

together a young cast; to embody, that is, the interior of the characters, to embody the force of the transgression; it wasn't of the slightest importance whether Nobbs was beautiful or ugly. I preferred not to approach the question in the usual way, where, starting from their appearance, actors express the inner life of characters according to the theatre's psychological laws, I chose the opposite approach: starting from their interior life, to make their exterior body plausible. And here we come back to the problem raised by Nobbs: the costume makes the body believable. Neither Susannah York nor Juliet Berto was physically Nobbs; they made her plausible, though, by their acting, their costume, and their feeling for the imaginary. This is why I could not, either, do what Moore did and show Albert as a corpse; no, I just could not bring myself to do her that violence. Albert is there, sitting on her chair, the chair that has become far more than just her chair. It is her *place*—a place she has come to know by heart in all its details: its consistency, colour, polish and scratches. I could not take away her disguise when she was dead, as people 'take away' a corpse from a house in order to bury it: only her hands, which had been polishing shoes, remain suspended in mid-air.

Portrait of Dora

by

Hélène Cixous

*Translated from the French by
Anita Barrows*

Portrait of Dora was first performed in London at the New End Theatre on the 23rd May 1979 with the following cast:

DORA	Caroline Langrishe
FREUD	Terence Bayler
MR B.	Neil Phelps
MR K.	Gérard Falconetti
MRS K.	Sheila Gish

Directed and designed by Simone Benmussa.
Produced by Buddy Dalton and Richard Jackson.

Handwritten notes in the left margin:
C
2
3
LADY, CELLO
CLARINET
PROMENADE
VIZIT

Handwritten notes in the top right margin:
15
Freud

VOICE OF THE PLAY. These events appear, like a shadow, in dreams, often with such lucidity that one seems actually to grasp them. But despite that effect, they evade any definitive clarification; and if we proceed without particular skill and caution, we find ourselves unable to determine whether or not such an incident has really taken place . . .

DORA. *(in a tone of voice that shatters the silence abruptly, somewhere between a threat and a demand)*: If you dare kiss me, I'll slap you in the face!

DORA. *(with a cajoling inflection, suddenly in his ear)* Go ahead, just you dare! I'll slap you!

FREUD. Yes, you will tell me about it. In all its details.

DORA. *(in a faraway voice)* "If you like . . ."
(in an alert voice) If you like, Doctor. And then?

FREUD. You will tell me about the scene by the lake, in all its details.

DORA. Why did I keep silent for the first few days after the scene by the lake?

FREUD. To whom do you think you should ask that question?

DORA. And then why did I suddenly tell my parents about it?

FREUD. Why do you think?

DORA. *(doesn't reply, but recites in a dreamy voice)* When Papa was getting ready to leave, I told him I wasn't going to stay on without him. Why did I tell my mother what had happened, so that she could repeat it to my father?

MR. B. Mr. K. has always been very kind to my daughter, ever since our two families established the close friendship that has lasted now for many years. When he was there, Mr. K. would go for walks with her. With an almost paternal affection. Although she was only a child. He gave her presents and looked after her with an almost paternal affection. Dora herself was particularly attached to our friend's two young children, and took marvellous care of them. She could have taken the place of their mother. Two years ago, my daughter and I went to visit the K's at their summer home on the shore

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of one of our mountain lakes. Dora was to remain with them for several weeks.

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

MR. B. But the lake and the mountain air would do wonders for your nerves. I'm sure that in a few days

DORA. I'm leaving with you. (*Abruptly threatening*) I'll never forgive you!

MR. B. I don't understand you!

DORA. You understand me, but you're not honest. There's something deceitful about you. You think only of your own satisfaction. You don't understand. I am not honest. I reproach myself for being unfair. Give me a bracelet. (*pause*) My father is a generous man. He likes to do nice things for poor Mrs. K. At the same time, he is generous toward his wife and his daughter. My father never buys a piece of jewelry for me without buying one as well for my mother and for Mrs. K.

MR. B. Dora is still a child, and Mr. K. treats her like a child. He would send her flowers, he would buy her little gifts. She was like a mother to the children, she heard their lessons, she took walks with them. Their own mother could not have been more tender or attentive to their needs.

DORA. I never loved Mr. K., I was never crazy about him. I might have loved him, but since the scene by the lake, its out of the question. There had been talk of divorce between Mr. and Mrs. K. I looked after the children. When my father visited Mrs. K., I knew that the children wouldn't be home. I liked to walk in the direction I knew they had taken and catch them up.

MR. K. Dora is not a child anymore.

MRS. K. Dora is a child, who is interested only in sex. When she stayed at our house by the lake, she used to sneak off and read "The Psychology of Love" by Montegazza, and other such things, which excited her. She adores me. She has faith in me. She's a child who arouses mixed emotions; you can't set store by everything she says, her reading goes to her head.

MR. B. She has probably "imagined" the whole scene by the lake.

DORA. Do you hear him?

FREUD. Yes.

DORA. There is a door in Vienna through which everyone may pass except me. Often I dream that I've come to this door, and it opens, and I can go in. Young men and young women are flooding through, and I could easily slip into the crowds, but I don't do it, however I can't keep myself away from this door—forever, I approach it, I linger in front of it, but I don't do it, I can't bring myself to go through it, I am full of memories and despair, and the strange thing is that I could go through it but something is holding me back, I'm beyond all fear but I don't go in, if I don't go in I die, if I wanted to see Mr. 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 just once, and that would be the last time. Then

MRS. K. (*with mocking laughter*) I've always told him the whole thing was wrapped up.

DORA. Then . . . nothing. Nothing at all.

As soon as I understood Mr. K's intentions, I cut him off, I slapped him, and I ran away. I ran away I slapped him I stopped him short. I understood what he'd said.

THE VOICE OF THE PLAY. This initial account may be compared to an unnavigable current, a current whose course would now be obstructed by rocks, and now divided by sandbars.

FREUD. I happen to be acquainted with Mr. K. He is still a young man, with a rather striking appearance. Mr. B., the father, was a refined and well-to-do man, a tender father and a patient husband. I never knew Dora's mother. The father was very attached to his daughter. Each time he was questioned about her health, tears came to his eyes.

DORA. My mother means nothing to him.

MR. B. You must have imagined it! A man like Mr. K. is incapable of such intentions!

DORA. (*beside herself*) I must have "imagined" it! He said "You know, my wife means nothing to me." As soon as I understood what he was after, I slapped him and ran away.

This next event is performed on the side.

As soon as Mrs. K. had understood what Papa wanted, she shut him up, slapped him, and ran away. She slapped him. And you, you, you say that I "imagined" it! Now *choose! Choose!*

MR. B. (shouts) Stop shouting!

DORA. Her or me!

MR. K. I never made the slightest gesture that could be interpreted in such a way. For a year I sent her flowers, I treated her like my own daughter. Mr. B., who is known for his discretion where women are concerned, should be well aware that my attentions towards his daughter had no ulterior motive.

7 DORA. Answer me! Answer me!

DORA. It wasn't exactly on the shore of the lake. It was in the forest. I had understood Mr. K's intentions for quite some time. During our walk, he had rolled a cigarette.

A silence, during which a flashback scene - DORA at age fourteen is performed by the door near the staircase.

DORA. Every morning when I wake up, I smell smoke. It's always the same. I don't open my eyes. I sniff, and there he is.

DORA. When I went into the shop, there was a faint smell of smoke. Mr. K. was alone. Mrs. K. and my mother were late. It was nearly time for the parade.

8 FREUD. Where there's smoke, there's fire.

DORA. Mr. K. and my father were both heavy smokers. Like you. I also smoked by the lake. He had rolled me a cigarette. He smelled of smoke. I can't stand the smell of smoke.

