

Kafka and the Doll – One Act

35 minutes

By Claudia Haas

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\*The play was developed by The Growing Stage in New Jersey and through the Old Miner's Children's Playwriting Contest in Utah. It was produced by Somerville High School for the Massachusetts Thespian Festival, Charles Jabour directing. Can send original cast.

RUNNING TIME: 40 minutes

(If you need a running time of 35 minutes, Cut the characters ROMEO and JULIET and Scenes 6 and 7. At the end you will just need to cut LISETTE'S two lines about her "cat encounter.")

SYNOPSIS: The play is about love and kindness. Love within families, friends and a touch of the romantic. Some people come into your lives at just the right time. This was just the right time for SOFIE. Franz Kafka is noted for mixing realism with the fantastical. But there was another side to him. A side that delighted in playing with his young nieces and nephews. A side that yearned to be loved by his distant parents. And a side that knew that kindness was a good force. The world can be a treacherous place. Finding your way in it takes courage. Diversity in casting is encouraged.

There is a short note from Dora Diamont that Kafka found a young girl weeping in a park. The story was found among Dora's memories of Kafka. Kafka 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. And so began a three-week correspondence where Kafka wrote letters for the girl from her travelling doll. Nothing remains from this story – it was never found. But it might have gone something like this...

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Claudia Haas

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CAST: 10 (5 female, 4 male, 1 any gender)\*

With doubling: 7 (Suggestions below)

If you want to add to the cast, you could assign a magical character to change the signs and set up the various locales. Think: Harlequin, a magician, a wizard.

SOFIE SCHWARZ (female) age 11-12; mourning a loss

ANYA MEYER (female) 20-25? Sofia's young aunt who is caring for Sofia

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

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

LISETTE (female) age 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

MONSEIUR/MADAME COCTEAU Toymaker (ageless, heart of gold)

ANNOUNCER VOICE (offstage)

BOY'S VOICE (offstage)

**EXTRAS welcome! Have fun with extras – have them twirling, playing games, handstands, rolling hula hoops, playing chess, etc. in the various parks.)**

CAST WITH DOUBLING: 7 (4 female, 3 male)

SOFIE

ANYA

FRANZ

DORA

FREDERICK/GARGOYLE

CARUSO/ROMEO

JULIET/COCTEAU

**Setting**

The play is a story told with stories. You do not need to clutter it up with a lot of settings. Steglitz Park in Berlin (really, just a park bench is fine). SOFIE'S room (all you need is a desk and a chair); FRANZ'S room (again – just a desk and a chair); For the travelling doll sequences, we are always in a park. Change a flag, hang a sign, or use a set piece that evokes the particular country. You could go all out and do projections – the designs can be as simple or as complicated as you wish.

**Time** July and August 1924

## Kafka and the Doll

Scene 1, Friday, July 25, 1924

*AT RISE we are in Steglitz Park in Berlin. It is a small, leafy 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. Think: Madame Alexander type – not American Girl.*

SOFIE

These are so good. Your kolaches are better than the ones from the bakery. Are there any more?

ANYA

You wolfed down three of them! I can't believe you finished the last one.

SOFIE

It was raspberry – my favorite!

ANYA

I thought the one with the cherry filling 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 hills with our tummies filled with pastries! Let me push you in a 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 ... ever ... ever.

ANYA

Don't give me those puppy-dog eyes. You know I spoil you. We just had lemonade and kolaches. Wasn't that enough?

SOFIE

It was enough for my tummy. Now my arms and legs want to have fun, too. Please, Auntie 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 dirty but your aunt can!

SOFIE

Race you!

