Henrik Ibsen
Four Major Plays

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IBSEN: FOUR MAJOR PLAYS

HENRIK IBSEN was born in 1828, the son of a Norwegian merchant, who suffered financial setbacks during the boy's childhood, causing him to be apprenticed to an apothecary at the age of 15. In 1850 Ibsen came to Christiania (Oslo) with the intention of studying at the university there, but soon abandoned this idea in order to devote himself to writing. His first play, *Catiline*, aroused little interest, but his second, *The Burial Mound*, was staged, and not unsuccessfully. He held posts as producer and resident dramatist in theatres in Bergen and Christiania successively, but his politics in the latter post were severely criticized, and in 1864 he embarked on a long period of self-imposed exile abroad with his wife and their only child, Sigurd. Recognition of Ibsen's true genius came after the publication in 1866 of the dramatic poem *Brand*, and he was at last awarded an annual grant by the Norwegian Parliament to devote himself to writing. From 1868 to 1891 he lived mainly in Dresden, Munich, and Rome, and during this period wrote most of the prose plays which established his European reputation. *A Doll's House* (1879) went through three editions within four months of publication (and was the first substantial Ibsen production in London, ten years later). *Ghosts* (1881) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890) also aroused storms of controversy, but Ibsen's position as a dramatist of world-wide stature was by now unassailable. He returned to live in Norway in 1891, and his seventieth birthday was the occasion of national celebrations. His literary career was terminated by a stroke in 1900, and he died on 23 May 1906.

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HENRIK IBSEN

Four Major Plays

A Doll's House · Ghosts
Hedda Gabler · The Master Builder

Translated by
JAMES McFARLANE
and
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With an Introduction by
JAMES McFARLANE

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INTRODUCTION

In an age when literature addressed itself to the debating of problems, Henrik Ibsen waited for question time and cast his dramas in an interrogative mould. 'I do but ask,' he at one point insisted, 'my call is not to answer.' In its totality his creative career fits almost exactly into the second half of the nineteenth century: his first prentice drama was published in the early spring of 1850, and his final 'dramatic epilogue' appeared in the last December days of 1899. It is however from the second half of this career, and from the last quarter of the century, that the four plays in this volume are drawn. They form part of that incomparable series of twelve investigative 'dramas of contemporary life' which filled these years—a period of sustained creative endeavour unparalleled in the history of the modern theatre and one which gave a whole new impetus and direction to the drama of the twentieth century.

The series began in 1877 with the publication of *Pillars of Society*; and it was largely through its immediate (and multiple) translation into German and its rapid and sensational success in the German theatre that Ibsen began to reach out to a wider European public. But it was the next two plays in the series—*A Doll's House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881)—which on their appearance and during the following years and decades were to bring the name of Ibsen inescapably to the attention of the world. The two plays belong inherently together. Indeed, not only did Ibsen himself define *A Doll's House* as 'an introduction to or preparation for *Ghosts*' but he also and more explicitly asserted that '*Ghosts* had to be written. . . . After Nora, Mrs. Alving had of necessity to come.' Together these two plays provoked a storm of outraged controversy that penetrated far beyond the confines of the theatre proper into the leader columns of the Western press and the drawing rooms of polite society.

In much the same way that *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* thus complement each other, so the other two plays in this volume—*Hedda Gabler* (1890) and *The Master Builder* (1892)—share a common dramatic purpose. As numbers eight and nine in the duodecimal series, they are similarly contiguous. Nevertheless in the intervening years between the two pairs—years in which there appeared *An Enemy of the People* (1882),

The Wild Duck (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886) and *The Lady from the Sea* (1888)—a distinct shift in the author's preoccupations is evident: from the social to the visionary, from the naturalistic to the symbolic, from the problematical to the psychological, from the demonstrative to the evocative. At the same time, this shift remains firmly located within one unifying progression; and it is useful to see the two *pairs* of plays as relating to each other in a way not dissimilar from the way the individual plays within the pair do. It is not without relevance in this respect that when in later life Ibsen wrote a brief preface to the collected edition of his works, he commended the whole corpus of his authorship as 'a continuing and cohesive whole'.

Most of the work on *A Doll's House* was done while Ibsen was resident in Rome in 1879, though the final revisions to it were made while holidaying in Amalfi later that summer. A few notes and jottings from the previous autumn indicate that from the very first Ibsen was intent on writing a drama which would highlight the anomalous position of women in the prevailingly male-dominated society. 'A woman [he wrote] cannot be herself in contemporary society; it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view.' In these notes he claimed to be able to identify two kinds of conscience, one in man and a completely different one in woman; and he pointed to the inevitable confusion over matters of right and wrong that inescapably follows when a woman is judged by man's law, and when in consequence her natural instincts are brought into conflict with the notions of authority she has grown up with.

That the defining starting-point in the genesis of the play should have been a 'problem' of this kind came as a response to the vigorous promptings of his friend and fellow Scandinavian, the critic Georg Brandes. A few years previously, Brandes had insisted that the only way in which a work of literature could show itself as a living and vital thing was 'by subjecting problems to debate'. When in the course of the winter of 1879–80 *A Doll's House* was played in all three Scandinavian capital cities, it was the *problem* treated there that provoked the most intense public discussion. Such furious controversy did the play arouse—it was reported from Stockholm—'that many a social invitation . . . during that winter bore the words: "You are requested not to mention Ibsen's *Doll's House*!" ' In Germany the same vehement public argument followed, exacerbated by the fact that the eminent actress cast for the role of Nora refused in a storm of publicity to play

the part of such a monster unless the ending were altered and a more conciliatory one substituted.

It took several years before the play eventually reached the London stage. But when finally on 7 June 1889 *A Doll's House* was produced at the Novelty Theatre, it was—in the words of Harley Granville-Barker—'the most dramatic event of the decade'; and William Archer remarked that if fame were to be measured by mileage of newspaper comment, then Henrik Ibsen had become the most famous man in the English literary world, so much had Nora's departure from her doll's house exercised the mind of contemporary men and women. Although in many circles there was widespread public hostility to the play, there was also a measure of vocal and influential support; and with this came that polarization into 'Ibsenist' and 'anti-Ibsenist' conviction which dominated the cultural scene in Britain in the early 1890s.

