

Letters from Lisette
55 minutes
By Claudia I. Haas
Claudiahaas12@gmail.com
www.claudiahaas.com

Adapted from lore

SYNOPSIS: There is a story that Kafka found a young girl weeping in a park. He tried to console her, but she was bereft. She had lost her doll and would never get over it. Kafka announces that he has a letter that he found and he wonders if it could be from her doll. It was! And so began a three-week correspondence where Kafka wrote letters for the girl from her travelling doll. Her doll was not lost. She was merely looking for an adventure. The story might have gone something like this...

All rights reserved August 2021
Claudia I. Haas
www.claudiahaas.com

Letters from Lisette by Claudia I. Haas
 (Play for human actors or humans plus puppets*)
 *Puppet recommendations at bottom

USING ALL HUMAN ACTORS

Characters 6-11 (for 6: 4 f, 2 m) (for 11 6f, 5m)

SOFIE SCHWARZ (female) age 8; mourning a loss

ANYA MEYER (female) 25-? Sofia's nanny; motherly because Sofia's mother isn't

FRANZ KAFKA (male) 40, a writer who is losing his battle with life

DORA FISCHER (female) (25), Kafka's friend, encourager, helper

LISETTE (female) as played by a human actress (16-20): Lisette can be any color or nationality but she must be a doll old enough "to fall in love." She is more Madame Alexander than American Doll.

FREDERICK (male) 16-25 toy soldier, kind

CARUSO (male) an insecure vaudeville porpoise

ROMEO (male) an alley cat; kind of a wise guy

JULIET (female) a long-haired alley cat whose beauty may be fading

FIFI LA CUTE (female) French Poodle with the heart of a St. Bernard

MONSEIUR COCTEAU (male) Toymaker (ageless, heart of gold)

ANNOUNCER VOICE (offstage)

BOY'S VOICE (offstage)

Doubling**

Sofie Schwarz

Anya Meyer/Boy's Voice/Fifi La Cute

Franz Kafka/Announcer Voice/Romeo/Caruso

Dora Fischer/Juliet/

Lisette (as played by a human)

Frederick/Monsieur Cocteau

***NOTE: Is you are using puppets, the cast is 4 human actors (3f, 1m) and Lisette and "fantasy" characters can be puppets**

If doubling, have FRANZ "conjure" small set pieces. DORA can provide costume pieces: gloves with fins for CARUSO. A baseball cap with cat fur for the CATS, a baseball cap with long curls and bows and jewels in them for FIFI, etc.

If not doubling: Franz will set the scene and you can have him set pieces or use projections or both. **OR** feel free to make your own decisions!

Setting

Steglitz Park in Berlin and suggested European locales: SOFIE'S room; FRANZ'S room; Copenhagen harbor, Hamburg, Paris. For the travelling sequences, have a designated stage area for these scenes and fill them with found objects to become the harbor, etc. Or go all-out and use projections of the European cities.

Time July, August, 1924

Letters from Lisette

Scene 1, Friday, July 25, 1924

AT RISE we are in Steglitz Park in Berlin. It is a sprawling park with ponds, gardens, children's playgrounds, and hills. But all you need is a park bench. SOFIE and ANYA are having a picnic of pastries. SOFIE is holding an exquisite doll.

SOFIE

These are so good. Your kolaches are better than the ones from the bakery. I wish there were more.

ANYA

You had three! I couldn't believe you finished the last one.

SOFIE

Because it was raspberry – my favorite!

ANYA

I thought the chocolate was your favorite. *And* the strawberry one. They can't all be favorites.

SOFIE

Grown-ups are so silly. You can have lots of favorites. You know what time it is, don't you? It's "rolling down the hill" time.

ANYA

We cannot roll down a hill with our tummies filled with sweets!

SOFIE

Pretty *please!* With cherries and kolaches on top!

ANYA

No more kolaches! I'd be happy to push you in a swing.

SOFIE

The hill!

ANYA

The swing!

SOFIE

The hill is more fun. Plus I get to be dirty.

ANYA

I like being clean.

SOFIE

I never get to do anything ever.

ANYA

We just had lemonade and kolaches. Wasn't that fun?

SOFIE

It was fun for my tummy. Now my arms and legs want to have fun, too. Please, Anya! I'll rub your sore neck for ten whole minutes when we get home.

ANYA

Fifteen minutes.

SOFIE

Fifteen. But you have to roll down the hill two times.

ANYA

It's a deal. Shake?

(They shake their bodies.)

SOFIE

I'd better leave Lisette here. I don't want her to get messed up.

ANYA

Isn't that a punch in the arm? Lisette cannot get messed up but your nanny can!

SOFIE

Race you!

(ANYA and SOFIE run off. LISETTE is seated on the bench. Lights dim and change and maybe turn colors. We hear a waltz – “The Blue Danube?” Whatever you choose, it should be the same music that LISETTE and FREDERICK dance to at the Eiffel Tower and the music the cast dances to at the end.

DORA and FRANZ enter dancing. They only have eyes for each other and they are clearly enjoying the dance.

When they are done dancing, DORA does a more modern dip into FRANZ'S arms as the lights return. LISETTE “the doll” is gone and in her place we see LISETTE as played by a human. LISETTE is intently staring at the two dancers

and is mesmerized. As DORA and FRANZ stare at each other filled with love, LISETTE does a leap for joy and runs off.

FRANZ and DORA sit on the bench. FRANZ has a notebook. DORA fusses over him. FRANZ wears a light jacket and scarf.)

DORA

Are you warm enough? We could go to the café for a warm drink.

FRANZ

Stop fussing. It's July not December! I think more clearly in the air.

(FRANZ takes out a letter. A very long letter. Very, very long.)

DORA

Stop writing your family!

FRANZ

I need to keep trying. I miss having a family. And my sweet Ottla always answers.

DORA

Keep your sister. Get rid of your parents.

