentleman come in quietly.

MAID.

Yes, ma'am. I understand. [She goes out.]

MRS LINDE.

Was that Krogstad? I saw your face change the moment you looked at the card. He is not going to let you rest for a single hour.

NORA.

No, he is waiting in the kitchen now. Go in to the children's room for a little while, Christine. I do not want you to be here when he comes. Afterwards you shall know all.

MRS LINDE.

Very well, but I shall not leave the house. If this grows worse, I may still be of use. [She goes into the room on the left.]

[NORA quickly bolts the door of HELMER'S room. Then KROGSTAD is shown in by the MAID and enters in outdoor clothes, wearing boots and a fur cap.]

NORA.

Speak low. My husband is at home. If he hears your voice, everything may be

ruined in a moment.

KROGSTAD.

That matters little to me now. You know already that I have been dismissed. Your husband's letter reached me not long ago.

NORA.

I did all I could. I begged him to keep you. I fought for you as far as I dared. You must believe that, even if it did no good.

KROGSTAD.

Then your husband loves you less than I thought. If he knows what power I have over you and still dares to dismiss me, he is either a fool or a very brave man. Which is it?

NORA.

Do not speak of him in that way. Leave us alone, and when the rest of the money is paid we shall have nothing more to do with you. That would be best for everyone.

KROGSTAD.

Best? Do you imagine I care only for the money now? If I were thrown aside, I would still keep my hold on what concerns me. I told you before that I am fighting for my place in society, not merely for coins.

NORA.

Then what is it you want now? Say it quickly and go. My strength is nearly gone.

KROGSTAD.

I want to rise again, and I mean to do so. For the next few years your husband must help me. I must have a better position at the Bank, and in time I shall stand

above the others there. He shall not merely employ me—he shall make room for me.

NORA.

Never. Torvald would rather break with the whole world than submit to such pressure. He despises that kind of control, and he would hate you even more if he guessed it.

KROGSTAD.

Then he must guess it. Since persuasion failed, I have chosen another method. Here is the answer to your refusal.

[He takes a letter from his pocket.]

NORA.

No! You must not. Not that. Anything but that. Do not put it there.

KROGSTAD.

It is a letter for your husband. In it he will learn enough to understand your position and mine. I do not think he will continue to treat me lightly afterwards.

NORA.

Tear it up. I beg you. Ask me for anything else that a woman can do. I will work, save, travel, hide—anything. Only do not let him read that letter.

KROGSTAD.

I am not moved by tears now. You should have thought of all this before. [He goes to the hall door.] The letter is in the box already, Mrs Helmer. Now it must work for me.

NORA.

[Runs toward the hall.] No, no! Give it back. Open the box and take it out. There is still time if you only wish it.

KROGSTAD.

I have no key to your husband's box, and even if I had, I would not use it now. Let the paper speak where your influence failed. Good evening.

[He goes out. NORA stands frozen, then gives a strangled cry and grips the back of a chair.]

NORA.

In the box. The letter is in the box. Then the thing has happened after all. There is no longer only fear. Now it is real.

[MRS LINDE comes quickly out from the room on the left.]

MRS LINDE.

He has gone? I heard the outer door close. Tell me, what has he done?

NORA.

He has written to Torvald. The letter is in the box now, waiting for him like a knife in the dark. Once he opens it, all is finished.

MRS LINDE.

But your husband does not usually fetch the letters at once, does he? There may still be a little time, and a little time can matter greatly.

NORA.

Torvald always goes to the box after dinner, or when he thinks of his papers. He has the key, and no one else can touch it. Oh, Christine, how shall I keep him away?

MRS LINDE.

Leave that to me as far as I can help. I know Krogstad from long ago. There was a time when he would have listened to me as he listened to no one else. I will go to him at once and try to speak.

NORA.

Yes, go. Tell him to ask for the letter back. Tell him not to destroy us. Tell him whatever may soften him. You once had power over his heart, and perhaps some part of it is still there.

MRS LINDE.

I cannot promise success, but I can promise I will try. Give me his address quickly. Every moment counts now.

NORA.

Yes, here. He lives just at the corner. Go by the back way. And if you meet no one, come back at once. I shall stay here and keep watch over that box as if it were a living enemy.

MRS LINDE.

Be brave until I return. Above all, do not let your husband see anything in your face if you can help it. That will be your hardest task. [She takes her cloak and goes out quickly through the hall.]

[NORA remains alone. She stares toward the hall, then begins counting softly and wildly on her fingers.]

NORA.

One, two, three, four, five, six. No, that is useless. Numbers do not stop letters. The box hangs there, and behind that thin wood my whole life waits. If Torvald

reads before Christine returns, there will be nothing left to save.