By comparison, *Ghosts* was in its impact more subversive, though no less influential. On its publication in Scandinavia, it was so vehemently attacked in the press that its sales in book form were seriously affected. In this new play the 'problem' was an extension of the one that had served *A Doll's House*: the exploration in dramatic form of the fate of contemporary woman to whom society denied any reasonable opportunity for self-fulfilment in a male world. This time Ibsen's jottings asked: 'These women of the modern age, mistreated as daughters, as sisters, as wives, not educated in accordance with their talents, debarred from following their real mission, deprived of their inheritance, embittered in mind—these are the ones who supply the mothers for the next generation. What will result from this?' Now the institution of marriage and the nature of the obligations it imposed on the woman partner were subjected to even sterner and more uncompromising scrutiny in a drama remarkable for the concentration and tautness of its structural design. Ibsen was from the very first in no doubt as to the audaciousness of his theme and the starkness of his treatment of it, especially its readiness to introduce topics about which polite society was normally at pains to preserve a decent reticence. He was determined 'that a few frontier posts should be moved', as he put it, even though he was aware that this would doubtless bring a storm about his ears. In this he was not disappointed. The Scandinavian establishment—in the form of the leading theatres of the three capital cities—repudiated his play completely: indeed, in the Norwegian capital of Christiania it had to wait more than eighteen years for a production at the National Theatre, and at Copenhagen's Royal Theatre even longer. In Germany,

the police authorities refused permission for 'public' performances for many years, whilst in Britain the first fully public performance licensed by the Lord Chamberlain was not until 1914.

In contrast to this a whole series of private and so-called independent theatres throughout Europe seized on the play as one which most triumphantly embodied their ideas of what 'contemporary' drama should be. Conspicuous among these were the Meiningen Court Theatre, the 'Freie Bühne' (which selected this play for its opening production in Berlin on 29 September 1889), Antoine's 'Théâtre Libre' in Paris, and J. P. Grein's Independent Theatre in London. The reaction of the press to the first London production on 13 March 1891 was memorably recorded by William Archer in the anthology of cuttings which he compiled on that occasion:

'Ibsen's positively abominable play called *Ghosts* . . . An open drain; a loathsome sore unbandaged; a dirty act done publicly; a lazar house with all its windows open . . . Candid foulness . . . Offensive cynicism . . . Ibsen's melancholy and malodorous world . . . Absolutely loathsome and fetid . . . Gross almost putrid indecorum . . . Literary carrion . . . Crapulous stuff.'

In an entirely quantitative sense, therefore, it was primarily the 'problem' element in Ibsen that preoccupied the contemporary public; though not everyone saw as clearly as did Shaw that these two plays were not indicative but interrogative. In his confidently assertive study of Ibsen, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw disarmingly indicated the folly of making confident assertion, especially about *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*:

'When you have called Mrs. Alving an emancipated woman or an unprincipled one, Alving a debauchee or a victim of society, Nora a fearless and noble-hearted woman or a shocking little liar and an unnatural mother, Helmer a selfish hound or a model husband and father, according to your bias, you have said something which is at once true and false, and in both cases perfectly idle.

The tradition so established has proved within the wider European context to be remarkably persistent; and among those who were subsequently to make what Brecht was to call 'the great attempts to give the problems of the age a theatrical structure' one would probably wish to include the names of Hauptmann, Shaw, Wedekind, Gorky, Kaiser and O'Neill as well as that of Brecht himself. It is a tradition which has acknowledged a *truthful* vision as its prime commitment:

truth, fearlessly recognized and boldly declared, was the supreme objective; truth, however unexpected or unpalatable it might be to received ideas, was the overriding imperative.

In the group of plays of which *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* are the defining achievements, Ibsen's attention was thus chiefly drawn to those problems stemming from the inhibitions set upon individual freedom and self-realization by social and institutional forces: by commercial hypocrisy, religious intolerance, political expediency, and all the accumulated pressures of conventional morality and established authority. With the passing of time, he became more and more engrossed by the ways of the individual mind, by the clash of personal temperament, by the endless and tragic conflict between the calls of duty and the search for happiness within the individual psyche. Ibsen's plays of the nineties, beginning with *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder*, are often best resolved when read as studies of interlocking and interpersonal relationships. Increasingly his preoccupations were less with public abuses than with private dilemma and anguish, more with what was individual and personal than with what was typical and representative; and with this went a compulsive curiosity about the nature of the tensions, the manifold attractions and repulsions, that hold a shifting and essentially dynamic situation together in moment-to-moment equilibrium: temperamental and sexual incompatibility; personal magnetism and hypnotic force: the undertow of the unconscious mind; the persuasive force of dreams and visions.

On its appearance *Hedda Gabler* was a sad disappointment to many, including even some of Ibsen's most ardent admirers. The reason was precisely because of this shift of focus. Expecting the usual Ibsenist exposure of establishment folly, the castigation of some social abuse, the best they could find in the play was a piece of admittedly brilliant but essentially pointless dramatic portraiture, 'the story of . . . un état d'âme', as Henry James put it at the time.

Once again it is Ibsen's own notebooks that provide the corrective. There, in a wealth of preliminary jottings for the play, we read: 'The demonic thing about Hedda is that she wants to exert an influence over another person'; and again: 'The despairing thing about [Lövborg] is that he wants to control the world, but cannot control himself.' Whereupon, taking our cue from this, we see that *Hedda Gabler* is most convincingly read as the record of a series of personal campaigns for control and domination: over oneself, over others, and over one's world. Hedda, Lövborg, Brack, Thea Elvsted are all plausibly inter-

preted along these lines; even Tesman and Aunt Julle are responsive to this reading.

The Master Builder, no less than *Hedda Gabler*, is the product of a mind deeply preoccupied with the nature of power, particularly the power of one mind to influence and impose itself upon another. But whereas *Hedda Gabler* is a study in the demonic—Ibsen's own term—*The Master Builder* is a study in the erotic. Potency, the capacity to exert some inherent power, is the theme to which the events of the drama constantly relate. In a basic sexual sense in the first instance: the nature of the power of the male mind over the female, and vice versa. And then by extension into the areas of artistic and professional potency. And ultimately to the sheerly personal potency of individual charisma. Potency, the possession of it, the loss of it, the search for and the wonder at it, the stimulation of and the submission to it are the drama's central concerns, the recurrent forms and images of which cluster and combine into patterns of often unexpected complexity. As when Solness—first by simple force of his hypnotic personality, and then by a more overtly sexual domination—imposes his will on Kaja, then by extension exploits this relationship to maintain by oblique methods a supremacy in the generation battle with youth (in the person of Ragnar), in order ultimately to preserve a kind of surrogate potency in his profession as builder and designer.

