



Nora Nora

Ibsen's Nora serves the author merely as a starting point for the continued exploration of the state of affairs in the ongoing (and increasingly destructive) battle of the sexes. Today this is a battlefield on which skirmishes are fought between experienced warriors who, instead of swords, use sharpened words. Interwoven throughout this inexorable play of words and people, dictionaries and genders, references and declarations are entire literary and personal worlds that define the context of closeness and alienation among the four characters as an apparently inevitable succession of three dictionaries (peddled by one of them): *Dictionary of New Words* (infatuation), *Dictionary of Cliches* (boredom), and *Dictionary of Silence* (opting out).

Both couples choose the names (Nora and Helmer) themselves – with self-confidence, knowledge and (self)irony, hoping (but not really believing) that “life will not imitate art.” It does, and does so repeatedly. Slowly but surely, like a giraffe that has lost its head being transported from one zoo to another (because it couldn't adapt to the height of the entrance), both Noras and Torvalds (in whatever combination) wind up bereft of a true, committed love safe from corrosive elements. Real relationships are born elsewhere, it seems: on the border of faith, hope and love, on the border that is the most difficult to cross.

Despite it all, a ray of hope emerges at the end of the play with a growing closeness between Nora 1 and Nora 2, and Helmer 1 and Helmer 2, revealed in the understanding and acceptance of similarity and difference (almost compassion), and in the willingness to see others of the same sex not merely as competitors, but also as fellow victims of the opposite sex. *Nora Nora* may be seen as an elaboration of the theme explored by the author in his play *The Nymph Dies*, in which one of the characters, Tristan, says: “They say that in every marriage there is a phantom marriage, with phantom partners the real ones would like to be married to. The eternal foursome.”

This is a challenging play for any director, not only because the staging of it requires a physical presentation of two couples living in the same apartment without ever becoming aware of the fact, but also, and perhaps even more so, because of the emotional cruelty the partners display in their attempts to emerge unscathed from repeatedly crumbling relationships.



What the critics said

“The exciting and multifaceted *Nora Nora*, for which Flisar won last year’s Grum Award for the best Slovenian play, is far from being a mere paraphrase of Ibsen’s renowned masterpiece... The main reason for *Nora Nora*’s excellence lies mostly in Flisar’s sensitivity to the complex speech of the plot, his lucid analysis of its key moments, his ability to expose its playfulness, while not avoiding its gnawing pain, its noisy sarcasm and its acrid self-irony ...”

Petra Pogorevc, *Sodobnost*, 2004

“Flisar poses the question why we always love what we don’t have, and why love bliss always turns into boredom and/or torture and domination. He poses the question radically, skilfully, sharply and entertainingly... This reveals him as a shrewd and penetrating playwright ... His dialogue is fascinating, words fly about like axes and boomerangs; both couples exploit them in the style of: it hurts because it’s only a game...”

Matej Bogataj, *Delo*, 2004

“If Ibsen’s Nora withdrew from her century’s game because Torvald became too captivated by his role of directing her life, we are now, more than a hundred years later, watching a play in which their roles (at least in terms of power) have become equal. In other words, the dynamics of the game have shifted to Nora’s side. But this new division of roles between the sexes has not brought salvation. If anything, it has created hell from which withdrawal is no longer possible...”

Marinka Postrak, *Sodobnost*, 2004



“Theater im Keller has staged the latest play by Evald Flisar, *Nora Nora*, and marked a stunning victory on all fronts... This ironic, intelligent and hugely topical variation on Ibsen’s *Nora* is destined to become a box-office success...”

HSG, *Kleine Zeitung*, 2005

“Evald Flisar, speaking of the Egyptian production of *Nora Nora*, said: I believe my plays are funny because they are so tragic...”

Al-Rai Al-Ram, Kuwait, 2004





Nora Nora, Theater im Keller, Graz, Austria, 2005
Ute Walluschek-Wallfeld as Nora 1, Alfred Haidacher as Helmer 1
Directed by the ensemble





NORA NORA

Best Play of the Year Award 2004

Characters

Nora 1

Nora 2

Helmer 1

Helmer 2



Nora Nora was first produced at the Preseren Theater Kranj, Slovenia, on September 25, 2004. It was directed by Dusan Mlakar with the following cast:

Nora 1

Nora 2

Helmer 1

Helmer 2

Vesna Pernarcic Zunic

Darja Reichman

Borut Veselko

Rok Vihar





NORA NORA

Act One

1.

Sofa, armchair, coffee table. In the corner, a computer desk with computer and monitor, house plants, framed pictures on walls, bookshelves. Comfortable, middle-class, tasteful, not luxurious. Main entrance on the right, door into the kitchen at the rear, bedroom door on the left.

Nora 1 is sitting on the sofa, dressed in a blue bathrobe. She is sipping tea. A picture of health. Helmer 1, young and handsome, is sitting in the armchair. On the floor next to him a large briefcase of a door-to-door salesman. Helmer 2, also dressed in a bathrobe, is sitting in front of the computer, surfing the internet. Nora 1 is leafing through a voluminous book.

NORA 1: A Dictionary of New Words. (*Puts the book on the table.*) No use to me, I'm afraid.

HELMER 1: Excellent for crossword puzzles.

NORA 1: I'm too cross and puzzled to appreciate them. Have you sold many?

HELMER 1: Not today.

NORA 1: Oh you poor thing.

HELMER 1: I know it sounds hideous, but every family should have one.

NORA 1: I'm not a family. Are you?

HELMER 1: No.

NORA 1: Besides, there are no new words. At least not for me. Old, all of them. (*Reaches for the cup, sips tea.*) And stale.



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HELMER 1: The book contains explanations of over two thousand words you won't find in any other dictionary.

NORA 1: For example.

HELMER 1: For example... (*Takes the book, flips through the pages.*)... have you ever heard the word karoshi?

NORA 1: Should I have?

HELMER 1: Karoshi is a Japanese expression meaning death caused by overwork or job-related exhaustion.

NORA 1: I'm in a far greater danger of dying of idleness.

HELMER 1: Or, for example, karaoke...

NORA 1: Come on, who hasn't heard of karaoke!

HELMER 1: Yes, but how many people know what it means literally? Empty orchestra.

NORA 1: Interesting. So one could say, for example: an empty orchestra's been playing in my life for years. There's no one to sing for me.

HELMER 1: You don't sing?

NORA 1: I have no ear for music.

HELMER 1: You must find someone who does.

NORA 1: Got anyone in mind?

HELMER 1: Or, for example, the word kaizen. "Change for the better, continuous improvement." Although it refers to productivity at work, it could also be a philosophy of life.

NORA 1: Is it? For you?

HELMER 1: I do make an effort, occasionally. And you?

NORA 1: I've grown tired of making an effort. Now I stagnate. I sit in the waiting room, waiting to be called in.

HELMER 1: And what does it say on the door? *Lasciate ogni speranza, voi qui entrate?*

NORA 1: Are you testing the parameters of my ignorance?

HELMER 1: Not at all. I could see at once that you were well-read.

NORA 1: And how could you see that?

HELMER 1: A man knows what sort of woman he's dealing with.

NORA 1: Male intuition?

HELMER 1: If you like.

NORA 1: Is that from the Dictionary of New Words?

HELMER 1: Touché.

NORA 1: Is that in the dictionary as well?

HELMER 1: No, touché is an old word. Meaning admission that a fencing opponent has scored a hit.



NORA NORA

NORA 1: Are we fencing?

HELMER 1: Or that a remark has reached its target.

NORA 1: Thanks for the information. Are you a teacher?

HELMER 1 (*laughs*): Far from it. And you?

NORA 1: I asked first. And don't tell me you're a door-to-door salesman.

HELMER 1: Why not?

NORA 1: Because you're not.

HELMER 1: What makes you think so?

NORA 1: Female intuition, if you like.

HELMER 1: You're right. I sell books only part-time, to survive. In truth I'm ... a drowner.

NORA 1 (*looking at him*): A browner.

HELMER 1: Drowner. D for Delta.

NORA 1: Oh. That *is* a new word.

HELMER 1: Yes. You won't even find it in this dictionary.

NORA 1: And what do you drown?

HELMER 1: Fields. Deserts. When there is no rain, I drown them and bring them to life.

NORA 1: Gallant work.

HELMER 1: And poetic. I create ponds, full of clouds. Mirrors in which stars gaze at themselves in astonishment at their beauty. The moon, too. Late at night, when the world endures nightmares.

NORA 1: Lucrative job?

HELMER 1: Labor of love. I earn my living by selling dictionaries.

NORA 1: Well, if you carry on like this I may decide to buy one.

HELMER 1: You'd do both of us a big favor.

NORA 1: And what else do you drown? Withered souls?

HELMER 1: It has happened.

NORA 1: Is there a long line?

HELMER 1: Not really. And even if there were one, some manage to jump it with a single look, single gesture, single word.

NORA 1: Because they're lucky?

HELMER 1: Talented.

NORA 1: Would you like some nettle tea?

(Helmer 1 laughs.)

NORA 1: Is that laughter or a nervous habit?

HELMER 1: I'm laughing because you've just cut into line.



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NORA 1: With nettle tea?

HELMER 1: With the way you offered it.

NORA 1: And now you're going to drown me.

HELMER 1: That's not for me to decide. A drowner must listen to the voice from within.

NORA 1: Which isn't there.

HELMER 1: A drowner is merely a tool, carrying out the dictates of nature trying to balance itself.

NORA 1: A noble calling.

HELMER 1: Responsible.

NORA 1: Are there many of you?

HELMER 1: There must be quite a few of us. But we don't know one another.

NORA 1: That's no good.

HELMER 1: On the contrary. That's in line with the wisdom of nature. If we formed a union we could start demanding our rights, and that might damage nature.

NORA 1: Demanding one's rights damages nature?

HELMER 1: It can. A profession can become a conspiracy against those it's meant to serve.

NORA 1: Not drowning, surely.

HELMER 1: True, we drowners have certain advantages. The main one is that we're not paid for our work.

NORA 1: That's an advantage?

HELMER 1: Of course. Otherwise we'd fall in love with our income and bring about the Great Flood. For the second time.

NORA 1: I haven't thought of that.

HELMER 1: Besides, I can get an order to drown certain countries. Or certain armies that have attacked certain countries. Or palaces of influential people plotting evil deeds.

NORA 1: Sitting before me is the savior of the world!

HELMER 1: And you?

NORA 1: And I?

HELMER 1: What is your major concern?

NORA 1: Aspects of my character I dislike.

HELMER 1: I meant your profession. Not even that, I meant your calling. Each of us is here for a reason.

NORA 1 (*extending her right hand*): Do you like my nails?

HELMER 1: Red. Painted.



NORA NORA

NORA 1: You don't like them.

HELMER 1: I like your fingers.

NORA 1 (*looks at them*): Really? Someone once told me they reminded him of the claws of a beast dying to stick them into the first available prey.

HELMER 1: Perhaps he was hoping you'd stick them into him.

NORA 1: I did. Disaster for both of us. So I prefer not to stick them into others. I just paint them. That's my concern.

HELMER 1: Painting your nails?

NORA 1: Not only mine. There are other women who want to have beautiful claws.

HELMER 1: You are ...

NORA 1: A manicurist. That, too, is an old word. Show me your fingers.

(Helmer 1 extends his hands; Nora 1 leans across the coffee table and looks at them.)

NORA 1: Not bad. You take care of them. I like that. If you ever want a complete treatment call at my booth in the shopping centre.

HELMER 1: What does complete treatment include?

NORA 1: That's negotiable. Extras are usually free of charge.

HELMER 1 (*slight cough*): For everybody, or just for the lucky ones?

NORA 1: On average one a year, if you really want to know.

HELMER 1: There are areas where modesty does one credit.

NORA 1: Although this probably doesn't apply to men, right? Will you come?

HELMER 1: I may well do.

NORA 1: Good. My calling is noble, too. If the world really has to be in men's hands, let it be in manicured hands.

HELMER 1: Are you sure the world is in men's hands?

NORA 1: In yours certainly, if you can drown it.

HELMER 1: Will you buy the dictionary?

NORA 1: I suppose I should say yes, shouldn't I? Considering it contains so many words beginning with k. Are there any more?

HELMER 1 (*checking*): K... K... oh yes... kinesiology.

NORA 1: Something to do with the Chinese?

HELMER 1: Nothing at all. It comes from kinetics, which is a study of bodies in movement.

NORA 1: Bodies in movement?!



Nora Nora, Theater im Keller, Graz, Austria, 2005
Alfred Haidacher as Helmer 1, Ute Walluschek-Wallfeld as Nora 1
Directed by the ensemble



NORA NORA

HELMER 1: Kinesiology is a therapeutic technique employing touch and massage for correcting energetic imbalances in the body.

NORA 1: I could certainly do with that. Can you demonstrate?

HELMER 1: I haven't done the course. (*Pause.*) But I can try.

NORA 1: I'm a practical person. I buy a book if I find it useful.

HELMER 1 (*looking at the shelves*): Can't see many practical books.

NORA 1: All of them. Novels and poetry are practical books for the soul. Mini drowning, you could say. Although a woman always waits for the real drowner to knock at her door.

HELMER 1: Probably true.

NORA 1: And if he has mastered the art of massage, so much the better.

HELMER 1: As I said, I can try.

NORA 1: Not from there, surely. Or is this massage from a distance?

HELMER 1 (*rises, moves behind the sofa*): Strictly speaking I shouldn't be doing this.

NORA 1: There are moments when strictly speaking is not in line with the pulse of life.

HELMER 1: Might this be one such moment?

NORA 1: You never know. (*Helmer 1 is standing behind the sofa.*) From behind?

HELMER 1: You don't like it from behind?

NORA 1: I do, but initially I prefer a frontal engagement, eye to eye.

HELMER 1 (*placing hands on her shoulders*): Sometimes it pays to do things in reverse.

(*He begins to massage her shoulders.*)

NORA 1: Why? Because from behind a man can fool himself that he's in control?

HELMER 1: A man doesn't want to be in control. He is forced to assume control by the woman.

NORA 1: My goodness... I mean your massage, not your remark. It may not be kinesiology, but it is rather pleasant.

HELMER 1: I warned you I wasn't a professional.

NORA 1: You have a natural talent ... Oooohhhh... What bliss.... And now here...

