

Letters from Lisette  
55 minutes  
By Claudia I. Haas

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...

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**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, wants to be brave

CARUSO (male) the operatic Porpoise – must sing!

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

Franz Kafka/Announcer Voice\*

Dora Fischer/Kleopatra/Fifi La Cute

Lisette (as played by a human)

Frederick/Caruso/Antonious/Monsieur Cocteau

\*If desired, Kafka can also play Caruso and/or Monsieur Cocteau

\*NOTE: Directors are free to find other choices. You could make some or all the fantasy characters puppets or marionettes.

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, Colmar. 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, hills and a great place to observe ducks, geese and birds. All you need is a park bench. SOFIE and ANYA are near it. SOFIE is holding a doll. An exquisite doll.

SOFIE

Pretty pretty *pretty please* with cherries on top!

ANYA

I'd be happy to push you in a swing.

SOFIE

The hill!

ANYA

The swing!

SOFIE

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

ANYA

I like being clean.

SOFIE

Roll down with me! Please! (Beat.) I never get to do anything fun anymore.

ANYA

The medium hill.

SOFIE

Medium - but two times. 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 turn colors. Lights return and LISETTE is gone.)

OR: Lisette on bench is now human actress having changed while SOPHIE and ANYA had their discussion. When SOPHIA and ANYA leave, LISETTE stands up and runs away.

OR: LISETTE simply disappears while FRANZ and DORA are on the bench.)

(FRANZ KAFKA and DORA FISCHER enter. They see the empty bench and sit down. 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.)

DORA

Stop writing your family!

FRANZ

I need to keep trying. Something in me wants a family. And my sweet Ottla always answers.

DORA

Keep your sister. Get rid of the rest.

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

You did it! You did look silly – but you did it! (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.)

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. Never, ever, ever!

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

FRANZ

Please. Keep it.

SOFIE

Oh no. I couldn'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.)

Lisette! 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! She has giant curls and a grand cloak and is beautiful.

DORA

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

SOFIE

An extra-special doll. My father brought her home from his travels. (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? *No! My poor Lisette.*

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 around here. 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

I don't have to search. I've already found her.

(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 stroll in the park.

FRANZ

You carry everything else. Never mind. I shall fashion 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. This has to be realistic. 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. Look! Why ... here'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!

FRANZ

She came from France?

ANYA

Yes. Sofie's father had some business there. It is where he bought Lisette.

Is there more?  
SOFIE

Just a little.  
FRANZ

Let me see!  
SOFIE

“I would like to use this ...this...  
SOFIE (Reading)

Opportunity.  
FRANZ

SOFIE  
- opportunity 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 you of my adventures. I hope you will like that.

You have been very kind to me and I love you very much. I wish you could also write me but I will be traveling.  
Warmest wishes,  
Lisette”

SOFIE  
Doesn't she have the prettiest handwriting?

(DORA and FRANZ exchange a glance.)

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 will be here. I am Lisette's mother and I am a much 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 family in Italy. She hasn't returned. Lisette was Sofie's bridge to a happier time. And now she is gone.

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

FRANZ

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

SOFIE

*May I see it?*

FRANZ

Of course.

(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. He must be going back to France! So I sneaked into his suitcase. Don’t you think that was smart?”

(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. Oh those eyes! I swooned.”

(We see FREDERICK sitting next to LISETTE.)

FREDERICK

Are you all right?

LISETTE

I just – swoon... SIGHED! 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 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 if you decide to go to Tivoli.

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. And maybe just maybe ... Frederick will return.

With Love,  
Lisette"

SOFIE (cont'd)

I miss her. 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.

ANYA

Ha! I roll down hills.

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.

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

You can count on it.

(ALL exit as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE BRIDGE: Possible projection of a porpoise. Operatic singing that will later be revealed to be CARUSO.

### 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! 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,

SOFIE (cont'd)

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. It's not a fisherman. It's not a whale! What is it? Oh my goodness-gracious-gosh! It's a porpoise! A singing porpoise! Can you believe it was a porpoise? Singing!"

(We are at the Pier with LISETTE She is sobbing. Somewhere in the harbor is Caruso, a wanna-be-opera-singer-porpoise. We hear him singing.)

CARUSO

(To the tune of *Funiculi, Funicula*, Find tune here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HH0TMmgPtjg>

*No Pizza Pie*

Some eat their weight in plates of bread and pasta.  
But not say, I; but not say I. (aye?)  
Some eat their fill of meatballs and lasagna.  
Eat or die! Eat or die!