At the core of the drama there is of course the hauntingly complex relationship between Solness and Hilde: between man and woman, between youth and age, between a guilt-ridden and remorseful spirit and an aggressively amoral and essentially pagan will. This encounter with Hilde is something to which Solness responds with a hope born of desperation and indeed despair: a hope that he may once again be assisted towards the reassertion of his variously threatened potencies. But in the final consummation it is only Hilde who enjoys an unambiguous triumph, who wins the struggle for possession. 'My . . . my . . . master builder!' is her last exultant cry.

If *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* were the plays which by their *succès de scandale* transformed Ibsen from a dramatic author of modest Scandinavian reputation into one of European stature, it was the plays and productions of the nineties that gave him undisputed international status. Ibsen was responsible for a totally new phenomenon—the concerted launching of a single literary or dramatic work in a whole range of the cultural capitals of Europe. These were the years when the publication of a new Ibsen play sent profound cultural reverberations

throughout Europe and the world. Within two years of its initial publication in Scandinavia, *Hedda Gabler* had been translated and published in Germany (three times), in Russia (three times), in England and America (twice), in France and in the Netherlands, and shortly afterwards was additionally translated into Italian, Spanish and Polish; moreover, within a year of its composition, it had been played in Munich, Berlin, Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Christiania, Rotterdam, London and Paris, and in the following year in St. Petersburg and in Rome. *The Master Builder* had within a year been translated and published in German (thrice), English (twice), French, Italian and Russian; and within three years it had been played not only in many places in Scandinavia (including Finland), but also in London, Manchester, Chicago, Berlin, Leipzig, Paris, Rome, Brussels and Amsterdam. Never before had a dramatic author so dominated the theatres of the world or so monopolized public debate.

After all this has been noted, it would nevertheless be wrong to think of Ibsen's achievement as being wholly or even predominantly attributable to his genius as a 'problem' dramatist. Whilst acknowledging that this was the aspect of his authorship that was most stridently remarked upon, one must also be aware that accompanying it went an equally obsessive and dedicated concern on his part to explore the previously unapprehended subtleties of *prose* dialogue. After the completion of his great verse dramas *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* (in 1866 and 1867 respectively), Ibsen quite deliberately gave himself to the strenuous exploration of what he called 'the far more difficult art' of prose. Never again for the rest of his life did he attempt to use verse as a medium for his drama. The result was the creation of a mode of communication which, behind a façade of what at first sight might seem to be little more than the spare commonplaces of everyday speech, was nevertheless able to convey nuances and profundities of which prose had never been thought capable. This achievement did not go unremarked in his own day; and one now sees that it was precisely those who were themselves among the most sensitive practitioners of language—writers such as Henry James, Maeterlinck, Hofmannsthal, James Joyce, Rilke—who were most immediately seized by this aspect of Ibsen's achievement. Like Maeterlinck, who was conscious in these dramas of what he called a 'dialogue du second degré', they were fascinated by the elusive undertones in Ibsen's dramatic dialogue; they detected a second unspoken reality behind the more immediate surface of the words. Of *The Master Builder*, and particularly of those long (and, to some of

Ibsen's contemporary audiences, forbidding) conversations between Hilde and Solness, Maeterlinck wrote: 'Le poète a tenté de mêler dans une même expression le dialogue intérieur et extérieur. Il règne dans ce drame somnambulique je ne sais quelles puissances nouvelles. Tout ce qui s'y dit cache et découvre à la fois les sources d'une vie inconnue.' Or as Rilke put it more comprehensively, the onward path of Ibsen's authorship was 'an ever more desperate search for visible correlations of the *inwardly* seen'. And, one might add, audible correlations of the inwardly heard. Alongside the 'problematic' tradition inspired by the truth of his vision, his art also in this way gave impetus to that line of development in modern European drama for which the oblique, the implied, the subdued, the elusive, the symbolic are of the essence.

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CHRONOLOGY OF HENRIK IBSEN

1828 20 March Born in Skien, a small timber port about 150 kilometres south-west of Christiania (now Oslo), the second son in a family of six children

1835 June The Ibsen family moves out of town to a smaller house at Venstøp

1843 Leaves Skien for Grimstad to work as an apothecary's apprentice

1846 9 October A servant girl in the household bears him an illegitimate son

1850 12 April His first play, *Catiline*, published, privately and unsuccessfully
28 April Arrives in Christiania in the hope of studying at the university
26 September *The Burial Mound* performed at the Christiania Theatre

1851 26 October Takes up an appointment at the theatre in Bergen as producer and 'dramatic author'

1852 Study tour of theatres in Hamburg, Copenhagen and Dresden

1853 2 January *St John's Night* performed at the Bergen theatre

1855 2 January *Lady Inger* performed

1856 2 January *The Feast at Solhoug* performed

1857 2 January *Olaf Liljekrans* performed
11 August Moves to a post at the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania

1858 25 April *The Vikings at Helgeland* published
18 June Marries Suzannah Thoresen

1859 His son (and only legitimate child) Sigurd born

1861 Accused of neglect and inefficiency in his post at the Norwegian Theatre

1862 31 December *Love's Comedy* published

1863 October *The Pretenders* published

1864 Leaves Norway and travels via Copenhagen, Lübeck, Berlin and Vienna to Italy, where he remains resident until 1868

1866 15 March *Brand* published. Awarded an annual grant by the Norwegian Parliament

1867 14 November *Peer Gynt* published

1868 October Takes up residence in Dresden

1869 30 September *The League of Youth* published
October–December Travels to Egypt and the Middle East and attends the opening of the Suez Canal, as Norway's representative