I remember that the door that led from the shop to the flat was open, and I smelt the smoke, and Mrs. K's perfume, mixed together. When the parade was just about to pass, he asked me to wait for him . . . to wait for him.

FREUD. Go on. Go on. Go on.

DORA. He asked me . . . To wait for him, when it was almost time.

Silence.

FREUD. And?

DORA. There is a door. That leads to the stairway to the floor above; there. While he was lowering the shades, I waited for him. There was a smell . . . that I recognized.

FREUD. Yes. And then?

DORA. He came back, and then, and so, instead of going out the open door, he drew me close to him, and he kissed me on the lips. And then I felt such an intense disgust, I hated him with all my soul, I was revolted, I tore myself away from him, violently, I can still feel it now, today, I felt it so intensely.

I still feel that kiss, and the pressure of that embrace; his lips were very wet. Here, on my chest, and all the way through to my back. I ran in front of him, I brushed past him, past that man.

I tore myself away from him, I raced, I looked back at him, I raced towards the stairs, brushing past that man (I thought, "I'm brushing past this man"), toward the stairs, and, from there, toward the door of the house.

FREUD. And?

DORA. And . . . nothing. Just that. The door.

DORA. I can't stand intimate conversations.

MR. B. My daughter has had a chronic respiratory disturbance since the age of eight. She has always been very nervous, very frail. At one time her health caused me a good deal of concern.

FREUD. And her mother?

MR. B. The relations between my wife and my daughter are rather strained. My wife doesn't mean very much to me. Unfortunately. She is not an educated woman. She has no understanding of her children's aspirations. Dora naturally favoured me. I have been seriously ill myself. I have

little doubt that her feelings for me were increased by what I went through.

DORA. When he was ill, Mrs. K. supposedly saved his life. She has an eternal right to his gratitude. When I was ten years old, my father had a detached retina, the doctors told him to stay in a darkened room. I liked to keep him company in the dark. He would hold me in his arms and kiss me. I myself took charge of seeing that the curtains were always drawn.

MR. B. The migraines and the attacks of nervous coughing appeared when she was about twelve. (I remember because it was at that time that my friend K. persuaded me to consult you). The coughing fits sometimes last as long as three or four weeks. But what distresses me most are the spells of aphonia.

DORA. But their relations became intimate only after Mrs. K. took over as sick nurse.

My mother stayed out of the room, because she has no love for my father. My mother is a stupid woman.

MR. B. What I feel for Mrs. K. is a deep and sincere affection. Dora, who is very close to me, felt a sort of idol worship for her.

DORA. Idol worship. I had never seen such a beautiful, elegant woman. How I loved to look at her! I drank in her every movement! I thought she knew how to do everything that women are supposed to do. I loved to bring flowers into her bedroom.

When she and my father changed their rooms and they both moved into the rooms at the back of the house, I understood everything.

(shout directed at MR. B.) Everything! Do you hear? →

MR. B. (defends himself, very aggressively) An extremely nervous woman herself, Mrs. K. has in me her only friend. Given the state of my health and the delicacy of her nature, it goes without saying that all that exists between us is a very warm friendship. Dora's animosity is unfounded. Her irritability, her suicidal thoughts! She obviously gets all that from her mother.

DORA. Why did I never tell this story to anyone?

FREUD. Except to me.

DORA leaves. Footsteps are heard on the staircase, running footsteps. She stops on the staircase.

DORA. It's dark here

MR. K. (whispers) Wait for me, let me lower the shades and then I'm yours.

DORA. (Dora whispers, a torrent of words. What is unsaid, what is lost, in the body, between bodies) No point opening. It's always open. I can open. Not open. That man had beautiful teeth, like a bracelet of pearls. I can open a bit. And why wouldn't you open? That which is open can be not open. That which has happened can have not happened.

MR. K. Nothing is irrevocable. Why not?

DORA. (whispers) I still feel like I'm there. I have trouble breathing. I've already heard someone behind the door. Leaning with all his weight. It was a new sensation . . . (abrupt return to her normal voice) But—the thing that didn't happen.

FREUD. How did you know it was a man? Since he was behind the door.

DORA. (whispers) Who was leaning against the door with all his weight. I felt his penis stiffen. Who told you that? (a pause) It's Mrs. K. who told me. While I combed her hair, she read books to me that no one has ever read. (A silence)

She performs this to one side.

DORA. (in a voice that is at once clear and lethargic) It would have been pointless to wait for him. One could wait, if one liked. I had seen him in a dream. He was a gentle, attractive man who didn't take his eyes off of me. But it wasn't him. Is that him now, behind the door? One never knows. I open it just a bit. There's a man in the shadows. I don't see his head. He stoops down. I understand what he's after. I push back the door panel. I have no doubt that he intends to push the door open. And he presses against the panel. I feel his erection. He leans.

COULD BE VERY
CLEVER WITH
VIOLENCE
FEMALE BLOODS

Too late. He's going to force open the door. His decision has forced it open already. And keeps me from closing it. The door is heavy, and I lean my weight against it. I squeeze myself behind the panel, on the left. I smell smoke. How simple and mortal it all is! It's Him or me! In the darkness I am dark. The imaginary flesh that swells the door disgusts me. There will be a murder. It's a law. That's a key. One will have to kill the other who kills the first who wants to kill who wants to be killed? I want to kill him. He knows it. He wants to kill me. I know it.

A moment ago I would have liked him to kill me. Who kills me? The one who kills me is the one I want. I feel like. One can remain for a long time without moving, and then one has to move. Kill me! Kill me! Kill me! It's so long! That man who's behind the door, I don't see him. He's a tall man, he's still young. Because I want him. He has a familiar look: a ladies' man. There's something devious in his expression. His eyes are somewhat troubled, they don't go at all with his mouth. I'll have to get at his neck. This action demands the utmost effort. I give it all my strength. I take him in my arms, lock him in my embrace, and lean on him, hard. From this angle, his face doesn't seem familiar; it doesn't terrify me, as it would if I knew it well. It's just that we know, and there, where our knowledge intersects, we reach into secret places that escape neither him

2.00

2.1

nor me. I'm in a hurry to get there. I'm not sure I'll make it, despite the fact that my strength is increasing every minute. While I'm holding him against me, I turn him halfway round and I grab his head from the rear, my arm encircles his forehead and his skull presses against my chest; I hold him tight and slit his throat. The knife has become one with my hand. How hard it is to cut his throat. I don't push very hard, because I'm holding him close to me. I slit his throat, I pull the knife across the width of his neck; but I don't cut all the way through to the back. For a long time afterward I still feel the resistance of his throat. As though I were still doing it, I feel the density of that resistance, I was using my left hand, and I pulled straight across from left to right, in a single stroke. It takes a lot of pressure, it's like opening a tin. His suffering makes me ill. I had a terrible pain in my throat. It's hard for me to speak.

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2.45

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FREUD. No doubt Mr. K. travelled a good deal?

DORA. I don't know. I haven't the slightest interest in what Mr. K. does.

FREUD. Do you like to write? Yes.

DORA. No.

FREUD. You sent me a very pretty postcard. Do you like receiving postcards?

DORA. I don't much care. Mr. K. spent part of the year travelling. Like Papa. Journeys have their uses. Whenever my father feels his health declining, he goes to Berg.

FREUD. Does he stay very long?

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DORA. *(an immediate stream of associations in a very low but abrupt voice, with violent outbursts on the words between quotation marks)* I'll write a letter it will be hesitant. It will start with these words: "You have killed me." And I'll write "You, my dear, have killed me." Then I'll write another letter on very thin paper, tissue paper, that will start with these words, "That's what you wanted." I'll leave it ambiguous, for him to complete himself." Because I don't know what he wanted. However, I'm "the one" who's dead. My body is buried. In the forest. It's dark there. I have no voice.