(*She pulls his hands onto her breasts, under the bathrobe.*)



Nora Nora, Theater im Keller, Graz, Austria, 2005
Ute Walluschek-Wallfeld as Nora 1, Alfred Haidacher as Helmer 1
Directed by the ensemble



NORA NORA

NORA 1: It's here that I miss kinetic balance most of all.

(Helmer 1 massages her breasts; or, rather, she massages them herself with his hands.)

HELMER 1: Yes, maybe I do have a natural talent.

NORA 1: All you need is encouragement. What do you find more rewarding, this or drowning?

HELMER 1: About the same.

NORA 1: Actually this is a kind of drowning, isn't it?

HELMER 1: Very close.

NORA 1: In that case, to avoid drowning the sitting-room, I suggest we move to the more congenial surroundings of my bedroom.

HELMER 1 *(removing his hands)*: Okay. *(Nora 1 rises, takes him by the hand, pulls him towards the door on the left.)* Just a moment. *(They pause.)* I don't know your name.

NORA 1: Is that important?

HELMER 1: We drowners are incurable romantics.

NORA 1: My name is Nora. *(Helmer 1 laughs.)* What's the joke?

HELMER 1: You said your name was Nora.

NORA 1: So?

HELMER 1: The joke is that my name is Torvald.

NORA 1: Yes, that *is* a joke, but not a very good one.

HELMER 1: I can show you my driving licence.

NORA 1: Yes, do. *(Changes her mind.)* No. After the deluge.

2.

Nora 2, returning from work, enters from the right and throws her handbag onto the armchair. Helmer 2 desperately tries to switch from the internet to a working Word file.

NORA 2: Good boy?

HELMER 2: As usual.

NORA 2: How many words?

HELMER 2: Over two thousand.

NORA 2: No! Over two thousand words of an impossible translation from an impossible language? You're a genius.



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HELMER 2: More of a drudger.

NORA 2 (*goes to the phone, picks up the receiver, listens, replaces it*): Yes, real drudgery, surfing the net.

HELMER 2: I had to check some facts.

NORA 2: I've been trying to reach you all day.

HELMER 2: I forgot to log off.

NORA 2: And what have you got today? Liver cancer? Fibroblastoma? Pulmonary embolism?

HELMER 2: I'll pay the next phone bill.

NORA 2: You won't, it's my turn.

HELMER 2: It doesn't matter.

NORA 2: Let's go to the seaside.

HELMER 2 (*puzzled*): Now?

NORA 2: Now.

HELMER (*looks at his watch*): Isn't it a bit late?

NORA 2: Tomorrow. I'll take a day off.

HELMER 2: I don't feel well.

NORA 2: You never feel well. Go as you feel. Go on all fours, if that's the only way you can. Only go. We haven't been anywhere for five years.

HELMER 2: Why don't you go alone?

NORA 2: I don't want to go alone. I want to go with you. We're married. Isn't it normal to go together?

HELMER 2: It's just as normal to stay at home.

NORA 2: Always what *you* want.

HELMER 2: Each according to his... her... abilities.

NORA 2: My abilities are shrinking. To be honest, I'm about to become disabled.

HELMER 2: Is that a threat?

NORA 2: Try to understand me, Torvald. In the last ten years there can't have been more than five moments when you didn't believe you were dying of an incurable illness.

HELMER 2: Don't exaggerate.

NORA 2: You've had twenty complete check-ups. And every time all they found was slightly raised cholesterol. Even flu you had only twice during this period. I get it twice a year.

HELMER 2: You should look after your health.

NORA 2: How can I look after my health next to a husband who develops five new symptoms a day?



NORA NORA

HELMER 2: A perfectly respectable average.

NORA 2: You've had ten different types of cancer. You've had five extremely rare tropical diseases, although the closest you ever got to the tropics was with your finger sliding across the map of the world. You've had pneumonia, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis. Soon they'll have to discover a new disease just for you.

HELMER 2: Everyone is entitled to his or her pleasure.

NORA 2: This gives you pleasure?

HELMER 2: Evidently.

NORA 2: An unending search for proof that you are ill? Taking your pulse and blood pressure every two hours, analysing the fat content of food before you dare put anything in your mouth?

HELMER 2: Do I ever get excited about *your* personal interests?

NORA 2: What personal interests?

HELMER 2 (*counting on the fingers of his hand*): Meditation, astrology, bioenergetics, aromatherapy, kinesiology, rolfing – not to mention all the other claptrap for the naive.

NORA 2: I'm looking for proof that I'm alive.

HELMER 2: Oh, really?

NORA 2: You're looking for proof that you're dying. I'm positive.

HELMER 2: You don't sound very positive.

NORA 2: Well if I don't, it's thanks to you.

HELMER 2: *You* came home and started to scream, not me.

NORA 2 (*sinks in the armchair, exhausted*): You're driving me up the wall.

HELMER 2: You're driving yourself up the wall.

NORA 2: I'm surprised you still haven't received an award for translation.

HELMER 2: Oh?

NORA 2: Whatever I say you immediately translate into a language all your own, so that white becomes black, God turns into Lucifer –

HELMER 2: Oh come on, aren't God and Lucifer a little *passé*?

NORA 2: Of course. I keep forgetting. God's been demoted to an icon of the New Age, and Lucifer... who is he anyway? A colleague at work says that the Dutch call matches lucifers.

HELMER 2 (*looks at her*): You discuss Lucifer with a colleague at work?

NORA 2 (*smile*): Are you jealous?

HELMER 2 (*resumes typing*): Yes. Very.



Nora Nora, Hanager Theater, Cairo, Egypt, 2004
Mohamed Shindy as Helmer 2, Magda Mounseer as Nora 2
Directed by Saleh Saad



NORA NORA

NORA 2: You're not. But if I tried very hard I could make you jealous. Or is it too late for that, too? (*Looks at him.*)

HELMER 2: Try.

NORA 2: Maybe I will. How else can I bring back to life the corpse I share the flat with?

HELMER 2: Look ... I want to finish what I'm doing.

NORA 2: Do. Finish it. (*Sinks back into the armchair*) And I will... what? And I will what?

HELMER 2: Make tea, for example?

NORA 2: Yes, I could make tea. But I can't. And I won't. Can you? Will you?... Torvald!

HELMER 2: For God's sake, do you have to shout?

NORA 2: Can you make me a cup of tea?

HELMER 2: Nora, I'm trying to –

NORA 2: I'm tired. I've just come home from work. I've been on my feet all day. Am I expecting too much?

HELMER 2: Ohhhrrr... (*Rises.*) Earl Gray? Hibiscus?

NORA 2: Your choice.

(Helmer 2 goes to kitchen. Nora 2 rushes to the computer, closes the working file, checks history of opened internet pages, reopens the working file, returns to the armchair. Sits frozen, staring ahead. Helmer 2 returns with a cup of tea, puts it on the coffee table.)

HELMER 2: Chamomile. It's supposed to calm you.

(Returns to the computer, sits. Looks at Nora 2.)

HELMER 2: Anything the matter?

NORA 2: Thank you, dear. (*Sips tea.*) Such a lucky woman, aren't I? I return from work, and my darling makes me a cup of tea. How many women can claim to have such an attentive husband?

HELMER 2: Ohhhrrrr...

NORA 2 (*reaching for the book on the coffee table*): Dictionary of New Words. Where did you get it? You never go anywhere.

HELMER 2: From a door-to-door salesman.

NORA 2: Since when do you open the door to strangers?

HELMER 2: He was very pleasant.



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NORA 2: Hardly a reason.

HELMER 2: He said he was selling dictionaries to finish his medical studies.

NORA 2: And you took pity on him.

HELMER 2: I tried to help him, yes. Any objections?

NORA 2: Why are you so defensive?

HELMER 2: Ask yourself.

NORA 2: Perhaps I should learn some new words. (*Opens the dictionary.*) You never know. New words, new ideas. Actually, no... Have you heard of associative prognosis?

HELMER 2: Of what?

NORA 2: The future. And the present. Like the Chinese Book of Changes. Only different. Intuitive. I close my eyes. (*Closes her eyes.*) I open the book. (*She opens the book.*) I place my finger on a word. (*She presses her forefinger against a page, opens her eyes, looks.*) And what has my finger found? Karoshi. Surely, knowing as you do everything, you've heard of this word.

HELMER 2: No I haven't. Happy?

NORA 2: Karoshi. Death from exhaustion caused by overwork. Bull's eye. The thing works.

HELMER 2: I had no idea you worked so hard.

NORA 2: Very funny. Torvald, when did we last have a holiday?

HELMER 2: You're repeating yourself.

NORA 2 (*rising*): I shall repeat myself until I get an answer that won't be an insult. Sorry, Torvald. You stare at your screen for fourteen hours a day. Out of this you spend two hours translating, for a pittance, I may add, and the other twelve hours jerking your brain with web diagnoses of your numerous illnesses. The rest of the time you sleep or stare into space.

HELMER 2: That's not entirely true.

NORA 2: Isn't it?

HELMER 2: No. I do manage to accomplish a thing or two apart from that. Occasionally.

NORA 2: You mean behind my back? Because you haven't surprised me for more than six months.

HELMER 2: I may surprise you very soon. And when I do you'll be surprised indeed.

NORA 2: If I had to live on your promises I'd have died long ago.



NORA NORA

(She leafs through the dictionary. Helmer 2 approaches her from behind. He pulls a small kitchen knife from his pocket. He grabs hold of her hair and puts the knife to her throat.)

HELMER 2: Maybe you will, right now.

NORA 2: Torvald ...

HELMER 2: When will you stop riding me like a witch?

NORA 2: Torvald, please ...

HELMER 2: Why can't we be a normal couple?

NORA 2: You tell me.

HELMER 2: You've plucked me like a chicken and cut off my crest.

NORA 2: I didn't, Torvald ...

HELMER 2: Look at me ... What do I remind you of? A man, or a squashed worm?

NORA 2: I just want to help you ...

HELMER 2: I do not want to be helped. I want to be left alone.

NORA 2: We are husband and wife ...

HELMER 2: That's why. A normal wife lets her husband breathe.

NORA 2: It's I who cannot breathe ...

HELMER 2 (*pressing the knife against her throat*): And how does it feel? Because that's how I feel most of the time.

NORA 2: Torvald, no...

HELMER 2: Why not?

NORA 2: Because of love... Your love for me... And mine for you...

HELMER 2: Love? Where have you stumbled on that fossil?

NORA 2: I won't any more... I promise.

HELMER 2: Will you let me be from now on?

NORA 2: I swear.

HELMER 2 (*removes the knife and pushes her head away*): Don't get me wrong. Everybody has a right to breathe.

NORA 2 (*massaging her throat*): Breathe, Torvald. Breathe as much as you like.

HELMER 2: How generous of you.

(Returns to his computer, puts the knife on the desk.)

NORA 2: Just tell me one more thing.

HELMER 2: Here we go again.



Nora Nora, Preseren Theater, Kranj, Slovenia, 2005
Darja Reichman as Nora 2, Rok Vihar as Helmer 2
Directed by Dusan Mlakar



NORA NORA

NORA 2: Just one.

HELMER 2: All right. One.

NORA 2: Why did you surf the net for symptoms of schizophrenia?

(Helmer 2 jumps on Nora 2 and starts to beat her. Lights out. Nora 2 continues to shriek in darkness.)

3.

A year or two later. Nora 1 sits on the sofa, nervously smoking, sipping whiskey and leafing through a women's mag. Helmer 2, wearing the same bathrobe, sits at his computer, surfing the net. Helmer 1 enters on the right, returning from work. Nora 1 looks at him briefly, then continues to stare at the magazine.

HELMER 1: Anything wrong with my dove? Usually she coos when her pigeon comes home.

NORA 1: No more cooing.

HELMER 1: Why?

NORA 1: Because the pigeon's forgotten that the dove needs an occasional shove.

HELMER 1 (*uncertain*): I've got five post-mortems behind me. Including a murdered woman. Must have something to eat.

(He moves towards the kitchen.)

NORA 1: Yes, make yourself a nice sausage selection. So you'll have a better...

HELMER 1 (*turns and looks at her*): Can't you wait for a more suitable moment?

NORA 1: Isn't that what I'm doing? While the corpses wait for your knife, I, patient idiot that I am, wait to be given what's due to a wife.

HELMER 1: I simply don't know how to react to that.

NORA 1: Pretend you don't know what I'm getting at. As usual. Or that I am a common dipsomaniac, which rhymes with... what?



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HELMER 1: Consumer maniac. That's why we're overdrawn again, because during our trip to Paris, just like during the earlier trip to Florence, you unleashed your credit card.

NORA 1: Lucky credit card, being allowed to feel free for a day or two.

HELMER 1: Are you chained?

NORA 1: Like a bitch. Which isn't allowed past the gate for fear of being serviced by a passing dog. While her own dog has no qualms about servicing passing bitches.

HELMER 1: Don't be ridiculous. What proof have you got?

NORA 1: You prove it.

HELMER 1: What?

NORA 1: That I'm wrong!

HELMER 1: The burden of proof is on the accuser.

NORA 1: What about the message on your hotmail?

HELMER 1: You read my mail?

NORA 1: I opened it by accident. Why, do you have something to hide?

HELMER 1: It's a question of moral hygiene.

NORA 1: Well, your relationship with Veronica can't be very hygienic.

HELMER 1: Veronica?

NORA 1: Read her mail.

HELMER 1 (*moves towards the computer*): I will. (*Changes his mind.*)
But not on an empty stomach. (*Goes to the kitchen.*)

NORA 1: No! It could damage your lining! But above all you need time to come up with an excuse, right?

(She puts out her cigarette in an ashtray, lights a new one. Helmer 1 returns from the kitchen with a slice of bread.)

HELMER 1: This bread is at least five days old.

NORA 1: It's a five-minute walk to the shop. A day a minute, a minute a day.

(Blows cigarette smoke towards him.)

NORA 1: Too far for you?

(Helmer 1 returns to the kitchen.)

NORA 1: "This bread is at least five days old." Bastard!



NORA NORA

(Sips whiskey. Helmer returns from the kitchen with a slice of bread and a piece of salami.)

NORA 1: This salami is at least two weeks old.

HELMER 1: And?

NORA 1: Take care you don't end up on the dissection table yourself.

