

# **Happy New Century, Doktor Freud**

by

**SABINA BERMAN**

Translation by  
Kirsten F. Nigro

No one is so great as to not find himself controlled  
by the laws that govern with equal severity  
normal and pathological activity

Sigmund Freud

## Cast

Dora... also Ana and Gloria

Sigmund Freud

Freud 2... also Herr K. and Rank

Freud 3... also Herr F., a railroad employee and Jung

Lou Andreas Salomé... also Frau K., Frau F., Marta, Dora as an adult and Jones

1

*An abstract place. Sigmund Freud walks towards us, dressed as an end-of-the- nineteenth century Viennese professor--three-piece suit, a little worn; moustache and beard cut close to his jaw. He is forty-five years old and has a distinguished manner. He has a cigar in his right hand and the thumb of his left hand rests in the little pocket of his jacket.*

FREUD: Three years ago, in 1897, and in this same scientific forum, I put forth for your consideration certain ideas about hysterical neuroses. I now want to back up that theoretical presentation with a detailed report on the treatment of a young girl afflicted, precisely, with hysterical symptoms. To protect her true identity, I will call my patient in this study....

*A second Freud crosses the back of the stage, horizontally, as he says:*

FREUD 2: Pandora. Like in Pandora's box.

*A third Freud enters, saying:*

FREUD 3: No. They'll hate it for sounding too presumptuous.

FREUD 2: Then Dora.

FREUD: Yes. Dora.

FREUD 3: More modest, less Greco-Roman.

*The second and third Freud walk toward us.*

FREUD 2: I am fully aware/

FREUD 3: /fully cognizant

FREUD: /that my previous publications have been read--at least in this our...

3

FREUD 2: Morbid Vienna...

FREUD 3: Have been read in certain circles/

FREUD: /-- yes-- more like *romans à clef*/

FREUD 2: /pornography; scandalous, steamy/

FREUD 3: /in the manner of Sherlock Holmes/

FREUD 2 : (*Under his breath*) /in the manner of the Marquis de Sade/

FREUD: /of absolutely no scientific value.

FREUD: This because of their emphasis on sexual themes/

FREUD 3: /and, as it's been explained to me/

FREUD: /because of the fine writing of which I am capable. Well/

FREUD 2: Hypocrites.

FREUD: I can only warn you that I will not submit to the hypocrisy of my century concerning sexuality. This case will also abound in sexual references because it's useless to talk about hysteria without talking about sex.

FREUD 2: And I will dare to go even further/

FREUD 3: No, that's enough.

FREUD: I will dare to say that/

FREUD 3: /the hypocrisy/

FREUD: /of our culture about sex/

FREUD 3: Be careful...

FREUD 2: /which our culture immediately relegates to damnation or mystification/

FREUD: /and the fact that neurotic illnesses are the plague of our times, are not two unconnected facts. It is the complication of sexual energy that provokes neuroses.

FREUD 3: (*Under his breath*). Brilliant.

FREUD 2 and 3: Ergo/

FREUD: /these days we live in a society where to be neurotic is to be normal.

*The three Freuds tap the ashes of their cigars with their index finger. Change of lights. Only Freud remains in front of us:*

FREUD: In the summer of 1899 Herr F. visited me. Herr F, a gentleman of vast fortune and influence in Vienna.

*Freud's consultation room. He and Herr F. talk. The similarity between them is notable. Herr F. is a member of the bourgeoisie, like Freud. Like Freud, he too is forty-five years old, and like Freud, he wears a three-piece suit - his being impeccable and brand new. Also like Freud, he has a moustache and a beard cut close to his jaw. He wears thick glasses. He's suffering now; his voice is broken, nasal.*

HERR F.: I have a son, but Dora is my favorite. She is very intelligent; she's my confidant, my... I've even thought that Dora could inherit my businesses, despite being a woman. (*Herr F. puts his hand on his forehead.*) I have an unfortunate marriage, Herr Doctor. If I haven't separated from my wife it's because of Dora, because I've not wanted to lose her... (*Tears stream down his cheeks and he can't finish his sentence.*) Pardon me. (*He coughs and takes out a handkerchief to dry his tears. He then dries his glasses, explaining*) I have neurasthenia, my eyes burn when I have an attack. Anyway, I was saying that since you cure illnesses that don't exist/ I mean imaginary ones/ Well, I want you to cure her.

