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Cat on the Rails

Josef Topol

Translated by George and Christine Voskovec

Josef Topol was born in a small town near Prague in 1935, and came to Prague at the age of eighteen to work in theatre directed by E. F. Burian, the great Czech director of the inter-war period. His first play, *Midnight Wind* was an historical drama written for this theatre. In the late fifties Topol was encouraged by the director Otomar Krejča to write for the new regime he had created at the National Theatre, where Topol's plays *Their Day* and *The End of the Carnival* marked a new wave in playwriting in Czechoslovakia. He also worked as a translator, particularly of Shakespeare and Chekhov. *Cat on the Rails* (*Kočka na kolejích*) was written in 1965 for the opening of Krejča's new venture, The Theatre Beyond the Gate which was closed during the 'normalisation' of the early seventies. Topol continued to work as a translator until 1977 when, having signed Charter 77, he was forbidden to do any other than manual work. During this period he wrote *Goodbye Socrates!* and *The Voices of Birds*, the former was produced at the Theatre of the Estates in 1990, the latter at the Vinohrady Theatre as early as June 1989.

Characters

ÉVI

VÉNA

THE BOY

FIRST YOUNG MAN

SECOND YOUNG MAN

The action takes place at a whistle stop of a railway branch line, not far from Prague.

The scene is a whistle stop of a railway branch line. Shadows of the spread-out branches of a large tree fall on a wooden shed, the type found at whistle stops the world over. A single track runs alongside the proscenium. Upstage and parallel to it, a footpath, between the track and the shed. A little distance from the shed, a bench.

It is night.

Situation One

THE BOY enters running along the path. He is wearing a white shirt with an open collar and carries his jacket under his arm. He is out of breath. He stops for a moment, then runs into the

shed. An irritated male voice is heard from inside. 'Hey!' THE BOY backs out of the shed, throwing the jacket over his shoulders.

VÉNA enters from shed, rubbing his forehead.

VÉNA. You out of your mind, idiot! (He stuffs his shirt tails into his trousers.)

THE BOY. How could I...

VÉNA steps threateningly towards him. THE BOY, backing away, lifts his hands to protect his face; the jacket slips off his shoulders, he trips over it and sits on the bench, VÉNA towering over him.

VÉNA. How could you what?

THE BOY (bursts out). It's a waiting room...

ÉVI appears in the door of the shed.

ÉVI. He calls it a waiting room? This hedgehog nest?

BOY grabs his jacket, starts off, but VÉNA gets hold of a sleeve. The jacket is stretched taut between them.

VÉNA (giving the sleeve a jerk). Let's have it: 'I didn't know you were having such a good time...'

BOY (sarcastically). I didn't know you were having such a good time...

VÉNA (prompting). 'I could kick myself.'

BOY. I sure could kick you. (He tries to jerk the jacket free but VÉNA pulls him back and twists his arm.)

VÉNA. Good. Let's see you try.

ÉVI. Let him go, Véna. (To BOY) What's your name?

BOY. Ivan.

ÉVI. That's better, Ivan. Got a match?

BOY (making a face) Nyeh! (A hiss of pain as VÉNA twists his arm.) . . . Sorry.

VÉNA (letting him go). No match but some cheek.

ÉVI. We'll never get a smoke. (To BOY) Can you strike a flint?

VÉNA. The peasantry has lost the art of flint striking.

A distant sound of running feet is heard on the tracks, off. BOY gets fidgety.

VÉNA notices it, drapes BOY's jacket over his own shoulders.

You in a hurry? Sit down. (Sits down on bench and ties his shoe laces.)

BOY. You crud.

VÉNA. What have you done? Well?

BOY stand helplessly, peering into the night.

ÉVI. You can tell me. I'm an outlaw too.

VÉNA. Kind of a wildcat.

ÉVI. Kind of your unlawful wife.

VÉNA. Sure.

Someone is heard whistling, off.

BOY. So what? They're after me.

ÉVI (to VÉNA.). He set fire to the pub.

VÉNA. Him? He's got hot pants, that's all. Bet you there's a woman. (*Feeling the jacket's pockets*) No matches. (*Tossing the jacket to the BOY.*) Good boy. Tells no lies.

BOY *catches jacket, looks around in alarm and darts off behind the shed.*

BOY (*as he runs off*). You can both go and...

VÉNA. Mind your language. (*Picks up a stone and throws it after the BOY.*)

ÉVI. What if you'd hit him?

VÉNA. I didn't, did I?

ÉVI. You always play the fool. (*Pours broken pieces of glass out of her handbag.*) You were lying on my mirror.

More whistling, off.

VÉNA. Seven years' bad luck.

ÉVI. Already, with you. (*Begins to make up.*)

VÉNA (*Feeling his forehead*). The bastard. I got a lump.

ÉVI. Such a useful little mirror.

VÉNA (*crushing the fragments with his heel*). And unto dust it shall return...

ÉVI. How am I going to see myself now?

VÉNA *offers his face for a mirror.*

Vandal (*Almost tenderly.*) It was for me you were showing off; wasn't it?

VÉNA. Showing off?

ÉVI. That act you put on. Trying to scare him. (*Paints his face with her eyebrow pencil*)

VÉNA. What're you doing to me?

ÉVI. A moustache. It won't come off. I made it a defiant one.

Two figures, unseen by the couple, enter from the darkness.

VÉNA (*sticking out his chest*). Ho-ho!

The two figures approach. They are TWO YOUNG MEN.

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*grabbing VÉNA from behind*). Got him!

SECOND YOUNG MAN (*grabbing ÉVI almost simultaneously*). Got him!

ÉVI *kicks his shins; he hurriedly lets go of her.*

Sorry...

VÉNA (*throws FIRST YOUNG MAN off*). What's this?

ÉVI. Playing cops and robbers?

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*picking himself up, to VÉNA.*). Seen a kid - about like so?

VÉNA. Mm. Seen a few about like so -

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*angry*). Did you or didn't you?!

ÉVI (*Pointing at herself*). She did.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Where'd she go?

VÉNA (*with irony*). What she do to you?

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*screams*). Where'd he go!

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Easy!

(*To VÉNA.*). You know what a vendetta is? If you don't, shut up.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Speak up, dammit, speak up!

SECOND YOUNG MAN. We're going to kick his teeth in. Right?

VÉNA. The kid's, that is.

FIRST YOUNG MAN *starts taking a swing at VÉNA.*

SECOND YOUNG MAN (*backs away*). He can't be far. His train will be here any minute.

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*exploding*). I'm gonna kick his teeth in! (*He runs towards the shed*)

ÉVI. Look at the sky - It's so low... If it weren't for the shed it would collapse.

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*stopping*). That funny?

ÉVI. Isn't it though?

FIRST YOUNG MAN *starts towards the shed again.*

VÉNA. Suppose he's got a catapult -

FIRST YOUNG MAN *turns to VÉNA angrily.*

SECOND YOUNG MAN. A stone would do -

FIRST YOUNG MAN *gives SECOND a dirty look. He reaches the shed, dodges sideways.*

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*banging the shed wall with both fists*). Come on out! Come on out! Let's have a look at you.

Silence. FIRST YOUNG MAN *grabs a flashlight from SECOND's hand and directs the beam inside the shed.*

SECOND YOUNG MAN (*peering in*). Some mess.

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*stupidly*). Where'd all the eggshells come from?

VÉNA. From the bright ideas we hatched.

SECOND YOUNG MAN (*to FIRST*). C'mon, let's go home. You'd need a police dog.

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*stops*). I once had a dog. Smart. Could he point!

SECOND YOUNG MAN. A train ran him over.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Sonofabitch train.

ÉVI. Poor thing.

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*shouts into the night*). Go fish in yow own waters, you stinker! Hear me?

SECOND YOUNG MAN (*to ÉVI*). The kid's after his sister.

ÉVI. That against the law?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Only I was going out with her first!

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*shouting*). Go fish in your own waters, I swear to you! C'mon and get one in the teeth! Come on out!

Silence.