But me, I like to feast on calamari.  
No pizza pie! No pizza pie!  
While gazing at my lady-love, Caramari  
Under sea and sky; under sea and sky.

(Refrain)

Herring! Whitefish! Cod and octopi!  
Sardines! Mackerel! Squid and fishhead pie!  
No pizza pie, no pizza pie,  
No pizza pie, no pizza pie!  
Unless it has sardines don't feed us cheesy pizza pie!

LISETTE

That was wonderful!

CARUSO

I know. Did I cheer you up?

LISETTE

For a moment. But now I am remembering that I am all alone and I'll never make it to my home. And I have no one to blame but myself for starting out on this adventure!

CARUSO

I understand. Not really. I have no idea what you are talking about. (Beat.) Are those real tears?

LISETTE

I don't know.

CARUSO

You know what they say, if you don't cry – your eyes can't be beautiful.

LISETTE

Who says that?

CARUSO

My wife. She should know. She cries a lot. The sun comes up – she cries (CARUSO cries in imitation – boo hoo or something similar). The sun goes down – she cries. (CARUSO fake cries.) The moonlight shines above us – she cries. She cries and she cries and her eyes – oh those eyes!

(CARUSO cries now in earnest.)

I miss those rainy eyes! *Caramari!*

LISETTE

I miss my human! *Sofie!*

(THEY cry. CARUSO stops abruptly.)

CARUSO

Signorina, I am off to meet my wife in Hamburg. Would you like me to take you? Otherwise you shall spend the night alone on the pier.

LISETTE

I don't know. I've never ridden on a porpoise.

CARUSO

*Never fear! Caruso-the-magnifico-singing-porpoise-with-a-purpose is here!* I can get you all the way to Hamburg. Are you up for an adventure?

LISETTE

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

CARUSO

I have the perfect solution.

(CARUSO dives under and comes back with possibly a saddle on its back and definitely with a pretty umbrella. It could be wet.)

CARUSO

The umbrella will protect you from the sea spray.

LISETTE

If you say so.

CARUSO

What are you waiting for? I have a date in Hamburg. I must be going. Avanti!

LISETTE

It's hard with these shoes and the cloak.

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.)

LISETTE

Signore, not so fast, please.

(CARUSO slows down and sings.)

CARUSO

(He starts "Beautiful Dreamer")

Beautiful dreamer, out on the sea  
Mermaids are chanting the wild lorelie,

Sing, Signorina, sing!

CARUSO (cont'd)

I don't know how.

LISETTE

But you must sing! Life is a song!

CARUSO

I never learned.

LISETTE

CARUSO

(Stops swimming.)

Now *that* is a tragedy. Say good-bye to Copenhagen. It's beautiful at night, is it not?

LISETTE

Magnifique!

CARUSO

Like me! Now let's get ready for the crossing. Soon there will be nothing but moon and stars. Look up. Bella, no?

LISETTE

Very.

CARUSO

(Sings By the Light of the Silvery Moon.)

“By the light” – now you –

LISETTE

What? No!

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 safely 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)  
 What an adventure! I want to ride on a porpoise! Wouldn’t you, 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. It will pass.

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?

SOFIE

I'm bored.

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.

ANYA  
I just meant/  
  
(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  
*Can I pleeeeeease have the letter!*

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

SOFIE  
I'm sorry. I'm glad you are feeling better. *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 and the sun is bright. 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 – small.

FREDERICK

Yes... it... shrunk 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 who is my human dropped me just as the ferry was pulling in.

LISETTE

Careless boy! I hope you ran away from him.

FREDERIK

He's a good sort of chap. He is fond of waving me around in the air and then dropping 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.

LISETTE

Perhaps they will get you a new uniform.

FREDERICK

Perhaps. (Beat.) 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. Again.

(SHE giggles.)

LISETTE (cont'd)

I'm sorry. It's just ... 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.*

(Lights change back to the park where SOFIE is continuing the letter.)

SOFIE

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

Oh! Paris! I think she should go to Paris, 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

Maybe she wants you to come home.

FRANZ

I'm afraid not. When I am home, she doesn't make time to see me.

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 not read them. Unanswered letters are sad. (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! Conquerors of mice! 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 “peer.”)

SOFIE

My lips are shut. Zip! Sofie has turned over a new leaf. She doesn’t speak/

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

FRANZ and DORA

*Surprise!*

ANYA  
 Goodness! I just aged ten years!

DORA  
 Look! Sweets!

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?

ANYA  
 We're pleased that your check-up went well. Aren't we, Sofie? Sofie!

SOFIE  
 Look at those pastries!

