Unit Five: Underscoring A Dramatic Scene

Consider the possibilities for underscoring the following scene from A Doll’s House by Henrick Ibsen. During the 1890’s in Norway when women could not get a loan themselves, Nora borrowed money on the sly to save her husband, Torvald Helmer who was deathly ill. When Torvald discovers her deception, he is more concerned about his reputation than the effort she had put forth to save his life. What role might underscoring play in accompanying this scene as their marriage dissolves.

HELMER

I would gladly work night and day for you, Nora—bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves.

NORA

It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done.

HELMER

Oh, you think and talk like a heedless child.

NORA

Maybe. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could bind myself to. As soon as your fear was over—and it was not fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you—when the whole thing was past, as far as you were concerned it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so brittle and fragile. *[Getting up.]* Torvald—it was then it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living here with a strange man, and had borne him three children—. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself into little bits!

HELMER

*[sadly].* I see, I see. An abyss has opened between us—there is no denying it. But, Nora, would it not be possible to fill it up?

NORA

As I am now, I am no wife for you.

HELMER

I have it in me to become a different man.

NORA

Perhaps—if your doll is taken away from you.

HELMER

But to part!—to part from you! No, no, Nora, I can't understand that idea.

NORA

*[going out to the right].* That makes it all the more certain that it must be done.

*[She comes back with her cloak and hat and a small bag which she puts on a chair by the table.]*

HELMER

Nora, Nora, not now! Wait till tomorrow.

NORA

*[putting on her cloak].* I cannot spend the night in a strange man’s room.

HELMER

But can't we live here like brother and sister—?

NORA

*[putting on her hat].* You know very well that would not last long. *[Puts the shawl round her.]* Good-bye, Torvald. I won't see the little ones. I know they are in better hands than mine. As I am now, I can be of no use

to them.

HELMER

But some day, Nora—some day?

NORA

How can I tell? I have no idea what is going to become of me.

HELMER

But you are my wife, whatever becomes of you.

NORA

Listen, Torvald. I have heard that when a wife deserts her husband’s house, as I am doing now, he is legally freed from all obligations towards her. In any case, I set you free from all your obligations. You are not to feel yourself bound in the slightest way, any more than I shall. There must be perfect freedom on both sides. See, here is your ring back. Give me mine.

HELMER

That too?

NORA

That too.

HELMER

Here it is.

*A Doll’s House – 2*

NORA

That’s right. Now it is all over. I have put the keys here. The maids know all about everything in the house—better than I do. Tomorrow, after I have left her, Christine will come here and pack up my own things that I brought with me from home. I will have them sent after me.

HELMER

All over! All over! —Nora, shall you never think of me again?

NORA

I know I shall often think of you and the children and this house.

HELMER

May I write to you, Nora?

NORA

No—never. You must not do that.

HELMER

But at least let me send you—

NORA

Nothing—nothing—

HELMER

Let me help you if you are in want.

NORA

No. I can receive nothing from a stranger.

HELMER

Nora—can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?

NORA

*[taking her bag].* Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

HELMER

Tell me what that would be!

NORA

Both you and I would have to be so changed that—. Oh, Torvald, I don’t believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

HELMER

But I will believe in it. Tell me? So changed that—?

*A Doll’s House - 3*

NORA

That our life together would be a real wedlock. Good-bye. *[She goes out through the hall.]*

HELMER

*[sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands].* Nora! Nora! *[Looks round, and rises.]* Empty. She is gone. *[A hope flashes across his mind.]* The most wonderful thing of all—?

*[The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]*

*A Doll’s House - 4*