FRANZ

I write all of them. There are some difficult Kafkas, but they are mine to sort out.

(FRANZ writes for a moment. SOFIE runs on followed by ANYA who is sort of running. They are disheveled.)

SOFIE

That was so much fun. Thank-you. (beat; SOFIE looks around) – Excuse me, sir. Can you get up? I think you are sitting on my doll!

FRANZ

I hope not!

(FRANZ and DORA leap up. SOFIE checks every inch of the bench.)

SOFIE

Oh no, oh no, oh no – *LISETTE!* Where could she have gone?

(SOFIE lets out a wail that would break the heart of every bird and human in the park.)

SOFIE

Noooooo!

FRANZ

What sounds! Can I help you?

SOFIE

Nobody can ever help me again!

(FRANZ offers her a handkerchief. SOFIE wipes her face and then commences to blow her nose. She tries to hand it back to FRANZ who refuses.)

FRANZ

Please. Keep it.

SOFIE

Oh no. I shouldn't, Mr.....

FRANZ

Kafka. Franz Kafka. This is my friend Dora Fischer. And I insist. Consider the handkerchief a gift.

SOFIE

Thank-you Mr. Kafka. I am Sofie Schwarz and this is my governess Anya Meyer.

(SOFIE returns to her pathetic tears.)

My poor Lisette! Someone who does not know how to properly care for her stole her.

DORA

This Lisette is a doll?

SOFIE

The most perfect doll ever made!

DORA

She cannot have gone far. She is a doll after all.

SOFIE

A special doll. My father brought her home from France. (Beat.) It was the last thing he ever gave me.

DORA

I am sorry.

ANYA

He died over the New Year. It's been ... a difficult time.

FRANZ

Well, we must find her then. I wonder - maybe a bird picked her up.

DORA

Or a wild animal.

SOFIE

A wild animal?

DORA

No! Not a wild animal..... a duck, yes. A silly duck. (Beat.) Quack.

FRANZ

Let's start a search party. Why don't you cover the area by the pond and Dora and I will check the woods. Is she small?

ANYA

About half a meter long.

FRANZ

Then she cannot have gotten far with those little legs. Please, split up. There's no time to waste.

SOFIE

Thank-you, thank-you/

FRANZ

/Go!

(They split up. As soon as ANYA and SOFIE are out of sight, FRANZ sits down to write. He tears the paper in half.)

FRANZ

This paper is too big for a doll.

DORA

Whatever are you doing?

FRANZ

Go. Search for the doll. Maybe she's tangled in a tree further up in the woods?

DORA

You want me to go through the brush while you sit here as comfortable as can be on the bench?

FRANZ

Yes.

(HE writes for a second or two.)

Do you have an envelope in that great big handbag of yours?

DORA

I don't usually carry envelopes for a walk in the park.

FRANZ

You carry everything else. Never mind. I shall make one.

(FRANZ makes an envelope from a piece of paper and sticks a short letter in it. He sticks it into a slot on the bench.)

Perfect! Be on the lookout for Anya and Sofie. As they approach, I shall make my big discovery.

(Meanwhile, FRANZ musses up his hair and takes off his jacket.)

FRANZ (cont'd)

Come on, get yourself mussed up. We need to look like we searched the woods.

(They mess each other up a bit and then smile. Maybe there is a kiss.)

DORA

I don't know what you're up to....

FRANZ

But you know it will be interesting.

(ANYA and SOFIE approach.)

DORA

They're coming!

SOFIE

She isn't anywhere!

ANYA

Have you had any luck?

FRANZ

The woods were empty, I'm afraid... nothing but ... oh my ... look here! I didn't notice that before. It's a letter.

(FRANZ picks up the letter and with exaggerated surprise, continues.)

It's addressed to a Miss Sofie.

SOFIE

That's me! Open it!

FRANZ

"Dear Miss Sofie,
I hope you will forgive me but I suddenly got itchy feet and decided I needed an adventure. I would love to dance in the moonlight and see my birth place. I never did get a good look at where I came from."

SOFIE

She is travelling all the way to France! Is there more?

FRANZ

Just a little.

SOFIE

Let me see!

(We hear LISETTE'S VOICE)

LISETTE

"I want to see something of the world before I become shabby. I hope you understand. You will grow up. Dolls don't. They just get worn out. I shall write

LISETTE (cont'd)

you of my adventures. I hope you will like that. You have been very kind to me and I love you very much.

Warmest wishes,

Lisette"

SOFIE

How will she write me? I never gave her my address. I don't think letters get delivered to a park bench.

(Beat.)

FRANZ

But ... Dora runs a Kindergarten and in her room there is a doll house and ... and a doll café and ...

(FRANZ looks at Dora. "Play with me here.")

DORA

And ... a doll school... and a doll bakery...

(FRANZ gives her a hard stare.)

DORA

And a doll post office! That's it! I do indeed have a doll post office. Of course school is not in session right now...

FRANZ

But the mail still gets delivered.

DORA

Yes, it does.

SOFIE

I never heard of a doll post office.

ANYA

I have!

FRANZ

Oh good! (Beat.) Most people don't know about it. I would think ... that Lisette will need time to get to her new place ... and so ... there probably won't be a letter every day.

DORA

Maybe ... once a week...

FRANZ

Or – every other day. That's it! I think there will be a letter every other day.

DORA

Franz! The doctor appointment. We're going to be late.

FRANZ

I'm sorry I do need to go. Shall we meet here in two days at the same time?

ANYA

Sofie does have her piano lessons, and is trying to advance in her language study/

SOFIE

/We'll be here. I am Lisette's mother and I am a more loving mother than my own/

ANYA

Sofie! Enough! Wednesday morning it is.

(As FRANZ and DORA start to exit, ANYA approaches them.)

ANYA

Tread gently, Herr Kafka. After Sofie's father passed, her mother was so grief stricken that she went to visit her family in Italy. It's been almost seven months and her mother still hasn't returned. Lisette was Sofie's bridge to a happier time. And now she's gone, too.

