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Nora Perceived by Other Characters

In the Victorian age many woman were thought of as mere objects. Most woman has no real social status and were not allowed to express themselves freely. A Doll's House, a play by Henrik Ibsen, has brought controversy to the conclusion in which Nora leaves her family. Nora perceived in many different ways is the catalyst that forces Nora to leave her family. Many people had found it difficult to understand how Nora could dessert her husband and children. In the Victorian Age it was not only unheard of to walk out on your loved ones but unethical as well. There are many incidents that inch by inch helps Nora come to the conclusion that she must leave her home and family. As Nora states ³ My first duty is to myself² (Ibsen 68). Her husband, Torvald, treats Nora more as a possession then an equal partner. He uses, manipulates and molds her to fit perfectly into his facade. Krogstad, a morally diseased man who works for Torvald, also uses Nora to gain a higher position at work. He believes her to be an easy target for blackmail. Nora's best childhood friend, Christine Linde, helps her realize that a woman can think, act and live independently for herself. As Nora realizes that she must find her true self, the ways in which Krogstad, Christine and Torvald perceive her dramatically change.

Christine Linde, a woman who has had to live independently since her husband died, suddenly comes back to visit Nora and finds Nora has not changed from her childish ways in high school. Nora for an instant does not recognize her old friend because of the time that has passed since the last time she saw her. Christine tells Nora of her husband's passing and how he did not leave her any money or ³even any sorrow or grief to live upon² (Ibsen 6). She tells Nora how she had to marry him because of her ailing mother and two younger brothers. She needed someone who could take care of her and her family financially. Now she is on her own and looking for a job to support herself. Nora expresses her sympathies and promptly brags about Torvald's promotion at the bank. She is so excited at the importance of his job and more importantly the money that will begin to start pouring in. Nora thinks it will be wonderful not having to worry about money and being able to shop at any time for anything. ³Nora, Nora, haven't you learnt any sense yet? In our school days you were a great spendthrift² (Ibsen 8). Christine tries to point out to Nora that there are more important things in life to worry about besides money. ³Christine, a woman who has been forced to live in a hard world starts out patronizing Nora² (Rogers 83). She believes Nora is living in a dream world, one that nothing can go wrong, instead of living in the real world where everything is not always so perfect. Christine understands that Nora has led a sheltered life for she was always taken care of, first by her husband and then by Torvald. Nora has never had her freedom like Christine; she always depended upon someone else. Christine on the other hand never really had life easy. ³She had to marry a man she did not love for the sake of money - in other words she too had her doll house² (Hornby 99). For most of her life, Christine was responsible for someone. She never had the luxury of depending upon anyone and therefore became more cynical of the world.

As Christine gets better acquainted with Nora she begins to realize that Nora is not what she seems; Instead her true inner feelings and thoughts are smothered by Torvald's domineering views. When Nora tells Christine about the money she borrowed, Christine does not understand because a woman is not allowed by law to borrow money. Nora answers ³humming and smiling with an air of mystery, Couldn't I? Why not?² (Ibsen 12). Christine is shocked at this information and can not believe that Nora would defy her husband. ³Christine too is inclined to treat Nora as a kitten that has never known trouble. Not unnaturally Nora is piqued into revealing that she is not such a child after all. Seven years ago she saved her

husbands life by borrowing money² (Ibsen and Strindberg 139). ³You are just like the others. They all think that I am incapable of anything really serious² is Nora's response to Christine's comment (Ibsen 11). Nora is sick and tired of everyone treating her as though she is incompetent. She wants them all to realize that she is a woman who is more than Torvald's ³little squirrel² to manipulate (Ibsen 5).

When the doctors tell her that Torvald will die if he does not live in the south; she first tries to work her wiles on him and uses tears and begs but he will not go. She knows she must save him at any cost. Nora did what she thought the only solution was; she borrowed the money and told Torvald that it was a present from her father. Nora's borrowing gave her a sense of worth. It made her feel like a man and made her feel more powerful. Christine's first thoughts of Nora's forgery change as she realizes that Nora did it out of love and not deceit. Christine begins to understand more and more that Nora is forced into a role that Torvald wants filled but not one that Nora wants to play. She on the other hand is waiting for Torvald to love her as she loves him. She wants him to sacrifice his reputation to prove his love for her is as great as hers for him. Christine ends up interfering in their relationship by holding Krogstad from retrieving the letter because she believes the truth must come out in order for them to save their marriage.

