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Family Plays

HENRIK IBSEN'S

A DOLL'S HOUSE

Drama adapted by
THOMAS HISCHAK



A DOLL'S HOUSE

Drama. *Adapted by Thomas Hischak from the story by Henrik Ibsen.* *Cast: 3m., 3w.* All of Henrik Ibsen's major characters, situations, and themes are in this short version. The dialogue has been made accessible for both actors and audience. And, of course, the ideas presented in the play are as potent and fascinating today as they were 130 years ago when Ibsen won worldwide attention with this play in which he showed that a husband and wife should live together as equals. Thomas Hischak wanted to present *A Doll's House* for several years, but the play was too long and talky for most groups. Thus, he wrote a one-act version that utilizes six actors, one simple interior set and a running time of approximately an hour. Each character has only one costume. The time period is flexible. The first production was presented without intermission, but one can easily be inserted. This version of *A Doll's House* was well received when presented at State University of New York College at Cortland, N.Y., in 2002. *One int. set. Approximate running time: 50 minutes. Code: DD9.*

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THOMAS HISCHAK

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(A DOLL'S HOUSE)

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ABOUT THE PLAY

For several years, Mr. Hischak wanted to present *A Doll's House*, but the play was too long and talky for most groups. So last summer he wrote a version that utilizes six actors (three women and three men), one simple interior set, and a running time of just over an hour. Each character has only one costume and the time period is flexible. The first production was presented without intermission, but one can easily be inserted.

This new version of *A Doll's House* was very well received. All of Ibsen's major characters, situations, and themes are in the short version and the dialog has been made very accessible for both actors and audience. And, of course, the ideas presented in the play are as potent and fascinating today as they were 130 years ago.

CHARACTERS

Nora Helmer
Anna
Torvald Helmer
Christine Linde
Nils Krogstad
Dr. Rank

This version of A DOLL'S HOUSE was first produced at the State University of New York College at Cortland in December 2002. The original cast was:

Nora Helmer	Libby Sinback
Anna	Sarah Briggs
Torvald Helmer	Jeff Brooks
Christine Linde	Ashley Hugye
Nils Krogstad	Jeffrey Ayers
Dr. Rank	Connor Gates

TIME

Christmas, 1879

PLACE

Torvald and Nora Helmer's home in Norway

PRODUCTION NOTES

This version of Ibsen's classic drama approaches the text a little differently. The setting, for example, need not be realistically portrayed. It can be suggested by a sofa, some chairs, a low warming stove and a small Christmas tree on a table. Doors, walls and windows are not needed. It is recommended that the room be outlined with a railing or low banister so that it looks something like a child's playpen or even a cage. The characters enter and exit the room by going through one or two openings in this "cage." The script is written so that Nora never leaves the "cage" until the very ending of the play. It is also recommended that when the other characters exit, they sit upstage of the room or in view at the sides as if they are observing Nora in her doll house.

PRESENTON STAGE:

- 1 round table
- 1 rectangular table
- 1 sofa
- 3 chairs
- 1 stove

- on the round table
 - candy dish
 - clock
 - tin box
 - oil lamp
 - lace tablecloth

- on rectangular table
 - Christmas tree
 - handmade ornaments
 - tablecloth

HAND PROPS:

- Nora-
 - small travel bag
 - brown paper bag with chocolates* inside
 - keys

Anna-

tray with teapot and cups

letter with Krogstad's second letter and promissory note* inside

Krogstad-

sealed envelope with Krogstad's first letter inside

Torvald-

deposit papers

unsealed letters with Dr. Rank's note inside

mail— four sealed envelopes

money

Christine-

sealed envelope with Christine's letter inside

* destroyed each performance

COSTUMES

Nora Helmer- long maroon skirt, pink blouse, small maroon jacket, brown shoes. Add coat and hat for beginning and end of play; add shawl for Christmas day scenes.

Torvald Helmer- brown cutaway suit with tan vest, white shirt, yellow cravat, brown shoes

Christine Linde- long black skirt, white blouse, black shoes

Nils Krogstad- black cutaway suit, grey vest, white shirt, black cravat, black shoes

Dr. Rank- grey cutaway suit, red vest, gold cravat, black shoes

Anna- dark blue skirt and jacket, black shoes

Although the play was first produced in 1879, *A DOLL'S HOUSE* has been successfully placed in other time periods as well. The style of costume should be determined by the time period chosen, or vice versa. The production at the State University of New York was set in the 1890's because costumes of that period were most practical.