He hid in the rye. Betcha he's in the rye. (*Starts off, stops.*) Hear him rustling? (*He goes.*)

SECOND YOUNG MAN. I can hear him. (*Stumbles after FIRST. They are gone*)

ÉVI. What about the matches?

VÉNA (*calling after them*). Hey, fellas - wait! Got a match?

Silence.

ÉVI. We're just never ever going to smoke again. I know it.

VÉNA. Morons.

ÉVI. Wind's getting up.

VÉNA. Live, they say. Be full of life. What for?

ÉVI. For a girl - Not you.

VÉNA. I'm not a stag in October.

ÉVI. Next thing I know you'll be saying love is only for beasts.

VÉNA. You bet. I could use a drink.

ÉVI. Whatever in the world we talk about - you always wind up with 'I could use a drink.'

VÉNA (*laughs*). Come on, cat. What's the matter? (*Sits on the bench.*) So, the kid's after the moron's sister. That makes sense to you?

ÉVI. Maybe she's his step-sister.

VÉNA. What a fuss for a Suzy.

ÉVI. Everything revolves around us.

VÉNA (*pacing up and down the path, preaching*). That's why darkness prevails. If it weren't for Suzies, the world would revolve around the sun.

ÉVI (*matching him*). Hey, are you putting on weight?

VÉNA (*stops*). Me? - Well, that ought to make me good-natured. Fatsos are good-natured.

ÉVI. All quiet...

VÉNA.... on the Western front - (*Stops.*) What's that from? . _ .

ÉVI. The whole place is like a horror picture. I could get scared.

VÉNA. If it weren't for me.

ÉVI. There are things tickle you, bite, sting, crawl on you... Nature... Nature!

VÉNA. She's too thick. Creature upon creature.

ÉVI (*shuddering*). Ugh!

VÉNA (*tickles ÉVI's neck with a straw*). Imagine a great big catfish. There's his pink mouth and whiskers.

ÉVI (*catches his hand*). Last year's blade of grass. (*She crosses to the track.*)

VÉNA. What did you mean you're my unlawful wife?

ÉVI. Barbarian. Am I not?

VÉNA. You belong to me.

ÉVI. By what right?

VÉNA. The right of might.

ÉVI. If you conquer a territory you go and make it legal so nobody can take it away from you, don't you?

VÉNA. Barbarians don't.

ÉVI (*standing by the track*). Where can that train be?

VÉNA. Maybe it got involved on the way.

ÉVI. What if that territory found itself somebody else to run it?

VÉNA. In that case - between that somebody and me - there would arise territorial disputes. (*Closer to her.*) Cat, I would claim a minimum of two hills and one valley. I'd let that other take what was left.

ÉVI. Well, frugal you're not.

VÉNA. I would rally all my troops and would not rest till I reconquered you in your integrity.

ÉVI. I would never be through with wars.

VÉNA. And you'd love it, cat, pussycat.

ÉVI. Don't you ever drag me into the countryside again.

VÉNA. Does it bore you to go hiking with me?

ÉVI. We fight our way through brush like badgers, ford rivers like horses and, like a couple of idiots, we get stuck at a whistle stop. No train ever ran through here. Look at the rails. They're covered with rust.

VÉNA. It's been raining.

ÉVI. Don't remind me. I feel like a shirt - wash-and-dry.

VÉNA. I'll iron you.

ÉVI. And wet matches. Won't *one* catch?

VÉNA *hands her a box of matches.*

ÉVI *tries in vain to strike one.* They crumble like cheese. Where are we? - Where are we, you and me?

VÉNA. Don't ask me. We're somewhere.

ÉVI (*sighs*). Are we?

VÉNA. Well, we're not *nowhere*, are we?

ÉVI. Nowhere! That's all we'd need. When I think I could be...

VÉNA. Cat, pussycat...

ÉVI.... out of these shoes, and the coffee brewing...

VÉNA. You ought to have that stove fixed. It'll asphyxiate you one day.

ÉVI. *One*, that's all.

VÉNA. It'll asphyxiate me, too. That's why I won't marry you.

ÉVI. Oh you, you would have got a new one right away, wouldn't you? You with your life insurance! - You have one, haven't you?

VÉNA. Wasn't my idea. My mother. She said, 'a piano might fall on you...'

ÉVI. '... and I will collect.' You've got a foxy mommy.

VÉNA. She cares.

ÉVI. She shouldn't have let you be a removal man then. Should have sent you to school.

VÉNA. I'd have to have the brains.

ÉVI. Would you now? You're a shrewd enough.

VÉNA. That's not brains. That's life.

ÉVI (*throwing her arms around his neck*). What does your mother think of me, anyway?

VÉNA. She likes you.

ÉVI. Oh sure.

VÉNA. She knows I won't marry you. She's morbidly jealous.
ÉVI. Of you?
VÉNA. Of my cash. I can take my love wherever I choose but the cash I must take home.
ÉVI. That's clever. Paying her all your life for bringing you into the world.
VÉNA. I'm not here for free. Some pay money for eats and drink and stuff. Me, I even pay for breathing.
ÉVI. Because of her you're stuck with menial work.
VÉNA. Gives me exercise.
ÉVI. You could play tennis.
VÉNA. Tennis!
ÉVI. White trousers, racquet under your arm -
VÉNA. Knock myself silly chasing that ball?
ÉVI. Oh well, if that's all you see in it... what is one to do with you? You rob yourself of so much beauty - and you don't even know it.
VÉNA. You're beautiful enough for me.
ÉVI. I'm cold.
VÉNA. You've been cold ever since I've known you.
ÉVI. Like that time in the park. That was April, though.
VÉNA. I don't remember that it was April.
ÉVI. It's written down. In my head. Let's take a walk, come on.
VÉNA. Oh no, not that.
ÉVI. It'll warm you up.
VÉNA. I'd rather unpack the blanket.
ÉVI. What a prosaic soul!
VÉNA. Must be age.
ÉVI (*crossing to shed*). Notice any such signs in me?
VÉNA (*laughs*). Well, who keeps talking marriage? (ÉVI *stops to read a poster stuck on the wall of the shed*) That's age.
ÉVI (*stubbornly*). That's love.
VÉNA. Oh, come off it.
ÉVI. That is precisely what your prosaic soul will never comprehend. (*Reading from the poster*.) 'Dance music by comrade Posch and his Brass Band.' How posh can you get?
VÉNA. Why is it, the moment you hit thirty, all of you, you get all hot about the family hearth?
ÉVI (*continues reading*). 'In the Grand Hall of the Union Lodge.' Must have been lovely.
A silence. ÉVI *studies* VÉNA.
Such a body, and it won't dance.
VÉNA. Maybe it don't dig rhythm.

ÉVI. Did I tell you? No, I didn't. Listen, the manager came to me yesterday - seems they'll be turning that old gate house into a little wine bar, a kind of bistro - and would I run it for them.
VÉNA. Do! Take it.
ÉVI. They need an attractive female who knows how to smile at the tourists and throw in a bit of French or German here and there.
VÉNA. What's in it for you?
ÉVI *gives him a look*.
The manager, eh?
ÉVI. Aren't you silly. People *like* me - He was happy to make me the offer.
VÉNA. Take it, take it.
ÉVI. There are others who'd take it. Plenty of others. There's this Prokoš, comes on inspection. One day he opened a matchbox full of gold... that's to make rings, he said -
VÉNA. Must have picked his late grandmother's teeth.
ÉVI. Oh - honestly!
VÉNA. Not only are you growing old, cat. You're growing stupid, too.
ÉVI. Could be.
VÉNA. You talk considerable nonsense lately.
ÉVI. I don't mean to.
VÉNA. Well, don't - or you'll get used to it.
ÉVI (*sits on the bench, dejectedly*). It's not enough for me.
VÉNA. Now, cat...
ÉVI. Not enough, not enough. (*Looking at the back of her hand*) I'm all blue.
VÉNA. It's your blood, it goes off
ÉVI. Didn't it ever occur to you? Don't say it didn't
VÉNA. I am not saying anything.
ÉVI. See! - Wouldn't you want a child?
VÉNA (*in surprise*). What?
ÉVI. A tiny bit of a boy. You'd always be tripping over him. And he would be the spit of you.
VÉNA. Wouldn't he just!
ÉVI. It wouldn't be so bad.
VÉNA. The family hearth.
ÉVI. You'd have to rustle up the firewood.
VÉNA (*sits beside her on the bench*). I would get crates from the greengrocer and I'd bring home piano legs and desk legs that I broke off moving widows and school teachers -
ÉVI. Would you really?
VÉNA. Speaking of the hearth...
ÉVI (*props her back against him and cuddles up*). Tell me something nice.