1871 3 May His collected *Poems* published

1873 16 October *Emperor and Galilean* published

1874 July–September Summer visit to Norway. Invites Edvard Grieg to compose incidental music for *Peer Gynt*

1875 April Moves from Dresden to Munich for the sake of his son's education

1877 11 October *Pillars of Society* published

1878 Returns to Italy 'for the winter', but remains largely resident there (in Rome) until 1885
1879 4 December *A Doll's House* published
1881 12 December *Ghosts* published
1882 28 November *An Enemy of the People* published
1884 11 November *The Wild Duck* published
1885 June–September Summer visit to Norway
October Takes up residence once again in Munich
1886 23 November *Rosmersholm* published
1887 9 January Berlin performance of *Ghosts* creates a sensation
July–October Summer visit to Denmark and Sweden
1888 28 November *The Lady from the Sea* published
1889 7 June *A Doll's House* performed in London—the first substantial Ibsen production in England
1890 December *Hedda Gabler* published
1891 13 March J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre performs *Ghosts* in London to a storm of criticism
July Leaves Munich for Norway and takes up permanent residence there
1892 11 October His son Sigurd marries Bjørnson's daughter Bergliot
December *The Master Builder* published
1894 December *Little Eyolf* published
1896 12 December *John Gabriel Borkman* published
1898 Collected editions of his works in Norwegian and German begin publication
1899 19 December *When We Dead Awaken* published
1900 15 March Suffers a stroke, and is unable to do any further literary work
1906 23 May Dies, and is given a public funeral

A DOLL'S HOUSE

[*Et dukkehjem*]

PLAY IN THREE ACTS

(1879)

Translated by James McFarlane

CHARACTERS

TORVALD HELMER, a lawyer

NORA, his wife

DR. RANK

MRS. KRISTINE LINDE

NILS KROGSTAD

ANNE MARIE, the nursemaid

HELENE, the maid

The Helmers' three children

A porter

The action takes place in the Helmers' flat.

ACT ONE

A pleasant room, tastefully but not expensively furnished. On the back wall, one door on the right leads to the entrance hall, a second door on the left leads to HELMER'S *study. Between these two doors, a piano. In the middle of the left wall, a door; and downstage from it, a window. Near the window a round table with armchairs and a small sofa. In the right wall, upstage, a door; and on the same wall downstage, a porcelain stove with a couple of armchairs and a rocking-chair. Between the stove and the door a small table. Etchings on the walls. A whatnot with china and other small objets d'art; a small bookcase with books in handsome bindings. Carpet on the floor; a fire burns in the stove. A winter's day.*

The front door-bell rings in the hall; a moment later, there is the sound of the front door being opened. NORA *comes into the room, happily humming to herself. She is dressed in her outdoor things, and is carrying lots of parcels which she then puts down on the table, right. She leaves the door into the hall standing open; a* PORTER *can be seen outside holding a Christmas tree and a basket; he hands them to the* MAID *who has opened the door for them.*

NORA. Hide the Christmas tree away carefully, Helene. The children mustn't see it till this evening when it's decorated. [*To the* PORTER, *taking out her purse.*] How much?

PORTER. Fifty öre.

NORA. There's a crown. Keep the change.

[*The* PORTER *thanks her and goes.* NORA *shuts the door. She continues to laugh quietly and happily to herself as she takes off her things. She takes a bag of macaroons out of her pocket and eats one or two; then she walks stealthily across and listens at her husband's door.*]

NORA. Yes, he's in.

[*She begins humming again as she walks over to the table, right.*]

HELMER [*in his study*]. Is that my little sky-lark chirruping out there?

NORA [*busy opening some of the parcels*]. Yes, it is.

HELMER. Is that my little squirrel frisking about?

NORA. Yes!

HELMER. When did my little squirrel get home?

NORA. Just this minute. [*She stuffs the bag of macaroons in her pocket and wipes her mouth.*] Come on out, Torvald, and see what I've bought.

HELMER. I don't want to be disturbed! [*A moment later, he opens the door and looks out, his pen in his hand.*] 'Bought', did you say? All that? Has my little spendthrift been out squandering money again?

NORA. But, Torvald, surely this year we can spread ourselves just a little. This is the first Christmas we haven't had to go carefully.

HELMER. Ah, but that doesn't mean we can afford to be extravagant, you know.

NORA. Oh yes, Torvald, surely we can afford to be just a little bit extravagant now, can't we? Just a teeny-weeny bit. You are getting quite a good salary now, and you are going to earn lots and lots of money.

HELMER. Yes, after the New Year. But it's going to be three whole months before the first pay cheque comes in.

NORA. Pooh! We can always borrow in the meantime.

HELMER. Nora! [*Crosses to her and takes her playfully by the ear.*] Here we go again, you and your frivolous ideas! Suppose I went and borrowed a thousand crowns today, and you went and spent it all over Christmas, then on New Year's Eve a slate fell and hit me on the head and there I was. . . .

NORA [*putting her hand over his mouth*]. Sh! Don't say such horrid things.

HELMER. Yes, but supposing something like that did happen . . . what then?

NORA. If anything as awful as that did happen, I wouldn't care if I owed anybody anything or not.

HELMER. Yes, but what about the people I'd borrowed from?

NORA. Them? Who cares about them! They are only strangers!

HELMER. Nora, Nora! Just like a woman! Seriously though, Nora, you know what I think about these things. No debts! Never borrow! There's always something inhibited, something unpleasant, about a home built on credit and borrowed money. We two have managed to stick it out so far, and that's the way we'll go on for the little time that remains.

NORA [*walks over to the stove*]. Very well, just as you say, Torvald.

HELMER [*following her*]. There, there! My little singing bird mustn't go drooping her wings, eh? Has it got the sulks, that little squirrel of mine? [*Takes out his wallet.*] Nora, what do you think I've got here?

NORA [*quickly turning round*]. Money!

HELMER. There! [*He hands her some notes*]. Good heavens, I know only too well how Christmas runs away with the housekeeping.

NORA [*counts*]. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty. Oh, thank you, thank you, Torvald! This will see me quite a long way.

HELMER. Yes, it'll have to.

NORA. Yes, yes, I'll see that it does. But come over here, I want to show you all the things I've bought. And so cheap! Look, some new clothes for Ivar . . . and a little sword. There's a horse and a trumpet for Bob. And a doll and a doll's cot for Emmy. They are not very grand but she'll have them all broken before long anyway. And I've got some dress material and some handkerchiefs for the maids. Though, really, dear old Anne Marie should have had something better.

HELMER. And what's in this parcel here?

NORA [*shrieking*]. No, Torvald! You mustn't see that till tonight!

HELMER. All right. But tell me now, what did my little spendthrift fancy for herself?