FRANZ

Let's see if we can bring her back then, shall we?

(DORA and FRANZ exit. SOFIE joins ANYA.)

SOFIE

Do you think what he says is true? Will Lisette write me?

ANYA

I am certain of it.

Lights fade to black. Music.

SCENE BRIDGE: Projection of Copenhagen Harbor and/or Tivoli Gardens. LISETTE enters and sees it – enchanted with the scene. Lights change for Scene 2.

Scene 2 - Sunday, July 27, 1924

Berlin. Park.

LISETTE GOES TO COPENHAGEN

FRANZ and DORA enter.

SOFIE

Herr Kafka! Is there news? Do you have a letter?

FRANZ

Why it's right here. Now settle yourself so you can read it carefully.

(The group gathers.)

SOFIE

“My Dear Sofie,
The most amazing thing happened. After I left the bench to go travelling, I saw a gentleman wearing a beret and reading a French newspaper. As I am a clever doll, I decided he must be French. He had a train ticket. I thought, he must be going back to France! So I sneaked into his suitcase.”

(We transition to LISETTE'S voice or we see LISETTE turn around from the harbor in Copenhagen and face us.)

LISETTE

“First: I was on a train. I was so excited. And then, I seemed to be bobbing up and down – so I knew I was on a boat! Why was I on a boat? Uh oh.”

VOICE

MALMO PORT! PORT OF COPENHAGEN!

LISETTE

“I had gone north instead! I was in Copenhagen. I scrambled out of the suitcase and found myself on a dock. After hundreds of legs passed me by, I looked around and sitting right next to me was a handsome soldier. I swooned.”

(We see FREDERICK sitting next to LISETTE.)

FREDERICK

Are you all right?

LISETTE

I just – yes. I am very all right. It's so pretty on the water.

FREDERICK

It is. I am going to Tivoli Gardens. Are you?

LISETTE

No. Yes! I could ... maybe... I don't know.

FREDERICK

You look familiar.

LISETTE

So do you!

FREDERICK

Do you live in Vienna?

LISETTE

No, Berlin. So we couldn't have met.

(Beat.)

FREDERICK

You are very pretty.

LISETTE

Thank-you. So are you. Pretty... handsome! Yes, you are very handsome.

FREDERICK

Awww shucks.

BOY'S VOICE

Frederick? Where did you go?

FREDERICK

My human is calling. I must go. I ... will be at the Ferris wheel. The little boy loves the Ferris wheel.

LISETTE

I'm/

(But FREDERICK runs off.)

LISETTE

Afraid of heights.

(LIGHTS change to BERLIN.)

SOFIE (Reading.)

“That's my adventure so far. I am going to watch the harbor lights. It's so pretty.
With Love,
Lisette”

SOFIE

I wish I was with her.

ANYA

But you're with me! Isn't that lucky?

SOFIE

I do love you even if you're a stick-in-the-mud.

I roll down hills!
 ANYA

SOFIE
 Maybe someday you could take me on a Ferris wheel in Copenhagen.

ANYA
 I don't like heights.

DORA
 Maybe someday, your mother will take you.

SOFIE
 She's in Italy so I don't think she's taking me anywhere.

ANYA
 It's getting late and your piano teacher will be at our home shortly.

FRANZ
 And I have work to do.

SOFIE
 But you'll be back on Friday, right?

FRANZ
 Of course.

(ALL exit as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE BRIDGE: Possible projection of a porpoise.

Scene 3

LISETTE MEETS CARUSO, AN ITALIAN PORPOISE AND LEARNS TO SING

It is Tuesday, July 29 at Steglitz Park.
 SOFIE and ANY enter from one side as DORA and
 FRANZ enter from elsewhere. SOFIE runs to FRANZ.

SOFIE
 HERR KAFKA! Is there a letter?

FRANZ

There is. Now where did I put it? Here? Or there? I couldn't have dropped it.

SOFIE

Please!

FRANZ

For you.

(SOFIE just about tears it open.)

SOFIE

“Dear Sofie,
I have had a new adventure! I forgot to hop on the last ferry and was very upset. I collapsed on the pier and cried and cried when suddenly...”

LISETTE'S VOICE

“...suddenly – I heard singing. I looked around but no one was there. Then I searched the sea and the voice came closer. What is it? Oh my goodness-gracious-gosh! It's a singing porpoise!”

(We are at the Pier with LISETTE She is sobbing.
Somewhere in the harbor is Caruso.)

CARUSO

“By the Beautiful Sea”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kq3kxtDJxR0>

(CARUSO is clearly trying to make LISETTE stop crying.
He is as silly as a porpoise can be.)

CARUSO

“By the sea, by the sea, by the beautiful sea,
You and I you and I, oh! How happy we'll be,

When each wave comes a rolling in,
We will duck or swim, and we'll float and fool around the water...

Did I cheer you up? I'm a cheery porpoise!

(To the tune of “I Want to be Happy”)

“I want to be happy, but I won't be happy
Till I make you happy, too!”

Signorina, are you – happy?

LISETTE
(Through sobs and tears)

Yes, very happy. Thank-you.

CARUSO

Signorina – you are doing a bad imitation of being happy! Look at the moon – it’s a-shining!
Look at the stars – they’re a-sparkling! Nobody can cry on a night like this!

LISETTE
(Sobbing.)

I’m – not – crying!

CARUSO

I think you told a little fib there, eh? What can I do? What can I say?

LISETTE

It’s hard to be happy when you decide to run away from home and realize you did not even know
how to do that right! And now I am all alone on a pier –

CARUSO

What am I, chopped spaghetti? You are here with me!

LISETTE

Grazie. I appreciate the company.

CARUSO

But of course! What the world needs are porpoises! Many porpoises! Why? Because we give you
a purpose in life? Get it? Porpoise? Purpose?