FREUD. Tell me about the letter.

DORA. *(almost inaudible)* What letter?

MR. B. I found a letter on the desk. It was inside her desk. It said that she couldn't bear to live anymore. "This is what you all wanted," she said, and she told us goodbye. I didn't think she would actually kill herself, but I was shocked. A few days later, after an insignificant argument, she had a fainting spell, for the first time. That frightened me, of course.

DORA. How did they find that letter? It was locked inside my desk.

FREUD. Is your desk locked?

DORA. I don't know. Does anyone besides me have a key?

FREUD. Who has the keys?

MR. B. On her desk. It was a rough draft. I worried about it particularly after her fainting spell.

DORA. *(in a pained staccato voice)* You don't love me! You think I don't see through you? You're abandoning me!

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

You make me sick.

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

She screams. MR. B. is afraid, and tries to stop her.

MR. B. *(in a hurried voice)* Dora, Dora, Dora, my dear, my love, my sweet child . . . Come. Come now, come.

DORA. You have no idea how I despise that woman! When she's dead, I'll marry you.

FREUD. What was the argument about?

MR. B. I don't remember anymore. I had just returned from some

journey. She seemed tired. I remember I had just given her a pearl bracelet.

DORA. At one time I quite liked jewelry, but I never wear it anymore. When I was living at the K's, she used to like to show me her jewelry. She loaned me her pearls, she told me they were more becoming to me than they were to her.

FREUD. What was your attitude toward Mrs K. before the incident?

DORA. I don't know. Normal.

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

(A pause)

She used to say to me . . . When I was combing her hair. Me. Standing behind her. The whiteness . . . of her body.

The characters change places, as in a ballet.

MR. K. *(in a voice that sounds as though it's coming over a telephone)* I am prepared to meet you face to face, to clear up all these misunderstandings. Dora is nothing but a child as far as I'm concerned. You know what respect I have for you and your daughter. Didn't she live in our house? And in the greatest friendship with my wife?

MRS. K. My pet, you have no right to criticize your father's behaviour; he is a very generous man. You know how much your father cares for you. He can't even speak to me about you without tears coming into his eyes.

MR. B. . . . every reason in the world, rather, to be grateful to Mrs. K.

MR. K. . . . Always perfect confidence in her.

MR. B. A man like Mr. K. could not have presented any threat to her.

MRS. K. He's a man with very coarse appetites: he doesn't know what a real woman is. Men are often like that: they think of nothing but their own satisfaction. Not your father . . . Poor man he was so unhappy at that point that he wanted to commit suicide. I was seized with a premonition, I ran to the woods, I found him. I pleaded with him. I managed to make him renounce his terrible decision. To preserve him for his family.

DORA. Always in white. Milky tulle. Crepe. I saw HER. The

whiteness of her body, especially her back. A faint lustre:
pearly.

MR. K. I am prepared to meet with you immediately to clear up
this misunderstanding. A young girl who reads such books
cannot command the respect of a man. When she was
visiting us, my wife went so far as to let Dora share her room.
And I deliberately kept myself at a distance, because we
thought Dora was badly in need of affection. My wife was
astonished at such curiosity in a young girl.

MRS. K. You know that you are free to tell me everything and
ask me anything. There's nothing in the world that I feel I
must hide from you. The brutality of certain practices has
totally alienated me from men.

DORA. You are absolutely everything. And I am nothing, nothing.
No one. Listen to me: I love you as though you were God.
Someone. For whom I don't exist.
For whom I am living. For no one

*In adoration, in front of MRS. K. who, seated in front of her
mirror looks back at her with a long smile and an enigmatic and
sinister serenity.*

MR. B. There had often been talk of divorce between Mr. and
Mrs. K. It never came to that, because Mr. K. was a devoted
father, and couldn't bring himself to give up either of his
two children.

MR. K. Either of my two children.

DORA. I went to Dresden. My cousin wanted to take me to the
Gallery. I refused. I ran to the door. I left. I wandered aimlessly
through the foreign city. I went to the Gallery alone. There is
a painting I can't look at without . . . I stood for a long time.
In front of that painting. It was the "Sistine Madonna". I stood
alone. Completely absorbed. In that painting. For two hours.
In its radiance. A very faint smile. You can't see her teeth.
But a pearly lustre, between her lips.

FREUD. What was it that held your attention so, in this painting?

DORA. The . . . The . . .

*Suddenly, the evidence that perhaps no one is aware of: the child
Jesus in the Madonna's arms is none other than a miniature DORA.*

*DELICATE TOOLS - Filmed sequence, in three shots:
The Sistine Madonna, substitution
of the Madonna and MRS. K., DORA*

*mirrored behind the Madonna. It's not clear
which woman - Mary or MRS. K. is speaking.*

MRS. K. (*with infinite tenderness*) You must live, you must make
a life for yourself.

DORA. (*to FREUD*) I shared her room, I was her confidante and
even her counsellor. She told me about all the problems of
married life. There was nothing we couldn't have spoken
about . . .

MRS. K. (*gently laughing*) I call a spade a spade!
There's more than one way. The body, you'll find out, has
infinite resources.

DORA. Let me kiss you!

MRS. K., *smiling, grows sweeter and more distant, ephemeral,
close, inaccessible. She says no with a gesture, with her whole
body, she resists DORA's embrace. Calmly.*

DORA. Let me take you in my arms! Just once.

DORA. (*to FREUD*): I don't know. Exactly. She was there,
before me. Her smile. As though she were smiling to herself. . .

FREUD. Two hours? What was it that moved you?

DORA. (*After a long silence*) Her. ?

DORA. (*to MRS. K.*): I'm riveted here. Before you. I'm waiting.
If only! If only you wanted to tell me!

MRS. K. But I have nothing to tell.

DORA. Everything you know. Everything I don't know. Let me give
you this love. Her body, its ravishing whiteness. Her tiny
breasts, the smooth skin of her belly.

MRS. K. (*her hand over DORA's mouth*) Oh! It's impossible,
impossible my mad little child!

DORA. I feel ill, I always feel ill, take my head in your hands,
hold me.

MRS. K. My God! What am I going to do with you?

DORA. Look at me! I would like to step into your eyes. I want
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 cherished her.

FREUD. How could you be attracted by this man when your cherished friend spoke so ill of him?

DORA. (*standing beside MRS. K.*) She is an intelligent woman, superior to the men around her. A woman of exquisite beauty. How white your back is! And your skin! Oh, God, I love you! (*A whisper, and the very faint sound of a kiss*) May I? And here, too, just above . . .

164 You can't imagine how much I love you. If I were a man, I'd marry you, I'd take you away and marry you, and I'd know how to make you happy.

MRS. K. Dora!

DORA. (*to FREUD*) They weren't right for each other.

MR. B. I expect an explanation.

MR. K. A girl who dwells on such things can't possibly command the respect of a man. She read Montegazza. She knows more about it than you do. My wife was so astonished that she ventured to tell me about it.

DORA. Tell me more, tell me everything, everything. (*With, leaning against MRS. K.*) Everything women know: how to make jam, how to make love, how to make up their faces, how to make pastry, how to adopt babies, how to cook meat, how to dress fowl. I watched my grandmothers do these things when I was small. But would I know how to do them? I'll have to learn. She told me that she had thought a lot about what she would do if she had to choose to come back to earth as a man or a woman. She said she was sure, she wouldn't hesitate, it's women who rule the roost. I told myself that I wouldn't know, I've thought a lot about it, but I don't know. On which side. But if I were a man, I'd know. But I'd be a man, quick-tempered. But afterward? I'd be a man who's too gentle, maybe I'd be brutal. I'd be troubled, I'd be cowardly.

MRS. K. Patience, Patience! It's hard work. Patience, my dear, it will come in time. With a bit of deception as well. Our sex has to learn its lesson. Draw the curtains.

