

Ákos Németh

The Web Emporium

(translated by Eugene Brogyányi)

Characters

MARTINA, fourteen years old

MARCELLA, same

LÓRÁNT, same

BÁLINT, same

MELINDA, Martina's sister,
thirteen years old, wheelchair-bound

Takes place in the present, in Budapest.

1.

LÓRI: You don't even have the guts to grab her hand.

BÁLINT: Yes I do.

LÓRI: Big talk, no action.

BÁLINT: No it isn't.

LÓRI: I don't care what you say. A babe like that, and you're letting her slip through your fingers.

BÁLINT: I'm not letting her slip through my fingers.

LÓRI: You're just pussyfooting. Have you even talked to her yet?

BÁLINT: I will.

LÓRI: So stop pussyfooting.

BÁLINT: Next time I see her I'll stop her in her tracks. Believe me.

LÓRI: If only I could, but you've got milk running through your veins. You're a cottage-cheese man.

BÁLINT: She's such a babe.

LÓRI: Wait, not cottage cheese, sour cream. You're a sour-cream man. I meant to say sour cream.

BÁLINT: And she's so, so... well, beautiful. Simply beautiful.

LÓRI: Well, yeah. She's pretty much of a babe, not too bad.

BÁLINT: I was wondering, what if I touched her hair. It probably smells so good.

LÓRI: Not even milk. Pudding.

BÁLINT: Ever since I've known her, I wash my hair more. Brush my teeth more. Use underarm deodorant. I'm just a better person.

LÓRI: Butterscotch. Butterscotch pudding.

BÁLINT: The problem is, she's such a super babe.

LÓRI: I'm hungry. I got hungry, goddammit.

BÁLINT: That's why I'm speechless when she's around.

LÓRI: When you come right down to it, Szilvi's better looking. So's Kriszti.

BÁLINT: Well yeah, maybe. Probably. But she's different.

LÓRI: Or Angéla. Or Andi. Or Laura. Or Kitty. Or Noémi. Or Niki. Or Szabina. Or Betti. Or Zsóka. Or Emma. They're all better looking.

BÁLINT: Maybe, maybe you're right, but she's different. She's beautiful in a different way.

LÓRI: Or Hanna. Or Roberta, or Gréti, or Zsanett, or Timi, or...

BÁLINT: Put a lid on it.

2.

In a playground at night

MARTINA: What're you doing here?

MARCELLA: I'm sitting, sitting and waiting for somebody.

MARTINA: Okay if I sit down too?

MARCELLA: You want to sit here?

MARTINA: Is it okay?

MARCELLA: Go ahead, I don't mind.

MARTINA: Who're you waiting for?

MARCELLA: I'm not telling you.

MARTINA: What's this?

MARCELLA: A book, can't you see?

MARTINA: We haven't studied that yet.

MARCELLA: It's an eighth-grade book.

MARTINA: We don't have it yet.

MARCELLA: Well sure, it's hard. Math.

MARTINA: Hard?

MARCELLA: Very. I'm the only one in class who understands it.

MARTINA: You must be very smart.

MARCELLA: Well, yeah, that's true. But they say I'm an eager beaver.

MARTINA: You're an eager beaver?

MARCELLA: That's what they say, they say I'm an eager beaver, but I just study.

MARTINA: I study too, but it's pointless. I can't retain anything. Nobody calls *me* an eager beaver, even though I study all day long. I've got nothing else to do anyway. Mostly I watch TV. My sister's always at the computer, but I'm not interested. Mostly I watch TV. I'm always home, because I don't have friends. Anyway I'm so bad at math, they might flunk me.

MARCELLA: Why don't you have friends?

MARTINA: According to them I'm ugly. According to me, too. I'm ugly as a corpse. Ashen face, sunken eyes.

MARCELLA: Who says that?

MARTINA: Them. Me too.

MARCELLA: This isn't what a corpse looks like.

MARTINA: I know what a corpse looks like. I had a dog that died.

MARCELLA: Ashen face, sunken eyes, but not like this. Different.

MARTINA: I wish I didn't look like a dead dog.

MARCELLA: What grade are you in?

MARTINA: Seventh.

MARCELLA: And do the seventh graders make fun of you?

MARTINA: Yes. My classmates.

MARCELLA: Seventh graders don't yet know what a corpse looks like. Seventh graders don't yet know what sunken eyes look like. They don't yet know what life is.

MARTINA: And who are you waiting for?

MARCELLA: Nobody. I just made that up.

MARTINA: Nobody? Really?

MARCELLA: Nobody.

(Pause.)

MARTINA: So we're just sitting here? Just like that?

MARCELLA: Just like that. Is that a problem?

MARTINA: No, no problem. *(Pause.)* So you were just pretending to be sitting here waiting for somebody?

MARCELLA: Right. Is that a problem?

MARTINA: No. No problem. *(Pause.)* Is it okay if I pretend I'm waiting for somebody with you?

MARCELLA: Why do you want to do that?

MARTINA: It's better than waiting alone.

MARCELLA: All right, go ahead.

MARTINA: Good, then let's pretend we're waiting together. *(Pause.)* But shouldn't we decide who we'd be waiting for if we were waiting?

MARCELLA: You mean if we were really waiting?

MARTINA: Yeah, if we really were.

MARCELLA: Makes no difference to me at all. Nobody comes this way anyhow. We're alone, believe me.

MARTINA: How old are you?

MARCELLA: Thirteen. I'll be fourteen soon.

MARTINA: I bet you think you're fat.

MARCELLA: What makes you say that?

MARTINA: You're not fat.

MARCELLA: Thanks.

MARTINA: Really.

MARCELLA: I take diet pills. My mother's prescriptions.

MARTINA: Really? How come?

MARCELLA: I want to be attractive. My mother wants to be attractive too. The family doctor prescribes them.

MARTINA: Oh, I see.

MARCELLA: You don't take anything?

MARTINA: No, nothing. You think I'm fat?

MARCELLA: Well, I don't know. No, maybe not.

MARTINA: Some day I'll give it a try. I often think I'm fat. Actually, I always did.

MARCELLA: The stuff's good, only my head aches.

MARTINA: From that? It aches from that?

MARCELLA: Well, maybe. Also my mother says I don't sleep enough.

MARTINA: And you don't?

MARCELLA: Well, no, I don't.

MARTINA: And what do you take for the headaches? Does your mom have some prescription for that?

MARCELLA: No, I take care of it myself. Spray paint.

MARTINA: Boys like a girl to be smart. They don't like me much.

MARCELLA: You have to inhale the fumes.

MARTINA: What I mean is, not at all.

MARCELLA: Paint. Smells real good.

MARTINA: Well, I don't know.

MARCELLA: Very good smell. Or that spray they use for loosening screws, but that's not so good.

MARTINA: That's not good?

MARCELLA: It takes away your headache, but it stinks.

MARTINA: Then that's not good.

MARCELLA: No. Or there's nail polish.

MARTINA: Nail polish?

MARCELLA: Yeah. That's awesome, really. Oh, and there's a furniture varnish, I can't remember the name of it right now.

MARTINA: What do you do with that?

MARCELLA: Smell it.

MARTINA: You don't have to drink it or anything?

MARCELLA: No. You smell it. I mean inhale it.

MARTINA: You know a lot about this kind of stuff.

MARCELLA: Well, yeah. But I forget the name of that varnish.

MARTINA: That's okay. It'll come to you.

MARCELLA: There's an additive in it. That's what does the trick. I just can't remember the name.

MARTINA: You're very smart.

MARCELLA: Well, yeah. Oh, let's just say it slows you down a little, but that can be taken care of.

MARTINA: Taken care of?

MARCELLA: It's no big deal. My mother has real good prescriptions. She's got a stimulant they use for sleep disorders. Only I can't remember the name of it. It's a type of barbiturate.

MARTINA: You can't remember?

