



Portrait of Dora

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PORTRAIT OF DORA

HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

[Hélène Cixous had written of Dora in her novel *Le Portrait du soleil* (1973) and in *La Jeune née* (1975), the work of feminist theory she published in collaboration with Catherine Clément, before she set out to dramatize the case history. *Portrait de Dora*, in a production directed by Simone Benmussa, opened, to critical acclaim, in February 1976, at the Petit Orsay theater in Paris. The French script was published that year by the *Editions des Femmes*; the following year an English translation appeared in the Gambit International Theatre Review. In 1979, Simone Benmussa came to London to direct *Portrait of Dora* at the New End Theatre. That translation, by Anita Barrows, has been published in *Benmussa Directs* (London: John Calder and Dallas: Riverrun Press, 1979) as Playscript 91 in the Calder series of French plays and screenplays. The present translation has been prepared for *Diacritics* by Sarah Burd, and is published with the permission of Riverrun Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010.]

Projected on the scrim is “the incident by the lake”. Slow flickering of an incessant mourning.

Freud’s voice (**seated, seen from behind**)

“. . . These events project themselves like a shadow in dreams, they often become so clear that we feel we can grasp them, but yet they escape our final interpretation, and if we proceed without skill and special caution, we cannot know if such a scene really took place.”

DORA

(**a voice which rips through silence – half threatening and half begging – is heard**)

If you dare kiss me, I’ll slap you!

(**becoming more tenderly playful**)

DORA

Dare kiss me, I’ll slap you!

(**all of a sudden, close to his ear**)

FREUD

Yes, you will tell me. In full detail.

DORA

“If you want”

(**voice from afar**)

(**voice awakens**)

If you want.* And after that?

FREUD

You will tell me about the incident by the lake, in full detail.

DORA

Why did I keep silent the first days after the incident by the lake?

FREUD

To whom do you think you should ask that question?

* The *vous*, or more formal form of the French word “you,” is used by both Freud and Dora in the text, except in isolated cases. Here, the sentence in quotations is in the informal “you” – tu – in the French. – Tr.

DORA

Why did I then, suddenly, tell my parents about it?

FREUD

Do you know why?

DORA

(does not answer but tells this story in a dreamlike voice)

As father prepared to leave, I said that I would not stay there without him. Why did I tell my mother about the incident so that she would repeat it to my father?

HERR B

Herr K was always kind to my daughter, ever since our two families formed an intimate friendship that has lasted several years. While he was there, he went on walks with her. Treated her affectionately, almost like a father. Even though she was only a child. He gave her small presents and looked after her with an affection almost like a father's. As for Dora, she took care of my friends' two babies with a wonderfully tender concern. She could have been their mother. Two years ago, my daughter and I joined the K's on vacation alongside a mountain lake. Dora was to stay with them for several weeks.

DORA

I'm not staying, I'm leaving with my father.

HERR B

But the mountain and lake air would do your nerves a world of good. I am sure that in a few days . . .

DORA

I'm leaving with you.

(them abruptly, menacing)

I'll never forgive you!

HERR B

I don't understand you!

DORA

You understand me but you aren't honest. You have a deceitful personality. You think only of your own satisfaction. I am not honest. I scold myself for being unjust to you. Give me a bracelet.

(pause)

My father is very generous. He loves to please poor Frau K. At the same time, he's generous to his wife and daughter. My father never buys a gift of jewelry for me without also buying one for my mother and one for Frau K.

HERR B

(to Freud)

Dora is still a child and Herr K treats her as a child. He sent her flowers, he gave her small gifts. She acted as the children's mother, gave them lessons, took them on walks; gave them the same tender care their own mother would have shown them.

DORA

(still carrying on in violent denial)

I have never loved Herr K. I was never madly in love with him. I could have loved him but since the incident by the lake, it's altogether impossible. There had been talk of divorce between Herr and Frau K. I used to take care of the children. While my father would visit Frau K, I knew that the children would not be at the house, so I liked to meet up with them and I would walk with them.

HERR K

Dora is no longer a child.

FRAU K

Dora is a child, who is only interested in sexual matters. While she was staying at our house by the lake, she secretly read Mantegazza's *Physiology of Love* and other books of that sort, reading which excited her. She adores me. She trusts me. She's a child that provokes mixed feelings; one can't trust all she says, these books get her all excited.

HERR B

She probably "fancied" the whole scene by the lake.

DORA

Do you hear him?

FREUD

Yes.

DORA

(Fantasized tales – as if the vision possessed, dreamed, Dora)

There is a door in Vienna through which everyone can go except me. I often dream that I get to this door, it opens, I could enter. Some young men and women crowd through it, I could step in among the crowd, but I do not, still, I cannot move away from this door forever, I go by it, I linger but I do not do it, I am unable to, I am full of recollections and despair, what is strange is that I could go in but I am held back, I fear, I am above all fear, but I don't enter, if I don't enter, I die, if I entered, if I wanted to see Herr K but if papa saw me, but I don't want to see him, but if papa saw me see him, he would kill me, I could see him once. It would be the last time. Then . . .

FRAU K

(a laughing, mocking voice)

I always said the affair is all washed up . . .

DORA

Then . . . nothing. Pointless.

DORA

As soon as I understood Herr K's intentions, I interrupted him. I slapped him in the face and I hurried away. I hurried away, I slapped him, I cut short his intent. I understood his words.

FREUD

"This first account may be compared to an unnavigable river whose stream is at one moment choked by masses of rock and at another divided and lost among shallows and sand-banks."

FREUD

I happen to know Herr K. He's still quite young and has a pleasing appearance. The father, Herr B, was a successful man, mild-mannered, a gentle father and a patient husband. I never knew Dora's mother. Herr B was very attached to his daughter. Each time I asked him questions about her health, tears came to his eyes.

DORA

My mother means nothing to him.

HERR B **(to Dora)**

You dreamt it all up! A man like Herr K would never think such a thing!

DORA

(beside herself)

I dreamt it all up! huh! He said: "You know that my wife means nothing to me." As soon as I realized Herr K's intent, I slapped him in the face and hurried away.

(on side stage)

As soon as Frau K realized papa's intent, she interrupted him, slapped him in the face and hurried away. She slapped him. And you, you say I dreamt it all up! Now choose! Choose!

(screams)

HERR B

Well, don't scream about it!

DORA

It's her or me!

HERR K

I didn't make the slightest move which could have been open to such an interpretation. I sent her flowers for a year, I treated her as if she were my own daughter. Herr B, whose refined ways with women are well known, is aware of the extent to which my concern for Dora was unselfish.

DORA

Answer; Well, answer!

DORA says:

It wasn't exactly alongside the lake. It was in the woods. I had been aware of his

motives for quite a while. During the walk, he rolled a cigarette.

DORA

Every morning when I get up, I smell cigarette smoke. It's always the same. I don't open my eyes. I inhale and it's him.

FREUD

Where there's smoke there's fire.

DORA

Like you, Herr K and my father were compulsive smokers. I also smoked at the lake. He had rolled me a cigarette. He smelled like cigarette smoke. I hate the smell of smoke.

DORA

I remember that the door leading from the store to the apartment was open, and I smelled cigarette smoke; Frau K's perfume; mixed. When it was time for the procession, he asked me to wait for him; . . . to wait for him.

FREUD

Continue. Continue, say more.

DORA

He asked me . . .

To wait for him, as it was about to begin.

(silence)

FREUD

And?

DORA

There is a door. Which opens onto the staircase leading to the upper story; there. While he closed the shutters. I waited. There was something I knew . . . a smell.

FREUD

Yes. And then?

