

# KAFKA IN LOVE

Genre: Romantic Dramedy

Period: 1912 to 1924

Locations: Prague, Prague's countryside, Berlin, Vienna

## Pitch

Between 1912 and his death in 1924, Franz Kafka was engaged four times but never married. We follow here the main relationships of his romantic life, all of which were initially long distance, through the love letters Franz exchanges with his fiancées Felice, Julie, Milena and Dora. Here, between Prague, Berlin and Vienna, the literary genius becomes a man - flawed, scared, funny and always ironically and cruelly aware of his own limitations. Beyond the tragedy of his life and the depth of his writings, Kafka is a modern lover, seducing women, often too scared to get close to them, comedic in spite of himself and always ready to make fun of himself. One of the most influential authors of the last century becomes the uniquely charming lead of an unexpected romantic dramedy.

## Synopsis

Felice

In 1912, **Franz Kafka** is walking in Prague at night towards his best friend's house for dinner. **Max Brod** and Franz Kafka met ten years before when they were both law students. Their common passion for literature brought them closer, and Max will remain Franz's best friend until his death. As he goes there every night, Franz feels at home in the joyful chaos of Max Brod's family house. That night, he meets **Felice Bauer** for the first time and according to what he wrote in his diary, Kafka is far from impressed by what he sees in the young woman. Nevertheless, Kafka sends Felice who lives in Berlin more than a hundred love letters in the three months that follow. Moreover, despite the catastrophic trip Kafka takes to Berlin to visit Felice's family, the two of them get engaged. Kafka then tries to dissuade Felice from marrying him, warning her about his terrible personality and dreadful habits. Felice sends a friend as an emissary to Prague. Kafka meets with **Grete** and cannot help but start a flirtatious correspondence with her. His letters will be brought as pieces of evidence during the personal trial Felice organizes during Kafka's following trip to Berlin. This event could mean the end of their relationship, but instead Felice and Kafka renew their engagement and plan a wedding. Franz feels like a prisoner. The first manifestation of the tuberculosis that will finally take his life gives Kafka the perfect motive to escape his second engagement and leave to his sister's countryside house where he experiences the seven most peaceful months of his life.

## Julie

In 1918, Kafka's illness worsens and he's sent to rest in a small hotel in the north of Prague. At first, Franz is the only guest in the remote hotel. After several weeks, another guest, **Julie Worhyzek** moves into the house. Though they have the whole hotel for themselves, Julie and Franz cannot help bumping into each other; they are inexorably attracted to each other, inducing them to laugh to tears every time they meet in the same room. Their love story starts as a magnetic attraction, surrounded by snow and forests as far as the eye can see. Back in Prague, Franz and Julie meet secretly for a while. Franz finally faces his father's disapproval with his choice to propose to the daughter of a modest family after the failure of his first two engagements. Franz finds an apartment for himself and Julie. For Julie it's a dream come true; for Franz, it's the beginning of a nightmare. He's already looking for an exit and finds one miraculously when their landlord refuses to rent them this small place. Kafka flees again to the resting cure of the countryside.

## Milena

In 1920, Franz Kafka meets **Milena Jesenska** in a cafe. Kafka is thirty-seven; Milena, twenty-three. When he meets her, Kafka doesn't know Milena is about to become the rebel icon of a generation. Rejected by her father, she took care of her mother until her death. On her own, Milena has already lived on the street, tried cocaine, crossed the Moldau to meet a lover, posed naked, worked as a carrier and written feminist articles for Prague's newspaper. Milena is the most passionate of Kafka's lovers, and he's seriously concerned he might not survive her intensity. As he's about to leave the countryside to return to Prague, Milena begs him to visit her in Vienna. Franz feels too old and weak to meet Milena anywhere, but he finally succumbs and joins her in Vienna in June of 1920. The young woman has no pity for Franz's weakness and refuses to leave her other lover to stay with Franz. Kafka returns to Prague and keeps sending Milena letters, confiding in her the most intimate details of his sexual life.

## Dora

Franz's condition becomes more and more unbearable. In 1923, as he's resting on the Baltic Sea, Kafka meets his last love, **Dora Diamant**. She's a Polish instructor and dreams of opening a restaurant in Palestine. She shares her dream with Kafka, invites him to open this restaurant with her, and this project—impossible, considering Kafka's health—becomes a peaceful horizon to their story. Kafka still follows her to Berlin and despite the cold, the fever, the misery, he's happy for the first time to share his life with a woman. Kafka's fever rises and his best friend Max brings him back to Prague. Kafka doesn't want Dora to go there with him; he wants to spare her his father's attitude. They will finally meet at the sanatorium where Franz will spend his last days. Dora is enraged to see her lover's suffering. She stays with him until the end. Franz Kafka dies asphyxiated on the third of June 1924.

In 1948, Kafka's niece, Marianne, accidentally runs into Dora in London. When she learns about Dora's terrible financial situation, she offers her the English rights to her uncle's work.

## **Adaptation**

The tragic and anxious absurdity in Kafka's work is well known. The writer's frantic obsession with women he's barely seen, his incapacity to fully commit to any of them, his profound anxiety about being unable to meet his lovers' expectations - all of these character traits echo vividly in his work. His love life reveals a side of him that one could have guessed in his writings but which takes here its full dimension: Kafka's fabulous sense of humor. What is immediately striking in the story of his love life is Kafka's impeccable irony in any circumstance. Despite the pain of his anxiety, the frustration of how little time is left for him to write at night, the permanent conflict between him and his father, and finally his unbearable physical agony, Kafka always finds a way, as he's crying, to make fun of himself, of his idiosyncrasies, of his limitations.

This text gives a brand new perspective on Kafka's attitude towards his own love life and makes it irresistible to imagine Kafka as the lead of a dark romantic comedy. With his intelligence and unforgiving self-awareness, Kafka becomes the ultimate indecisive yet passionate lover. This material gathers elements of a unique cinematic story: the elegant and romantic set of Prague, Berlin and Vienna in the 20's, the tension and energy of passionate love stories, and most of all the gravitas and humour of one of the greatest writers of his century.

## **References**

*Annie Hall*, Woody Allen (1977)

*Manhattan*, Woody Allen (1979)