

## 2. NORA'S MARRIAGE

According to the history of civilization, the marriage in each period of time has its own characteristics. The marriage in the early period is different from the marriage of today. In the early period, the husband, who is the head of the family, has the authority over his wife completely; she has to knuckle under his superior decision and do what he wants her to do. On the other hand, in the modern time, although the husband still functions as the head of the family, he does not dominate his wife anymore. His leadership is not domination of his wife, but rather it is a partnerlike leadership based upon love; therefore the wife can still speak up. Meanwhile, Nora's marriage, which is in the Victorian period, is a conventional type of marriage. And the characteristics of this kind of marriage are far different from the characteristics of marriage in the 20th century.

### 2.1. THE ROLE AND THE POSITION OF TORVALD AND NORA

Torvald, Nora's husband, as the head of the family considers that he has the authority upon his wife; he does not want to be influenced by her. For instance in the case of his dismissing Krogstad, he tells Nora not to interfere with his decision. Whatever consequences might come out of it, he will take the responsibility upon himself. Torvald does not want to change his mind, and he is ashamed if people know that he is influenced by her. Since he has let it be known

that he intends to dismiss Krogstad, it will lower his reputation if others find out that his wife makes him change his mind; as he says to Nora :

....Do you suppose I am going to make myself ridiculous before my whole staff, to let people think that I am a man to be swayed by all sorts of out side influence ?<sup>1</sup>

Due to his authority, Torvald dominates Nora completely. He has the right to command Nora to do his bidding and Nora has to obey him. Therefore she is not free to do what she pleases.

He feels superior to Nora, he does not want to depend on her. It is he who is concerned with money, and the financial responsibility of being the provider of the family. He controls the money; Nora has none of her own. It will be shameful and painful for him to depend on his wife to manage his financial affairs. Because, like "most men", he has his pride; he will be terribly hurt and humiliated if he knows he owes his wife anything. We know this from what Nora tells Christine :

....And besides, how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence to know that he owed me anything ....<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Nora has a different role from Torvald. She is responsible for the running of the household and for the rearing of the children. Besides doing her housework, she also has to do everything Torvald wants her to do. She has to obey him; Moreover, she must not think of going against his wishes. If her opinion is different from his, she has to

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1. Henrik Ibsen, Four Great Plays By Henrik Ibsen , trans. R.Farquharson Sharp (Newyork, 1959) p.35.

2. Ibid, p.13.

conceal it. She is so dominated that she does not have her own identity.

## 2.2 TORVALD'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS NORA

As Torvald is the head of the family, the dominant individual and the provider, he treats Nora not as a mature person, but as a child. Nora cannot have her own opinion, and she is not free to do what she wants to do. Also, he always criticizes her in what she has done. He even humiliates her and considers her silly. He does not appreciate her as a person who has her own opinion, who is mature enough to make her own decision.

Treating her as a child, Torvald arranges what Nora should do. Torvald forbids her to eat macaroon which might destroy her "sweet teeth", and he decides what she should dress and perform in a dinner party. When Torvald does not like Nora to stay any longer at the party, he then brings her almost by force out of the room, disregarding her pleading to allow her to stay .

Not only does Torvald arrange Nora's life, but he also always criticizes her in whatever she does. He lectures her like a father with his talk of principles; he accuses her of wasting his money and warns her against spending the money on "useless things". When Torvald finds out that Nora has forged her father's signature, he immediately scolds her and calls her a hypocrite, a liar. He does not want to know or to understand why Nora has made such a forgery.

Scolding her the way he does, Torvald does not concern with Nora's pride. He considers her as a child who is under his authority; therefore he belittles her. He considers her as a worthless person; he has no respect for Nora and regards her as a stupid girl. When he discovers Nora's forgery, instead of appreciating her sacrifice to save his life, Torvald accuses her of ruining his reputation. He even declares that it is an obligation for her as his wife to sacrifice her life for him as an expression of her love. This shows that in his image Nora is a dull woman.

Besides treating Nora as a child, Torvald also treats her as a doll. She is treated as an individual who has neither feeling nor opinions. Being "a doll", she is his favorite plaything and he likes most to be with her.

Being Torvald's doll, Nora is his treasure. He is concerned with her appearance only. He keeps her well, dresses her up beautifully and then shows her off as an exhibition. He is so possessive of Nora that he is jealous if she ever mentions her old friends. He likes to enjoy his beautiful doll, and he is proud that others also enjoy "it"; therefore, when Nora is in her fancy dresses, Torvald tells Christine to enjoy her beauty. This beautiful doll "belongs" to him, she is his "very own".

### 2.3 NORA'S REACTION TOWARDS TORVALD'S ATTITUDE

Since Nora has to fulfill the cultural conventional demands, she behaves according to her social role. She does

what Torvald wants her to do. For her, obedience means completely following her husband's command. In order to please him, she must hide the other side of her personality from Torvald as he disapproves of it.

Although Nora has tried to have the same taste as Torvald, she fails to change her personality. Consequently, she practises lies in her marital relationship. She is no longer honest to Torvald, what she does in front of and behind him are different. As she cannot do according to her own desires to eat macaroon, she pretends to obey him. When Torvald begins questioning about her "sweet teeth", she responds like a dishonest child to its parents : "I would not do anything that you do not like."<sup>3</sup> He trusts her, and believes in her "word", but in fact she has been eating macaroon. Moreover, since she knows that Torvald is more concerned with his reputation, instead of telling him the truth that she has borrowed from Krogstad to pay for their expenses in Italy, Nora tells him that the money comes from her father. By practising these lies, Nora does what she wants to do.

Another way for Nora to win Torvald's approval is to flatter him . She praises him and exaggerates the good points in him. She tries to please him and to win him over by words or actions. In order to persuade him to keep Krogstad's position in the bank, Nora plays at being Torvald's pet, she calls herself a skylark, a squirrel and

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3. Ibid. p.16.

dances in front of him. Furthermore, as Torvald likes Nora to depend on him, she pretends to be helpless. She says she cannot do anything without his help. Nora is very good in pretending while she is with him. In order to keep Torvald away from opening the letter box which contains her forgering bond, she distracts him by flattering that she will be unable to do her tarantella dance unless he plays the piano and directs her rehearsal.

Observing their marital relationship, we find out that their marriage is not a healthy one. Torvald is self-centered and possessive. He only thinks about his own reputation and his own feelings, but he never wants to understand Nora's. Treating Nora as a child or even as a pet rather than an independent person, Torvald controls and orders her in every details.

Meanwhile, Nora tries to play her conventional role, but she fails. She cannot suppress her true feeling which contrasts with the cultural conventional demands; therefore she pretends to fit her part. And this leads her increasingly into dishonesty.

Based on Torvald's attitudes of playing "god" upon Nora and Nora's reactions of practising lies, we know that there is no understanding between Torvald and Nora. there is so much concealment and subterfuge in their marriage.