

## Comment P. 35

### “Yes, sometimes perhaps-many many years...”

These lines are taken from Henrik Ibsen’s “A Dolls’ House”, a play written as an outcry to reform the false values in society.

This excerpt comes in the first act of the play. It is a part of a conversation between Nora and Mrs. Linden, her class-mate, who comes over to pay a visit to her after nine years of being apart. They are talking about Mrs. Linden’s suffering in life after her husband’s death that left her nothing at all to rely on. Thus, she has to struggle to earn her living to enable her to survive. During this conversation, Mrs. Linden mentions the carefree life that Nora leads and that she has not faced any kind of serious trouble that would upset her stability and cause her to worry. Nora is annoyed by Mrs. Linden’s air of superiority. This urges Nora to reveal her secret that she has kept for eight years. The secret is that she has borrowed money from someone behind her husband’s back in order to save his life as he has been about to die if he has not travelled to Italy.

At this point, Mrs. Linden is surprised. She could hardly believe that Nora, the empty-headed spendthrift, is capable of managing this matter alone. Mrs. Linden becomes suspicious. How can Nora borrow money without her husband’s consent? She asks Nora if she will ever tell Torvald about this secret. Mrs. Linden acts as an eye-opener to Nora.

This excerpt begins with Nora answering Mrs. Linden’s question. She tells her that perhaps after growing old and becoming no longer pretty, she would tell her husband about her secret. “Then it might be well to have something in reserve.” The secret will be an alternative to Nora’s bygone beauty. It is clear that Nora is talking about her physical beauty. Thus, it seems that Nora is aware that Helmer regards her as an object of pleasure and entertainment. She is nothing but a doll-wife. Her purpose in life is to please her husband!! The irony, in fact, lies in Nora’s well-awareness of that. Nora’s “when Torvald is not so much in love with me as he is now; when it does not amuse him any longer to see me dancing about, and dressing up and acting” indicates to the reader that Helmer’s love to Nora is not built on understanding. It is rather a physical love; it is measured by what she does to please him whether “dancing”, “dressing up” or “acting”. However, when these things vanish, an alternative must be ready. Nora believes that she will find no alternative better than her “grand secret”.

Ibsen implies by this that physical love is merely temporary. It is the spiritual love which lasts forever. Spiritual love is governed by very highly-evaluated

values- namely, honesty, understanding, sincerity and frankness. Surely, these are the things that Nora and Helmer cannot acquire at all.

Nora's repetition of "nonsense: nonsense! That time will never come" implies to the reader that she seems to be deceived as she contradicts herself and says that the day Torvald might stop loving her will never come. This is very ironic for this day will never come very soon when Torvald knows about her forgery and overlooks the fact that she has sacrificed herself for his own sake.

Nora is really naïve in spite of her responsible attitude towards her husband's crisis. She knows nothing about how society looks upon a person who commits forgery for the sake of others. She cannot realize that people do not care about motivations and how much noble they may be. What concerns those people is that such a person must be expelled and treated as an outcast. Nora does not have the slightest notion about all this and is very proud of the great deed she has done by saving her husband from an unexpected death.

Nora asks Mrs. Linden "Am I fit for nothing now?" By asking this question, Nora declares that she, too, has a role in life. She is not so empty-headed as people think of her. Her mind is occupied by serious matters rather than trivialities. What she has done for the sake of her husband was not an easy work. It has cost her "a lot for anxiety." "It has been no joke to meet my engagements punctually."

Moreover, Nora is not a spendthrift as Helmer considered her at the beginning of the play. In this context, the readers are introduced to a very thrifty woman who does her best to save the loan. At the same time, she is aware of the necessity of making a balance between her duty to her husband's and children's requests, on the one hand, and saving the loan, on the other hand.

Ibsen draws a realistic picture of a typical mother who is willing to do anything for the sake of her children's comfort and happiness. She does the same with her husband who "had to live well". Nora's purpose in life seems to be pleasing the others! She has no duty towards herself. This is one of the things that Ibsen refutes.

Nora's character can be analysed through what she says to Mrs. Linden. Her words impart to the readers many pieces of information about herself. She seems to believe in her destiny as a doll-wife, just for amusement. Besides, she is very far from understanding her husband's character and how he thinks. She lives in the world of emotions and thinks that he will be pleased by what she has done for his sake. Furthermore, she is a mixture of a child and a mature woman. She sings, dances and dresses up to please her husband. But when it is time for duty, she is

able to play the role of a fully responsible and mature woman. In short, Nora is a romantic sacrifice who expects to be rewarded.