

# REQUIEM FOR FREUD'S SISTERS

by Barbara F. Lefcowitz

In Memory of

Regina Deborah Freud Graf (Rosa) 1860-1942

Maria Freud Moritz (Mitzi) 1861-1942

Esther Adolfine Freud (Dolfi) 1862-1943

Paulina Regina Freud Winternitz (Pauli) 1864-1942

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## CHARACTERS

**ROSA**, oldest of Freud's sisters

**DOLFI**, second to youngest of the sisters

**HILDE SCHUSSNIG**, 45, Freud family's former maid, an "Aryan"

**TWO GESTAPO OFFICERS**

**SIGMUND FREUD (O.S.)**

## SETTING

A nearly dark cramped flat in Leopoldstadt, Vienna's lower middle class Jewish district.

## TIME

June 2, 1942, late evening

## SYNOPSIS OF "REQUIEM FOR FREUD'S SISTERS"

The founder of psychoanalysis, Dr. Sigmund Freud managed to escape to London from Nazi-occupied and violently anti-Semitic Vienna in 1938, but left his four elderly sisters in Vienna from where they were eventually transported by cattle car to the Treblinka concentration camp and died in its gas chambers. This sad fact is not widely known—at best it's a footnote in biographies of Freud—but it's full of implications about Freud himself, his attitude towards women, as well as such universal themes as rivalry, anger, and denial.

I focus on two of the sisters (Rosa and Dolfi) for the sake of dramaturgical economy. The action takes place in a shabby Vienna flat the evening before the Gestapo arrives to haul off the sisters prior to their transport. Because many such transports have already taken place, the sisters are aware they might be next, but react in different ways. Rosa embodies a bitter awareness of reality while Dolfi takes refuge in a dreamlike passivity.

The events are real though I've reshaped history in some small ways—e.g. introducing the character of Hilde, the Freuds' former maid, and some details of life in the Jewish ghettos of Vienna before and during World War Two. The script makes ironic use of popular music of the time, like Strauss waltzes, and at one point includes a flashback to Freud giving a lecture in London while his sisters await the Gestapo in Vienna. I do not supply any false hopes to make the material less dark; rather I aim to engage the audience emotionally.

REQUIEM FOR FREUD'S SISTERS

(As the lights dim, two elderly women, thin white-haired ROSA, who wears her hair in a bun, and plump gray-blond DOLFI, sit in shabby upholstered chairs. Between them is a sideboard with a large framed photo of Freud that faces the audience, a small crystal vase, and sterno cans. The left wall, which leads to their sleeping alcove, has a bookcase with boxes of papers; a menorah sits on the top shelf. Against the right wall a small table holds a ceramic lamp, the sole source of illumination aside from the sterno cans. On that wall there hangs a sentimental landscape of mountains and a lake; a faded oriental rug covers most of the floor.

The one window, behind the sideboard, is covered with a thick maroon velvet drape, but through a gap the audience can see a Nazi flag extended from a storefront. The door to the outside is on the right. An old valise lies nearby. It is late evening. )

ROSA

(Dressed in shapeless peasant frock. French jeweled sandals barely fit over her swollen ankles. She is shuffling through papers between packing the valise along with Dolfi)

Hilde, where are you? Damn your blonde Nazi face.

DOLFI

(Wears a similar frock, but with a softer neckline, small scarf of yellowed lace. Barefoot. She rubs a rag over two old shoes; places them in the valise along with the rag)

I'm sure she'll be here soon. She was so devoted to our brother. How could she let us down?

ROSA

Damn our famous brother too! The . Great. Dr. Sigmund. Freud. Didn't give a shit about us when that French whore bribed the Gestapo for his visas.

DOLFI

But she was a Princess.

ROSA

Stop believing in fairy tales.

(Shakes a finger at DOLFI, as if admonishing a child, sighs)

Ach, Hurry up, Hilde. You said you'd come for us by 8. *'Have the money ready. And everything packed. They're getting closer.'* As if we didn't know that! As if every Jew is Leopoldstadt didn't know that.

(She opens the valise, adds a couple of worn paintbrushes.)

**DOLFI**

If only Sigmund was alive. I know he'd rescue us.