ANYA  
 Sofie...

SOFIE  
 Of course, I am happy for you, Herr Kafka. And happy for the sweets. I never get anything sweet anymore. I wish these could last forever.

FRANZ  
 We can make it last all morning. 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. Hisses. Claws. LISETTE is first frightened trying to shoo them. And then she gets mad! Using her cloak or satchel, she twirls in a circle with he 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 manicured 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.)

Don't do that! 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

LISETTE  
Sorry, don't have one.

JULIET  
A mouse?

LISETTE  
I'm all out.

ROMEO  
Not even a grouse?

LISETTE  
Not even a louse.

JULIET  
What good are you?

LISETTE  
I'm ... pretty?

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

JULIET  
*I used to be! 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 I am a matted-meow? My tail doesn't fluff! My whiskers are twisted!

ROMEO  
Julie, you are still the salt in my rat stew, the purr in my heart, 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 go back to the way things used to be. When we were gods!

JULIET

Those were the days, my friend. We were the “bee’s knees” at catching mice. We were so good, that eventually there were no more mice and we were thrown out.

LISETTE

That’s terrible!

ROMEO

That’s life. I’ve been a lion, a tiger, a cheetah, a jaguar, a god and a king. When life gets me down, I pick myself up and get back in the ring.

LISETTE

That’s so wise.

JULIET

Antonius is one cool cat. I’m Juliet by the way. The Former “Beauty Feline” of Hamburg. Who are you?

LISETTE

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.



(JULIET jumps away and does a happy, dance.)

ROMEO

But soft! What light through yonder harbor breaks? It is the east and Juliet is the sun! She is my lady! She is my love!

JULIET

I feel fluffy! Oh so fluffy! It's funny how fluffy I feel!

(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

Whoops. What can I say? Meow! 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 sweets, shall we? To being together? To love?

ALL

To love!

(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 (preferably at sunrise). 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 school assignment and FRANZ opening a letter. ANYA enters.

ANYA

The spelling is perfect – all correct. How’s the arithmetic going?

SOFIE

I hate multiplication.

ANYA

Everyone goes through that phase. 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.)

FRANZ

At least it’s from Ottila 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?

DORA

Yes.

FRANZ

And yes, I am thinking of going.

(The lights switch to SOFIE. She gingerly takes her mother’s letter and opens it.)

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. It would be swell if there was the Eiffel Tower way in the background.

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 on and 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 jumps up.)

ANYA

Sofie!

SOFIE

I’m not doing anything.

ANYA

Please continue to “not do anything” quietly.

(SOFIE sits. She 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.)

FRANZ (cont'd)

Are you ready?

SOFIE

For ages!

“Dear Sofie:

“I arrived safely in Paris. I am trying to make my way 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 Lisette.

FIFI LA CUTE

Nice name.

LISETTE

Thank-you.

FIFI LA CUTE

Look at me, Lisette! 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 better. 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 remains quiet.)

*I said, 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 treacherous territory! 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! That was what I was bred for!

(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 very slowly in broth and vegetables and give it to me as a midday snack. It's very healthy and nutritious.

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 paces.)

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 my "not a poodley-poodle" status. If she can understand what I understand we can come to an understanding. But first - I need to - get clean!

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. I am feeling better. I still need to rest but yes, your news has definitely helped me.

(A handshake or a small hug. 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 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 lightning. LISETTE peers out

at Paris – a possible projection. She tries to stand on some rails and winds up standing on FREDERICK!)

LISETTE

Oh! This is so far off the ground!

(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.)

FREDERICK

Well ... hello!

LISETTE

Hello! (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.)

FREDERICK

How ... are you?

LISETTE

... fine. A bit tired. But fine! No! Not fine. Exhausted. In the last few days, I have been on a train, a ferry, a porpoise, another train and then I walked from the train station to here. I have been hanging on to so many human legs that my fingers went numb.

(LISETTE starts to break down.)

I met cats and dogs and now it's raining cats and dogs ... and I am a silly doll!

(LISETTE cries.)

FREDERICK

Don't cry.

LISETTE

All right.

(LISETTE stops crying.)

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.)

LISETTE

This is ... this is ...

FREDERICK

Wonderful.

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)

And my feet are a long way up ... and I don't mind. I don't mind at all.

LISETTE

(THEY look out and are so very content for a moment. Suddenly we hear the BOY'S (Charles) voice.)

Frederick! *Frederick!* Where arrrrre you?

BOY'S VOICE

I have to go.

FREDERICK

(But he takes her other hand.)

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

LISETTE