165 *Sound of curtains being drawn. Then DORA's voice fades to a faraway whisper.*

166 DORA. It looks like a cave! Where are you? It looks like a cave; It's me! Me inside myself, in the shadow. In you. (*in a faraway voice*) Sometimes the full, sometimes the void, and always

darkness. One might come to understand everything. And then one might change the world. These moments open and close like hesitant eyes. Don't tell anyone what I know. Swear you won't tell.

MRS. K. I swear.

DORA. (*sharply, hissing*) You killed me! You betrayed me! You deceived me!

"Who" is abandoning me?

Didn't I write you innumerable letters?

Didn't I worship the ground you walked on?

Didn't I open my doors to you?

Didn't I tear my heart out for you?

Is there anything on earth I refused to do for you? I followed you.

I stroked, I polished, I put my right hand at your service. I spoke to you when you listened to me, and when you didn't listen to me I told you, I gave myself to you, I sacrificed myself to your law, I made your bed, I drove the shadow away from your bed, who are you to abandon me now?

To whom can I address this letter?

To whom can I address my silence? My suicide?

And you? Who are you jealous of, how, why are you jealous? Say it, answer me!

Do you want me to tell you? Draw the curtains! I'm going to show you everything you want to see. You're no different. You're exactly the same.

FREUD. No, if it's that, then leave . . .

DORA. That's all?

Sound of door opened. Closed. Footsteps.

167 } MR. K'S VOICE. But what in the world did she want?

168 } DORA. Nothing now, Nothing ever again.

A still shot, on film, of the Madonna. Before which, in a sad voice:

DORA. I beg you, give me something. Do something for me. Tell me some word that will make me be born again. Feed me. I am dead, dead! I don't even have the strength to desire anymore! Make something happen to me.

MR. K. Don't be afraid. You know me, Dora.

DORA. Yesterday you called me "my dear"

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MR. K. Come my dear, don't be afraid.

DORA. He had said to me, "Come, I'll tell you your real name."
I wanted so badly for him to tell me!

MR. K. Come now, come, take my hand. What's stopping you?

DORA. He was calling me. I was unable to move. As though the world were about to split open. He had to drag me. I wanted him to carry me off.

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

DORA. I want to. I don't understand myself. I was so heavy. I want to believe you, Mr. K. I do.

MR. K. Yesterday you called me by my first name. You know we don't have much time . . . Dora. That doesn't mean that nothing is possible. I have one word

DORA. Don't tell me anything. Anything at all. There's something in your voice

MR. K. What would I have to do? What haven't I done?

DORA. You talk too much. It's in your silences that I'd like to touch you.

FREUD. And you thought, "I know who the other is"

DORA. I don't know.

(20) MR. K'S VOICE. As if she feared the best. As if she deliberately went off alone, because she didn't want to be alone. Quite the contrary.

DORA. (to FREUD) I dreamed he rejected me and I saw him for the last time. He was saying to me, "I have nothing against you. I don't take back anything I said, I'm a man of my word, didn't I keep my word, yes." And he said, "I'm not cross with you, you know me a bit" . . . and, yes it's true, I knew him better than anyone . . . and "I've thought a great deal about it, and I'm making my decision as clear to you as I've always made everything else, and this is how it has to be." And the tears were streaming down my cheeks, but I was saying yes, yes, you're right. And then he said, "I'm taking back my pearls!" And he really did say that; and also, "I had given you the key to the box . . . I'd like it back now." There was no use crying, with all the crazy things he was saying. And I said, yes, yes . . . as though I wanted to die. But what key?

MR. K. What key?

FREUD. What box?

DORA. Some time previously, Mr. K. had given me a very valuable jewelry box. For my birthday.

FREUD. Good. And the key?

(21) MR. K'S VOICE. And suppose I had asked her to wait for me?

DORA. The afternoon following the excursion to the lake, from which Mr. K. and I had returned home separately, I was taking a little nap on the *chaise longue* in the bedroom. I woke with a start.

(19) A sudden noise.

What are you doing here?

MR. K. It's my room, no one is going to tell me when I can be here and when I can't. Besides, I came in to get something.

DORA. (*halting and painful*) I got up quickly, to escape. I ran. Then I dreamed I was running. I could see myself running on a beach. The sand was so rough that it tore my feet. A woman who was taller and stronger than me was running beside me. Everything about her was the exact opposite from me. I called her dear Mrs. K. She made me feel ashamed of myself. In every way, she was all I could have been. I didn't have to explain anything to her. She was sublimely indifferent to my failures. Going down. I felt I was drifting further and further away from myself. Even I was abandoning myself.

(22) FREUD'S VOICE. As if she, too, were escaping. To keep from arriving. To keep from dying, as well.

DORA. Just then, I saw him again. There! It was Him! So far away! But really only a few meters away. But too far. So far from me. I knew very well that one day

FREUD'S VOICE. To search for Him everywhere, from the beginning of time. As if He existed. As if He were waiting only for her. For her arrival, to disappear.

DORA. There was no reason to hope. Everything keeps us apart. He said, "This way, nothing is changed." And I couldn't wait for him. Because here where I am, nothing is alive. I was in the past.

FREUD'S VOICE. All that happened to her happened only after the fact. She lived on memories. A prey to the past. Without any hope of ever reaching anything that would be the present.

DORA. She urged me to live. She was unaware of the enormity of my suffering. Which I can't even feel. I couldn't even cry out.

FREUD. Totally lost, between love and desire.

DORA. When I wanted to shut myself in the bedroom in the afternoon to rest, there was no more key. I'm certain that it was Mr. K. who took it away.

FREUD. Naturally one can't be indifferent as to whether a girl is "open" or "closed". It's obvious which key would be used to "open" in such a case.

DORA. I was "sure" you would say that!

FREUD. Didn't you ever wish to give a present to Mr. K. in return? That wouldn't have been out of place.

DORA. Absolutely not. I've never thought of it. I didn't trust him. I was afraid he would come into my room while I was getting dressed.

FREUD. Into "his" room?

DORA. Mrs. K. always left very early to take a walk with him. But he didn't bother me again.

FREUD. Perhaps you regretted it?

DORA. Absolutely not. Besides, I had promised myself not to stay at the K's house without Papa. Because Papa was living at the hotel and he always went out in the morning, I dressed very quickly to run and meet him.

MR. K. This is my room.

DORA. There is some mistake.

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

23 DORA. I'll take my pearls, then, and throw them on the floor!
Sound of pearls rolling on the floor.

MR. K. *(a cry of anger)* I'll take back my key! Give me my keys!

24 DORA. *(childishly)* No. *(from far away)* Where are we headed. Where are we headed. Where are we headed!
And if something dreadful happens, it will be Papa's fault. Mr. K. gave me a jewelry box. So. I gave Mr. K. my jewelry box. No I didn't.

FREUD. Go on.

DORA is looking for something.

FREUD. If it's your handbag you're looking for, it's there, on your lap. You haven't stopped fiddling with it for the past hour. By the way, it's very pretty.

DORA. *(suspicious)* This is the first time you've noticed it?

FREUD. It's the first time I've seen you with it. Here, in any case.

DORA. I carry my handbag with me wherever I go. Always. *(anguished)* It's stuck, look, I was fiddling with it because I couldn't open it. Here: look how tight it is. It's impossible to open.

FREUD. Don't you think your words might be referring to something other than your handbag?

DORA. *(hatefully)* Yes, if you like. That's what men like to think.

FREUD. He whose tongue is silent speaks with his fingertips. Ambiguous words are like needles on the path of free association.

DORA. Pricked, pierced, sewn, unravelled. That's women's work.

DORA. I have a dream.

FREUD. Tell me.

DORA. I know how to

FREUD. What do you know how to do?