VÉNA. We moved an old lady to Kampa once. She was assigned a room and in the room there was a hearth, a huge fireplace. It reached half across the place - an historically valuable, State-protected landmark. The trouble was the old baba couldn't get her cupboard in. She kept imagining the cupboard where the fireplace stood - over and over, until she was stultified. Just kept seeing that stupid cupboard where the fireplace stood. So, finally she went and tore that splendid fireplace down. That thing of beauty.

ÉVI. What did they do to her?

VÉNA. Nothing. Who's going to sue for a pile of bricks? So, the cupboard was installed in all its glory, and there was still room for a small runner so that baba had somewhere to pace up and down *in triumph* over them all.

ÉVI. That wasn't a nice story.

VÉNA. From that time on, 'hearth' is a hollow term - like a great many heart-warming words. In due time, they will be joined by 'love' when love will have been totally wiped out.

ÉVI. Uh -

VÉNA. Only in ancient rocks will they discover fossilised kisses. Commissions of experts will hold conferences over a few traces of a caress...

ÉVI (*throws herself around his neck*). Darling - (*Stops him with a kiss*.)

VÉNA. Kitten -

ÉVI. You're making a pile of bricks out of me, too.

VÉNA. You're no housewife.

(*He lies down on the bench, his head in her lap.*)

ÉVI. But I will take the bistro.

VÉNA. Changing trades like that! My grandfather was a metal worker. That's what he was born and that's what he died.

ÉVI. I don't want to die.

VÉNA (*closes his eyes*). Who's talking of dying?

ÉVI (*gazes at him*). You are my burden, my yoke. You're like a lamb when you sleep.

VÉNA. Suppose I married you. What would I do with you?

ÉVI. You would find something to do.

VÉNA. We don't need to marry for that.

ÉVI. Why don't you go to sleep?

VÉNA. How can I?

ÉVI. How can't you when you have such a nice pillow.

VÉNA *turns his face into her lap and stops his ears*.

Did I tell you my little turtle died? I kept her in my closet in a box. I thought she was hibernating, so I waited until Easter... then I found out it was all up with her.

VÉNA. How, pray, did you find out?

ÉVI. Lovely little turtle. I was looking forward to her growing up. All that time I believed I had something alive to keep me company - and it was not the least bit alive.

VÉNA. It was dead.

ÉVI. It was not alive - You've got a pointy nose. (*She lifts his head by the hair.*) It's a barbarian I'd have but I would *have* him. In time, he might listen to reason. He could be tamed.

VÉNA. Me?

ÉVI. You would have to be virtuous.

VÉNA. 'Virtuous?' Never.

ÉVI. What do you want to be all your life?

VÉNA (*lies back again and thinks for a moment*). What's a not too dirty a word, meaning the opposite of virtuous?

ÉVI. Shameless.

VÉNA. Shameless - that's what I want to be.

VÉNA. Shameless.

Silence. ÉVI *leans over him*.

ÉVI (*plays with his hand*). Still, you could have cleaned your nails.

VÉNA. Sometimes I get the feeling that if I really concentrated, I mean really, I could *be* what I want to be.

ÉVI. A demon?

VÉNA. Maybe a demon. (*He rises*) I'll go and concentrate, all right?

ÉVI (*with a sigh*). Go ahead.

VÉNA. I'm serious.

ÉVI. Hurry up. The train may be here any minute. (*She glances at him. VÉNA stands a few steps away covering his eyes.*) What do I do?

VÉNA. You must keep quiet.

ÉVI. Is that the only way?

VÉNA. That's why there are no demons nowadays. That's why they walk only nights and in desert places. (*Uncovers his eyes but keeps them shut.*) I'm ready.

ÉVI (*softly*). What's it going to be?

VÉNA (*in fuller voice than before*). I have negated myself - I am nothing - I am blotted out.

ÉVI (*a whisper*). Blotto -

VÉNA. Shush! - I am yet to be created. - You may address me now, and the way you address me, that's what I'll be, that's what you'll make me. It'll all depend on what you use to call me out of the dark. Remember, it is just like when the first man saw a lump of matter in front of him and called it 'tree'

ÉVI (*frivolously*). Or 'cloud' -

VÉNA. - or 'rock'. So you'd better bloody watch out how you evoke me.

ÉVI *looks at him intently. VÉNA's eyes are closed.*

Well?

ÉVI (*after a beat*). My angel.
VÉNA (*opens his eyes in disgust*). Oh, get lost. Is that all you could think of?
ÉVI. You shouldn't have made that face.
VÉNA. I didn't make an angel face, did I?
ÉVI. A little Véna face. I had to say something sweet to you.
VÉNA. What do I do now? - Float? - 'Something sweet!' Women are crazy for puddings.
ÉVI. Try again.
VÉNA. I can't concentrate now. You were supposed to create the world!
ÉVI. I can see the mess *you* would make of the world! You could never think up anything as tender as a finch. And all your trees would look alike, I know you!
VÉNA. Powerful and gnarled.
ÉVI. No snowball bushes, no meadowsweet -
VÉNA. Platypuses and otters, sewer rats and lizards, orangutans and mastodons, rhinos and ant-eaters. And instead of rosebushes - one great thorn piercing the heavens.
ÉVI. And gliding over the desolation there'd be my angel. He'd make it that way on purpose, to be sure he would stand out.
VÉNA. That's always been my ambition!
A silence. ÉVI *shakes a pill out of a tube.*
What have you got there? Give me one. (*Grabs tube*)
ÉVI. Aspirin.
VÉNA (*ironically*). Aspirin.
ÉVI. Have one. I will, too.
VÉNA. Why should I?
ÉVI. Puts you in a good mood.
VÉNA. All the better to spin a yarn. (*Looks at ÉVI and swallows pill.*)
ÉVI. You'll feel better. That's all.
VÉNA. What if it knocks me out? You may have to carry me onto the train. - Well, I swallowed it - so what?
ÉVI. It doesn't work right away.
VÉNA. Don't expect me to make a declaration of love. - Or ask for your hand.
ÉVI. That'll be the day.
VÉNA. My mother used to take this stuff when she worked at the café. Made her talk all right.
ÉVI. Helped her to 'realise herself.'
VÉNA. When business was slow, she would lean against the cash register and grind out poems.
ÉVI. Did she compose them herself?
VÉNA. How can I tell a composed poem from a written one?
ÉVI. We'll see when you start your poem.

VÉNA. There'll be no poems. And if there were - it doesn't count, with dope. -
Where'd you get it? On prescription?
ÉVI. The girls gave it to me for my birthday. My thirtieth.
VÉNA. Big deal -
ÉVI. They gave what they could.
VÉNA. I took you to see Harold Lloyd.
ÉVI. You said - it would be fun!
VÉNA. Well, wasn't it?
ÉVI. The way he kept hanging on those ledges... Gave me goosepimples -
She sighs.
A something roasted would hit the spot.
Glancing at her watch.
If the train gets here at midnight we could be at home by two. (*Sits on the bench.*)
Will you stop by?
VÉNA. If I were in your shoes I'd have had enough of me for a week.
ÉVI. I am the one in my shoes. And I never have enough.
VÉNA (*sitting next to her*). Well, that's nice of you. (*He kisses her*) Hey, it's beginning to work.
ÉVI. Sure, sure - we know what works with you.
VÉNA (*embracing her*). That was great when he chased after the wedding.
ÉVI. What?
VÉNA. Lloyd, the way he chased the wedding.
ÉVI. Had he missed it, she would have married the wrong guy.
VÉNA. It wasn't about getting married.
ÉVI. Then what was it about?
VÉNA. The acrobatics! Not the wanting to marry her or any such nonsense.
ÉVI. That's not nonsense.
VÉNA. Even old Lloyd was clear about that. That's what he was making fun of. It is nonsense.
ÉVI. It's not nonsense.
VÉNA. It is.
ÉVI. It's not.
VÉNA. It's not.
ÉVI. It is!
VÉNA (*in triumph*). There you are! All I have to do is mix you up and you don't know what you're saying.
ÉVI. What did I say?
VÉNA. That it was nonsense.
ÉVI. I didn't say that.
VÉNA. All you want is to say the opposite of what I say. Automatically, you contradict me. Woman's logic!
ÉVI. I don't give a damn about logic.