Henrik Ibsen's
A DOLL'S HOUSE
adapted by Thomas Hischak

[The setting is the sitting room of Torvald and Nora Helmer's home in a city in Norway, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and the day after Christmas, 1879. The play is performed without intermission.]

AT RISE: ALL CHARACTERS are seated upstage or on the sides except NORA who stands in the middle of the sitting room in a spotlight. She is in her late twenties and wears a long, heavy traveling coat, a hat, and holds a small suitcase. She either speaks to the audience or her recorded voice is heard]

NORA'S VOICE. I have traveled many miles since I left my house and my husband behind me. But none of those miles were as difficult and held such terror for me as the first steps I took to go out my own front door. When I think of those three days before I began my journey, I am amazed at how quickly my life changed. Three days. Almost a lifetime in itself. It all began on Christmas eve.

[The LIGHTS in the sitting room change and ANNA, the housemaid, enters the room. She can be just about any age and is dressed in a period servant's uniform. She goes to NORA and helps her take off her hat and coat]

NORA. Where are the children, Anna?

ANNA. In the kitchen, still having their tea.

NORA. Do they know I'm home yet?

ANNA. Not yet, Ma'am. They'd be up here and all over you if they knew.

NORA. Don't tell them just yet, Anna. I want to finish the tree before they come up and see it.

ANNA. Yes, Ma'am. *[Starts to leave]*

NORA. Oh, Anna! Look! *[Pulls out a small paper bag]* Chocolates! But we better hide them from Mr. Helmer.

ANNA. I'll take them to the pantry.

NORA. Not yet! *[Puts two in her mouth, then takes a handful from the bag]* There. You take the rest. *[Hands bag to ANNA]* We'll sneak some to the children after dinner.

ANNA. Yes, Ma'am. *[Exits]*

[HELMER, still offstage, rises from his chair and calls her name]

HELMER. Nora? Is that you? Are you back?

[NORA quickly swallows the chocolates, looks for a place to hide the ones in her hand]

NORA. Yes, Torvald, I just came in!

[She hides the chocolates in a covered candy dish as HELMER enters the sitting room. He is a sturdy, handsome man in his late thirties. He is not stern but there is a patronizing tone to his voice. He often laughs but sometimes it is a dismissive laughter]

HELMER. Where's my meadowlark?

NORA. Here I am, dear.

HELMER. Oh, how I missed you! *[Embraces her warmly]* It seems you've been gone for hours!

NORA. Not so long. I had to get one or two last things.

HELMER. Christmas shopping still! You'll spoil our children.

NORA. It wasn't just for the children. I got something for you. Do you want to know what it is? I can't wait till tomorrow!

HELMER. Patience, my dearest. I can wait, so can you.

NORA. Of course. I just meant—

HELMER. I'm afraid that Christmas has quite gone to your head this year.

NORA. And why not? It's our first Christmas in so long since you had your health and we had money to spend!

HELMER. What money? I don't start the new position at the bank until January first.

NORA. You know what I mean, Torvald. Soon you'll be drawing a manager's salary, and all our money worries will be behind us. So this is a Christmas to celebrate!

HELMER. *[Laughing]* You're such a child, Nora! What am I going to do with you?

NORA. Indulge me for once, Torvald! Let's make this the best Christmas ever!

HELMER. How can I resist my meadowlark? *[Kisses her on the lips]* Oh, it seems like you've already been indulging! Chocolate?

NORA. Just a taste. It's Christmas Eve!

HELMER. Next you'll be gorging our children with sweets, and they will grow up to be as spoiled as you!

NORA. Would that be so terrible? Am I so very bad?

HELMER. My little wife, bad? Impossible! But you need watching, my dear. You've no sense of money. You don't understand the practical things in this world. Just like your father.

NORA. Papa did all right for himself. He knew how to enjoy money.

