**A Doll’s House – Henrik Ibsen**

**Key Moments**

Nora is married to Torvold Helmer, a bank manager. Nora has a childish, dependent relationship with her status-conscious husband. Out of love for her husband, Nora commits a transgression. Anxious to save her husband’s life, she borrows money from Krogstad using her father’s forged signature as guarantor for a loan. Her deception is uncovered and she finds herself blackmailed by Krogstad. Helmer soon discovers the truth and reprimands his wife severely. At this point, the dynamics in their relationship change and Nora engages in her first mature conversation with her husband in eight years of marriage.

**KM- Nora’s relationship with her husband, Helmer**

Nora returns in festive cheer and furtively listens at her husband’s door. Helmer is in his study. He calls her “my skylark”. She pops a few macaroons into her mouth.

Excitedly, Nora wants to show her husband what she has bought. Helmer is startled by the word “bought”. He opens his study door. He asks her if she has been overspending again.

Nora delights in Helmer’s new position. She pleads for more money at Christmas. She wonders why he does not just borrow the money, now that he has a secure position in the bank.

Helmer is determined that he will not borrow: “A home that is founded on debts and borrowing can never be a place of freedom and beauty.” He hands her some money for the Christmas season and asks her what she would like for a Christmas present.

She simply pleads for more money. He describes her as an “expensive pet”. Nora accepts his definition of her: “If only you knew how many expenses we larks and sqirrels have.”

He fears his wife has inherited her father’s spendthrift qualities and asks her if she spent money in the pastry shop. She denies it, though it is clear to the audience that she is lying. (Act 1)

**KM – Krogstad’s Menace**

Nora plays happily with her children until Krogstad appears in the doorway. Nora is unnerved by his presence and quickly ushers the children away. She is concerned that he should arrive on Christmas eve.

Krogstad coldly suggests that her happiness over the festive period depends on her. Ha asks about Mrs Linde’s new position. Nora claims she had some influence over her husband. He inquires if Nora would help him. At this point she denies that she has any sway over her husband’s decisions.

He mentions the loan she took out. In particular, he refers to the IOU which her father signed. He cross-examines her and during the questioning she unwittingly admits that her father died on the 29th of September. Krogstad realises Nora’s deception immediately as the date on the IOU suggests that her father had been alive three days later.

Nora is silent. Then, defiantly, she acknowledges that she forged her father’s signature. Krogstad is aware of the legal implication of Nora’s admission. Nora states her reasons, but Krogstad is quick to interject that the law does not concern itself with motives.

He threatens her. Nora is left deeply distressed. When he leaves, the delighted children return, but a troubles Nora shepherds them away. (Act 1)

**KM – Nora’s Monologue**

Nora is deeply unsettled by Helmer’s words. Helmer claims that lies and deception poison the environment in the home. Nora is concerned for her children.

When Helmer exits, Nora’s distress is evident:

Nora: (Pale with fear) Corrupt my little children-! Poison my home! (Short pause. She throws back her head.) It isn’t true! It *couldn’t* be true! (Act 1)

**KM – Nora’s worst fears realised**

Nora is deeply troubled by Krogstad’s presence in her house and she is fearful that Helmer will uncover the truth.

She walks over and bolts Helmer’s study door. Krogstad is wearing an overcoat, heavy boots and a fur cap. At first, Krogstad feigns sympathy, claiming that the problem can be settled quite amicably.

Then he produces the letter disclosing everthing to her husband. He even makes more demands. He anticipates that Helmer will be compelled “to create a new job” for him.

He paints a terrifying image of those who have drowned in the “cold, black water.” Krogstad delights in his prospective triumph over Helmer: “I’ve got him in my pocket”. (Act 2)

**KM – Time is running out**

Helmer sits at the piano while Nora seizes the tambourine. She wraps a shawl around herself and dances the tarantella while Helmer plays the piano. He urges her to dance slowly but Nora is behaving frantically.