**ROSA**

(She retrieves a kitchen match from her pocket, rubs it against a sandal, but it does not ignite. Walks to the valise and opens it, putting in the sandal and its mate as well as the menorah)

The dead can't rescue anyone. Soon we'll be dead, too. When will you get it through your skull that when he left for London, he *knew* he was leaving us here to die. What a joke he died first! Shit, I wish we had some cigarettes.

**DOLFI**

I can't believe he would do a thing like that. How could he possibly know how bad the situation would get for Jews after he left? If anything happened, he was sure his name would protect us.

Hey, be careful with those matches.

**ROSA**

(sarcastic laugh)

Of course he knew! About the Nazis, about Austria's pact with Germany. Why do you think he was so anxious to leave Vienna?

**DOLFI**

He was sick. And thought he could get better medical care in London.

**ROSA**

Who were we compared with his cancer? Useless old women. O he was so ashamed of us. How could His Holiness, the God of Berggasse 19, of Western Civilization, the world—more brilliant than Newton, Copernicus, Einstein, and Darwin put together—  
How could such a God have such plain sisters?

(She rises, letting some papers drop to the floor, and speaks with fake British accent)  
So sorry. These are my servants. Kindly ignore them, my dear British friends. They're only women.

(Retrieves and tosses some papers towards photo of Freud. They fly helter-skelter, land on the rug.)

**DOLFI**

Bite your tongue! Never say bad things about the dead. Never. Watch out, you'll break that crystal vase.

**ROSA**

So what? It's not worth a pfennig. They took all the good stuff to London.

**DOLFI**

Why are you so angry at him? He did his best.

**ROSA**

I'm an *artiste*, that's why. And artists have deeper feelings. We can see the truth more than ordinary people.

(She makes a dismissive gesture towards the vase, sits again)

Such an ugly little vase. My own paintings are gone because of him, no room here. We had to sell them for a few pfennigs. To think that I got accepted by the Vienna Academy of Arts. (Laughs) The same school that rejected Adolph Hitler! Now there's only that one landscape left. Surely it won't fit in that little valise.

(Points towards murky landscape on the wall)

I should have gone to Paris with all the other great painters. But he wouldn't let me.

**DOLFI**

I'm so happy to be ordinary. God prefers people like me. We don't curse Him like you do.

**ROSA**

God is dead, as the great Nietzsche said. That doesn't mean we can't curse him. Same as we can curse our dead brother. (pause) Where the hell is that fucking Hilde?

**DOLFI**

Be patient. She'll come soon. You're always in such a rush.

**ROSA**

It's getting late. The bastards are getting closer and closer. And we're almost out of food and money.

**DOLFI**

We can always get something from **IZZY SHAPIRO**. He'll surely give us credit.

**ROSA**

(Laughs)

**IZZY SHAPIRO**. The last so-called kosher butcher. With hair curling from his ears. Who can't even speak good German, babbles in Yiddish, that lower class language of Jews from the East. Who sells pigs' feet to the last Jews of Leopoldstadt.

(Mocking tone)

'Just pay me with your gold. And your diamonds.' Jew or not Jew, he's no fucking different from Hilde and the rest of them.

(pause)

Oh why didn't I go to Paris? Despite Siggie. I even took lessons in French from Madame Kleinfeld. Until she disappeared one night. I would have loved the bridges, the grand architecture, *Le Place d'Etoile*. Why oh why didn't I go?

**DOLFI**

So why didn't you? You were always the daring one. I was happy to stay with him and help. When he and his wife lived on Berggasse I used to keep that vase filled with flowers.

(Removes a book from bookcase, slips it in the valise)

**ROSA**

Why are you doing that? We're almost out of room.

**DOLFI**

Because it's by him.

**ROSA**

(laughs)

Bet you never read a word he wrote. (pause) Yes, you were always very good to him. Almost like a servant. I'm sorry for you, I really am. Sorry he abandoned you like he did to me and his old aunt. She's dead now from typhus. (pause) You certainly had away with flowers.

**DOLFI**

'He loved mums. Once yellow water spilled onto his couch. As if someone had peed there, but Hilde cleaned it up right away. So loyal. And now she'll take care of us.