FREUD: You think your daughter has an illness of the psyche.

HERR F.: She sees things that don't exist. Hallucinations.

FREUD: Hallucinations?

HERR F.: She has coughing attacks--in the middle of summer. Headaches. Attacks of/ (*Lowering his voice as he tends to do when he wants to tone down anything aggressive; Herr F. cannot deal with aggression.*) of anger--, mostly at me, who loves her so much. And now-- yesterday-- (*His voice breaks*) she tried to commit suicide.

*A brief pause.*

HERR F.: She left this on my desk. (*He hands Freud a letter*) I went up to her bedroom immediately and said to her, I suppose in a very desperate tone: How can you possibly think that I want your death?

*In another, distant area of the stage, Dora; a seventeen-year-old with an intelligent face. She coughs and then answers:*

DORA: Don't lie. Everything would be easier for you and Frau K., that whore.

HERR F.: What language! I hit her.

*Dora receives the blow. He coughs and then says:*

HERR F.: For God's sake, what does Frau K. have to do with this?

*Dora and Herr F. freeze. Freud, to us:*

FREUD: Of course, I refer here to Frau K. like that--as Frau K.-- to protect the identity of the lady in question.

3

*The consulting room again. Herr F. lights a cigar. Freud, still smoking his cigar, hands Herr F. a silver ashtray.*

HERR F.: Thank you. Five years ago, when I became ill with neurasthenia and took my family to live in Baden Baden. That's when Frau K. enters our lives. Frau K. took pity on me and practically became my nurse.

FREUD: And your wife?

HERR F.: I--I told you already: My wife and I have a non-marriage. Since then Frau K. and I have been friends. We take vacations together, the two families. And here in Vienna I go to visit them almost every day, because now I have business with Herr K. And Herr K. has become like an uncle for my daughter, a close uncle. They have a friendship full of gifts and confidences and/ Excuse me? What did you say?

FREUD: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

HERR F.: Oh. Well, you can see that in this context, my daughter's accusation is terrible.

FREUD: That you want her death.

HERR F.: There was previous accusation. There are various other previous accusations. (*He covers his eyes again.*) It shames me to speak of this.

FREUD: I'm listening.

HERR F.: A week ago Dora called me to her bedroom and told me that Herr K. had kissed her on the mouth while he touched.... her noble parts.

FREUD: Her genitalia.

*Herr F. is alarmed by Freud's words.*

Herr F.: Her breasts. I, of course, left immediately in my automobile to the K.s' house and, of course, Herr K. was greatly offended at the accusation. And no wonder. Herr. K is a married man. (*He coughs.*) When I got home I told Dora what Herr K. had said to me - that the business about the kiss was a fantasy of Dora's and she answered that I had to choose between the K.s' and her. (*He passes his hand over his mouth.*) She more or less talked about the K.s'. and Frau K. without distinguishing. Either her or me. You stop seeing her or I'll kill myself. I left her room extremely upset and for days we didn't speak of the matter. But a week later, yesterday to the day, when I was returning from Frau K.'s house...

FREUD: You went to Frau K.'s house again.

HERR F.: (*Looking the other way.*) Yes.

FREUD: Despite the fact that your daughter threatened to/

HERR F.: Yes.

FREUD: When you returned from Frau K.'s house...

HERR F.: I found the letter and went up to her room, like I told you. Dora had a bottle of tranquilizers; I knocked them out of her hand...

*In another area of the stage, not as distant as the previous one, Dora has her hand extended; she opens her palm.*

HERR F.: I put the bottle in my jacket. She said to me...

