

A Doll's House

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a new version by Helene Kvale  
from the original by Henrik Ibsen

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ACT ONE

*It is Christmas Eve. Lights up on the living room of an immaculate apartment with wood burning stove and simple, tasteful furniture. There is a piano, a bookshelf, an etagere with ornaments, a rocking chair. One door leads to the hall and entry, another to Torvald's study. Large windows reveal gently falling snow.*

*The doorbell chimes. The nanny opens the front door to Nora who breezes into the living room, laden with packages and brimming with excitement.*

NORA

(off)

Anne-Marie! Quickly, hide the Christmas tree. I don't want the children seeing it before it's decorated. How much do I owe you?

DELIVERY BOY

(off)

Fifty øre.

(Nora hands him a krone. She waits.)

NORA

(off)

Oh...keep the change. It's Christmas after all!

The front door closes. Nora surveys the living room, careful to pluck the macaroons from her pocket, before going back to the hall to hang up her coat. She returns, popping one, then two macaroons into her mouth. Humming happily, she tiptoes over to Torvald's study door.

NORA  
(whispers)

He's home!

Nora hums breezily.

TORVALD  
(off)

Is that my little squirrel scurrying around out there. Hmm?

NORA  
Maybe!

TORVALD  
(off)

When did my squirrel get home?

She hides the packet of macaroons  
in her pocket.

NORA  
Just a second ago. Won't you come in and see what I have  
bought?

TORVALD  
(off)

I'm busy.

He opens the door and peers in, his  
glasses in hand.

TORVALD  
Bought? Did you say bought? Has my songbird been throwing  
money around again?

NORA  
No! But can't we enjoy ourselves this year? Do we really have  
to scrimp and save? It's Christmas!

TORVALD  
But, we can't be extravagant either.

NORA  
We can be a tiny bit extravagant, can't we Torvald? Just a  
teensy bit? You'll be getting a huge salary soon. Think of  
the money you'll earn.

TORVALD

...as of January one and it will take three months to take effect.

NORA

So, we just borrow til then.

TORVALD

Reckless folly, Nora! Imagine if I borrowed a thousand kroner today and you spent it all over Christmas and then on New Years Eve, as I was minding my own business, I suddenly got hit by a falling branch.

NORA

Don't say such horrible things!

TORVALD

But imagine if something like that did happen, what then?

NORA

Well then, it wouldn't matter if I had debts or not!

TORVALD

But what about my creditor?

NORA

What about him? I don't care about him. He's a total stranger.

TORVALD

That is typical of a woman! Seriously Nora. You know how I feel about borrowing. No debts, no loans. A home built on debts and loans becomes shackled and ugly. You and I have managed to stay afloat until now and we will continue to do so for the interim. Case closed.

NORA

As you wish, Torvald.

Nora turns to go to the stove.

TORVALD

Now Nora, Nora, Nora. Are my songbird's wings drooping? Are we sulking? Hmm?

He takes out his wallet.

TORVALD

Do we need a little something to make us feel better?

NORA

Maybe...

TORVALD

Something green and crisp and ....

NORA

Mmm....perhaps...

Torvald laughs and holds the dollar bills out of reach.

TORVALD

Yes, I know how much goes into the household.

Nora jumps up and grabs the money.

NORA

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty! Thank you my darling! I love you I love you I love you.

TORVALD

Don't spend it all at once.

NORA

You will be so proud of me. But look! Look here! I want to show you what I've bought and for so little too. Some new clothes for Ivar. And a sword and a horse and a trumpet for Bob. And here is a doll and doll's bed for Emmy. It's not that special, but she'll destroy it in seconds anyway! And I have some soap for nanny. I should get her something else, really.

TORVALD

And what is in this package here, hmm?

NORA

No! You are not to touch that until tonight!

TORVALD

All right, my dear, all right. And tell me, what does the mistress of the house want, hmm?

NORA

Oh, I don't know. I don't need anything.

TORVALD

But what would you desire? Nothing too expensive, mind.

NORA

I don't know. I, well...actually yes. I do know. If you do want to give me something special, something I would *really* desire, then you could...you could...