Krogstad is a man who is treated and treats with contempt. He is Torvald's employee at the bank who is about to lose his position for lack of morals. Torvald will fire him not because he forged someone's name on a bond but because he did not take his punishment instead he ³got himself out of it by a cunning trick, and that is why he has gone under altogether² (Ibsen 27). Krogstad is angry and vows revenge so he goes to Nora, whom he has been lending money, to reveal that he has discovered Nora's own forgery. He hopes to use this against her to retain his position at the bank. He thinks Nora will be an easy target as he says ³Oh you can't frighten me. A fine, spoiled lady like you² (Ibsen 43). He does not believe Nora will display the courage to defy him. This information is important to Krogstad because he now wants to rehabilitate himself. He needs Torvald to give him a higher position in the bank so that people will respect him. Respectability is important because he is tired of being depicted as a villain. The irony is that he wants to become a better person but to do this he will blackmail Nora and destroy a marriage without feeling any guilt. Instead of rehabilitating himself he is becoming more and more villainous.

Thinking that Nora could use her influence on her husband he tells her to make sure that he is able to keep his job. Nora knows this is impossible because her husband will never listen to her pleas for Krogstad's sake. He scares her with threats that he will tell Torvald about the forgery. ³Nora condemns Krogstad's behavior as shameful, brutal, and nasty. He retaliates by making her look in the mirror. He manipulates her into thinking that her crime was just as bad as his² (Durbach 79). A disagreeing Nora naively tells him that the law will see that her crime was different because it was out of love whereas his was out of greed. ³Nora would rather die than tarnish Torvald's honor. She would rather die than put him to the test² and that is why she tells Krogstad she will do anything for him in exchange that he keep her secret (Hornby 101). Nora pleads with him to take money instead but Krogstad wants more than money instead of his position at the bank. He instead has decided that he will use Nora to influence Torvald to promote him to second-in-command who actually runs the bank. When he does not get his promotion but rather a dismissal, out of anger and revenge sends a letter to Torvald explaining Nora's forgery and lies.

Krogstad's turning point comes when his old flame, Christine, comes to him to reconcile. She wants someone to love and someone to take care of and Krogstad fits the description. She explains that she had to jilt him not because she did not love him but to marry someone with enough money to support her family. Krogstad confesses that her rejection was the beginning of his downfall. Krogstad is hesitant at first to trust her love but Christine's suave words about ³two shipwrecked people joining forces having a better chance than each on their own²

and the fact that she could live with him even knowing his past history made up his mind to trust her love (Ibsen 56). When Christine pledges her love to Krogstad, that love gives him the strength to turn over a new leaf over and really want to rehabilitate himself. Christine changes Krogstad because she was the only one who has ever loved and cared for him. Due to this quickly, blossoming love, Krogstad realizes that the most important things in life are not money and respectability but rather love and trust. This realization helps him to understand that blackmailing Nora was wrong. He wants to relieve Nora's fear and make everything right in their marriage. Christine who has seen Nora's struggle tells Krogstad that the letter must be read. She believes that the truth must come out so they can have a complete understanding between them.

Nora and Torvald's marriage seems like the perfect marriage to everyone including Nora and Torvald. What no one saw is the facade Torvald is living in including Nora. Torvald had just been made manager of the bank, a position that holds prestige and includes a bigger salary. Now that he is in the spotlight he wanted a perfect home life. He believes that Nora should not work but stay home and raise the children. He also believes that a wife should obey her husband and not argue with his decisions. In effect he transfers Nora into his own puppet to maneuver. ³Once married, the women find they have a clearly defined and essentially subordinate role in relation to their men, whose property they legally and socially become² (Thomas 177).