DORA: You have chosen. I must die.

HERR F.: I asked her to be reasonable, but she went on in the same dramatic way.

DORA: It's natural. It's convenient for you to believe him, because you and she are lovers.

HERR F.: We have an honorable friendship, daughter. I and Frau K., and her husband.

DORA: Ha! And now you and the husband have agreed on a price for his wife.

HERR F.: What price?

DORA: Your daughter. Me. He wants to use me like you use his wife.

HERR F.: What a delirious idea. Monstrous. (*He coughs.*)

DORA: I'll be his whore, like she's yours.

HERR F.: And the obscenity, Doctor. It was as if a devil--a strident and vile spirit--had entered her body. (*He coughs.*)

DORA: For the last time: If you love me, you have to stop seeing her.

HERR F.: Dora, you can't ask this of me. It's cruel, irrational.

DORA: Ha!

HERR F.: She saved my life, you know that. (*He coughs.*)

DORA: Then you have decided for the second time. You prefer Frau K. and I must die.

HERR F.: As if she were saying: I don't want to live, therefore I should die. I said to her very slowly - Daughter... daughter, how can you think that I want your death?

*Dora coughs, then replies.*

DORA: Don't lie. Everything would be easier for you and that whore.

HERR F.: I hit her.

*Dora receives the blow.*

HERR F.: For God's sake, I yelled. And then I didn't know what else to say or do and I hit her again, and again, and again.

*Dora receives three blows. Lights out over Dora.*

HERR F.: I understand, Doctor, that a man's life is made of happiness and suffering, and that if he lives enough years/

*He keeps talking but we don't hear him, because Freud speaks directly to us.*

FREUD: (*To us.*) And here Dora's father escaped into philosophy. (*As he takes a pill box out his vest pocket.*) That blah-blah-blah of generalities which we call philosophy and with which we escape our individual destinies. (*Freud swallows a pill, then speaks to Herr F., interrupting him.*) Herr F.

HERR F.: Excuse me?

FREUD: And the cough. When did you say it started?

HERR F.: My... my cough?

*In a contiguous space, Dora's already seated on the divan.*

DORA: No, what my father has is neurasthenia. (*She signals quotation marks with her fingers, a gesture she makes whenever she quotes something.*)

HERR F.: My daughter's? She's been coughing since...since the hallucination about the kiss. (*Lights fade over Herr F.*)

4

***The consulting office again.*** *Dora is now angry and her intelligence has turned ironic. As she speaks, she opens and closes a coin purse. Freud can't keep from being distracted by this automatic and obsessive movement.*

FREUD: (*Marking quotations with his fingers, just like Dora.*) Why do you say neurasthenia?

DORA: Because neurasthenia is what we call a group of nervous illnesses that nobody knows exactly what they are, isn't that so?

FREUD: It is.

*Dora leaves the coin purse alone and Freud sighs, relieved.*

9

DORA: My father has a hard time with life. He has problems, he's indecisive, he has headaches, he cries suddenly. But it seems more elegant to him to have neurasthenia than to just be a miserably unhappy person. May I have a mint?

*Freud speaks to us, while Dora opens her coin purse to take out a mint.*

FREUD: I could not nor did I want to hide how charming I found this precocious young woman.

DORA: Oh, would you like one?

FREUD: I understood immediately why her father wanted to send her to Leipzig, to the only School of Finance in Europe that admitted women.

DORA: I'll tell you something else: He makes love to Frau K. and he's cured. That's why I became worried when we moved to Vienna, but guess who also moved to Vienna in a matter of two weeks?

FREUD: ....

DORA: ....

FREUD: I'm listening.

DORA: It's just that I'm thinking about something else now. Is that what association is--jumping from one subject to another?

FREUD: I'm listening.

DORA: I thought that you were going to ask me about my mother.

FREUD: Very well, then. I'm asking you about your mother.