MARCELLA: No, I can't.

MARTINA: That's okay. It'll come to you.

MARCELLA: Yeah, sure it will. Or the stuff they treat attention deficit with, we've got pills like that too. That's good too, it's awesome if you're dragging ass.

MARTINA: And what's the name of that?

MARCELLA: I can't remember that right now either. But I'll be able to tell you later.

MARTINA: That's okay. *(Pause.)* So we're just sitting here?

MARCELLA: Yeah. Don't you feel like it?

MARTINA: No problem, let's sit. *(Pause.)* I don't even think you're fat. Really.

MARCELLA: Why do you say that?

MARTINA: Just saying.

MARCELLA: I've got to go now.

MARTINA: You've got to go?

MARCELLA: Yeah.

MARTINA: We'll meet tomorrow too. Okay?

MARCELLA: Why? Why do you want to meet?

MARTINA: You're so smart. I just came down because I don't feel like watching TV. And by this time there's nobody here.

MARCELLA: You're still very young. You don't know anything yet.

MARTINA: So we're meeting?

MARCELLA: Maybe.

MARTINA: My name is Martina. What's yours?

MARCELLA: Why do you want to know? I'm Marcella.

MARTINA: So long, Marcella. Are we meeting?

MARCELLA: I'll see. And don't watch TV. The rays are bad for you. The TV sends out rays.

MARTINA: Bad for you? I didn't know that.

MARCELLA: You don't know anything yet. *(She exits.)*

3.

LÓRI: I'm not Croesus either, but all right, in the beginning it's okay, but in the long run, I'm tired of always paying. Women are damn expensive, believe me.

BÁLINT: Money doesn't matter so much. I'm not saying it doesn't matter, just not that much.

LÓRI: Are you stupid? What do you mean it doesn't matter?! You think my mother steals the money she gives me?

BÁLINT: Okay, no, she doesn't steal it. I didn't say she steals it. I never said anything like that. Did I say anything like that?

LÓRI: My mother doesn't steal it in the laundry, no way, you can believe me. What she does do is breathe in those noxious fumes and gases. You can believe me on this, totally.

BÁLINT: All right already, I believe you. Chill out!

LÓRI: So I'm gonna be filthy rich when I grow up. As soon as I'm old enough. Rolling in dough. I'm gonna be such a fat cat, it'll take three people to get me into my Chevy. But at least I won't be working in a laundry, that's for sure. I'll own a laundry, though. I'll send my mother over just to look at it.

BÁLINT: Not everybody has to work in a laundry.

LÓRI: That's easy for you to say, with your father's great little restaurant.

BÁLINT: My father doesn't own a restaurant. He never owned a restaurant.

LÓRI: Well, where does he work? Where, if not the restaurant? At the Silver Poodle.

BÁLINT: Silver Noodle, but never mind. And it's not his, he's just the business manager.

LÓRI: Even so, he won't hire my mother for the cleaning, whatever his title is.

BÁLINT: The market's at a standstill.

LÓRI: I don't care about your market. Your father's market either. Here I am, sharpening your pick-up skills, and your father's a scumbag.

BÁLINT: Why? What's your father?

LÓRI: He's a scumbag too.

BÁLINT: So there ya go: yours is one too.

LÓRI: But only I can say that. Only me. Got that?

BÁLINT: Then *you* lay off *my* father too, okay? Just because he doesn't hire your mother in the middle of this crisis. For your information, he just fired a waiter.

LÓRI: For stealing?

BÁLINT: No, not for stealing. He was dispensable. So your mother ought to be glad over at the laundry, she ought to be glad she's not dispensable. My father hasn't got it easy either. He says the whole restaurant's dispensable, the whole thing, as is. It could just as well be closed down.

LÓRI: Okay. Forget it. But I still don't get it, if he didn't steal.

BÁLINT: They might close any day. The tax office is hanging over them like that sword. The sword of Aristotle. So lay off, once and for all.

LÓRI: Okay. Let's talk about chicks instead. And I never heard of that sword.

BÁLINT: Get what I'm saying? Get the picture?

LÓRI: All right already, let go of it. I get it: your father hasn't got it easy either. There's a sword hanging over his head.

BÁLINT: This isn't something you'd know anything about, but it's staring me in the face. You don't even have a father.

LÓRI: What do you mean I don't have a father?

BÁLINT: Why, do you?

LÓRI: Yes, you twerp, for your information, I do! It's just that he skipped out on us.

BÁLINT: Okay, let's talk about women.

LÓRI: But I'll track him down. I'll ask him why he was such a scumbag. Why he was a scumbag to my mother. Because that's how he treated her, he was a shithead. But only I can say he's a scumbag, only me, understand? Or a shithead.

BÁLINT: Let's talk about women.

LÓRI: Okay, let's talk about women.

(Pause.)

BÁLINT: I didn't mean to offend you.

LÓRI: It's okay, no problem. And don't call my father a shithead, got that?!

BÁLINT: On to the women.

LÓRI: Well, yes, the women. They're sleazeballs too. Take Andi. She sits in my lap. I ask her if we could spend more time with our friends.

BÁLINT: What does she say?

LÓRI: We can't. That's what. Just like that. For two weeks I'm spending money on her hand over fist. I took her to the movies twice. What I spent on popcorn alone!

BÁLINT: It's damn expensive, that's for sure. And we're in the middle of this crisis. They're not worth all that.

LÓRI: She just used me, played me for a fool, a sucker. I'm a loser! A big loser. She even drank coke. Four times. Apple juice once. How can women behave that way?

BÁLINT: They're from Venus. There's that book.

LÓRI: What book?

BÁLINT: There's this book that says so. I forget the title.

LÓRI: Leave off with your books. When it comes out on DVD, I'll watch it. I'll download it and watch it.

BÁLINT: But they won't be making a movie out of it. It's like philosophy.

LÓRI: Come off it! You're such a child! If the book's good, they'll make a movie out of it. They'll buy the rights.

BÁLINT: But it's pure philosophy!

LÓRI: They'll cut that stuff out and just shoot the action parts, take it from me. Tell me when it comes out on DVD, but not any sooner, don't even mention it till then, leave me alone with these books of yours.

BÁLINT: What an idiot. I mean Andi. Andi's an idiot.

LÓRI: She seems like one, but she's not. I'm not saying she's a genius, but she's not stupid. She's crafty. She sure got the better of me. For two weeks I'm spending on her like crazy, two whole weeks! God damn her! I'm a loser. Which reminds me, I've got English class tomorrow, on top of all this.

4.

MARCELLA: Imagine being skinny, so skinny you don't leave footprints in the snow. The boys are hot for thin girls. This way, you don't stand a chance with them. But you need money to do it.

MARTINA: I'll ask my mother for money.

MARCELLA: First secret: Don't tell your mother anything! Have a smoke. It'll take away your appetite. It's a totally good feeling when there's nothing in your stomach.

MARTINA: But that makes me all uptight, I get all stressed out.

MARCELLA: I could give you something to get you in a better mood.

MARTINA: I don't want anything like that.

MARCELLA: Aw c'mon. Don't be such a wimp.

MARTINA: I don't have money anyway.

MARCELLA: I've got a solution for that.

MARTINA: There's no solution for that.

MARCELLA: You don't think so?

MARTINA: There's no solution for that.

MARCELLA: You seventh graders don't know anything about life yet.

5.

BÁLINT: Next week we're learning about human anatomy. Did you have that yet?

LÓRI: Yeah. It's pure boredom. Human anatomy is pure boredom. Whoever came up with that could never have seen a human.

BÁLINT: Even so, I'm curious. Mostly about the teacher, when she explains it.

LÓRI: All you think about is having fun. But life, pal, life is tough. In English they're gonna flunk me. I don't get any of it. Do you get indirect quotation? It's total nonsense. There's no such thing. I can hardly wait to be finished with this lousy school.

