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Doll house sparknotes act 1

Did you know you can highlight text to take a note? x From the opening of the play to the announcement of Dr. Rank's and Mrs. Linde's arrivals. It is Christmas Eve. Nora Helmer enters the house with packages and a Christmas tree. She pays the porter double what she owes him and eats some macaroons. Her husband, Torvald Helmer, comes out of his study and addresses Nora with tenderness and authority, calling her his "skylark" and his "squirrel." Nora tells Torvald that she wants to show him what she has bought, and Torvald teases her for being a spendthrift. Nora replies that she and Torvald can afford to be extravagant, since Torvald's new position at the bank means he will earn a large salary. Torvald replies that he will not take over that position until after the new year begins. When Nora argues that they can spend on credit until Torvald is paid, Torvald scolds her, reminding her that if something were to happen to make them unable to pay off their loan, they would be in trouble. He concludes by saying that he hates debts because "[a] home that depends on loans and debts is not beautiful because it is not free." Nora finally acquiesces and says, "Everything as you wish, Torvald." Witnessing Nora's pouty disappointment, Torvald tries to cheer up his wife by offering her money to spend for Christmas. Nora becomes enthusiastic again and thanks him profusely. She then shows him all the gifts she has purchased for their children. Torvald asks Nora what she would like for Christmas, and at first, Nora replies that she doesn't need a gift. It becomes apparent that she is hesitant to tell Torvald what she wants, and finally she says that she would just like some money so that she can pick out the perfect thing and buy it herself. Torvald again accuses Nora of being wasteful, arguing that wastefulness with money runs in her family and that she inherited the trait from her father. But, he says, he loves his "lovely little singing bird" just the way she is, and he wouldn't want her to change. Torvald then asks Nora if she has given in to her sweet tooth that day. Nora vehemently denies Torvald's suggestion and continues her denial even when Torvald specifically asks if she has eaten any macaroons. Torvald finally abandons his questions, respecting her word. The two discuss that evening's Christmas festivities and the invitation of Dr. Rank to dinner. Torvald says Dr. Rank knows that he is always welcome and therefore doesn't need to be invited. Nevertheless, Torvald tells Nora, he will invite Dr. Rank when he visits that morning. Torvald and Nora then return to their discussion of how wonderful it is that Torvald has a secure income and a good job. Torvald recalls the events of the previous Christmas, when Nora shut herself up in a room until very late every night for three weeks to make Christmas ornaments. He remarks that he had never been so bored in his life. He also emphasizes that Nora had very little to show for all of her toil when she was finished. Nora reminds her husband that she can't be blamed for the cat getting into the room and destroying all her hard work. Torvald again expresses happiness that they are financially better off than they were before. It is Christmas Eve in the Helmer family's apartment, which is furnished "comfortably but not extravagantly." Nora enters with parcels, leaving a porter at the door with a Christmas tree, which she tells a maid to hide so that her children will not see it. She nibbles on some macaroons she has bought, but she hides them too when her husband, Torvald, comes out of his study. Torvald has recently been given a new job as a bank manager. Discussing her purchases with him, Nora is keen to spend more money, believing that her husband's new job will mean that the family no longer has to be careful with money. In a series of complaints, Torvald chastises Nora for being a spendthrift, suggesting that she inherits the trait from her father. He points out that his new salary is not to be paid until April, and he wonders what would happen to her if he were to die before that time. He then gives her extra money to spend on presents, and he asks her what she would like as a Christmas gift. She asks for money. Torvald reminds her of the previous Christmas, when Nora apparently locked herself in a room to surprise everyone with homemade ornaments, which the cat then tore to bits. Torvald then asks her if she has bought any sweets or cakes in town—she lies and says no. Nora is talking about Christmas again when the maid interrupts, announcing two visitors: an unknown woman, who is shown into the (onstage) living room, and Dr. Rank, who is shown into Torvald's study via a door (offstage). Torvald exits to his study, and Nora greets the stranger, whom she eventually recognizes as Mrs. Christine Linde, a friend from school whom she has not seen for almost a decade. Mrs. Linde is a widow. She tells Nora she feels that she has become much older. She had married her husband, not for love, but to provide financial and domestic security to her bedridden mother and her two younger brothers. Her mother has died and her brothers are adults, so she is now free to make her own life. But since her husband died penniless, she has had to work extremely hard for the past few years in order to support her relatives. In the course of this conversation about their lives since they last met, Nora mentions Torvald's new job and Mrs. Linde reveals that she came to see the Helmers to try to get a job from Torvald at the bank. Mrs. Linde