DORA: Oh, Doctor, my mother is a fool--an idiot--and profoundly so, Doctor. She doesn't do anything but clean and sew and cook. My father says that when she was young the world interested her-- politics, literature. But marriage shrank her intelligence and now everything is buttons and rugs and little spots on the silver. And this, with three servants. They are the happiest servants in the world, they sit down to watch my mother polish the candelabra. I mean, it's not like your wife, Doctor, who goes around cleaning because you don't have servants. Today I saw her cleaning the waiting room and I remembered what my father said, that you barely earn enough to own two suits. I shouldn't have said this. Are you angry with me?

FREUD: I said: You should say whatever occurs to you, with total freedom.

DORA: It's that... Well, it's strange but the truth is that I don't blame my father for falling out of love with my mother and falling in love with Irena like that, hopelessly. As far as my mother is concerned, all she cares about is that □nothing happen to her family, that's how she says it. Translation: that there be no scandals or divorces. And Herr K., ... well, the pitiful man lets things be and has a brandy. Or two. O seven. Besides, my father□s made him rich. What does it matter to him if my father and his wife do what they do. Besides, what do they do? My father□s... it doesn□t... It doesn□t.... get hard.

FREUD: (*Interested.*) How do you know that?

DORA: I heard him tell our doctor. He said it in Latin so that I wouldn□t understand. *Penis flaccidus*. But I speak Latin and Greek. And the book at my bedside is *The Physiology of Love* by Mantegazza.

FREUD: Oh.

DORA: Frau K. gave it to me. I talk about sex with her.

FREUD: But if your father has *penis flaccidus*, then how can your father and Frau K...?

DORA: □Fuck□? With their mouths.

FREUD: Do you have any idea how coitus is accomplished?

DORA : I□ve seen pictures.

FREUD: Then how do you imagine it...?

DORA: They suck each other. It□s called *cunnilingus*. If you want, I can bring you some pictures so you can see how it□s done.

*Dora starts to open and close her coin purse.*

FREUD: What are you thinking about now?

DORA: I remembered Herr K.□s kiss. And my father□s treachery.

FREUD: Dora, I want you to listen to me carefully. Do you remember that when you were six years old you had a nervous asthma? It was real. It did you harm. It fatigued you. However, its cause was mental, not physical. Well, there are □nervous□ memories. (*Freud signs quotation marks with his fingers, just like Dora, a gesture other characters will also acquire.*) Perhaps-- and only perhaps-- the memory of Herr K.□s kiss is the result of a mental process, like your asthma and maybe□and again, only perhaps□your present cough. The memory is real to you, it

hurts you. But it's important that we clarify here if it happened in the outside world or in your imagination.

*Dora has a reflex as if to vomit, which then immediately turns into a cough. She coughs two times.*

DORA: You're just like my father. *(She coughs again.)* Pleasant. Well-mannered. *(She coughs.)* And a liar. You believe what's convenient for you, nothing more.

FREUD: What's convenient for me?

*Dora replies, with increasing anger.*

DORA: That I imagined the kiss.

FREUD: *(To us, pressing his brow with two fingers; he has a headache.)* Interesting.

DORA: My father pays you so that nothing happens to my family, as my mother says.

FREUD: *(To us.)* Very interesting.

DORA: So that when they ask him how his family is, he can say "Well, very well, and yours?"

*Dora keeps talking but we don't hear her because Freud is talking to us, as he takes his pill box out of his vest pocket and takes a pill.*

FREUD: In just one session Dora had gone from amorous complicity with me to hatred, a bond as intense or more so than love. Not for nothing did she end by saying to me on three occasions:

DORA: Yes, you are identical to my father.

5

***Freud, alone in his consulting room. He sits down behind his desk and he opens his hard-covered notebook.***

FREUD: It is now pertinent to speak about the phenomenon of transference. We have the impression that when we meet someone we allow, without difficulty, that we do not know anything about that person/

*FREUD 2 and FREUD 3 enter.*

FREUD 2 & 3: (*One after the other.*) How are you? How are *you*?

