

Synopsis and Summary of Acts - A Doll's House Study Guide

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[Synopsis](#)

A Doll's House traces the awakening of Nora Helmer from her previously unexamined life of domestic, wifely comfort. Having been ruled her whole life by either her father or her husband Torvald, Nora finally comes to question the foundation of everything she has believed in once her marriage is put to the test.

Having borrowed money from a man of ill-repute named Krogstad by forging her father's signature, she was able to pay for a trip to Italy to save her sick husband's life (he was unaware of the loan, believing that the money came from Nora's father.) Since then, she has had to contrive ways to pay back her loan, growing particularly concerned with money and the ways of a complex world.

When the play opens, it is Christmas Eve, and we find that Torvald has just been promoted to manager of the bank, where he will receive a huge wage and be extremely powerful. Nora is thrilled because she thinks that she will finally be able to pay off the loan and be rid of it. Her happiness, however, is marred when an angry Krogstad approaches her. He has just learned that his position at the bank has been promised to Mrs. Linde, an old school friend of Nora's who has recently arrived in town in search of work, and he tells Nora that he will reveal her secret if she does not persuade her husband to let him keep his position. Nora tries to convince Torvald to preserve Krogstad's job, using all of her feminine tricks (which he encourages), but she is unsuccessful. Torvald tells her that Krogstad's morally corrupt nature is physically repulsive to him and impossible to work with. Nora becomes very worried.

The next day, Nora is nervously moving about the house, afraid that Krogstad will appear at any minute. Her anxiety is reduced by being preoccupied with the preparations for a big fancy-dress party that will take place the next night in a neighbor's apartment. When Torvald returns from the bank, she again takes up her pleas on behalf of Krogstad. This time, Torvald not only refuses but also sends off the notice of termination that he has already prepared for Krogstad, reassuring a scared Nora that he will take upon himself any bad things that befall them as a result. Nora is extremely moved by this comment. She begins to consider the possibility of this episode transforming their marriage for the better—as well as the possibility of suicide.

Meanwhile, she converses and flirts with a willing Dr. Rank. Learning that he is rapidly dying, she has an intimate conversation with him that culminates in him professing his love for her just before she is able to ask him for financial help. His words stop her, and she steers the conversation back to safer ground. Their talk is interrupted by the announcement of Krogstad's presence. Nora asks Dr. Rank to leave and has Krogstad brought in.

Krogstad tells her that he has had a change of heart and that, though he will keep the bond, he will not reveal her to the public. Instead, he wants to give Torvald a note explaining the matter so that Torvald will be pressed to help Krogstad rehabilitate himself and keep his position at the bank. Nora protests against Torvald's involvement, but Krogstad drops the letter in Torvald's letterbox anyway, much to Nora's horror. Nora exclaims aloud that she and Torvald are lost. Still, she tries to use her charms to prevent Torvald from reading the letter, luring him away from business by begging him to help her with the tarantella for the next night's party. He agrees to put off business until the next day. The letter remains in the letterbox.

The next night, before Torvald and Nora return from the ball, Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, who are old lovers, reunite in the Helmers' living room. Mrs. Linde asks to take care of Krogstad and his children and to help him become the better man that he knows he is capable of becoming. The Helmers return from the ball as Mrs. Linde is leaving (Krogstad has already left), with Torvald nearly dragging Nora into the room. Alone, Torvald tells Nora how much he desires her but is interrupted by Dr. Rank. The doctor, unbeknownst to Torvald, has come by to say his final farewells, as he covertly explains to Nora. After he

leaves, Nora is able to deter Torvald from pursuing her any more by reminding him of the ugliness of death that has just come between them, Nora having revealed Dr. Rank's secret. Seeing that Torvald finally has collected his letters, she resigns herself to committing suicide.