Part 8

NORA.

The box hangs there, and behind that thin wood my whole life waits. If Torvald reads before Christine returns, there will be nothing left to save. I must keep him away, one minute after another, until the night is over.

[She hears movement from HELMER'S room, starts, and quickly goes toward the middle of the room. HELMER comes out, cheerful and carrying no papers now. He looks at her with surprise.]

HELMER.

Well, my little runaway, why are you standing there as if you had seen a ghost? I thought you were with Mrs Linde and the dress. Have you been dreaming again?

NORA.

No, I was thinking of tomorrow evening. I am so afraid I shall not dance well. It has been so long since Capri, and perhaps I have forgotten half the steps.

HELMER.

Forgotten them? That is impossible. My Nora forgets nothing that helps her look charming. Still, it will do no harm to practise a little. We will go over it together later.

NORA.

No, now. Please, Torvald, now at once. I feel as if I cannot breathe unless I begin this moment. You know how nervous I become when I think I may disappoint you.

HELMER.

So much eagerness? That is new. Yesterday you needed to be persuaded, and now you are almost trembling for the rehearsal. Very well, I shall help you.

NORA.

But first you must promise me something. You must not go to the letter-box this evening. Not until after I have danced tomorrow. Not until then, Torvald.

HELMER.

Again this nonsense about the letters? Really, Nora, you grow more childish every day. What should there be in the box that you fear so much?

NORA.

Nothing, perhaps. That is just why it does not matter if they wait. If you open business letters now, you will think only of the office, and then you will not help me properly. I need you only for myself tonight.

HELMER.

Ah, so that is the little trick. You want to keep me from serious matters and make me belong only to you. Well, there is something sweet in that, I admit.

NORA.

Yes, yes, only to me. Sit there by the piano and play for me. I will dance as I did in the south, and you shall tell me every movement I do wrong. You must watch everything.

HELMER.

Very well. Since you insist, I will be your music-master and dance-master too. But where is the tambourine? A tarantella without that would be a poor thing.

NORA.

Here it is. I had it ready. I think I knew I should need it before the evening ended. Everything has felt as if it were rushing toward this.

[HELMER sits at the piano. NORA stands in the middle of the room with the tambourine in her hand. She looks toward the hall for one second, then turns sharply back.]

HELMER.

Now then, begin quietly. No wildness at first. A dance must have shape as well as fire. Ready?

NORA.

Yes. Play. And do not stop unless I tell you. If I go too fast, faster still. I must forget everything except the sound.

[HELMER begins to play. NORA dances. At first her movements are light, then quickly they grow hurried and almost violent. Her hair begins to loosen, and she does not notice it.]

HELMER.

No, no, not like that. Too much haste. You are racing ahead of the music and scattering the steps in every direction. My little Capri girl must be more exact.

NORA.

I cannot be exact tonight. You must let me dance as I feel it. It burns in the blood, and that is the truth of it. Play again, and faster.

HELMER.

Slower first. You are missing the turns, and you are striking the tambourine at the wrong moment. If you dance so tomorrow, people will think you are out of your senses.

NORA.

Then let them think it. Better that than to look cold and dead. I tell you I can only do it this way tonight.

[The door of HELMER'S room opens, and RANK appears. He stops on the threshold and watches in surprise. NORA continues dancing, more wildly than before.]

RANK.

Why, what is this? I leave you for half an hour, and now the whole house seems full of southern madness. Helmer, have you set the room on fire with music?

HELMER.

Come and see what I have to endure. She will not listen to one instruction. She has forgotten everything I taught her only yesterday.

NORA.

I have forgotten nothing. It is you who do not understand. One must dance it as if one's life depended on it. Play, Torvald, play!

RANK.

Upon my word, she is right in one thing. There is spirit in it, whether there is method or not. I have not seen eyes shine like that in a long time.

HELMER.

Spirit is not enough. There must be grace, control, obedience to the measure. Nora, stop now. You are tiring yourself past reason.

NORA.

No, not yet. I have only begun. If I stop, I shall hear other sounds. Play, and let

me go on.

[She dances again. This time the tambourine falls from her hand and rolls away. HELMER rises quickly and catches her by both arms.]

HELMER.

Enough! This is sheer madness. You are not dancing; you are flying apart. What has come over you tonight?

NORA.

[Breathing hard.] I told you so. I cannot dance tomorrow unless we practise again and again. You must promise that. Every free hour until the ball, you must be with me and no one else.

HELMER.

If that is what will calm you, I promise it. I will coach you myself tomorrow from morning onward, and no letters, no business, no callers shall come before my little pupil. Are you satisfied now?

NORA.

Yes, if you keep the promise exactly. Not one letter, Torvald. Not even one look into the box. You must let everything rest until after I have danced.