BÁLINT: Do you think it'd be good to be grown up?

LÓRI: Of course it would. You're stupid. You can do anything you want. School is slavery. And there aren't even any decent women. Got a cigarette?

BÁLINT: I don't even have money, never mind cigarettes.

LÓRI: Eh, as if you smoke.

BÁLINT: I do. Imagine that.

LÓRI: I can't imagine you smoking.

BÁLINT: It's bad for the health, everybody knows that.

LÓRI: That goddamn indirect quotation. That's what's ruining my life.

BÁLINT: It's bad for the health, you can believe me.

6.

MARCELLA: At the doctor's, I'll distract her.

MARTINA: How do you know she's a woman?

MARCELLA: Pediatricians are always women. Men can't stand kids, they get the willies if there's a kid around.

MARTINA: I don't know about that. My old pediatrician was a man.

MARCELLA: Well, he must've been pretty miserable. And an alcoholic for sure, that's for sure. He hated kids secretly.

MARTINA: He liked me.

MARCELLA: You only *thought* he did. He detested you, believe me, detested you. From the bottom of his heart. All he had to do was look at you, and he hated you.

MARTINA: You don't even know him.

MARCELLA: I know men. All they like about kids is making them. After that they skip out, as soon as they can. If a kid comes toward them, they get the creeps thinking about the consequences.

MARTINA: And how are you going to distract her?

MARCELLA: I'll phone her from the waiting room while you're in with her.

MARTINA: It'd be better if you came in with me.

MARCELLA: You've got to do that yourself. I'm only going as far as the waiting room with you.

MARTINA: And what'll you say to her on the phone?

MARCELLA: Let that be my problem.

MARTINA: I've got to know what you're going to say. I'm the one being examined, coughing and everything the way we discussed, and if you call while I'm in there, I've got to know what you're saying.

MARCELLA: What do I know what I'll be saying? I'll come up with something.

MARTINA: I can't cough while you're on the phone.

MARCELLA: While I'm on the phone, you don't have to cough. You have to cough only when she's paying attention to you.

MARTINA: That's good. Because I really can't cough that much. Especially if there's nothing wrong with me.

MARCELLA: You just go ahead and cough. And don't give me any excuses, cough normally. Cough like this. *(She coughs.)*

MARTINA: I can't do it like that.

MARCELLA: How then?

MARTINA: Like this. *(She coughs.)*

MARCELLA: No good. That's a big zero. She'll catch on.

MARTINA: I don't care if she catches on. Why is it a problem if she catches on? Who cares?

MARCELLA: Because then what she's catching on to is that you're trying to get out of going to school, and she'll call the police.

MARTINA: What are you talking about?

MARCELLA: Believe me, she'll call the cops.

MARTINA: The cops are busy chasing bank robbers. They don't have time for teenyboppers like us.

MARCELLA: Not *those* cops, the truant officers.

MARTINA: You're a total idiot. Everybody's always cutting school and nobody ever calls anybody.

MARCELLA: But now you're committing medical fraud, that's what they call it. Especially because you're going to be stealing the prescription pad. So don't go making excuses, just cough normally. If your coughing isn't convincing, you'll be suspicious right off the bat.

MARTINA: I'm really not in the mood for this whole thing.

MARCELLA: I'm only trying to help you.

MARTINA: Help me?

MARCELLA: I'm helping you so you don't have to stay the way you are. Not the way you are, but different.

MARTINA: I don't care about that.

MARCELLA: How come? Do you want to be the way you are? Do you? See what I mean? And anyway, this is no big deal. You go in, your lungs hurt, like this, you cough, like this, you stick out your tongue, like this, you growl a little, like this, don't overdo it, meanwhile I call her, I say something, and you pocket the prescription pad and hightail it out of there. That's it.

MARTINA: That's it?
MARCELLA: That's it.
MARTINA: You promise nothing bad'll come of it?
MARCELLA: Yes, you idiot, I do. Nothing bad'll come of it. Will you do this much for me?
MARTINA: When you come right down to it, you're my best friend.
MARCELLA: When you come right down to it, I'm your best friend.
MARTINA: Well, okay, when you come right down to it, you're my only friend.
MARCELLA: Okay, so are we okay?
MARTINA: Well, but still... what're you going to say to her over the phone? When you call her - what?

7.

Lóri is studying English. It's not going well. He slams the book to the floor, then rolls a cigarette from one of its pages.

8.

MARTINA: Oh my God, I stole it, I stole it!
MARCELLA: Of course you stole it, you were super!
MARTINA: But I stole it, don't you understand? I! Stole! It!
MARCELLA: Sure I understand, you were tops, totally tops! I'm proud of you!
MARTINA: But they'll be looking for me. I'll get caught! I'll go to jail!
MARCELLA: Oh my God, are you ever stupid! How could you go to jail? How? Tell me! This is nothing, nothing at all. From the point of view of the police, it's a big zero. You think anybody cares?
MARTINA: Juvenile detention.
MARCELLA: You're completely out of your mind.
MARTINA: And I'll get raped in jail.
MARCELLA: It's boys who get raped in jail.
MARTINA: Boys can't get raped.
MARCELLA: Brace yourself, yes they can. Your mascara's running, stop crying. Wipe your eyes. And you're not going to jail, the prescription pad isn't an issue, not even the receptionist is going to notice. She'll just get another one from the supply closet.
MARTINA: What do you mean she won't notice?
MARCELLA: Well okay, the receptionist will notice. She'll notice, so what?

MARTINA: She'll think about what could've happened to it.

MARCELLA: So what if she thinks about it? First of all, she can't think, her brain can't handle that. Didn't you get a look at her? She's got the I.Q. of a potted cactus. Second of all, she's got six screaming babies in the waiting room, and two mothers. She doesn't have time to *die*, much less think! Think about it!

MARTINA: Let's take it back.

MARCELLA: I don't believe this.

MARTINA: Okay, that's not a good idea. But then let's throw it away.

MARCELLA: You want to throw it away?

MARTINA: Yes. I want to.

MARCELLA: Am I hearing this? Do you know how many hallucinogens we can get with this? Do you have any idea? Any at all?

MARTINA: What are we going to do with so many hallucinogens?

MARCELLA: We'll treat the whole class.

MARTINA: Nobody in the class likes me.

MARCELLA: They will now.

MARTINA: Let's sell it.

MARCELLA: You know what? That's not a bad idea. Not bad at all. But who'll buy it?

MARTINA: There's a twelfth grader who'll buy it.

MARCELLA: Do you dare ask her?

MARTINA: I stole it, it's your turn. You ask her.

MARCELLA: I don't even know her.

MARTINA: I don't either, not personally.

MARCELLA: Then let's at least try it ourselves.

MARTINA: Are you crazy? Never.

MARCELLA: I've already tried it.

MARTINA: I don't believe you.

MARCELLA: My mother takes these little round pills. I'm telling you, I've tried it.

MARTINA: And?

MARCELLA: And what?

MARTINA: And how is it?

MARCELLA: Very mellow. You get mellow from it. Very mellow.

MARTINA: Where? Where did you try it?

MARCELLA: At a party at Zsuzsa's. You don't know her. An eighth grader.

MARTINA: What kind of party?

MARCELLA: Never mind.

MARTINA: I know who that is.
MARCELLA: Well, she's the one.
MARTINA: You were there? They didn't invite me. Even though my mother knows her mother.
MARCELLA: I was invited only because she's my classmate. But her mother wasn't there. Her father either.
MARTINA: (*enviously*): And was it good?
MARCELLA: Well at first nobody would talk to me. But I was in high gear. Everybody liked that, and then I made a bunch of friends.
MARTINA: Who was there?
MARCELLA: I don't remember.
MARTINA: How can you not remember that?
MARCELLA: I told you, I was in high gear.

9.

