In Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*, Nora is characterized by others as childish, irresponsible, and dim witted. Her identity is formed by and around these characterizations. Her husband, Torvald Helmer, refers to her often as a squirrel, a chirping skylark, and a little spendthrift. Rarely is she considered to possess a solid thought, and at one point she states that everything she thinks seems silly and insignificant; her husband is pleased that she has acknowledged this fact. She states that her father treated her as a doll-child, and her husband treats her as a doll-wife. Nora, however, possesses a secret that she is certain will transform her identity from that of a brainless object to that of a caring and clever business-minded woman. She is confident that once it is revealed that it was not money left by her father that saved Torvald's health by allowing them to move to Italy for a year but rather it was money gained through her own devices, that her husband will then look upon her in a new light, and she will be seen by him and others as a competent woman. Nils Krogstad, the man she entered into the loan agreement with, ends her hopes as he reveals to her his knowledge that she forged a signature on the loan document. He threatens to reveal Nora's identity as a criminal if she does not ensure that Torvald, as bank manager, allows him to maintain his current lower-level position at the bank.

Krogstad is described as a morally corrupt individual who cares little for others and is primarily concerned with his own well-being. He too forged a document in his past, causing him to lose not only his job but his standing in society as well. He has spent the years since that time attempting to regain his reputation, and he is dependent upon his blackmail of Nora to guarantee his standing through retaining his position at the bank. He intends to further rely on this blackmail by revealing the truth of Nora's position to her husband and ultimately usurping Torvald as bank manager. Krogstad claims that his moral corruption arose due to his being a victim of circumstance. Had he not been jilted by Christine Linde, a school friend of Nora's, years before he would have been a different man. His plans to further blackmail Nora and her husband are altered as he encounters Linde at the Torvald residence.

Up to the time she arrives at Nora's home, Linde's identity was made up of being a caretaker to her mother and a provider for her two younger brothers as well as a wife to a man whom she did not love but married for the sake of financial assistance in caring for her family. She was soon widowed and left penniless, leaving her to take any position she could find to continue to care for her family. Once her mother died and her brothers were set in situations in which they could care for themselves, Linde was left alone and empty. She decides to forge a new identity as an office worker to keep her mind busy. It is to this purpose that she comes to Nora asking for assistance in obtaining a position at Torvald's bank, to which Nora complies. It is here that she runs unexpectedly into Krogstad, the man she jilted in order to ensure what she thought would be financial security in marrying another. She states that dire circumstances led her to end their relationship. Linde professes a need to reclaim her identity through once again having someone to care for and suggests that she and Krogstad renew their relationship and join forces to once again stand on solid ground.

Although Linde has it within her power to prevent Torvald from learning of Nora's loan agreement, she believes it best to have Torvald read the letter in which Krogstad sets forth the circumstances surrounding Nora's criminal activity. Upon reading the letter, Torvald is immediately struck with how the situation will affect his reputation. It is at this point that Nora realizes Torvald's true identity and his complete disregard for her thoughts and emotions, for he does not express any concern for how the situation may affect her. She once thought of him as a loving and concerned husband, but now she sees that he loves only the thought of being with her, and he is concerned only with his own affairs. Nora decides to leave Torvald, hoping that by doing so she will learn more of the world in which she has been sheltered and transform her identity from that of a dim-witted, overly trusting doll to that of a prudent and sensible human being.