VÉNA. Of course not, you with your lyrical soul!

ÉVI. You would love to knock it out of me, wouldn't you?

VÉNA. Absolutely. (*Puts his hands around her throat ironically.*) I could put the wind up you!

ÉVI. Go ahead. Just go ahead.

VÉNA. Enough. Futility's coming over me.

ÉVI. Oh, stop blabbering.

VÉNA. Where does it say two people who are together must blabber all the time?

Who says so? (*He stretches out on the bench.*)

ÉVI. We don't have to talk.

VÉNA *turns on his side.*

We can be quiet.

VÉNA. Gape at the stars.

ÉVI. What?

VÉNA. The stars. Gape.

ÉVI. 'Gape, gape' - Don't talk like that.

VÉNA. One should be alone.

ÉVI. One is alone, anyway.

Silence.

VÉNA. The thing is, one won't admit it. You keep on forcing yourself to do things, and forcing everyone else. When the day's over, you slam the door, you lean on it - and 'to hell with everybody' and 'Good god, who needs it?' -

ÉVI. So, be alone and stick to it.

VÉNA. Serves me right I can't stand being without a woman. But you find yourself a woman, and what have you got? A whole bunch of girl friends, childhood sweethearts, lovers...

ÉVI *listens to him for a while then wanders off, behind the shed.*

Know what I'd like to do? Lock myself in, stare at the ceiling, and cure it deep brown with cigarette smoke. There were times I used to mix things up like crazy - like the time in the park. I said you had a head like a Botticelli angel and other stupidities. I've a hunch though it wasn't what I said... For remember, you told me what a wonderful hold I have - the way I take things in my hands, you said - that stuck in my mind - I even thought: the Grip Royal beats 'em all! I never went for the 'soul' stuff anyway - First thing I noticed about you was that time at the movies - the way you bit into that ice-cream - the greedy way you nibbled at it - I've always been sweet on girls with a sweet tooth.

ÉVI *appears on the roof of the shed. She peers out into the darkness. Once in a while, she glances down at VÉNA who is now lying on the bench.*

For all I know, I may be pretty good at taking things in my hands. The only damn talent I've got. Well, a removal man... Fact is, whatever I can't get my hands on gives me trouble. A lot of trouble. You too - why, when I don't actually see you I... all of a sudden I get awful suspicious. Those are the times

when out of the blue I dial your number - those are times I could go off my rocker - I could, you know - sometimes I keep ringing you for an hour! You're not in, and where the hell can you be, or you're in the tub and can't hear the phone for the water running, then at long last you answer and I hear you whining at the other end, and right away it gets on my nerves because all I wanted was proof I hadn't made you up! I didn't want no conversation with you! There are times I hang up the moment you pick up the phone, at two in the morning, that's no wrong number, baby, that's me.

Silence.

What're you thinking?

Silence. VÉNA *lifts his head, looks for ÉVI rises, walks to the track, then to the shed. He stops at the door.*

Cat?... Cat, you in there? You're cold, eh? - Why don't you say so? (*Goes into the shed*) What's the idea? Where are you? (*Coming out.*)

ÉVI. You're getting warm.

VÉNA. Hey, stop it I don't like it.

ÉVI, *who was lying flat on the roof, looks up.*

ÉVI. You're hot!

VÉNA. What're you doing up there - want to fall down?

ÉVI. Having a think.

VÉNA. That roof may be rotten.

ÉVI. I love heights. I love heights.

VÉNA. The whole thing'll collapse. Stop it!

ÉVI. Do I still have a sweet tooth? I wonder.

VÉNA. All you remember about books is the titles.

ÉVI. That's how I know what books are about.

VÉNA. Sometimes that's not what they're about.

ÉVI. Sometimes it is. (*She kneels on the roof and looks up at the sky.*) It's lifted up a bit.

Not so close any more.

VÉNA *spits on the track.*

Situation Two

ÉVI *motionless, is kneeling on the roof. VÉNA stands by the track. TWO YOUNG MEN from Situation One enter from the back.*

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*to SECOND*). What did you have to get me in deep water for? (*Wringing the wet legs of his trousers*) Get lost.

SECOND YOUNG MAN (*holding his eye, to VÉNA.*). Hey, you, has the kid been around?

FIRST YOUNG MAN. He had a woman with him before.

VÉNA. Well, what's new, mugger boys?

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*to SECOND*). Say something.

VÉNA. How'd you make out?
FIRST YOUNG MAN. It might just stop me clobbering him.
SECOND YOUNG MAN (*to VÉNA.*). It's a wonder I didn't put an eye out. A wonder I didn't leave it on a twig somewhere.
VÉNA. He gave you the slip.
FIRST YOUNG MAN. He's an expert at that.
VÉNA (*chuckling*). He figured what was in store for him.
FIRST YOUNG MAN (*examining his trousers*). New trousers. Wringing wet. Brand new.
SECOND YOUNG MAN (*to VÉNA.*). He took a plunge in the brook.
FIRST YOUNG MAN. Just look at'em!
VÉNA. Outlaws of this land! There are two of you. Why didn't you ambush him?
SECOND YOUNG MAN. I could've buggered off to bed by now.
FIRST YOUNG MAN. I'll tear him in two like a snake.
SECOND YOUNG MAN. He makes me tramp through the rye, drags me through the brush, wade the brook...
FIRST YOUNG MAN. When I look at you I wonder what the kid ran so hard for.
SECOND YOUNG MAN (*to VÉNA.*). And the young lady, how's she? (*To FIRST YOUNG MAN.*) Maybe you didn't notice, but he's got a pretty good-looking granny. I had hold of her for a moment -
FIRST YOUNG MAN. I'm an idiot. We're off.
ÉVI (*up on the roof*). At last, a bit of intelligence.
SECOND YOUNG MAN (*stops*). What did I tell you. She's in there.
FIRST YOUNG MAN (*stops*). Up there, look.
SECOND YOUNG MAN. Some silhouette!
VÉNA. So long, so long.
SECOND YOUNG MAN. And what might your business be up there?
VÉNA. Go hit the sack. Go.
SECOND YOUNG MAN. Pity there's no rosy dawn behind you. You'd have a sharper outline.
ÉVI. I like myself better in soft focus.
SECOND YOUNG MAN. Give us the profile.
VÉNA (*kicks him in the rear*). How's that for profile?
SECOND YOUNG MAN (*turns around, to FIRST*). You stand for that? Call yourself a friend!
FIRST YOUNG MAN *hesitates, then steps toward VÉNA who takes one step back and watches both men.*
FIRST YOUNG MAN. You asked for it -
Lunges at VÉNA.
ÉVI *lets herself down from the roof. She is banging by the hands.*
ÉVI. Help! - somebody help me!