DORA (playfully; only the italicized phrases are spoken, but as if torn from the rest like her short, choppy sentences)

He came back, and then and after, instead of going out the open door, he clasped me to him, he held me close to him, and he pressed a kiss on my lips. I felt such intense disgust, I hated him with all my heart, I was disgusted, I violently tore myself free from him, I still feel it today, at this moment, I feel it, so intensely.

DORA

I still feel the kiss and the pressure of that embrace; his lips were very wet. Here, on my breast and down my back. I ran by him, next to this man.

I tore myself free, I hurried away, I glanced at him, I hurried to the staircase, passing right by him (*I thought: I am going*

by "this man"), to the staircase and then to the street door.

FREUD

And?

DORA

And . . . Nothing. Only that. The door.

DORA

I hate little tête-à-têtes.

HERR B

(still there)

She has suffered from a respiratory problem since the age of eight. My daughter has always been very nervous, very fragile. I used to be quite concerned about her health.

FREUD

And her mother?

HERR B

The relationship between my wife and my daughter is an unfriendly one. My wife does not mean much to me. Unfortunately, she is an uncultured woman. She has no understanding of her children's aspirations. Dora was naturally on my side. I myself was seriously ill. I don't doubt that her tenderness towards me was heightened by all that I've suffered.

(Freud, Dora, Herr B and Frau K on stage)

DORA

During his illness, Frau K was his savior. She deserves his eternal gratitude. When I was ten years old, my father had a detached retina. Total darkness was prescribed to cure this. I liked to keep him company in the dark. He took me in his arms and hugged me.

I saw to it that the venetian blinds were always lowered.

HERR B

When she was about twelve, she suffered from migraine headaches and attacks of nervous coughing. (I remember because it was at this time that my friend K persuaded me to come consult with you.) The coughing fits sometimes last three to four weeks, but I am actually most worried by her bouts of aphonia.

DORA

But the relationship didn't become intimate until Frau K took over as sick nurse. My mother stayed away from the room because she doesn't like my father. She's a stupid woman.

HERR B

I am bound to Frau K by an honorable friendship. Dora, who is very close to me, felt a sort of adoration for her.

DORA

Adoration.

I have never seen a woman so elegant and so beautiful. How I loved to look at her! I followed her motions with my eyes. I thought she must know how to do everything that women are supposed to be good at. I loved to bring flowers to her bedroom.

When my father and Frau K moved to the two rooms at the end of the hall, I understood everything.

(Herr K comes back, sits next to Freud)

(Dora shouts at Herr B)

Everything. You hear me?

HERR B

(aggressively, defending himself)

Frau K is very nervous herself and I am her only friend. Between my health and her fragile nature, I need scarcely assure you that we are bound only by a deep friendship. Dora's animosity is unjust. Her irritability, her suicide threats! All of this obviously comes from her mother.

DORA

Why didn't I ever admit this story to anyone?

FREUD

Except me.

(Dora goes out. Footsteps on the stairs, footsteps running, she stops on the staircase.)

DORA

It's dark in here . . .

HERR K

(whispering)

Wait for me, I'll lower the blinds and I'll be right with you.

DORA

The unsaid, lost, in the body, in between the bodies.

No need to open it. It's always opened. I can open. Don't open. That man had beautiful teeth, like pearls on a bracelet. I can open just slightly. And why wouldn't you open? That which is opened can be unopened. What happened can have not happened.

HERR K

Nothing is beyond repair. Why not?

DORA

(whispering)

I still feel it there. I can't breathe. I already felt someone behind the door. Pushing with all his strength. It was a new sensation . . . But, what didn't happen?

(sudden return to normal voice)

FREUD

How did you know it was a man? He was behind the door.

DORA

(whispering)

He pushed against the door with all his weight. I felt his erection. Who told you? (pause) Frau K told me.

She read books to me that nobody had ever read to me, while I did her hair.

(silence)

They, at the end of the hall, to the right.

(Herr K close by in the dark)

They don't want to know anything

She acts this out on a side stage

DORA (voice sometimes clear, sometimes drowsy.)

Waiting wouldn't have helped. We could have waited, if I had wanted to. I saw him in a dream. He was mild-mannered, had a pleasing appearance, would not stop staring at me. But it was not him. Is this him now, behind the door? I don't know. I open the door halfway. There's a man in the darkness. I can't see his head. He bends down. I understand his motives. I shut the door, lock the latch. I don't doubt he'll force the door open. He's pushing against the latch. I feel his erection. He's leaning against the door. Too late. He's going to force the door open. He has already opened it. I can't close it. The door is pushed open. I push against the door. I gather my strength up against the left side of the door. I smell smoke. How simple and deadly everything is. It's Him or Me. In the darkness I am dark. The fictitious flesh that pushes at the door disgusts me. I must kill. It's a law. It's a key. The one must kill the other who kills the one who wants to kill who wants to be killed? I want

to kill him. He knows that. He wants to kill me. I know that.

Soon I would like him to kill me. Who'll kill me? Whoever kills me, I want it. I want to be killed. You can stand still for just so long without moving, but eventually you must. Kill me! Kill me! Kill me! It's lingering. This man behind the door, I don't see him. He's a big man, quite young looking. Because I want it-him. I recognize his face? from man to woman. He has a bit of a deceitful look. His eyes are a bit blurry, which doesn't at all go with his mouth. I must get at his neck. That motion demands the greatest energy. At the risk of death, I give it all my strength. I encircle him, I take him in my arms, I lean towards him. From up close, I don't recognize his face; it's not terrifying, as if I knew it well. We know, and where our knowledge crosses we touch secret places which escape neither him nor me. I am not sure to succeed, despite the incredible intensity of my strength. While I am holding onto him, I turn him halfway around and get his head from behind, my arm wraps around his forehead and his skull pushes against my chest, I clench him tightly and I slit his throat. I can't tell the knife from my hand. How hard it is to cut his throat. I don't make a big cut because I am holding him tightly, I slit his throat the length of his neck, but not the width. For a long time afterwards, I can still feel the throat resisting. As if I were still doing it, I feel that particular resistance, with my left hand, I cut like a shot, from left to right. I was holding his head with my right arm. You have to press very firmly, like when you break open a safe. His sadness makes me ill. I had a very sore throat. It's difficult to speak.

FREUD

Herr K evidently traveled often.

DORA

I don't know. I'm not interested in what Herr K does.

FREUD

Do you like to write? Yes.

DORA

No.

FREUD

You sent me a very pretty post card. Do you like receiving post cards?

DORA

I don't care. Herr K used to spend a good part of the year traveling. Like papa. Trips are useful. Each time my father's health takes a turn for the worse, he goes to Berg.

FREUD

Does he stay in Berg for a long time?

8

(immediately following this in a low but brusque voice with violent outbursts on the words in quotes.)

DORA

I'll write a letter. It will be ambiguous. It will begin: "you've killed me." And I'll write: "You've (*tu*) killed me." Then I'll write another letter, on paper as fine as onion skin, which will start with these words: "You wanted it this way . . ." I'll leave it unclear so he can finish it "himself". Because I don't know what he wanted. Nonetheless, "I'm the one" who died. My body's buried. In the woods. It's dark in there. I am voiceless.

FREUD

Tell me about the letter.

DORA

(almost inaudibly)

What letter?

HERR B

I found a letter on the writing-desk. It was on her desk. She said she could no longer endure life. "You wanted it this way," she said; she was bidding us farewell. I suspected that she was not seriously determined to kill herself but I was shaken; a few days later, after a small altercation between us, she fainted for the first time. This frightened me terribly.

DORA

How did they find that letter? It was locked up in my desk.

FREUD

Is your desk locked?

DORA

I don't know. Does someone else also have the keys?

FREUD

Who has the keys?