*(ANYA and SOFIE run off. LISETTE is seated on the bench. We hear music. "The Blue Danube?" FRANZ and DORA enter dancing – probably a waltz but you decide. They only have eyes for each other. DORA curtsies and FRANZ bows. FRANZ and DORA freeze.*

*The lights change. Maybe the music changes – think of the "Christmas tree growing" sequence in "The Nutcracker." A brief blackout and as the lights start to return, LISETTE-the-doll is gone. In her place is LISETTE-played by a human actor. LISETTE is amazed and thrilled that she can move. She stands. It is awkward. She stretches her limbs – which is also awkward but becomes smooth. She looks around and sees DORA and FRANZ who now dance towards the bench. She moves aside and watches – captivated. She then makes the impulsive decision to "seize the day" and runs off.*

*FRANZ and DORA sit on the bench. FRANZ is wearing a light jacket and carries a notebook.*

*DORA fusses over him. DORA takes out a scarf from her large handbag and wraps it around FRANZ.)*

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! They never answer your letters And then you get upset..

FRANZ

I need to keep trying. I love the idea of a real 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 figure out.

*(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! Nooooooo!

*(SOFIE lets out a wail.)*

FRANZ

What sounds! May I help you?

Nobody can ever help me again!

SOFIE

*(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.)*

Please. Keep it.

FRANZ

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

SOFIE

Kafka. Franz Kafka. This is my friend, Dora Diamont. And the handkerchief is yours.

FRANZ

*(SOFIE abruptly stops crying and becomes the obedient, polite child.)*

Thank-you Herr. Kafka. I am Sofie Schwarz and this is my aunt, Anya Meyer.

SOFIE

*(With the introduction done, SOFIE returns to her pathetic tears.)*

My poor, beautiful, perfect Lisette! Someone stole her!

DORA

Who is this Lisette? A poodle?

SOFIE

A doll! The most perfect doll ever made!

FRANZ

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 can't have gotten far with those little legs. Please, split up. There's no time to waste. 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 comfortably on a bench?

FRANZ

Yes. I don't suppose you have an envelope?

DORA

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

FRANZ

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.)*

FRANZ (cont'd)

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.

DORA

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

FRANZ

But you know it will be interesting.

*(ANYA and SOFIE approach.)*

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. It's addressed to Miss Sofie. 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 decided I needed an adventure. I want to see where I was made. My clothes all say “Made in France” so that will be my first stop. I want to see something of the world before I look scruffy. I hope you understand. You will grow up. Dolls don't. They just get worn out. I shall write 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.

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.

SOFIE

I never heard of a doll post office.

ANYA

I have!

FRANZ

Oh good! Most people don't know about it. I would think ... that Lisette will need time to get to ... wherever she is going ... and so ... there probably won't be a letter every day. Possibly - 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?

SOFIE

/We'll be here. I am Lisette's mother and I would never leave her like my mother left me.

ANYA

- Sofie! Enough! Wednesday morning it is.

*(ANYA approaches FRANZ.)*

Tread gently, Herr Kafka. The doll is the last thing her father gave her before he passed away. Her mother was so grief-stricken that she went to visit family in Italy and hasn't returned. She writes Sofie but Sofie won't read the letters. Lisette is 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?

I am certain of it.

ANYA

*(Lights fade. Music.*

*SCENE BRIDGE: LISETTE enters and looks out into the audience.)*

VOICE

WELCOME TO COPENHAGEN!

*(LISETTE is thrilled to be – somewhere. With a big smile she runs off to start her adventure. Blackout.)*

**Scene 2 - Sunday, July 27, 1924**

*(We are back in Berlin where SOFIA and ANYA are waiting. FRANZ and DORA enter.)*

SOFIE

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

FRANZ

I do! Now settle yourself so you can read it carefully.

SOFIE

“My Dear Sofie,

The most amazing thing happened. After I left you, I saw a gentleman wearing a beret and reading a French newspaper. As I am clever, I decided he must be French. The man had a train ticket. I thought, he must be going back to France! So I sneaked into his suitcase. I am off to visit the land of my birth.”

*(We transition to LISETTE’S voice or we see LISETTE in Copenhagen. There might be a tiny scene adjustment – a sign, a Ferris wheel, a bench by the harbor.)*

LISETTE

“First: I was on a train. I was so excited. And then, I was bobbing up and down – so I knew I was on a boat! But 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 in a park by the harbor. I looked around and standing at attention next to me was a handsome soldier.”

*(We see FREDERICK standing next to LISETTE.)*

FREDERICK

Hello.

LISETTE

Hello.

FREDERICK

Pretty, isn't it.

