

## A Character sketch for Torvald

Nora Helmer is the main male character in "A Doll's House", a modern tragedy in which the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen discusses some important themes such as the emancipation of women's character, the husband-wife relationship, hereditary doom, and appearance versus reality. Nora is a young pretty wife who sacrifices a lot for her husband.

One of the most complex characters of 19th century drama, Nora Helmer prances about in the first act, behaves desperately in the second, and gains a stark sense of reality during the finale of Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House". In the beginning, Nora exhibits many childish qualities. The audience first sees her when she returns from a seemingly extravagant Christmas shopping excursion. She eats a few desserts which she has secretly purchased. When her condescending husband, Torvald Helmer, asks if she has been sneaking macaroons, she denies it whole-heartedly. With this minor act of deception, the audience learns that Nora is quite capable of lying.

Moreover, Nora is most child-like when she interacts with her husband. She behaves playfully yet obediently in his presence, always coaxing favors from him instead of communicating as equals. Torvald gently chides Nora throughout the play, and Nora good-naturedly responds to his criticism as though she were some loyal pet.

However, Nora has been leading a double life. She has not been thoughtlessly spending their money. Rather, she has been scrimping and saving to pay off a secret debt. Years ago, when her husband became ill, Nora forged her father's signature to receive a loan to save Torvald's life. The fact that she never told Torvald about this arrangement reveals several aspects of her character. For one, the audience no longer sees Nora as the sheltered, care-free wife of an attorney. She knows what it means to struggle and take risks. In addition, the act of concealing the ill-gotten loan signifies Nora's independent streak. She is proud of the sacrifice she has made. Although she says nothing to Torvald, she brags about her actions with her old friend, Mrs. Linden, the first chance she gets! Basically, she believes that her husband would undergo just as many hardships, if not more, for her sake. However, her perception of her husband's devotion is quite misplaced.

When the disgruntled Nils Krogstad threatens to reveal the truth about her forgery, Nora realizes that she has potentially scandalized Torvald Helmer's good name. She begins to question her own morality, something she has never done before. Did she do something wrong? Were her actions appropriate, under the circumstances? Will the courts convict her? Is she an improper wife? Is she a terrible mother?

Nora contemplates suicide in order to eliminate the dishonor she has wrought upon her family. She also hopes to prevent Torvald from sacrificing himself and going to prison in order to save her from persecution. Yet, it remains debatable as to whether or not she would truly follow through and jump in the icy river. Krogstad doubts her ability. Also, during the climactic scene in Act Three, Nora seems to stall before running out into the night to end her life. Torvald stops her all too easily, perhaps because she knows that, deep down, she wants to be saved.

Nora's epiphany occurs when the truth is finally revealed. As Torvald unleashes his disgust towards Nora and her crime of forgery, the protagonist realizes that her husband is a very different person than she once believed. Torvald has no intention of taking the blame for Nora's crime. She thought for certain that he would selflessly give up everything for her. When he fails to do this, she accepts the fact that their marriage has been an illusion. Their false devotion has been merely play acting. She has been his "child-wife" and his "doll." The monologue in which she calmly confronts Torvald serves as one of Ibsen's finest literary moments.

Since the premiere of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, much has been discussed regarding the final controversial scene. Why does Nora leave not only Torvald but her children as well? Many critics and theater-goers questioned the morality of the play's resolution. In fact, some productions in Germany refused to produce the original ending. Ibsen acquiesced and grudgingly wrote an alternate ending in which Nora breaks down and cries, deciding to stay, but only for her children's sake.

Furthermore, some argue that Nora leaves her home purely because she is selfish. She does not want to forgive Torvald. She would rather start another life than try to fix her existing one. Or perhaps she feels that Torvald was right, that she is a child who knows nothing of the world. Since she knows so little about herself or society, she feels that she is an inadequate mother and wife. She leaves the children because she feels it is for their benefit, painful as it may be to her.

Nora's last words are hopeful, yet her final action is less optimistic. She leaves Torvald explaining that there is a slight chance they could become man and wife once again, but only if a "Miracle of miracles" occurred. This gives Torvald a brief ray of hope. However, just as he repeats Nora's notion of miracles, his wife exits and slams the door, symbolizing the finality of their relationship.

In short, Ibsen is very successful in portraying the character of Nora Helmer through "A Doll's House". The very wilderness and violence of the dance expresses her feelings. Ibsen attempts to discuss several important themes through this central character. He makes us, as readers, sympathize with her.