MARCELLA: You want something from me?
BÁLINT: No, nothing. Nothing, really.
MARCELLA: Then why are you staring at me?
BÁLINT: I just wanted to ask you something.
MARCELLA: Time out. First of all, who sent you?
BÁLINT: Nobody sent me.
MARCELLA: Martina, right?
BÁLINT: I don't know any Martina.
MARCELLA: I'll help you. You're going to a party and you want to be a little mellow.
BÁLINT: Party? What party?
MARCELLA: Well, frankly, you seem pretty uptight to me. You like a girl, right? Don't be shy.
BÁLINT: Frankly, yes.
MARCELLA: I bet you never even talked to her.
BÁLINT: I just happen to be past that.
MARCELLA: I can help you with all that, mellow you out, that I can do. You see these little green pills? Two thousand apiece.
BÁLINT: I don't have that kind of money.
MARCELLA: So you don't get an allowance. How much of a pussy are you? Go reinvent yourself: cut the neighbors' grass, deliver the newspaper, what do I know.
BÁLINT: This is not exactly what I wanted to talk to you about.

MARCELLA *(at a loss)*: About what, then?

(Pause.)

Listen, I don't have the time.

BÁLINT *(in desperation)*: About the blue pills. Those are the ones I'm interested in. The blue ones.

MARCELLA *(taken aback)*: Those are for stimulating hair growth.

BÁLINT: Somehow my hair isn't full enough.

MARCELLA: Looks full to me.

BÁLINT: No, it's not full enough. It's not as nice as yours.

MARCELLA: How does *my* hair come into this?

BÁLINT: Just like that. Just an example.

MARCELLA: Get your paw out of my hair. Don't paw my hair.

BÁLINT: Sorry, I usually don't paw. Really, I never paw.

MARCELLA: Well, don't.

10.

BÁLINT: Who're you with now?

LÓRI: Who am *I* with?

BÁLINT: Yes. That's my question. That's what I'm asking.

LÓRI: You're askin' *me* who *I'm* with? The one who's helpin' you out? Me? I'm the only one trying to get you off your ass, you loser, because you're such a pussy, you'd never talk to her, never. Who am *I* with, you numbskull? Who am *I* with?

BÁLINT: For your information, I did talk to her. Amazed, huh? Speechless.

LÓRI: Well, I don't believe it, to be honest.

BÁLINT: Who cares what you believe.

LÓRI: And what did you say?

BÁLINT: Well, nothing, I spoke to her the way you're supposed to. What do you think I said? Stop pestering me!

LÓRI: What about her? What did she say?

BÁLINT: Not to paw her hair.

LÓRI: What?

BÁLINT: Not to paw her hair, that's what she said, her hair, that I shouldn't paw it. Anything else is okay, just not the hair.

LÓRI: She said that?

BÁLINT: She did. How about that? You're blown away now, right? Blown away, right?

LÓRI: And what's that you've got? What the hell's that? What're you hiding?
BÁLINT: This? This here? It's for hair growth. She gave it to me.
LÓRI: This is too much! She gave you a hair-growth pill? Why? Is your hair falling out?
BÁLINT: Now your mind is blown, right? I knew I'd like her. She's so considerate, that's the kind of person she is. That's what she's like, so what can I do? I couldn't stop her. She gave me a hair-growth pill.

11.

MARCELLA: This is an upper.
BÁLINT: I understand.
MARCELLA: This is a downer.
BÁLINT: I understand. But actually, I'd like to stay the way I am right now.
MARCELLA: That's no problem. Take both at once.
BÁLINT: The green one and the pink one?
MARCELLA: Yes, the green one and the pink one. In any order.
BÁLINT: Listen...
MARCELLA: You want any weight-loss pills?
BÁLINT: No, not really.
MARCELLA: Then how about something to increase your appetite? This'll increase your appetite. You're not very health conscious, I have to tell you.
BÁLINT: No. No, I don't need it. There's something... something I'd like to say.
MARCELLA: You've got a special request?
BÁLINT: Well, in a way.
MARCELLA: Trust me, I can supply it. Twelve thousand so far.
BÁLINT: I don't need you to supply anything for me.
MARCELLA: I don't get it. What do you want?
BÁLINT: I wrote a poem.
MARCELLA: A poem?
BÁLINT: For you.
MARCELLA: For me?
BÁLINT: Will you listen to it?
MARCELLA: Must be some pornographic thing.
BÁLINT: Her little body is trembling in silence, the stars gather around and gaze, gaze at her. It's got a beginning too, but I can't remember that now.

(Pause.)

MARCELLA: Beautiful. Really.

BÁLINT *(modestly)*: I wrote it for you.

MARCELLA: I understand. Beautiful poem. Twelve thousand so far.

BÁLINT: Twelve. Right.

MARCELLA: Your poem's beautiful.

12.

At Martina's

MARCELLA: Who the hell are you?

MELINDA *(in a wheelchair)*: The question here is, who the hell are you?

MARCELLA: Don't tell me you're the one we've been waiting for. You're Martina's sister?

MELINDA: What's the matter? Something bothering you?

MARCELLA: No, no problem. Is your sight good? Your hearing and everything? Yoo-hoo!

MELINDA *(laughs bitterly)*: You little jerk.

MARCELLA: So then you're the one with the technological talent. Can you roll as far as the computer?

MELINDA: It's not talent. It's genius.

MARCELLA: Boy! You don't hold back.

MELINDA: My sister sent word she'll be right here. But till then you could tell me what you two want from me.

MARCELLA: All right. So be it. You know that we... deal.

MELINDA: In other words, that's how you refer to it.

MARCELLA: Yes, that's how we refer to it. You have a problem with that? We deal in medicines.

MELINDA: I had an inkling.

MARCELLA: Somehow I don't appreciate your tone.

MELINDA: Unfortunately it's the only tone I have to offer. This is what my voice is like.

MARCELLA: So that's what it's like.

MELINDA: Yes, this is my voice. This is what my voice is like, and this is what I'm like. You'll have to live with that.

MARCELLA: No, you're the one who has to live with it.

MELINDA: So what would you like?

MARCELLA: Business is booming.

MELINDA: I'm so glad. And?

MARCELLA: It's booming. So much so, that we decided to expand.

MELINDA: You're expanding. Awesome.

MARCELLA: We were thinking of a web emporium.

MELINDA: Awesome.

MARCELLA: That's where you come into the picture.

MELINDA: That's where I come into the picture.

MARCELLA: Tell me, do you have to repeat everything I say?

MELINDA: No, I don't have to. I just want you to see what a little eager-beaver I am. I repeat everything, the better to grasp it.

MARCELLA: Somehow I have a feeling you're looking for trouble.

MELINDA: The trouble's already here. Go on, spill the beans.

MARCELLA: That's all. They're all spilled. A web emporium. But a little squirt like you obviously can't handle it. I'm obviously just wasting my time here.

MELINDA: Are you implying I can't build a web emporium?

MARCELLA: Bingo. How about that?

MELINDA: The issue isn't whether I *can* build it.

MARCELLA: Then what's the issue?

MELINDA: The issue is whether I *want* to.

MARCELLA: Money.

MELINDA: Yes?

MARCELLA: Lots of money.

MELINDA: I don't need money.

MARCELLA: You could buy things. What do you like? New music, new books, I don't know, new legs?

MELINDA: Okay, get out.

MARCELLA: Or else what, you squirt? Do I look stupid to you? Web emporium...

MELINDA: I could build it.

MARTINA (*enters*): I see you've gotten acquainted.

MELINDA: We have.

MARTINA: Will you build us the web emporium, Meli?

MELINDA: If this jerk asks me nicely, I will.

MARCELLA: What?

MELINDA: Ask me. Ask me nicely.

MARTINA: Boy! Get along already you two! (*To Marcella.*) Ask her already, dammit.

(*Pause.*)

MARCELLA: Please.

