

A Doll's House Act IV: Rejected Love

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Act Four:

Scene: A pale, grey-haired woman, her stature drooped and eyes weary, rests her chin in her hands as she stares at nothing in particular. Her fleeting gaze darts with no final destination, no true purpose. The soft lines etched in her face, the few white strands within her hair, and the lost spark of joy in her eyes stand as the tolls of years of stress. At times, she cannot recognize herself in the mirror, but the dainty inscription on the inside of her gold locket — “NORA JENSEN” — serves a constant reminder of her identity.

KRISTINE: Nora, darling, are you quite sure you wouldn't like some tea? You look haunted by such exhaustion and boredom!

NORA: Yes, yes, thank you, I'm sure... [*her voice trails off, tinged with a hint of worry. She fumbles with the locket, holding it up within her fingertips, and letting it drop back to her neck.*]

Kristine, I thank you for opening your home to me. I had decided to go straight from my mother's home to Torvald's, but I just didn't *feel* ready. The only person left to turn to was you. Oh, everything has changed forever, hasn't it? My life really was so bright, so cheery, but Torvald became too much to bear.

KRISTINE [*gently lifting Nora's chin to look at her*]: Nora, you mustn't let this dishearten you. After these three long years, you've returned here. I would have done the same thing, and I am proud of you. I truly am.

NORA: Ah yes, my mother, may she rest in peace. It was quite a shock to find out that she didn't really abandon me; she died in childbirth. I am so grateful for Anne-Marie, though, what a lovely mother she was to me... Oh, Kristine, I do wish my mother had been able to meet my little children. She would think of them so sweetly— what angels they are! That's truly why I came here... I must see them again.

KRISTINE [*nodding in acknowledgement*]: Indeed, Nora, such sweet children you have. They must miss you as well.

NORA: Oh, but Kristine, you hardly even met them! I remember that day so vividly; you were out the door before I could call their names. What a pity it is you never had children! Such a lovely life it is, with the little ones scampering around.

KRISTINE: Yes, Nora, but one cannot pity themselves so long over something never in reach. Whether children, or money, or a husband— [*Nora opens her mouth, clearly having taken offense to this statement*]— now, Nora, you know I didn't mean it like that. I talk about my own husband, who died leaving me with no funds, no children. Well, I have Krogstad now, but... Nora, I've said things to you before— I remember telling you that you have no knowledge of the hardships of life— but I now realize I could not have been more wrong.

NORA [*nodding, looking away*]: I remember that well too. How I wish it were true! But at least I have one thing, Kristine, and that is conviction. I *must* meet my children again, I just know it. They must think of me all the time, as I do. Torvald never cared much for my little angels, my Emmy, my Bobby, my Ivar; it's what I most regret about leaving. Oh, Kristine, what if they hate me?

KRISTINE: Now, now, Nora, you mustn't think this way. I saw how you doted on them so; they love you and always will. All this you've been telling me about Torvald I could never have fathomed. How controlling and exhausting he must have been!

NORA: He certainly was. I never really could catch my breath. I was constantly lying, or hiding, or spinning up some breathless excuse; I was even stashing away little macaroons in my dress pocket! It makes me recoil thinking about that night we danced the tarantella, the way he acted as though I were his plaything... [*she shudders, flashing a grimace*]

KRISTINE: Now that you mention, I do remember that... Oh, and the embroidery! I so clearly remember Torvald telling *me* that embroidery is more "dainty" than knitting! How ridiculous that was! I doubt he's ever picked up a sewing needle in his life, let alone even *seen* one!

NORA [*giggling cheekily at the mere thought of Torvald's confusion*]: He surely was such a clueless man. But... [*Her face darkens*] it was obsessive, really, the way he chased after me. [*She scoffs.*]

KRISTINE: Yes, yes...but speaking of Torvald...*[Kristine opens her mouth for a moment, contemplating whether to speak or stay silent. She averts her gaze from Nora's knowing expression]*. Maybe it's best not to—

NORA: Kristine, you know you must tell me what's happening. We are much too far past this age of lies; you should know by now.

KRISTINE: I know, it's just—

NORA: Kristine.

[Kristine sighs and stands up, walking towards Nora and overturning a cushion on the couch. From underneath, she pulls out a tall stack of letters, tied together with a length of yarn].

NORA: Oh, Kristine, I'd recognize that handwriting anywhere! Those are letters from Torvald, aren't they? But for whom? *[Her eyes widen in shock as the realization sets in]*. Kristine, you don't mean to say Torvald's been writing to me all these three years?

KRISTINE: Yes. Well, he used to, at least. When you first left, he was desperate to find a way to reach you. So I told him I knew where you were, and I would send his letters to you. At first, he gave them to me every week, checking in with me every day to make sure I had sent them. And here I was, stashing them under this couch cushion. After a few months, it was every three

weeks. Then every couple months. But for this past year, there hasn't been anything at all. My letterbox has been empty.

NORA: I told him not to write in the first place.