HELMER. He enjoyed it too much, I'd say. You picked up some bad habits from him. But now you are all mine, Nora, and I will take care of you and keep the cold cruel world away from you and my children.

[Embraces her again; DOORBELL CHIMES] That will be Dr. Rank, I imagine.

NORA. He's early today.

HELMER. Yes. And I still have so much work on my desk. I was hoping to finish before the holiday.

NORA. Leave it, Torvald. It's Christmas Eve!

HELMER. And I suppose little elves will come in the night and finish all the work for me?

NORA. Yes! A splendid idea! *[They laugh]*

[ANNA re-enters and stands in the entrance to the room]

ANNA. There is a lady here to see Mrs. Helmer.

HELMER. A lady? Well, I don't want to be in the way. I'll be in my study, Nora. *[Exits the opposite side]*

NORA. Yes, dear. *[To Anna]* Show her in, Anna.

ANNA. Yes, Ma'am. *[Exits]*

NORA. Who could it be? *[Goes and takes another chocolate from the candy dish]* And on Christmas Eve too?

[CHRISTINE LINDE rises from her offstage chair and enters the sitting room. She is the same age as Nora but has lost her youthful innocence and gleam. It is a tired face, but she smiles bravely and has no sense of self pity about her. She wears a simple dark dress and practical white blouse. NORA does not recognize her]

NORA. Yes...?

CHRISTINE. Good day to you, Nora.

NORA. Ah... yes. Good day.

CHRISTINE. I guess you don't recognize me. How embarrassing. No doubt I've changed—

NORA. [*Suddenly recognizes her*] Christine!

CHRISTINE. Yes!

NORA. Is it really you! [*Goes to her*] Christine Hamsun! But of course! Oh, how long has it been?

CHRISTINE. A long time, I'm afraid. Years. But I am Christine Linde now.

NORA. I know! Eight years! It's been eight years since we've seen each other. When we graduated together! Remember?

CHRISTINE. Yes. That's right!

NORA. At first glance I couldn't see— Oh, but of course you are Christine! My dear old friend! [*Embraces her*] But you are freezing cold! Come sit by the stove. How long have you been back in town? [*They sit by the stove*]

CHRISTINE. Just since this morning.

NORA. Home again for Christmas?

CHRISTINE. Not exactly. I've no family left here but—

NORA. Oh, I remember now. Your mother passed away last summer. I am so sorry and— [*rises*] My goodness! I should have remembered! You are a widow, Christine.

CHRISTINE. Yes.

NORA. I read about it in the newspaper. It was a long time ago...

CHRISTINE. Nearly five years now.

NORA. Oh, I am so sorry, Christine. Do you have any children?

CHRISTINE. No.

NORA. What a shame. [*Sits again*] You will not believe this but I have three! [*They both laugh*] They are seven, five and two years old. Can you imagine that? You must see them sometime! But not right now. They're having their tea, and I don't want them to see the tree until it's finished. Oh, but listen to me! Chattering on like some kind of bird.

CHRISTINE. You are the same, Nora. Delightful as ever! Just like when we were in school.

NORA. Oh, but I am all grown up now. I've become quite a mature woman since I got married.

CHRISTINE. Have you, Nora?

NORA. Certainly. [*Laughs*] But I try not to show it! [*They both laugh*] Torvald calls me his meadowlark. But sometimes I think I'm really a cuckoo bird! [*More laughter*]

CHRISTINE. It's so good to see you again! I knew it would be just like old times.

NORA. Some things never change.

CHRISTINE. I fear that I have changed, Nora. Life's circumstances have changed me.

NORA. It must be so hard to be a widow. Did he leave you well off?

CHRISTINE. He left me practically nothing. But I knew that before he died. Mr. Linde was not such a smart businessman, I'm afraid. We had a very difficult time of it. He lost the family business and then his health deteriorated. It was terrible.

NORA. But you loved him!

CHRISTINE. I don't know about that.

NORA. Why did you marry him then?

CHRISTINE. He seemed prosperous. *[Rises, moves about the room]* His family had a very good lumber business in Eigersund. My mother was widowed and too sickly to work. And I had two little brothers to take care of. So when Mr. Linde proposed marriage—Well, it seemed like the right thing to do.

NORA. But no love?