HELMER 1: You'll beat me to it, if you carry on like this. Why have you stopped drinking nettle tea?

NORA 1: Why have you stopped being what you kept telling me you were?

HELMER 1: Shall I remind you of the damage smoking and alcohol do to a female body?

NORA 1: I don't believe it! Suddenly you've noticed I have a body?

HELMER 1: Women have to drink only a third of what a man drinks –

NORA 1: Yes, yes, what I drink and smoke *is* only a third of what you'd drink and smoke if you drank and smoked! You... pathological saint! For whom do you want to live forever? Veronica?

HELMER 1 (*finishes his sandwich, sits on the edge of the sofa*): Could we talk about this as... two human beings?

NORA 1: We'd need too many rehearsals.

HELMER 1: Only goodwill.

NORA 1 (*takes another sip of whiskey*): Besides, I've stopped being a human being. It happened when I realized that it's all in vain, in vain, in vain. And that there is no such thing as a free lunch. God, how I'm paying!

HELMER 1: I'm a doctor. A pathologist.

NORA 1: And I'm a manicurist.

HELMER 1: That's what you were.

NORA 1: Right. My business collapsed, yours is booming. Nails went elsewhere to be manicured, but corpses continue to come your way. You'll never be short of customers. Congratulations.

(Raises her glass and drinks.)

HELMER 1: Being a pathologist entails a terrible deformation, worse even than that of a professional killer.

NORA 1: Well, why didn't you remain a drowner?

HELMER 1 (*raises his hands and stares at his fingers*): I dare not touch anything still alive. After a day in the dissection room I feel I could



Nora Nora, Preseren Theater, Kranj, Slovenia, 2005
Vesna Pernarcic – Zunic as Nora 1
Directed by Dusan Mlakar





NORA NORA

infect with death anything that is still warm, that still breathes. Do you know that I haven't shaken anyone's hand for almost a year?

NORA 1: Do you know that you haven't put your hand between my legs for over a year?

HELMER 1: Don't exaggerate.

NORA 1: Why did you drown me in the first place – so you could watch me get increasingly dry?

HELMER 1: You don't understand...

NORA 1: Look at my skin. (*Extends her arm.*) Flakes are falling off it. As if I had dandruff all over my body.

HELMER 1: I don't know what's happening to me. Or the world. Or the two of us.

NORA 1: But it was you who kept telling me that you know. It was you I trusted all this time.

HELMER 1: A mistake.

NORA 1: Now you tell me? After relishing my trust for so long, and encouraging it?

HELMER 1: I may have done that. And maybe I did relish it. At least occasionally. But we were both moving through darkness. I walked ahead, holding your hand. You followed me. I needed your trust. So did you.

NORA 1: We walked through darkness – to reach the light.

HELMER 1: Yes.

NORA 1: But the only light was at the beginning. Your fake sparkle. Drowner indeed! I must've been mad, to have fallen for such undergraduate stuff. (*Takes a sip.*)

HELMER 1: Please stop drinking.

NORA 1: You've stopped drowning me, so I have to drown myself.

HELMER 1: We have to solve this problem together.

NORA 1: Together with Veronica?

HELMER 1: Is that all you see? The threat of another woman? Can't you see the context, the depth, the essence of the problem?

NORA 1: I'm not educated, like you. Somewhere along the way I run out of context, depth, and essence.

HELMER 1: You've read hundreds of books.

NORA 1: I've even stopped reading. Everything's left me. All my loves are only a fading memory.

HELMER 1: Why do you keep calling me Torvald?



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

NORA 1: Why do you keep calling me Nora?

HELMER 1: You started all this.

NORA 1: It seemed like fun. Just before you sold me the Dictionary of New Words I saw the play at the National. You accepted the game.

HELMER 1: It seemed like fun to me too.

NORA 1: Do you think we could change our names and start afresh?

HELMER 1: The name's not the problem, it sticks to the outside. It's the pattern that gets ingrained.

NORA 1: What are you trying to tell me? (*Begins to cry silently.*)

HELMER 1: I sit before you helpless, with a sense of guilt I'm powerless to define. I haven't done anything wrong. I've never betrayed you. I've done my best to make you enjoy our life together. When your business collapsed I said: don't worry, stay happy, I earn enough for two. Maybe I should've encouraged you to start something new. And maybe you shouldn't have been loafing around.

NORA 1: Well, I'm just a lazy cow, aren't I? A typical drunk, lazy slut, right? A heap of rotten skin my husband's afraid to touch because it reminds him too much of the rotten corpses for which he has to determine the cause of death.

HELMER 1: Nora ...

NORA 1: Will you determine the cause of my death, too, doctor?

(*Helmer 1 lowers his head, Nora 1 takes a sip, puts the glass on the coffee table.*)

NORA 1: How often do you fuck Veronica?

HELMER 1 (*startled*): Please don't vulgarize the pain we both feel.

NORA 1: Stop feeding me your stilted clichés! How often do you fuck Veronica? A matter of arithmetic, not metaphysics.

HELMER 1 (*after a pause, defiantly*): Three times a week.

NORA 1 (*startled*): Only? I expected three times a day.

HELMER 1: There's no opportunity.

NORA 1: No opportunity, or doesn't your uncle march as firmly as he used to any more?

HELMER 1: Maybe that, too ...

NORA 1: Where do you do it?

HELMER 1 (*rises*): On the dissection table. Sometimes next to a half-dissected corpse. We simply push it aside. Morbid, but the presence of death intensifies feelings. Enough, or do you want details?



NORA NORA

NORA 1: I want details.

HELMER 1: Are you sure?

NORA 1: No. Try anyway.

HELMER 1: Think it over. Because after that nothing will be the same again. Ever.

NORA 1: I can't think at the moment. Tell me.

HELMER 1: A while ago I was doing a post-mortem on a man who died in a traffic accident. For some inexplicable reason his member remained fully erect. While we were at it, Veronica and I, she reached out to find something to hold onto, and the stubbornly erect member was the first thing she grasped. When she realised what she was holding she was stunned for a moment, but then she began to grasp at it with mounting excitement. In the space of ten minutes she had five consecutive orgasms. *(Pause.)* Find that stimulating?

NORA 1: Carry on.

HELMER 1: After the fifth orgasm she asked me would it turn me on if she mounted the corpse. I said it would.

NORA 1: And it did?

HELMER 1: In the space of five minutes I had five spontaneous ejaculations.

NORA 1: Death *can* be an aphrodisiac.

HELMER 1: It can, can't it?

NORA 1: Hundred percent.

(She reaches under a cushion, pulls out a gun, aims it at Helmer 1 and pulls the trigger. There is a loud bang. Helmer 1 stumbles. Nora 1 fires again. Helmer 1 collapses into the armchair and lies motionless, staring ahead.)

NORA 1: How's that for an orgasm, drowner?

(She looks at Helmer 1, who is rigid.)

NORA 1: Torvald? What's the matter?

(Helmer 1 doesn't respond.)

NORA 1: Do you know what you look like? As if you'd been frightened to death. Torvald?



Nora Nora, Preseren Theater, Kranj, Slovenia, 2005
Vesna Pernarcic – Zunic as Nora 1, Borut Veselko as Helmer 1
Directed by Dusan Mlakar



NORA NORA

HELMER 1: I don't feel well.

NORA 1: Come on.

HELMER 1: Am I dead?

NORA 1: Dissect yourself and find out.

HELMER 1: Why have you done this?

NORA 1: You said we should talk to each other like human beings.

HELMER 1: Surely people don't talk to each other like this.

NORA 1: How then? On a dissection table, screwing a corpse?

HELMER 1: That was pure fabrication.

NORA 1: Because you wanted to be kind to me?

HELMER 1: You pushed me over the edge. I wanted to hurt you.

NORA 1: I shot at you with a toy gun because *I didn't* want to hurt you.

Which of us is behaving like a human being?

HELMER 1: Where did you get a toy gun?

NORA 1: From my last customer. He was an actor. With beautiful nails.

I was quite turned on by the thought that he didn't stick them into corpses but used them, in the worst case, to scratch his butt. All the more so because butt is the part of male anatomy I've always liked most.

(She blows away imaginary gun smoke and fires another shot at Helmer 1. He winces.)

HELMER 1: Please...

NORA 1: Surely you're not afraid of this little banger.

HELMER 1: It could be real.

NORA 1: Maybe I have a real one too, and this is just practice.

HELMER 1: Would you like to kill me?

NORA 1: No, Torvald. I'd like to get some attention. I'm decaying, and you're behaving as if you didn't see that.

HELMER 1: We're both decaying. Decay is natural.

NORA 1: Oh, really?

HELMER 1: Decay makes way for new growth. You'd like to remain on the same spot forever. That's not possible. We have to move with the currents. To wither when it's time to wither, and to grow when it's time to grow.

NORA 1: You sound as if you've started to read New Age shit.

HELMER 1: You know I don't touch your books.

NORA 1: Touché, as you said when you came to sell me the Dictionary of New Words. What century was that?



Nora Nora, Theater im Keller, Graz, Austria, 2005
Ute Walluscsek-Wallfeld as Nora 1, Alfred Haidacher as Helmer 1
Directed by the ensemble





NORA NORA

HELMER 1: Well before civilization. When I was still a Neanderthal. Now, unfortunately, I'm a Homo Sapiens. Now I think and make decisions.

NORA 1: And you've decided that that kinesilogic massage was a huge mistake.

HELMER 1: We've had many beautiful moments.

NORA 1: Are you leaving?

HELMER 1: The apartment is yours.

NORA 1: I can go. Veronica can come here. She's got a studio flat, hasn't she? Why slum it if you can live in reasonable middle-class comfort? She comes here, I go there, a studio flat is more than enough for me.

HELMER 1: How can I convince you that this has nothing to do with Veronica?

NORA 1: You can't because it has.

HELMER 1: It hasn't.

NORA 1: It has.

HELMER 1: Veronica and I work together, that's all.

NORA 1: You're screwing her, you pig!

(She tries to fire another shot at him, but the gun is empty. She breaks down and starts to cry.)

HELMER 1 *(slowly approaches, stands behind the sofa, looks at her)*: Remember what you once said? In the golden days, now faded beyond recognition? You were leaning across the back of the sofa and I was drowning you from behind, slowly, wave after wave, like a sea surging towards the land.

NORA 1: Spare me, Torvald...

HELMER 1: You said: Maybe this isn't the only world in which we live. Maybe there are other worlds, and maybe in one of those we're different. In this world we're happy, in another we may be unhappy. If that is true we can say, now that we're unhappy, that we may be happy in one of the other worlds.

NORA 1: There are no other worlds.

HELMER 1: A serious scientific hypothesis suggests that there are.

NORA 1: Go fuck yourself.

HELMER 1: There is such a thing as anti-matter, which forms a parallel world, occupying the same space as this one, although we can't see or feel it.



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NORA 1: Why don't you move there, with Veronica?

HELMER 1: Maybe all you need to do is reach out with your hand. (*Does so.*) Maybe there, in front of our computer, another Torvald is sitting right this very moment, living a parallel life with some other Nora. And maybe their lives are exactly what we set out to achieve but failed. And maybe they're unhappy in spite of that.

NORA 1: It's not Torvald and Nora who're living parallel lives, but Torvald and Veronica.

HELMER 1 (*sighs*): Time to move on, I think.

(Nora 1 sits up and grabs his hand.)

NORA 1: Torvald... couldn't we... once more? Just once... for the last time?

HELMER 1: Couldn't we what?

NORA 1: A parting present? Like the first time, with the same fire, the same passion?

HELMER 1: What are you talking about?

NORA 1: Like when you came and sold me the Dictionary of New Words? The newest of which, at least for me, was orgasm? Only once more? As if for the first time?

HELMER 1: I have chosen the wrong profession.

(He raises his hands, looks at them.)

HELMER 1: It's too late now to change it. I'm committed to decaying flesh. Death is my lover.

NORA 1: You... melodramatic show-off! (*She slaps his face.*) You've always been one. Bloated words and cheap manoeuvres, that's your style. Get out before I kick you out.

(Helmer 1 walks to the door. He turns.)

HELMER 1: Would you really move to Veronica's one-room apartment?

NORA 1 (*after pause*): I have a better idea. Let her come here. Let's try a threesome.

(Helmer 1 stands, looking at her. Blackout.)



NORA NORA

4.

Nora 1 on the sofa with a cell phone in her hand. She is studying ads in Loot. Helmer 2, wearing the same dressing gown, comes from the kitchen with a glass of water and sits down at his computer.

NORA 1: "Many illnesses and other things that bother you can be cured telepathically. Call today, tomorrow it may be too late." (*Closes Loot, throws it on the coffee table.*) Call yesterday, today is too late. (*Pours herself whiskey, sips.*) On the other hand...

(Checks Loot again and types a number into her cell phone. Another cell phone, on the computer desk next to Helmer 2's elbow, starts to ring. Helmer 2 checks the number, puts the phone down. Checks the number again, hesitates, puts the phone down. The phone keeps ringing. Helmer 2 gets up, moves around restlessly, cracking his fingers, wondering what to do. Finally decides to accept the call.)

HELMER 2: Yes?

NORA 1: I'm calling today because tomorrow it may be too late.

HELMER 2 (*confused*): Really?

NORA 1: On the other hand it may be too late already and I should've called yesterday. What do you advise me to do?

HELMER 2: I advise you to make sure you're calling the right number.

NORA 1: "Many illnesses and other things that bother you can be cured telepathically."

HELMER 2: Are you having health problems?

NORA 1: Not so much health, it's more other things that bother me. Can you really cure them telepathically?

HELMER 2 (*decides to play*): In principle, yes. I suppose.

NORA 1: You suppose? You're not sure?

HELMER 2: What I mean is that most of the time we can cure them telepathically, but sometimes a meeting is unavoidable.

NORA 1: Where is your office?

HELMER 2: A meeting is definitely the last resort. We always try telepathy first.

NORA 1: What are your charges?

HELMER 2: Negotiable.



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NORA 1: Can I pay you telepathically too?

(For a moment, Helmer 2 wonders how to respond. Then he switches off the phone and sits down at his computer.)

NORA 1: Shit.

(Nora redials. Helmer 2 considers whether to answer. Finally he gets up again and accepts the call.)

HELMER 2: Hullo?

NORA 1: It's me again. We got cut off.