makes an offhand remark about how little Nora has had to worry about in life. She even calls Nora a child. Nora responds that she and Torvald both have had to work very hard to fund the life they have. In fact, she reports, early in their marriage, Torvald fell ill, and the doctor insisted that he must take a very costly vacation to Italy in order to recover. Since Torvald refused to borrow money, Nora borrowed it secretly, pretending it had come from her father. She has managed, secretly, to pay the quarterly installments and interest over the years. Nora now hopes that Torvald's new job will provide her with enough money to pay off the debts entirely. Returning to the present, Nora happily reports that Torvald has been in good health ever since their trip. Mrs. Linde asks Nora whether she ever plans to tell Torvald. Nora replies that she may someday do so, if her good looks and charm wear off and she is in need of some way to keep Torvald's interest in her—but not yet. The doorbell rings, and the maid informs Nora that Krogstad, who works at the bank, desires to see Torvald. Krogstad had loaned Nora the money, so she is shocked and worried that Krogstad has come to inform Torvald of the secret. She asks Krogstad about his business visiting them. Krogstad assures her that he comes only on bank business. When Krogstad goes into the study, Dr. Rank comes out to chat with Nora and Mrs. Linde. Dr. Rank discusses with them the human urge to sustain life. He grudgingly admits that he wants to preserve his own life despite the physical pain his disease causes him. He then begins to discuss moral corruption, denouncing Krogstad as his immediate example. Nora suddenly bursts out laughing. Not explaining herself to Mrs. Linde or Dr. Rank, she asks if the employees of the bank will be under the power of Torvald after his promotion. She revels in the idea. Still happy, she offers a macaroon to Dr. Rank. She claims that the macaroons were a gift from Mrs. Linde. Nora then impulsively shares with Mrs. Linde and Dr. Rank that there is something that she would very much like to say if Torvald were able to hear: "Bloody hell!" Her companions' reactions are cut short by the emergence of Torvald from the study. Having dispatched Krogstad, Torvald returns to the living room. Nora immediately asks him to give Mrs. Linde employment, and Torvald suggests that he can probably get her a job. Nora reminds Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde that they are expected to return the same evening, and as Dr. Rank exits with Torvald, a nurse shows in the three children. While they are engrossed in a game of hide-and-seek, Krogstad knocks and half enters the room. The game abruptly stops when his presence is recognized. Nora, somewhat shocked, sends the children out to the nurse and speaks to Krogstad. Krogstad asks whether Mrs. Linde has been given an appointment at the bank. Nora confirms this and cautions Krogstad to be careful about offending Torvald, for Krogstad will be Torvald's subordinate at the bank. Krogstad then asks Nora to use her influence to ensure that he will be able to keep his position at the bank. Nora is confused and explains that she has no influence on such matters. In response, Krogstad reveals that he is prepared to fight for his position at the bank as if for his life, implying that he will not hesitate to reveal Nora's secret. Krogstad explains that his reputation at the bank, sullied by an indiscretion in the distant past, is extremely important to him and his social respectability. He threatens again to reveal Nora's secret. Nora then vehemently responds that he can do his worst. At this, Krogstad reveals that he knows that Nora, by signing her father's signature and dating it three days after his death, committed fraud in order to secure her loan. Nora refuses to believe that any court of law would convict her of a crime she committed only in order to save her husband's life. Krogstad leaves, still threatening to reveal what he knows. When Krogstad leaves, Nora's children enter. Nora tells them not to mention Krogstad's visit to Torvald. She also reneges on her earlier promise to play with them, shooting them away. Nora begins to decorate the Christmas tree, and Torvald enters, asking what Krogstad came for. Nora asks about the nature of Krogstad's past indiscretion, and Torvald reveals that it was forgery. He condemns Krogstad in strong terms for failing to admit it. Torvald admits that he would have forgiven the man had Krogstad owned up to his lie. He suggests that such moral hypocrisy would even infect Krogstad's family. Torvald makes Nora promise never to plead Krogstad's case again. He also reveals his intention to fire Krogstad from the bank. Torvald exits to his study. Nora will not allow the children to come into the same room with her. Prompted by Torvald's comments about moral corruption over forgeries, she is terrified that she will "infect" her own children. AnalysisIn the tradition of the time, well-made plays used the first act as an exposition, the second to treat an event, and the third to unravel the issue. Ibsen will diverge from the pattern in the third act, but here the beginning is traditional, establishing the tensions that will explode later in the play. Ibsen sets up the act by introducing the central topic, Nora's character. Specifically, the topic is Nora's relation to the home or the world outside the home. Nora is a symbol of the women of her time, who were thought to be content with the luxuries of modern society without worrying about the men's world outside the home. Many