LISETTE

That’s terrible.

CARUSO

I know. I never get a laugh from that one. Signorina, what do you want? What has brought you to
this pier in the middle of the night?

LISETTE

I – this is going to sound silly. I was in a park in Berlin and I saw a couple dancing and I want –
to dance in a park like they did – and look at someone with love – just like they did and – so I ran
away from the park.

CARUSO

You want to dance in a park so you left a park to sit on a pier far away from the park so that you
could dance in a park. Do I have this right?

LISETTE

Yes. Do you understand?

CARUSO

No. Signorina, are you up for a real adventure? I could take you across the sea to Hamburg. They have beautiful parks and it's a perfect night for a ride across the sea.

LISETTE

I am! But... I am not sure I want to get all wet. That would make me shabby before I reach my home in France.

CARUSO

Adventures don't make you shabby. Adventures make you strong.

LISETTE

I don't swim.

CARUSO

I have the perfetto solution.

(CARUSO dives under and comes back with possibly a saddle on its back and definitely with a pretty umbrella. It could be wet. Feel free to use sillier props.)

CARUSO

The umbrella will protect you from the sea spray.

LISETTE

If you say so.

CARUSO

Don't worry. I haven't lost a doll yet.

LISETTE

You've done this before?

CARUSO

Never.

(LISETTE manages to get on CARUSO.)

CARUSO

And now – I shall sing you across the sea. Hold on!

(CARUSO swims with LISETTE holding on to everything:
to Caruso, her umbrella, her cloak.)

CARUSO
(Sings By the Light of the Silvery Moon.)

“By the light” – now you –

LISETTE
What? No! I – can’t sing.

CARUSO
Just sing what I sing. Again.

“By the light”

LISETTE
“By the light”

CARUSO
“Of the silvery moon...”

LISETTE
“Of the silvery moon”

CARUSO
“I want to spoon...”

LISETTE
“I want to spoon”

CARUSO
“For my honey I’ll croon loves tune.
Honey moon....”

LISETTE
“Honey moon, honey moon”

CARUSO
“Keep a shinin’ in June...”

LISETTE
“Or July”

CARUSO
“Your silver beans will bring love’s dream

We'll be cuddlin' soon.

LISETTE and CARUSO

"By the silvery moon."

(They swim off as the lights change to Berlin.)

SOFIE

"Caruso got me safe and dry back to Hamburg and I must say I am exhausted so I'll close for now. I will write more later.

Yours with love,

Lisette"

SOFIE (cont'd

I want to ride on a porpoise! Would you ride with me, Anya?

ANYA

Not on purpose.

(FRANZ has a bit of a coughing fit.)

DORA

I need to get you home. You must rest.

ANYA

You should see a doctor.

FRANZ

A doctor. Yes. I do see doctors. Too many doctors. It's nothing.

SOFIE

Thank-you for bringing the letter. You will be back soon?

FRANZ

On Thursday. Until then – as Caruso would say - arrivederci.

(FRANZ and DORA exit.)

SOFIE

I hope Herr Kafka feels better.

ANYA

I hope so, too. Come. It's time for your lessons.

SOFIA and ANYA exit as lights fade to black.

SCENE 4

AT RISE KAFKA is in his sitting room. There is a package that he has opened containing a letter that is at least fifty pages long! DORA enters.

DORA

Good news?

FRANZ

My father returned the letter I sent him. All fifty pages.

DORA

You wrote a fifty page letter to your father?

FRANZ

There was a lot I wanted to say.

DORA

That's longer than your novels!

FRANZ

Maybe I should cut it down to thirty pages...

DORA

One page is sufficient.

FRANZ

One! I want to map out the heartbeats of our difficult relationship.

DORA

Is it not enough that my heart beats for you?

(DORA falls into his lap.)

FRANZ

What did I do to deserve you?

DORA

It's your huge heart. Your huge beating heart.

Lights fade to black.

SCENE 5 – Lisette Meets Frederick (again)

AT RISE, it is early Thursday, July 31 in the park. SOFIE is in a bad mood... waiting.

SOFIE

We've been here forever!

ANYA

It's hardly been forever. We got here early, remember? Have another slice of strudel?

SOFIE

I'm full.

ANYA

I know! I'll read you the letter from your mother.

SOFIE

I'm not that bored.

ANYA

Your mother misses you.

SOFIE

Then she should come home.

ANYA

The memories here are hard for her.

SOFIE

I have memories, too.

(DORA and FRANZ enter.)

SOFIE

Herr Kafka! Finally!

ANYA

Manners, Sofie! How are you feeling, Herr Kafka?

FRANZ

Better, thank-you.

SOFIE

Is there a letter?

ANYA

Sofie! And how are you today, Dora?

DORA

Well, thank-you.

SOFIE

Is there a letter?

ANYA

She's usually not this rude, isn't that right Sofie?

SOFIE

I'm sorry. I'm glad you are feeling better. (Beat.) *Now*, may I see the letter?

FRANZ

Of course.

(FRANZ gives the letter to SOFIE. Who tears it open.)

SOFIE

"Dear Sofie,
I saw Frederick!"

(The lights switch to the harbor in Hamburg. It is morning. LISETTE is where she was dropped off by Caruso. SHE is fiddling with her dress and her hair – trying to put herself back together. She stands and suddenly sees FREDERICK who is laying down a few feet away. FREDERICK's soldier suit that is now too small for him. We hear gulls swooping down and LISETTE chases them away.)

LISETTE

Scoot! There's nothing for you here! Fly away you noisy gulls!

(FREDERICK opens his eyes and sees LISETTE. HE smiles. LISETTE smiles.)

FREDERICK

Thank-you for chasing the gulls away. I thought they might peck at me.

LISETTE

You're welcome.

(FREDERICK gets up and tries to pull his too short jack down – or tries to button it and cannot. He also tries to pull his too short trousers down. He’s embarrassed.)