DORA. How to make dreams rise, inflate them, heat them, roll them, take them in my mouth.

I sit at the table beside my grandmothers. They are having a terrific feast on little cakes. We become aware of the sound of the wedding procession approaching. I am shocked by it, sad and ashamed. I realize that there aren't enough cakes left. I've eaten several of them myself, I've gorged myself out of nervousness, I'm violently upset by the idea that I've eaten other people's portions. Mr. and Mrs. K. came in, holding hands, and then my father and his bride, holding hands. I don't know what they're thinking. They are all beautiful and charming and familiar. As if I were seeing them all together for the first time. I don't know whom to serve first. I go to

ask my three grandmothers how to divide the cakes equally. They're choking with laughter, their mouths are stuffed, they've eaten everything.

Mr. K. turns to me and says, in the most natural voice, "Can you be ready to set aside two hours of your time at a moment's notice?" I'm lost, taken aback by the simplicity of another era. What does Papa think of this?

I can't bring myself to answer. For what? Ready for what? I put it off, I excuse myself for not answering. I ask them if they want to play cards, which I don't know how to play, but maybe draughts. There are five of them for with against me.

And if one of them killed me, ah! If one of them killed me under my own eyes, what revenge would that be! My body cut into tiny slices on the table. To replace the cake.

DORA. I smell smoke. *RECALL OF A?*

FREUD. Tell me about the smoke.

DORA. The smell of smoke came to me in the last dream. And in the other dreams.

FREUD. Yes. So?

DORA. There was always a smell of smoke. Like a sudden blow. I woke with a start. And I had this same dream three times. My father is standing at the foot of my bed, and he wakes me up. I'm asleep, but I see him. There must be a fire somewhere in the house. I get dressed quickly. Mama wants to save her jewelry box, but Papa says "I won't have myself and my two children burned to a crisp because of your jewelry box." We run downstairs and as soon as we're outside, I wake up.

FREUD. Did you have this dream when you first arrived at Linz, or just before you left?

DORA. I don't know. I think it was afterward.

FREUD. How long after the scene by the lake did you remain at Linz?

DORA. Four days.
The afternoon following the excursion to the lake, I stretched out as usual on the *chaise longue* in the bedroom, to have a nap. I woke with a start and saw Mr. K. standing before me.

FREUD. You are certain it was Mr. K?

DORA. What's the matter?

MR. B. Quick, get dressed, hurry, go downstairs. (MR. B. screams violently) I don't want my two children burned to a crisp because of you!

DORA. As soon as I get outside, I wake up. I wonder what Mama is doing in this dream? She wasn't with us at Linz.

FREUD'S VOICE. But it was for her—or for another woman—that her father brought home jewelry. And Mr. K. gave her a jewelry box.

DORA. (to whom? To Papa? To Mr. K.) I am ready. I would have given you what your wife refuses you. It would be her fault.

FREUD. The secret lies with your mother. What role does your mother play here? She was once your rival for your father's love.

DORA. I "knew" that "you" were going to say that.

FREUD. So now you know who stands for whom.

DORA. (tired) To know. To know. But no one knows anything. What does it mean, to know? Do I know what I know, do I know it? Everything means nothing. If there were a god . . .

FREUD. Who used to stand by your bed when you were small?

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

FREUD. I don't know. Someone stood by your bed and awakened you. Why?

DORA. Tell me what you know.

FREUD. I don't "know" anything.

DORA. So what use is it? What do you want to make me say?

FREUD. . . . To make you understand.

DORA. I forgot. Yes. I don't understand.

FREUD. Where there's smoke, there's fire.

DORA. (Ironically) And where there's fire, there's water?

FREUD. Precisely. (He smiles) Fire is the opposite of water. In the dream where there is fire, there is water. You certainly "had to go out" because of the fire. But also in order that some little mishap might not occur . . . On the other hand, fire enflames. It is obviously a symbolic representation of

love. From fire, then, begins a path, which leads . . .

DORA. I see what you're getting at!

FREUD. You don't know how right you are to say that. You see what I'm getting at. Which another has already gotten, a long time ago. A very long time ago.

DORA. You don't think you're interpreting all this a bit too personally?

FREUD. That may be. However, all I'm doing is teaching you the significance of dreams. I see that the contrast between fire and water in the dream serves you particularly well. What does one do to prevent a child from wetting its bed? One wakes it up. Your father wakes you up in the dream. Mr. K. wakes you up.

DORA. Tell me, Doctor, why exactly did this disease strike me, why me particularly?

FREUD. What disease? You're not . . .

DORA. (*cutting*) It comes from my father. He had already been ill before his marriage because of his dissolute life. It's a poison that can be transmitted. He gave it to Mama. And I have the disease as well.

FREUD. What disease?

DORA. Like Mama had, when we had to go to Franzensbad for her cure. She was haemorrhaging and she had lower abdominal cramps.

FREUD. You think that you have a venereal disease? (*Silence*) Since when? (*Silence*) Do you know why you cough?

DORA. My father coughs as well.

FREUD. Look. The "disease" comes from your father, but the symptoms affect the lower half of the body or the upper half, depending on whether it's you or your mother who's ill. By coughing you proclaim your father's responsibility for what you call your "disease."

DORA. But I really do cough!

FREUD. Yes.

DORA. I was getting dressed quickly. I was afraid he would

surprise me while I was dressing. So I dressed very quickly. (*whispering*) I dress quickly. (*panting*) As soon as I'm outside I wake up, I'm drenched in sweat. The smell of smoke awakens me.

FREUD. You get dressed quickly. To keep your secret.

DORA. But I've never said anything of the kind.

FREUD. He whose tongue is silent.

DORA. Yes. Yes, I know. And he who speaks with his fingertips? Why do you twist your pen seven times in your hands before talking to me? Why?

FREUD. You must respect the rules!

DORA. (*She mimics him*) You must respect the rules!

She strides across the width and length of the room.

27 Where are your cigarettes?

Sound of a cigarette lighter

FREUD. Good. You can go now. Next Tuesday?

28 DORA. Next Tuesday? (*She bursts out laughing*)

29 THE VOICE OF THE PLAY. It is possible that Dr. Freud had this dream toward the end of December, 1899. Dora is then a blossoming young girl, about eighteen years old. There is something strange and contradictory about her, which makes her quite charming. Her cheeks are rosy, but her mouth is stern; she has a girl's forehead, but a fixed, icy stare. She resembles hidden, dangerous, vindictive loves. Dr. Freud cannot take his eyes off her. Dora, who is holding him by the hand with the firm and irritated grip of a governess, leads him to the shore of a mountain lake, which she points to with her fingers. She doesn't throw him into the water; but she insists that he pick her a bouquet of those shimmering white flowers which grow on the opposite side of the lake, and whose perfume she can smell despite the distance. Though his hesitation is entirely natural, Freud is upset, for he senses that he is being put to a test, or perhaps led into a trap. He wonders why they didn't get off the train at the previous station, which was on the other side of the lake. But he doesn't wonder for long, for Dora suddenly eyes him up and down, gives him a look of disdain, and then turns her back to him with a movement that stuns him: haughty, implacable, unrestrained. Then,

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with perfect composure, she lifts her dress in a wilfully seductive way, allowing Freud to see her bare ankles; and she walks across the lake, over hundreds of bones. Something keeps Freud from doing the same.

A round of voices: MR. K, MRS. K, and FREUD, successively.

MR. B. The girl insisted that he pick her a bouquet of those white flowers that grow across the lake.

MR. K. She couldn't stand those white flowers that grew on the other side of the lake. They would have given off a very bitter scent.

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

MR. B. With a pale, distracted hand, she was fiddling with the pearls around her neck. Without thinking. Staring into the distance.