NORA. For me? Puh, I don't really want anything.

HELMER. Of course you do. Anything reasonable that you think you might like, just tell me.

NORA. Well, I don't really know. As a matter of fact, though, Torvald . . .

HELMER. Well?

NORA [*toying with his coat buttons, and without looking at him*]. If you did want to give me something, you could . . . you could always . . .

HELMER. Well, well, out with it!

NORA [*quickly*]. You could always give me money, Torvald. Only what you think you could spare. And then I could buy myself something with it later on.

HELMER. But Nora. . . .

NORA. Oh, please, Torvald dear! Please! I beg you. Then I'd wrap the money up in some pretty gilt paper and hang it on the Christmas tree. Wouldn't that be fun?

HELMER. What do we call my pretty little pet when it runs away with all the money?

NORA. I know, I know, we call it a spendthrift. But please let's do what I said, Torvald. Then I'll have a bit of time to think about what I need most. Isn't that awfully sensible, now, eh?

HELMER [*smiling*]. Yes, it is indeed—that is, if only you really could hold on to the money I gave you, and really did buy something for yourself with it. But it just gets mixed up with the housekeeping and frittered away on all sorts of useless things, and then I have to dig into my pocket all over again.

NORA. Oh but, Torvald. . . .

HELMER. You can't deny it, Nora dear. [*Puts his arm round her waist.*] My pretty little pet is very sweet, but it runs away with an awful lot of money. It's incredible how expensive it is for a man to keep such a pet.

NORA. For shame! How can you say such a thing? As a matter of fact I save everything I can.

HELMER [*laughs*]. Yes, you are right there. Everything you *can*. But you simply can't.

NORA [*hums and smiles quietly and happily*]. Ah, if you only knew how many expenses the likes of us sky-larks and squirrels have, Torvald!

HELMER. What a funny little one you are! Just like your father. Always on the look-out for money, wherever you can lay your hands on it; but as soon as you've got it, it just seems to slip through your fingers. You never seem to know what you've done with it. Well, one must accept you as you are. It's in the blood. Oh yes, it is, Nora. That sort of thing is hereditary.

NORA. Oh, I only wish I'd inherited a few more of Daddy's qualities.

HELMER. And I wouldn't want my pretty little song-bird to be the least bit different from what she is now. But come to think of it, you look rather . . . rather . . . how shall I put it? . . . rather guilty today. . . .

NORA. Do I?

HELMER. Yes, you do indeed. Look me straight in the eye.

NORA [*looks at him*]. Well?

HELMER [*wagging his finger at her*]. My little sweet-tooth surely didn't forget herself in town today?

NORA. No, whatever makes you think that?

HELMER. She didn't just pop into the confectioner's for a moment?

NORA. No, I assure you, Torvald. . . !

HELMER. Didn't try sampling the preserves?

NORA. No, really I didn't.

HELMER. Didn't go nibbling a macaroon or two?

NORA. No, Torvald, honestly, you must believe me. . . !

HELMER. All right then! It's really just my little joke. . . .

NORA [*crosses to the table*]. I would never dream of doing anything you didn't want me to.

HELMER. Of course not, I know that. And then you've given me your word. . . . [*Crosses to her.*] Well then, Nora dearest, you shall keep your little Christmas secrets. They'll all come out tonight, I dare say, when we light the tree.

NORA. Did you remember to invite Dr. Rank?

HELMER. No. But there's really no need. Of course he'll come and have dinner with us. Anyway, I can ask him when he looks in this morning. I've ordered some good wine. Nora, you can't imagine how I am looking forward to this evening.

NORA. So am I. And won't the children enjoy it, Torvald!

HELMER. Oh, what a glorious feeling it is, knowing you've got a nice, safe job, and a good fat income. Don't you agree? Isn't it wonderful, just thinking about it?

NORA. Oh, it's marvellous!

HELMER. Do you remember last Christmas? Three whole weeks beforehand you shut yourself up every evening till after midnight making flowers for the Christmas tree and all the other splendid things you wanted to surprise us with. Ugh, I never felt so bored in all my life.

NORA. I wasn't the least bit bored.

HELMER [*smiling*]. But it turned out a bit of an anticlimax, Nora.

NORA. Oh, you are not going to tease me about that again! How was I to know the cat would get in and pull everything to bits?

HELMER. No, of course you weren't. Poor little Nora! All you wanted was for us to have a nice time—and it's the thought behind it that counts, after all. All the same, it's a good thing we've seen the back of those lean times.

NORA. Yes, really it's marvellous.

HELMER. Now there's no need for me to sit here all on my own, bored to tears. And you don't have to strain your dear little eyes, and work those dainty little fingers to the bone. . . .

NORA [*clapping her hands*]. No, Torvald, I don't, do I? Not any more. Oh, how marvellous it is to hear that! [*Takes his arm.*] Now I want to tell you how I've been thinking we might arrange things, Torvald. As soon as Christmas is over. . . . [*The door-bell rings in the hall.*] Oh, there's the bell. [*Tidies one or two things in the room.*] It's probably a visitor. What a nuisance!

HELMER. Remember I'm not at home to callers.

MAID [*in the doorway*]. There's a lady to see you, ma'am.

NORA. Show her in, please.

MAID [*to* HELMER]. And the doctor's just arrived, too, sir.

HELMER. Did he go straight into my room?

MAID. Yes, he did, sir.

[HELMER *goes into his study. The* MAID *shows in* MRS. LINDE, *who is in travelling clothes, and closes the door after her.*]

MRS. LINDE [*subdued and rather hesitantly*]. How do you do, Nora?

NORA [*uncertainly*]. How do you do?

MRS. LINDE. I'm afraid you don't recognize me.

NORA. No, I don't think I . . . And yet I seem to. . . . [*Bursts out suddenly.*] Why! Kristine! Is it really you?

MRS. LINDE. Yes, it's me.

NORA. Kristine! Fancy not recognizing you again! But how was I to, when . . . [*Gently.*] How you've changed, Kristine!

MRS. LINDE. I dare say I have. In nine . . . ten years. . . .

NORA. Is it so long since we last saw each other? Yes, it must be. Oh, believe me these last eight years have been such a happy time. And now you've come up to town, too? All that long journey in wintertime. That took courage.

MRS. LINDE. I just arrived this morning on the steamer.