TORVALD

Yes, yes! Out with it!

NORA

You could...give...me...money. Only as much as you can spare and I will buy something lovely with it. When I find it. After Christmas, perhaps.

TORVALD

But Nora!

NORA

Isn't that a perfect idea? Then I can hang the notes in shiny paper on the tree. Wouldn't that be fun?

TORVALD

You are not a songbird at all. You are a magpie. What are you?

NORA

A magpie. But let us do as I say, hmm? Then I can think about what I really need. You see I am a sensible magpie.

TORVALD

But could you hold onto it and buy something just for yourself? I fear the money will go on the house or some useless knick knack and then, before long, I'll be coughing up again.

NORA

No, Torvald!

He wraps his arms around her waist.

TORVALD

It cannot be denied, my magpie is sweet, but she does get through an awful lot of cash. It is amazing how much it costs to keep a little bird like you!

NORA

Shame on you, really! I try to save as much as I can.

TORVALD

(laughing)

Of course you do! As much as you can, but you actually can't.

NORA

If only you knew what expenses we have, my dear.

TORVALD

You, you , you are just like your father. Never able to hold onto a single penny. It just slips through your fingers, but I suppose I must accept you as you are. These things are in the blood you know.

NORA

If only I'd inherited some of his better characteristics.

TORVALD

Oh, I wouldn't have you any other way, even if you do look guilty as sin!

NORA

Do I?

TORVALD

Yes! You do. Look me in the eye.

NORA

Yes...

TORVALD

Are you sure a little sweet tooth didn't pop into the bakery on her way home?

NORA

I promise you.

TORVALD

Didn't taste a sample or two?

NORA

No! Absolutely not.

TORVALD

Didn't nibble just one macaroon?

NORA

No, Torvald! Honestly.

TORVALD

I'm only teasing!

NORA

I wouldn't disobey you.

TORVALD

Of course you wouldn't. You've given me your word. Now you keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself. I'm sure that all will be revealed tonight.

NORA

Did you remember to invite Dr. Rank?

TORVALD

Totally unnecessary, my dear. He will dine with us as usual. Nonetheless, I will ask him this afternoon. I've ordered some fine wine...do you know, I am really looking forward to this evening.

NORA

Yes, I am as well. And the children will be so happy, Torvald.

TORVALD

Isn't it wonderful to have a secure and respectable position? To have a decent salary? Such a comfort, don't you think?

NORA

Yes, absolutely.



TORVALD

Do you remember last Christmas? Locking yourself into that damn room for three whole weeks, making flowers and goodness knows what else for the Christmas tree, burrowing yourself away till well after midnight, making little surprises for us all. My God I've never been so bored in my life!

NORA

I wasn't bored.

TORVALD

(grinning)

But there was nothing to show for it, Nora!

NORA

Don't start! I couldn't help it if the cat decided to tear everything to shreds.

TORVALD

No of course you couldn't, my dear. You had the best intentions and that is the main thing. But those frugal times are behind us now, eh Nora?

NORA

Yes, thank God.

TORVALD

Now I don't have to sit here alone and you don't have to vex your pretty little eyes and your sweet, little fingers.

NORA

Halleluja! Now this is how it is going to be: As soon as Christmas is over...(doorbell rings) Oh, someone's here. How dull.

She quickly tidies up.

TORVALD

If it is for me, I'm not at home!

Nanny enters.

NANNY

There's a lady at the door for you, ma'am.

NORA

Show her in.

NANNY

And Dr. Rank has just arrived. He's in your study.

TORVALD

Good, good.

As Nanny exits, Torvald kisses Nora on the cheek and goes to his study. Nora momentarily alone, looks around the room and sighs.

Kristine enters cautiously.

KRISTINE

Hello Nora.

NORA

Hmm?

KRISTINE

You probably don't remember me.

NORA

No, I...Oh, of course...my goodness! Kristine?

KRISTINE

Yes.

NORA

Kristine! I can't believe I didn't recognize you! You've changed so.

KRISTINE

It's been nine, ten years and...

NORA

That long? Well I suppose it has! These last eight years have been incredible for me. Have you moved into town? (Kristine nods) In the middle of winter? How brave!