LISETTE

Yes.

*(A beat or two. FREDERICK clears his throat.)*

LISETTE (cont'd)

Did you say something?

FREDERICK

Are you ... from around here?

LISETTE

No. Are ... you?

FREDERICK

No.

LISETTE

Oh. We have something in common then. We're both not from here.

FREDERICK

No. Yes.

LISETTE and FREDERICK

Where...

LISETTE

Sorry, you first.

FREDERICK

No, Ladies always go first.

LISETTE

I insist.

LISETTE  
Berlin.

FREDERICK  
Vienna.

FREDERICK

Lovely city.

LISETTE

Vienna?

FREDERICK

Berlin.

LISETTE

Yes.

FREDERICK

I am going to Tivoli Gardens. Are you?

LISETTE

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

FREDERICK

Are you lost?

LISETTE

I don't know. Since I don't know where I should be, I could be anywhere. I am starting an adventure and adventures are everywhere so anywhere I am is where I should be.

FREDERICK

Are you – alone?

LISETTE

... why do you ask?

FREDERICK

Dolls usually travel with their humans. I was with mine. But he dropped me. He drops me a lot. He's very young. Were you dropped by your human?

LISETTE

Not exactly. One could say I dropped her. I left her to have an adventure.

FREDERICK

I'm going to ride the Ferris Wheel in Tivoli Gardens. Would you like that?

LISETTE

No. I'm afraid of heights.

FREDERICK

What will you do on your adventure?

LISETTE

I don't know. I didn't think this through.

FREDERICK

Please be careful. Adventures can be amazing but they can be dangerous. Especially if you are alone. And pretty. Which you are.

LISETTE

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

FREDERICK

Awww shucks.

BOY'S VOICE

Frederick? Where did you go?

FREDERICK

It was nice meeting you. My human is calling. I must go. He's always losing me.

LISETTE

You're Frederick?

FREDERICK

Yes.

LISETTE

I'm/

*(FREDERICK runs off.)*

LISETTE

Lisette.

*(LIGHTS change to BERLIN.)*

SOFIE (Reading.)

“That’s my adventure so far. I am going to watch the harbor lights. It’s so pretty. I love you, Lisette”

SOFIE

I wish I was with her.

ANYA

But you’re with me! Isn’t that lucky?

SOFIE

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

ANYA

I’m like Lisette. 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.

JFRANZ

It’s getting late 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: LISETTE is still in a park by the harbor. Maybe we hear waves and gulls flying. LISETTE sits and falls asleep.*

### **Scene 3**

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

SOFIE  
HERR KAFKA! Is there a letter?

FRANZ  
There is. For you.

*(SOFIE just about tears it open.)*

SOFIE  
“Dear Sofie,  
I have had a new adventure! I fell asleep and missed the last ferry out of  
Copenhagen and was very upset. I collapsed on the pier and cried and cried when  
suddenly...”

*(We are back at the Harbor. Lisette is sobbing.  
We hear singing. It will be CARUSO.)*

LISETTE’S VOICE  
“... I heard singing. I looked around but no one was there. Then I looked out to  
the sea and the voice came closer. It’s a singing porpoise!”

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 *(Sobbing.)*  
Very happy.

CARUSO

I think you told a little fib. You don't look 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

It's hard to be happy when you decide to run away from home and you do it all wrong  
and now I am all alone –

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 more 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 has brought you to this pier in  
the middle of the night?

LISETTE

I was in a park in Berlin and I saw a couple dancing and I thought – that's what 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 don't know if I can trust you. Suppose you want to eat me? I read "Little Red Riding  
Hood." I am a cultured doll.



CARUSO

Do I look like a wolf in a porpoise's clothing?

LISETTE

Not exactly.

CARUSO

I am much better looking. And as you a cultured doll, surely you know I only eat fish. Are you a fish in disguise as a doll?

LISETTE

Don't be silly.

CARUSO

I have to be silly. It's my porpoise in life. *(Beat.)* Climb aboard. It's a perfect night for a moonlight cruise.

LISETTE

It is! But... 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

Really?