HERR B

On her desk. It was a first draft. I was especially worried when she fainted.

DORA

(in a pained, staccato voice)

You don't love me!

You think I don't see you? You're abandoning me!

You love her more than me! I want nothing, do you hear? *Nothing*.

You disgust me!

You think you can buy me? You think you can sell me?

(she yells. Herr B is frightened, he tries to quiet her down.)

HERR B

Dora, Dora, Dora, my dear, my sweet, my little girl . . .

Come, come now.

(the voice of a little girl playing with her father)

DORA

You can't imagine how I hate that woman! When she's dead, I'm going to marry you.

FREUD

What were you arguing about?

HERR B

I don't remember anymore. I had just come back from a trip. She seemed tired. I remember I had given her a pearl bracelet.

DORA

I used to really like jewelry, but I don't wear it anymore. While I was living at the K's, she liked to show me her jewelry. She would lend it to me. She told me that the pearls looked better on me than on her.

FREUD

How did you feel about Frau K before the incident?

diacritics / spring 1983

9

DORA

I don't know. Average.

I'm sure that the jewelry my father gave me was chosen by her. I recognize her taste. My father gave me jewelry, especially pearls. Like the ones I saw at Frau K's house.

(pause)

She told me . . . While I did her hair. Me. Standing behind her. The whiteness . . . of her body.

(balletic place change)

HERR K

I am ready to come before you, to clear up all these misunderstandings. Dora is only a child to me. You know how I respect you and your daughter. Did she not live at our house? and was she not most intimate with my wife?

FRAU K

You have no right to criticize your father's actions, my dear; he's a generous man. You know how attached he is to you. Whenever he talks to me about you, tears come to his eyes.

HERR B

. . . all the more reason to be grateful to Frau K.

HERR K

. . . always absolute confidence in her.

HERR B

A man like Herr K could not be harmful to her.

FRAU K

He's a man of base desires; he doesn't know what a real woman is. Men are often like this: they think only of their own satisfaction. But not your poor papa . . . He was so unhappy at that time that he wanted to kill himself. I suddenly sensed this, I went straight to the woods, I found him there. I pleaded with him to go back on this terrible decision. To preserve his life for the sake of his family.

DORA

Always in white. Milky white veils. Crêpe de Chine. I saw HER.

The whiteness of her body, especially her back. A very soft luster; pearly.

HERR K

I am ready to come before you to clear up this misunderstanding. A girl who reads such books cannot claim a man's respect. When she used to vacation with us, my wife practically shared her bedroom with her. And I would stay away, willingly, because we felt that Dora needed that tenderness. My wife was surprised at such inquisitiveness in a girl her age.

FRAU K

You know you can tell me everything and ask me anything. There's nothing I would hide from you. The brutality of certain experiences has permanently kept me distant from men.

DORA

You are absolutely everything. And me, nothing, nothing. Nobody.

Listen! I love you as if you were god. Someone.

For whom I do not exist.

For whom I live. For nobody

(in adoration in front of Frau K, who, seated in front of her mirror, looks at her without turning around, with a terribly calm and unfathomable smile)

HERR B

Herr and Frau K had often talked of getting divorced. This never happened because Herr K, who was an affectionate father, would not give up either of the two children.

HERR K

(echo)

Neither of my children.

DORA

I visited Dresden. My cousin wanted to take me around the gallery. I refused his offer. I rushed to the door. I left. I wandered about the city. I went to the gallery alone. There's a painting there that I can't look at – without . . . I lingered for a long time. In front of the

painting. It was *The Sistine Madonna*, I stood, alone, immersed. In the painting. Two hours. In her aura. A very gentle smile. You cannot see her teeth. Only a pearly glimmer, between her lips.

FREUD

What was it that captured you in the painting?

DORA

The . . . Her . . .

Suddenly, the evidence, unnoticed perhaps by everyone: the infant Jesus held by the Madonna is none other than a baby Dora.

filmed sequence of three stills. The Sistine Madonna, substitution of the Madonna, and Frau K. Dora behind the Madonna, seen through a mirror.

**(the audience does not know who is speaking, Mary or Frau K)
(very gently)**

FRAU K

You also must live.

DORA **(to Freud)**

I shared her room, I was her confidante and even her counselor. She talked to me about all the difficulties of married life. There was nothing we wouldn't discuss.

FRAU K

(laughing gently)

Me, I call a spade a spade.

(they laugh)

There's more than one way. A body has all kinds of ways.

You'll see.

DORA

Let me embrace you!

(Frau K smiling more and more sweetly, from farther and farther away, vaporous, infinite, very near, inaccessible, with her motions, with her body, says no, resists Dora's reach. Calmly.)

DORA

Let me take you in my arms! Just this once!

DORA **(to Freud)**

I don't know. She just appeared before me. Her smile. As if she were smiling to herself . . .

FREUD

Two hours? What moved you?

DORA

(after a long silence)

Her.

DORA **(to Frau K)**

I'm standing here! Before you. I'm waiting. If only! if only you would tell me!

FRAU K

But I have nothing to say.

DORA

All that you know: All that I don't know. Let me give you that love.

(Dora nestles up against an uneasy Frau K)

DORA

Her body, a delightful white glow. Tiny breasts, the skin on her belly very smooth.

FRAU K

(her hand covering Dora's mouth)

Oh! Impossible, impossible, my silly little one.

DORA

I hurt. I'm always hurting, put your hands on my head, hold me.

FRAU K

My goodness. What am I going to do with you?

diacritics / spring 1983

11

DORA

Look at me. I would like to see behind your eyes. I would like you to close your eyes.

DORA

Her way of looking at herself. Of loving herself. Of not suffering. Of not looking at me. Of looking at me, so calmly. With that smile.

DORA

I owe her everything. I used to cherish her.

FREUD

How can you be attracted to the man that your dearest friend told you so many bad things about?

DORA

(answers aside to Frau K)

She's an intelligent woman, superior to the men who surround her, and adorably beautiful! . . . how white your back is! and your skin! How I love you!

(murmur and very light brush of a kiss.)

Can I? . . . and also here, just above.

You cannot imagine how I love you: if I were a man, I would marry you, I would carry you away and I would marry you, I would know just how to please you.

FRAU K

Dora!

DORA **(to Freud)**

They weren't made for each other.

HERR B

I am waiting for an explanation.

HERR K

A girl interested in such things cannot claim a man's respect. She read Mantegazza. She knows more about these things than you do. My wife was so surprised that she had a talk with me about this.

DORA

Tell me more, tell me all, everything.

(with, against Frau K)

All the things that women know how to do: make jam, make love, put on make-up, bake pastries, adopt babies, cook meat, dress a bird. I saw my grandmothers do these things when I was little. But me, do I know how to do them? I should learn. When she told me that if she had to choose between coming back to earth as a man or a woman, she had often thought about this, she wouldn't hesitate, it's definitely women that rule, I realized I wouldn't know, I have often thought about this, but I don't know. Which to choose? But if I were a man, I would know. But I would be a man, a hot-headed man. What else? I would be an overly gentle man, maybe I would be brutal, I would be apprehensive, I would be sleazy.

FRAU K

Patience, patience! It takes practice. Patience, my dear, it will come. With a bit of ruse, too. Woman must learn her lesson. Close the curtains.

(sound of curtains closing, then Dora's voice, murmuring and growing more distant.)

DORA

It's like a grotto. Where are you? It's like a grotto; it's me! Me in myself, in the shadow. In you.

(Dora's voice in the distance)

Sometimes full, sometimes empty, and always dark. One could understand everything. Then one could change the world. Time opens and shuts like hesitant eyes. Don't tell anyone, the things I know. Swear you won't.