NORA. To enjoy yourself over Christmas, of course. How lovely! Oh, we'll have such fun, you'll see. Do take off your things. You are not cold, are you? [*Helps her.*] There now! Now let's sit down here in comfort beside the stove. No, here, you take the armchair, I'll sit here on the rocking-chair. [*Takes her hands.*] Ah, now you look a bit more like your old self again. It was just that when I first saw you. . . . But you are a little paler, Kristine . . . and perhaps even a bit thinner!

MRS. LINDE. And much, much older, Nora.

NORA. Yes, perhaps a little older . . . very, very little, not really very much. [*Stops suddenly and looks serious.*] Oh, what a thoughtless

creature I am, sitting here chattering on like this! Dear, sweet Kristine, can you forgive me?

MRS. LINDE. What do you mean, Nora?

NORA [*gently*]. Poor Kristine, of course you're a widow now.

MRS. LINDE. Yes, my husband died three years ago.

NORA. Oh, I remember now. I read about it in the papers. Oh, Kristine, believe me I often thought at the time of writing to you. But I kept putting it off, something always seemed to crop up.

MRS. LINDE. My dear Nora, I understand so well.

NORA. No, it wasn't very nice of me, Kristine. Oh, you poor thing, what you must have gone through. And didn't he leave you anything?

MRS. LINDE. No.

NORA. And no children?

MRS. LINDE. No.

NORA. Absolutely nothing?

MRS. LINDE. Nothing at all . . . not even a broken heart to grieve over.

NORA [*looks at her incredulously*]. But, Kristine, is that possible?

MRS. LINDE [*smiles sadly and strokes* NORA's *hair*]. Oh, it sometimes happens, Nora.

NORA. So utterly alone. How terribly sad that must be for you. I have three lovely children. You can't see them for the moment, because they're out with their nanny. But now you must tell me all about yourself. . . .

MRS. LINDE. No, no, I want to hear about you.

NORA. No, you start. I won't be selfish today. I must think only about your affairs today. But there's just one thing I really must tell you. Have you heard about the great stroke of luck we've had in the last few days?

MRS. LINDE. No. What is it?

NORA. What do you think? My husband has just been made Bank Manager!

MRS. LINDE. Your husband? How splendid!

NORA. Isn't it tremendous! It's not a very steady way of making a living, you know, being a lawyer, especially if he refuses to take on anything that's the least bit shady—which of course is what Torvald does, and I think he's quite right. You can imagine how pleased we are! He starts at the Bank straight after New Year, and he's getting a big salary and lots of commission. From now on we'll be able to live quite differently . . . we'll do just what we want. Oh, Kristine, I'm so happy and relieved. I must say it's lovely to have plenty of money and not have to worry. Isn't it?

MRS. LINDE. Yes. It must be nice to have enough, at any rate.

NORA. No, not just enough, but pots and pots of money.

MRS. LINDE [*smiles*]. Nora, Nora, haven't you learned any sense yet? At school you used to be an awful spendthrift.

NORA. Yes, Torvald still says I am. [*Wags her finger.*] But little Nora isn't as stupid as everybody thinks. Oh, we haven't really been in a position where I could afford to spend a lot of money. We've both had to work.

MRS. LINDE. You too?

NORA. Yes, odd jobs—sewing, crochet-work, embroidery and things like that. [*Casually.*] And one or two other things, besides. I suppose you know that Torvald left the Ministry when we got married. There weren't any prospects of promotion in his department, and of course he needed to earn more money than he had before. But the first year he wore himself out completely. He had to take on all kinds of extra jobs, you know, and he found himself working all hours of the day and night. But he couldn't go on like that; and he became seriously ill. The doctors said it was essential for him to go South.

MRS. LINDE. Yes, I believe you spent a whole year in Italy, didn't you?

NORA. That's right. It wasn't easy to get away, I can tell you. It was just after I'd had Ivar. But of course we had to go. Oh, it was an

absolutely marvellous trip. And it saved Torvald's life. But it cost an awful lot of money, Kristine.

MRS. LINDE. That I can well imagine.

NORA. Twelve hundred dollars. Four thousand eight hundred crowns. That's a lot of money, Kristine.

MRS. LINDE. Yes, but in such circumstances, one is very lucky if one has it.

NORA. Well, we got it from Daddy, you see.

MRS. LINDE. Ah, that was it. It was just about then your father died, I believe, wasn't it?

NORA. Yes, Kristine, just about then. And do you know, I couldn't even go and look after him. Here was I expecting Ivar any day. And I also had poor Torvald, gravely ill, on my hands. Dear, kind Daddy! I never saw him again, Kristine. Oh, that's the saddest thing that has happened to me in all my married life.

MRS. LINDE. I know you were very fond of him. But after that you left for Italy?

NORA. Yes, we had the money then, and the doctors said it was urgent. We left a month later.

MRS. LINDE. And your husband came back completely cured?

NORA. Fit as a fiddle!

MRS. LINDE. But . . . what about the doctor?

NORA. How do you mean?

MRS. LINDE. I thought the maid said something about the gentleman who came at the same time as me being a doctor.

NORA. Yes, that was Dr. Rank. But this isn't a professional visit. He's our best friend and he always looks in at least once a day. No, Torvald has never had a day's illness since. And the children are fit and healthy, and so am I. [*Jumps up and claps her hands.*] Oh God, oh God, isn't it marvellous to be alive, and to be happy, Kristine! . . . Oh, but I ought to be ashamed of myself . . . Here I go on talking about nothing but myself. [*She sits on a low stool near* MRS. LINDE *and lays her arms on her lap.*] Oh, please, you mustn't be angry with me!

Tell me, is it really true that you didn't love your husband? What made you marry him, then?

MRS. LINDE. My mother was still alive; she was bedridden and helpless. And then I had my two young brothers to look after as well. I didn't think I would be justified in refusing him.

NORA. No, I dare say you are right. I suppose he was fairly wealthy then?

MRS. LINDE. He was quite well off, I believe. But the business was shaky. When he died, it went all to pieces, and there just wasn't anything left.

NORA. What then?

MRS. LINDE. Well, I had to fend for myself, opening a little shop, running a little school, anything I could turn my hand to. These last three years have been one long relentless drudge. But now it's finished, Nora. My poor dear mother doesn't need me any more, she's passed away. Nor the boys either; they're at work now, they can look after themselves.