KRISTINE: That's likely the reason he did.

NORA: But why has he stopped?

KRISTINE: He's probably moved on, Nora. Perhaps he's gotten over his grief, or...*[She hesitates]*. Perhaps he's found someone new.

NORA *[pursing her lips]*: No, that can't be. *[Though she tries to hide it, her hands tremble]*. Could he have really found another...No, no, it's impossible. Such silly thoughts you have, Kristine.

KRISTINE *[gravely]*: It may be so. But Nora, this doubt is all the more reason to go back. As much as I would love it, you can't stay here in my home forever, you know. You must take action, Nora, for the sake of your children, for the sake of yourself.

NORA *[with newfound determination]*: You're right, Kristine. What you say is the truth I've been avoiding, but now is the time. I can just feel it.

[Before Kristine can say another word, Nora stands up quickly, running towards the door and slamming it behind her].

KRISTINE: Nora, your coat... *[she sets the coat back on the sofa, leaning her head back with a weak smile]*. She was always so impulsive...some things never change.

[As snowflakes flurry around her, Nora wraps her arms around herself, regretting not wearing her coat. With utmost confidence, she winds along the narrow streets she knows so well. Stepping up to the front door of her old home, the paint still peeling and door knocker rusty, she raps on the door once, then twice, then thrice. Through the glass, she sees a young girl opening the already unlocked door. Nora waits for the unachievable perfect moment.]

NORA *[immediately recognizing her child's face]*: Emmy!

EMMY *[distracted, not even casting a glance at Nora]*: My mum will have the clothes downstairs for you in a minute. Meanwhile, you can wait in the— *[Emmy finally looks up, meeting Nora's gaze. She freezes, eyes widening, and her mouth falls open. Emmy looks Nora up and down, but her vision does not deceive her]*. You- you aren't the seamstress! You are— you were— you're my mother!

NORA: Yes, my beloved angel, my daughter! I can't tell you how I've missed you; how have your brothers been? *[her brow furrows, remembering what her daughter said a moment ago]* But who is this "mum" you speak of?

EMMY [*hands clasped together behind her back as she sways from side to side, still dumbfounded*]: Well, you see...you're not *really* our mother. Not anymore, at least. [*Nora opens her mouth in objection*]. Papa told us that, long ago, you were *once* our mother. You used to play games with me, with Bobby and Ivar too, I still remember. [*Emmy frowns*]. Then you left us but you never said why. Papa says you just walked out the door, a day before you were supposed to dance the tarantella with him. He says...[*Emmy backs away a few steps, still unsure.*] He says that you don't love us anymore. So we have a new mother now. She doesn't play with us much, but at least she's *here*.

NORA [*tears filling her eyes, her face twisting with pure horror and disgust*]: What did Torvald say to you? Oh, what has he poisoned my children with? What lies, with deceit! Emmy, I danced the tarantella that night with such ferocity, and he threw it all away with his revolving innuendos...[*Her face softens as she watches fear fill her daughter's gaze*] Oh, Emmy, how could he say I don't love you? You, my children, are the only reason I came back. Whoever this wretched woman is, this imposter, she isn't your mother! I am, I am...it's me...your mother...[*She breaks down in tears, collapsing as sobs wrack her body*].

[*A sudden series of thumping increases in intensity. Torvald, who has not aged nearly as much as Nora, reaches the bottom of the stairwell. Behind him trails a woman, tall and graceful, carrying a stack of luxurious clothing. She holds an expression that Nora can only think of as aloof. Torvald meets Nora's eyes. He stops, staring at her for what feels like forever.*]

TORVALD: Emmy, why don't you...*[still frozen]* Run along, go upstairs and play with Bobby. Amanda, why don't you run along too, go and frolic with the children, or maybe practice your tarantella for tonight, my songbird. Here, my little squirrel, I'll take the clothes and give them to the seamstress...*[As Emmy and Amanda hurry past him, Torvald steps forward, taking long strides until he is face-to-face with Nora]*. You came back.

NORA *[stares at him incredulously for a few moments, mustering her strength to speak]*: I did, Torvald. But not for you. No, not for you or your pet-names or your little lies. And not for that wretched woman either. I came back for my children. And what have you done? You've lied to them, you've tricked them, you've fed them stories about me abandoning them and hating them! Oh, I should've known you were like this. To think at one point in my life I loved you!

TORVALD: Not even a proper introduction, Nora? After three whole years? *I* should've known *you* were like this. Always so...unladylike. I only told my children the truth. And as for the— *my*— new woman...

NORA: Yes? What about her? Who is she, this woman who *my* children think is their *mother*? Oh, I cannot believe you've lied to them like this! Emmy looked at me as though I were a stranger! *[She lets out another sob, wiping her eyes with a handkerchief as she tries to contain her emotions. Torvald stares at her intently, unbothered by her outburst.]*

TORVALD: Nora, if things were different— if we were still in the past— I would've told you that she was just the housekeeper, that you shouldn't think anything of it, that you were still my little

songbird, my singing-lark. But it isn't true. So I *have* found someone new. And she's everything you should have been.