HELMER.

Very well, since it means so much to you. But after the dance I shall open everything, and then no more pleading. A manager cannot hide from paper forever.

RANK.

I begin to suspect that the tarantella is less about art than about strategy. Mrs Helmer seems to know very well how to govern a household campaign.

NORA.

Laugh at me if you wish, but help me too. Tomorrow you shall sit below and watch, and you must say that I dance beautifully, whether I deserve it or not. I shall need friendly eyes upon me.

RANK.

That I can promise. Indeed, tomorrow evening I shall sit close and look as long as I am allowed. A dying man may ask at least that much of beauty.

NORA.

Do not speak that way again. I cannot bear that tone from you tonight. We must all pretend the world is bright for one more day.

RANK.

One more day. Yes, that is well said. And because I mean to take my leave properly, I have done something this evening that may puzzle you later.

NORA.

Puzzle me? What do you mean? You look almost cheerful when you say it, and that makes it worse somehow.

RANK.

I have sent my visiting cards to you both, with a black cross over my name. When they come, you will know that I have closed my door and do not wish to be seen in the last ugliness. That is my way of saying farewell.

NORA.

No. No, you must not shut yourself away like that. We are your friends. You must let us come, at least once.

RANK.

No, Nora. Friendship ends before decay begins. Let me keep one little pride. Let me go out of your lives while I still look like myself.

HELMER.

Rank, you are dark tonight, darker even than usual. But if this is your wish, we shall respect it. Still, I hope the black cards will not come for a long time yet.

RANK.

Hope what you like, Helmer. I know my own account better than you do. And now I shall leave you to your lesson. Mrs Helmer has enough fever in her feet for the whole evening.

NORA.

Good night, Doctor Rank. And thank you for coming. I do not know why, but I am glad whenever kind people are near me now.

RANK.

Then remember me kindly tomorrow. That will be enough. [He bows to them both and goes out through the hall.]

[There is a short silence. HELMER watches NORA with concern and tenderness, then picks up the fallen tambourine and places it in her hands.]

HELMER.

My poor little frightened girl. All this excitement has worn you out. Tomorrow I will guide you through every step, and after that the world may come back with all its dull papers and demands.

NORA.

Yes, tomorrow first. Let there be only tomorrow now. If I can dance well tomorrow, perhaps everything may still hold together until night is over.

HELMER.

It shall. Come, enough of practice. You must rest those feet and smooth your hair. Then we shall go upstairs when the time comes, and all eyes will turn to you, just as they should.

NORA.

[Looking toward the hall.] All eyes, yes. But there is one thing I pray for more than all admiration in the world—that your eyes may stay away from the letter-box until the last possible moment. That is all I ask of fate tonight.

Part 9

[The MAID appears in the doorway.]

MAID.

Dinner is served, ma'am. Everything is ready upstairs, and they are waiting only for you. Shall I bring anything more before you go?

NORA.

Yes, we will have champagne tonight. Let there be plenty of it too, and let the glasses be kept full. And bring macaroons as well, just for this once.

HELMER.

A banquet then? My little skylark means to make a feast of it. You are very wild tonight, Nora, and you tremble from one moment to the next.

NORA.

Yes, dear, but now you must go in, and Doctor Rank too, if he is still near. Christine must help me with my hair before we go upstairs. Everything must be

exactly right.

HELMER.

Very well. But remember what I promised: tomorrow I shall coach you again, and not one business matter shall come between us until the dance is over. Come when you are ready, my dear little bird.

[HELMER goes in. NORA and MRS LINDE remain alone for a moment.]

NORA.

Well? You went to Krogstad. I can see at once from your face that something has happened. Tell me quickly, because every second seems to strike my heart.

MRS LINDE.

He was not at home. He had gone out of town for the day, and no one knew when he would return. So I could not speak with him face to face.

NORA.

Yes, I thought as much the moment I saw you. There is always one more wall in front of me each time I think I have found a door. Then what did you do?

MRS LINDE.

I left a note for him and asked him to meet me tomorrow evening. He will come back then, and he will understand from my message that I wished to speak of something important. That is all that was possible.

NORA.

Perhaps that is best after all. You must prevent nothing now, Christine. Let events come as they will. Strange as it sounds, there is something almost splendid in waiting for a great thing to happen.

MRS LINDE.

A great thing? You speak as if you hoped for rescue from the very moment of ruin. What is it you imagine may still take place?

NORA.

You would not understand, not fully. It is something that must come from him, not from me, and it must come of itself. If I spoke it aloud, it would lose all its life.

MRS LINDE.

Then I will not press you now. But remember this: miracles are not made stronger by silence. If no miracle comes, you must still stand like a human being and meet the truth.