As she is leaving, though, Torvald stops her. He has just read Krogstad's letter and is enraged by its contents. He accuses Nora of ruining his life. He essentially tells her that he plans on forsaking her, contrary to his earlier claim that he would take on everything himself. During his tirade, he is interrupted by the maid bearing another note from Krogstad and addressed to Nora. Torvald reads it and becomes overjoyed. Krogstad has had a change of heart and has sent back the bond. Torvald quickly tells Nora that it is all over after all: he has forgiven her, and her pathetic attempt to help him has only made her more endearing than ever.

Seeing Torvald's true character for the first time, Nora sits her husband down to tell him that she is leaving him. After he protests, she explains that he does not love her—and, after tonight, she does not love him. She tells him that, given the suffocating life she has led until now, she owes it to herself to become fully independent and to explore her own character and the world for herself. As she leaves, she reveals to Torvald that she hopes that a "miracle" might occur: that one day, they might be able to unite in real wedlock. The play ends with the door slamming on her way out.

[Summary of Acts](#)

[Act One](#)

Nora Helmer enters her lovely living room laden with packages and a Christmas tree, humming a happy tune and sneaking a macaroon. Her husband, Torvald, greets her with questions about her spending, calling Nora his "little lark," "squirrel," spendthrift," and "sweet tooth." Nora reminds him that they have no worries since Torvald has just been offered a bank managerial position, but her husband opts for caution. When Torvald inquires what she desires for Christmas, Nora asks for money. Two visitors enter the house: Dr. Rank accompanies Torvald to his study, and Mrs. Linde, an old friend who has been out of touch, joins Nora. The two women share confidences, and Nora reveals that she has hidden more than macaroons from her husband. Due to Torvald's serious illness several years prior, Nora explains, she had to finance a year of recovery in Italy. While she told Torvald that her father had left them the money, Nora actually forged her father's signature and borrowed the money from a lawyer named Krogstad. Justifying her dishonesty by saving Torvald's health and pride, Nora explains that she has been secretly working to pay off the loan, and she is almost free of her debt. Krogstad enters next, hoping to salvage his position at the bank by speaking to Torvald. After Krogstad leaves, Nora is able to talk Torvald into giving Mrs. Linde a position at the bank. Torvald, Dr. Rank, and Mrs. Linde leave, and Nora visits with her three children. Krogstad returns with a threat: Nora must get Torvald to keep Krogstad's position at the bank, or Krogstad will reveal Nora's deception and forgery. Upon Torvald's return, Nora questions him about Krogstad's past, and Torvald explains that Krogstad lost his own reputation due to forgery. Declaring that such a lie "infects the whole life of a home," Helmer returns to his study, leaving Nora anxious but determined.

[Act Two](#)

The curtain rises on the same room the next day, which is Christmas. Nora paces frantically, anxious that Krogstad will return to reveal her forgery to Torvald. The nurse enters with a box of masquerade clothes for the next evening's festivities, and Nora questions her about children who grow up without mothers. Kristine Linde enters, and as she helps Nora repair her masquerade dress, Nora confides in her friend once again. Assuring Kristine that she did not get the money from Dr. Rank, Nora asks Mrs. Linde to play with the children while she speaks to Torvald. Promising "to scamper about and do tricks" if only Torvald would give in, Nora asks her husband to keep Krogstad at the bank. Reminding her that rumors would spread about his wife's influence, Torvald denies Nora's request. When she says his concerns about propriety are "petty," Torvald becomes incensed and sends Krogstad's termination letter to his home. Dr. Rank confides to Nora that he is dying and that he has loved her for years. Unable to ask the doctor for help after his admission, Nora asks for a lamp to be brought in. Krogstad, having received his termination, returns to threaten Nora again, and the two admit that though they have both considered suicide, neither can brave it. Krogstad leaves, but his letter revealing all is clearly heard entering the mail slot. Nora keeps Torvald from reading the letter by begging his help with the tarantella dance she will perform at the masquerade. Dancing frenetically as though her "life were at stake," Nora keeps Torvald occupied re-teaching her the