FRAU K

I promise.

DORA

(bitterly, hissing.)

You've killed me! You've betrayed me.

DORA

(bitterly, hissing.)

You've killed me! You've betrayed me. You've deceived me!

"Who" is abandoning me

Did I not write you innumerable letters?

Did I not worship your every step?

Did I not open my doors?

Did my heart not break over you?

There is nothing kindly that I didn't do for you. I followed you.

I caressed, I polished; I would have given my right hand for you. I spoke to you when you were listening, and when you weren't. I told you, I surrendered, I was crushed under your rule, I made your bed. I chased the shadow from your bed, who are you to abandon me?

And now, to whom do I send this letter?

To whom my silence? To whom my death?

DORA

And you? Who are you jealous of now? Why? You "are" jealous. Tell me. Well, answer. Do you want me to tell you? Close the curtains! Close the curtains! I am going to show you all you want to see. You too are like that.

FREUD

No, if that's the way it is, leave . . .

DORA

That's all?

(Door. Opened. Closed. Footsteps.)

HERR K's voice

But what did she want, finally?

DORA

Nothing, now. Nothing ever again.

(a still shot of the Madonna. Dora stands in front and says, sadly)

DORA

I beg you, give to me. Do something for me. Tell me the words that give birth. Nourish me. I am dead, dead! I don't even desire anymore. Make something happen to me!

HERR K

Don't be afraid. You know me. Can't you trust me, even a bit?

DORA

You called me *tu* yesterday.

HERR K

Come, don't be afraid.

DORA

He had said: "Come, I'll tell you your real name." I would have so much liked him to tell me.

HERR K

Let's go, come, come, take my hand – What's stopping you?

DORA

He was calling me. I couldn't move. As if the world was going to fly open. He had to pull me. I wanted him to take me away.

HERR K

You know me. Don't close up. Trust me. Don't you know you can trust me?

DORA

I would like to. I don't understand myself. I was so heavy. I want so much to believe you.

HERR K

You called me *tu* yesterday. You know we don't have much time . . . Dora. That doesn't mean nothing is possible. I'll keep my word.

DORA

Say nothing to me. Please don't speak. There's something in your voice . . .

HERR K

What should I do? What did I not do?

DORA

You talk too much. I like to reach and touch you in your silences.

FREUD

And did you think: "I know who the other is"?

DORA

I don't know.

HERR K's voice

As if she feared the best. As if she chose to be alone, because she didn't wish to be alone. Just the opposite.

DORA **(to Freud)**

I dreamt that he rejected me and that I saw him for the last time. He told me: "I don't resent you. I don't take back any of the things I've said, I'm faithful to my word, did I not keep my word, yes." And he said: "I don't hold any grudge against you, you know me somewhat – and that's true – yes – I do know him better than anyone else – and: "I've made up my mind, and my decision is as firm as ever, and that's that." And the tears rolled down my cheeks, but I said yes, yes, that's true, then he said these words: "I'm taking back my pearls!" He did say that, and then: "I gave you the key to the box; I'm taking it back." What use was it to cry? In the midst of such absurd words? And I said: yes, yes – as if I wanted to die. But what key?

HERR K

What key?

FREUD

What box?

DORA

Some time ago, Herr K had given me a very precious little jewelry box. For my birthday.

FREUD

Good. And the key?

HERR K's voice

And if I had asked her to wait for me?

DORA

The afternoon following the walk around the lake, from which Herr K and I returned separately, I stretched out on the chaise lounge in the bedroom to sleep for a little while. I awoke suddenly.

(startling noise)

What are you doing here!

HERR K

It's my room, nobody will prevent me from coming in when I want.

Besides, I need to get something in here.

DORA

(sadly and out of breath.)

I rushed up to leave. I ran. Then *I dreamt that I was running away*. I saw myself on a beach, running. The sand was so sharp, it was cutting into my feet. *I was with a woman bigger and stronger than I, and my exact opposite, feature for feature. I called her dear Frau K. She made me feel ashamed. She was exactly what I could have been, feature for feature. I didn't need to explain it to her. She was supremely indifferent to my failures. While going down, I felt like I was running from myself. I, too, was abandoning me.*

FREUD's voice

As if she were running away from herself. So as not to arrive. So as not to die, either.

DORA

(continuing, stranded)

That's when I saw him again. There! It was Him! So distant! A few yards from me. Still, too far. So far. I knew that some day.

FREUD's voice

Looking for him everywhere, forever. As if He existed. As if he were waiting only for her. Only for her arrival, before he'd disappear.

DORA

There was no reason to hope. Everything separates us. He told me: (Frau K's voice) "Thus, nothing is different." And I couldn't reach him because, here where I am, nothing is alive. I was back in the past.

FREUD's voice

Everything that was happening to her was a happening from the past. She was living in her memory. Fallen prey to her past. Without any hope of ever reaching the present.

DORA

She encouraged me to live, unaware of my terrible suffering. Which I can't even express. I couldn't even cry.

FREUD

Completely lost, between desire and love.

DORA

When I wanted to lock myself in the room to rest in the afternoon, the key was gone. I'm sure it was Herr K who took it.

FREUD

Whether a girl be "opened" or "closed" is not a fact to be lightly dismissed. We know which key works in this case.

DORA

I "knew" you would say that!

FREUD

Didn't you ever feel like giving Herr K a present in return? It wouldn't have been out of place.

DORA

Absolutely not. I never thought of it. I was on my guard. I was afraid he would come into my room while I was getting dressed.

FREUD

Into "his" room?

DORA

Frau K always left early to walk with him. But it did not bother me any more.

FREUD

Maybe you missed him?

DORA

Absolutely not. I even promised myself I would not stay at the K's without papa, because papa was living in the hotel and always left early in the morning. I dressed very quickly to catch up to him!

HERR K

I'm in my own house.

DORA

There's a mistake.

HERR K

There's no mistake. You are in my house.

DORA

I'll take my pearls and I'll throw them.

(sound of pearls rolling)

(angrily)

HERR K

I'll take back my key. Give me my keys.

DORA

(childishly)

No.

DORA

(from a distance)

Where are we heading. Where are we heading? Where are we heading! And if something horrible happens there, it will be papa's fault, Herr K gave me a jewel case. So. I'll give Herr K my jewelry box. Better yet, I won't.

FREUD

Let's continue.

(Dora looks around, turns on her chair, says nothing)

FREUD

If you're looking for your small purse, it's on your knees. You haven't stopped fiddling with it for an hour. By the way, it's quite pretty.

DORA **(suspiciously)**

Is this the first time you've noticed it?

FREUD

It's the first time I've seen you with it. Here, at least.

DORA

I take my little purse with me wherever I go.

(anguished)

It's stuck, you see, I fiddled with it because I couldn't get it to open. Look, see how hard it is. It can't be opened.

FREUD

Don't you think this can apply to something other than the purse?

DORA **(scornfully)**

Yes, if you insist. That's what men seem to think.

FREUD

He whose lips are silent chatters with his fingertips.

Unclear words, by means of free association, become sharp as needles.

DORA

Pricked, pierced, stitched, unstitched. It's all women's work.

DORA

I've got a dream.

FREUD

Yes . . .

DORA

I know how to do . . .

FREUD

What do you know how to do?

DORA

To make dreams rise, to expand them, to cook them, to roll them and put them in my mouth.

(This sequence on film, in the background)

I am sitting at the table next to my grandmothers. They're happily eating cake. A low drone announces the wedding procession. I am shocked; sad and ashamed; I realize there's no longer enough cake. I ate several pieces, out of nervousness, I gorged myself, horrible embarrassment at the idea that I ate other people's cake, between Herr and Frau K, holding hands, then my father and his wife, holding hands. I don't know what they're thinking. They're all beautiful and gentle and friendly. Since this is the first time I've seen them all together, I don't know whom to serve first. I'll go ask my three grandmothers how to divide the cake evenly. They're dying of laughter, mouths full, they've eaten everything.