MELINDA *(with a haughty smile)*: And now tell me exactly what you want. Barbie dolls on the home page, I'm guessing.

MARTINA: Back off, Melinda.

MELINDA: In any case, the server is a concern. We can talk about it, but *my* computer's off limits. Maybe the school's.

13.

MARCELLA: You can go to hell.

BÁLINT: What's wrong?

MARCELLA: You know.

BÁLINT: I don't know. I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about.

MARCELLA: "I don't know. I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about." Don't gimme that.

BÁLINT: I always paid on time.

MARCELLA: That's not what I'm talking about.

BÁLINT: About what then? I haven't got a clue.

MARCELLA: I see right through this game of yours. It's sad, isn't it, getting caught with your pants down.

BÁLINT: What's going on?

MARCELLA: All I'll say is: Attila József.

BÁLINT: Okay, Attila József. What about him?

MARCELLA: My heart is perched upon the branch of nothingness. That's your poem, huh? You little fool.

BÁLINT: That's just the first line, that was just the first line, I didn't write that. But I wrote the rest. I wrote all the rest, it's at least as good as the old version. The first line, that's not mine, but I usually don't recite that one. I don't.

MARCELLA: Of course you don't. That's what I always do too. I leave off the first line.

BÁLINT: Will you listen to my poem? Will you listen to it? You'll see right away.

MARCELLA: Get lost. *(She begins to go.)*

BÁLINT: Wait, wait! My heart's upon the branch of nothing... there's a girl in the street... somebody likes her.

MARCELLA: That's your poem?

BÁLINT: That one is, yes.

MARCELLA: Well this I can believe.

BÁLINT: Don't you like it?

MARCELLA: What do you take me for? There's nothing to it.

BÁLINT: What's wrong with it?
MARCELLA: It doesn't rhyme! It doesn't even rhyme!
BÁLINT: It's free verse. There aren't supposed to be rhymes in it.
MARCELLA: Boy, you really get on my nerves. Honestly. Next time don't look me up unless you want some, some uppers. You could use some.
BÁLINT: I truly don't need any uppers. I don't even have money.
MARCELLA: Oh yeah? So then that's it. So much for our little commercial interaction. Good-bye.
BÁLINT: Wait! I do want some after all.
MARCELLA: And you have money too?
BÁLINT: On Wednesday. I'll have it on Wednesday.
MARCELLA: Then come back on Wednesday. But no poems.

14.

In the schoolyard

MARTINA: You can pay another way.
LÓRI: How? What other way?
MARTINA: You'll do me a favor.
LÓRI: That's the sort of thing they say in the movies.
MARTINA: Well, that's exactly how it's going to be.
LÓRI: What do you want?
MARTINA: You've got to do that favor.
LÓRI: That depends. Spit it out already.
MARTINA: The walls have ears.
LÓRI: Then whisper it to me.
MARTINA: If I'm going to lean in close to you, I'd appreciate it if you showered first.
LÓRI: I was at basketball practice. Sorry.
MARTINA: You've got to take care of a teacher.
LÓRI: What do you mean: take care of?
MARTINA: You know perfectly well. Don't pretend to be stupid.
LÓRI: A teacher? I want to graduate. One or two freshmen, okay, but...
MARTINA: You owe me. Did you forget?
LÓRI: Are you crazy? Never.
MARTINA: Then let's make this interesting. In fact, to show you who you're dealing with, I'll even take a hit. I'll give you ten thousand, over and above your debt.

LÓRI: Ten?

MARTINA: Ten.

LÓRI: Fifteen.

MARTINA: Twelve.

LÓRI: Fourteen.

MARTINA: Twelve, and that's that.

LÓRI: Man! Which one? Which teacher? Lucky for you I'm saving for a mountain bike.

MARTINA: I want to see this person on the floor, beaten to a pulp.

LÓRI: You want to be there?

MARTINA: You bet.

LÓRI: That's extra. That'll cost more. And who is it?

MARTINA: The math teacher.

LÓRI: Jesus Christ, that's a woman!

MARTINA: That much easier.

LÓRI: But kicking a hundred-sixty centimeter woman in the stomach, I'll lose face.

MARTINA: Do you need the work or not?

LÓRI: What did you say, how much?

MARTINA: We're past that. Is there anything else? What are you hanging around here for? I don't want us seen together.

LÓRI: At least tell me why.

MARTINA: That's *my* business. A personal matter.

LÓRI: Why her? She passed you last year.

MARTINA: She gets on my nerves, along with her trig functions. And get ready, I'll have other jobs for you.

15.

MARCELLA: But who? Who was it?

MARTINA: He didn't introduce himself.

MARCELLA: And what exactly did he say? Tell me word for word.

MARTINA: I don't remember word for word. After all, we weren't discussing English conjugations, I didn't memorize it for you.

MARCELLA: Then tell me the way you remember.

MARTINA: He asked who I am.

MARCELLA: What do you mean who you are?

MARTINA: You heard me. That's what he asked. Who are you, little girl? That's exactly what he asked.

MARCELLA: And what did you say? I hope you didn't tell him your name.

MARTINA: I didn't have to, he already knew it.

MARCELLA: Of course, you're in the directory. Dammit.

MARTINA: In other words, he knew my name. He was asking for me by name.

MARCELLA: And then? Then what did he say?

MARTINA: That we should stop. Stop the whole thing. That's what he said.

MARCELLA: But how exactly did he say that?

MARTINA: That it would be a very sad thing if something happened to us.

MARCELLA: That's what he said?

MARTINA: That's what he said.

MARCELLA: And did he tell you his name? Did he introduce himself?

MARTINA: What do you think?

MARCELLA: Damn him. Did he say anything else?

MARTINA: Only that we're stepping on toes. We're stepping on some people's toes. And that we made some of them nervous, and he won't be able to hold them back for long. Oh, and he wanted to know one other thing.

MARCELLA: What?! This is like pulling teeth!

MARTINA: In whose name am I speaking. That's what he wanted to know.

MARCELLA: What? In whose name? In our name, no? Who else's? Ours.

MARTINA: What he meant was, there's somebody in the background.

MARCELLA: Like who?

MARTINA: A grownup. That's what he thought. Because we're children. He thought there's got to be a grownup.

MARCELLA: That there's got to be a grownup?

MARTINA: The whole time that's what he was after. That I should tell him who he can talk to.

MARCELLA: He didn't want to talk to you?

MARTINA: Not really, no.

MARCELLA: And what did you say? About the grownup, what did you say? That there *is* somebody? Did you let on that this is our business? That the web emporium is ours?

MARTINA: I said nothing. Nothing.

MARCELLA: But how? How did you say nothing to him?

MARTINA: I tried to be mysterious. Like a femme fatale.

MARCELLA: We're in deep shit.

16.

BÁLINT: Here I am, according to plan. As promised.

MARCELLA: Did you bring the money?

BÁLINT: There's, well, there's a little problem with that.

MARCELLA: Where's the money?

BÁLINT: That's what I'm trying to tell you now. There's a slight problem.

MARCELLA: You didn't bring the money?

BÁLINT: Yes. No.

MARCELLA: I don't understand any of this. What's yes and what's no? And where's the money?

BÁLINT: I got caught at home. I got caught going into my father's drawer. I mean not at home, but at the restaurant.

MARCELLA: What's that got to do with to me?

BÁLINT: I got caught, and... it's amazing I was able to come here. My father has a restaurant. I mean it's not his.

MARCELLA: But where's the money?

BÁLINT: I didn't bring it.

(Pause.)

MARCELLA: You mean to say you didn't bring what you owe? Do I have this right?

BÁLINT: I'm sorry.

MARCELLA: Tell me I don't have this right.

BÁLINT: I'm sorry, don't be mad.

MARCELLA *(icily)*: And that's that? Is that what you think?

BÁLINT: No, that's not what I think, I'm sorry.

MARCELLA: Can you say anything else? Something else?