LISETTE

Did you grow over night? Your uniform looks – smaller.

FREDERICK

Yes... it... shrank you see. Uniforms do that if they get wet and are put in the sun.

LISETTE

Oh. (Beat.) How did you get wet?

FREDERICK

I ... fell in. Clothes and all. That is ... I was dropped. The boy dropped me just as the ferry was pulling in.

LISETTE

You should run away from him.

FREDERICK

He’s a good sort of chap. Even though he waves me around until I am dizzy and then drops me. This time, I fell into the water. I am supposed to dry in the sun. It’s too bad my body did not shrink with the clothes.

(Beat.)

FREDERICK

I didn’t see you on the ferry.

LISETTE

No. I came ... on a smaller boat. The Porpoise.

FREDERICK

I see.

(Beat. They just stare at each other.)

It’s good to see you again.

LISETTE

Yes. And you.

(SHE giggles.)

LISETTE (cont’d)

I'm sorry. It's ... the uniform.

FREDERICK

I know! I looked better yesterday.

LISETTE

You did! I mean... you do ... still... look ...

(THEY grow closer.)

FREDERICK

Yes?

(Even closer. They start to reach for each other's hand. Instead there is the blare of horns on ferries and boats and gulls and suddenly we hear the same boy's voice that we heard in Copenhagen.)

BOY'S VOICE

There you are! I thought I'd never find you. Come on, the train for Paris leaves soon. Tomorrow we will be on the top of the Eiffel Tower! Won't that be fun?

(FREDERICK runs off calling to LISETTE.)

FREDERICK

I have to go! We're going to the Eiffel Tower in Paris! Please come! And - I'm Frederick!

(And he is gone.)

LISETTE

I know! And I'm .. Lisette and am also going to Paris!

“So now, dear Sofie. I don't know what to do. Do I try to meet Frederick in Paris?
Your loving doll,
Lisette”

SOFIE

I think she should go to the Eiffel Tower, don't you?

DORA

Absolutely! Mr. Kafka has told me wonderful things about Paris.

FRANZ

The gardens! The Seine! The lights! I could write long letters from Paris...

DORA

You can write long letters from anywhere.

ANYA

I think she should go to Italy. Her mother writes her lovely letters about its charm.

FRANZ

So, you *do* receive letters from your mother.

ANYA

Indeed she does.

FRANZ

And do you answer them?

ANYA

Indeed she does not.

FRANZ

I would give anything for a letter from my mother. I write her and write her and I get nothing.

SOFIE

Mothers are a mystery, aren't they?

KAFKA

Indeed they are. But remember, you do have letters. Letters are special. They are forever. You can reread a letter again and again. They should be treasured.

ANYA

I keep all the letters side-by-side in a box together with the ones from her father.

FRANZ

I would give anything for such a box. I continue to write my family. They continue to send them back – unopened. (Beat.) It's time to leave. I'll see you on Tuesday. I may be a little late. I have an early appointment that day.

(FRANZ and DORA exit.)

SOFIE

I wish I could write Lisette. I would tell her how much I miss her.

ANYA

You could write your mother.

SOFIE

No.

ANYA

And tell her about Lisette's adventures.

SOFIE

No!

ANYA

We could ... roll down a hill...

SOFIE

It's even too hot for that. (Beat.) But I love you for asking.

ANYA

I love you, too. Now about your mother/

SOFIE

/No!

SCENE 6

(The lights fade to black. Lights up on FRANZ's flat. He is, of course, writing. And coughing just a bit. DORA enters with tea.)

DORA

I brought you some tea. I thought it might ease your cough.

FRANZ

That's very thoughtful of you. (He takes some tea.) I've been thinking. About you. I should be writing about you! About my Dora who is both sweet and fierce.

DORA

In your novel?

FRANZ

In my letters from Lisette.

DORA

Just don't turn me into a singing porpoise.

FRANZ

What, my love? *You don't see yourself as a porpoise?*

DORA

I see myself as – Juliet with you as my Romeo!

FRANZ

Romeo and Juliet! I rather like that. But instead of star-crossed lovers, they are cats!

DORA

Wait a minute/

FRANZ

/Alley cats! Raggedy, rough-and-tumble cats! What an inspiration you are, Dora.

DORA

I was better off as a porpoise.

Lights fade to black.

SCENE 7

LISETTE meets alley-cats and tries to be tough.

AT RISE we are in the park. It is Tuesday morning,
August 2, 1924.

SOFIE is in the park reading. ANYA is next to her –
reading. They periodically peer over their books and look
to see if FRANZ and DORA are coming.
After the “second peer,” ANYA finally speaks.

ANYA

He did say he’d be late.

SOFIE

I’m not nagging. Do you hear me nagging? Not a word. I’m not saying anything.

(They read. They look again.)

ANYA

Have some Apple Kuchen.

SOFIE

We’re supposed to share it with them.

ANYA

You are turning down my Apple Kuchen?

I already swiped one.

SOFIE

(As SOFIE speaks, FRANZ and DORA sneak up on them.)

FRANZ and DORA

Surprise!

ANYA

Goodness! I just aged ten years!

DORA

Look! Balloons!

SOFIE

Is it someone's birthday?

FRANZ

I had a very good check-up at the doctor's office...

DORA

So we thought why not celebrate?

SOFIE

This is perfect! We brought Apple Kuchen! Our hearts knew something happy would happen.

FRANZ

Ohh I love Apple Kuchen.

SOFIE

Anya's are the best in the country.

ANYA

Sofie...

SOFIE

That's what Mother always said.

FRANZ

So, first, we will go on an adventure with Lisette and then- we feast on sweets!

(FRANZ hands SOFIE a letter. She tears it open.)

SOFIE

I hope she made it to Paris. And found Frederick because it sounds like she might be in love with him and people in love should be together.

“Dear Sofie,
I need to tell you about Romeo and Juliet. What an adventure that was!”