FREUD: /or so we say, and perceive this total stranger as a clean slate and we expect him to reveal himself to us little by little.

FREUD 3: Tell me something about yourself, because for now you're an absolute stranger to me.

FREUD: False. It's never like that. The fact is that immediately we associate our acquaintances with significant people in the past. We think, consciously or unconsciously:

FREUD 3: (*To us.*) This one is a haughty boy, a thief like my younger brother. Or rather/

FREUD 2: (*To us.*) /this one is a presumptuous fool like my grandfather.

FREUD: And we reedit with them our past relationships, making slight corrections to adjust them to a new reality.

FREUD 3: I will be discrete with him like a shadow. Like I am with my brother the thief. (*Extending his hand to him, condescendingly.*) Excuse me. I'm leaving. I have an appointment.

FREUD 2: (*Very friendly.*) I don't believe anything you say, you mouthful of shit.

FREUD 3: (*As he walks backwards, exiting obsequiously.*) No, he didn't even steal a crumb from me.

FREUD 2: You have a good day, too--hypocrite. And die during the night.

FREUD: Is the example necessary?

FREUD 3: Cross that out.

*Freud crosses it out; Freud 2 & 3 sit at their respective desks.*

FREUD 3: But the concept is extremely...

FREUD 2: Disquieting.

FREUD 3: Yes, very promising.

FREUD: (*To us, with rising excitement.*) We know very few people during our lives. Our parents, our siblings, a few others, and from then on, we go on re-knowing them and re-knowing them in the people we recently □know.□ In the consulting room of a psychoanalyst/

*Freud□s wife, Marta, enters. She wears an apron, a feather duster peeking out of its pocket. So as to not be interrupted, Freud bends over his desk dramatically, to write, while Freud 2 takes over.*

FREUD 2: In the consulting room of the psychoanalyst, where/

MARTA: Dinner/

FREUD: (*A little annoyed, looking up from his desk.*) Yes?

MARTA: /dinner will be ready in half an hour.

FREUD: Fine. Thank you, Marta.

*Marta takes the silver ashtray, empties it and cleans it with her apron, puts it back in its place, while Freud keeps on writing and Freud 2 composing.*

FREUD 2: In the consulting room of a psychoanalyst who remains in silence a good deal of the time and who is never/

FREUD 3: (*Writing.*) Ideally.

FREUD 2: /ideally never motivated by any interest other than to clear things up for his patient, the phenomenon of transference is undeniable.

FREUD 3: (*To Freud 2.*) Scientific measurements. That□s what they□ll ask for. Replications in the laboratory.

FREUD 2: .....?

FREUD 3: The phenomenon is very notable.

*Martha exits and Freud retakes the baton.*

FREUD: It□s clear that in the beginning of analysis, I took the place of Dora□s father in her imagination. (*Freud 3 wipes his thick glasses and becomes Herr F . He and Freud stand up; they move identically while Freud has continued talking, without a pause.*) In fact, a conscious association on her part and besides, one right on the mark, given the similarities between her father and me.

FREUD 3: Similarities in our age, in our physical appearance and in our gestures/

FREUD: /acquired in a similar milieu. The fact that both of us were Jews.

FREUD 3 & 2: SHHH.

FREUD 3: Irrelevant.

FREUD 2: Ha!

FREUD 3: Cross that out. (*They cross it out.*)

FREUD: Similarities in our education and in .. and in our...

FREUD 2: Full stop. New paragraph.

FREUD: (*Sitting down again.*) The case of Dora was not a case of great hysteria, with spectacular symptoms like a sudden blindness, a paralysis of the extremities or a sudden amnesia. It was a question merely of a *petite histerie*, with the most common of symptoms.