NORA. What a relief you must find it. . . .

MRS. LINDE. No, Nora! Just unutterably empty. Nobody to live for any more. [*Stands up restlessly.*] That's why I couldn't stand it any longer being cut off up there. Surely it must be a bit easier here to find something to occupy your mind. If only I could manage to find a steady job of some kind, in an office perhaps. . . .

NORA. But, Kristine, that's terribly exhausting; and you look so worn out even before you start. The best thing for you would be a little holiday at some quiet little resort.

MRS. LINDE [*crosses to the window*]. I haven't any father I can fall back on for the money, Nora.

NORA [*rises*]. Oh, please, you mustn't be angry with me!

MRS. LINDE [*goes to her*]. My dear Nora, you mustn't be angry with me either. That's the worst thing about people in my position, they become so bitter. One has nobody to work for, yet one has to be on the look-out all the time. Life has to go on, and one starts thinking only of oneself. Believe it or not, when you told me the good news

about your step up, I was pleased not so much for your sake as for mine.

NORA. How do you mean? Ah, I see. You think Torvald might be able to do something for you.

MRS. LINDE. Yes, that's exactly what I thought.

NORA. And so he shall, Kristine. Just leave things to me. I'll bring it up so cleverly . . . I'll think up something to put him in a good mood. Oh, I do so much want to help you.

MRS. LINDE. It is awfully kind of you, Nora, offering to do all this for me, particularly in your case, where you haven't known much trouble or hardship in your own life.

NORA. When I . . . ? I haven't known much . . . ?

MRS. LINDE [*smiling*]. Well, good heavens, a little bit of sewing to do and a few things like that. What a child you are, Nora!

NORA [*tosses her head and walks across the room*]. I wouldn't be too sure of that, if I were you.

MRS. LINDE. Oh?

NORA. You're just like the rest of them. You all think I'm useless when it comes to anything really serious. . . .

MRS. LINDE. Come, come. . . .

NORA. You think I've never had anything much to contend with in this hard world.

MRS. LINDE. Nora dear, you've only just been telling me all the things you've had to put up with.

NORA. Pooh! They were just trivialities! [*Softly.*] I haven't told you about the really big thing.

MRS. LINDE. What big thing? What do you mean?

NORA. I know you rather tend to look down on me, Kristine. But you shouldn't, you know. You are proud of having worked so hard and so long for your mother.

MRS. LINDE. I'm sure I don't look down on anybody. But it's true what you say: I am both proud and happy when I think of how I was able to make Mother's life a little easier towards the end.

NORA. And you are proud when you think of what you have done for your brothers, too.

MRS. LINDE. I think I have every right to be.

NORA. I think so too. But now I'm going to tell you something, Kristine. I too have something to be proud and happy about.

MRS. LINDE. I don't doubt that. But what is it you mean?

NORA. Not so loud. Imagine if Torvald were to hear! He must never on any account . . . nobody must know about it, Kristine, nobody but you.

MRS. LINDE. But what is it?

NORA. Come over here. [*She pulls her down on the sofa beside her.*] Yes, Kristine, I too have something to be proud and happy about. I was the one who saved Torvald's life.

MRS. LINDE. Saved . . . ? How . . . ?

NORA. I told you about our trip to Italy. Torvald would never have recovered but for that. . . .

MRS. LINDE. Well? Your father gave you what money was necessary. . . .

NORA [*smiles*]. That's what Torvald thinks, and everybody else. But . . .

MRS. LINDE. But . . . ?

NORA. Daddy never gave us a penny. I was the one who raised the money.

MRS. LINDE. You? All that money?

NORA. Twelve hundred dollars. Four thousand eight hundred crowns. What do you say to that!

MRS. LINDE. But, Nora, how was it possible? Had you won a sweepstake or something?

NORA [*contemptuously*]. A sweepstake? Pooh! There would have been nothing to it then.

MRS. LINDE. Where did you get it from, then?

NORA [*hums and smiles secretively*]. H'm, tra-la-la!

MRS. LINDE. Because what you couldn't do was borrow it.

NORA. Oh? Why not?

MRS. LINDE. Well, a wife can't borrow without her husband's consent.

NORA [*tossing her head*]. Ah, but when it happens to be a wife with a bit of a sense for business . . . a wife who knows her way about things, then. . . .

MRS. LINDE. But, Nora, I just don't understand. . . .

NORA. You don't have to. I haven't said I did borrow the money. I might have got it some other way. [*Throws herself back on the sofa.*] I might even have got it from some admirer. Anyone as reasonably attractive as I am. . . .

MRS. LINDE. Don't be so silly!

NORA. Now you must be dying of curiosity, Kristine.

MRS. LINDE. Listen to me now, Nora dear—you haven't done anything rash, have you?

NORA [*sitting up again*]. Is it rash to save your husband's life?

MRS. LINDE. I think it was rash to do anything without telling him. . . .

NORA. But the whole point was that he mustn't know anything. Good heavens, can't you see! He wasn't even supposed to know how desperately ill he was. It was me the doctors came and told his life was in danger, that the only way to save him was to go South for a while. Do you think I didn't try talking him into it first? I began dropping hints about how nice it would be if I could be taken on a little trip abroad, like other young wives. I wept, I pleaded. I told him he ought to show some consideration for my condition, and let me have a bit of my own way. And then I suggested he might take out a loan. But at that he nearly lost his temper, Kristine. He said I was being frivolous, that it was his duty as a husband not to give in to all these whims and fancies of mine—as I do believe he called them. All right, I thought, somehow you've got to be saved. And it was then I found a way. . . .

MRS. LINDE. Did your husband never find out from your father that the money hadn't come from him?

NORA. No, never. It was just about the time Daddy died. I'd intended letting him into the secret and asking him not to give me away. But when he was so ill . . . I'm sorry to say it never became necessary.

MRS. LINDE. And you never confided in your husband?

NORA. Good heavens, how could you ever imagine such a thing! When he's so strict about such matters! Besides, Torvald is a man with a good deal of pride—it would be terribly embarrassing and humiliating for him if he thought he owed anything to me. It would spoil everything between us; this happy home of ours would never be the same again.

MRS. LINDE. Are you never going to tell him?

