# The Farmer’s Bride

# By [Charlotte Mew](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/charlotte-mew)

     Three summers since I chose a maid,

     Too young maybe—but more’s to do

     At harvest-time than bide and woo.

              When us was wed she turned afraid

     Of love and me and all things human;

     Like the shut of a winter’s day

     Her smile went out, and ’twadn’t a woman—

            More like a little frightened fay.

                    One night, in the Fall, she runned away.

     “Out ’mong the sheep, her be,” they said,

     ’Should properly have been abed;

     But sure enough she wadn’t there

     Lying awake with her wide brown stare.

So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down

     We chased her, flying like a hare

     Before out lanterns. To Church-Town

              All in a shiver and a scare

     We caught her, fetched her home at last

              And turned the key upon her, fast.

     She does the work about the house

     As well as most, but like a mouse:

              Happy enough to chat and play

              With birds and rabbits and such as they,

              So long as men-folk keep away.

     “Not near, not near!” her eyes beseech

     When one of us comes within reach.

              The women say that beasts in stall

              Look round like children at her call.

              I’ve hardly heard her speak at all.

     Shy as a leveret, swift as he,

     Straight and slight as a young larch tree,

     Sweet as the first wild violets, she,

     To her wild self. But what to me?

     The short days shorten and the oaks are brown,

              The blue smoke rises to the low grey sky,

     One leaf in the still air falls slowly down,

              A magpie’s spotted feathers lie

     On the black earth spread white with rime,

     The berries redden up to Christmas-time.

              What’s Christmas-time without there be

              Some other in the house than we!

              She sleeps up in the attic there

              Alone, poor maid. ’Tis but a stair

     Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,

     The soft young down of her, the brown,

The brown of her—her eyes, her hair, her hair!

*Directions:*

*1.Read the poem carefully at least two times.*

*2. Discuss with your group what you think it means (your first impression).*

*3. On a separate sheet of paper that you will hand in, answer the questions below.*

1. Who seems to be the narrator of this poem?

2. What do you imagine this narrator is like (age, appearance, personality, etc.)?

3. How does the farmer’s bride feel about her marriage? Why do you think she feels this way?

4. To what is the bride constantly compared? How is this similar to Nora?

5. In what ways is this poem similar to the some of the ideas in *A Doll’s House?*

From *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft (1792)

“I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but what has been the result?—a profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion. The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity.”

“My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists—I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.”

“Besides, the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband, and if she deserves his regard by possessing such substantial qualities, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions. In fact, if we revert to history, we shall find that the women who have distinguished themselves have neither been the most beautiful nor the most gentle of their sex.”

She goes on to argue that

* beauty is temporary, but intelligence is lasting.
* men become bored with women when their beauty/charm fades
* beauty inspires fondness, but not friendship
* education and empowerment of women would benefit both sexes.

*Directions:*

*1.Read the excerpts carefully at least two times.*

*2. Discuss with your group what you think they mean (your first impression). (Hint: maybe read and discuss one section at a time)*

*3. On a separate sheet of paper that you will hand in, answer the questions below.*

1. Why does the author compare women to flowers in the first excerpt?

2. Why does Wollstonecraft say she hopes women won’t mind if she “treat them like rational creatures”?

3. What two things does Wollstonecraft urge women to strengthen? Why are these important?

4. In the last passage, why does Wollstonecraft suggest women should seek to become friends (and not dependents) of their husbands?

5. The last excerpt concludes with, “In fact, if we revert to history, we shall find that the women who have distinguished themselves have neither been the most beautiful nor the most gentle of their sex.” What does this mean? Do you agree?

6. How does the advice given by Wollstonecraft relate to Nora’s situation? Give as many reasons as you can come up with.

From *On the Subjection of Women* by John Stuart Mill (1869)

“All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women should be collectively rebellious to the power of men. They are so far in a position different from all other subject classes, that their masters require something more from them than actual service. Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. All men, except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favourite. They have therefore put everything in practice to enslave their minds. The masters of all other slaves rely, for maintaining obedience, on fear; either fear of themselves, or religious fears. The masters of women wanted more than simple obedience, and they turned the whole force of education to affect their purpose. All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections.”

“What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others. It may be asserted without scruple, that no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relation with their masters; for, if conquered and slave races have been, in some respects, more forcibly repressed, whatever in them has not been crushed down by an iron heel has generally been let alone, and if left with any liberty of development, it has developed itself according to its own laws; but in the case of women, a hot-house and stove cultivation has always been carried on of some of the capabilities of their nature, for the benefit and pleasure of their masters. Then, because certain products of the general vital force sprout luxuriantly and reach a great development in this heated atmosphere and under this active nurture and watering, while other shoots from the same root, which are left outside in the wintry air, with ice purposely heaped all round them, have a stunted growth, and some are burnt off with fire and disappear; men, with that inability to recognise their own work which distinguishes the unanalytic mind, indolently believe that the tree grows of itself in the way they have made it grow, and that it would die if one half of it were not kept in a vapour bath and the other half in the snow.”

His core arguments are

* women are so stifled that men do not know their true thought and capabilities
* science cannot prove men are superior to women because women have been altered from their natural states by the expectations of men
* women are in many ways worse of than slaves

*Directions:*

*1.Read the excerpts carefully at least two times.*

*2. Discuss with your group what you think they mean (your first impression). (Hint: maybe read and discuss one section at a time)*

*3. On a separate sheet of paper that you will hand in, answer the questions below.*

1. In the first passage, what kind of relationship does Mill say men want with their wives?

2. In the first passage, how does Mill say women are trained to be wives?

3. In the second passage, what thing in nature does Mill compare women to? What is done that harms them?

4. In the second passage, why are women worse off than slaves?

5. List as many ways as you can think of in which Torvald’s treatment of Nora is similar to what Mill describes here.