**ROSA**

(Picks up some of the papers, begins to tear them into small pieces. They land on rug. She pulls out another match but doesn't try to light it; instead she puts it in her mouth, chews on the wooden end, removes it as if it were a cigarette)  
Maybe he was the one who peed. Like he did in New York, according to Jung. Sorry. Want a match? It's almost as good as a cigarette.

**DOLFI**

No thank you. Ach, I wish I could have gone to America. All those wonderful high buildings, castles in the sky.

**ROSA**

(Laughs, removes a letter from its envelope)

He would have dragged you back here. Because HE hated America. Listen to this from his visit in 1909:

(Starts to read from letter. DOLFI looks away)

'America is a mistake. A gigantic mistake but a mistake nonetheless. '

(Laughs again, crumples letter)

JUNG said America gave SIGMUND diarrhea. And he made him faint. Poor, poor Siggie.

**DOLFI**

I bet New York has beautiful flowers.

**ROSA**

Time is running out and all you can talk about is flowers?

**DOLFI**

(Shades her eyes with her hands, speaks in a dreamy voice)

Mums the size of moons.

**ROSA**

Mums. Death flowers. Death masks. Everywhere around him death. Herr Dr. *Tod* Dr. Sigismund Death. That whole office reeked from death. Like his breath—all those stinking cigars. Even Hilde couldn't keep their ashes from falling all over the place.

(Fake cough)

**DOLFI**

(Rises to face ROSA directly)

Can't you ever say anything good about him? Did you even say thank you for your art lessons? Let alone the money he left us? All you did was curse.

**ROSA**

Barely enough for us to eat. Now all that's left goes to Hilde, that blonde Nazi peasant. Now it's all up to her, our last chance to escape. (pause) Ach, now I'll never see Paris.

**DOLFI**

Why escape? Vienna is our home.

**ROSA**

It was his home too. Until he escaped.

(Puts another match between her teeth, removes it, pretends to be shaking its "ashes")  
Oh, poor, poor Siggie. His dogs were more important than us. Who else would do tricks for him, lick his hands. Like his beautiful women patients.

**DOLFI**

Stop that. What's past is past. You look pale. Want a cup of tea?

**ROSA**

(Doesn't respond, rises to remove another box of papers from bookcase)

And we sit here in Leopoldstadt eating turnips and pigs' feet. On a street full of Jews from Poland and Russia. who can't even speak German. Loud Yiddish voices. He's lucky he's dead. At least the Nazis didn't pull out his beard. Servants took care of his least wish. And we sit here waiting for a knock on the door.

(She begins to pace around the room)

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(The figure of SIGMUND FREUD appears in shadows on left corner of the stage. Lights dim to half. Spotlight on Freud. He stands at a podium, smoking a cigar, reads from "Civilization & Its Discontents." The sisters are frozen in space and time, so not to distract from Freud.)

**FREUD**

Men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked, but a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment.



Their neighbor is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.

(He looks around, points as if to audience)

You ask, sir, if I mean that men are savage beasts to whom the thought of sparing their own kind is alien?

Yes. When their basic instincts are allowed to break through the boundaries of their ego and superego.

(The lights dim slowly on Freud. He vanishes into the blackness. Voices fade. Lights dim up in the living room. Dolfi is speaking)

**DOLFI**

(Picking up the previous conversation)

What do you mean? It's not a sewer, Vienna is a beautiful city. St. Stefan's Cathedral, the Belvedere, Schonbrunn Castle. Cafes on the Ringstrasse with the best china and silver. Better than they had on Berggasse .

(Covers her eyes, dreamy voice)

Ach, those chestnut trees in back of the house. All those statues in his office. Everyday I would dust them. Better than Hilde. And the trains with velvet seats we took in the summer to Baden-Baden when Papa let us come with him.

**ROSA:**

(seated again)

Now they're all death trains.

**DOLFI**

(Places other shoe with its mate in front of bookcase)

God knows where you get such crazy ideas. How about a biscuit? There's a bit of sausage left.

**ROSA**

No, thank you. I'm not hungry. Jews are scrubbing the streets. The acid makes their hands fall off.