CARUSO

Don't-a 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 (cont'd)  
*(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

Oh no! No cuddles!

CARUSO

No, No, of course not. It's just a song.

LISETTE and CARUSO

“By the silvery moon.”

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

SOFIE *(Reading.)*

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

Yours with love,  
Lisette”

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

ANYA

Not on purpose.

*(FRANZ has a bit of a coughing fit.)*

DORA

I need to get you home. You need to see the doctor.

FRANZ

A doctor. Yes. I see 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.*

FRANZ

My father returned the letter I sent him. All fifty pages. Maybe I should cut it down to thirty pages...

DORA

One page is enough.

FRANZ

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

DORA

Is it not enough that my heart beats for you?

FRANZ

What did I do to deserve you?

DORA

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

*(The 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

Waiting is boring. We've been here forever!

ANYA

It's hardly been forever. We got here early. Would you like more apple strudel?

SOFIE

I'm full. I can't have any more sweets.

ANYA

I didn't think that was possible. I know! I'll read you the letter from your mother. Your mother misses you. She wants you to go there. The memories are sad for her here.

I have sad memories, too.

SOFIE

*(DORA and FRANZ enter.)*

Herr Kafka! Finally!

SOFIE

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

ANYA

Better, thank-you.

FRANZ

Is there a letter?

SOFIE

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

ANYA

I'm sorry. I'm glad you are feeling better. *(Beat.)* Is there a letter?

SOFIE

Of course.

FRANZ

*(FRANZ gives the letter to SOFIE.)*

“Dear Sofie,  
I saw Frederick!”

SOFIE

*(The lights switch to the harbor in Hamburg. A sign may change. It is morning. LISETTE is where she was dropped off by CARUSO. She stands and suddenly sees FREDERICK who is laying down a few feet away. 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. How did you wind up here?

FREDERICK

The boy dropped me when we were getting off the ferry.

LISETTE

Again? 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 he drops me. I just stay put until he comes looking for me. I didn't see you on the ferry.

LISETTE

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

FREDERICK

It's good to see you again.

LISETTE

And you.

*(Suddenly we hear the same boy's voice that we heard in Copenhagen.)*

BOY'S VOICE

/Frederick! There you are! I thought I'd never find you. Come on! The train for Paris leaves soon. Won't that be fun?

*(FREDERICK runs off calling to LISETTE.)*

FREDERICK

I have to go! We're going to Paris! I think we're visiting the Eiffel Tower. Please come! I hope he doesn't drop me from the tower! And - I'm Frederick!

*(And he is gone.)*

LISETTE

I know! And I'm .. Lisette and I ... think I want to go to Paris, too!

“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?

FRANZ

Absolutely! It's magnificent! 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

Yes, she does.

FRANZ

And do you answer them?

ANYA

No, she does not.

FRANZ

I would give anything for a letter from my mother. I write her and I get no response.

SOFIE

Mothers are a mystery, aren't they?

KAFKA

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

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!** She should come home.

*(THEY exit.)*

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

Ahh .... More tea. I shall turn into a proper English woman soon. I suddenly can't write anything. Not to Sofie. Not to my father.

DORA

Forget your father, my sweet Romeo.

“Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name.”

FRANZ

I can't. I am a Kafka. Just as he is.

“I take thee at thy word. Call me but love and I'll be new baptized.  
Henceforth, I never will be Kafka.”

DORA

But you will always be my Romeo.

KAFKA

That's it! You are my sweet Juliet. But as a cat. You hiss when someone wrongs me and purr when you are content. You just helped me figure out my next letter from Lisette. You will be my Juliet to my Romeo. Eating mice. Struggling to survive.

DORA

Maybe I would have been 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, 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.*

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. FRANZ and DORA sneak up on them.)*

FRANZ and DORA

Surprise!

ANYA

Goodness! I just aged ten years!

DORA

Look! Balloons!

FRANZ

I had a very good check-up at the doctor's office... so, we thought why not celebrate?

SOFIE

This is perfect! We brought kolaches! We knew something happy would happen.

FRANZ

I love kolaches.

SOFIE

Auntie Anya's are the best in the country. That's what Mother always said.