women were, but others were not, both as a matter of interest and as a matter of principle. Nora does delight in material wealth; Torvald is not entirely wrong in labeling her a spendthrift from an early age. She projects the attitude that money is the key to happiness. The issue is not quite so simple, though, for Nora's one great expense was to serve her husband's need to travel far from home for the sake of his health. Nora already demonstrates some personal complexity, but generally she seems to have a fairly simplistic interaction with the outside world. This pattern is not entirely her fault, for she has not had any real opportunity to take her chances there. She moved from her father's home to her husband's. Torvald's treatment of Nora as a small, helpless child exacerbates Nora's isolation from reality. In this context, note that a doll's house is a child's toy that often allows children to play at being adults. The exterior world, moreover, never makes it onto the stage. Nora is the doll in the house, and the house is the only location we see. Torvald controls the stage on which Nora is an actor who generally believes that this pretend-world is the real one. Just as Nora relates to the exterior world primarily through material objects, Torvald relates to Nora as an object that is possessed, a doll to be controlled within a small sphere. Torvald's attitude pervades every word he speaks to Nora, and his objectification of her is most evident in his diminutive pet names for her. She is his little "lark" and "squirrel" and, later, his "songbird." Similarly, Torvald repeatedly calls Nora his "little one" or "little girl," maintaining the atmosphere of subordination more appropriate to a father than a husband. As for Nora, we see in this first conversation that she seems entirely dependent on Torvald for her money, her food, and her shelter, despite the fact that she is keeping a secret. This secret is the kernel of her individuality and her escape from the doll's house. Nora's skewed vision of the world is most evident in her interactions with Mrs. Linde. Whereas her old school friend is wizened and somber, Nora is impetuous. Her choice to tell Mrs. Linde about her secret seems to be more the boast of a child than the actions of a thoughtful adult, and Mrs. Linde also refers to her as a child. Nora's naive view of the law—that the law would not prosecute a forgery carried out in the name of a good purpose like love—reinforces the idea that Nora is fundamentally unaware of the ways of the real world. Still, it is apparent that Nora is at least partly aware that her doll-like life is not the only choice. When pressed about whether she will ever tell Torvald about the loan, she replies that she will, in time. For now, she believes that telling him would upset the balance in her home. Torvald's position as the manly provider and lawgiver is something that she is willing to manipulate, at least from within the home. She knows that other women, like Mrs. Linde, have different levels of freedom and autonomy. It is important to examine the language of the opening scene between Nora and Torvald in this context. Nora's words could be partly sincere and partly insincere; the text suggests an ambiguity in Nora's awareness of her situation. This ambiguity is perhaps why Nora's character is so popular for actors to play; actors can use gesture and voice inflection to signal the true level of Nora's satisfaction with her sheltered place in the home and in Torvald's life. Nevertheless, she does not seem want to face the implications of a choice to escape her confinement. She believes that material wealth will render her "free from care," allowing her not just to repay the debt but also to play with her children, keep the house beautifully, and do everything the way that Torvald likes. The lie about the loan can be preserved. She seems content with her one great secret, her knowledge that she has done something for Torvald entirely without prompting from him. When Mrs. Linde complains that she feels unspeakably empty without anyone to care for, Nora can feel some comfort in her domestic situation with children and a husband, and this ideal of domestic tranquility is reiterated throughout the text. It is a happy first act for the family, but Krogstad's presence launches the crisis that will consume Nora's attention. The family seems functional, the room is comfortable, and Nora seems to have the Christmas spirit (for instance, she generously tips the porter who brings in the Christmas tree). The family seems to be, as Aristotle might have had it, at the height of happiness—from which they will tumble downhill. Nora's secret, which might come out before its time, puts an ominous cloud over the doll's house. The outside world now invades the home in the form of Mrs. Linde and then Krogstad. These machinations about who should get the banking jobs, complicated by Krogstad's threat to reveal the secret and by Torvald's denunciation of Krogstad, are just too much for Nora to manage. Perhaps the coldness of the Norwegian winter in which the play is set represents the coolness, societal conformity, and comfortable routine of Nora's world. In contrast is a kind of repressed Italy—referenced most obviously in Nora's outfit and the tarantella—featuring heat, passion, truth, desire, and the flame of individuality. Nora's secret is bound to come out. Ibsen has set up an ironic inevitability. All who know are waiting for the moment at which the lie falls apart. Torvald almost is cuckolded by the lie.

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