HELMER 2: We didn't. I hung up.

NORA 1: I'm sorry. That was meant as a joke. I assumed you could take a little humor.

HELMER 2: Humor? I must check the Dictionary of New Words.

NORA 1: Have you got one?

HELMER 2: Of course.

NORA 1: Because if you haven't I can lend you mine. A medical student sold it to me a few years ago.

HELMER 2: To me, too.

NORA 1: Well, that's another thing that connects us. Apart from mobile telephony. And, of course, telepathy. Right?

HELMER 2: Maybe.

NORA 1: Actually, to be honest, you don't sound at all positive. I'd expect a healer to bristle with energy.

HELMER 2: Visit the nearest library, fairytales section.

NORA 1: You mean there is no point?

HELMER 2: You said you were interested in health.

NORA 1: Listen. Are you really what you claim to be, or just a crank?

HELMER 2: And what do I claim to be?

NORA 1: Now I'm completely confused. An interesting way of soliciting clients. I'll try someone else.

HELMER 2: Yes, do.

(Puts the phone down, resumes work at computer. Nora puts down her phone, pours herself a whiskey, sips.)

NORA 1: "Fairytales section." Who does he think he is?



NORA NORA

(She picks up the phone and redials. Helmer 2 starts. After a while he picks up the phone and rises. Paces up and down for a while, then accepts the call.)

HELMER 2: Yes?

NORA 1: Why are you being so difficult?

HELMER 2: Who are you?

NORA 1: Are you not even *interested* in my problems?

HELMER 2: I have problems myself, but I wouldn't think of boring complete strangers with them.

NORA 1: Then why do you advertize that you heal by telepathy?

HELMER 2: Because I enjoy talking to stupid women.

NORA 1: Is that what I am?

HELMER 2: Why else would you so stubbornly keep calling the wrong number?

NORA 1: It's not the wrong number.

HELMER 2: Check it.

(Puts the phone down, resumes work. Nora 1 grabs Loot and compares the advertized number with the one she dialled.)

NORA 1: Shit. What's the matter with me, am I drunk? *(Carefully, she types in the correct number. Waits. Lights a cigarette. Waits.)* This one can't even bother to answer.

(She redials and waits. Smokes. Helmer 2 keeps glancing at his cell phone. He picks it up, rises, paces up and down. Decides to make a call, but changes his mind. Nora 1 puts her phone down and studies other advertisements. Helmer 2 finally dials Nora 1's number. Her phone rings. Helmer 2 changes his mind and cancels the call. Nora 1 checks the caller's number and smiles. She decides to call back. Helmer 2's phone rings. He is so startled that he nearly drops it. He lets it ring. Then he takes a deep breath and accepts the call.)

HELMER 2: Yes.

NORA 1: Did you call me?

HELMER 2: By mistake. I wanted to... I'm sorry.



Nora Nora, Theater im Keller, Graz, Austria, 2005
Ute Walluschek-Wallfeld as Nora 1, Bernd Sracnik as Helmer 2
Directed by the ensemble





NORA NORA

(Cuts off, puts the phone down, resumes work, but cannot concentrate. Nora 1 considers what to do. Then she returns the call. Helmer's phone rings. He answers as if expecting the call.)

HELMER 2: Yes.

NORA 1: I'm not calling by mistake. I want to talk.

HELMER 2: What about?

NORA 1: The meaning of life.

HELMER 2: Oh my God.

NORA 1: Don't misunderstand me. I'm not some New Age freak. The meaning of life is still an important subject, regardless of the fact that it no longer interests philosophers but mostly fools.

HELMER 2: Is that your area of interest? The meaning of life?

NORA 1: Actually, no. My area of interest are aspects of my character I dislike.

HELMER 2: Well paid work?

NORA 1: Considering the effort I put into it I should be rich by now. And you? I hope you're not a doctor.

HELMER 2: Why?

NORA 1: I don't like doctors. They've brought pain into my soul and my beautiful body. You *are* a doctor, aren't you?

HELMER 2: The very opposite. A patient.

NORA 1: Oh you poor thing. What have you got?

HELMER 2: I'm dying of hundreds of different diseases. But no one believes me. They all refuse to accept that my death is only a matter of time.

(Nora 1 laughs.)

HELMER 2: What's funny?

NORA 1: Isn't that true for all of us? Isn't it more important what we do in the time we still have? That we live?

HELMER 2: How can I live while waiting for death?

NORA 1: I don't know. How do you live?

HELMER 2: Not at all. I'm dying.

NORA 1: I phoned you because I needed help. Now I see that you need help a thousand times more.

HELMER 2: No I don't.

NORA 1 *(brief pause, then gently)*: I don't even know your name.



Nora Nora, Theater im Keller, Graz, Austria, 2005
Ute Walluschek-Wallfeld as Nora 1, Bernd Sracnik as Helmer 2
Directed by the ensemble



NORA NORA

HELMER 2: Torvald.

NORA 1 (*brief pause*): Don't play games with me.

HELMER 2: It's true. My name is Torvald.

NORA 1: Do you happen to have a wife whose name is Nora?

HELMER 2: How do you know?

NORA 1: Any children?

HELMER 2: No. My wife is barren.

NORA 1: And my ex is sterile. We are facing the same predicament.

HELMER 2: I don't know. Are we?

NORA 1: Do you live in a house or an apartment?

HELMER 2: Apartment.

NORA 1: Describe it.

HELMER 2: Non-descript. Boring. Middle-class. Sofa, armchair, bookshelves, TV, computer. Kitchen diner. Bedroom. Small balcony.

Noisy street below. A small park opposite.

NORA 1: What color is the sofa?

HELMER 2: Red.

NORA 1: What make is the computer monitor?

HELMER 2: Nokia.

(Nora 1 is silent.)

HELMER 2: Are you still there?

NORA 1: Have you ever heard of parallel worlds?

HELMER 2: I have.

NORA 1 (*gets up and moves behind the sofa*): Where are you at this moment?

HELMER 2: In the living room.

NORA 1: Where exactly?

HELMER 2: Standing next to the armchair.

NORA 1: Go behind the sofa. Please.

(Moves behind the sofa, but at the opposite end to Nora.)

HELMER 2: And now?

NORA 1: Reach out with your hand.

(They are standing next to each other, Helmer 2 on the left, Nora 1 on the right. They extend their arms in opposite directions.)



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

HELMER 2: And now?

NORA 1: What do you feel?

HELMER 2 (*feeling with his hand*): Emptiness.

NORA 1 (*feeling with her hand*): So do I. And yet I feel that we're close to each other. Very close.

HELMER 2: Yes, we're both dying.

NORA 1: We'd both like to live, but have no courage.

HELMER 2: I need help.

NORA 1: My ex is a doctor. What's your wife?

HELMER 1: A nurse.

NORA 1: You're joking. What's her name?

HELMER 2: Nora.

NORA 1: Her real name.

HELMER 2: Nora.

NORA 1: Did you meet in a theatre?

HELMER 2: How do you know?

NORA 1: And you decided to be Torvald and Nora in the hope that art cannot imitate life?

HELMER 2: You know even that.

NORA 1: So, what is the real name of your wife?

HELMER 2: Veronica.

(Nora 1 is silent.)

HELMER 2: Are you still there?

NORA 1: It seems we have quite a lot in common.

HELMER 2: Do you really think so?

NORA 1: It seems there are no parallel worlds. All there is are parallel states of mind, identical destinies, kindred souls, mutual futility. Perhaps you're right. Perhaps there is no point in living while waiting for death.

HELMER 2: I was hoping you'd convince me that there is.

NORA 1: Does your wife live with you?

HELMER 2: She's got a little apartment. That's where she lives now.

NORA 1: With whom?

HELMER 2: Alone. Why?

NORA 1: Are you always so dry, or is this merely a camouflage?

HELMER 2: That's what I keep asking myself.

NORA 1: Do you like sex?



NORA NORA

(Helmer 2 is silent.)

NORA 1: Are you still there?

HELMER 2: Yes.

NORA 1: And?

HELMER 2: I'll have to check the Dictionary of New Words.

NORA 1: Shall we check it together?

(Blackout.)

5.

Helmer 2 is sitting on the sofa checking his blood pressure with a digital measuring device. Nora 2 is sitting at the computer, answering e-mail messages. Nora 1 and Helmer 1 come from the kitchen, she preceding him with a glass of green liquid, he with a glass of red wine. She sits on the sofa next to Helmer 2 and puts the glass on the table, he paces to and fro past Nora 2, observing her and sipping wine. He coughs to attract her attention. No response.

NORA 1: Here, drink this.

HELMER 2 *(concentrating on his blood pressure)*: Sshhhh...

NORA 1 *(recoiling)*: Sorry.

HELMER 2 *(unwrapping the belt)*: I don't understand why my pressure is so dangerously low. Hundred and ten over seventy.

NORA 1: No one dies of low blood pressure.

HELMER 2: Low blood pressure can be a sign of hundreds of different conditions. Occult bleeding, among other things. Which, in turn, can be caused by dozens of life-threatening illnesses. Can I have a little massage?

NORA 1: First drink your spirulina.

HELMER 2 *(sniffs at the green liquid)*: Can you imagine what sea algae smell like to someone who hates fish?

NORA 1: Think of them as the only substance that will prevent you from dying of cancer.

HELMER 2: Unfortunately cancer is not the only thing one can die of. *(He closes his eyes, empties the glass.)* This unending fight against



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death is so exhausting. There are moments when I feel a great urge to surrender.

NORA 1: You'll surrender to my arms and enjoy yourself.

(She begins to massage his shoulders. Helmer 2 closes his eyes and moans, half in pleasure half in pain.)

(Helmer 1 coughs again to attract Nora 2's attention.)

HELMER 1: Here I am. With my fifth glass of wine.

NORA 2 *(finally looks at him)*: Torvald, haven't you promised you'd stop drinking? Have you nothing better to do?

HELMER 1: I want to talk to you.

NORA 2: We talk to each other at work. Every day.

HELMER 1: Yes, about other things.

NORA 2: What other things?

HELMER 1: "Pass me the scalpel. Look at this kidney, it doesn't look at all well. He's got three nails in his stomach. Tray for the heart, please."

NORA 2: That's what I mean. Home is for rest.

HELMER 1: Yes, but not excessive rest.

NORA 2: Find yourself a hobby.

HELMER 1: Actually it's the same at home. Here, too, I could say: Pass me the scalpel so I can remove my kidney. Look, I have three nails in my stomach. *(Reaches out.)* Tray for the heart, please.

NORA 2: Torvald, you've never been... a romantic. I'm sorry but this side of your character... for me at least... is a little...

HELMER 1: Indigestible?

NORA 2: Thank you. I knew you'd find the right word.

HELMER 1: How about a quick dash to the seaside?

NORA 2: We have to work tomorrow.

HELMER 1: Don't you feel that something between has... gone its own way? Evaporated? Done a salto mortale and ended up on its back in the corner, like a frog run over by a dredger?

NORA 2: No, I don't feel that. And I'm sorry to hear that you do. Even so, the last thing I want is to analyze it.

HELMER 1: Why?

NORA 2: Because an excessive desire for analysis destroyed my previous relationship. Take care you don't destroy ours.



NORA NORA

HELMER 1: A threat?

NORA 2: A friendly warning, Torvald. And now, if you don't mind...

HELMER 1: Must've been a fool to think that your previous relationship was destroyed by your excessive desire for me.

NORA 2: Torvald...

HELMER 1: Which was supposed be more than a result of your husband's insufficient desire for you.

NORA 2: Listen...

HELMER 1: I am listening.

NORA 2: Why have you turned into a bore?

HELMER 1: Who, me?

NORA 2: Don't you see that everything is O.K.?

HELMER 1: Everything is O.K.?

NORA 2: Not only O.K., it's superlative.

HELMER 1: By what standards?

NORA 2: My Torvald has moved in with your Nora, you have moved in with me, I've let my little apartment, we have reasonable jobs, sociologists would describe us as a well-situated couple, what else do we need? Except the time we can devote to ourselves?

HELMER 1: Maybe the time we can devote to each other?

NORA 2: Torvald, I want this apartment to be our home, not an amateur counseling service for failing marriages.

HELMER 1: What do you think of when we are having sex?

NORA 2 (*turns back to the computer*): Why?

HELMER 1: Because you're always so absent.

NORA 2: I meditate.

HELMER 1: During or after?

NORA 2: During. At work I can't. But with my legs apart, while you're huffing and puffing in search of God knows what manner of proving yourself, I can quietly concentrate on emptiness.

HELMER 1: Emptiness?

NORA 2: Yes. That's the name of one of the meditation techniques. Seize the emptiness.

HELMER 1: That could be the title of the story of our life, couldn't it? Seize the emptiness. What about pleasure?

NORA 2: Pure pleasure, Torvald. You should try it.

HELMER 1: It used to be different.



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NORA 2: Everything used to be different. Five minutes ago it wasn't the same. And tomorrow it won't be as it is now. Isn't it wonderful that we don't get stuck in a rut?

HELMER 1: Or that we do?

(Drains the last drop from the glass and goes to the kitchen. Nora 2 redirects her attention at the screen. Nora 1 stops massaging Helmer 2.)

NORA 1: Do you feel more alive now?

HELMER 2: Not at all. I feel almost completely dead. Thank you.

NORA 1: Anytime.

HELMER 2: To be dying slowly in front of one's own eyes, and fully conscious, is probably the greatest adventure one can hope for in this life.

NORA 1: And all thanks to me. Am I not worth my weight in gold?

HELMER 2: More than that.

NORA 1: At last it's become clear to me what I really want. To be with someone who has to rely on me.

HELMER 2: Not many men can claim to have such exorbitant luck.

NORA 1: My ex Torvald drowned me completely. He entered me through all the available pores. I was suffocating. He was interested in control. And how devious he was! First he controlled me with sex, then with celibacy.

HELMER 2: Perhaps he's now getting his own back.

NORA 1: I sincerely hope so.

HELMER 2: I can't imagine what could've attracted him to my wife.

NORA 1: Smell of death.

HELMER 2 *(looks at her)*: What do you mean?

NORA 1: They dissected corpses together. Male, female corpses, indistinguishably bared in their final humiliation. They were cutting out their internal organs, putting bits of tissue under a microscope. What an aphrodisiac for someone whose goal is control!