Calling Nora names such as ³little skylark² and ³spendthrift² indicate that Torvald sees Nora on a level below him (Ibsen 6). To him Nora is not equal to him for she is a woman and does not have the intelligence or competence to think as well as a man. ³When Nora wants something from him, she flatters and manipulates instead of asking directly, as an equal. Concealing her competence and strength, Nora makes every effort to appear the twittering lark Torvald believes and wants her to be² (Rogers). Torvald treats Nora like a child because that is how he manipulates her into thinking that she is an inferior creature who needs a strong man to lean on. She tries very hard to please her husband because that is all she knows how to do.. ³She can wheedle and cajole but can never speak to him frankly and has therefore had to take a number of serious decisions on her past life in secret and entirely on her own² (Thomas 2). When Torvald talks to Nora he talks about silly things; he never converses about anything serious because he thinks she lacks the intelligence. Nora amuses Torvald when she brings up scientific investigations with Dr. Rank. He laughs and says ³Just listen- little Nora talking about scientific investigations!² (Ibsen 56)

Nora real purpose to Torvald is that of a ³doll-wife². Torvald needs Nora to act every inch the lady. He wants everyone to be jealous of his wife and home life. He wants to control her every action and thought. ³Nora herself is trying to keep from being reduced. She wants to curse like a man, sign loans, have male friends, and enjoy some personal power, not because she wants to be a man but because she wants to express herself more than society allows² (Deer 89). Torvald has Nora perfect the Tarantella before the ball because he wants her to leave a spellbinding effect on everyone at the dance. His wish is for everyone to admire her beauty and perfection and in effect be jealous of him. After the dance he whisks her away suddenly because as he states ³Do you think I was going to let her remain there after that, and spoil the effect?² (Ibsen 53) Torvald did not really know Nora or even really care to know her, all she needed and wanted was someone to be molded into a perfect doll.

As Nora secret is revealed, Torvald is angered at her lies and deception to him. He does not give her time to explain but merely converts her from being his little skylark to criminal and hypocrite.

When he finally learns of Nora's forged note, he acts true to form. This sort

of thing Nora expected. She accepts it calmly and is even resigned to committing suicide by jumping into the river. But almost immediately Helmer's facade crumbles. It turns out that he is more interested with

his

own career than with Nora's moral character (Hornby 95).

As Nora tries to explain that she did it for love, Torvald is quickly thinking up a plan on how to save his reputation. He decides that Nora may stay in the house but may not raise the children. He thinks her lies and deception will poison the children. ³Nora discovers how limited her romantic role-playing has been, how it was not only imposed on her by society, but willingly accepted by her² (Deer 2). She begins to realize that she must find out who she really is before she can be a wife and mother.

Just as soon as Torvald begins to calm down, he receives the returned bond from Krogstad. He is ecstatic and yells ³I am saved!² (Ibsen 67). Suddenly everything in Torvald's eyes is alright again. To him they can go back to the way their marriage was before. He forgives Nora and tells her that he now understands that she did it out of love for him. Nora on the other hand has finally come to the end of her straw. To her ³Torvald proved to be not a courtly hero, but a frightened and mean-spirited little man who is more worried about his reputation than his wife² (Thomas 2). When Torvald reveals the note, Nora wanted him to take the blame on himself and protect her to prove his love for her.

³Torvald's rejection of Nora when he read Krogstad's first letter closes off

since he their relationship. In effect he dismissed her from the human race,

denies her the only roles permitted her those of wife and mother, thus ironically pushing her toward finding new ways to relate to society.

When

moments he later receives Krogstad's second letter and restores her to

her

status as delicate possession she recognizes the he is once again trying

to

cut off her change to grow and become involved in the world (Hornby 100).

In effect Torvald alienates Nora into leaving her home and her family.

The ways in which Torvald, Christine and Krogstad perceive her all had a direct effect on Nora's leaving Torvald. Christine at first thought Nora to be childish but then realizes it was just an act she played to fit in Torvald's facade. She learns that even though Nora always had someone to take care of her she has had to struggle internally with who she really is and how she acts. Krogstad along with Torvald both use and manipulate Nora for their own advantages. Both cared nothing about her thoughts or feelings. Throughout the play Nora begins to realize that she no longer wants to play Torvald's role anymore. Torvald's failure to take the blame on himself is when Nora finally realizes she must find herself because she can not continue to live in the facade world that Torvald put her in.