FRANZ

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

*(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. LISETTE does not know what to make of them.)*

LISETTE

... here kitty, kitty?

ROMEO

Meow!

*(THEY circle LISETTE again. More hisses. LISETTE is at first frightened and then she gets mad! Using her satchel, she twirls in a circle with her arms outstretched trying to smack the cats away. She gets dizzy and faints.)*

JULIET

You killed her!

ROMEO

Me? I wouldn't hurt a fly. It was you and your pointy claws. You need to stop sharpening them. Dollface? Cat got your tongue?

LISETTE

My name's Lisette! Not Dollface!

ROMEO

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

LISETTE

What do you want from me?

ROMEO

A rat?

LISETTE  
Sorry, don't have one.

JULIET  
A mouse?

LISETTE  
I'm all out.

JULIET  
What good are you?

LISETTE  
I'm told I'm ... pretty?

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

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

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

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

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

LISETTE  
That's so sweet!

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 an 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. 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

But Romes... I don't wanna be tough. I wanna be queenly. Like a goddess. Without fleas.

LISETTE

If I clean you up and get you all fluffy, would you show me to the train station?

JULIET

**Meow!**

LISETTE

It's a deal.

*(JULIET sits by LISETTE who painstakingly runs her fingers through JULIET'S matted fur. Soon JULIET*

*is fluffed out or her fur is up or she sports a bow – you get the picture. SHE purrs.)*

LISETTE

All done! Now you look like a goddess!

*(JULIET does a happy dance.)*

JULIET

I feel fluffy! Unscruffy! I feel puffy and fluffy and clean!

*(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.

## ANNOUNCER VOICE

ALL ABOARD! Train to Paris on Track 11. Train to Rome on Track 12. Mach schnell!  
Quickly! Quickly!

*(We return to the park.)*

## SOFIE

“And so dear Sofie, I made it to the train. 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 join her! I miss her.

## FRANZ

You love her?

## SOFIE

Of course.

## FRANZ

And you believe people who love each other should be together.

## SOFIE

Yes.

## FRANZ

So do I. Let’s make a toast with our kolaches. To love!

## ALL

To love!

*(The lights dim as they hand out the pastries.  
There’s a short montage of French music and  
Lisette dancing in the Paris streets.)*

## SCENE 8 – FRANZ’S home.

*LIGHTS UP on FRANZ opening a letter. He is with  
DORA.*

## FRANZ

The letter’s from my sister Ottla. 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 be together?

DORA

Yes.

FRANZ

Yes. I am thinking of going.

*(The lights fade.)*

SCENE 9

*Lights up on the Berlin park. It is Thursday, August 4, 1924. ANYA and SOFIA are waiting. DORA and FRANZ enter. FRANZ is in some distress.*

SOFIE

Can I ... do something? Rub your back? What can I do?

FRANZ

Just let me sit. *(SOFIE and FRANZ sit.)* Yes, this is better. We should begin.

*(FRANZ takes out LISETTE'S newest letter.)*

“Dear Sofie:

“I arrived safely in Paris. I made it to the Eiffel Tower! It is 17 thousand and ten steps to the top! There is a lift but it is so crowded. I worried about being squished. Plus, I don't like heights, So as the sun was setting, I stayed in the park below.

LISETTE'S VOICE

“And *then* all these tourists came out from the Tower and I was afraid they would step on me so I ran and ran and then tripped – over Frederick!”

FREDERICK

Owwww!

LISETTE

I'm sorry! I'm a bit jumpy tonight! Wait! Frederick? Is that you?

FREDERICK

Oh no, thank goodness. He dropped me when we were on the ticket line.

LISETTE

It's hard being a doll.

*(LISETTE sees the label on his jacket.)*

LISETTE (cont'd)

Made in Paris, France! So was I! Monsieur (Madame) Cocteau created me.

FREDERICK

And me! Why, we are old friends!

LISETTE

Nice to meet you – “old friend.” How are you?

LISETTE

A bit wobbly. Adventures can be scary.

FREDERICK

May I – hold your hand? Would that help?

LISETTE

Maybe. I think ... yes.