FREUD. Unnerved, Freud suddenly gives her a slap to stop her.

DORA. Sometimes she wondered if she herself was not Mr. K. In his place, how she would have loved her!

FREUD. She said she would have liked to sleep on the meadow of his breast.

DORA. Whose? You know that you are everything to me. For whom? Am I nothing to you?

FREUD. The worst was that he felt like a fool at the moment when his greatest dream was just beginning.

MR. B. Then my fear was perfectly natural?

FREUD. Naturally.

MR. B. That can't be right. It's quite conceivable that one might need to go out at night.

FREUD. And if someone awakened her?

DORA. Papa came up to my bed. He awakened me with a kiss; he protected me. How beautiful everything was when he loved no one better than me and he awakened me!

FREUD. Go on.

DORA. And now . . .

Mr. K. smokes. I smoke. Heavily.
Papa as well is a heavy smoker.

FREUD. Given that I, too, am a smoker.

DORA. I have to go. I have to get out. I can't stay anymore.

FREUD. But who stands for whom in this story?

DORA. Yes. Everyone. Except me. *(sudden outburst)* How I adored him! My God, how he loved me then!

FREUD. Yes, who stands for whom? At one time, he had stood at the foot of your bed. He awakened you with a kiss. What if it was your father standing by your bed instead of Mr. K.

DORA. And now, what do I mean to him?

FREUD. And Mr. K.?

DORA. *(looking at MR. K.)* I feel absolutely nothing for that man.

Papa takes advantage of the opportunities Mr. K. allows him. Mr. K. takes advantage of the opportunities Papa allows him. Everyone knows how to get his piece of the cake.

FREUD. And Dora?

DORA. He preferred to ignore Mr. K's behaviour. It would have inhibited him in his relations with her.

FREUD. And you?

DORA. I never went to her house when Papa was there. That was taken for granted. I was thrilled that Papa had found a woman to get involved with. What my father does is none of my business.

FREUD. And what Dora does?

DORA. I have nothing against anyone. What should I have against him? My reproaches were unfair. He sacrificed me to that woman. She took him away from me. But how could I resent it?

FREUD. Resent whom?

DORA. Who betrays whom in this story? No one. Is no one to blame? Give me my coat. I'm leaving.

While she's leaving FREUD, she repeats all her departures, she is already gone, she doesn't look at him: she sees herself leaving again, being abandoned.

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DORA. Once more, alone. Everyone stays. You let me go. I was the first to hang my coat on the coat-hook. And you hung your coats on top of mine. As if to say to me, you're not welcome here.

DORA. *(a low, sleepy voice)* I'm taking back this coat. Too beautiful for me. It was a leather coat. I never felt like myself when I wore it, it was the hide of an animal I didn't know, extremely fine and soft, pale, with orange highlights. Is it mine? I searched through the pockets to be sure. He had warned me so many times. I might have left something in the pockets . . . letters?

MR. K'S VOICE. What carelessness! After all the warnings I'd given you!

DORA. From that time on it had no more importance.

Sound of a piece of paper being slipped into a pocket.

FREUD. What's that you're crumpling in your pocket?

DORA. Nothing. Goodbye. *(She leaves noisily)*

FREUD'S VOICE. In a stunned silence, she walks the blazing streets of Linz. She walks slowly, stiffly. She is in excruciating pain. She says nothing, she feels infinitely small, shattered. A piece of dust tossed by the wind. She knows the bitterness of regret to be far more powerful than desire.

DORA. Practically dead from exhaustion. All that could have been. Exhausts me.

MR. K'S VOICE. Where are you going?

DORA. Where I too will be able to sleep. As for continuing straight ahead, I'm ready to give that up.

FREUD. She felt used. Ridiculed.

DORA. I could have said Yes. Just once! His mouth would have tasted of smoke. You haven't understood anything! Haven't you understood anything?

FREUD. If she had been able to speak . . .

DORA. It's not my fault. When you can't speak, you're dead. If I wrote him a superhuman letter, in my blood; if I explained to him who I could have been if I could have if he looked at me if I showed him my hands in my pockets, the letters crumpled in my hands, if I proved my strength my life my courage to him right here where I'm burning if

I captured his glance just long enough to throw fire to water and sun to shadow if I stung him with this regret if I knocked him out if I crushed him . . . *(Silence)*

FREUD. It's still unclear why you felt so offended by Mr. K's intentions.

DORA. *(in a voice that descends upon FREUD from a great height from a great distance)* Good-bye.

Pause. Then she whispers.

(Singsong) You can never be sure who kills, dying can kill. Who wants to kill who wants to die I don't know anymore who. Did I know, I know I once knew it, I knew it before wanting it, but I hardly wanted it, what? What's holding me back, if I am held back, but I'm not, it's the other. But is it; and the other, if it's the other, is it her or him or? One can kill by administering one's own death.

MR. K. I take the keys and I shoot. *(Sound of a pistol shot)* And I take back my keys.

DORA. How will I forgive you?

MR. K. You know me. I would have given everything. And now I'm taking back whatever I gave you.

DORA. Give me back the keys. Such very little keys.

MR. K. I'm taking them back.

DORA. It's not the first time. Is this all that's come of it?

FREUD. At the threshold.

DORA. Am I on time? Why are you looking at me like that? So insistently?

FREUD. I'm not looking at you insistently.

DORA. Why not?

FREUD. No, no, none of that. You know very well that I'm an institution.

DORA. May I take my shoes off?

FREUD is silent. A sigh.

My foot hurts. Does my foot disturb you? Is it ugly? *(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 she?

FREUD. Who?

DORA. You know who I mean. That woman. It's not the first time I've seen her leaving here. I see everything. You, too, have a fondness for secrets.

FREUD. No, she's a former patient; after her treatment she remained a friend of the family.

DORA. Remained a friend of the family.

FREUD. Come, don't be childish. Believe me. And tell me your dream.

DORA. Don't be childish.

MRS. K. Come. Tell me what you've been doing.

DORA. I have nothing to tell you. I never do anything.

MRS. K. Tell me something about yourself. →

DORA. Couldn't you love me a little? Just a little?

MRS. K. Yes, of course I could love you a little. But what does it mean, *love*?

DORA. You don't love me at all, then? Not at all?

MRS. K. It never crosses my mind! You *are* lovable! Someone will love you. I very much love all that you are ...

DORA. There's nothing I can give you? There's nothing that you might need from me?

MRS. K. I don't need anything, anyone. That doesn't mean that you're nothing.

DORA. Then you'll go on seeing me?

MRS. K. Why not?

DORA. One day, I would like to be lying beside you. Not sitting—I want to lie against your body. I close my eyes, and I see. There would be blood all over. I would have blood on my face.

MRS. K. How gory! I see you standing, quite alive, preparing for a journey

DORA. And I see you dead. I would like to see you dead. And no one allowed to touch you. To see you.

MRS. K. A ten-year-old has thoughts like that.

DORA. A person too much in love has thoughts like that.

MRS. K. The most frightful the most desirable

Silence

DORA. I had a dream.

FREUD. Tell me your dream.

DORA. I dreamed about you. (*She stops short*)

FREUD. Tell me your dream.

DORA. What will you give me?

FREUD. (*smiling*) Not a jewelry box. But my full attention.

DORA. It's strange, I see myself climbing the stairs that lead to your flat. I ring the bell. Your former patient comes to the door and says, "You may come in, he's already dead." I look at her face. Although she's at least ten years older than me, her skin is fresh, her features are wholesome, sensuous. It's only later that I realize that she's abnormally tall. After she speaks I don't feel the least bit sad. I realize there's a crowd of women waiting in the parlour—perhaps they're servants.