**DOLFI**

I don't want to hear such things.

**ROSA**

Yesterday I looked out and saw a crowd pulling away the crutches of this old Jewish man. And laughing when he fell into the gutter.

**DOLFI**

I never look out the window any more. It's nice enough inside here with your beautiful painting to look at. You were such a good artist. Anyway, what's all that crazy stuff got to do with us? We had a famous brother.

**ROSA**

Yes, the late great healer. All he cared about were men's pricks.

(She tosses some of the torn paper in the air; they fall like bits of dirty snow)

*Scheisse!* This place is filthy. *Scheisse, Scheisse!*

(Knock on door. DOLFI opens it and HILDE SCHUSSNIG enters. She's a shapely woman, about 45, wears a stylish black suit and a feathered red hat on her light blonde hair; carries a small basket and a large handbag. She and DOLFI kiss each other on alternate cheeks, European style. Rosa does not move from her chair.)

**HILDE**

(Placing basket on small table)

Look. I bring you apples. Herr BLEICH would kill me if he knew I bought fruit for Jews from his store. But you were such a good family to work for. I hated to leave. But I had to. Or else I would catch the Jew sickness and die.

**DOLFI**

How sweet of you.

**ROSA**

(Rises and picks up basket of apples,, speaks in sarcastic voice)

Thank you for risking your life with Herr BLEICH.

**HILDE**

(Walking around and looking at things; rubs her fingers along the painting's frame)

Now I risk my life to save you. Another major roundup of Jews has started.—But there's still time for me to help you escape. I hope you have packed your valise.

**ROSA**

(Approaches Hilde)

Really? You keep us waiting for hours. How can we trust you?

**HILDE**

(Backs away from ROSA)

Would I lie? FRANZ and I will take care of you. You'll eat roast goose on our farm, pork *schnitzel* from our own pigs. And walk with the Steinbergs in the beautiful Vienna Woods.

**ROSA**

The Steinbergs. Nobody's heard from them since they disappeared one night

**HILDE**

They're very well on the farm. But they must keep it a secret, like the other people we rescued. We're one happy family. Now give me the money, please, the 10,000 marks. . Then let's go. I see you have already packed your valise..

**ROSA**

You asked for only 5000 last week.

**HILDE**

(with a slight smile)

Things have gotten more dangerous since then. My contacts now demand more. 10,000. That's a real bargain. Others have paid me 20, even 30,000 to risk helping them escape.

**ROSA**

We don't have 10,000. Will you accept 7000?

**HILDE**

Absolutely not. Leave it to a Jew to try to bargain. 10,000. Aren't your lives worth 10,000 marks? Go look for the rest. I'm sure it's hidden somewhere in this filthy flat.

(turns towards DOLFI, who's sitting with her eyes closed)

Find the money, Dolfi. Surely you know. You were his favorite. And mine, too. You would have made a good Austrian *hausfrau* if you'd gotten married. Even though you're a Jewess.

(She takes DOLFI by the arm)

We can search for it together. But we must hurry. Before I help you escape you must give me the rest of the money. I know you have it. Your famous brother left you at least 80,000 marks when he left. I know everything about you. Find it!

(Still holding DOLFI'S arm, HILDE pulls her to the bookcase and insists she empty it. Her open handbag hangs from her other arm; books and boxes of Freud's papers fall onto the rug)

**ROSA**

(to HILDE)

We don't have it. Our brother left us that money four years ago. We had to eat, pay the rent.

(HILDE and DOLFI continue to empty the bookcase; more books and papers fall onto the rug. DOLFI bends, tries to pick some up with her free arm but HILDE pushes her back up and she is forced to continue emptying the bookcase)

**HILDE**

**Hurry. Time is running out.**

**ROSA**

**(Turns towards HILDE)**

**All right. I promise I will get you the rest of the money. From the bank, soon as I can get there. I'm sure I can find the extra 5000 there.**

**HILDE**

**(Laughing)**

**What bank? There's no more Jewish banks. You think I'm an idiot? I must go now, the streets are getting more dangerous every minute. Much more dangerous. Fires, soldiers, guards with guns and whips. I must get to your neighbor Mrs. Weiss. *She's* willing to pay 50,000. . .**