KRISTINE

I arrived by steamer this morning.

NORA

No doubt to catch the Christmas parties! What fun! Do, please, take off your coat. Are you cold? Come, we'll sit here by the stove where it's cosy. No, you take the armchair, I insist. I don't mind the rocker. (Taking Kristine's hands) Ah now I see the old you again! It was just those first few moments, but you're a little paler, a little thinner perhaps and...

KRISTINE

...a little older.

NORA

Yes, yes perhaps a little older, just a teensy bit, but not that much really. Oh I can't believe how thoughtless I am, wittering on. Will you forgive me Kristine?

KRISTINE

What do you mean?

NORA

Poor, poor you. You're a widow now.

KRISTINE

Yes, three years ago.

NORA

I heard. Oh Kristine, please believe me. I often thought of writing to you, but something always came up.

KRISTINE

I understand.

NORA

No! It was terrible of me. You poor darling, you must have suffered so much. And he left you nothing?

KRISTINE

No.

NORA

No children?

KRISTINE

No.

NORA

Absolutely nothing at all?

KRISTINE

Not so much as a regret.

NORA

But really Kristine. How is that possible?

KRISTINE

These things happen. Occasionally.

NORA

So. All alone. That must be torture for you. I have three beautiful children. They're not here at the moment, they're out. But tell me everything, from start to finish.

KRISTINE

No, you go first.

NORA

No, I insist. You start. I refuse to talk about myself. Today will be devoted to you. But I must just tell you one thing. Have you heard our news?

KRISTINE

No.

NORA

My husband has become Manager of The Savings Bank.

KRISTINE

Your husband? My goodness!

NORA

Yes, amazing isn't it? You know it's virtually impossible to make a decent living as a lawyer, especially if you only take cases from the best firms, as Torvald always chooses to do. So you can imagine how excited we are. He starts in the New Year! He'll get a huge salary as well as commission, so from now on we will live as we please. Oh Kristine! I'm so happy. Plenty of money, no scrimping and saving..

KRISTINE

Just to have the essentials must be nice.

NORA

I'm not talking about "the essentials." I'm talking about bags and bags of money.

KRISTINE

The same old Nora, eh? Holes in your pockets...

NORA

(laughing softly)

My husband says the same thing. But I'm not as featherbrained as you think. Our life hasn't been easy, you know. Money has been scarce and actually we've both had to work.

KRISTINE

You, work?

NORA

Absolutely! A little bit of sewing, embroidery, crocheting. And some other things as well. You know Torvald resigned from the council after we got married...there was no chance for promotion, so naturally...but with the two of us, there were more expenses and he worked himself to the bone, taking on extra work whenever possible to make ends meet, until in the end, he got ill. Quite ill. His doctors were adamant that he stop working, travel south, get some sun...

KRISTINE

I remember. Weren't you in Italy for an entire year?

NORA

Yes, we were. It wasn't easy to get away, you know, with little Ivar just born. But we had to make it happen somehow. And what a trip! It saved Torvald's life, but cheap it was not, Kristine!

KRISTINE

I wouldn't have thought so.

NORA

Guess how much it cost. Go on...guess! 4800 kroner!

KRISTINE

Well you were lucky to have the money!

NORA

Us? Good God! It came from my father, dear.

KRISTINE

Of course. Your father died around that time, didn't he?

NORA

Yes, that's right, he did, but imagine this, Kristine..I couldn't even travel and take care of him. I was confined at home, waiting for little Ivar to be born and then of course, I was looking after poor Torvald who was on his death bed. Dear, dear Pappa...he was so kind. I never set eyes on him again Kristine. That is positively the worst experience I have had to endure since getting married.

KRISTINE

And then you set off for Italy?

NORA

Yes. By then we had the money and the doctor insisted we go, so we left a month later.

KRISTINE

And Torvald returned fully recovered?

NORA

Fit as a fiddle!

KRISTINE

So, why the doctor?

NORA

What doctor?

KRISTINE

I thought...a doctor arrived, as I came in, a minute ago...