Herr K turns towards me and says, perfectly naturally: "*Can you, at any given moment, at a moment's notice, be ready to spend two hours with me?*" Troubled by the naturalness, recalling another time, distraught. What does papa think about this?

I cannot answer. *For what? Ready to what?* I avoid having to answer, I apologize for not answering. I ask them if they want to play cards (which I don't know how to play) or maybe checkers . . . There are five of them for with against me.

And if one of them killed me, ah, if one of them killed me before my very eyes what revenge. My body in pieces on the table, replacing the cake.

DORA

(she inhales, gets up, walks to center stage)

I smell smoke.

FREUD

Tell me about smoke.

DORA

In the last dream, I smelled smoke. And in the other dreams.

FREUD

Yes? And?

DORA

There was always a smell of smoke. It would suddenly hit me. I would get up with a start. This dream recurred three times. My father is standing in front of my bed and wakes me up. I am asleep but I see him. There must be a fire in the house. I dress quickly. Momma wants to save her jewelry box but papa says: "I don't want my two children and myself to be burnt for the sake of your jewelry box." We run downstairs and as soon as I get outside, I wake up.

FREUD

Did you dream this during your first few nights at Linz or the last few before you left?

DORA

I don't know. I think it was after.

FREUD

For how long after the incident did you stay at Linz?

DORA

Four more days.

The afternoon following the outing around the lake, I stretched out, as usual, on the chaise longue in his bedroom to sleep a bit. I got up with a start and saw Herr K standing in front of me . . .

FREUD

Was it Herr K? Are you sure?

DORA

(startled, she cries out)

What's the matter?

HERR B

Hurry up, get dressed, come downstairs.

(Dora gets up. Herr B exclaims forcefully)

I don't want my two children to be burnt because of you!

DORA

As soon as I get outside, I wake up. I wonder why momma is in the dream. She wasn't with us at Linz.

FREUD's voice

But is it for her, or for someone else, that her father brought the jewelry. And Herr K offered her a jewelry box.

DORA

(to whom? To papa? To Herr K?)

I'm ready. I would have given you what your wife refuses you. It will be her fault.

FREUD

The secret lies in your mother. What role does your mother play? In the past, she competed with you for your father's love.

DORA

I "knew" that "you" would say that!

FREUD

So you know who replaces whom.

DORA

(growing weary)

Knowledge. Knowing. But *nobody knows* anything. What does it mean? To know? Do I know what I know, do I know it? Nothing means anything. If only there were a god . . .

FREUD

Who stood by your bed when you were little?

DORA

I don't know. My father . . .?

FREUD

I don't know. Someone stood before you and woke you up. Why?

DORA

Tell me what you know.

FREUD

I don't "know" anything.

DORA

What good does that do? What are you trying to get me to say?

FREUD

. . . To make you understand.

DORA

I forgot. Yes, I don't see.

FREUD

No smoke without fire.

DORA

(ironically)

And no fire without water?

FREUD

Exactly.

(he smiles)

Fire is the opposite of water: in the dream where there is fire, there is water. You surely "needed to leave" because of fire. But also to avoid a little mishap . . . Besides, fire ignites, it can perfectly well represent love. Thus, from fire there is a path, with leads . . .

DORA

I hear you coming!

FREUD

You don't know how right you are! You hear me coming. There where another has already been, a long time ago, a very long time ago.

DORA

Don't you think you're interpreting all that a bit too subjectively?

FREUD

That's possible. Nonetheless, I am only trying to show you what the dreams are saying.

I see that the contrast between water and fire in your dreams serves your purposes beautifully. What does one do to prevent children from wetting their beds? Wake them up. In the dream, your father wakes you up. Herr K wakes you up.

DORA

Tell me, Doctor, why was I struck with illness? Why me?

FREUD

What illness? You aren't . . .

DORA

(cutting him off)

It comes from my father. He was already ill before he got married. It's poison that gets passed on. He got sick because of the derelict life he was leading. He transmitted his illness to momma. And I'm ill too.

FREUD

What illness?

DORA

Like momma, when we had to go to Franzsbad for her treatment. She had a discharge and abdominal pains.

FREUD

Do you think you have venereal disease? For how long do you think you've had it?

(silence)

For how long?

(silence)

FREUD

Do you know why you cough?

DORA

My father also coughs.

FREUD

You think that the "illness" comes from your father, but it's shifted from the throat to the abdomen or from the abdomen to the throat according to its connection with you or your mother. As for the coughing, you claim that what you call "your illness" is your father's fault.

DORA

But I really do cough!

FREUD

Yes.

DORA

I got dressed quickly. I was afraid he would come in on me while I was dressing. So I dressed very quickly.

(murmuring)

I dress quickly.

(breathless)

As soon as I'm outside, I wake up, I'm wet with sweat. The smell of smoke wakes me up.

FREUD

You get dressed quickly: to hide the secret.

DORA

But I never said anything of the kind.

FREUD

He whose lips are silent . . .

DORA

Yes, yes, I know. And he who chatters with his fingertips? Why do you spin your pen seven times in your hand before speaking? Why?

FREUD

We must respect the rules!

DORA

"We must respect the rules."

(she mimics him)

(she paces the floor)

Where are your cigarettes?

FREUD

(sound of a lighter)

Good. You can go. I'll see you on Tuesday, right?

DORA

Right?

(she breaks out in laughter)

VOICE OF THE PLAY

(very cold and monotone, Freud's voice)

during which time the incident by the lake is projected on the screen with several modifications.

Doctor Freud could have dreamt this, at the end of December, 1899. Dora is an exuberant girl, eighteen or nineteen years old. She has something contradictory and strange about her which is attractive. A healthy complexion but a rigid mouth, a girl's forehead, fixed icy eyes. She looks like those hidden cupids, vengeful and dangerous. Doctor Freud cannot take his eyes off her. Dora, holding him by the hand tightly, like an irritated governess, led him to the edge of the mountain lake which she pointed out to him with one finger. She does not throw him into the water; but she insists that he go pick a bouquet of the brilliant white flowers growing on the other side of the lake whose scent he can smell despite their distance. Even though Freud is hesitant, he is curious, because he senses that this is a test or maybe a trap. He wonders why they didn't get off the train one station earlier which would have left them on the other side of the lake. But not for long, because Dora suddenly eyes him up and down, casts him a scornful look and turns her back on him, moving her neck in a way that overwhelms him: freely, haughtily, relentlessly. Then, without any warning, she raises her dress in a purposely seductive gesture which slightly reveals her ankle, and she walks across the lake, stepping on hundreds of bones. Something prevents Freud from doing the same.

(then a canon of voices, Herr B, Herr K, Frau K, and Freud speak in succession)

HERR B

The young girl insisted that he go pick a bouquet of those white flowers growing on the other side of the lake.

HERR K

She hated the white flowers growing on the other side of the lake, they gave off too bitter a scent.

diacritics / spring 1983

19

FRAU K

She agrees with him that it would be better not to touch them.

HERR B

With her white hand, she was fiddling awkwardly with the pearls around her neck. Without thinking about it. Her eyes elsewhere.

FREUD

Annoyed, Freud suddenly slaps her to stop this.

DORA

She sometimes wondered if she weren't Herr K herself. In his place, how she would have loved her!

FREUD

She said she would have liked to rest on the grass of his chest.

DORA

Of whom? You know that you are everything to me. To whom? Do I mean nothing to you?