Helmer stops abruptly. Dr Rank offers to play for Nora. Mrs Linde interrupts while Helmer notes that Nora is dancing as if her “Life depended on it.” Nora agrees.

He asks her to stop, disappointed that she has forgotten the steps he had taught her. She places her tambourine aside. Nora is passive here: ”You must show me every step of the way.”

She pleads with him not to open the post and Helmer’s suspicions are aroused. Dr Rank encourages him to give into his wife and Helmer concedes.

Nora is left alone with Mrs Linde, who reports that Krogstad has left town. Nora sits there “waiting for the miracle to happen.” Mrs Linde wonders what miracle she expects. Mrs Linde leaves, while Nora simply counts the hours before Helmer opens Krogstad’s letter.

**KM – Krogstad’s and Mrs Linde’s isolation**

The Helmers’ music is being played upstairs. Mrs Linde is anxiously awaiting Krogstad’s arrival. She lets him in. he refers to her note. She pours out her heart to him. He is unsettled by her revelation that she married a man merely for the security of money.

He clenches his fists. She pleads that she was in a precarious financial situation with her ill mother and young brothers to support. Krogstad expresses his hurt over her betrayal and his grief over losing her. He aptly describes himself as a “shipwrecked man, clinging to a spar.” She tries to console him, but his suspicions are aroused, thinking she is trying to save her friend, Nora.

Mrs Linde shares her own story of loneliness and expresses a hope that “two shipwrecked souls could join hands.” She hopes she can be a mother to his children.

Krogstad plans to ask for his damning letter back but Mrs Linde claims that Helmer needs to know the truth. Krogstad is blissfully happy. (Act 3)

**KM – Helmer’s horror at Nora’s deception**

Helmer is shocked to read the contents of Krogstad’s letter. He questions Nora about it. Nora anticipates a miracle: “You’re not going to suffer for my sake. I won’t let you.”

Helmer is angry, castigating her as a “hypocrite, a liar – worse, worse – a criminal.” He draws a parallel between her behaviour and that of her father: “I repeat, all your father’s recklessness and instability he has handed on to you!”

He rebukes her for her lack of morality. Helmer contends that now Krogstad has power over him. He orders her to take off her shawl. Nora is silent while her husband declares their relationship is over, except for public appearances.

He is startled when the doorbell rings: “Hide yourself, Nora.” Nora stands there motionless. The maid arrives with Krogstad’s second letter. In it, Krogstad absolves Nora from all blame by returning the IOU. Helmer is delighted by his sudden reversal in fortunes. Nora goes to take off her fancy dress. (Act 3)

**KM – A new Nora?**

Nora emerges in her new clothes, she launches into her first direct and frank communication with her husband in eight years of marriage. She compares Helmer’s treatment of her to that of her father. She likens her life with him to a playroom. She argues that her children have been her “dolls.” She expresses the need to assert herself and discover her unique role in the world.

Helmer is horrified that his wife intends to leave him. He protests that she has “sacred duties,” but she insists that her first duty is to herself. Helmer calls on religion as an “infallible guide in such matters”. Nora reacts to this. She no longer believes that something is true because it is written in books. Helmer is shocked by her answer and wonders how a young woman can have such thoughts.

Helmer is hurt by Nora’s assertion that she no longer loves him, despite his kindness to her. Now she sees Helmer in a new light. She says she had expected Helmer to take full responsibility but was fearful of the consequences. This miracle failed to materialise.

Nora explains that she had expected her husband to sacrifice himself for her. Helmer dismisses the idea: “But no man can be expected to sacrifice his honour, even for the person he loves.” Nora retorts that many women sacrifice themselves.

She claims that she can no longer stay in a house with a complete “stranger”. Helmer is troubled by the prospect of his wife leaving him. Nora tells him that he is free of any obligation towards her. They exchange rings.

She wonders how she could ever have thought that life with Helmer “could become a marriage.” Then she walks out of the door. A fleeting moment of hope strikes Helmer only to be dashed when he hears the door slam behind her. (Act 3)