HELMER 2: She never spoke about that.

NORA 1: Do you know they had sex on the dissection table?

HELMER 2: I should've strangled her.

NORA 1: He told me. And once apparently she even mounted a corpse whose member had hardened in an upright position.

HELMER 2 *(rubs his stomach)*: I feel sick after this spirulina.

NORA 1: Can you imagine what I felt like when he told me that?



NORA NORA

HELMER 2: Horrified?

NORA 1: Envious. Why doesn't he do that with me, I asked myself. Why with her, who is ten years older? It's only recently I found the answer.

HELMER 2 (*looks at her*): I'm listening.

NORA 1: I wanted to be alive. Wildly, romantically alive. He was afraid of that. I demanded my pound of flesh. I wanted to be an equal of his. Well, there's no need to share anything with corpses, is there. You can rummage inside them to your heart's content, you can sexually assault them, you can push objects into them through all the available orifices. How can someone whose ideal is complete control resist that?

HELMER 2: But ...

NORA 1: Yes, dear? (*She strokes his cheek.*)

HELMER 2: Then... why... me?

NORA 1: Because of all the men still breathing you come closest to being a corpse. When I impale myself on your column I feel I control the world. And for that I would cross the Himalayas on my knees.

HELMER 2: Which would be far more exhausting than climbing on me twice a day.

NORA 1: Don't misunderstand me. This is my way of getting even with Torvald.

HELMER 2: I, too, am Torvald.

NORA 1: I mean previous Torvald. That's how I repay him at least in part. Can you imagine what pleasure that gives me? Torvald, are you all right?

HELMER 2 (*swallows*): Couldn't be better. The only thing missing is a dissection table.

NORA 1 (*straddling his lap*): With a bit of imagination this sofa can serve the same purpose.

HELMER 2: Actually...

NORA 1: What?

HELMER 2: I should analyze the correlation between low blood pressure and low body temperature, and the consequent possibility of developing diabetes.

NORA 1: There's no need. I will raise your pressure *and* your temperature.

HELMER 2: I should translate a few more pages of the novel.

NORA 1: No one reads novels anymore. Even I've stopped. People are interested only in an exchange of favors and goods.



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HELMER 2: What are we going to live off?

NORA 1: Should the worst come to the worst, I'll sell my body. And you're lucky to have it for free. That means nothing to you?

HELMER 2: Of course it does.

NORA 1: Well?

HELMER 2: Can I put my fingers round your neck?

NORA 1: Why?

HELMER 2: I want to get even with Nora. I mean of course previous Nora. I want to repay her at least in part. And forgive myself for not strangling her when I had the chance.

NORA 1: All right, if it turns you on.

HELMER 2: It does, actually.

NORA 1: But do take care you don't lose the present Nora as well.

HELMER 2: I'd hate to live alone.

NORA 1: Go ahead, then. Squeeze.

(Helmer 2 places his fingers round her neck. Sitting rigidly, like a corpse, he squeezes. Love movements are performed by Nora 1. Whether they make love on the sofa or more discreetly behind it should be decided by the director with regard to the sensibilities of the potential audience. Helmer 1 returns from the kitchen with another glass of wine. Stands and looks at Nora 2, who is still busy with her e-mails.)

HELMER 1: Guess what I saw on TV a while ago.

NORA 2 *(without averting her eyes from the screen)*: What?

HELMER 1: A documentary about moving a giraffe from one zoo to another.

NORA 2: I didn't know you watched television.

HELMER 1: The giraffe was placed on a specially adapted truck, with boards all around, but even so its neck was sticking out by ten feet at least.

NORA 2: And?

HELMER 1: Throughout the journey it was fed with leafy tree branches, so it wouldn't panic.

NORA 2: How considerate.

HELMER 1: Then something happened.

NORA 2: Really?

HELMER 1: The road was almost empty, the sun was shining, the giraffe was overjoyed by the rocking movements and the sudden luxury of food.



NORA NORA

NORA 2: Bravo.

HELMER 1: Feeling happy, it lifted its head and extended the neck as far as it would go. And then the truck drove into a tunnel.

NORA 2: Oh?

HELMER 1: The giraffe was higher than the permitted height. Only its trunk continued the journey. The head and the neck remained at the entrance.

NORA 2 (*sigh*): Torvald...

HELMER 1: Who do you think this giraffe might be?

NORA 2: Metaphors invariably give me a rash.

HELMER 1: We are this giraffe. The so-called well-situated middle-class couples. We have no idea that our only progress is being moved from one zoo to another. As long as we have enough to eat and drink, to pay the bills and buy some clothes, we are blind to everything that hurries past.

NORA 2: And what's that?

HELMER 1: No one thinks that there is a tunnel ahead of us. No one retracts his or her complacently extended neck. At least for safety's sake, if not in humility.

NORA 2: Torvald, the last thing I want to do is paddle in the shallows of moralizing.

HELMER 1: I'm talking about the urgency of communication.

NORA 2: Can't you see I'm communicating? By e-mail, true, but it's comfortable, safe and fast.

HELMER 1: Communicating with whom, why and to what end, that is the question.

NORA 2: With people who have similar interests. You don't.

HELMER 1: I have interests which you ignore.

NORA 2: Yes, sex. In increasingly perverse forms.

HELMER 1: Isn't sex important? After all that's how we began, and you were the initiator.

NORA 2: Things last as long as they last.

HELMER 1: But that is not, as you well know, my only interest.

NORA 2: No?

HELMER 1: I miss the feeling that we actually live together.

NORA 2: I'm sorry, Torvald, I don't need your permission to share my thoughts with people who value spirituality more than sex.

HELMER 1: But in this spirituality you're deadlier than Ossama bin Laden in his.



Nora Nora, Preseren Theater, Kranj, Slovenia, 2005
Vesna Pernarcic – Zunic as Nora 1, Rok Vihar as Helmer 2,
Borut Veselko as Helmer 1, Darja Reichman as Nora 2
Directed by Dusan Mlakar



NORA NORA

NORA 2: Why? Because I find your scientific view of the world rigid, prehistoric and without a trace of imagination?

HELMER 1: I do have imagination.

NORA 2: Only when it comes to the positions of Kamasutra.

HELMER 1: Better that than cosmic mind, astral bodies, aura and other inanities.

NORA 2: Torvald, I will not negotiate the basic right of everyone to follow their interests, however stupid they may appear to you personally.

HELMER 1: Isn't diplomacy better than war?

NORA 2 (*consults her watch*): Speaking of diplomacy, isn't it time for dinner? It's your turn.

HELMER 1: Dinner is ready. It only needs to be served.

NORA 2: Well, serve it, then.

HELMER 1: Bon appetit.

(He pulls a gun from his pocket, aims at Nora 2 and fires. Nora 2 grabs at her chest; her eyes pop out. She gets up, stumbles, collapses into the armchair. She stares into space. Helmer 1 stops in front of her, aims at her head and fires again. Nora 2 jumps, shudders and opens her mouth; her head falls forward onto her chest.)

HELMER 1: Nora? Do you know what you look like? Like someone who's been frightened to death.

NORA 2: I don't feel well.

HELMER 1: I've never felt better.

NORA 2: Am I dead?

HELMER 1: Not entirely, it seems.

(He fires at her once more. She jumps again and subsides, motionless. At the same time Nora 1 begins to struggle for breath. She tries to pull Helmer 2's fingers off her throat.)

NORA 1: Torvald... This is no longer a game... I can't breathe.

HELMER 2: Another few seconds, and we're there!

NORA 1: Torvald, stop strangling me!

(Blackout.)



Nora Nora, Preseren Theater, Kranj, Slovenia, 2005
Vesna Pernarcic – Zunic as Nora 1, Rok Vihar as Helmer 2
Directed by Dusan Mlakar





NORA NORA

Act Two

6.

Helmer 2 is lying on the sofa in his usual dressing gown, with a thermometer in his mouth. Nora 2 is doing Tai Chi exercises behind the armchair.

HELMER 2 (*checks the thermometer*): Oh my God...

(He pushes the thermometer back in his mouth. Nora 1 comes from the kitchen with a glass of carrot juice and puts it on the coffee table.)

NORA 1: For you, when you stop measuring your temperature in half an hour or so.

HELMER 2 (*pulls the thermometer from his mouth*): I feel as if I were boiling.

NORA 1: 42 degrees Centigrade?

HELMER 2: At least.

NORA 1 (*pulls the thermometer from his hand, looks*): 35. You're freezing, not boiling.

HELMER 2: Something must be terribly wrong with me. Unless there is something wrong with the thermometer. You try it.

NORA 1 (*hands thermometer back to him*): My temperature is O.K.

HELMER 2: I want to know.

NORA 1: Don't force me, Torvald. If you force me my temperature will shoot up, and then you won't know at all how reliable the thermometer is.

HELMER 2 (*sulkily*): Well, thank you.



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NORA 1: Besides, that's not important. Tomorrow you're off to the clinic where your health will be monitored 24 hours a day. You'll be informed of the changes in your body on an hourly basis.

(She starts to paint her nails.)

HELMER 2: I'm not at all sure that's a good idea.

NORA 1: You can't know what's good until you try it.

HELMER 2: I'm afraid.

NORA 1: Of what? They'll help you.

HELMER 2: I don't need help.

NORA 1: Of course you do. That's what you said when I mistakenly rang your number. I need help, you said.

HELMER 2: I wanted to be helped by you.

NORA 1: I did all I could. It's true that you've helped me a lot more, but that's how it is.

HELMER 2: Have I really helped you?

NORA 1: Of course. You've helped me to shoot the flock of restless birds in my head.

HELMER 2: Lucky you.

NORA 1: Lucky me? Lucky you, who have managed to survive a hundred terminal diseases. In fact I should've donated you to a medical school, instead of arranging a stay for you at a private clinic.

HELMER 2: What seems rather strange is that this clinic is so... scattered.

NORA 1: What do you mean?

HELMER 2: That each patient has his own little apartment. And a carer who visits him at home.

NORA 1: One of the benefits of globalisation.

HELMER 2: Are you trying to get rid of me?

NORA 1: My dear Torvald, after all I've done for you, and considering what I'm going to do for you, I find your remark, to put it mildly, insulting.

HELMER 2: Who is going to pay for all this?

NORA 1: The state. You're insured.

HELMER 2: The state can't possibly be so generous.

NORA 1: Why? Because the state of your health is not as serious as it seems?

HELMER 2: No...



NORA NORA

NORA 1: Believe me, Torvald, the state of your health is extremely serious.

HELMER 2: But suppose it isn't?

NORA 1 (*sighs*): Listen. If you leave me in the lurch now that I've organized everything I will walk out of that door and won't stop until I turn into an invisible speck in deep space.

HELMER 2: Will you come and visit me?

NORA 1: You'll *beg* me to come less often.

HELMER 2: And you? What are you going to do?

NORA 1: How do you mean?

HELMER 2: When you finally get rid of me?

NORA 1: Please don't ruin our last moments together.

HELMER 1: When you hand me over to the professionals. Now that you're painting your nails.

NORA 1: I'll become a drowner.

HELMER 1: Is that from the Dictionary of New Words?

NORA 1: No, this word is even more recent than that.

HELMER 2: And what are you going to drown?

NORA 1: Barren soil. Fields. Deserts. Do you realise what car exhausts have done to the atmosphere? When there is no rain I will drown the parched areas, bring them back to life.

HELMER 2: Gallant work.

NORA 1: And poetic. I'll be creating pools, full of clouds. Mirrors in which the stars will fall in love with themselves. And the Moon. Late at night, when the world will suffer its nightmares.

HELMER 2: The world and I.

NORA 1: The world and you. Two equally magnificent, equally important, equally sick creations of God.

HELMER 2: Do you think I'm going to die in that apartment?

NORA 1: I've got some bad news for you, Torvald. You won't. The fate of some is not to die but to go on dying forever.

HELMER 2: I need a massage.

NORA 1: I can't, Torvald. I hope I won't have to massage anyone for a thousand years. My finger joints are feeling the first pangs of osteoarthritis.

HELMER 2: I've had it for years.

NORA 1: That's what I mean. Soon I'll be just like you. Horizontal and breathing my soul out. Of course I'd very much like to do that, but for different reasons.



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HELMER 2: Evidently you won't waste much time.

NORA 1: It won't be easy. After necrophilia the choice narrows considerably.

HELMER 2: He's probably hiding behind the corner, waiting for me to be driven off.

NORA 1: Jealousy doesn't suit you. Jealousy reeks of life, and life is completely at odds with your philosophy.

HELMER 2: I don't know what to say.

NORA 1: The less the better. You must think of your vocal cords. Throat cancer is far from being a pleasant experience. Better go to the bedroom and dress. They'll be here in ten minutes.

HELMER 2: And if I refuse to go?

NORA 1: Oh, very simple. Four massive men will carry you down the stairs, toss you into the back of a van and drive you off. Not into a detox clinic but into the unknown.

HELMER 2 (*slowly sits up*): Forced eviction, then.

NORA 1 (*shows him*): Do you like my nails?

HELMER 2 (*gets up and with hands supporting his lower back hobbles to the bedroom door*): I should've known it would end like this. (*Goes out.*)

NORA 1 (*sings to herself*): Na nana na nana na...

7.

Helmer 1 comes from the bedroom half-dressed, with a shirt in his hand.

HELMER 1: Where are my shirts?

NORA 2 (*without stopping Tai Chi*): You're holding one in your hand.

HELMER 1: I've been wearing this one for days. I have twenty shirts. They can't all be in the washing machine.

NORA 2: There is no washing machine.

HELMER 1: What do you mean?

NORA 2: I've donated it to the Red Cross.

HELMER 1: How are we going to do the washing?

NORA 2: By hand. Or in a laundromat.

HELMER 1: Wait a minute. What's all this? Have you donated my shirts to the Red Cross as well?

NORA 2: No, Caritas.



NORA NORA

HELMER 1: What is this? Some kind of revenge?

NORA 2: No, Torvald, I want to bring you down to earth. Both of us. I've reduced my wardrobe as well, to about ten percent of what I used to have.

HELMER 1: You can do with yours what you like. As for mine, you could at least have asked me.

NORA 2: You can accept certain things only as *fait accompli*.

HELMER 1: No one will confront me with given facts as regards the number of shirts I want to have. Or ties. Or shoes. Or underpants.