**ROSA**

**Just a few more seconds.**

**(She walks towards the packed valise, which is on the floor near the door, opens it and retrieves a large stuffed sock, shakes it so bits of broken glass fall to the floor. DOLFI is still scanning the books as if looking for something by Freud. HILDE is moving slowly towards the door. ROSA stops her and extends the sock towards her)**

**ROSA**

**Our mother's diamonds. Inside this sock.. They're worth thousands. At least 50 or 60,000.**

**Here. Take them in addition to the 7000 marks. And now let's go.**

**HILDE**

**(laughing and pushing away the sock)**

**You think I'm an idiot who can't tell diamonds from glass?**

**(laughs even louder)**

**In case you don't know, I took your Mama's diamonds a long time ago. From Berggasse. To keep them safe when they left for London.**

**(She leaves after slipping the small crystal vase in her handbag, kicks the valise across the room, slams the door)**

**ROSA**

**HILDE was our last chance, that bitch.**

**(She stands, still holds the sock)**

**DOLFI**

**Calm down for God's sake. Let me look again. There must be more money lying around.**

**ROSA**

No. I'm absolutely sure. Get it into your head that we barely have 1000. Scarcely enough for us to eat. Far from enough to pay Hilde the 10,000 she wants. The bitch is gone. Now we're on our own. Wonder who else she bribed, that nasty two-timing Nazi bitch. Oh, sorry. I know you don't like words like that.

**DOLFI**

I've heard from Izzy Shapiro that the Germans are promising their trains will take Jews to the country until the war is over. Maybe even the Black Forest where everything is magic. Like in that movie about a wizard.

(Sings a few words *Where Happy Little Bluebirds Fly. ..*)

**ROSA**

(Sitting down and holding her hands to her head)

You make me sick. Get it into your thick head: nobody comes back after the Gestapo drags them off. Nobody! Never! Like the STEINBERGS. All of them. Even the old mother. And the BAUMGARTNERS and Dr. RUBINSTEIN'S family. Never, never, never! Soon there won't be a Jew left in Vienna.

**DOLFI**

I'm sure they are very happy in the country. God is taking care of them. Until the Spirit of SIGMUND sends a carriage to take us to London. Beautiful London. In a picture I once saw its big bridge.

**ROSA**

I cannot understand how you can believe that bullshit!

(She begins to bang her fists on the wall)

God. Gott. Gott in Himmel! Fuck KARL LUEGER, that Anti-Semite! Fuck DOLLFUSS. HITLER. SIGGIE. GOD. All the same. Fuck them all.

(Laughs)

Where was God when my Hermann was killed in the war? Where was he when my MAUSI took veronal? God. Where is He now? He never liked the Jews even though we made him up in the first place.

**DOLFI**

Maybe He didn't like how we made him up.

**ROSA**

So little our brother left us.

**DOLFI**

Sigmund meant the best for us. How could he know prices would go up? And how the situation for Jews would get so much worse? You can't blame him. Especially now that he's dead.

**ROSA**

The dead cast long shadows. He said so himself .

**DOLFI**

I'm not as smart as you. He never gave me any lessons.

**ROSA**

Any minute they'll be here. And you want to babble about lessons!

(Hands the sock to DOLFI, who shakes it slightly)

Stop. There'll be glass all over the place. Not that I'm going to stay here like a goat just waiting to be sacrificed. I'm going out to find someplace to hide, maybe a sewer. If I hadn't stupidly trusted Hilde I would have done so yesterday.

**DOLFI**

(Flings sock back into the still open valise)

Do what you want. I'm not going. I'm staying here. God will take care of me. Like He took care of Isaac in the Bible.

**ROSA**

What God? You're out of your mind. Enjoy the ride to the country and give my regards to the STEINBERGS and the BAUMGARTNERS.

(She turns her head, looks around the flat)

Wait. I got a better idea.

(She reaches into valise and removes the French sandals, rubs a kitchen match from her pocket against one of them, but it does not ignite.)

**DOLFI**

Get rid of those matches. You'll set the place on fire!

**ROSA**

Good. That's what it deserves. Like old people. Especially old women left behind to die. Get ready to jump out the window before the flat burns down. They'll think the Nazis pushed you.