CHRISTINE. *[Lightly]* Oh, Nora, you're still such a school girl! Not all marriages are based on love.

NORA. Mine is!

CHRISTINE. I am glad to hear it. You are lucky. But marriage without love is very common. And marriage without money is worse. It turned out my marriage had neither love nor money.

NORA. My poor Christine...! *[she rises]*

CHRISTINE. No need to pity me, Nora. I've long outgrown that. Besides, I loved someone once. He even wanted to marry me.

NORA. Yes?

CHRISTINE. He hadn't a penny. And no prospects. So I turned him down for Mr. Linde. In either case it would have been a disaster.

NORA. I don't know what to say.

CHRISTINE. No need to say anything. I married Mr. Linde. Before he went bankrupt, I was able to help my mother during her final years, and I provided for my brothers. Now mother is dead, and the boys are grown up and off on their own. So I have come back here and hope to make a new start.

NORA. Poor, dear Christine...

CHRISTINE. Oh, stop saying that, Nora! I told you, I haven't come here for pity. I want to see you again and ...

NORA. And? What is it, Christine. Tell me. *[They both sit again]*

CHRISTINE. When I was moving my things into the boarding house on Heiberg Street, I asked the landlady if she knew of you and where you lived. And she told me the good news about your husband.

NORA. About the bank?

CHRISTINE. Yes. And the whole story. How he was so ill, and the whole family had to move to Italy for a year.

NORA. They thought it was the consumption. But it went away. The warm climate made his lungs strong again.

CHRISTINE. Yes. And she told me that you had returned to town and were getting on well enough. Then how just a few weeks ago he was named the new manager of Bergen Security Bank.

NORA. Yes! Isn't it wonderful news! Now we won't have to scrimp and save every little penny like before. Torvald's getting that new position was the greatest Christmas present of all!

CHRISTINE. I am so happy for you and your family. But I must be honest and tell you that I came today with an ulterior motive in mind—

NORA. *[Jumps up]* Christine, do you want Torvald to help you get a job at the bank?

CHRISTINE. Yes. Exactly that.

NORA. He must help you! He will be the manager, after all. I will speak to him about it. It is the least I can do!

CHRISTINE. I'm not looking for charity. *[Rises]* I am a good worker. I was a clerk's assistant in Eigersund. And when Mr. Linde's business fell apart, I did all sorts of jobs to make ends meet.

NORA. I will make him give you a wonderful little job! Then everything will be all right!

CHRISTINE. You have that much influence over your husband? Times are difficult, and there are many looking for work.

NORA. Well, even a meadowlark has ways to get what she wants. I can chirp with the best of them! *[They laugh]*

CHRISTINE. Oh, Nora! You are still a delight! *[Sits]*

NORA. A cuckoo bird! I know! *[Stops laughing]* But even a cuckoo can save a man's life.

CHRISTINE. Whatever do you mean, Nora?

NORA. *[Goes to doorway, looks out]* You must never breathe a word of it, Christine!

CHRISTINE. A word of what?

NORA. *[Returning to her]* About how I saved him. My husband!

CHRISTINE. I don't understand.

NORA. Listen and I will show you that the cuckoo has some brains after all. [*Sits down besides her*] When Torvald was very sick, the doctors said that a year in Italy was the only way to save him. Of course, he would hear none of it. It would cost three thousand crowns. We hadn't the money and, oh, how Torvald loathes the idea of going into debt! The man is so stubborn he'd sooner die than— Well, I took care of it. I got the money.

CHRISTINE. The landlady says you got it from your father.

NORA. That's what everyone thinks. Including Torvald!

CHRISTINE. What?

NORA. Papa was very ill himself at the time. He only had a few more months to live. And he didn't have any money to spare. Papa was a bit of the cuckoo himself when it came to money. So I borrowed it from someone. All three thousand crowns!

CHRISTINE. But a wife cannot borrow money without her husband's approval.

NORA. All the same, I managed it. Then I told Torvald that my father gave us the money and that he insisted we live in Italy for a full year. Poor papa died soon after that and two days after the funeral we went south. So you see... I saved Torvald's life!

CHRISTINE. What would he think if he knew?