NORA 2: Why are you being so petty? Can't you imagine it's not the question of underpants, but something much higher?

HELMER 1: Mount Everest?

NORA 2: Our life resembles a junk room. We have to simplify it.

HELMER 1: I knew you've been bitten by a new bug.

NORA 2 (*stops Tai Chi, straightens up*): Torvald, sit down.

HELMER 1: Without my shirt? I'll catch a cold.

NORA 2: You're holding a shirt in your hand.

HELMER 1: This one's five years old. I want the white one with blue stripes.

NORA 2: God knows who's wearing that one by now. Sit down, or you'll never learn what's going on.

HELMER 1 (*sits on the edge of the armchair, shirt in hand*): I know what's going on. A malignant growth of feminism at the expense of male dignity.

NORA 2: Why are you such a chauvinist?

HELMER 1: No one has ever accused me of that.

NORA 2: Typical of you to infer accusation from a simple statement of fact.

HELMER 1: Say what you have to say, I'm cold.

NORA 2: Torvald, an increasing number of people are realizing that wanting to have everything means having less.

HELMER 1: I don't want to have everything. I just want to have more than one shirt.

NORA 2: An increasing number of people are realizing they're exhausted.

HELMER 1: That's their problem. I'm not.

NORA 2: Not only exhausted, but positively broken by the stress of exaggerated involvement in useless endeavors. They can't enjoy



Nora Nora, Theater im Keller, Graz, Austria, 2005
Alfred Haidacher as Helmer 1, Ewa Weutz as Nora 2
Directed by the ensemble



NORA NORA

even what they almost kill themselves to obtain. Not even their annual holiday.

HELMER 1: I begged you five times to go with me to Florida. And five times you said you had no time.

NORA 2: An increasing number of people are opting for a less hectic, simpler life. Don't you think we should join them?

HELMER 1: No. And certainly not at the cost of my shirts. Or everything else that's disappeared. What else has disappeared?

NORA 2: Almost everything.

HELMER 1 (*rising*): Then it might be best for me to disappear, too.

NORA 2: Torvald, sit down and listen.

HELMER 1: I'm cold.

NORA 2: Put on the shirt, and stop twisting it in your hands like a dishcloth.

HELMER 1: Wait a minute ... Are you telling me that you gave away even the dishcloths, and will use my only shirt for drying the dishes from now on?

NORA 2: Torvald...

HELMER 1: And for cleaning shoes? And windows?

NORA 2: Stop playing the clown.

(Takes a sheet of paper off the computer desk.)

NORA 2: Shall read you a list of do's I had in mind next to my job, and next to being a full-time servant of yours?

HELMER 1: Servant of mine?

NORA 2: Listen. "Start painting with water colors. Join a drama group. Learn rapid reading. Join a choir. Improve your knowledge of French. Work out an optimal diet for a healthy life..."

HELMER 1: Nora...

NORA 2: "Three times a week swimming. Daily fast walk. Seaside twice a month. Start a spice garden on the balcony. Update the wardrobe. Stop wearing the same clothes for two days running. Get used to classical music, although you hate it..."

HELMER 1 (*who has put on his shirt*): This is mad.

NORA 2: I haven't finished. "Get rid of cellulite. Reflexology once a week. Meet at least three interesting men for walks in the park. Examine your sex life and try to improve it."

HELMER 1: I urgently need some fresh air.



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NORA 2 (*almost hysterical*): I agree it's mad! That's why I said: this is it, no more! You should live with no more than you could take with you if you had to abandon a sinking ship.

HELMER 1: Three interesting men for company on a desert island.

NORA 2: Torvald, why do you deliberately misunderstand me?

HELMER 1 (*moves towards exit*): Have you left me a jacket? A pair of shoes? Or will I have to go to work in my slippers?

NORA 2: Since when do you go to work after you've just come from work?

HELMER 1: I'm not going to work. I'm going for a drive. Wonderful weather out there. Or have you abolished that, too? I'm going to meet three interesting women for walks in the park.

NORA 2: Torvald...

HELMER 1: Get fucked. You could've told me what's eating you. We could have worked this out together.

NORA 2: Torvald, you know how accommodating I am by nature, and will do things people want me to do for no other reason than to avoid disappointing them. I just couldn't risk giving you a chance to talk me out of it.

HELMER 1: I don't give a damn what you do yourself. But you can't do this sort of thing to me.

NORA 2: Here. (*Hands him a small coin-like object.*)

HELMER 1: What's this?

NORA 2: A bus token.

HELMER 1 (*hands it back to her*): I have a car.

(*Walks to the door, suddenly freezes, slowly turns.*)

HELMER 1: Tell me it isn't true.

NORA 2: I sold it this morning. For a good price.

HELMER 1: And the money?

NORA 2: Half went for the poor in Africa...

(*Helmer 1 raises a hand to strike her.*)

NORA 2: And the other half for a battered women's refuge.

(*She smiles sweetly. Helmer 1 slowly lowers his hand, crumbles into the armchair and starts to cry. Nora 2 is watching him with a mixture of triumph and pity.*)



NORA NORA

HELMER 2 (*through tears*): Can I ask you something?

NORA 2: Of course.

HELMER 1: Why did you stop working with me? Why did you resign?

NORA 2: Because I urgently needed a whiff of freedom.

HELMER 1: You mean, opportunities to meet interesting men for walks in the park.

NORA 2: A private care nurse can do a lot of good. Do you know how many patients can't get home care? You, too, could open a private practice. I really don't understand what binds you to those corpses. You could...

HELMER 1: Yes, I know I could. If I were a man.

NORA 2: You were a man once.

HELMER 1: Once.

NORA 2: And what are you now?

HELMER 1: I feel like a rotten head of cabbage.

NORA 2: That's what you look like. Here.

(Offers him a handkerchief.)

NORA 2: I have given ten of your hankies to Caritas, but one I kept. I knew you'd need it.

(Blackout.)

8.

Nora 1 is sitting on the sofa, reading a book. On the coffee table a glass and half-empty bottle of whiskey. Nora 2 is sitting at the computer, checking her mail. She reaches for the mobile phone and dials a number.

NORA 2: Good morning... I've received a message that you're looking for a nurse, for private care... Can you tell me a bit more about the patient?... I see... (*Jots down information in a little notebook.*) No major problems, except incontinence... Sorry, what can't he keep inside?... Contents of his bowels... How often?... Every five minutes... Well, at the age of ninety-five one isn't exactly in the prime of life... Unfortunately I'm rather busy at the moment... No, it's not that, I'm used to cases ten times worse, it's just that... (*Nervously*



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tapping the desk with her pencil.) Who's been taking care of him?... He what?... Put his hand up her skirt... Oh I doubt she left because of that... She probably found it quite amusing... She probably left because she realized she lacked the necessary experience for wiping the ass of a geriatric Romeo... Hullo? *(Puts the phone on the desk.)* Torvald, please come back... I want to return to the dissection room. *(She collects herself and starts composing an electronic message.)* Dear Torvald... *(Deletes and starts again.)* Dearest Torvald...

(Continues writing. A cell phone on the sofa next to Nora 1 rings. She picks it up.)

NORA 1: Hello, my unforgettable one... Are you all right?... How can you say I don't visit you, I was there a week ago... All right, two weeks ago... What did they find?... Plantar fasciitis... You found it yourself, walking round your studio flat... I thought so... And how do you feel?... Consistently unwell... That's good... No, I mean it, Torvald, consistency of symptoms indicates that your condition has stabilized and you can expect to live on in utmost misery for another fifty years...

(She lights a cigarette, gets up, paces around.)

NORA 1: I am, Torvald, I am ready for bad news... After all, the worst news coming from you would be that you have no bad news... The nurse said she wouldn't be coming any more?... That's not a problem, we'll find you a new one...

(Pauses by the coffee table, takes a sip of whiskey.)

NORA 1: No, it won't be difficult, supply exceeds demand by three to one... But why did she leave?... You what?... You tried to strangle her? Why, Torvald?... You asked her to let you put your fingers round her neck?

(Pours herself more whiskey, takes a sip, puts the glass down, continues pacing.)

NORA 1: Yes, I know you failed to strangle your ex Nora to death, but that doesn't mean you can go around strangling other women...



NORA NORA

Are you mad?... No, Torvald, you have no right to strangle other women... With us it was different, we were... Hey, wait a minute, did you and the nurse... Are you sure?... All right, I believe you... Yes, I'll find you another, don't worry.

(She throws the phone on the sofa.)

NORA 1: All right, you lucky girl, take a deep breath... *(Takes a deep breath.)* And thank God because he let you escape relatively unscathed... *(Joins her hands in prayer and looks up.)* Thank you, God...

(Sits down, reaches for Loot, starts to look through the ads. Reaches for the phone, dials a number. Nora 2's phone rings. Nora 2 accepts the call.)

NORA 2: Yes?

NORA 1: I see that you offer nursing care to home-bound patients.

NORA 2: That depends.

NORA 1: It says here to all patients except to those with AIDS and mad cow disease.

NORA 2: And which one have you?

(Nora 1 wants to answer, changes her mind, cuts off. Reaches for Loot.)

NORA 1: Let's start again.

NORA 2 *(pulls at her hair)*: What's the matter with me?

(Nora 2 dials back the number of the last call. Nora 1 checks who is calling, compares the number with that in Loot, smiles, ignores ringing. Finally presses No.)

NORA 2: What's the matter with me? WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH ME?

(Puts the phone down, resumes writing electronic message.)

NORA 2: I know that this letter will surprise you...

(She cannot concentrate. Keeps glancing at the phone. Repeats the call. Nora 1 checks the number. Ignores ringing. Then she reaches for the phone and accepts the call.)



Nora Nora, Theater im Keller, Graz, Austria, 2005
Ute Walluschk-Wallfeld as Nora 1, Ewa Weutz as Nora 2
Directed by the ensemble





NORA NORA

NORA 1: Hullo.

NORA 2 (*falsely cheerful*): I think there's been a misunderstanding.

NORA 1: Really? Who are you?

NORA 2: The nurse offering care to home-bound patients.

NORA 1: I'm not a patient.

NORA 2: I know. But you have a patient. Weren't we conversing just now?

NORA 1: Speaking, I think you mean. Were we not speaking a short while ago.

NORA 2: (*decides to cut off, changes her mind*) Really? Well, what d'you know. My English is somewhat ...

NORA 1: Pretentious?

NORA 2: Limited. (*To herself.*) Why do I bother? Why do I bother?!!!

NORA 1: Mine isn't all that extensive either.

NORA 2: I'd say it is. You sound like a strict, pedantic school-teacher. (*To herself.*) What's the matter with me today? (*Into the phone again.*) I don't mean anything bad, it's just that I myself tend to be rather sloppy.

NORA 1: That can't be good, considering your job.

NORA 2: I know.

NORA 1: You could easily give a patient the wrong medicine.

NORA 2: I have years of experience. Plus references from the teaching hospital where I used to work.

NORA 1: But now you're free.

NORA 2: Professionally speaking, yes.

NORA 1: But not otherwise?

NORA 2: But not otherwise. May I ask what you do?

NORA 1: Why do you want to know?

NORA 2: It isn't often I speak to someone who makes me feel we'd have quite a lot to say to each other.

NORA 1: Are you trying to crawl up my ass to get the job?

NORA 2 (*checks herself*): No, I mean it. Usually I'm surrounded by excruciatingly boring men. I'd blow them away if I could. All of them.

NORA 1: Bitter words.

NORA 2: Your experience is probably different.

NORA 1: With men? (*She laughs.*) My experience with men is such that it would blow *you* away if you knew the details.

NORA 2: Then we have quite a lot in common.



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

NORA 1: Both surrounded by patients, is that what you mean? I'm sorry. I know it's not fair, but I'm having a rotten day. I simply don't know any more in which direction to move.

NORA 2: Neither do I. But today I finally realized that the only safe route leads back to how it used to be.

NORA 1: Another favor to men? Don't do it.

NORA 2: Why not?

NORA 1: Men always want us to return to our starting positions. They're never quite sure they've managed to break our necks, so they want to start all over again.

NORA 2: Don't we actually help them with that?

NORA 1: Unfortunately we do.

NORA 2: Because we're afraid to be alone?

NORA 1: I am alone.

NORA 2: So am I. At the moment.

NORA 1: And how do you feel?

NORA 2: As if I'd prefer to be with a man.

NORA 1: Even at the cost of humiliation?

NORA 2: Almost.

NORA 1: You sound like a mother who's lost her only child.

NORA 2: The only children in my life have been men.

NORA 1: Welcome to the club of the martyrs of love. We always sacrifice what we are in order to give men a leading role. After you, dear. You decide. Guide us, I'm blind.

NORA 2: Is that wrong? Not all Indians can be chiefs.

NORA 1: You can't be serious. Whose side are you on?

NORA 2: Why must our relationships be a battle?

NORA 1: Because it's forced upon us. Should we just crumble?

NORA 2: I don't know.

NORA 1: Well, it's our fault anyway. We fall in love – not with what men are, but with their potential. Which, needless to say, is never realized.

NORA 2: If only things were as simple.

NORA 1: They are, but men have the uncanny ability to keep strangling us from afar.

NORA 2: Don't take it personally, but this sounds to me like something from a feminist manual.

NORA 1: Touché.

NORA 2: Sorry?

NORA 1: Oh, nothing. How did we get into this anyway?



NORA NORA

NORA 2: You called because you need nursing care.

NORA 1: Not for myself. For my ex. In fact I'm still not sure if it wouldn't be simpler to just let him die.

NORA 2: A difficult case?

NORA 1: You can't imagine.

NORA 2: Oh I doubt that.

NORA 1: He keeps taking his temperature, checking his blood pressure, cholesterol level, blood glucose, white cell count, red cell count, potassium levels, you name it. He is paralyzed by fear that death is about to knock on his door. To be honest I'm not cruel enough to saddle you with a case like this.

NORA 2: Don't worry. I'm familiar with the syndrome. I used to live with a man like that.

NORA 1: Impossible. I thought this case was unique.

NORA 2: Evidently not.

NORA 1: Towards the end I had the feeling I was living with a corpse.

NORA 2: So did I. What made matters worse was the fact that I worked as an assistant to a pathologist in a dissection room.

(Long pause.)

NORA 2: Hullo? Are you still there?