Just then I hear a dance melody. The young woman comes up to me and asks me to dance with her. She puts her arm around my waist. I'm slightly surprised; I'd been expecting a male partner. But I accept. Who am I? I don't know how to dance—but I let myself be led. I am annoyed. I want—or she wants—a third person to join us. I don't know whether it's a man or a woman. (*DORA whispers*) I wonder what I mean to her. We dance our way downstairs. I'm dancing poorly.

Then I realize that I'm also embarrassed because my knickers have fallen down to my knees. (*She leans her head on her partner's shoulder and sighs*)

They watch while I lift my dress and pull my knickers up. I realize that all three of us have been your patients, and I wonder if you preferred one of us to the others. What do you think?

FREUD. And you? What do you think?

DORA. I didn't feel the least bit sad. I felt an unspeakable tenderness for my companion, but it was checked by my irritation with her. It's only when I woke up that I was overcome with sorrow, as though I had loved her in real

life, and then lost her.

FREUD. Did it ever occur to you that there was a serious obstacle to your desire to have your father rescue you from some danger? And that obstacle was the thought that it was your father himself who exposed you to this danger?

DORA. What does that have to do with it? Is that all you can come up with?

FREUD. This thought makes you uncomfortable.

DORA. (*exasperated*) Which relationship? Great God, which relationship? During the dance I felt very irritated, but also very sweet: as though I were overflowing with tenderness. At one point—it's strange—she tells me she is forced to carry a heavy sack all the time. I suggest that I take it from her for a moment, to give her a chance to rest. But instead of carrying it in front of me, with my arms outstretched, as she does, I slip a shoulder-strap around it. I tell her that my arms are weak, but my shoulders are strong. In fact, this bag is so extraordinarily heavy that I stagger as soon as I try to lift it; and I have to walk hunched over and leaning on the edge of space, of the road, so as not to be overcome by its weight. It's impossible to walk one step further.

FREUD. And the dead man?

DORA. I knew you had died. That was understood between us. Besides, I wasn't coming to see you anymore, because it was understood, absolutely, between us. I was coming, then, to bring or to receive the news.

FREUD. Do you know why you wanted to kill me?

DORA. No. Do you?

FREUD. And with the young woman—you didn't feel threatened?

DORA. No, not really. I felt irritated, rather. As though I were slow—a bit feeble minded. In one sense, I was flattered that she trusted me; but I knew I was deceiving her. I was dancing poorly, I was caught up in my knickers. I wasn't thinking anymore about your death. It was as though you had always been dead; or as though the fact that you had always been dead were perfectly natural.

FREUD. That's not wrong. But perhaps I'm not. Dead. For you.

DORA. Perhaps. Yes. It doesn't matter.

FREUD. We'll speak about this again. Next Tuesday?

DORA. Perhaps.

FREUD. You'll tell me . . . I'll walk you downstairs.

DORA. No.

DORA. (*staccato voice, each word a wrenching outburst*) This-treatment-is-taking-too-long. How much longer must it go on?

FREUD. I told you: a year. We have six months to go.

DORA. Why a year? Why not two years? Or two days?

FREUD. You still need a guide for a few months.

DORA. I don't need a governess.

FREUD. Did you ever have a governess?

DORA. Oh, yes. She wasn't very young, but she was well-educated and quite a free spirit.

FREUD. Was she pretty? Seductive?

DORA. No. She was flabby.

MR. B. This woman persists in turning my daughter against Mrs. K.

DORA. I got on rather well with her. She didn't like Mrs. K. She told my mother it was beneath her dignity to tolerate such a relationship 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. And besides, my father didn't pay her the slightest attention.

MR. B. She quarrelled with her all of a sudden and demanded that she be sent away.

FREUD. And what happened to her?

DORA. She was dismissed. Within two hours she's already left. She didn't even say good-bye.

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

MR. B. You're stronger than all of us put together.

VOICE OF THE PLAY. They all pick up their rifles. They spray Dora with pearls to prove that she is stronger than

all of them put together. They prove it, in a cloud of smoke.

When the smoke clears, the ghost of Dora-the-stronger-than-all lifts her apron so as to make a sort of pouch, into which she gathers thousands of these tiny pearls. Then she holds the apron over an open briefcase, and spills the pearls inside it. In the event that they should run out of ammunition.

Pause.

DORA. The K's had a governess who did the same thing.

FREUD. Ah! You've never mentioned her to me.

DORA. Her behaviour toward Mr. K. was very strange. She never greeted him, never answered him, never passed anything to him at dinner; in short, she treated him as though he didn't exist. And he was no more civil to her. One or two days before the scene at the lake, she told me that Mr. K. had begged her not to refuse him anything; he had told her that his wife meant nothing to him, etc.

FREUD. But those are the words

DORA. Yes. She gave in. Afterward, he didn't give her a second thought, and she started to hate him.

FREUD. What became of this girl?

DORA. All I know is that she left.

FREUD. If he had disregarded it, if he had continued to pursue her with a passion capable of winning her over, perhaps love might have conquered all the obstacles?

Besides, it wouldn't have been so hard to work out. Mrs. K. would have consented to a divorce; and as for your father, you're able to get whatever you want from him.

DORA. Whatever I wanted? And what do you want?

DORA. I think Mr. K. was serious when he spoke to me.

FREUD. Yes.

DORA. But I didn't let him finish.

FREUD. Exactly what terms did he use?

DORA. I don't remember any more. He said to me: you know that my wife means nothing to me. And I cut him off right away.

MR. K. You know that my wife means nothing to me.

DORA. So as not to run into him again, I made up my mind to

walk around the lake as far as Linz, and I asked a passer-by how much time it would take me. He said it would take two-and-a-half hours. I remember another detail: in my dream, I saw the "interior" of the forest, as though my eyes could pierce right through it. From far away, I saw flowers beds of white flowers. Suddenly I was a woman.
A young woman.

MRS. K. What are you looking for?

DORA. From a distance I saw a huge bed of white flowers. Are they forbidden? No.

MRS. K. Those flowers are native, they grow all around here.

DORA. How much time would it take?

MRS. K. They're rather far. The flowerbed must be at least two kilometers away, over land.

DORA. That's too far. I won't bother.

But I returned in any case to the boat. Mrs. K. was aboard.

MR. K. I beg you to forgive me, and not to say anything about what's happened.

DORA. Suppose I told your wife?

You offer me a cigarette. And I agree to postpone my departure for twenty-four hours because you say that you'll help me tomorrow. Out of exhaustion I agree to spend the night with you. You smoke two cigarettes. You have one in your mouth and one in your hand. You keep talking, nonstop.

It can't go on much longer. Besides, the cigarette is burning down.

FREUD. (*insinuating voice*) One more puff!

DORA. Let's get it over with and then drop it!

FREUD. (*insinuating voice*) Suppose we went on a journey?

DORA. I don't have the strength to start all over again. I accepted the cigarette out of exhaustion. But I am incapable of desire. I can neither smoke nor travel anymore. Adieu! Adieu! Where is the station?

FREUD. Those flowers that grew in white rows beside the forest, two kilometres from where you stood—were they lilies-of-the-valley?

DORA. And if the white flowers had been blue, would I have given up? (*imitating her mother's voice*) For shame, they say!

For shame! Dora, what are you doing? That's poison. That makes you go mad!

39 DORA. Where! Is! The! Station! (*screams*)

40 VOICE OF THE PLAY. What lily-of-the-valley says in a dream
Mr. K. says with a jewelry box.
What can be said with flowers
Papa says with pearls
What Dora hasn't said
the Doctor says with smoke.

DORA. At last, at last, I arrived at the station.

MR. K. There's no train. The rails have been cut.
Do you mind my being here?

DORA. Yes, if you want to know the truth.

MR. K. Is this the last time I'll see you?

DORA. (*a furtive silence, like a long stare*)

MR. K. Such silence, from you, who are usually so full of words!