SECOND YOUNG MAN (*loses interest in VÉNA.*). Say the word - (*Starts towards ÉVI but FIRST pushes him aside.*)
FIRST YOUNG MAN. Wanna drop her?
SECOND YOUNG MAN (*Flares up*). Quit bragging. Fancy yourself, do you?
FIRST YOUNG MAN. Shithead you!
FIRST YOUNG MAN *pushes SECOND who falls but drags down FIRST with him.*
VÉNA (*helps ÉVI down, and takes her in his arms*). Kitten -
FIRST YOUNG MAN *and SECOND get up.*
FIRST YOUNG MAN (*to SECOND*). I'll fix you later.
SECOND YOUNG MAN. To think I've invested two fivers in him.
FIRST YOUNG MAN. Get movin'. Take off.
SECOND YOUNG MAN (*retreating*). T'morrow they'll all know how you fell in the brook - I'll see to that - (*He runs off.*)
FIRST YOUNG MAN. I'll break your head first, you bastard... (*He goes, running after SECOND. They are gone*)
VÉNA (*still holding ÉVI*). Why did you do that?
ÉVI. I wanted you to take me down.
VÉNA. You sure?
ÉVI. Didn't dream it would last that long. (*She puts her arm around his neck.*)
VÉNA (*carrying her to the bench*). You're not the least bit heavy.
ÉVI. That roof is rotten all right.
VÉNA. What did I tell you. (*He puts her down on the bench.*) You've no sense.
ÉVI. I know. (*She hides her face in her hands.*) I know. It scares me. Sometimes, I wonder what might...
VÉNA (*He sits beside her*). Well - what might what?
ÉVI (*pressing her hands over her face*). Do like this.
VÉNA. What for?
ÉVI. Do it.
VÉNA *covers his face with his hands.*
What do you see?
VÉNA. Nothing.
ÉVI. Close your eyes tight.
VÉNA. Kind of a pinky darkness.
ÉVI. Wait, you'll start getting pictures.
VÉNA. I'm getting shimmers now.
ÉVI. See?
VÉNA. Minnows and tiddlers.
ÉVI. I get little flowers.
VÉNA. I'm going to smell fishy.
ÉVI. Oh, it's lovely. How do we see? Our eyes are shut. With the soul, I guess.
VÉNA (*resting his head in her lap*). I rule this territory. Here is where I shall settle.

ÉVI (*with eyes still shut, she runs her fingers through his hair*). When you were born - did you have all that hair?

VÉNA. I had a bare skull and jaundice.

ÉVI. Ugh.

VÉNA. This is the way I looked. (*Makes a face*.)

ÉVI (*eyes still shut*). There's something for my fingers. All that hair. I could bury my fingers in it forever. Keeps them warm, too.

VÉNA. Tell me about me.

ÉVI. I can't see you.

VÉNA. With your fingers. Tell me with your fingers... as if I was written in Braille.

ÉVI. All tight. - Your forehead's all knitted up.

VÉNA. Kitted up?

ÉVI. Knitted up. Some people's foreheads are so transparent, it's a wonder the thoughts don't jump out. Others are thick with meat - lumpy - the skin like shoe leather. You're neither fish nor fowl.

VÉNA. So I am cheese. Go on.

ÉVI. Your eyes are spotted like a tiger. In each eye you've got a few extra little eyes. The big one is for me, the little ones for the other girls.

VÉNA. Go on. Go on.

ÉVI. A scar on the nose. Who scratched you?

VÉNA. You. In self-defence.

ÉVI (*kisses him*). For the first and last time. May I skip?

VÉNA. What are you going to skip?

ÉVI. The mouth. It's indescribable.

VÉNA. Fine.

ÉVI. Now I'll skip to the collar bones. That's my weakness.

VÉNA. Oh? What do you see in them?

ÉVI. Strong like two hasps. So they make deep pits above. Come rain - two little ponds. For birds to drink out of.

VÉNA. They'd splash all over me.

ÉVI. Beautiful ribs, and likewise, the spine.

VÉNA. When I stretch, a skeleton tries to get out.

ÉVI. You've got him caged in. He can't get out. If you didn't have these bones, you wouldn't be so fragile. If you were to be run over, you wouldn't even crack, you would just pop like a bladder.

VÉNA. Next.

ÉVI. Shoulder blades. When you walk, they're like fledgling wings.

VÉNA. Wings. Ha!

ÉVI. You can't see them. You crane your neck - they fly away.

VÉNA. That's how I can handle all those pianos. I fly them upstairs.

ÉVI. Now, I want to take it all in one fell swoop.

VÉNA (*shakes his head*). Item by item, nice and orderly.

ÉVI. Belly. You haven't got one. Just a dimple in the middle.

VÉNA. Belly-button.

ÉVI. I didn't feel like calling it that.

VÉNA. What's wrong with belly-button? That's where they tied us up. Like they knitted us out of some yarn... and then they had to make a knot so we wouldn't unravel when we started to walk,

ÉVI. Next the legs.

VÉNA. You're skipping.

ÉVI. I can skip.

VÉNA. I'll skip yours, too, then.

ÉVI. Why waste words? - The legs. You could sky-walk if it weren't for gravity.

VÉNA (*sits up next to her, his chin on his knees*). Closed for inventory. Some other time.
A silence.

Let's pretend we're hiding in the woods.

ÉVI. It's fun the way we make things up like this...

VÉNA. Is it?

ÉVI. Yes. A lot of fun.

VÉNA. When nothing else works any more.

ÉVI. That head of yours. There's always something there that's not in mine.

VÉNA. The heads are the same but the ways are different. With you, it's thoughts.

ÉVI. That's what I mean. With you it's always different

VÉNA. It comes to the same in the end, believe me.

ÉVI. I'm scared. (*Rises and walks a bit along the path*). What will become of us?

VÉNA. What will become of us we already are. - We've been that for ages, kitten...
We were ahead of ourselves, and now, things are catching up with us.

ÉVI (*stops*). What do you mean?

VÉNA. Everything's going to be the way it already is.

ÉVI. The whole world?

VÉNA. The whole world.

ÉVI. Us too?

VÉNA. Us too. Only in your grave will you see how dead you were at twenty.

ÉVI. Where did you get that idea? - Come closer, won't you?

VÉNA. It's the same distance for you.

ÉVI. But if you do it...

VÉNA (*doesn't move*). It would be my move -

ÉVI. The other day, I poked around in my brother's briefcase. Leafed through his anatomy book. Have you ever seen the way we look inside?

VÉNA. Sure.

ÉVI. Harakiri must be horrible.

VÉNA. Hara - what?

ÉVI. Madam Butterfly. She slit her belly. . .

VÉNA *gives her a shocked look*.

They don't show it on stage.
VÉNA. Oh. They just sing about it, is that it?
ÉVI. She did it out of unrequited love.
VÉNA. I'd be surprised if she'd done it out of anything else. (*He is standing behind her.*)
ÉVI (*feeling his closeness*). Breathe on me.
VÉNA. Three beers, and stale.
ÉVI. Please, let me feel your breath.
VÉNA *breathes on her neck.*
It's crazy. (*She presses her hand on the place.*)
VÉNA. Sure is.
ÉVI. I must have radar inside me or something.
VÉNA. You don't say.
ÉVI. Is there anything more material than breath?
VÉNA. A nightmare is. Chokes you.
ÉVI. Remember seven years ago when you sat next to me at the movies? Whenever you turned towards me I felt you on my neck.
VÉNA. Did I huff and puff?
ÉVI (*slaps him lightly across the mouth*). You breathed on me. It was beautiful. Had I been a window I'd have been all misted up. Honest.
VÉNA *laughs.*
When you laugh you cry! - What do you do when you cry?
VÉNA. I don't cry then.
A silence.
ÉVI. I could have written it in music, the way you breathed... in eighths and halves - the pauses... I sure knew the score.
VÉNA. A man breathes one way when he lugs a sofa to the fourth floor, and another when he breathes in the neck of some desirable girl.
ÉVI. Some desirable girl - Are you saying something rude again?
VÉNA. No, no.
ÉVI. I can't tell any more what's rude and what isn't.
VÉNA. You're just corrupt. You can't tell the difference any more.
ÉVI. Well, you can take the credit. I was different when you first knew me, wasn't I?
VÉNA. Sure. You had distinguished manners. You smoked Turkish cigarettes in an ivory holder and dragged an impossible handbag over your shoulder.
ÉVI. I was stupid.
VÉNA. The only thing that's not changed.
ÉVI. You've become such a bastard. I'm amazed. You still don't want to walk?
VÉNA. I don't. I don't.
ÉVI (*with a sigh*). If only something would happen. Even the moon is gone.
VÉNA. Behind the pine tree.
ÉVI. Behind a cloud.
VÉNA (*takes a look*). A pine tree, you cuckoo.