NORA. Oh, but he must never know! It's my secret. My deepest, dearest secret! Torvald thinks I don't have the brains to add two and two. But I have faithfully paid off that loan every month and soon it will be paid off forever!

CHRISTINE. How did you manage to pay?

NORA. By being more clever than a meadowlark, I can tell you. [*Rises, crosses to the doorway, then comes back*] Every time Torvald gave me money for household expenses, I'd put some aside. I'd shop at the cheapest places so he'd never suspect. And I even sold some of my mother's jewelry— old and gaudy things, but still they fetched a decent amount. Oh, sometimes I surprised myself at how clever I was!

CHRISTINE. Do you think you will ever tell him?

NORA. Oh, perhaps someday. When I get old and lose my looks and Torvald starts to wonder what he ever saw in me. Then I will tell him and he'll be mine again. [*DOORBELL heard; she rises*] Oh, that must be Dr. Rank. A dear friend of the family.

CHRISTINE. Perhaps I should go now. [*Rises*]

NORA. You must meet him, Christine. But not a word about my secret. Not even to Dr. Rank.

CHRISTINE. Of course.

NORA. Oh, what a Christmas this will be! Torvald's new job and me almost free and clear forever!

ANNA. *[Entering]* There's a gentleman here to see Mr. Helmer.

NORA. Not the doctor? Who is it, Anna?

[NILS KROGSTAD rises from his offstage chair and moves to the doorway. He is in his late thirties but looks older. His voice is soft and sometimes halting, yet he can be a disturbing presence at times]

KROGSTAD. Good day, Mrs. Helmer.

NORA. Oh. You wish to see my husband?

KROGSTAD. Yes. Bank business. You understand. *[He looks at CHRISTINE, who turns away from him]*

NORA. Well, he's in his study. Anna, show him the way.

ANNA. Yes, Ma'am. *[Exits with KROGSTAD]*

CHRISTINE. Nora, who was that man?

NORA. No one! I mean, just someone who works at the bank. Krogstad is his name.

CHRISTINE. I thought it was him. But he's changed so!

NORA. I couldn't say. I never knew him until— They say he is a widower. With three children, I believe. Not a very reputable man, though. A shady past. So I hear.

CHRISTINE. I knew him a long time ago. Back before... all that.

[DOORBELL rings]

NORA. This time it must be Dr. Rank! You must meet him before you go, Christine!

[NORA goes to the doorway where she meets DR. RANK, who has moved from his chair offstage. He is not an old man, but he is sickly and frail and seems old. He has a warm smile and clearly adores Nora. They embrace]

RANK. Nora! Merry Christmas!

NORA. Come in, doctor! I want you to meet an old friend of mine. We were at school together!

RANK. As far back as all that? My goodness!

NORA. Christine, this is Dr. Rank. *[To Dr. Rank]* And this is Mrs. Linde. Though when I saw her last, she was Christine Hamsun.

CHRISTINE. Pleased to meet you, doctor.

RANK. So you have been away from our town, Mrs. Linde?

CHRISTINE. Yes. For many years, I'm afraid. I lived in Eigersund.

RANK. And now you have returned home to rest. [*Looking at her closely*] You are pale, my dear. Have you not been feeling well?

CHRISTINE. I am just tired, that's all. I've returned to my home town to find work.

RANK. Not the very best remedy for tiredness. Perhaps you ought to come and see me after the holiday. I might have something that will help.

CHRISTINE. A job?

RANK. No. A tonic that I recommend. It will put some color back in your cheeks. [*CHRISTINE sits*]

NORA. Isn't he wonderful? Dear Dr. Rank! Will you be spending Christmas Eve with us?

RANK. If you'll have the old invalid! [*He sits*]

NORA. Listen to him! [*She sits*]

RANK. I am not in the best of health, Mrs. Linde. But the Helmers still think I am the most scandalous of bachelors and they try to reform my decadent ways!

NORA. We do nothing of the sort. Though he is a most frivolous man all the same. [*Laughs with him*]

RANK. I live for pleasure, I must admit it. Just like my father before me.

CHRISTINE. But your father did not remain a bachelor.

RANK. True, true. I guess I am the more frivolous of the two of us! [*They all laugh*]

[*HELMER enters the room*]

HELMER. What is this? Has the celebrating begun without me?