NORA.

Yes, perhaps. Go in now to the others. I shall come in a moment, after I have made my face quiet again. My eyes must not betray me before the evening is done.

[MRS LINDE goes in. NORA remains alone, standing still. Then she takes out her watch and looks at it.]

NORA.

Five o'clock. Seven hours until midnight, and then another full day until the next midnight. After that the tarantella will be over, the candles will be out, and the mask will fall. Thirty-one hours to live as I am living now.

HELMER.

[Calling from within.] Where is my little skylark? Are you ready at last, or must the whole feast wait for your feathers?

NORA.

[Going toward the door with her arms spread.] Here she is. Here is your skylark, ready to sing for one more evening.

ACT III

[The same room later that night. The table stands in the middle of the room with chairs around it. A lamp is burning on the table. The room is empty for a moment. Then MRS LINDE enters from the hall, still wearing her outdoor things, and looks around.]

MRS LINDE.

The house is quiet at last. They are all still upstairs at the party, and the music must be going on there even now. How long it has been since I waited for a man in this way, with old memories coming back like steps on the stair.

[She listens. There is no sound. She takes off her cloak and hat and lays them down.]

MRS LINDE.

No, I am not afraid. I have lived through harder things than this, and I have learned to stand still when life turns serious. If he comes, I must speak plainly, because we have both had enough of half-truths.

[KROGSTAD is heard in the hall. A moment later he enters. He stops when he sees her.]

KROGSTAD.

Mrs Linde. So it was really you who sent for me. Your note was so short that I hardly believed it could be from your hand.

MRS LINDE.

Yes, it was I. Thank you for coming so quickly. I knew you would come if you understood that the matter was important enough.

KROGSTAD.

Important enough? You left me once for another man, and since then years have passed. When a woman who has done that sends for me suddenly at night, I suppose I may wonder why.

MRS LINDE.

You have the right to wonder. And I have no wish to hide behind excuses or soft words. I was forced into a choice then by my mother and my brothers, and I chose as I thought duty demanded.

KROGSTAD.

Duty. Yes, women always have that word ready when they break a man's life. You chose money and security, and I was left to sink as I could.

MRS LINDE.

You think I do not know what it cost? You think I have not remembered it? I went where I did not love, and I lived in work and emptiness afterward. There was no victory in it for me.

KROGSTAD.

Perhaps not. But while you had a roof and respectability, I went on from one hard necessity to another. And once a man's name is stained, the world helps the stain spread wider.

MRS LINDE.

I know that too. That is why I asked you to come. We have both been shipwrecked in our own ways, and perhaps two broken lives may still be joined into something steadier than either had alone.

KROGSTAD.

What are you saying? Speak carefully, because I am not in a mood for dreams. I have trained myself not to trust them.

MRS LINDE.

Then do not call it a dream. Call it work, if you like. I am alone, and you are alone. I need someone for whom I may work, and your children need someone who can give a house a human heart. That is the truth of it.

KROGSTAD.

Christine—do you mean that now? After all these years, and after everything that has happened, do you truly mean to come to me of your own free will?

MRS LINDE.

Yes, freely, and with open eyes. I am no longer young, and I am tired of living only for myself. There is no happiness for me in that. I would rather build something difficult and real than sit in safety with empty hands.

KROGSTAD.

This sounds too good for a man like me to believe at once. My past is known, my temper is not gentle, and the world does not smile when my name is spoken. Are you ready to share that life?

MRS LINDE.

I have known cold work and loneliness, and neither of them frightened me away from living. I have also known you from long ago, before bitterness settled over everything. I believe there is still a better man in you if someone stands beside you instead of turning away.

KROGSTAD.

There was a time when I would have risked everything for you. Then when you went, it seemed to me that all solid ground had gone with you. Perhaps that is why I grew harder than I ought.

MRS LINDE.

Then let that time not be wasted completely. Let us take what remains of our lives and make it cleaner than what went before. It is not too late for honesty, even if it is late for youth.

KROGSTAD.

[Takes her hands.] Then I must become a different man for your sake. No, not for your sake only—for my own and for the children's too. If this is truly to be, I will not let you come into a house built on tricks and revenge.

MRS LINDE.

That is well said. But there is still one thing to settle at once. Your letter to Helmer lies in the box below. If it remains there, everything in this house may be shattered before morning.

KROGSTAD.

Ah, the letter. Yes, I had almost forgotten for a moment that the old bitterness still stands outside this new hope. I can take it back if you wish. It is not too late yet.

MRS LINDE.

No. Do not take it back. At first I thought as Nora thought, that the truth must be prevented. But now I see that this house has been living on concealment too long. They must come to open speech at last.