*(And very slowly, LISETTE and FREDERICK'S hands reach for each other and they make contact. Music starts. It's the music that FRANZ and DORA were dancing to in the park..)*

LISETTE (cont'd)

Where is that coming from?

FREDERICK

Does it matter?

*(They dance. 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. The boy needs me. 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?



I did. But I ran away.

LISETTE

Why?

FREDERICK

LISETTE

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

BOY'S VOICE

Oh Frederick. Are you gone forever? Please don't leave me.

FREDERICK

Lisette/

LISETTE

/I know. Go to him. Let him find you. 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.)*

FREDERICK

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

LISETTE

No. this place was perfect.

FREDERICK

We'll always have Paris.

*(FREDERICK exits.)*

LISETTE

Now what do I do?

*(Lights change to the park.)*

SOFIE (*Reading.*)

“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”

SOFIE (cont’d)

I wonder what she will do.

FRANZ

What do you want her to do?

SOFIE

Come home. I think everyone should come home.

FRANZ

Wise words. And about going home ... I should tell you...

DORA

Franz ... you look tired.

FRANZ

Don’t I always? I just love it here. These moments together. They make me happy. This bench has been a home for me. Think about it, the four of us have created a home right here in the park. We’re a family – bound together by letters. Now, I do need to rest.

SOFIE

But we’ll see you soon? On Monday.

FRANZ

I’ll be here. Who knows what Lisette will be up to?

*(THEY separate as the lights fade to black.)*

## SCENE 11

*LIGHTS up outside a toy shop in Paris. It is night. MONSIEUR/MADAME COCTEAU is putting the finishing touches on a doll. A table with two chairs would be nice. LISETTE enters.*

LISETTE

Monsieur? Monsieur Cocteau? Do you remember me?

*(COCTEAU peers. THEY puts the doll down and inspects LISETTE.)*

COCTEAU

Lisette? Is that you? You were one of my finest creations. How long has it been? Two years? Oh my! You look – a bit – worn. Has the world been unkind to you?

LISETTE

Au contraire! The world has been very kind. I have been on an adventure. And now, I need your help.

COCTEAU

I'll fix some cafe and do whatever I can to help.

*(Lights change to the Park in Berlin. It is two days later. DORA is there with ANYA and SOPHIE.)*

DORA

I am sorry but Franz cannot join us today. He is not well.

SOFIE

But he was getting better.

DORA

He has good days and bad days.

SOFIE

I wrote him a letter to tell him I read my mother's letters and wrote her back.

DORA

So, you wrote him a letter about a letter from a letter?

SOFIE

Yes. Herr Kafka was right. Letters are forever.

DORA

Herr Kafka is right about so many things.

*(DORA exits. SOFIE just stares at the letter.)*

ANYA

Read it, Sofie. That's what Herr Kafka would like.

SOFIE

“My Dear Sofie,

SOFIE (cont'd)

I made it to Paris. That's where your father bought me. I always thought of Paris as my "real home" and Monsieur (Madame) Cocteau as my "real family." But now I know that home is wherever you are loved."

*(The lights switch to Paris where COCTEAU and LISETTE are having coffee. COCTEAU is listening and LISETTE is talking a-mile-a-minute. COCTEAU tries to get a word in.)*

LISETTE

But nothing was like I thought it would be. I met Frederick - a toy soldier who was very handsome. Do you remember Frederick? You created him?

COCTEAU

Why I/

LISETTE

Handsome is fine. But that's not what made him special. He was kind. You made him kind. I also met a porpoise who told terrible jokes and taught me to sing. And then in Hamburg I met these harbor cats and well – Juliet wanted to be pretty and Romeo wanted to have fun. They are cats after all – and I had to accept that they were cats and I should not judge a cat by its fur.

COCTEAU

A good lesson/

LISETTE

/and I danced under the Eiffel Tower and my dancing partner was awkward and it was - all - wonderful! Thank-you for your advice, Monsieur (Madame) Cocteau. You have been very helpful.

COCTEAU

De rien. (Beat.) Are you ready to return home? Because I have a nice travelling dress that is perfect for you. We could spruce you up a bit. Would you like that?