NORA 1 *(trying to collect herself)*: Yes, I've knocked over a glass of wine. On the carpet! Shit. Sorry.

(With a trembling hand, she lights another cigarette.)

NORA 2: Well? I'm free, I could start tomorrow.

NORA 1: Listen... We've had a nice little chat, so I'll be honest with you. His previous carer ran away because he tried to strangle her.

NORA 2: I'll wear an orthopedic collar.

NORA 1: You really want this job, don't you.

NORA 2: That's how it is with us freelancers. We take what comes along. Only one thing would put me off. What's the condition of his sphincters?

NORA 1: Sphincters?

NORA 2: How well can he retain water and faeces?

NORA 1 *(laughs)*: Oh my God! For a moment I thought it was something from the Dictionary of New Words. Sphincters! Of course I know what sphincters are. He has no problems there, you'll be glad to know.



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NORA 2: Do you have a Dictionary of New Words?

NORA 1: Of course, why?

NORA 2: Seems to be quite a bestseller.

NORA 1: It does. Although this may be deceptive. I must warn you of one thing, though.

NORA 2: What is that?

NORA 1: The patient you'll care for lives in a small apartment I rented for him because I could no longer stand living with him at home. This is costing me the world and only God knows how I'm going to repay my debts. But he believes that the studio flat is part of a detoxification clinic, and that he is terminally ill. Can you somehow reinforce his waning belief that it's too risky for him to return home?

NORA 2: If that's what you want.

NORA 1: Will you take the details?

NORA 2: You can send them by e-mail. That will serve as our contract. You are connected, I take it?

NORA 1: Of course. In other words, veronica@hotmail.com.

NORA 2: How do you know my name is Veronica?

NORA 1: How do I know?... Good question... It's a guess... No, it's not a guess, it says so in your advertisement!

NORA 2: In fact, I'm not Veronica. I'm Nora.

NORA 1: Oh...

NORA 2: Do you know the play?

NORA 1: I don't go to the theatre. Besides, I find these ancient plays completely at odds with the times we live in.

NORA 2: There is another thing that might surprise you. The man I used to live with is called Torvald.

NORA 1: How romantic! Give him my regards, when you see him.

NORA 2: I doubt I'll ever see him again. Not that Torvald, at any rate.

NORA 1: Life is full of surprises. Just one more thing. That orthopedic collar you mentioned... A very good idea.

(Closes the phone, puts it on the coffee table, sits on the sofa, raises the glass of whiskey.)

NORA 1: Touché!

NORA 2 *(returns to her message)*: Dearest Torvald... No... My only one... No... Listen, you... No... If you want your shirts back, I'll try to... *(Pauses. Stares into space.)* All right, I've made some mistakes...



NORA NORA

9.

Nora 2 continues typing her message. Helmer 1 enters through the main door with a book in his hand. He stops, looking at Nora 1. He comes forward, sits in the armchair.

HELMER 1: The door was open. So I just... walked in.

NORA 1: That's what doors are for. To be used for pissing off. And for coming back shrivelled up like a starving dog.

HELMER 1 (*puts the book on the coffee table*): I'm a door-to-door salesman. Offering a special deal for the Dictionary of Clichés.

NORA 1: Clichés? What use would they be to me?

HELMER 1: Clichés are an important part of everyday life.

NORA 1: They must be, since you've just used one.

HELMER 1: One word led to another, and the cliché struck out of the blue.

NORA 1: Sooner or later, I suppose, even new words turn into clichés.

HELMER 1: I get the feeling that you're reading me like a book.

NORA 1: Not entirely. Lots of water under the bridge since we last sat like this.

HELMER 1: Lots of water, causing floods at one end and drought at the other.

NORA 1: Both at both ends.

HELMER 1: Dry floods.

NORA 1: Dry eyes when I ran out of tears. When only one thing remained: a desire to get even.

HELMER 1: To fight cliché with cliché.

NORA 1: Revenge is sweet.

HELMER 1: No doubt. But in clumsy hands it can cause diabetes.

NORA 1: Really? What are the symptoms?

HELMER 1: Disorientation. Anxiety. Coma.

NORA 1: Who would've thought! Even symptoms can become clichés.

HELMER 1: The more often one repeats the same mistake, the more difficult it becomes to live a cliché-free life.

NORA 1: Have you come to repeat the mistake?

HELMER 1: We're neither of us so naive as to try the lucky dip. We'll have to tell each other nothing less than the plain truth.

NORA 1: Is that possible?

HELMER 1: Why not?

NORA 1: A wolf never changes its coat.



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

HELMER 1: Except when stepping out of its skin. And it turns out it's no more than a black sheep.

NORA 1: Even a black sheep is not above having a joker up its sleeve.

HELMER 1: A desire for greener grass. That's all it has up its sleeve.

NORA 1: Isn't the grass greener on the other side?

HELMER 1: Of course. That's why the black sheep decided to jump back over the fence.

NORA 1: Smells like opportunism pure and simple.

HELMER 1: Not at all. The black sheep would like to catch the last train.

NORA 1: To where?

HELMER 1: Back to Shangri-la.

NORA 1: Things have changed there. Darkness reigns, it's raining cats and dogs, each blade of grass is a double-edged sword.

HELMER 1: Then a rescue mission is long overdue.

NORA 1: Some things can't be rescued. The best we can do for them is to let them expire in peace.

HELMER 1 (*slowly rising*): Pity. Evidently clichés lie. Hope is not always half of life.

NORA 1: Sit down, Torvald, and stop with these adolescent tricks, they won't help us salvage anything.

HELMER 1: I've come repentant, contrite and remorseful, and hoping to God we can pick up where we left off – is that a cliché?

NORA 1: The greatest of all. You ended on top of Veronica, and I under Torvald – is that where you want us to continue?

HELMER 1: I've returned because I realized that actually... I... that I actually...

NORA 1: What?

HELMER 1: That I actually...

NORA 1: That you actually need me?

HELMER 1: No. That I actually love you.

NORA 1 (*laughs*): That you actually love me! Come on. A grown man doesn't discover love as if stumbling on a twenty-dollar bill on the sidewalk.

HELMER 1: I'll give you everything.

NORA 1: You haven't got everything. And I don't want it anyway.

HELMER 1: I'll give you everything you want.

NORA 1: You chose another.

HELMER 1: I made a mistake.

NORA 1: This isn't a reform school for naughty boys.



NORA NORA

HELMER 1: To give someone a second chance is Christian.

NORA 1: So is watching one's partner making love to a corpse, I suppose.

HELMER 1: You know perfectly well I invented that.

NORA 1: The thought itself is repugnant.

HELMER 1: God created us, the devil corrupted us. We are a sad mixture of purity and filth. Who am I to try to transcend the human average?

NORA 1 (*looks at him*): Did she give you the push?

HELMER 1: I gave her the push.

NORA 1: Did you ... love her? (*She laughs.*) I'm sorry, the word still won't pass my lips without making me laugh.

HELMER 1: Never as I loved you.

NORA 1: Never from behind, you mean? I don't believe that.

HELMER 1: And you? Did you love him?

NORA 1: Torvald?

HELMER 1: I'm Torvald.

NORA 1: That's what you think. There are enough Torvalds to fill a large theater. Half the world. And all the same. A treacherous sea of cloned masculinity.

HELMER 1: There is no one like me.

NORA 1: That's your common denominator. Stubborn belief that you are unique.

HELMER 1: We're not. I alone am unique.

NORA 1: A drowner... What did you drown last?

HELMER 1: The pathology room at the hospital. I accidentally pushed the table against the air-conditioning pipe and ended up with three swimming stiff.

NORA 1 (*laughs*): Oh my God... Just like you.

HELMER 1: I'm glad you haven't forgotten.

NORA 1: What?

HELMER 1: How amusing I can be.

NORA 1: Obviously not amusing enough for Veronica.

HELMER 1: I left because she was getting on my nerves.

NORA 1: That's what men usually say.

HELMER 1: And you? How could you shack up with that... hypochondriac? I took that as a personal insult.

NORA 1: I wanted to be good. And he made that possible. Women are different from men.



Nora Nora, Preseren Theater, Kranj, Slovenia, 2005
Vesna Pernarcic – Zunic as Nora 1, Borut Veselko as Helmer 1
Directed by Dusan Mlakar



NORA NORA

HELMER 1: And now, you no longer want to be good?

NORA 1: I think I've lived out this particular urge. Everything has its limits. Besides...

HELMER 1: Besides?

NORA 1: No, I can't tell you that. You couldn't take it.

HELMER 1: Try me.

NORA 1: I know you couldn't. You'd hit me.

HELMER 1: I'm made of better dough than that.

NORA 1: I'm glad it was you who first used the word. So then, dear Torvald: you're doughy. Even in those rare moments when you're least doughy, you're still very doughy. Compared to him.

HELMER 1 (*nervous cough*): Are you talking about my character?

NORA 1: No, Torvald. We both know that you have no character to speak of. I'm talking about the protuberance which defines Torvalds as men. Some of you have doughy ones, and others as if they were made of steel.

(Helmer 1 closes his eyes and leans back.)

NORA 1: You look very pale all of a sudden. Shall I make you a cup of tea?

HELMER 1: I'm tired. I've got five post-mortems behind me. Including a murdered woman.

NORA 1: Again? Who is murdering all these women? Are you sure this isn't only wishful thinking? Shall I fetch you a hanky?

HELMER 1 (*fighting tears*): I just don't know... Veronica used to reproach me that all I think of is sex...

NORA 1: It's not a question of how often you think of it. It's a question of what you can offer when you get down to it. If you think too much, you may not be able to offer enough.

HELMER 1 (*wiping tears with the sleeve of his jacket*): You've never... never...

NORA 1: The only thing Torvald ever thought of was his terminal illnesses. He never tried to impress me. Quite often, during sex, he would read the Great Dictionary of Symptoms. He transferred the ownership of his organ to me.

HELMER 1: You're all the same. You're not interested in a relationship, not even in sex. All you care about is power.



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

NORA 1: The most doughy among you are those who try hardest to subjugate us to your will. I'm surprised you haven't worked that one out. At least the intelligent among you.

HELMER 1 (*sinks back in the armchair*): I feel as if I were decaying.

NORA 1: Decay is natural. Decay makes way for new growth. Have you forgotten? You'd like to remain in the same spot forever. That's not possible. We have to move with the currents. To wither when it's time to wither, and to grow when it's time to grow.

HELMER 1: Fuck all that.

NORA 1: You're a doctor, Torvald. Watch your language.

HELMER 1 (*rises*): And you can fuck yourself, because I certainly won't. Not because I'm too doughy, I just don't want to. I find you repugnant with your... your... feminine superiority.

NORA 1: You're turning back into a Neanderthal.

HELMER 1: The only way to survive among demented bitches.

NORA 1: Why must you be so... lacking in finesse?

HELMER 1: I thought, doughy as no doubt I am in my head as well, that we were negotiating the terms of a peace settlement between two people who made a few grave mistakes, but have so much in common that they could, with the hindsight of experience and a little goodwill, create something that would suit not only one of them but both equally.

NORA 1: What're you talking about?

HELMER 1: About love. You cow. Open the Dictionary of New Words if you've never heard of it.

NORA 1: You repeat yourself.

HELMER 1: I do not repeat myself. Things that last forever repeat themselves. Sorry. I'm not offering you anything original. All I can offer you is a doughy feeling of security.

NORA 1: You stole my gun.

HELMER 1: Yes. I'm sorry. Is this the moment you'd like to use it?

NORA 1: What have you done with it?

HELMER 1: I shot Veronica.

NORA 1: And?

HELMER 1: To no avail. She donated my shirts to the Red Cross. She sold my car and sent the proceeds to starvation victims in Africa. She stuck my ties to the bathroom walls. She said we had too much of everything. Why can't women find out what they want and then stick to that?



NORA NORA

NORA 1: Since when do men know what they want?

HELMER 1: I know when I'm not wanted. I feel as if I were visiting a graveyard.

NORA 1: Sit down, Torvald.

HELMER 1: I'm not your dog.

NORA 1: Maybe I'd like to be your bitch again.

HELMER 1: Bitches don't eat dough. Neither do sows. Nor rattlesnakes either.

NORA 1: Where is that from? Dictionary of Endearments? What else can you offer me?

HELMER 1: The Dictionary of Silence.

(Walks to the door.)

NORA 1: Then give me back my gun, because I want to kill myself.

HELMER 1 *(turns)*: Shall I help you?

(Pulls the gun from his pocket, points it at Nora 1, fires. Nora 1 jumps, grabs at her chest and collapses on the sofa, where she remains motionless.)

HELMER 1: Is it nice to be dead? *(Takes two steps towards her.)* You look rather doughy. Nora? What's the matter? *(Kneels in front of the sofa, shakes Nora's head.)* Nora, that's enough. Open your eyes and look at me. *(He looks at the gun, confused.)* Christ... She hasn't actually... inserted real cartridges?... I thought she was joking... *(He examines Nora's chest.)* There is no wound, stop this.

NORA 1 *(jumps up and embraces him)*: You're fondling my tits, how wonderful!

HELMER 1 *(freezes)*: Sorry.

NORA 1: More, please. Like you used to. It's not so far back. Come on, Mr. Dough. You'll see how quickly you'll turn into Mr. Steel.

HELMER 1: It's a question of pride.

NORA 1: That's why. You'll see how proud you'll be when I finish with you.

HELMER 1: I don't know.

NORA 1: Come on. Like the first time. Drown me, can't you see I'm parched? You alone can drown me in such a way that flowers start growing out of me.



Nora Nora, Theater im Keller, Graz, Austria, 2005
Ute Walluschek-Wallfeld as Nora 1, Alfred Haidacher as Helmer 1
Directed by the ensemble





NORA NORA

HELMER 1 (*hesitating*): I don't know.

NORA 1 (*pulls the gun from his hand, points it at him*): Have you ever been raped?

HELMER 1: No.

NORA 1: You don't know what you've been missing.

(Blackout.)

10.

Nora 1 sits on the sofa, painting her nails. Every now and then she takes a sip of whiskey. She is smoking, moving the cigarette from mouth to hand, from hand to hand, from hand to mouth. Helmer 2, dressed for a marathon, with the gun in his hand, is marching up and down.