BÁLINT: I was thinking...

MARCELLA: Yes?

BÁLINT *(anguished)*: I have an idea.

MARCELLA *(as before)*: I'm listening.

BÁLINT: I was thinking I could work off the debt.

MARCELLA: Work it off? You want to work it off?

BÁLINT: Yes.

MARCELLA: And tell me what you can do. What can you do?

BÁLINT: A lot. An awful lot.

MARCELLA: Yes?

BÁLINT: I can do a lot.

MARCELLA: I'm listening.

BÁLINT: I have a lot of ... collections. I've collected things. I can sell them. I bred goldfish for a while.

MARCELLA: Goldfish.

BÁLINT: They're worth something. I'm not saying a lot. Then for instance...

MARCELLA: Tell me what you can do. Could I maybe use you for something. Looks like I can't.

BÁLINT: I can do a lot of things.

MARCELLA: Maybe you're in luck. Maybe Lady Luck smiled at you. I need somebody. After all I could use somebody...

BÁLINT: Yes?

MARCELLA: ...who knows how to drive.

BÁLINT: Well... I don't have a driver's license. I'm only fourteen.

MARCELLA: I didn't ask you if you have a driver's license. Did I ask you that?

BÁLINT: No. No, no. You didn't ask me that. Sorry.

MARCELLA: And? Answer the question.

BÁLINT: Yes? Sorry. No. Unfortunately I can't. I can't drive. But I have a bike. I'll take you anywhere. Anywhere, really.

MARCELLA: You're a funny boy. (*She broods.*) On the other hand, maybe I can use you for something. But I don't know if you've got the skill set. Or if you're reliable enough.

BÁLINT: Yes?

MARCELLA: You'd need to take a package.

BÁLINT: Of course, of course, right away. Where?

MARCELLA: Now and a few more times. Different places.

BÁLINT (*eagerly*): Of course.

MARCELLA: Can you do that?

BÁLINT: Certainly.

MARCELLA: Well, I don't know. I don't know. It's a confidential matter.

BÁLINT: You can trust me.

MARCELLA: You make me uneasy.

BÁLINT: Rest assured, I'll take care of everything. You can trust me. Totally.

MARCELLA: Well, all right. I'll give you a chance.

BÁLINT: Thank you.

MARCELLA: Come to our place tonight. My address is...

BÁLINT (*eagerly*): I know your address.

MARCELLA: You know my address?

BÁLINT: Yes, I know it.

MARCELLA: How do you know it?

BÁLINT: By chance. I just happen to.

MARCELLA: But still, how?

BÁLINT: I once happened to see you going home.

MARCELLA: You happened to see me. By chance.

BÁLINT: Well, yes.

MARCELLA: Tell me, it wasn't you, was it, who scribbled all over our wall?

BÁLINT: Me? Was it me?

MARCELLA: All kinds of hearts and everything.

BÁLINT: Me?

MARCELLA: Some idiot painted graffiti all over the wall on our house.

BÁLINT: The jerk!

MARCELLA: My father's mad as hell.

BÁLINT: He should be.

MARCELLA: I'm mad as hell too.

BÁLINT: I understand. I understand completely.

MARCELLA: So it wasn't you.

BÁLINT: God forbid.

MARCELLA: All right. Tonight then.

BÁLINT: Yes...

MARCELLA: Anything else?

BÁLINT: No, no, nothing.

MARCELLA: Tonight then.

BÁLINT: Just one thing...

MARCELLA (*impatiently*): Yes?

BÁLINT: I was thinking, when I come back, when I deliver the package and come back...

MARCELLA: Why would you come back?

BÁLINT: Well, afterwards, we should talk.

MARCELLA (*completely at a loss*): About what?

BÁLINT: Well, to talk things over.

MARCELLA: Things? Things? What things?

BÁLINT (*in deep anguish*): Well, between us.

MARCELLA: What is there between us?

BÁLINT: I was thinking that... that when I get here, if you were in the mood, if you were in the mood to go to the movies, if you were. That's what I was thinking.

(Pause.)

MARCELLA: That's what you were thinking.

BÁLINT: Well, well, yes. It was.

MARCELLA: Now tell me I'm dreaming.

(Pause.)

BÁLINT *(anguished)*: No, you're not dreaming.

MARCELLA: Then you're dreaming.

17.

At school

MELINDA: So what exactly do you want?

LÓRI: None of your business.

MELINDA: I'm waiting for somebody here.

LÓRI: You can wait some other time. I have something to do here now.

MELINDA: You don't say! Well, for your information, so do I.

LÓRI: Didn't I make myself clear? Get lost.

MELINDA: What's your problem?

LÓRI: I won't have a problem as soon as you grab your wheelchair and roll away.

MELINDA: Even though it's none of your goddamn business, I'll let you in on this much: I'm waiting for a teacher.

LÓRI: Hold on to your hat, so am I.

MELINDA: She told me she'll be right here.

LÓRI: She told me too, well *she* didn't, but I know she's coming.

MELINDA: But it's not a school matter I'm seeing her about.

LÓRI: Same here. In all my life I never wanted to see a teacher about a school matter.

MELINDA: I'm seeing her about a business matter. So you're really in the way. It's been arranged.

LÓRI: I'm seeing her about a business matter too.

MELINDA: Who exactly are you waiting for?

LÓRI: Okay listen, so far I've been very patient with you here, but I don't have time. Get lost.

MELINDA: I already told you I'm not going. I'm waiting for the computer-science teacher, it's been arranged.

LÓRI: The computer lab's not even open now.

MELINDA: As far as I'm concerned, you can stay here, but I want to talk to her in private.

LÓRI: I'm not waiting for her anyway.

MELINDA: This is her room.

LÓRI: Let's make a bet. This is the math teacher's room.

MELINDA: The math teacher and the computer-science teacher are the same. She has two specialties.

LÓRI: Are you serious?

MELINDA: And why are you waiting for her?

LÓRI: It doesn't matter any more. I'll come back another time.

MELINDA: Do you have a message for her?

LÓRI: I'm out of here.

MELINDA: Help me get my chair up there. I can see better from there.

LÓRI: These rotten stairs, huh?

MELINDA: And what do you want from the teacher? Is it a secret?

LÓRI: Eh, no. It's just not very interesting. I worked out a formula. I wanted to show it to her.

MELINDA: That's a good one. You're probably flunking, and you came to whine to her.

LÓRI: I am flunking, but I didn't come to whine. You'd be surprised if you knew why I came.

MARTINA: (*enters, to Lóri*): Cancelled. She went home. I saw her leaving. (*To Melinda.*) What're you doing here?

MELINDA: The question is not what am *I* doing here, it's what are *you* doing here.

MARTINA: The question, to be precise, is what are *you* doing here. Classes have been over for a long time.

MELINDA: I'm here in connection with a server. I want to rig one of the computers here. Web emporium, remember?

MARTINA: And you, what are you doing chatting with my sister?

LÓRI: I didn't know you two are sisters. Seriously?

MARTINA: You didn't answer my question.

LÓRI: I pushed your sister up this ramp.

MELINDA: Stop worrying! You're not my mother!

MARTINA: Just don't go pushing my sister any more.

LÓRI: Why not? She would've been rotting down there. No harm done. I didn't do anything wrong.

MARTINA: But you're forcing yourself on her. Even though she's just a child.

MELINDA: This is unbelievable. You didn't say that yesterday, when I was helping you with physics.

MARTINA: Physics is one thing, life is another. *(To Lóránt.)* So stay away from my sister.

LÓRI: I just pushed her chair, no emotions were involved.

MARTINA: I saw you. You pushed her for purely emotional reasons. So there!

MELINDA: I don't believe how stupid you are!

LÓRI: I think I better be going.

MARTINA: I think so too.

(Lóránt exits.)

MELINDA: What are you embarrassing me for? Get off my back.