FREUD

The worst was that he felt ridiculous from the moment that the greatest dream was emerging from the depths of his being.

HERR B

Then my fears were perfectly natural.

FREUD

Naturally.

HERR B

That's not right at all! People do need to get up in the night.

FREUD

And if someone woke her up.

DORA

Papa came to my bed. He woke me with a kiss; he protected me. How wonderful everything was when he loved only me and when he would wake me up!

FREUD

Go on.

DORA

And now . . .

Herr K is a smoker. I smoke. Compulsively. Papa is also a compulsive smoker.

FREUD

Seeing that I am also a smoker.

DORA

I must go. I must escape. I cannot stay here any longer.

FREUD

But who is replacing whom in this story?

DORA

Yes. Everyone. Except me.

(sudden noise)

How I adored him! My God! (How he loved me, then.)

FREUD

Yes, who is replacing whom? He used to stay by your bed. He would wake you with a kiss. And if it were your father who stood by your bed? In place of Herr K.

DORA

And now, what am I to him?

FREUD

And Herr K?

DORA

(looking at Frau K)

I feel nothing for that man.

20

Papa takes advantage of the times when Herr K's not around. Herr K takes advantage of the times when papa's not around. Everyone knows how to suit themselves.

FREUD

And Dora?

DORA

He didn't want to recognize Herr K's behavior, it would have put a strain on his relationship with her.

FREUD

And you?

DORA

I never went to her house when papa was there. It was only natural. I was delighted that he found a woman of whom he could be fond. My father's actions are none of my business.

FREUD

And Dora's actions?

DORA

I don't resent anyone. How could I resent him? My reproaches were unfair. He gave me up for this woman. She took him from me. But how could I resent him?

FREUD

Who?

DORA

Who betrays whom in this story? Nobody. There are no reproaches? . . . Give me my coat. I'm leaving.

(While breaking away from Freud, she rehearses, all her good-byes, she's already gone, she doesn't look at him: she sees herself, again moving away, being abandoned.)

DORA

Once again, Alone. Everyone else stays behind. You let me leave. I had hung my coat up first on the coat rack. And you had hung your coats on top of mine, as if to say: You don't belong here.

DORA

(slow, sleepy voice)

I'll take back the coat. Too nice for me. It was a leather coat which I didn't recognize. A kind of leather that I didn't know, extraordinarily fine and supple, clear with an orange tint.

Is it mine? I searched the pockets to make sure. He had warned me so many times. Could I have left something in the pockets, letters, perhaps?

HERR K's voice

What carelessness! I warned you a thousand times!

DORA

It didn't matter anymore.

(sound of paper rustling in a pocket)

FREUD

What are you crumpling in your pocket?

DORA

Nothing. Good-bye.

(she leaves with a clatter)

FREUD's voice

In a burst of silence, she goes up and down Linz's scorching streets, slowly, hardened by a fatal mourning. She says nothing. She feels minute. A speck of dust. She knows the horror of sorrow much more intense than desire.

DORA

Dying of exhaustion. All that could have been. Wears me out.

HERR K's voice

Where are you going?

DORA

To a place where I, too, might sleep

As for going on in the same path, I'm ready to give up.

FREUD

She felt worn out. Ridiculed.

DORA

I could have said Yes. Just once! His lips would have smelled of smoke. You understood nothing! So, did you never understand anything?

FREUD

If only she could have spoken . . .

DORA

It's not my fault. When one can no longer speak, one is dead. If I wrote him a superhuman letter, with my own blood, if I explained to him who I could have been if I had been able to if he looked at me if I would show him, my hands in my pockets, the letters balled up in my hands, if I showed him my strength my life my worth right there where I am burning up, if I caught his glance just long enough to set water on fire and the sun in the shade, if I shot him full of remorse if I aroused him. So, if I killed him, if I crushed him . . .

(silence)

FREUD

It still remains to be understood why you were so offended by Herr K's advances.

DORA

Good-bye.

(in a voice which comes to Freud from high up and far away)

(cut)

(then she murmurs.)

(sung:)

One never knows who kills, death can kill. Who wants to kill who wants to die who wants to put someone to death I don't know who anymore, did I know it, I know I knew it, I knew it before I wished for it, but it's hardly wished, and what then? The thing which holds me back, if I am held back, (though I'm not), is the other. But is it, and the other, if it is the other, is it she or he or . . . ? In taking your own life, you can kill.

HERR K

I take the keys and shoot.

(pistol shot)

And I take back my keys.

DORA

How will I forgive you?

HERR K

You know me. I would have given everything.

I take back what I have given.

DORA

Give me back the keys. Tiny little keys.

HERR K

I'm taking them back.

DORA

That's not the first time.

DORA

Is this all we get out of it?

FREUD

On the threshold.

DORA

I'm on time. Why are you looking at me that way? Persistently?

FREUD

I'm not looking at you persistently.

DORA

Why not?

FREUD

No, no. None of this. You know I'm an institution.

DORA

Is it all right if I take off my shoes?

(Freud's silence. He sighs.)

DORA

My foot hurts. Does my foot bother you? It's not nicely shaped?

(she laughs.)

Good, tell me something and I'll do it just to please you.

FREUD

Put your shoe back on and tell me a dream.

DORA

Who was that?

FREUD

Who?

DORA

You know. That woman. That's not the first time I've seen her leave here. I see everything. You like to be secretive too.

FREUD

No, that's a former patient; she has stayed in touch with my family since she was cured.

DORA

In touch with my family.

FREUD

Come on, don't be a baby. Believe me. And tell me your dream.

DORA

Don't be a baby.

(Frau K is there, sitting not too far from Dora, who doesn't see her but who hears her.

Frau K's voice reaches her from the back, goes right through her.)

FRAU K

Come here. Tell me what's new with you.

DORA

I have nothing to tell. There's never any news.

FRAU K

Tell me a bit about yourself.

DORA

Can't you love me even a little? A tiny bit?

FRAU K

Of course I can love you a bit. But what does that mean? Love?

DORA

So you don't love me at all? I don't appeal to you in any way?

FRAU K

But I don't even think about that! You are likeable.

Someone will love you. I really like all that you are.

DORA

I can't give you anything? Why don't you have any need for me?

FRAU K

I need nothing, nobody. That does not mean that you are nothing to me.

DORA

Will you see me again?

FRAU K

Why not?

DORA

Some day, I'd like to be lying next to you. Not seated – lying next to you. I close my eyes and I see. There'd be blood everywhere. I'd have it on my face.

FRAU K

What carnage! As for me, I see you standing full of life, getting ready to go on a trip . . .

DORA

And me, I see you dead. I would like to see you dead. So that nobody could touch you. Could see you . . .

FRAU K

People think like that when they're ten.

DORA

When they're too full of love.

FRAU K

The desire to be dreaded the most.

(moved, moving)

(silence)

DORA

I dreamt.

FREUD

Tell me your dream.

DORA

I dreamt about you . . .

(She stops dead.)

FREUD

Tell me your dream.

DORA

What will you give me?

FREUD

Not a jewelry box. But, all of my attention.

(smiling)

DORA

It's strange. I see myself going up *the stairs leading to your apartment. I ring the bell. Your former patient answers the door and says: "You can come in, he's already dead."* I look at her face. Even though she's about ten years older than I am, she has young skin, open features, looks natural. I don't realize until later that she is abnormally tall. After she tells me *this, I don't feel at all sad. I notice there are many women waiting in the living room, hoping to get a job in the house.*

At that moment, I hear dance music. The young woman comes forward and wants to dance with me. She places her arm around my waist. I accept, though I'm a bit surprised because I was expecting a male partner. Who am I? I don't know how to dance; but I let myself go. I feel awkward. I suggest or she suggests a third person. I don't know if she's a man or woman.