(LIGHTS change and we are back at the docks in Hamburg. We hear some “meows.” Two cats, ROMEO and JULIET sneak up on LISETTE. They circle her. They hiss. A paw goes in and out.)

... here kitty, kitty?

LISETTE

Meow!

ROMEO

Mew. Mew.

JULIET

(THEY circle LISETTE again. It’s a more menacing. More hisses. LISETTE is at first frightened trying to shoo them. And then she gets mad! Using her cloak or satchel, she twirls in a circle with her arms outstretched trying to smack the cats away. She gets dizzy and faints.)

You killed her!

JULIET

Me? I wouldn’t hurt a fly. It was you and your pointy claws. You need to stop sharpening them.

ROMEO

(ROMEO bends over LISETTE.)

Dollface? *Dollface?* Cat got your tongue?

ROMEO (cont’d)

(He paws at her.)

My name’s Lisette! Not Dollface!

LISETTE

She lives!

JULIET

I brought her back from the dead. I am an amazing cat!

ROMEO

What do you want from me?
LISETTE

A rat?
ROMEO

Sorry, don't have one.
LISETTE

A mouse?
JULIET

I'm all out.
LISETTE

Not even a grouse?
ROMEO

Not even a louse.
LISETTE

What good are you?
JULIET

I'm ... pretty?
LISETTE

You're not exactly the cat's pajamas.
ROMEO

I used to be! I used to be the cat's meow! *Me-ow!*
JULIET

My sweet Juliet Cat-ulet, you still put the "me" in "meow!"
ROMEO

Do you think so, Romeo O Romeo? Am I still beautiful even though my tail doesn't fluff and my whiskers are twisted!
JULIET

Julie, you are still the salt in my rat stew, I am lost without you.
ROMEO

That's so sweet!
LISETTE

ROMEO

Sweet? Don't make me spit up a hairball! I don't wanna be sweet! I want to be a god!

JULIET

Romeo is one cool cat. I'm Juliet by the way.

LISETTE

I'm Lisette.

ROMEO

So what's your story, Morning Glory?

LISETTE

You are nosy. Curiosity killed the cat, you know.

ROMEO

But satisfaction brought it back. Come on, let the cat out of the bag?

LISETTE

If you must know – I am on a grand adventure.

JULIET

I love adventures! You must have a cat-ologue of cool stories.

LISETTE

It's different than I thought it would be. Right now, I need to find the train station. Can you show me the way?

ROMEO

What'll you give us if we do?

LISETTE

I don't have anything. Sorry.

ROMEO

Time for a cat-nap. (Beat.) Sorry. Not sorry.

LISETTE

Wait! I can ... comb your fur?

ROMEO

I like my matted fur. It makes me look like a tough cookie-cat.

JULIET

(JULIET runs back to LISETTE and affectionately head-butts her.)

ROMEO

You done good, Dollface.

LISETTE

Lisette.

ROMEO

Lisette.

LISETTE

Now will you show me the way to the train station?

JULIET

Oh that. See that clock tower? That's the station.

LISETTE

You mean, I've been right by it all along and you two couldn't tell me that?

JULIET

Sometimes cats just wanna have fun.

ROMEO

You're a good sort of cat, you know? We'll walk you there – to keep you safe. You never know who you will meet on the streets! Where you going?

LISETTE

Paris.

JULIET

Paris is always a good idea.

(We return to the park.)

SOFIE

“And so dear Sofie, I made it to the train on time. I wonder if Frederick is on the train. It's hard to say. All I see are legs. But I found a baggage compartment where I fit quite nicely and will rest until we get to Paris.
With affection, Lisette”

She's on her way! This is so exciting. I wish I could hop on a train and join her! I miss her.

FRANZ

You love her?

SOFIE

Of course.

FRANZ

And you believe people in love should be together.

SOFIE

Yes.

FRANZ

So do I. Let's make a sweet toast with our Apple Kuchen, shall we? To being together? To love?

ALL

To love!

FRANZ

And to the best Apple Kuchen in Berlin!

ALL

Hear! Hear!

(And with that, the lights dim as they hand out the pastries, maybe feed each other and very happily partake in the pastries.)

OPTIONAL INTERMISSION

If there is no intermission, have a short montage of French music and Lisette dancing in the Paris streets. This can be done with projections or simple cutouts of a few Paris landmarks.

SCENE 8 – SOFIE'S Home and FRANZ'S home.

LIGHTS UP on SOFIE finishing a language assignment and FRANZ opening a letter. ANYA enters.

ANYA

Your French is improving.

ANYA

I think you need a break. Look what just came. A letter from your mother.

SOFIE

I'm not going to read it.

ANYA

Suit yourself. I'll just leave it here. (Beat.) With the others.

(ANYA exits. SOFIE stares at the letter. We switch to FRANZ and DORA. SOFIE takes the letter and it looks as if she is listening to DORA'S and FRANZ'S conversation. She is definitely remembering what FRANZ said to her in the park.)

FRANZ

At least the letter's from Ootla so it won't bite me. She has invited me to stay with her while I recuperate.

DORA

Are you thinking of going?

FRANZ

Answer me this. Do you think people that love each other should always be together?

(SOFIE looks at her letter.)

DORA

Yes.

(With that answer, SOFIE takes out the letter.)

FRANZ

And yes, I am thinking of going.

(SOFIE starts to read her mother's letter.)

SOFIE

"Dearest Sofie...."

(The lights fade.)

SCENE 9 – LISETTE meets FIFI LA CUTE.

AT RISE, we hear some "French" music. LISETTE is sitting on a blanket that she mysteriously has. She is along the Seine. There could be a makeshift picnic.

OPTIONAL: If using extras, people could stroll by – on foot, on a bicycle. They could juggle, chase balloons, You know – your average, extraordinary day in the park.

