**A DOLL'S HOUSE**

(in a new version by Claire Booker)

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**CHARACTERS**

Harold Helmer A forty year old deputy bank manager

Nora Helmer His wife - a vivacious housewife in her late 20s

Dr Rank Their friend - a retired colonial doctor

Mrs Lee Nora's old school friend

Nick Cruikshank An ex-school friend of Harold's

Aunt Helen Harold's maiden aunt, aged 40 to 60.

**SET**

England, 1955. A comfortable suburban living room filled with Utility furniture, but tastefully decorated. A door leads to the hall, backstage right. Another door leads to Mr Helmer's study. In the living room there is a sideboard on which stands a record player. A window gives onto the Helmer's front garden, and on the other side of the room, there is a gas fire with ornamental scuttle and tongs standing beside it. A wireless is located on the mantelpiece. It is winter.

EXCERPT

Harold No business tonight. I promise. This evening is hereby set aside for perfecting the imperfectable. (he notices the letter) Post. At this hour? I wonder what it can be.

Nora Don't touch the letterbox! Please! You promised.

Harold Yes, but . . .

Nora Business. You said no business.

Harold Little squirrel brain. How can I tell whether it's business or not until I open it? It won’t take a second. (he goes into the study to fetch the key)

Nora (desperate) Harold! Please! (Desperate, she moves rapidly across and selects a record)

Dr R Nora. Something's very wrong tonight. Why don't you tell me what it is?

Nora I just want to dance.

Dr R You’re really worried about tomorrow?

Nora Yes. Yes, I am. Frightfully. (Indian raga music starts to play)

Harold (re-enters with key) I say, you're keen, darling.

Nora Harold? I must practice with you now. (She rushes to the sari box and pulls out jangling anklets, bracelets and earrings) If you don’t show me, Harold, how can I get it right?

Harold First, the letter box. (heads for the hall)

Nora No!

Dr R Don’t, Harold. There's a good chap.

Nora No letters! Please.

Harold (sighs) Well, if you’re both going to gang up on me. Alright. We’ll practise

the dance first.

Nora I'll put the anklets on. They help me keep rhythm.

Harold Cracking idea. We'll start with the foot work.

Dr R (nostalgic sigh) The jangle of gold against slim brown ankles. Cicadas rasping through the hot night, the punkah wallah sleeping on the job. No heart to wake him. Stars round and bright as hub caps in the deep Punjabi night. (shakes his head) The dance could have gone on for ever.

Nora (bare foot, takes up position) I'm ready. Earnest, turn up the volume, please. (Dr Rank obliges)

Harold Right, let's see what you remember. (She starts to dance to the record)

Dr R Well done, Nora.

Harold Footwork, darling. Footwork. (she dances more frantically) Slower. Arms, remember the arms. No, no, no, no. Not so frantic.

Nora I can't, I can't.

Harold No, no, this won't do at all. You're a glamorous courtesan, Nora, not a chappati seller.

Nora Didn't I say I needed practice? Teach me, please, Harold. Teach me.

Harold It's not that difficult. Just keep an ear to the rhythm. (he claps his hands and she dances again) Arms higher, higher, more fluid. Loosen the wrists . . . (Dr Rank beats time on the back of his chair) Looser, looser.

Mrs L (appears at the door, she watches stunned) Good Lord.

Nora (still dancing frantically) Chrissie, we're having such fun. Aren't we, darling? (hysterically to Chrissie) Keep him talking, keep him talking, keep him talking.

Harold Nora! You'll do yourself an injury. Oh, this is sheer lunacy. (to Dr Rank) Switch it off, Earnest. (Nora collapses onto the sofa)

Nora You mustn't think about anything but me - today or tomorrow, Harold. You mustn't open any letters. You mustn't post any letters.

Harold She’s still thinking about that damn Cruikshank!

Nora No, no, Harold. I've forgotten about him. I'm just worried, worried . . . terribly worried.

Dr R Nora, please, quieten down now. This just won’t do, Harold.

Harold She’ll be fine. She’ll be fine. A nice cup of tea and a sit down. (to Nora) How does that sound?

Nora You must promise. Promise me, Harold. No letters.

Harold As you please. Little squirrel shall have her way. (kisses her tenderly) Whatever's in that letter can wait until tomorrow.

Nora No. Until after the dance, Harold. Please. I don't want anything to come between us until it's all over.

Harold Very well. Tomorrow evening. You really mustn’t worry, darling. You’ll ravish our hearts and reduce grown men to tears of longing.

Nora Yes. I will, won’t I, Harold? And I’ll drink champagne ‘til dawn. And chocolates. Lots of chocolates Just for once!

Harold Little squirrel shall have whatever she wants.

Nora That’s right. That’s right. I feel so much better now. Why don’t you go into the dining room, Harold. You too Earnest. The table's laid. We’ll follow, won’t we Christine?

Harold Whatever you say, my dear.

Dr R (to Helmer as they exit) I say Harold. She’s not in the family way, is she?

Harold No, no. She gets moody, that’s all. Ups and downs. Always best to humour her. (they exit)

Nora (to Mrs Lee) Well?

Mrs L He wasn't in.

Nora That's it then.

Mrs L He'll be back tomorrow evening. I left a note with his landlady.

Nora We can't stop it now. It's wonderful really, in a way. Standing here, waiting for the miracle to happen.

Mrs L I don't understand, Nora. What miracle?

Nora (pause) Go in and join them, Chrissie.

Mrs L Can’t I give you a hand?

Nora No. There’s nothing to be done now. (Mrs L exits to dining room. Nora stands for a few moments then checks her watch) Six O'clock. Six hours left to midnight. Then another 24 hours until midnight tomorrow. Then the dance will be finished. Twenty four hours plus six. Thirty hours. Just thirty hours left.

- End of Act Two -

CONTINUED

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