ÉVI. Suppose it's a cloud. Couldn't it be a cloud?
VÉNA. Cuck, cuck - it couldn't.
ÉVI. I see a cloud.
VÉNA. Say it again.
ÉVI (*turning her back on the tree*). Cloud! Cloud! Cloud!
VÉNA (*steps towards her and forcibly turns her head around*). Now look. Does this look like a tree or doesn't it? - Come, take a good look.
ÉVI. You'll strangle me! - Help! Let go of me. Brute! (*She struggles, kicking VÉNA, hitting him with her fists; suddenly she goes limp. VÉNA lets go. She stands, feeling her neck.*) I'm hanged.
VÉNA. In your own collar.
ÉVI. You strangled me.
VÉNA. That's what you deserve.
ÉVI. My head is two yards above the rest of me.
VÉNA. Oh, I didn't squeeze that hard.
ÉVI. All because of a stupid tree! Why is it there? I don't get it, and I don't care. I'm not the least bit interested. Not the least bit! It's stupid of it to grow, anyway.
VÉNA. You may be glad to get under it.
ÉVI. I'd rather get soaked.
VÉNA. Ho-ho, you of all people! You even use *me* for a shelter.
ÉVI. Yes! I do. When the storm howls through my life, I do!
VÉNA. Blah. Blah-blah-blah.
ÉVI (*holding her head*). You're driving me crazy.
VÉNA. If that's what you want.
ÉVI. Well, you sure don't turn me on.
VÉNA. Don't be such a cow.
ÉVI. My God. Is he rude!
VÉNA. Even my mother, when she first saw you - and she knows about people...
ÉVI. Does she! Sure sees through you!
VÉNA. Blah-blah-blah.
ÉVI. Now and again, she drops in for a vermouth. 'Honey,' she says, 'a double of the usual. When are you going to carry off my baby? What do you expect me to do - die washing and ironing for him?'
VÉNA. Oh shut up.
ÉVI. And after the second double it's, 'Sweetheart, for you he's all candy floss - but for me rudeness and dirt. You can have him a bargain!' - How do you like that?
VÉNA. Where are you heading?
ÉVI (*steps close to him*). Behind the pine tree. You're right, as always. I won't say another word. (*She stands close behind him, slips her hands into his trouser pockets.*)
VÉNA. You're a tramp all the same.
ÉVI. Come on -
VÉNA (*chanting*). Tramp - tramp - tramp -

ÉVI. Come on, now!

VÉNA. My sweet honey blossom.

ÉVI. Whaat?

VÉNA (*covering up*). What a switch, eh? Some cut, wasn't it! All I do is roll over, and the wolf turns into a lamb.

ÉVI. What're you trying to do to me?

VÉNA (*trying a joke*). The train isn't coming - I've got to do something.

ÉVI. Does something have to happen all the time? Can't we just be... as is?

VÉNA. You can't even wait 'as is'... Mouth keeps going.

ÉVI. The way we used to just take off for the country... just take off - It was marvellous. Satisfactory. Beautiful.

VÉNA. You know, you can lead a horse to water but one day the river's dry.

ÉVI. Oh, forget it.

VÉNA. Well, stop needling me.

ÉVI. As if *I* could needle you. Me! I know, time seems too long when you're with me now.

VÉNA. God, how I love it - that long time growing longer...

ÉVI. Don't get carried away.

VÉNA. Long, long - as long as it can grow. Everything long Sundays, summers, legs...

ÉVI. Women -

VÉNA. Also.

ÉVI. Well, I'll no longer get any longer.

VÉNA. And those fabulous cuts. The way a jazzband gets going real cool... up and up she goes and a bit higher still... nobody's got no head no more, everything's peeled off the ground - and then a little something dies away in the sax, and it's all over - The way everybody goes limp - that moment they all turn stupid, lovely dumb... No one knows where they're standing, what they're standing on, what with... Just try and get to a chair - you won't be able to take two steps. Out of the blue - it's scary like the earth's gravity - How about that? Aren't they magnificent cuts, hey?

ÉVI. What's so magnificent about that?

VÉNA. It's a well-known fact that when a landlady shouts at a sleepwalker out on the window ledge, the sleep-walker ends up in the dustbin below.

ÉVI. A sleep-walker shouldn't be shouted at.

VÉNA. But the sleep-walker is a booby and the landlady doesn't know any better. All she does is snoop around like an old mole - roots into everything...

ÉVI. What's the difference?

VÉNA. Some people carry their own mole around inside them. They do! They strut along, very pleased with themselves... and then suddenly the mole pops his head out, 'Look, look, the Emperor's got no clothes!'

ÉVI. You're trying to put one over on me.

VÉNA. Look, my darling, what I mean is -

ÉVI. So that's what it's all about.

VÉNA (*slowly*). Next time you ask me about the family hearth - why it won't work - just take it I've said all I'm going to say. The password is 'mole'.

ÉVI (*a beat*). Aha!

A beat.

You're scared, is that it?

VÉNA (*casual gesture*).

ÉVI. Scared of the role, eh? You wouldn't know where to put your hands during the ceremony. What face to fit the occasion.

VÉNA. That's all I meant. Yes.

ÉVI. All right - marry me at midnight with your eyes closed.

VÉNA. It wouldn't be the real thing. (*Irritated*) You can't do that goddamit! That's what kids do - close their eyes when a car is about to hit them or when they jump out of a window...

ÉVI. More of your pearls of wisdom.

VÉNA (*stubbornly*). I want to know what I'm doing.

ÉVI. Fanatic.

VÉNA. Why not?

ÉVI. But that's how things are. Some things you do for yourself. Others are - well - written out for you.

VÉNA. Who wrote this out then?

ÉVI. God. City Hall. How do I know?

VÉNA. Nobody knows. They all just pretend to know. Everybody pretends to everybody else. Take them together and they still know nothing! That's what eats me up. The know-alls.

ÉVI. You're not a know-all?

VÉNA. Me? Ha!

ÉVI. But you are. With me you are.

VÉNA. I'd have to be damn sure of you.

ÉVI. These seven years - and you're not?

VÉNA. Not even in a hundred.

ÉVI. Then there are people who are afraid that any moment, someone might shout at them: 'Hey there, wait a minute, it is you, isn't it? Yes - you out there!'

VÉNA. That's not nice.

ÉVI. You want to be anonymous all your life?

VÉNA. A while ago, you described me. From head to toe.

ÉVI. Everything has its own name.

VÉNA (*sighs*). Évi -

ÉVI. My name is Eve.

VÉNA (*laughing*). You have a cunning name, cat.

ÉVI. Think of the Bible and shut up.

VÉNA. That's just it. It's because of you I was chased out of Paradise.
 ÉVI (*with a sigh*). That's why you can't be alone. You'd have no one to blame.
 VÉNA. Darling Évi, you're not in a shooting gallery. You can shoot here, too, but you don't win. Even if you hit the bull's eye you don't win.
 ÉVI. That's why I don't bother shooting, sweetheart. I know there's nothing to win any more. Nothing to lose, either. That's the one thing that gives me courage. -
 VÉNA. What is it we want? (*He kneels by the bench and rests his head on it.*) As if we didn't know.
 ÉVI (*after a beat, a little anxious*). Let's stop torturing each other, shall we?
 VÉNA (*holds her tight*). Cat, I cannot be without you. That's what it always comes to.
 ÉVI (*holds him*). But I can't see what's ahead. We knock around together the whole wide world...
 VÉNA. But I never take you up the tower, huh?
 ÉVI. You're scared you might push me off, I guess.
 VÉNA. Is there no other solution?
 ÉVI. You'd rather knock around down here. No danger, no vertigo, no place to fall off of.
 VÉNA (*embracing her knees as she stands close to him*). How does one get up there?
 ÉVI. You'd have to be way above everything for all people to see us. - Let them! I wouldn't mind.
 VÉNA. You wouldn't?
 ÉVI (*resolutely*). No.
 VÉNA (*a quiet chuckle*). Now I don't mind either.
 ÉVI (*with conviction*). It's not all that difficult. You know why?
 VÉNA. Maybe I do.
 ÉVI (*stroking his head*). Well, tell me if it's the same way with you as it is with me. Come on, tell me.
 VÉNA. You want to hear it?
 ÉVI (*passionately*). Yes! At least once. I have a right.
 VÉNA. But I'm afraid -
 ÉVI. Don't be.
 VÉNA. - that I might say something rude again.
 ÉVI (*stops*). Better not tell me then. (*A beat*) Or do, do tell me.
 VÉNA. Well, the fact is - we've taken those pills.
 ÉVI. So?
 VÉNA. That's it. We're going up - we're high - and that's all there's to it. It's the dope, that's all.
 ÉVI (*breaks away*). You mean you don't believe it just happened by itself? (*She kneels beside him.*) You think I don't know what I'm saying?
 VÉNA (*shakes his head*). It was midnight with our eyes closed. - See him? The mole?
 ÉVI. You filth! (*Pushing him away.*) How can you believe it was only that? My God! (*She rests her head on the bench.*)