It's a brief montage before we return to the park in Berlin. It is Thursday, August 4, 1924. ANYA, DORA, and FRANZ are huddled around the bench. FRANZ is in some distress. SOFIE paces.)

SOFIE

Can I ... do something? Rub your back? Fetch you a sandwich from the café? Oh! I can't. I don't have any money - but Anya could! Herr Kafka? What can I do?

FRANZ

Just sit for a minute. (SOFIE sits.) Yes, that's very helpful.

(SOFIE twiddles her thumbs. ANYA gives her "the stare." SOFIE stops fidgeting and whistles – even if she cannot. SOFIE avoids ANYA'S glare.)

BEAT

FRANZ

We should begin.

(FRANZ takes out LISETTE'S newest letter. SOPHIE leaps up and runs around the bench behind FRANZ to see it.)

"Dear Sofie:

"I arrived safely in Paris. I am going to go to the Eiffel Tower. It is a long walk from the train station on my little doll legs. So I took a short break..."

LISETTE'S VOICE

"Suddenly, I was bowled over by an unusual poodle!"

(We return to Paris. A French Poodle who has just left the "Pet Beauty Shop" comes barreling through. SHE knocks over LISETTE and proceeds to pull bows out of her fur. Then she rolls around in the dirt – and if there is no dirt, she finds some way to get herself dirty – perhaps with a "dirt sponge?")

FIFI LA CUTE

Save me!

(And FIFI LA CUTE gets the zoomies around LISETTE.)

LISETTE

From what?

FIFI LA CUTE

From being beautiful. How do I look?

LISETTE

Horrible.

FIFI LA CUTE

Thank goodness. I hate the beauty shop! My mistress may be kind but truly – every time she takes me to the groomer, I come out looking – like you! No dignity in that at all!

LISETTE

I ... think I look fine.

FIFI LA CUTE

That's because you're not a dog. Dogs are supposed to be protectors! They should have names like "Slugger" and "Brutus." What does my mistress call me? "*Fifi La Cute!*"

LISETTE

Oh! I like that name. I am Lissette.

FIFI LA CUTE

Nice name.

LISETTE

Thank-you.

FIFI LA CUTE

Look at me, Lissette! Should I have bows in my fur and jewels in my collar? *Should I be all gussied up like a doll!* No! I'm supposed to save people in the mountains! Haul carts of food to mankind and be their savior! Don't you agree?

(LISETTE tries to answer.)

FIFI LA CUTE (cont'd)

I'm not even allowed to roll around in dead fish! Which at least would make me smell good. Instead, I am made to prance through the park as if my only talent was having curly fur. I am more than just a head full of curly fur, don't you agree?

LISETTE

Well ... you are a poodle.

FIFI LA CUTE

But my heart is one of a St. Bernard's. Put a keg around my neck! Let me guide you through rocky mountains! There is no task I will not undertake! No mission is too large for me!

LISETTE

Could I ride you to the Eiffel Tower. I am very tired.

FIFI LA CUTE

What do I look like? A Great Dane? *I'm a poodle!*

LISETTE

Well, accompany me then. So I don't get lost.

FIFI LA CUTE

Of course! I'll be your guide.

(They take a few steps.)

FIFI LA CUTE

You don't happen to have a dog bone with you, do you? I usually get a bone to chew on this time of day.

LISETTE

No, I am all out of dog bones.

(They take a few steps. Very few.)

FIFI LA CUTE

Or – some cooked chicken? Sometimes my mistress likes to cook chicken slowly in broth with vegetables and gives it to me as a midday snack. It's very healthy..

LISETTE

I am sorry. I did not bring my cooking pot.

(They take a step)

FIFI LA CUTE

I'm hungry!

LISETTE

Fifi, I don't know how to tell you this... but I think you really are a poodle. And you should accept that.

FIFI LA CUTE

But – the bows? The jewels? It’s just not me.

LISETTE

But the bones, the chicken stewed in broth, the pampering – that *is* you.

FIFI LA CUTE

I do like my downy bed. And my treats... and the bicycle basket my mistress puts me in when my legs are tired... *you’re right!* I *am* a poodle! Just not a “poodley-poodle!”

LISETTE

Definitely not a poodley-poodle!

FIFI LA CUTE

I need to return to my mistress! I need to get her to understand that I am a poodle but “not a poodley-poodle.” If she can understand what I understand we can come to an understanding. But first - I need to - get clean! Otherwise my human will be disappointed in me.

LISETTE

Jump in the river!

FIFI LA CUTE

Too dirty. I’ll smell like dead fish. I’ll find a fountain. Merci, Lisette. You have been a great help. Even if you don’t carry dog bones.

LISETTE

You’re welcome!

FIFI LA CUTE

(Running away.) I hope you make it to the Eiffel Tower!

LISETTE

(Calling out to her.) **I hope so, too! Even if I have to do it ...** alone. I’m alone. Again.

(We switch back to the Berlin park.)

LISETTE’S VOICE

“and so dear Sofie, I will close. Keep your fingers crossed that I make it to the Eiffel Tower. I miss you Sofie. I wanted an adventure. But I think it would be much more fun if I did this with you.

With love or as they say in France “avec amour,”
Lisette”

SOFIE

Will we ever find out if she makes to the Eiffel Tower and finds Frederick?

FRANZ

Why, I can't say...

DORA

Of course you can't. (Beat.) You must rest.

FRANZ

Yes. I wish I could spend the morning with you.

SOFIE

But – you were getting better!

FRANZ

I'm up and down. Today – I'm down.

SOFIE

I'm sorry. I wish I could help.

FRANZ

Rest will help me. I will see you soon.

(DORA and FRANZ start to exit. SOFIE runs to him.)

SOFIE

Herr Kafka, I know something that might make you feel better.

(She takes him aside and whispers.)

I read a letter from my mother.

FRANZ

And...

SOFIE

She misses me.

FRANZ

And ...

SOFIE

That's all. For now.