NORA [*scoffs*]: Oh, a housekeeper whom the children call "mother?" You were always full of lies, you conniving man. You've ruined my children, you've poisoned them. I was nothing more than a toy to you, wasn't I? Nothing more than a plaything, a doll, trapped in this horrific dollhouse. And now, you've moved on from one doll to the next. Like a child, you toss it around, rip its hair out, switch up its clothes. It's disgusting— *you* are.

TORVALD: Now, now, Nora, why must you be so frivolous? I only ever loved you, doted on you, cared for you. Now that I realized you weren't going to come back, I simply moved on. You brought this upon yourself.

NORA: You call what we had love? Your desperation, your control? All you ever wanted was something to play with. I was passed down from Daddy to you like a hand-me-down toy. I changed my last name back to my maiden name after I left; I couldn't bear to have you attached to me anymore. You told me I was harming the children all those years ago. You infiltrated my mind. But now I realize that it is *you* who is the true harm. Oh, the way you have poisoned my children with your filth— my children! They don't even know who I am!

TORVALD: Oh, Nora, half of what you say is nonsense. It's always been like that— you're so naive, so immature. Did you want me to tell the children that their mother was fetching something from the store, a three year-long trip? Pastries, perhaps? Grabbing a bag of macarons

from her dress pocket? Don't think you were sneaky, Nora. I always knew what tomfoolery you were up to. I told them the truth: you abandoned them and never looked back.

NORA: It wasn't like that! I was trying to do what was best for them-

TORVALD [*sneerily*]: Well, well, Nora. If I recall correctly, didn't your own mother abandon you?

NORA [*objecting indignantly*]: She did nothing of the sort. She died in-

TORVALD: History repeats itself, Nora. It was always in your nature, taking everything to heart. You even cared so much for Dr. Rank, entertaining his boring conversations. He may have been my "best friend," but speaking to him was so exhausting at times...he was such a miserable man. [*He interrupts Nora before she can even begin to speak*]. Yes, Nora, he's dead. He ended up hanging himself just four days after you left. His illness may have become too much to bear, or...[*He says what Nora fears*] it could've been because you abandoned not just us, but *him*.

NORA: But it couldn't have been because of me. He was sick, he told me the postcards meant-

TORVALD: Yes, I know, the announcement of his death. Normally, I would have agreed with you, but someone else reached the same ill fate...[*The tears roll down Nora's face again, her mind running through a checklist of her closest friends*] It was Anne-Marie. [*Nora gasps in disbelief*]. Yes, Nora, a month after you left, Anne-Marie told me herself that she couldn't bear to

take care of the children anymore. She didn't feel right caring for them anymore. Two months later, Kristine told me herself. They found her collapsed on the floor of her bedroom. The doctors said it was heartbreak.

NORA: But...She was so old, too, maybe that's why...*[sobbing]* Oh, the woman who raised me, dead!

TORVALD *[with a solemn expression]*: Such is the state of this world, Nora. There comes a point in time where excuses are nothing compared to reality. But it isn't just *them* being dead to *you*. The truth is, Nora, *you're* the one who's dead to *us* now. To me, to the children, to the people who once knew and loved you. You're not one of us anymore, Nora. And you aren't welcome here anymore. I understand you came for your children, but they really aren't *yours* now. They're Amanda's children now, and mine, because she stepped in when you failed to. Emmy's right. A mother isn't the one who gives birth to her children; she's the one who cares for them when they most need it.

NORA *[too weak to cry anymore, overtaken by desperation and grief]*: But Torvald, I *need* them. They're my children, my only blood, my only reason...everyone I love is gone except for them. *[Torvald remains stone-faced]*. Oh, Torvald, you can have your woman, you can have your life. Just please, let me be with my children again, I beg you. Give me a second chance...*[Her breaths grow ragged as she heaves, crying once more]*. It wasn't supposed to happen like this. I wasn't supposed to cry. I was supposed to knock on this door, strong, unrelenting, and look what you've made me! You've made me a mess, Torvald. You just don't *understand*.

TORVALD: Maybe I don't, Nora. Maybe I don't understand. Your grief is reasonable, but you must realize as I said, *you aren't welcome here*. This isn't your home, I'm not your husband, and Emmy, Bob, and Ivar aren't your children. It's far too late for second chances and reconciliation. We've both grown in these three years, you and I, but we've grown *apart*, not *together*. I hope you can come to terms with that as I have. Three years ago, you stood in this hall as we do now, but it was *you* who shut the door. Now, it is my turn.

NORA: But Torvald, please, just listen to me...

TORVALD: Goodbye, Nora.

[Torvald closes the door in one quick motion, letting it slam behind him. He bolts it shut, first locking the doorknob and then securing the chain. He saunters up the stairs, humming. He calls Amanda's name and praises her tarantella practice, not once looking back.]