KROGSTAD.

So you would let the husband learn everything? You who just spoke of building and healing? That seems a hard beginning.

MRS LINDE.

It is hard, but I think it is right. The secret has stood between them like a locked door, and it has warped both of them. If there is to be any true life between them after tonight, it must begin with truth, however cruel the hour may be.

KROGSTAD.

Then the letter shall stay where it is. But if they suffer from it, I suffer too, because your voice now stands beside theirs in my mind. Strange how quickly a man changes when he believes he is no longer alone.

MRS LINDE.

Stay only a little longer, then go. When they come down from the party, I will be here. Nora must not meet the truth in complete loneliness if I can help it. That much at least I can do.

[KROGSTAD bends over her hands, then goes out quietly through the hall. MRS LINDE remains standing by the table, listening. After a pause she sits and waits in silence.]

Part 10

[Voices and music are heard above. Then the sound grows weaker. A little later HELMER comes down the stairs with NORA, who is still in her costume, and they enter through the hall. HELMER has his cloak over her shoulders. She looks tired and pale beneath all the bright colours.]

HELMER.

No, no, my little darling, not another minute upstairs. I know very well what that look means. You would rather go away than stay and smile at people any longer.

That is exactly why I wanted to keep you there a little more. You are never more beautiful to me than when you seem tired and delicate, as if I alone had the right to take you away.

NORA.

Yes, yes, take me away then. I wanted to leave from the first moment after the dance. My feet kept moving, but my heart was down here all the time. I could not bear the room another minute.

HELMER.

Do you know what I was thinking as we stood there? I was wishing that you were mine in a secret way too, that I might pretend I had only just won you, and that tonight I would carry you home for the first time. I looked at your neck and shoulders and thought how lovely it would be if no one had ever seen them but me. Then the whole party seemed to vanish.

NORA.

Do not speak like that tonight. Your words fall on me strangely now, as if they belonged to another world. I am too tired even to answer you as you expect.

HELMER.

Tired? Yes, I can see that very clearly. And that is why you are dearer than ever at this moment. When we came away and the door closed behind us, it seemed to me as if I had brought home a young bride again, a woman who belonged only to me and needed my hands around her. Ah, Nora, if you knew how much I desired to be alone with you.

NORA.

Please, Torvald. Not now. I ask you only to be quiet a little while. I feel as if I have been running for days and can hardly think.

HELMER.

There, there, I understand you in my own way. Come and sit here by the table. I will watch you take off your things, and afterwards perhaps you will be more like yourself again. A man may surely keep his own wife near him after carrying her away from a party.

[RANK comes in through the hall. He has put on his hat and coat again, and he holds a stick in his hand. He stops when he sees them.]

RANK.

So you are back too. I thought perhaps I might still find you awake, and I wished to say good night before I went. The air upstairs became a little too warm for me.

HELMER.

Good. Then you can tell me whether my little Nora was not the finest thing in the room. Did she not shine over them all, even when she tried to fly away too early?

RANK.

She shone, yes. And more than that, she danced as if the floor itself were giving way under her. People will remember it for a long time. I think no one in that room will sleep quite peacefully tonight.

NORA.

You speak as if I were some strange creature, and not a tired woman who wants only to sit down. I am glad it is all over now. Let no one praise me anymore.

HELMER.

Praise you? I have not finished admiring you yet. When you danced and the tambourine flashed in your hand, I had to hold myself back from leading you away at once. You do not know what it costs a man to stand smiling among others when his own wife looks as you looked tonight.

RANK.

Then perhaps it is fortunate that the room is quiet now. There is less danger in admiration when chairs and tables stand between people. Still, I shall not stay long enough to disturb your happiness.

NORA.

You are going so soon? Then good night, Doctor Rank. And thank you for all your kindness through these days. You have been good to us both, though we have had little heart to show it.

RANK.

Good night, Mrs Helmer. Sleep if you can, and do not trouble yourself to think of me tomorrow. I would rather be remembered in music than in weakness. That is why I make my leave in this way.

HELMER.

Yes, yes, enough of dark speeches now. You and your black thoughts would freeze a warmer room than this. Come, Nora, let us not be infected by them any longer.

RANK.

Then I shall go indeed. Good night, Helmer. Lock your door well, keep your wife close, and if you hear nothing from me again except by card, remember that I chose it so myself. [He bows and goes out through the hall.]

[HELMER stands a moment listening, then goes toward the hall door and looks after him. NORA has taken off her cloak and stands near the table, quite still.]

HELMER.

Poor fellow. There was great sadness in him tonight, though he tried to dress it in wit. We shall soon have to lose him, I fear. And yet even that shadow cannot rob

me of the joy of having you here now, all to myself at last.