(Dora mumbles, barely audibly, the italicized phrases)

I wonder who I am to her. We go down dancing; I dance poorly.

Then I realize that my underwear has fallen down to my knees.

(she props her head up on her partner's shoulder and sighs)

I pull it up in front of my partners, lifting my dress first. I see that all three of us were your patients and I wonder if you had a favorite. *What do you think about this?*

FREUD

And you?

DORA

I didn't feel at all sad. I felt a deep tenderness for my companion, but my awkwardness kept me from expressing it. It wasn't until I woke up that I felt full of sadness, as if I had really loved and lost her.

FREUD

Did the idea ever occur to you that your desire to be saved from danger by your father was running into an obstacle, that it was your father who had exposed you to this danger?

DORA

What does that have to do with anything? Is that all you've found?

FREUD

You don't like that idea.

DORA

(exasperated)

What's the connection? Good God! What's the connection?

(While I was dancing, I felt awkward but very gentle, overflowing with tenderness. At one point, it's strange, she tells me that she has to carry this heavy bag with her every day. I offer to take it from her, to relieve her for a moment. But instead of holding it with my hand like she does, I make it into a shoulder strap, and I tell her that my arm's too weak and limp, but that my shoulder is strong. The bag was so extraordinarily heavy that I was immediately staggering under the weight and I had to crouch down and lean at the side of the road so as not to be carried off by this weight. I couldn't take another step.

FREUD

And the dead man?

DORA

I knew you were dead. It was understood between us. It wasn't you that I came to see, as a matter of fact, because this was understood between us. I came to hear or to share the news.

FREUD

Do you know why you wanted to kill me?

DORA

No, do you?

FREUD

And with the young woman, did you not feel threatened?

DORA

No, not really. Rather, I felt embarrassed. As if I were mentally retarded. In one sense, I was flattered that she trusted me, but I realized that I was disappointing her: I danced poorly, I got tangled up in my underwear. I no longer thought about your death. It was as if it had always been that way. Or as if it were perfectly normal that you had always been dead.

FREUD

That's not untrue. But maybe I am not. For you.

DORA

Maybe. Yes. It doesn't matter.

FREUD

We'll talk about it again. See you on Tuesday?

DORA

Maybe.

FREUD

You'll tell me . . . Should I see you out?

DORA

No.

DORA

(sharp outbursts in a staccato voice)

This-cure-is-lasting-too-long. How much longer still?

FREUD

I told you, one year. Still six months left.

DORA

One year, why? Why not two years? or two days?

FREUD

You still need help for another few months.

DORA

I don't need a governess.

FREUD

Did you have a governess?

DORA

Oh yes! She was single, no longer young, well-read, and very open-minded.

FREUD

Was she pretty? Attractive?

DORA

No. She was bland.

HERR B

That woman won't stop making my daughter turn against Frau K.

DORA

I got along well with her.

She didn't like Frau K. She told my mother that it was beneath her dignity to tolerate such an intimacy between her husband and another woman.

FREUD

Did she have any influence on you?

DORA

She was in love with papa. But I didn't hold it against her. Besides, my father never paid any attention to her.

HERR B

She suddenly became hostile to her and insisted upon her dismissal.

FREUD

And what became of her?

DORA

She was dismissed. And two hours later, she left without a word.

DORA

If I weren't there to fall, how would they walk?

HERR B

You're stronger than all of us combined.

(Filmed sequence – Danced – It's Dora, her body expressing sadness, desire, a strength divided, restrained)

FRAU K's voice

They all take their guns. They shower Dora with thousands of pearls to show she's stronger than all of them combined. They prove this amidst a cloud of smoke.

When the smoke clears, we see Dora's ghost, the strongest of them all gathering thousands of these small pearls in her apron, which she then releases over an opened attaché case. That's in case they might be short of ammunition.

(pause)

DORA

There's also a governess who did that at the K's.

FREUD

Well! You haven't ever talked to me about that.

DORA

She acted very strangely towards Herr K. She didn't greet him, didn't answer him, never handed him anything at the table; in short, she treated him as if he didn't exist. He, on the other hand, was hardly any more polite to her. One or two days before the incident by the lake, she told me that Herr K begged her never to refuse him anything; he told her his wife was nothing to him, etc. . . .

FREUD

But those are the words . . .

DORA

Yes. She gave in. And then he paid no more attention to her; since then, she hated him.

FREUD

And what became of this girl?

DORA

I only know that she left.

FREUD

If he had persisted, if he had continued to woo her with a passion capable of changing her mind, maybe love would have conquered all difficulties?

What's more, this plan would not have been so impossible to carry out. Frau K would agree to a divorce, and, as for your father, he gives you anything you want.

DORA

What I wanted? And you, what do you want?

DORA

Herr K had spoken to me sincerely, I think.

FREUD

Yes.

DORA

But I didn't let him finish.

FREUD

What were his exact words?

DORA

I don't remember anymore. He told me: you know my wife means nothing to me. I immediately cut him off.

HERR K

You know my wife means nothing to me.

DORA

(to Herr K, beyond him to Freud)

So as not to meet him again, I decided to walk around the lake to Linz and I asked a passer-by how much time it would take. He said: two and a half hours. I remember another detail? In my dream I saw the "inside" of the woods, as if my sight penetrated within. From a distance, I noticed flowers . . . Lots of flower-beds. White. (A young looking woman springs up.)

FRAU K

What are you looking for?

DORA

In the distance I saw a big plot of white flowers. Are they forbidden? No.

FRAU K

These plants grow naturally, abundantly.

DORA

How much time will it take?

FRAU K

They're pretty far away. The flower-bed must be more than a mile, even by taking the shortcut.

DORA

That's too far. I give up.

I caught up with the boat. Herr K was on it.

HERR K

And I beg you to forgive me and not to tell anyone what happened.

DORA

And if I told your wife?

You offer me a cigarette. And I accept, delaying my departure for twenty-four hours because you promise me you'll help me tomorrow. Out of weariness, I agree to spend the night with you. You smoke two cigarettes. You have one in your mouth and one in your hand. You talk non-stop.

DORA

I can't last any longer. Besides, the cigarette is burning down.

FREUD

(insinuating voice)

One more puff!

DORA

Let's do it fast and then beat it!

FREUD

(insinuating voice)

And if we went on a trip?

DORA

I don't have the courage to start all over again. I accepted the cigarette out of weariness. But as for desire, I'm incapable of it. I can no longer smoke or travel. So long, good-bye! Where's the train station?

FREUD

Was that Lily of the Valley growing in big white patches near the woods, one or two miles from your hand?

DORA

And if the white flowers had been blue, would I have given up?

(imitating her mother's voice)

They tell me: For shame! Dora, what are you doing? That's poison. It turns you into an idiot.

DORA

Where! is! the! station!

(she yells)

VOICE OF THE PLAY (Frau K)

What Lily of the Valley says in a dream

Herr K said with a jewelry box.

What one says with flowers

Papa said with pearls

What Dora did not say

the doctor said with smoke.

DORA

At last. Finally, I'm at the station.

HERR K

There's no train. The tracks are cut.

Are you annoyed to see me?

DORA

Frankly – Yes

HERR K

Is this the last time I'll see you?

DORA

(an underhanded silence – as effective as a look)

HERR K

What a silence! You, who usually spoke so much.

FREUD

(in his normal voice)

You knew there'd be no train? No flowers in the woods; no train in the station. It's not an accident. There's something you don't want to explore or grasp.

DORA

I get to the station. I'm alone. You had insisted that I come.

FREUD

The trip to Vienna would last six months, maybe. Or even nine.