NORA [*reflectively, half-smiling*]. Oh yes, some day perhaps . . . in many years time, when I'm no longer as pretty as I am now. You mustn't laugh! What I mean of course is when Torvald isn't quite so much in love with me as he is now, when he's lost interest in watching me dance, or get dressed up, or recite. Then it might be a good thing to have something in reserve. . . . [*Breaks off.*] What nonsense! That day will never come. Well, what have you got to say to my big secret, Kristine? Still think I'm not much good for anything? One thing, though, it's meant a lot of worry for me, I can tell you. It hasn't always been easy to meet my obligations when the time came. You know in business there is something called quarterly interest, and other things called instalments, and these are always terribly difficult things to cope with. So what I've had to do is save a little here and there, you see, wherever I could. I couldn't really save anything out of the housekeeping, because Torvald has to live in decent style. I couldn't let the children go about badly dressed either—I felt any money I got for them had to go on them alone. Such sweet little things!

MRS. LINDE. Poor Nora! So it had to come out of your own allowance?

NORA. Of course. After all, I was the one it concerned most. Whenever Torvald gave me money for new clothes and such-like, I never spent more than half. And always I bought the simplest and cheapest things. It's a blessing most things look well on me, so Torvald never noticed anything. But sometimes I did feel it was a bit hard, Kristine, because it is nice to be well dressed, isn't it?

MRS. LINDE. Yes, I suppose it is.

NORA. I have had some other sources of income, of course. Last winter I was lucky enough to get quite a bit of copying to do. So I shut myself up every night and sat and wrote through to the small hours of the morning. Oh, sometimes I was so tired, so tired. But it was tremendous fun all the same, sitting there working and earning money like that. It was almost like being a man.

MRS. LINDE. And how much have you been able to pay off like this?

NORA. Well, I can't tell exactly. It's not easy to know where you are with transactions of this kind, you understand. All I know is I've paid off just as much as I could scrape together. Many's the time I was at my wit's end. [*Smiles.*] Then I used to sit here and pretend that some rich old gentleman had fallen in love with me. . . .

MRS. LINDE. What! What gentleman?

NORA. Oh, rubbish! . . . and that now he had died, and when they opened his will, there in big letters were the words: 'My entire fortune is to be paid over, immediately and in cash, to charming Mrs. Nora Helmer.'

MRS. LINDE. But my dear Nora—who *is* this man?

NORA. Good heavens, don't you understand? There never was any old gentleman; it was just something I used to sit here pretending, time and time again, when I didn't know where to turn next for money. But it doesn't make very much difference; as far as I'm concerned, the old boy can do what he likes, I'm tired of him; I can't be bothered any more with him or his will. Because now all my worries are over. [*Jumping up.*] Oh God, what a glorious thought, Kristine! No more worries! Just think of being without a care in the world . . . being able to romp with the children, and making the house nice and attractive, and having things just as Torvald likes to have them! And then spring will soon be here, and blue skies. And maybe we can go away somewhere. I might even see something of the sea again. Oh yes! When you're happy, life is a wonderful thing!

[*The door-bell is heard in the hall.*]

MRS. LINDE [*gets up*]. There's the bell. Perhaps I'd better go.

NORA. No, do stay, please. I don't suppose it's for me; it's probably somebody for Torvald. . . .

MAID [*in the doorway*]. Excuse me, ma'am, but there's a gentleman here wants to see Mr. Helmer, and I didn't quite know . . . because the Doctor is in there. . . .

NORA. Who is the gentleman?

KROGSTAD [*in the doorway*]. It's me, Mrs. Helmer.

[MRS. LINDE *starts, then turns away to the window.*]

NORA [*tense, takes a step towards him and speaks in a low voice*]. You? What is it? What do you want to talk to my husband about?

KROGSTAD. Bank matters . . . in a manner of speaking. I work at the bank, and I hear your husband is to be the new manager. . . .

NORA. So it's . . .

KROGSTAD. Just routine business matters, Mrs. Helmer. Absolutely nothing else.

NORA. Well then, please go into his study.

[*She nods impassively and shuts the hall door behind him; then she walks across and sees to the stove.*]

MRS. LINDE. Nora . . . who was that man?

NORA. His name is Krogstad.

MRS. LINDE. So it really was him.

NORA. Do you know the man?

MRS. LINDE. I used to know him . . . a good many years ago. He was a solicitor's clerk in our district for a while.

NORA. Yes, so he was.

MRS. LINDE. How he's changed!

NORA. His marriage wasn't a very happy one, I believe.

MRS. LINDE. He's a widower now, isn't he?

NORA. With a lot of children. There, it'll burn better now.

[*She closes the stove door and moves the rocking chair a little to one side.*]

MRS. LINDE. He does a certain amount of business on the side, they say?

NORA. Oh? Yes, it's always possible. I just don't know. . . . But let's not think about business . . . it's all so dull.

[DR. RANK *comes in from* HELMER'S *study*.]

DR. RANK [*still in the doorway*]. No, no, Torvald, I won't intrude. I'll just look in on your wife for a moment. [*Shuts the door and notices* MRS. LINDE.] Oh, I beg your pardon. I'm afraid I'm intruding here as well.

NORA. No, not at all! [*Introduces them.*] Dr. Rank . . . Mrs. Linde.

RANK. Ah! A name I've often heard mentioned in this house. I believe I came past you on the stairs as I came in.

MRS. LINDE. I have to take things slowly going upstairs. I find it rather a trial.

RANK. Ah, some little disability somewhere, eh?

MRS. LINDE. Just a bit run down, I think, actually.

RANK. Is that all? Then I suppose you've come to town for a good rest —doing the rounds of the parties?

MRS. LINDE. I have come to look for work.

RANK. Is that supposed to be some kind of sovereign remedy for being run down?

MRS. LINDE. One must live, Doctor.

RANK. Yes, it's generally thought to be necessary.

NORA. Come, come, Dr. Rank. You are quite as keen to live as anybody.

RANK. Quite keen, yes. Miserable as I am, I'm quite ready to let things drag on as long as possible. All my patients are the same. Even those with a moral affliction are no different. As a matter of fact, there's a bad case of that kind in talking with Helmer at this very moment. . . .

MRS. LINDE [*softly*]. Ah!

NORA. Whom do you mean?

RANK. A person called Krogstad—nobody you would know. He's rotten to the core. But even he began talking about having to *live*, as though it were something terribly important.