NORA.

[Quietly.] Yes, to yourself. That is what you always wanted, is it not? A quiet room, a closed door, and me within it.

HELMER.

Do not speak as if that were something cruel. It is the happiest wish of any husband who loves his wife. But first let me make sure there are no letters or interruptions waiting below. Then the whole house shall belong only to us for the rest of the night.

NORA.

No! Not now, Torvald. Leave the box until tomorrow. You promised it would wait until after the dance, and I have danced. Let that be enough for one night.

HELMER.

My dear child, I have humoured you all day, and now the play must end. A man cannot leave papers hanging outside his own door because his wife has nervous fancies. It will take only a moment.

NORA.

Do not go. Sit down here first. Let me tell you something. Let me hold you for one little while longer before you touch anything outside us.

HELMER.

That sounds very tender, and I should gladly yield to it, but I know exactly what waits behind it. You wish to lead me away from the box. That alone is enough to make me open it at once.

[He goes out into the hall. There is the sound of the key in the letter-box. NORA

grips the edge of the table so hard that her knuckles whiten.]

HELMER.

[From the hall.] Rank has been here after all. He has left his visiting cards. See, here they are—with a black cross over the name. That means he has shut himself in and will receive no one. Poor friend. He has written his own death notice, almost.

NORA.

And the other letter? Was there another letter there too? Tell me at once, Torvald.

HELMER.

Yes. There is one from Krogstad. So that is the ghost that has been walking through this house. At last we shall see what he wants, and then we shall be rid of this whole ugly business.

NORA.

Torvald, for the love of heaven, do not read it. Tear it up unopened. Throw it into the fire and let the whole thing vanish. Whatever is in it, let it die unread.

HELMER.

Impossible. When a man is threatened, he reads. To destroy a letter unopened would be childish even for you. No, now we shall have light.

[He comes back into the room with the letter in his hand and stands by the lamp. NORA remains where she is, motionless except for her breathing.]

HELMER.

What can the fellow have written? He is insolent enough for anything, no doubt. Still, I hardly think he can invent something serious.

NORA.

Read it then. Yes, do it quickly. Every slow word is worse than the whole truth at once. I am tired of waiting.

HELMER.

[Breaks the seal and reads. His face changes at once.] What is this? What—? No. This cannot be true. It must be some filthy trick, some desperate lie by a ruined man.

NORA.

It is true. Every word of it. I did it all. No one else knew. No one else had any part in it.

HELMER.

[Reading again, then looking at her in horror.] You? You did this? Forged your father's name? Borrowed money in secret? Lied to me year after year under this roof? Oh, what an awful awakening. And I who believed myself the happiest of husbands.

NORA.

Yes. I did it to save your life. That is the beginning and the end of the matter. If you ask why, that is the only answer.

HELMER.

Do not speak to me of reasons. Do you think the world asks why when there is a criminal paper in a man's hand? I am in the power of an unscrupulous person now. He can command, threaten, expose, and drag me through the mud whenever he pleases.

NORA.

If I went away, you would be free of it. If I were no longer here, perhaps he could

do you less harm. That thought has been with me often.

HELMER.

No foolish speeches. What good would that do me? He could still make the matter known, and then everyone would think I had known of your act, perhaps even planned it. They would say the husband stood behind the wife's crime. And I have you to thank for that ruin.

NORA.

[Coldly.] Yes. Now I understand very clearly what I have done to you. You need not explain it further.

HELMER.

I can scarcely take it in. But we must think of what is to be done, and we must do so at once. Take off that shawl. Take it off, I say. I must see how to quiet him somehow. The matter must be hushed up at any cost. As for you and me, things must appear as before—before the world, at least.

NORA.

As before? You mean that all should look the same from the street and at the dinner-table, while everything is broken underneath. Is that your meaning?

HELMER.

Yes, in the eyes of others. Naturally you will remain in this house. That is understood. But I cannot trust you with the children. I dare not. To think I should have to say such words to the woman I loved, and whom I— No. That is over now. From this moment happiness is not the question. We must save what fragments we can, and keep up the appearance.

Part 11

[The front-door bell rings sharply. HELMER starts as if struck, and turns toward the hall. For one wild moment fear returns to his face, and he almost looks about for a place to hide NORA from the world.]

HELMER.

What is that? At this hour? Can the worst still be coming? Can he be here himself after all? Hide yourself, Nora. Say you are ill and cannot be seen.

[NORA does not move. HELMER goes into the hall, unlocks the door, and opens it. The MAID appears, half-dressed, holding out a letter.]

MAID.

A letter for the mistress, sir. The messenger said it must be given here at once, and then he went away again.

HELMER.