VÉNA (*stands mournfully*). Maybe I don't really believe it.
 ÉVI. He really does!
 VÉNA *puts his hands in his pockets, ÉVI starts crying.*
 VÉNA. Don't cry, cat. To hell with it all.
 ÉVI. You dirty mole. You filth.
 VÉNA (*shrinks even more*). I'm never sure which of the two is me, the one who enjoys or the one who destroys. (*A beat.*) Say something. Tell me.
 ÉVI *rises. VÉNA reaches for her. She pulls away and crosses to the track. VÉNA remains where he is, watching her.*

Situation Three

BOY *enters from darkness upstage, his head down, staring at the ground. He does not notice ÉVI until he is quite close to her.*
 BOY (*softly, very low*). It's me.
 ÉVI (*as though she is speaking to VÉNA.*). What's there to say?
 BOY. It's awful important to me. Please...
 ÉVI (*only now noticing the BOY, annoyed*). Oh, why do you bother? Why don't you quit?
 BOY. I can't help it. Can I help it?
 ÉVI. Look, be sensible. Go home.
 BOY. Gotta find it first.
 ÉVI *lets out an exasperated sigh.*
 BOY *turns to VÉNA.*
 You haven't found it, by any chance, have you?
 VÉNA (*indifferently*). No.
 BOY. I thought maybe I dropped it someplace around here.
 ÉVI. Dropped what?
 BOY. My wallet.
 VÉNA (*shaking his head 'no'*). Right, cat?
 BOY. God, this is terrible!
 VÉNA. Listen, they're after you. Take my advice -
 BOY. What if they found it?
 VÉNA. Have you been running from them all this time?
 BOY. I can't fight her brother, can I? We haven't known each other long enough for that. Only today she gave me her picture. It was in the wallet.
 ÉVI. Well, let's look for it, shall we?
All three look around in the area of the shed.
 VÉNA. What's that guy so mad at you for, anyhow? He's just her brother, isn't he?
 BOY. He already promised her to that other one...
 VÉNA (*stops*). He what?

BOY. He could've bust a gut when he saw her dancing with me all night. He took her home, and then came back and started after me - I'll go nuts if I don't find it.

VÉNA. Tough. All your cash -

BOY. Keep the cash!

VÉNA. So, she'll give you another picture.

BOY. I can't tell her I lost it.

VÉNA. Well, fella, I'm sorry for you.

BOY. I'll be back. I'll try get matches somewhere.

VÉNA. Listen, they'll beat the hell out of you.

BOY *waves his hand and starts off.*

You know - 'it's not just for one flower the sun shines.'

BOY (*turns, looks at them*). Sure. You can talk! (*Goes.*)

VÉNA (*watching him*). Poor old bugger.

ÉVI. I'm not so sure.

VÉNA. He hasn't been around too long.

ÉVI. Aha, age again.

VÉNA. Let's drop it, cat.

ÉVI. Drop what?

Silence.

VÉNA. Some lovers! Washed out. (*Goes into the shed.*)

ÉVI. Pals, that's us. Too much so.

VÉNA (*from the shed*). That's right. Pals. Comfortable. Like a pair of old slippers.

ÉVI. It's grown stale on us.

VÉNA (*comes out of shed tying up his rucksack*). We are each other's past. We remind each other of each other.

ÉVI. And it gets on your nerves.

VÉNA. *You* get on my nerves, not *it*. The 'it' is gone. But you're still around. Can't get rid of you.

ÉVI. If only you could be serious for one minute.

VÉNA. The dope must be wearing off. - I am serious.

ÉVI. You always talk that way.

VÉNA. Maybe at last you'll get the point.

ÉVI. Just one honest word. That's all I want to hear. Don't I rate that?

VÉNA. But you do *not* want to hear it.

ÉVI. You wait! One day I'll fly off the handle and simply say goodbye -

VÉNA. That would be sweet of you, cat, but you won't do it.

ÉVI. I will.

VÉNA. You won't.

ÉVI. (*absentmindedly trying to strike matches*). I will.

VÉNA. No, you won't.

ÉVI. Yes, I will.

VÉNA. All right. Do it then. Now.

ÉVI (*as one match catches*). All right, I will not do it. Just to show you, I won't. (*She is playing with the lit match*)

VÉNA. You will not do it. That's a fact.

ÉVI. Oh, who would I be looking for anyway? You'll do.

VÉNA (*glancing at her, he notices the lit match*). Whadya doing? It's lit!

ÉVI. It's lit.

VÉNA. The cigarettes! Where'd you put the cigarettes?

ÉVI (*realising*). I've packed them - Hurry! They're right on the top!

VÉNA (*trying to undo the tied sack*). I just tied it up!

ÉVI. I'm burning my fingers!

VÉNA. Goddammit!

ÉVI. Too late

VÉNA *gets the cigarettes, rushes to her, but ÉVI drops the burnt-out match.*

It's too late.

VÉNA. Try another one. Maybe they're dry now.

ÉVI. Only two left.

VÉNA. Try them. But careful - Let me do it. (*He takes the box, strikes the match, it breaks. He picks it up, tries again, in vain.*) Nothing. They crumble like cheese.

ÉVI. The expert -

VÉNA (*banding her the box*). Here - the last one.

ÉVI (*holding up the match*). It's got no head. (*She throws away match and box.*)

VÉNA. You could have held that match longer.

ÉVI. You could have got the cigarettes faster.

VÉNA. Hell - we'll get a light on the train.

ÉVI. If it ever comes.

VÉNA. I heard a hoot a while ago.

ÉVI. An owl.

VÉNA. A train. (*He kneels, puts an ear to the rail.*)

ÉVI. Well?

VÉNA. I seem to hear a faraway rumble.

ÉVI. You've a hum in your ear.

VÉNA *bends down and picks up something.*

What've you got there?

VÉNA *hands it to her.*

The kid's wallet!

VÉNA. I can see that.

ÉVI. We must call him back.

VÉNA. And how'll you do that?

ÉVI (*calling out*). Hello! Hey you, there -

VÉNA (*sneers*). 'Hey you there!' His name is Ivan. (*Calling out.*) Hey - Ivaaaan!!

ÉVI. Come back!!

They listen. Silence.

VÉNA. He's over the hill.

ÉVI. What can we do... The train will be here soon.

VÉNA (*opens the wallet, examines the contents*). Dance ticket, a little money -

ÉVI. How much?

VÉNA (*looks at her*). Interested?

ÉVI. Yes. It interests me to know how much a kid like that has left after a dance.

VÉNA (*counting the money*). A hundred-forty... three crowns. Cheapskate. Didn't even buy her a lemonade. Seven crowns admission, that's all he parted with.

ÉVI. How can you be so sure?

VÉNA. He's the type whose mama checks the book-keeping.

ÉVI. You mean *your* type. Must've slipped out of his pocket when you grabbed his jacket.

VÉNA. Might have. Yes.

ÉVI. How are you planning to get it back to him?

VÉNA. Well, I am not going to run after him - Besides, what makes you so sure I'm planning to get it back to him?