MARTINA: Cut this out. We need you. Now.

MELINDA: I'm not interested.

MARTINA: I need you to trace a number for me. An unlisted telephone number. I mean the person whose number it is.

MELINDA: Don't mother me. Is that clear?

MARTINA: Can you trace it?

MELINDA: Get off my back, I'm telling you for the last time. You don't have to protect me.

MARTINA: *This* one appeals to you, *this* boy? He's a stupid meathead. Ice hockey is all he's interested in. Formula One is all he's interested in. He's not interested in anything. And anyway he's got more women than you can shake a stick at. Little cripples are of absolutely no interest to him. Now why are you crying? I'll go crazy from this crying of yours. I'm only trying to save you from a disappointment. You ought to be grateful to me. Grateful, understand?

18.

MARCELLA: I haven't been feeling too well lately.

MARTINA: Take this. This'll make you feel fine.

MARCELLA: I already took two today. I ought to go to the school doctor and get a prescription.

MARTINA: Oh come on! There's nothing wrong with you!

MARCELLA: Well, I don't know.

MARTINA: You're so thin, totally thin and skinny. Looks cool. If only I could look that good!

MARCELLA: Thanks.

MARTINA: I'm skinny too, but not enough. I look better than ever, that's true. Even though I don't throw up, almost ever.

MARCELLA: I throw up less than I used to.

MARTINA: How much money do we have?

MARCELLA: We're doing fine.

MARTINA: Exactly how fine?

MARCELLA: I don't know exactly. I don't really keep track. It's in that bag under my bed, if you need any, take some whenever you're at our place.

MARTINA: Bag? What bag?

MARCELLA: A Nina Ricci bag. I put a big bunny in front of it, so nobody can see it, a big pink floppy bunny. Move it and you'll see it. It's got a big red ribbon on it. The bunny has.

MARTINA: What time do you have to be home?

MARCELLA: I don't remember what I told them at home.

MARTINA: Which drug store are we going to next time?

MARCELLA: I don't know. Just don't let me forget to get what the school doctor prescribes. He'll probably prescribe something that'll make me feel better.

MARTINA: What about school?

MARCELLA: I'm not as interested in school as I used to be.

MARTINA: Same here.

MARCELLA: Actually, I'm not interested at all.

MARTINA: Same here. Funny. Way back I got so paranoid.

MARCELLA: I'll pay somebody to do my assignments.

MARTINA: That's great! Awesome! Terrific idea.

MARCELLA: It's funny though, because *I* used to be the one who wrote everybody else's assignments.

MARTINA: I don't write assignments at all, ever.

MARCELLA: Doesn't it bother your parents that you're on probation?

MARTINA: No.

MARCELLA: It bothers mine.

MARTINA: You've got it good. At least I think you do.

MARCELLA: I'm dizzy.

MARTINA: Are you going to throw up? Here?

19.

At school

LÓRI: How did you get my phone number?

MELINDA: I'm a computer genius.

LÓRI: Wow. And very modest too. A shrinking violet.

MELINDA: So, do we have a deal?

LÓRI: You'll do my math problems, I understand. All of them, as long as I'm in school, every year?

MELINDA: That's what we agreed to.

LÓRI: And how do you get them to me? I'm sitting in a classroom. You're out of reach.

MELINDA: Technology. Over an earphone. There'll be a tiny earbud in your ear. The rest is my concern.

LÓRI: Fine. I understand. And in return?

MELINDA: You're at my disposal. You take me, you bring me. Up and down stairs.

LÓRI: As long as you're in school, the whole time?

MELINDA: Yes.

LÓRI: Every year?

MELINDA: Yes.

LÓRI: Well, after all...

MELINDA: Yes?

LÓRI: It's fine with me. It's a deal.

MELINDA: You can start right away. I want to go up these stairs. To the library.

LÓRI: Your wheelchair's heavy.

MELINDA: That's not what I had in mind.

LÓRI: What then?

MELINDA: In your arms. Carry me up in your arms.

LÓRI *(carefully lifts her out of the wheelchair)*: What shampoo do you use?

MELINDA: Why?

LÓRI: Just asking. No reason.

MELINDA: But why are you asking?

LÓRI: It's just that your hair smells good.

MELINDA: Just carry me. Are you strong enough?

LÓRI: Are you crazy?

20.

At Marcella's

BÁLINT: Sorry. Sorry I just walked in. It was open. Everything was open.

MARCELLA: What do you want?

BÁLINT: It's me, just me. Were you asleep?

MARCELLA: I forget to lock up nowadays. If my mother's here, she locks up. Or my father does, but he's only around at night. When my mother's asleep, my father's awake, when my father's asleep, my mother stays up, I'm the only one who never sleeps. Usually they leave messages for each other on the refrigerator with magnets, but now, thanks to my crisis, they're speaking, and that's good, it's a victory. What it means is, if they run into each other, the house comes alive.

BÁLINT: You were sleeping. I came at a bad time.

MARCELLA: My father's in charge of a health-care venture, did you know? Joint replacements or something. And I told him, father dear, I'm in charge of a health-care venture too, and it's going well for him, I mean it's going well for us, I mean we're rich. And my mother's afraid to even go out. I can't figure out what to do with her, she's like a child. There are all kinds of strange faces in the neighborhood. According to her.

BÁLINT: Yes, I understand.

MARCELLA: But those are my friends. Mother, don't be afraid of my friends. My mother cries, she takes all kinds of pills so she'll feel good enough to be a mother to me. We get in each other's face over who feels worse. My father yells at my mother about how she's not a good mother, my mother just cries and cries and cries, and says she's holding the fort all by herself, and that drives me crazy, because I'm not even worth all the trouble I cause. What was I gonna say?

BÁLINT: No, no, I was going to ask if there's anything to take somewhere, deliver.

MARCELLA: Did I call you? Did I call you for that?

BÁLINT: No, no, it's just that this is the usual time. You know.

MARCELLA: There aren't any more deliveries. Go away.

BÁLINT: Excuse me?

MARCELLA: And don't come back. Don't.

BÁLINT: What do you mean?

MARCELLA: You heard me. I'm sleeping now.

BÁLINT: But... I don't understand.

MARCELLA: I'm sleepy.

BÁLINT: And, and my debt?

MARCELLA: Martina, ask Martina. I don't handle that any more.

BÁLINT: I don't want to talk to Martina. Lately it's impossible to talk to her.

MARCELLA: Martina... well, yes, Martina. Even her mother's afraid of her. Go away, will you?

BÁLINT: So far it's always been you who told me what needs to be done. (*He is clueless.*) You sleep with this teddy bear? Or what is it? A rabbit, must be a rabbit. Only it doesn't have ears.

MARCELLA: Martina and her mother, her mother... is a cleaning lady, she cleans in some factory, or she's the custodian, or what do I know, you know her? Her biggest dream is for her daughters to go to secretarial school. She hates them, because one of her daughters is stupid and ugly as a frog, and the other one's a cripple, and neither one'll ever amount to more than a custodian at some factory. Her father's always skipping out on them, he's always got some new woman. Well me, nobody ever hit me at least, nobody ever hurt me, my life's been like I dreamt the whole thing. I'd kill myself if my mother were like that. And Martina... she's nervous nowadays. I'd be scared if I were her mother.

BÁLINT: So it's really over? And Martina, is she going on with the web emporium?

MARCELLA: Not my concern. That's her concern, only hers. Let me sleep. Leave me alone already.

(Bálint looks at the sleeping girl for a long time.)

21.

In the apartment

MARTINA: Your job was to trace a number, a phone number. Can't you even do that?

MELINDA: It's unlisted.

MARTINA: No shit, Sherlock. Just imagine, I knew that. That's exactly why you were given this job to do, whiz kid.

MELINDA: But this one in particular is untraceable.

MARTINA: Are you ever dumb! So you can't trace it, huh?