FRANZ

It's amazing, Sofie. That does make me feel better. I still need to rest but yes, your news has definitely helped me.

(There's a smile between friends. FRANZ and DORA exit as SOFIE watches. The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 10

SCENE BRIDGE: Lights up on LISETTE in Paris. It is sunset. There could be a projection of the bottom of the Eiffel Tower in the background where LISETTE looks very small. Very small indeed. LISETTE looks up.

LISETTE

I still don't like heights.

Lights change to the park. It is Saturday, August 6, 1924. DORA and FRANZ are on the bench. FRANZ is scribbling away.

DORA

I thought you finished the letter.

FRANZ

I did! But I had a new idea. There's always a new idea!

DORA

Stop pushing yourself!

FRANZ

I cannot buy time. I must make use of what time I have.

(ANYA and SOPHIE enter.)

DORA

They're coming!

(FRANZ hastily puts the letter in the envelope.)

FRANZ

I'm ready!

SOFIE

Herr Kafka, how are you feeling?

FRANZ

Strong enough to spend some time with you. For you.

SOFIE

“Dear Sofie,
I have so much to tell you. I did make it to the Eiffel Tower. It is 17 thousand and ten steps to the top! That’s a lot of steps for a doll. There is a lift but it is so crowded. I worried about being stepped on and squished.

(We switch to the EIFFEL Tower and LISETTE.)

LISETTE’S VOICE

“And *then* it started to rain. So I made a plan. I jumped on top of an umbrella and some human carried me all the way to the top – he never knew I was there!”

(We see LISETTE at the top of the Eiffel Tower. There’s thunder and lightening. LISETTE peers out at Paris – a possible projection. She tries to stand on some rails and winds up standing on FREDERICK!)

(FREDERICK moves.)

FREDERICK

Owwwwww!

(LISETTE jumps off. FREDERICK is no longer in his shrunken soldier clothes but in something incongruous – lederhosen? A baker’s outfit? You decide. LISETTE helps straighten his top and put his collar in. She notices a tag.)

LISETTE

Made in Paris, France! Were you made here or just the clothes?

FREDERICK

Both.

LISETTE

Monsieur Cocteau created me.

FREDERICK

And me! Why, we are old friends!

LISETTE

I wasn’t there long. I was bought right away.

FREDERICK

As was I.

LISETTE

Nice to meet you – “old friend.” (Beat.) What were you doing on the floor?

FREDERICK

I ... don't know. Charles, the boy I belong to was waving me around. Again. I was worried he would drop me from the top of the Tower. So I threw myself on the ground. Then there was that thunder clap - did you hear it?

LISETTE

I did.

FREDERICK

Very scary. Everyone was running every which way and that and - well that here I am!

LISETTE

Here you are! (Beat.) You've changed.

FREDERICK

No, I haven't! Oh! The clothes. Yes. At least they fit.

(Beat.)

How are you?

LISETTE

A bit wobbly. I'm afraid of heights.

FREDERICK

May I – hold your hand?

LISETTE

Maybe. I think ... yes.

(And very slowly, LISETTE and FREDERICK'S hands reach for each other. At the moment of contact, there is a huge thunderclap. They jump apart.)

FREDERICK

Goodness!

LISETTE

Gracious!

FREDERICK

Shall we try again?

(And they do. And they make contact.)

This is ... this is ...

LISETTE

Nice.

FREDERICK

Yes.

LISETTE

Look out there.

FREDERICK

(They look out at Paris – holding hands of course. Their sight lines are probably blocked a bit because they are short – they are dolls after all.)

Paris is at our feet.

FREDERICK (cont'd)

Tres jolie.

LISETTE

C'est magnifique. (Beat.) And that's all the French I remember.

FREDERICK

(We hear the music that FRANZ and DORA were dancing to in the park. LISETTE and FREDERICK smile at each other.)

Where is that coming from?

LISETTE (cont'd)

Does it matter? We should take advantage of it.

FREDERICK

(And they dance and end with the same “dip” that DORA did in the park. THEY look at each other and are so very content for a moment. Suddenly we hear the BOY'S (Charles) voice.)

BOY'S VOICE

Frederick! *Frederick!* Where arrrrre you?

FREDERICK

I have to go.

(But he takes her other hand.)

LISETTE

Come away with me! We can see the world together!

BOY'S VOICE

Frederick!

FREDERICK

But the boy/

LISETTE

He doesn't care for you!

FREDERICK

He needs me.

LISETTE

I care for you! (Beat.) Oh my, that was forward of me.

FREDERICK

Lisette. I care for you, too. But.

LISETTE

The boy.

FREDERICK

His father died in the Great War. His mother died of the flu. He lives with his uncle and I am all that is left from his early life. Don't you have someone who needs you?

LISETTE

I did. But I ran away.

FREDERICK

Why?

LISETTE

I thought ... to dance in the moonlight... have an adventure.

BOY'S VOICE

Oh Frederick. Are you gone forever?

FREDERICK

Lisette/

LISETTE

/I know. Go to him. Let him find you. (Beat.) You are a very kind, doll. I see that now.

(FREDERICK goes to her and lifts her hand up.)

FREDERICK

May I?

LISETTE

Yes.

(FREDERICK goes to kiss LISETTE's hand.)

BOY'S VOICE

There you are!

(LISETTE and FREDERICK may have a giggle.)

LISETTE

Well, this is awkward.

FREDERICK

In other time... in other place...

LISETTE

No. this place was perfect.

FREDERICK

We'll always have Paris.

(FREDERICK exits.)

BOY'S VOICE

I was so worried that I lost you forever.

FREDERICK'S VOICE

It was wonderful meeting up with you again!

LISETTE

It was, wasn't it?

(Thunderclap, rain, blackout.)

(The lights return to the park.)

SOFIE

“That was my Paris adventure. I don’t know what comes next. I do know that I miss you.
I have a lot of thinking to do.

Love, Lisette”