HERR K

My little dear, Dora. You know how attached I am to you.

(Fantasized – to the sound of a slow, distorted Viennese waltz)

DORA

You've treated me like a servant. I'm leaving you. Nobody'll accompany me. I'm alone in a strange city. I look at a painting of the Madonna. Nobody touches me. I'll never marry.

FRAU K

You're a virgin, sweetheart!

FREUD

And you spent hours gazing at this painting?

DORA

She had soothing, white skin.

FREUD

That's what you said about Frau K.

DORA

No, it's me!

(dance music)

FRAU K

Why don't you dance?

DORA

She was a mature woman at that time, but she didn't show her age. Besides, she spent a major portion of her life in bed.

FRAU K

You don't want to have children? You have such a maternal, caring attitude towards my children. Why don't you dance? This is what I like. You must be cheerful, be active, live to the fullest. You are always so serious.

DORA

It's true. No; Yes.

FRAU K

You're so serious! You are too serious, sweetheart!

DORA

She cheerfully lectured me. It's true that I was serious and reserved. She told me: You're always so serious. It's strange, isn't it? I asked her questions about pregnancy and giving birth. And she liked to satisfy my curiosity, to tell me about virginity and having children, about those kinds of things.

FRAU K

You are always so serious, my little one: too serious. Be careful. You must know what life is all about. Do you know enough about life? You cannot be a madonna. You are too handsome, little one.

DORA

Too handsome! That's strange.

FRAU K

It's so easy to make a blunder. Listen.

(whispering)

You don't know how to live.

(she laughs)

Hey, that's pretty cute. I could be your mother. Listen . . .

DORA

If I jumped on her? If I knocked her over? If I spanked her? She doesn't like me. If only she saw herself. My head's on too straight for her to turn it around. I could retaliate.

FREUD

Why is it that you've always so generously spared Frau K, the one who did slander you, while you persecute the others with an almost sly vengeance . . . ?

DORA

She had gentle, slow gestures that I liked a lot. One day a long time ago, I sprained my right foot falling on the staircase. My foot got swollen. She had to bandage it up. I had to keep off it for several weeks. She kept me company and spoke to me as if I were her friend. She confided in me. She told me her husband didn't want a divorce because of the children.

FREUD

Haven't you ever thought that a divorce would have been desirable for everybody?

DORA

I had a weird dream. I was running. My right foot hurt very badly. I had to sit. My ankle had swollen up. I couldn't move it any more. I wanted to speak to Doctor K. I knew all the time that he wasn't a real doctor. I wanted to ask his advice. I ask for him on the phone. Finally I get him. It's not he, it's his wife. I feel her presence there, veiled, white, intriguing.

FRAU K

(on the phone)

Who's calling?

DORA

She asks me.

Frau K speaking . . . I say.

FRAU K

(on the phone)

That's going too far!

DORA

Funny situation!

FRAU K

(on the phone)

What nerve!

DORA

(speaking quietly, without hesitating)

I know. Let me speak to him.

FRAU K

(on the phone)

All right.

DORA

She puts him on the phone. He tells me he can't do much; that I have to wait until next year. I laugh. He says: "You know that . . ." But I don't let him finish. I hang up.

FREUD

So you don't let him finish. Your ankle swells up. You give birth. Nine months after the incident by the lake. Thus, you still manage to have a child by Herr K. Something happened by the lake?

DORA

Nothing happened!

FREUD

As I suspected. That's where you made this blunder from which you still suffer the consequences today. You had regrets. You still regret the outcome of that incident. The Madonna is not what you wanted to be. Your love for Herr K doesn't end there.

(Dora is silent)

FREUD

Why did you prevent him from continuing?

DORA

That's all?

FREUD

I'm not unhappy with the results.

DORA

Your results are totally insignificant.

Doctor, do you know this is the last time I'll come here?

FREUD

Are you telling me?

DORA

Yes, I thought I'd be a patient a while longer, but I don't want to wait any more for "the cure".

FREUD

You know you're always free to stop treatment. When did you decide this?

DORA

About two weeks ago, I think.

FREUD

Two weeks? That's the notice a governess gives when she's quitting.

DORA

Are you alone? Where's your wife?

(this last tempo must be extremely violent)

FREUD's voice

Did he or didn't he wish to cure her, when he pleased, or did he wish it only on that January 1, 1900, he'll never know and neither do I and neither does she.

DORA

If only I knew just where I am now, in what country. I could begin to believe.

FREUD

You haven't given me the chance to say all I wished.

This fulfills your tendency to harm yourself. I've never felt such violence. Violence.

DORA

Today's the last time I'll come here.

FREUD

(doesn't hide his terror)

You're doing to me what you would have liked to do to Herr K. And you're rejecting me like he rejected you.

DORA

You don't understand anything. It's not going to prevent you from living! Here's my revenge; I'll go it "alone". I'll get better "alone". And I decided to leave you on that particular date by myself. It'll be January 1. 1900.

FREUD

Listen . . . Your decision . . . We had decided . . .

DORA

No.

FREUD

You know . . .

I'll admit . . .

I'm astounded. But I expected it. I had never thought it out. I could have sworn. How well I know her! Too well!

HERR K

She was beautiful. She seemed bigger to me, too.

DORA

That desire, still that desire. Yes.

FREUD

This is murder that you're committing here. Against another that I re . . .

(Dora's calm smile stops him)

Why didn't you say it earlier?

(She listens to him in a deadly silence)

DORA

Should I have chosen another day? Yes . . . You could have kept your wife here.

FREUD

(roughly)

You're trying to hurt someone else through me . . .

DORA

Dear doctor, you are an institution, so respect the will and opinion of a patient who wishes you well.

HERR B

Doctor, I assure you that my daughter will come back.

FREUD

She will not come back.

DORA

Act as if I had never come. As if I were dead.

Do you deny that you kissed me?

HERR K

No.

DORA (to Frau K)

I know that you and papa are having an affair.

FREUD

Maybe you know too much? Or in a way, not enough?

DORA

(mockingly)

And if that were true? If I knew too much. Always too much? A bit more than all of you?

FREUD

No. I'd say not enough.

DORA

Or maybe you love yourself a bit too much?

FREUD

Think about this. Don't hurt yourself.

DORA

You could make me laugh. But I don't want to hurt you. Because, you, doctor, I could never have loved.

FREUD

I could have completed the treatment. What stops me is the date, January 1, that single drop in time which still perplexes, still takes my breath away. I need another life. I could . . .

DORA

(cutting and bitter)

You could – shove me, push me down the stairs? Offer me a last session. Well thought out? Act relieved that I'm leaving, show me that you're concealing your satisfaction?

Tell me you're delighted with my decision. That you hoped for it? Banked on it? Had predicted it. That I was answering your dearest wish?

You could – you could not – beat me up. I wouldn't fight back. If you could slap me. It would give both of us a certain pleasure.

FREUD

I could have taught you what I have learned from you (*– with effort –*) I really would have liked to help you.

DORA

Nobody can do anything for me.

FREUD

I'd like to hear from me. (*This slip of the tongue is not necessarily noticeable.*) Write to me.

DORA

Write? . . . That's not my business.

VOICE OF THE PLAY (Freud)

May, 1900. Dora lives in Vienna. At a very busy intersection, a car knocks Herr K down. She saw him fall. It was the most horrible day of her life. It was the happiest day of her life. She walked across the road lifting her elegant dress with her fingertips in a gesture that barely revealed her ankles. It was only a slight accident. On the inside, Herr K was going through hell, but his appearance was still prepossessing. He had seen Dora go by. There's no greater sorrow than to remember love.

And Freud knew that.

– Translated by Sarah Burd