LISETTE

Merci.

*(The lights return to the park.)*

ANYA

Does Lisette mention anything about returning to you?

Not a word.

SOFIE

*LIGHTS OUT*

SCENE 12

*We are in FRANZ'S room. He is coughing a little. And reading.*

FRANZ

“Dear Herr Kafka,

“ I wrote my mother. I told her that I missed her. But only because she told me that she missed me first! I still think mothers are a mystery. We should be detectives and try to solve the mystery. Would you like to be a detective? That could be exciting.

Your friend, Sofie

P.S. I love reading letters. Someday, I want to go on an adventure like Lisette.

P.P.S. Nevermind. I will tell you later.

*(DORA enters with a package.)*

FRANZ

Did you find it? The exact one I wanted?

DORA

With your very detailed description of the clothes, yes, of course I found it. Do you want to see the doll?

FRANZ

Of course. *(Beat.)* I need to go home.

DORA

I know.

SCENE 13

*LIGHTS up in the park. ANYA and SOFIE are at attention. Waiting. FRANZ and DORA enter. FRANZ has a gift-wrapped package.)*

SOFIE

Herr Kafka! It's been two whole weeks and I missed you!

FRANZ

Did you miss me or the letters?

SOFIE

Both.

FRANZ

First, I have something to tell you. I am leaving Berlin. I am going home to Prague. What do you think?

SOFIE

I will miss you. And Dora will miss you.

DORA

I am going with him! His sister has a grand house with many bedrooms and has invited me. Isn't that kind.

SOFIE

Yes. It's important be with people who love you. Will you see your mother?

FRANZ

I don't know. I shall have to wait and see if she wishes to see me.

DORA

But he will be with his sister and his nieces and he will finish his novel/

ANYA

/You're a writer!

FRANZ

Yes. Didn't I mention that?

ANYA

No. It somehow slipped your mind.

FRANZ

We are getting off track. Look what showed up at the doll post office!

SOFIE

A letter from Lisette!

FRANZ

Yes! And something else! Look!

*(SOFIE unwraps the gift. It is a doll. Of course, it is not Lisette. SOFIE just stares at it.)*

FRANZ (cont'd)

Read the letter.

SOFIE

“Dear Sofie,  
I know I look different from when you last saw me. I wrote you all about my adventures and they changed me. I had to go away to come back. But I promise to never go away again if you will promise to love me the way I am now - in the same way you loved me before.”

*(SOFIE hugs and whispers to LISETTE.)*

I promise. Thank-you Herr Kafka, for bringing her back to me. *(Beat.)* Will I ever see you again?

FRANZ

Life's funny, isn't it? You never can know what will happen next.

SOFIE

That's what my mother said in her letter. She wants to bring Anya and me to Italy.

DORA

You two will love Italy!

ANYA

Actually ... I am not going. I got a job at a bakery here in Berlin. It turns out my recipes for kolaches are the best they ever tasted. I brought you some as a parting gift.

FRANZ

Everyone is starting a new adventure!

*(Music. It's the same music that they've danced to earlier.)*

FRANZ

No good-byes. Shall we dance? Until we meet again?

*(And there is a dance. With each other. With LISETTE. They change partners and continue the dance as the lights fade to black.)*

END OF PLAY

## NOTES:

1. **Steglitz Park** – a small, cozy, leafy park in Berlin. It contains ponds, a children's playground, a rose garden, trails and a restaurant. Established in 1914.
2. Kolache – Czech pastries made up of yeast dough and filled with fruit. Occasionally filled with sweetened farmer's cheese.
3. Tivoli Gardens – Copenhagen – a huge sprawling amusement park in central Copenhagen.
4. Strudel – Usually puff pastry and it is filled with sweets – and sometimes a savory (ham and cheese) for lunch. German.
5. Kuchen – it's mainly a cake but also a mash-up of cake and pie as it is usually filled with fruit. There's also usually a layer of custard inside. German.

A few French phrases:

Tres jolie: very pretty

Au contraire – to the contrary

De rien – it's nothing (a form of you're welcome)