Give it to me. Yes, it is from him. You shall not touch it, Nora. I will read it myself and see what new misery he tries to throw over us.

NORA.

Yes, read it. There is no use delaying it any longer. Let the truth come fully now, whatever it may bring with it.

[HELMER stands by the lamp. He breaks the seal, reads quickly, then looks at the paper enclosed. Suddenly his whole face changes, and he cries out in joy.]

HELMER.

Nora! Nora! No, I must read it again to be certain. Yes, yes, it is true. I am saved! Nora, do you hear me? I am saved from the whole thing.

NORA.

And I? What of me? Do not forget that I stand here too.

HELMER.

You too, of course. We are both saved, you and I together. Look, he has sent back the bond. He writes that he regrets what he has done, and that some happy change in his life has altered him. It does not matter why. The danger is gone, and no one can do anything to you now.

[He tears up the bond and both letters and throws them into the stove. He stands watching them burn as if he wished to destroy every trace with his eyes as well as his hands.]

HELMER.

There, now the whole ugly matter is gone. It is nothing now but a bad dream that has passed in the night and will leave no mark when morning comes. He says that since Christmas Eve you have suffered terribly. Poor little Nora, these must have been dreadful days for you.

NORA.

Yes, I have fought a hard fight these three days. Every hour felt like a weight I had to carry by myself.

HELMER.

No more of that now. We will not call back horror when joy has entered the room again. We will say only that all is over, and begin life afresh at once. My poor little Nora, I understand you well. You stand there as if you cannot believe that I forgive you, but I do. I swear to you that I forgive you everything.

NORA.

Yes, I know you say so. I hear every word you speak, and I understand your

meaning.

HELMER.

What you did, you did from love for me. That is the main thing, and I know it. Only you did not understand the world well enough to judge the means you used. Still, that does not make you less dear to me. On the contrary, it makes you dearer, because now you need me more completely than ever.

HELMER.

Lean only on me from this day onward. I will advise you and direct you in everything. I should not be a man if your helplessness did not make you doubly attractive in my eyes. Forget the hard words I spoke when I was frightened. They belonged to that moment only, and now that moment is dead.

NORA.

Thank you for your forgiveness. Thank you for speaking so warmly now that the danger has gone from your own head.

[She goes into the room on the right. HELMER follows to the doorway and looks in after her with gentle possession and deep self-satisfaction.]

HELMER.

No, do not go away from me. What are you doing there now, so quietly and so late at night? Surely you are not getting ready for bed already.

NORA.

[From within.] I am taking off my fancy dress. I have no wish to wear it one moment longer.

HELMER.

Yes, do that. Calm yourself and rest your mind. My poor frightened little bird must

feel safe again. Here in this house I will protect you. Here you may hide under my wings like a dove saved from a hawk. Little by little your heart will grow quiet, and tomorrow morning all this will look different.

HELMER.

Soon everything will be as it was before. Very soon you will no longer need me to repeat that I have forgiven you, because you will feel it yourself. Can you imagine I would ever cast you off or reproach you after such a thing? No, Nora. There is something deeply sweet to a man in forgiving the wife who belongs to him with all his heart.

HELMER.

It is almost as if he gives her life anew. She becomes doubly his own after such an hour, both wife and child together. That is what you shall be for me now, my little frightened darling. Have no anxiety anymore. Only be open with me, and I will be both will and conscience for you.

[NORA comes back in. She has taken off the bright costume and now wears plain everyday clothes. Her face is calm, pale, and settled in a new way.]

NORA.

Yes, I have changed my clothes now. I shall not sleep tonight, Torvald. It is not late yet, and there is something that must be spoken before another hour passes.

HELMER.

What is this face? What is this voice? You look colder than before, and I do not understand you at all. What can still remain to be said after everything is over?

NORA.

Sit down here. It may take some time, because you and I have much to say to one another. Tonight we must settle accounts between us, clearly and without play.

HELMER.

Nora, you alarm me. You sit there like a stranger, and your eyes no longer come toward me in the old way. Speak then, but do not frighten me without reason.

NORA.

That is just it. You have never understood me, and until tonight I had never truly understood you either. We have been married eight years, and this is the first serious conversation we have ever had together. In all that time, from the first day I knew you, we have never sat down honestly to get to the bottom of anything important.

HELMER.

How can you say that? Was I to bring you all my worries and heavy thoughts when you could not help me carry them? What use would that have been to you?

NORA.

I am not speaking of business matters. I am speaking of life, of myself, of what I have been in this house. First Papa wronged me, and then you wronged me in the same way. You both loved to arrange me, but neither of you cared to know me.

HELMER.

Wronged you? By us, who loved you more than anyone else in the world? That is a hard and unreasonable thing to say.

NORA.