NORA

(laughing)

Oh that's just Dr. Rank. He's always here. No, Torvald hasn't been ill since. And the children are well, as am I. Oh Kristine! Isn't life grand? There I go again...rattling on about myself. Again. (Nora pulls up a footstool and rests her hands in Kristine's lap). Now tell me. Is it really true that you despised your husband? Why on earth did you marry him?

KRISTINE

Well, my mother was bedridden and helpless. I was looking after my two younger brothers, handfuls, both of them. It would have been foolish not to accept his offer.

NORA

I heard he was very wealthy.

KRISTINE

I think he was, yes. But his businesses were unstable and by the time he died, every one of them had folded and there was nothing left.

NORA

And so?

KRISTINE

Well then I had to survive on my own. I ran a shop, a school, whatever I could get my hands on. These last three years have been endless, a constant struggle. But now it is over, Nora. My poor mother passed away, so she doesn't need me anymore. And neither do my brothers. They have both found work and can take care of themselves...

NORA

You must be so relieved.

KRISTINE

No. No, unspeakably empty. Nothing to live for.

(Kristine gets up.)

That's why I abandoned the country and came to town. All I need now is some steady work, an office job or something. Anything.

NORA

But office work is so stressful! You need to take time off, go to a spa, pamper yourself.

KRISTINE

I don't have a father who can foot the bill Nora.

NORA

(standing up)

Kristine!

KRISTINE

I'm sorry. Please be kind to me. You must understand that I have no one. I've become bitter and selfish, I can never relax. You know when you told me of your good fortune, I wasn't happy for you. I was actually happy for me.

NORA

Why? Because you thought Torvald could do something for you?

KRISTINE

The thought crossed my mind.

NORA

And so he shall, Kristine. Leave it all to me. I will introduce the subject so cleverly, he will think it was his own idea. Let me do this one favor for you.

KRISTINE

Well, that is very sweet, especially considering you haven't suffered a day in your life.

NORA

What did you say?

KRISTINE

(smiling)

Honestly Nora...bits of sewing! You're a child. You haven't got a clue.

NORA

How do you know? You're just like everyone else. You think I'm useless and incapable and...

KRISTINE

Nora...

NORA

...that I haven't suffered enough.

KRISTINE

Well, you just told me your problems and they really don't amount to much.

NORA

You haven't got a clue! I haven't even begun.



KRISTINE

What?

NORA

You look down on me, Kristine, but you shouldn't. You tell me how proud you are of the sacrifices you made for your mother and brothers...

KRISTINE

I think I have a right to feel that.

NORA

You do. But I too have a right to feel virtuous.

KRISTINE

(louder)

I don't dispute that.

NORA

Quiet Kristine. Torvald might hear you. No one must ever know. Only you.

KRISTINE

Know what?

NORA

Sit here.

Nora draws Kristine close to her on the sofa.

NORA

I saved Torvald's life.

KRISTINE

Saved? What do you mean saved?

NORA

I told you about the trip to Italy. Torvald would have died if he hadn't have made that trip.

KRISTINE

Yes, well thank God your father gave you the funds.

NORA

That's what everyone thinks, but...

KRISTINE

Yes?

NORA

Father didn't give us a single penny. It was me. I raised the money for the entire trip.

KRISTINE

You? The entire sum?

NORA

4800 kroner. What do you think of that?

KRISTINE

Don't be ridiculous. How is that even possible? Did you win the lottery?

NORA

(contemptuously)

The lottery? Where would be the glory in that?

KRISTINE

How else then?

NORA

Hmm hmm tralala!

KRISTINE

I mean you couldn't borrow it, could you!

NORA

Oh? Why ever not?

KRISTINE

It's illegal, for a start. A wife can't borrow money without her husband's permission.

NORA

Of course she can when it is the wife who has the eye for business, when she knows how to work the system.

KRISTINE

That's impossible.

NORA

Look, no one has said that I borrowed the money. There are plenty of ways I could have got it.

She throws herself back onto the sofa.

NORA

I might have got it from some admirer or other. I mean when one is as attractive as I...

KRISTINE

You are insane.

NORA

And you are dying of curiosity.