HELMER 2: Ta ram ta tam, ta ram ta tam, ta ram ta tam; tara tamta tara tamta tara tamta; trum trum trum; humpty dumpty humpty dumpty; taratum taratum taratum...

(A cell phone on the computer desk rings. Helmer 2 answers.)

HELMER 2: Yes? Veronica is away on business. You can talk to me.

(Sits down, picks up a pen, gets ready to jot down details.)

HELMER 2: Her phone? This is her phone. Who am I? I'm Prof. Dr. Torvald Helmer, a renowned expert for cardiology, oncology, sociology and hailmaryology. Joking, I? On the contrary, Madam: life is a struggle against the inevitable end, and I've won!

(Puts the phone down, rises, resumes marching up and down.)

HELMER 2: Eins, zwei, drei, vier; one, two, three, four; uno, due, tre, quattro; jedan, dva, tri, chetiri; satu, dua, tiga, empat; een, twee, drie, vier, hutje van papier...

(Hurries to the computer desk, grabs the phone, redials the number of the last caller, impatiently waits for a response.)



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

HELMER 2: Once again Torvald Helmer. The earlier information about my profession was wrong. I've just remembered that I'm a freelance translator, one of the best, no doubt about that, so that we know where we stand, I've translated the Bible from thirty-five languages into thirty-five other languages, simultaneously, no one can beat me in the speed and accuracy of simultaneous translation... Hullo?... Hullo?

(Puts the phone down, sinks into the armchair, stares. Nora 2 comes from the kitchen with a cup of tea; she puts it on the computer desk. Pats Helmer 2's head.)

NORA 2: Tea for funny little bunny.

HELMER 2: Little bunny, boom. *(Presses the barrel of the gun to his temple.)* Little bunny, boom. *(Points the gun at Nora 2.)* Boom boom.

NORA 2: Little funny bunny must drink funny bunny tea. Good for funny bunny. Medicine in tea. After medicine funny bunny beddy-byes.

HELMER 2: Prof. Dr. Torvald Helmer is an expert for: *(rapidly)* morphology, geology, urology, ufology, theology, sinology, spectrology, astrology, histology, sexology, psychology, indology. Bravo! Prof. Dr. Torvald Helmer has solved the riddle. Reward.

(Puts out his hand. Nora 2 reaches in her pocket, pulls out a bar of chocolate, breaks off a quarter and places it in Helmer's hand.)

NORA 2: Good funny bunny. And now funny bunny tea.

HELMER 2 *(swallows the chocolate and drinks the tea in one gulp)*: Good funny bunny. No more funny bunny tea. One more chocky.

(Puts out his arm. Nora 2 breaks off another quarter of chocolate and puts it in his hand. Helmer 2 swallows it.)

HELMER 2: Chocky bye bye. Funny bunny tea bye bye. Funny bunny beddy-byes.

(Lies down on the floor, assuming a foetal position.)

NORA 2: Has funny bunny forgotten he's got a bed?

HELMER 2 *(mumbling to himself)*: Prof. Dr. Torvald Helmer is an expert. Prof. Helmer is an expert for genealogy, phrenology, philosophy,



NORA NORA

ontology and thirty-five other rare diseases threatening to exterminate humanity... (*Waning.*) Professor Helmer... Professor... Professor funny bunny... Beddy-byes...

(Nora 2 bends down and shakes him by the shoulder. Helmer 2 has fallen asleep.)

NORA 2 (*straightens*): Good for ten hours at least.

(She steps over him and picks up the phone. Dials a number. Nora 1's phone rings. She answers.)

NORA 2: Hello. Would this be the right moment for me to come round?

NORA 1 (*consults her watch*): I should think so. I'll be alone for another three hours.

NORA 2: Good. See you soon.

(Bends down and pulls the gun from Helmer 2's hand. Puts the gun and the phone into her handbag, walks out through the main door on the right.)

NORA 1 (*examining her painted nails*): Na nana nana nana, nanana, na na, na na, nana nanana (*etc.*)

(Helmer 1 enters at the main door, slowly skulking behind the sofa so that Nora 1 doesn't see him.)

HELMER 1: Na nana nana na nanana...

NORA 1 (*startled*): Torvald... My God... (*Consults her watch.*) You're three hours early.

HELMER 1: Inconvenient for you?

NORA 1: Of course not. But you frightened me. My God. Anything wrong?

HELMER 1: On the contrary. The pigeon has come to check if you remember that the dove needs an occasional shove.

NORA 1: Torvald, I'm not in a mood for old jokes.

HELMER 1: I wouldn't have come unannounced, but I remembered our dear old friend Mr Luck who rhymes with ... I forget.

NORA 1: Torvald, wouldn't you rather wait for a more suitable moment?



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

HELMER 1: Isn't that what I'm doing? While the corpses wait for my knife, I, patient idiot that I am, wait to be given what's due from my wife.

NORA 1: I don't know how to respond to that.

HELMER 1: Pretend that you don't know what I'm talking about. As usual.

NORA 1: Torvald, our relationship is at a delicate point.

HELMER 1: You took me back. You wanted me back. And now you can't cope with the fact that I have desires?

NORA 1: Maybe I can't cope with your being here when you should be elsewhere.

HELMER 1: What you can't cope with is the fact that I'm not a corpse. I know your game. Your game is that you don't play. I take your pawn, and you push the chessboard off the table, sulking.

NORA 1: Torvald, go back to work. Please.

HELMER 1: Do you miss him?

NORA 1: Who, for God's sake?

HELMER 1: Mr. Unconcerned! Mr. Steel! Why didn't you tell me you visited him after you took me back?

NORA 1: I had to sort things out, he was in my care. I had to...

HELMER 1: You didn't have to. You wanted to. How many times?

NORA 1: What?

HELMER 1: How many times did you climb on top of him?

NORA 1 (*rising*): For God's sake, Torvald? By definition *he* should be ill, but you are more ill than he'll ever be.

HELMER 1: I'll kill him. And it'll be your fault.

NORA 1: Mine?

HELMER 1: You gave him the gun. And I've put in real cartridges.

(He walks to the door, turns, looks at her. He leaves.)

NORA 1: Oh my God...

(She grabs her phone, dials a number. On the computer desk, Helmer 2's phone rings. Helmer 2 moves, moans, continues to sleep. The phone keeps ringing. Nora 1 gives up, puts the phone on the table. Pours herself a whiskey. Her hand is shaking.)

NORA 1 (*continues painting her nails*): Na nana nana, nanana na, nana na na, nana...



NORA NORA

(Nora 2 enters at the main door. She pauses and listens to Nora 1. She clears her throat. Nora 1, startled, turns around. They look at each other for 30 seconds.)

NORA 2 *(smiles and proceeds into the room)*: Is that you?

NORA 1: Probably. *(Indicates the place on the sofa, next to her. Nora 2 sits down.)* You're much more beautiful than I feared.

NORA 2: So are you.

NORA 1 *(laughs)*: Me? Neurotic cow who keeps painting her nails for want of something to do? I've tried twenty different types of nail varnish.

(Indicates an array of bottles on the coffee table.)

NORA 2: Strange that we haven't met before.

NORA 1: We may have done. Torvald says –

NORA 2: Which Torvald?

NORA 1 *(smiles)*: My Torvald.

NORA 2: Which your Torvald?

(For a while they look at each other.)

NORA 1: My Torvald your ex boss in the dissection room – right?

(Nora 2 smiles and nods.)

NORA 1: My ex and current and maybe soon ex again Torvald says that there are at least two worlds. All we have to do is reach out.

(She reaches out with her hand. So does Nora 2, but in the opposite direction.)

NORA 1: It could well be that over there, in front of the computer, sits another Torvald, living a parallel life with another Nora, meaning you, and maybe your life together is the very thing that we have always longed for, my Torvald and I.

NORA 2 *(short laugh)*: You can't possibly have longed for that. Besides, my Torvald – and for a while yours as well – does not sit in front of the computer but lies on the floor behind the armchair, no longer a hypochondriac but a psychotic with a confirmed diagnosis.



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NORA 1: Oh... I didn't know.

NORA 2 (*looks around*): Amazing. Almost identical furnishings.

NORA 1: Yes, Torvald, your ex and present Torvald, said that everything was exactly the same, down to the last shade of color.

NORA 2: It could well be.

NORA 1: So you do believe ...

NORA 2: No, I have my own thoughts about parallel worlds. I think we all live in one and only world. Locked up in it, sentenced to life imprisonment..

NORA 1: I don't know...

NORA 2: We live in a world of men's illusions we cannot turn into reality. That's why through their transparent love they hate us. And they live in a world of our desires they're not really up to. They hate us for that as well.

NORA 1: I couldn't say I hate either of the two Torvalds.

NORA 2: Women don't know how to hate. We're left with despair.

NORA 1: And friendship?

NORA 2: At a certain stage of wisdom. Which is a certain stage of despair.

NORA 1: I'm glad you came.

NORA 2: I'm glad you accepted my self-invitation without a trace of reservation.

NORA 1: It wasn't without reservation. Or without agonizing. Even so, it wasn't curiosity that carried the day.

NORA 2: No?

NORA 1: No. I realized we are actually one family. If another world did exist, the four of us would live in it together.

NORA 2: That world does exist. And we do live in it. Together.

NORA 1 (*smiling*): I'd very much like to believe that.

(Helmer 1 enters at the main door, notices Helmer 2 on the floor. Helmer 1 bends down and shakes Helmer 2. Helmer 2 moans and opens his eyes.)

HELMER 1: What's the matter with you?

HELMER 2 (*half asleep*): Prof. Dr. Torvald Helmer is an expert in zoology, paediatrics, geriatrics, neurology...

(Helmer 1 takes a small can from his pocket, forcibly parts Helmer 2's jaws and sprays something into his mouth.)



NORA NORA

HELMER 1: Someone has drugged you with a strong sedative. (*He pulls up Helmer 2 and leans him against the back of the armchair.*)

Typical of her.

NORA 2: Actually I've come with a purpose.

NORA 1: Oh yes?

HELMER 2: I'm sorry, I said. I'm sorry, but I keep translating myself from a human being into a man and from a man into a human being. Traduttori traditori. Every man is a smearing of a human being, and each human being is a smearing of a man. Men are not human beings.

HELMER 1: I can see that you've been programmed. Women are not human beings.

HELMER 2: Women are goddesses who have slipped descending Mt. Olympus and ended at the foot of it badly bruised, a mere shadow of what they could be. Well, why didn't they stay where they belong?

HELMER 1: I've come to kill you.

NORA 2: I've come to kill you.

(*She opens her handbag, takes out the gun, points it at Nora 1.*)

NORA 1 (*laughs*): With that little pop gun?

HELMER 2: You know what? I'd be grateful. (*Searches in his pockets.*)
I had a gun. Where is it?

HELMER 1: But now I see that someone has beaten me to it. I'm sorry, comrade. Men kill swiftly, but women kill slowly and for pleasure.

NORA 2: How do you know I haven't inserted a real cartridge?

HELMER 2: I know who you are. She always spoke well of you. I think she liked you.

HELMER 1: Which one?

HELMER 2: Nora.

HELMER 1: Which Nora? Yours or mine?

HELMER 2: Mine. Yours. Ours. Is it wrong if I say ours?

HELMER 1: No, but I still don't know which one.

HELMER 2: Doesn't matter. Sooner or later I'll run out of words. Who cares. I'll get funny bunny tea for funny bunny, and dream on. I've grown old in the last year. Isn't that terrible? I'm older by a whole year. If this continues I'll run out of time. Dreadful. But anyway, what could I use that time for? Do you know?



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HELMER 1 (*rising*): For reclaiming a vestige of dignity. Like me.

NORA 2: Are you not afraid?

NORA 1: I am. Before I gave the gun to your Torvald so that he could scare you to death, my Torvald had, so he says, inserted real cartridges.

HELMER 2: Who are you? I mean, who are you really?

HELMER 1: You don't want to know.

HELMER 2: I do. Your words sound very pompous. Dignity. That's from a Dictionary of New Words, isn't it? A medical student sold it to me years ago.

HELMER 1: That was me.

NORA 2 (*looks at the gun in her hand*): In other words...

NORA 1: Why do you want to kill me?

NORA 2: Because I don't understand anything any more.

NORA 1: Neither do I. But at least I'm trying. Isn't that enough?

HELMER 2: Our curse is language. We live in one world. It's called Babylon.

HELMER 1: You have moments of lucidity which indicate that you're less confused than you'd like us to believe.

HELMER 2: Will you betray me if I tell you that you're right? Of course you won't. A victim will not hand another victim over to the executioner. Or will he? I don't know. I'll risk it. Yes, I am less confused than I'd like people to believe. That assures me of certain bonuses I'd find difficult to live without.

HELMER 1: What about pride?

HELMER 2: A monosyllabic word from a Dictionary of Phrase and Fable. We pride ourselves on being men. On understanding women. On being understood by women. On having the upper hand. On having an excellent sense of smell. And what do we smell? The scent of women as sweet, beautiful roses hiding poison in their thorns. Only men who are afraid to hide have no pride. Anything else?

HELMER 1: I think that'll do.

HELMER 2: Very considerate. Thank you.

(Curls up on the floor again. Nora 2 puts the gun back in her handbag. She rises, kneels before Nora 1 and puts her head in her lap. Nora 1 bends down and embraces her.)



NORA NORA

HELMER 1: I feel that someone has won at this game, but if you ask me who I have to say that I have no idea.

HELMER 2: The role of the winner is too much for me. You take it on. After all you're younger than I, and may find it useful. Although the notion that women love winners is not really true. They love themselves in different roles. Now in this one, now in that one.

NORA 2 (*looks up*): It's a pity we haven't had a chance to become friends.

HELMER 1: It's a pity we haven't had a chance to become friends.

HELMER 2: Oh... In the Dictionary of Lost Opportunities, a drop in the ocean.

HELMER 1: How to go on, that is the question.

HELMER 2: Don't forget to close the door when you leave.

HELMER 1: Has anything at all happened? Have we moved at all?

HELMER 2: Why this obsession with history and geography? Believe it or not, the greatest adventure is keeping still.

HELMER 1: Once I watched a documentary about moving a giraffe from one zoo to another...

(He stands, staring into space. Nora 2 looks at Nora 1. Nora 1 gently strokes her hair.)

(Lights slowly fade.)