ÉVI. Oh - you're going to steal it, is that it?

VÉNA. Why steal it? I can just keep it.

ÉVI. A hundred forty-three crowns?

VÉNA. Never mind! It would come in handy if right now we could buy a bottle. However, I can see that in the middle of a desert, money's for the birds.

ÉVI. You can stop for a drink when we get to Prague.

VÉNA. That's no fun. I want one now.

ÉVI. 'Now' won't work.

VÉNA. That's what's the matter with things. I don't enjoy what I can't have now - (*He throws the bills up in the air.*)
Worthless -

ÉVI. Bits of paper. They're like me. (*She puts her foot on a bill.*)

VÉNA. Don't step on them.

ÉVI. Why not?

VÉNA. Might come in handy.

ÉVI. But now it's for the birds.

VÉNA *starts picking up the bills.*

ÉVI *picks up a hundred-crown bill, offers it to VÉNA.*

Here, for a kiss.

VÉNA. A hundred? Pretty steep.

ÉVI. I want the best.

VÉNA *kisses her. She pushes him away.*

Go away. You're a liar. Your lips are liars.

VÉNA (*examining the wallet*). He doesn't even have his name in it. (*He takes out a snapshot*). Pretty as a picture.

ÉVI (*glancing at it*). That's all it is. A picture.

VÉNA. That's what's nice about it. (*Sticks snapshot in a corner of a poster on shed wall*) Just a pin-up.

ÉVI. Suppose he finds it?

VÉNA. He'll be glad. (*He pockets the wallet.*)

ÉVI. A thief, too. A liar and a thief.

VÉNA. If he really is an idealist he'll be glad.

ÉVI. But we'll be in hot water. That's a piece of evidence.

VÉNA (*looking at the snapshot*). Some piece! Now, there's the kind of Suzy things revolve around. Where, oh where will we be when the kid finds it?

ÉVI. Maybe we won't be at all.

VÉNA. Maybe we'll be killed.

ÉVI. Kill each other.

VÉNA. One would be left.

ÉVI. That would be you. You'd kill me like a fly.

VÉNA (*taking a knife from his belt*). With this knife.

ÉVI. Maybe.

VÉNA (*putting the knife to her heart*). Straight to the heart.

ÉVI. If you press -

VÉNA. Like so -

ÉVI (*after a beat*). Ouch -

VÉNA. Hurt?

ÉVI. Pricks.

VÉNA. Still?

ÉVI. It hurts! (*She grabs his hand with both of hers.*)

VÉNA. Hey, stop it! (*He breaks away from her.*) What's got into you?

ÉVI. You would really kill me.

VÉNA (*embarrassed*). So, I'm never serious -

ÉVI. Could you really kill me? Like a fly?

VÉNA. Now, don't start again.

ÉVI. You would actually kill me.

VÉNA. I wouldn't even know it.

ÉVI. Oh yes, you would. I would make sure of that.

VÉNA. All you need is get numb for a moment, stop thinking for a moment - and it's no different than sticking it into a loaf of bread.

ÉVI. You'd know the difference all right.

VÉNA. Afterwards - maybe.

ÉVI. Better put that knife away. (*Takes the knife and puts it back in his belt.*)

VÉNA. Were you really afraid?

ÉVI. You'd get into trouble. Killers do, you know.

VÉNA. If they get caught.

ÉVI. Even if they don't. Conscience.

VÉNA. What if they haven't got any?

ÉVI. They have. Everybody's got one.

VÉNA. If I can kill a person - I can kill a conscience.

ÉVI. It's different with thoughts - you can't just...

VÉNA. Who told you that? - All the murdered thoughts I've seen? Whole graveyards of them! (*He takes out the wallet and puts it on the ground underneath the poster.*) There, and may the Lord watch over it. (*Crossing over to ÉVI.*) Neither thief nor murderer.

ÉVI. Look, you actually wounded me. I've got a red dimple here.

VÉNA. Why didn't you scream?

ÉVI. I said ouch.

VÉNA. That's no good. A victim must fight back. Scream, kick, bite -

ÉVI. You'd like that, wouldn't you? Sadist. I would be like a lamb just to show you what it's like to slaughter a lamb.

VÉNA. All right. The killing's off. Wouldn't work with us.

ÉVI. Is there anything that would?

VÉNA. We could sing.

ÉVI. That would be worse. Unendurable. We could get married tomorrow.

VÉNA. Speaking of things that wouldn't work.

ÉVI. It's horrible.

VÉNA. What's horrible? What now?

ÉVI. Two people being honest with each other. A lie doesn't get you far - and honesty get you nowhere.

VÉNA. We've been lying long enough, cat.

ÉVI (*a sigh*). Pity. One should lie slower so it would last longer.

VÉNA (*he crosses to track and listens for the train*). Oh, I could've been asleep long ago instead of listening to your blah-blah. (*He sits on the rail.*)

ÉVI. It's the last blah-blah - (*She gazes at him.*)

VÉNA. It would have to be the last day. With no tomorrow.

ÉVI. Day after tomorrow we're going to the movies - I've got the tickets.

VÉNA. Day after tomorrow!

ÉVI *sits beside him.*

A silence. ÉVI puts her head on his shoulder.

ÉVI. Such a body, and it's afraid of a mole. Such a brow, and it can't outsmart it. Such hands, and they can't wring its neck. Such legs - and they can't run away.

Silence.

VÉNA. I could truly - truly tell you that I love you if I knew I wouldn't live till tomorrow.

ÉVI. Thank you very much. What good would that do me?

VÉNA. It would count forever. I couldn't take it back. You don't die of death. It's death that creates us. Whoever goes as a hero can't spoil it; he's got it tacked on, and that's that. The condition you die in.

ÉVI. Then you'll live a long life.

VÉNA. Me?

ÉVI. So far, you're neither murderer nor hero.

VÉNA. Why can't I go as a hero?

Silence.

ÉVI. I am no longer cold, no longer hungry, no longer thirsty - I don't even want to smoke.

VÉNA (*his arms round her shoulders*). You're trembling. Put on my coat.

ÉVI. No, my love, your coat won't do it.

VÉNA. Is there anything that will?

ÉVI. No. Or is there? I haven't got it.

VÉNA. Who has? Have I?

ÉVI. If you had it, you would give it to me. You are not stingy. That is one thing you're not. Right?

VÉNA. I am not stingy. That is one thing I'm not.

ÉVI. But you don't have it.

VÉNA. Nobody has it.

ÉVI (*taking his arm*). Love me at least.

VÉNA. Would that help you?

ÉVI. That would help me.

VÉNA. Is that allowed - to help oneself with love? Is there nothing else?

Silence.

ÉVI. Or tell me a story. Something nice or something funny.

VÉNA. I don't know anything, Évi.

ÉVI. Remember something.

VÉNA. I can't remember anything, Évi.

ÉVI. If you loved me the least tiny bit you would remember. It would just be there.

A distant train whistle.

VÉNA (*puts his hand over hers. A beat*). D'you smell those sleepers? Must've been lying here under this rail some ten or fifteen years, and still they smell of trees. Of resin and wood, fresh grass - a whole forest. Must be the way they dry and fry in the sun all day long... I do love you in my way, I suppose, but there are things that I know only now- What I mean is, tomorrow they'll be gone. I go to sleep with one thing, wake up with another. It's as though overnight I had been washed away, drenched through, wrung out - If we could stretch this now to last for life! - It wouldn't be all that much longer, would it? It's like now I see you, now I don't, one day I look for you, the next I can't - like swinging on a pendulum: when close I start to run away. And when I'm furthest off is when I'm coming close. You ought to stop me, never let me go. I'm close? Then grab. What with I don't know. Not hands, no, you'd break something inside me - whatever spring it is that makes me work -

ÉVI. Now I don't want a thing. I'm not afraid any longer.

VÉNA. But afterwards?

ÉVI. Leave that for afterwards. Just hold me for a while. Don't say a thing.

Train whistle again. The sound quickly approaches, changes into a sharp dissonance, everything goes dark abruptly.

The End.