MELINDA: I've never come across one like this. Normally it's simple, but this one just couldn't be traced. What kind of number is this?

MARTINA: None of your business. You just do what I tell you to do.

MELINDA: Is it those guys making threats?

MARTINA: You're too young for things like that. Show me the tally.

MELINDA: Where's mom?

MARTINA: She'll be here tonight.

MELINDA: Where is she? She said she'd talk to you.

MARTINA: What does she want from me? She better not want anything.

MELINDA: You haven't been to school in two days.

MARTINA: So what?

MELINDA: Mom's upset.

MARTINA: So what?

MELINDA: She said she'd talk to you. She said you make a mess. You don't straighten up. She said our home isn't like that.

MARTINA: Home sweet home.

MELINDA: They're upset at school too.

MARTINA: Who gives a shit.

MELINDA: Does Marcella go to school?

MARTINA: She's not feeling well. Understand? Drop it already. She'll get some aspirin from the school doctor, and she'll be fine. Show me the tally.

MELINDA: Take it and shove it.

MARTINA: What do you mean shove it? What do you mean shove it? You don't talk to me like that. Understand?

MELINDA: Here it is.

MARTINA: This is the tally? This?

MELINDA: Yes. What else would it be? Expenses, income. I'm not a bookkeeper.

MARTINA: This is a lousy piece of scrap paper.

MELINDA: It's from my favorite notebook. I tore the page out. What are you yammering for? My favorite notebook, dammit.

MARTINA: What's this? Barbie? You write the tally in a Barbie notebook?

MELINDA: It fits the printer just right. What do you want? I can't leave it on the computer, can I? For a while I was leaving it there, I secured it and everything. But ever since those two creeps were asking which school I go to and if I know you, I don't leave anything on the computer. Nothing. This is Princess Ariel, by the way.

MARTINA: Princess Ariel?

MELINDA: On the notebook. Ariel, not Barbie.

MARTINA: Switch computers, whiz kid.

MELINDA: I've used all the internet cafés in the city. All the computers at school.

MARTINA: And those can be traced?

MELINDA: You're so stupid! I don't believe this.

MARTINA: This tally's unacceptable.

MELINDA: I don't give a shit what you find acceptable and what you don't. Anyway, I want to quit this whole thing.

MARTINA: I've already told you, pip-squeak, you don't talk to me like that. And we *will* quit, but I'm the one who says when.

MELINDA: Who are you to order me around? You're such a jerk! Get off my back.

MARTINA: You're such a numbskull, you can't even trace a phone number. Such a cretin.

MELINDA: Because it can't be done, understand? It can't. Impossible!

MARTINA: What you need is a new head, not new legs.

MELINDA: Idiot, idiot!

MARTINA: Cripple! Papa's little favorite!

MELINDA: I want mom.

MARTINA: You'll do what I tell you to do.

MELINDA: In your dreams.

MARTINA: I see you've put the moves on Lóránt. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, seriously! What a hoot! The little cripple on the make!

MELINDA: I didn't put the moves on him at all! Not at all!

MARTINA: Keep dreaming, you miserable twerp.

MELINDA: And you're so ugly nobody'd want you, nobody! No matter how much make-up you use!

MARTINA: Shut up, shut your trap!

MELINDA: They call you skull-face. That's what they call you behind your back.

MARTINA: Put a lid on it.

MELINDA: Hey, stop shaking my wheelchair!

MARTINA: Afraid you'll fall out, huh?

MELINDA: Stop it!

MARTINA: Scares you shitless, doesn't it?

(She dumps the girl out of the wheelchair.)

MARTINA: Let's see how you do now.

MELINDA: You jerk, that hurts!

MARTINA: Cripple!

MELINDA: Gimme back my wheelchair.

MARTINA: Come get it!

MELINDA: Give it back!

MARTINA: Hurry on over here and get it. I'll record you on my phone and post it on YouTube. The adventures of a caterpillar, or a creepy-crawly's life.

MELINDA: Sleazeball!

MARTINA: Four steps, that's all, what are you worried about? Give it a try! These are life's real challenges, aren't they?

(Melinda cries, she does not move.)

MARTINA: Here, take your lousy wheelchair.

(Melinda climbs back into the chair.)

MARTINA: So they call me skull-face.

MELINDA: I only heard it once.

MARTINA: I don't give a shit.

MELINDA: What's the matter with you? Martina, Martina, can you hear me?

MARTINA: Nothing.

MELINDA: But what's the matter with you?

MARTINA: I'm nauseated. Lately I always get nauseated.

MELINDA: Should I call someone? I'll call mom. You look terrible.

MARTINA: Shut up already!

MELINDA: Tina, Tina! Oh my God!

MARTINA: I'll kill you if you call mom, I'll kill you if you call anyone to come here. Nobody can see me like this.

MELINDA: Somebody help! Can you stand up? You're heavy, I can't lift...!

MARTINA: Where's my make-up! Make up... it's all just a matter of make-up. Look good, look good, and you've got it made.

MELINDA: Martina, Tina, get up. Do you hear, do you hear me at all?

MARTINA: I'm not feeling well. Goddammit. It's so bad.

22.

Marcella alone, writing a letter

MARCELLA: Dear Doctor. No, not dear: honored. Delete. My problem is that, well, I have a problem with boys. They don't like me, none of them. Nobody's interested in me. And that's pretty hard to take. It looks like nobody's interested in me nowadays. Nowadays it looks like nobody's all that interested in me. Even though I'm losing weight all the time, but let's just say I'm still not pretty enough. There's room for improvement. I think about this a lot, and about the splendid tasks and wonderful challenges that passing my finals and moving on to college will mean to me. I'm looking forward to the future, the responsibility, and that brings a lot of joy to my life.

And just so the asshole will understand, I also have to write that school is not the issue.

Of course, little girl, study hard, don't dread the finals.

Mom, I don't believe what a lousy place I'm in. Who can I write to? Father, mother? In a letter on the refrigerator, which says I'm so despicably alone, so deleted. I dream like crazy. I have horrible dreams. I wake up at dawn because my heart's falling out. I have cold shivers, I'm sweating. My leg's torn off, my arm's torn off. I see my beating heart. Monsters are running at me, I'm falling, the ceiling is bleeding, it falls on me, arms are reaching from the walls, with eyes in the palms of their hands. I talk to myself, I sit face to face with myself, I have a rat's face, I laugh.

Excuse me, Doctor, if I happened to vomit. I see corpses, and yesterday I visited hell. I'll close now, please advise me.

This is not me.

23.

MELINDA *(on the phone)*: Hello, who are you? If you don't tell me your name, I'll hang up. No, I don't know about any web emporium, no. At this number? Out of the question. No I don't think so. At least *I* never heard of it. She's my sister, yes, what do you want from her? She's sick now, very sick. Yes, I'm telling you, she's sick, I'm not pulling a fast one, I wish I were. She's in the hospital, okay? No, I'm not playing around with you. I think *you're* playing around with *me*. You're wrong, believe me. You're mistaken. There's never been anything like that here. Forget this number. You hear? Get rid of this number. *(She hangs up.)*

Roughneck.

LÓRI *(enters)*: Can we finally get going?

MELINDA: Yes, but I can't stay long. My father gets all worked up. You know what he's like. He gets worked up even though he doesn't even live with us, he keeps checking up on us over the phone, his new woman gets all bent out of shape over him calling us.

LÓRI: Be glad he gets worked up. Whatever he's like, at least you have a father. I don't.

MELINDA: Yes you do, only he's not home. Didn't you tell me he's working in Germany?

LÓRI: England. I told you he's working in a pizzeria in England. I hope the indirect quotations drive him crazy. You're done, right? I'd really like to see that computer turned off for once.

MELINDA: Now, now I'm finished. There, we can go. *(She turns it off.)*

Oh, and now, now I'll let you kiss me.

THE END