*Ana enters the consulting room. She is the same age as Dora, but shier in nature. Her hair is collected in a bun at the nape of her neck; she wears a highly starched apron. Freud once again bends over to concentrate on his writing.*

FREUD 3: Precisely because of that it was to teach me much more about the healthy workings of the mind...

ANA: Papa.

FREUD 3: Like transference/

FREUD: (*Looking up slowly.*) Yes, Do...

FREUD 2: Do...? Dora!

FREUD 3: No: Ana. Ana.

FREUD 2 & 3: (*Pointing to Freud.*) *Lapsus lingüe, lapsus lingüe.*

FREUD: Yes, daughter?

ANA: Dinner.

FREUD: (*After consulting the clock on his desk.*) Time got away from me. (*He stands up, and as he exits with his daughter:*) Thank you, Ana. Let me see what your mother has prepared.

ANA: I prepared it, too.

FREUD 3: /the inevitable transference. Full stop. End of chapter.

*Lights on Freud 3 only, who is putting on his thick glasses. He becomes Herr F., takes a small box out of his coat pocket and opens it. We are now in:*

6

*Small foyer in the K.'s home.*

HERR F.: Irena. Frau K. No: Irena. This is a farewell gift. If we stop seeing each other, maybe Dora will get well and

*Frau K. enters and Herr F. quickly hides the little box. Frau K. is a forty-year-old woman, physically and emotionally adorable. They kiss on the cheeks. She looks one way and then another to make sure no one sees them; she takes his face between her hands and kisses him on the lips. He surrenders to her kiss avidly, then pulls back, guilty.*

*After a brief pause.*

FRAU K.: Why the urgency? Is it something the doctor said?

HERR F.: Ye-yes. He warned me that her cure is like opening a Pandora's box. He has to open it to cure, but then all the psychic complexities emerge and the patient gets worse before getting better. (*Suddenly irritated.*) Irena, why does your husband make an appointment with me in your/in your house?

FRAU K.: If he wants to see me, he said, tell him to come to our home.

HERR F.: Irena... Our situ/situation is very ... complicated. Irena... (*He takes his hand to the pocket where he has hidden the little box.*) I've thought that...

*As he seems unable to finish his sentence, she shows him her affection. She kisses him on the lips.*

FRAU K.: Be pleasant to him.

*She takes him by the arm and they start walking. As they exit:*

HERR F.: It's that/ I mean I've been told that it's not like that. A neurologist friend of mine has told me that Doctor Freud's patients sometimes worsen and never get cured.

7

*Little living room in the K.'s house. Herr K., who was Freud 2 before and is now bald, seated in a chair. He's drinking a brandy when he hears Frau K. and Herr F. enter.*

HERR K.: *(In a rough voice.)* How is your family, Herr F.?

HERR F.: Good. Very good. And yours?

HERR K.: And just how may I help you? *(Herr K. moves brusquely to the little table where the drinks are and brushes against a floor lamp, which teeters.)*

FRAU K.: My God! It's a Gallé lamp.

HERR K.: A jewel. *(Continuing his way to the drinks.)* Which we brutes don't know how to appreciate.

FRAU K.: Perhaps you shouldn't drink more? There's mineral water in/

HERR K.: *(To Herr F.)* Well, then? *(He starts to fill his glass.)*

HERR F.: I've come to... beg of you

HERR K.: What have you come to beg of me?

HERR F.: I'm asking you for the second time, but this time I ask, for pity's sake... that you tell me ... *(His voice quivers.)* if you have touched my daughter. *(He coughs.)*

HERR K.: I adore your daughter. I have given her books, candy. I gave her a Gallé jewelry box , a jewelry box that's worth more than that lamp. I'm her favorite uncle. Well, I was.

HERR F.: I/

HERR K.: I ask you, why would an attractive and sensual man like me touch a little girl? *(To his wife.)* I am a man who's attractive to women, isn't that right?

FRAU K.: Until they live with you.

HERR K.: (*Putting his hand to his heart.*) Touché!