(Footsteps on offstage stairs, gradually getting louder, followed by banging right-hand offstage door, then a loud crash as officers break down door.)

DOLFI retreats into the O.S. alcove just in time.

FIRST OFFICER shoves ROSA down onto the sofa)

**FIRST OFFICER**

Well, if it isn't ROSA FREUD. Sister of the famous doctor!  
Where did you get those beautiful Jew eyes? Where?

**ROSA**  
(defiant voice)

From my Aryan parents. And my Aryan grandparents and their parents—

**SECOND OFFICER**

Jews are the best. They know how to make money. ROTHSCILD, the richest man in Austria. And they're smart. Doctors, lawyers, professors.

**FIRST OFFICER**

Too smart for their own good. *Sieg heil!*

(Extends his hand in Nazi salute, **SECOND OFFICER** does the same, laughs.)

He looks around the flat, taking menorah from open valise and throwing against a wall where it lands under ROSA's painting.)

**FIRST OFFICER**  
(pointing pistol)

Where is your sister?

**SECOND OFFICER**

(Reading from a sheet of paper he takes from a pocket, along with a stamp)  
REGINA DEBORAH FREUD GRAF, KNOWN AS ROSA. (He stamps out her name)  
ADOLFINE FREUD, KNOWN AS DOLFI.

(Looks at ROSA)

Where is she? Tell us . At once!

**ROSA**  
(she begins to scream)

I don't know. Ask HILDE SCHUSSNIG. I'm sure she can tell you more.

**SECOND OFFICER**

Where's DOLFI? I bet you're hiding her. Tell us!

**ROSA**

I will not. Absolutely not.

(**SECOND OFFICER** pulls ROSA up. **FIRST OFFICER** points his pistol at her and fires a shot, which barely misses her. The bullet bounces off left wall, near entrance to the sleeping alcove. DOLFI emerges, crouching, from the alcove)

**DOLFI**  
(Offering some coins to **SECOND OFFICER**)

Here. For you.

**SECOND OFFICER**

(Frowns and says “Jew money” but stuffs the coins in a pocket)

You won't need any money now. The trains are free. Everything free.

**DOLFI**

What trains? I want to stay here. I'll make you strudel. The best in Vienna.

(Officers laugh , pin her down on sofa)

**ROSA**

(still standing, snarling at DOLFI)

Stop toadying, for God's sake.

**DOLFI**

Let go of me!

(She tries to kick one of the officers in the groin; he twists her foot until she cries out with pain)

Take ROSA!

She's much smarter than me. I'll wait here for God to rescue me. Take ROSA! She's an artist! She'll paint your portraits --

**ROSA**

(to DOLFI)

You bitch. You little bitch of a sister.

(Officers haul out both sisters. As they do so, exiting right, they whistle

“The Blue Danube,” slightly off-key.)

(Silence, then an excerpt of Mozart's Requiem. Set darkens. FREUD appears in shadows on left corner of stage. Lights dim up. He walks back and forth, repeating “to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.” Vanishes into the darkness.

**THE END****NOTES BELOW WILL BE ADAPTED TO PROGRAM NOTES, NOT SPOKEN**

That night ROSA and DOLFI, joined later by their sisters MITZI and PAULI, who were turned in by Hilde, entered the darkness that will lead to their deaths in the gas chambers of Treblinka, along with millions of other people there and in the other camps.

The name Freud was no help though a commandant recognized it and pretended to release ROSA so she could return to Vienna on the next train. In the meanwhile, she could refresh herself for the journey in the nice clean shower. . . She tried to jump over an electrified metal fence, dies immediately.

DOLFI lived the longest, probably because she was younger and strong enough to be assigned to forced labor, but died of malnutrition in 1943.



**Their brother SIGMUND, after escaping to London in 1938, continued to write and practice psychoanalysis until his death from cancer of the jaw in September 1939, a few weeks before the Nazi invasion of Poland. A merciful death: he knew the prospects for European Jews were deteriorating, but he never knew the worst.**

**Did he ever think about his sisters? Nobody knows. Like the sisters themselves the question is moot.**

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