RANK. Not at all, Torvald! Nora was just telling her school friend about my scandalous life!

HELMER. School friend?

NORA. Yes, Torvald. This is Christine Hamsun. I mean, Mrs. Linde now. Christine, my husband.

CHRISTINE. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Helmer.

HELMER. Welcome, Mrs. Linde. I don't recall our meeting before...

NORA. Christine has been away in Eigersund for years. She just returned to town today.

HELMER. I see.

RANK. She's looking for a job.

NORA. Yes, Torvald. [*Rises, goes to Torvald*] And I told her perhaps you might have something for her at the bank.

HELMER. I am sorry, but we do not employ married women.

CHRISTINE. I am a widow, Mr. Helmer. [*Rises*] And I have a great deal of clerical experience.

HELMER. Well, that's a different matter altogether.

NORA. You will try to find something for her, Torvald?

HELMER. As a matter of fact, there may be an opening right after the holiday. I've had to discharge someone and—

NORA. You see, Christine! I told you Torvald would help!

CHRISTINE. I would be very grateful, Mr. Helmer, for anything that you might have.

RANK. Good old Torvald! That's the Christmas spirit!

HELMER. Come and see me after the holiday, Mrs. Linde, and we will discuss it.

CHRISTINE. Yes, Mr. Helmer. [*She sits*]

HELMER. But before we begin our Christmas Eve celebration, I must walk over to the bank and deposit these papers. Dr. Rank, would you care for a stroll? Besides, I want your advice on something.

RANK. Certainly, Torvald.

NORA. Must you, dear? Can't it wait until tomorrow?

HELMER. No, it cannot, my little meadowlark. Besides, tomorrow is Christmas Day. Come along, doctor. [*RANK rises and joins TORVALD at the door*]

CHRISTINE. I must be leaving too, Nora. [*Rises*]

NORA. But you will come again, Christine? And soon?

CHRISTINE. I promise.

HELMER. We will accompany you, Mrs. Linde, and get you a cab.

CHRISTINE. No, it is not far. I'm staying on Heiberg Street.

RANK. Then we will walk part way with you.

HELMER. Certainly.

CHRISTINE. If you insist...

RANK. We shall return shortly, Nora!

NORA. See that you do. I know the children are anxious to see you.

CHRISTINE. Goodbye, Nora.

HELMER. Come, Mrs. Linde.

NORA. Goodbye!

[HELMER, CHRISTINE, and RANK leave the room and return to their offstage chairs. NORA goes to the candy dish and takes a chocolate. Then she goes to the Christmas tree and puts on some more homemade decorations. Soon KROGSTAD appears in the doorway and watches her for a moment]

KROGSTAD. May I have a word with you, Mrs. Helmer?

NORA. You startled me!

KROGSTAD. I beg your pardon.

NORA. What do you want? It's not the first of the month yet.

KROGSTAD. No. It's Christmas Eve.

NORA. I am well aware of that, Mr. Krogstad.

KROGSTAD. But are you aware that the kind of Christmas you have depends on me?

NORA. Don't threaten me, Mr. Krogstad, or I'll call my husband in—

KROGSTAD. He has just left. That is why I took this opportunity to speak with you.

NORA. You'll get your money—

[ANNA appears in the doorway]

ANNA. Ma'am... Oh, I didn't know you had a visitor.

NORA. What is it, Anna?

ANNA. The children, Ma'am. They want to come up and see you.

NORA. Not yet, Anna.

ANNA. Yes, Ma'am. *[Exits]*

NORA. You'll get your money on the first of January, just like always.

KROGSTAD. It was another matter that I needed to discuss with you. But first, that woman who was in here with you—

NORA. It is no concern of yours who comes to visit me!

KROGSTAD. Since we made our little agreement two years ago, Mrs. Helmer, everything about you concerns me. *[Pause]* It was Christine Hamsun, wasn't it?

NORA. Her name is Mrs. Linde now. She is a widow and an old friend of mine. She has just returned to town after many years and—

KROGSTAD. I could hardly recognize her. The years have changed her. What did she want here?

NORA. That is none of your business!

KROGSTAD. She's looking for a job at the bank, isn't she?