You never really loved me. You only thought it pleasant to be in love with me. At home Papa told me what to think about everything, so I thought as he thought, or pretended to. He called me his doll-child and played with me as I once played with my dolls. Then I passed from his hands into yours.

NORA.

Here too everything was arranged by your taste. I took your opinions, your likes, your words, or else I hid my own, because you would not have enjoyed them. Looking back now, I think I have lived here like a poor woman living from one day to the next. I have existed only to perform tricks for you, Torvald, because that was what pleased you.

HELMER.

There is some truth in what you say, though you speak too strongly and too bitterly. Still, what is done is done. From now on things can be different. Playtime may end, and lesson-time may begin.

NORA.

Whose lessons? Mine, or the children's? You still speak as if I were someone to be trained into shape for your use.

HELMER.

Yours and the children's, naturally. I can help you all. I can guide this house back to what it should be.

NORA.

No, Torvald. You are not the man to educate me into being the wife I ought to be. And I am not fit to bring up the children either, not until I have first tried to educate myself. That is why I am leaving you now.

HELMER.

Leaving me? What are you saying? No, no, that is madness. I will not allow it. I forbid you.

NORA.

You can forbid nothing now. I must stand quite alone if I am to understand myself

and the world around me. That is why I cannot remain here any longer. Tomorrow I will go back to my old home, and from there I will try to find some work and some way to live.

HELMER.

You blind, foolish woman. You are deserting your home, your husband, and your children. Have you not duties here that stand above every private feeling?

NORA.

I have duties to myself as sacred as any duty to husband or child. Before all else I must try to become a reasonable human being. I can no longer be content with what most people say, or with what is written in books. I must think for myself and try to understand what is right.

HELMER.

This is unheard of. If religion does not guide you, then let conscience do so. Tell me at least that you still know what moral duty means.

NORA.

I do not know religion as anything living in me. I only know what I was told as a girl. And as for law and morality, I know now that they do not speak as I expected them to speak. I cannot believe it is wrong for a wife to save her husband's life, or for a daughter to spare her dying father pain. Yet the law says otherwise.

HELMER.

You speak like a child who does not understand the world she lives in. You are ill with excitement and exhaustion, and that is why your mind has turned in this way.

NORA.

No. Tonight my mind has never been clearer. And yes, with that clear mind I say that I do not love you anymore. That is the hardest truth I have ever had to speak,

but it is the truth.

HELMER.

Nora! Do you understand the meaning of those words? Can you tell me what I have done to lose your love?

NORA.

Yes. It was tonight, when the wonderful thing did not happen. For eight years I waited for it without fully knowing how much I waited. When Krogstad's letter was in the box, I thought you would say, "Let the world know. I will take everything upon myself." That was the wonderful thing I hoped for and feared. It was to stop that from happening that I even thought of killing myself.

HELMER.

No man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves. A husband may labour, suffer, and endure poverty for his wife, but not give up his honour.

NORA.

Hundreds of thousands of women have done exactly that for men. That is the difference between us. When your fear passed, everything returned at once to its old form. I was again your little skylark, your doll, and this time you would care for me even more gently because I had proved so fragile.

NORA.

It was then I saw that I had lived eight years with a strange man and had borne him three children. I cannot bear that thought and remain here. An abyss has opened between us, and I do not see how it can be filled.

HELMER.

I can change. I feel it now. If that doll-life is the thing that has stood between us, then I can become another man.

NORA.

Perhaps. But that would require the most wonderful thing of all. Both you and I would have to change so deeply that our life together became a real marriage. I do not believe in such wonderful things any longer.

[NORA takes her cloak, hat, and small bag. She puts on the cloak and wraps the shawl around herself. HELMER stands helplessly, watching as the final shape of her decision becomes visible before him.]

NORA.

Here is your ring back. Give me mine. I set you free from every obligation to me, and I free myself from every obligation to you. There must be complete freedom on both sides now.

HELMER.

All over? Is everything truly over? May I never write to you? May I never help you if you are in need?

NORA.

No. You must write nothing and send nothing. I can receive nothing from a stranger. I know I shall think often of you, and of the children, and of this house, but that changes nothing.

HELMER.

A stranger? Can I never be anything more than that to you? Tell me at least whether there is any last hope left for me.

NORA.

Only if the most wonderful thing of all should happen. Only if both of us were so changed that life together became true wedlock and not a game. Goodbye, Torvald.

[She goes out through the hall. HELMER sinks into a chair by the door and buries his face in his hands. Then he lifts his head suddenly, as if a final spark of hope has broken through the darkness.]

HELMER.

Nora! Nora! Empty. She is gone. The most wonderful thing of all—? Could it still be possible, someday, somewhere, after all?

[The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]