FRAU K.: The child is the heir to a textile empire. Nobody cares if she's lost her innocence. Those are stupid words. What really matters is to know if she's mentally ill.

HERR F.: If she is mentally ill, she can't be my heir. (*He coughs.*) And if she's not going to be my heir, then it doesn't make any sense to send her to study finance. Nobody gives the management of a business to a woman, unless it's her father. It's unjust but that's the way it is. So, yes: I'd better decide soon; this winter.

*Herr K. calmly serves himself another brandy.*

FRAU K.: Don't sacrifice the child.

*Herr K. takes the glass of brandy to his lips.*

FRAU K.: She's not to blame for any of our entanglements.

HERR K.: You're the ones with entanglements. (*Suddenly, to Herr F.*) You are a man of very clear actions—even cruel. (*Herr F. coughs.*) What's despicable is your whimpering afterwards. From the very beginning you decided who was lying: it was your daughter or me. You sent her to a doctor for lunatics.

HERR F.: I thought it was best, but now I don't know.

HERR K.: What do I get out of this?

FRAU K.: Don't be so low.

HERR K.: Don't humiliate me any more, Irene. There is a limit to what a man can endure.

HERR F.: I am willing to pay for your sincerity.

HERR K.: How much?

HERR F.: Five percent of the import business. But I want proof.

HERR K.: Dora is an outstanding girl, we all know that. A girl avid for culture. Especially lately, especially for adult books. (*Looking at Frau K.*) Sex manuals. Sophisticated novels. (*Looking at Herr K.*) Her father takes her to the theatre: he took her to La Ronde, the latest avant-garde scandal. And well, her father is a modern man, is this not so? A man who thinks that we can live differently from our parents, more freely, without any respect for tradition.

HERR F.: That's not so. I have educa/

HERR K.: If you don't want to hear the truth.

HERR F.: ... I'm sorry. I won't say anything.

HERR K.: In one and a half hours, La Ronde tells of how many sexual seductions? Ten. One every seven minutes. (*Looking intently at his wife.*) Not even in a whorehouse is there so much activity, I can assure you. If La Ronde excites us and our imagination gets hot, little Dora's imagination burst into flames of lust. In effect, she went crazy. Her father made her go crazy.

HERR F.: (*Lowering his face, ashamed.*) I want proof.

HERR K.: Proof. Proof about a kiss that never happened. I'll give you proof. Scene four or five of La Ronde. A forty-year-old man seduces a girl in a private room of a restaurant, while they're eating...what?

HERR F.: I'm myopic, you know that.

FRAU K.: Meringues.

HERR K.: What did I give Dora to eat, according to her, the day of the criminal kiss?

HERR F.: ... Meringues?

HERR K.: (*To Frau K.*) A word with you, madam.

*Herr K. gets up; she does, as well. They go out to the next vestibule. Suddenly he grabs his wife violently by the hair and presses her against the wall. He lifts up her skirt and penetrates her with a finger. Meanwhile, in the little living room, Herr F. takes out the little box and gets ready to bid his lover farewell.*

*Herr K. comes back in, with a nonchalant air. Herr F. hides the little box.*

HERR K.: Enjoy yourselves. I'll be back in the early morning.

*As he leaves, Frau K. puts on the gramophone in the vestibule. A Strauss waltz. Frau K. goes into the little living room.*

HERR F.: (*Very low.*) He's drinking again.

FRAU K.: .....

HERR F.: (*Very low.*) What did he say to you?

FRAU K.: .....It doesn't matter.

HERR F.: This business about the meringue doesn't (*He coughs.*) prove anything. Or does it prove something?

*Sound of a far-away door closing. Frau K. sits down in the chaise longue.*

FRAU K.: I don't know. Come here.

*Herr F. does not move.*

HERR F.: Irena... I don't... think that my daughter deserves/I should provide her with an uncomplicated environment. We parents should, if we have brought them into the world—the children—we should, even if it pains us deeply...

FRAU K.: Go ahead and say it.