FREUD. (*in a normal voice*) You knew there wouldn't be a train?
No flowers for the forest, no train for the station. It's no accident. There's something you don't want to touch or catch.

DORA. I arrive at the station. I'm alone. You had insisted that I come.

FREUD. This trip to Vienna would last perhaps six months. Or, rather, nine.

MR. K. My sweet little Dora, you know how much I care for you.

DORA. You've treated me like a servant. I'm leaving you. No one will come with me. I am alone in a foreign city. I look at a painting of the Madonna. No one touches me. I will never marry.

MRS. K. You are a virgin, my little one.

FREUD. And you spent hours looking at this portrait?

DORA. It's whiteness was so soothing.

FREUD. That's what you thought of Mrs. K.

DORA. No; that's me!

A dance melody. SAME AS BEFORE

MRS. K. Why aren't you dancing?

41?

DORA. She had come into her maturity. But the years seemed not to touch her. Besides, she spent most of her time in bed.

MRS. K. You have no desire to have children? But you mother my children so well! Why don't you dance? That's what I like—gaiety, movement, vitality! You—you're always so serious.

DORA. It's true. No. Yes.

MRS. K. You're so serious! You're too serious, my child.

DORA. She preached to me, always good-naturedly. It's true that I was serious and reserved. She said to me, "You're such a serious child." That's strange, isn't it? I asked her questions about pregnancy and birth. She liked to satisfy my curiosity. To talk to me about birth and virginity, things like that.

MRS. K. You're such a serious child! Too serious. Be careful: You must know where to stop. Can't you accept your limits? You can't be a madonna. You are too handsome, my little man.

DORA. My little man! How strange.

MRS. K. One false step and you're over the edge. Listen: (*Whispers*) You don't know how to live.

It's rather charming, though. I could be your mother . . . Listen.

DORA. What if I leapt on top of her? Shook her? Beat her? She doesn't love me. If only she could see herself. I'm much too stubborn for her to turn my head. I could turn against her.

FREUD. How do you explain the fact that you've always been so generous toward Mrs. K, your slanders, whereas you hound the others with an almost sinister vengeance?

DORA. She had slow and gentle movements, which I loved very much. Once, a long time ago, I had sprained my foot tripping down the stairs. My foot swelled. She had to bandage it. I had to stay in bed for a few weeks. She kept me company and spoke to me as if I were her friend. She confided in me. She told me that her husband didn't want a divorce because of the children.

FREUD. Didn't you think a divorce would have been the best thing for all concerned?

DORA. I'd had a curious dream. I was running, my right foot was very sore. I had to sit down. My ankle was swollen. I couldn't

move anymore; I wanted to talk to Dr. K., and at the same time I knew he wasn't really a doctor. I wanted to ask his advice. I ask for him on the phone. Finally he comes; and it's not him, it's his wife. I feel her presence over the phone, obscure, white, insinuating . . .

MRS. K. (*over the phone*) Who shall I say is calling?

DORA. She asks. *Mrs. K.*, I say.

MRS. K. (*on the phone*) Oh, indeed!

DORA. (*in a modulated voice, without the slightest annoyance*) I know. Let me talk to him!

MRS. K. Indeed!

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

FREUD. In fact, you don't let things finish. Your ankle swells. You give birth. Nine months after the scene at the lake. So despite everything you manage to have a "child" by Mr. K. Something happened during the scene at the lake.

DORA. Nothing happened!

FREUD. Precisely. It was there that you took that "false step" whose consequences you are still suffering. You regretted it. You still regret the outcome of that scene. It's not *the Madonna* you wanted to be. Your love for Mr. K. doesn't stop at that.

DORA is silent.

FREUD. Why did you keep him from going on?

DORA. Is that all?

FREUD. I'm not disappointed with the results.

DORA. You're giving birth to a mouse.

DORA. Do you know, Doctor, that this is my last time here?

FREUD. You're informing me.

DORA. Yes, I told myself I would try to be patient, but I don't want to wait much longer for the "cure".

FREUD. You know you are always free to stop treatment. When did you make this decision?

DORA. Two weeks ago, I think.

FREUD. Two weeks? That's the notice a governess gives before quitting.

DORA. Are you alone? Where is your wife? (*This last time must be extremely violent*)

43
VOICE OF FREUD. Whether or not he wanted to cure her in his own time, or whether he wanted it only on this first day of January 1900, he will never know, and nor will she, and nor will I.

DORA. If only I knew very simply where I was now, in what country. I might begin to believe.

FREUD. You never gave me the chance to finish expressing myself. That's what you got out of your tendency to hurt yourself. I've never seen such violence.

DORA. Today is my last time here.

FREUD. (*doesn't hide his panic*) You are avenging me the way you would have liked to avenge Mr. K. And you are abandoning me the way he abandoned you.

DORA. You don't understand anything. That won't stop you from existing! Here's my revenge: I'll go "alone," I'll cure "myself". And I've made up my mind to leave on a date I've set myself. The first of January 1900.

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

DORA. No.

FREUD. You know

I admit

I am stupefied. But I expected it. Never did I really dream

I would have sworn How well I understand her! Too well!

*
44
MR. K. I found her beautiful. She seemed larger to me as well.

DORA. This desire still this desire. Yes.

FREUD. This is murder you're committing. You're murdering someone else, whom I re . . . (*DORA's serene smile stops him short*) Why didn't you tell me before?

DORA. I should have chosen some other date? Yes . . . You could have had your wife here?

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

DORA. Dear Doctor, you are an institution. So respect the will and the point of view of a patient who wishes you well.

MR. B. I assure you, Doctor, my daughter will return.

FREUD. I assure you she will not.

DORA. Act as though I had never come. As though I were dead.
Do you deny ever having kissed me?

MR. K. No!

DORA. (to MRS. K.) I know you're having an affair with Papa.

FREUD. Maybe you know too much about it? Or, in some way,
not enough?

DORA. (mockingly) And what if it were true? If I did know too
much about it? I still know too much? A little bit more than
all of you?

FREUD. No. I'd say you didn't know enough.

DORA. Or maybe you love yourself a bit too much?

FREUD. Think carefully. Don't hurt yourself.

DORA. You make me laugh. But I have no desire to hurt you.
Because, you, Doctor . . . I never would have loved you.

FREUD. I might have managed it. What takes my breath away is
this date, this first of January 1900, this single drop of time
that remains to me. I would need a lifetime, I could . . .

DORA. (stops him and lashes into him) You could . . . push me,
throw me downstairs? Propose a final meeting, meticulously planned,
planned, with an air of relief at my departure? Letting me
know, at the same time, that you're hiding your satisfaction?
You could tell me you're delighted with my decision. That
you were hoping for it. That you'd predicted it. Expected it.
That it's fulfilment of your greatest desire. You could—you
couldn't—beat me black and blue. I wouldn't put up a
struggle. You could slap me. I think we would both take a
certain pleasure in it.

FREUD. I would have taught you what I've learned from you.
(with great difficulty) I would have liked to do something for
you.

DORA. No one can do anything.

FREUD. Let me know what I'm doing (he makes a slip of the
tongue in such a way that it goes unnoticed) . . . Write to me.

DORA. Write? . . . That's not my affair.

46
VOICE OF THE PLAY. May 1900. Vienna. At a particularly busy
intersection, Dora saw Mr. K. struck by a carriage. She saw
him fall. It was the most horrible day of her life. ~~It was the~~
happiest day of her life. She crossed the street without
batting an eyelash, lifting her elegant dress with her finger-
tips, slightly baring her ankles. It was only a very minor
accident. On the inside, Mr. K. was going through the
tortures of the damned; but his outward appearance was
still quite striking. He had seen Dora pass. There is no greater
sorrow than the memory of love.

45
And Freud knew it.

THE END