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# IVANA VUKOVIĆ

(SPLIT, 1992)



Ivana Vuković holds an MA in Dramaturgy and is a graduate student of Comparative Literature. She writes for theatre, film and occasionally TV. Her texts have also been performed as radio dramas. A frequent collaborator on different performances for both the independent and institutional scene and film screenplays.

Her first play *Otok* was presented as part of *Mala noćna čitanja*, published in the *Kazalište* magazine, performed as a radio drama on Croatian Radio and finally staged in 2019, directed by Helena Petković. *Marta i sedam strahova* was staged the same year, directed by Natalija Manojlović and co-produced by KUFER&KunstTeatar. Her play *55 kvadrata* won the 2018 Marin Držić Third Prize and in 2022 it was staged at the Croatian National Theatre in Split, directed by Ivan Plazibat.

For the Split Puppet Theatre she wrote an original text in 2020 under the title *Miš u toću*, which earned her the Mira Muhoberac Award for best original text at the Naj, naj, naj Festival organised by the Žar Ptica Children's Theatre in Zagreb.

# YOU CAN BE ANYTHING

**TRANSLATOR**

Tomislav Žilić

*A hot summer afternoon. Everyone's asleep. Except the girls. They're at play. But the day is too hot for that kind of play, so they play by passing familiar words back and forth.*

*But first, Lenu waits for Mara to come outside. And waits. She mumbles to herself while waiting. She's practicing the game.*

**LENU** What happens when a woman falls down the stairs? Nothing, as long as the beer's intact. And you know what a woman is doing with a blank piece of paper in her hand? Reading her rights! A guy walks into a bar and asks this other guy: "What's this International Women's Day?" And he says: "It's basically Halloween, the witches just come out during the day."

**MARA** My mom says we should tone it down.

**LENU** (whispers) Don't trust anyone who can bleed for five days and survive!

**MARA** She does bleed a lot.

**LENU** and Mara mimic someone bleeding profusely.

*Lenu bursts out laughing.*

**LENU** You don't think it's funny?

**MARA** No.

**LENU** Why?

**MARA** Not convincing.

**LENU** I'm not convincing?

**MARA** Yeah, you're not convincing.

**LENU** What should we play then?

**MARA** Something easier.

**LENU** Do you bleed?

*Mara doesn't respond.*

*Lenu and Mara languorously go through children's rhymes.*

**LENU AND MARA** Eenie meenie sicileeny, Ooh ah zambalini, Achi cachi Liberache, I love you, Take a peach, Take a plum, Take a stick of bubble gum, Not a peach, Not a plum, Not a stick of bubble gum.

*They laugh.*

Hickory Dickory Dock The mouse ran up the clock The clock struck two The mouse went "boo!" Hickory Dickory Dock. Baa, baa black sheep Have you any wool Yes sir, yes sir Three bags full. Incy wincy spider climbed up the water spout, Down came the rain and washed poor Wincy out. A sailor went to sea, sea, sea To see what he could see, see, see But all that he could see, see, see Was the bottom of the deep blue sea, sea, sea! Head, shoulders, knees and toes, Knees and toes. And eyes, and ears, and mouth, and nose. Head, shoulders,

knees and toes, Knees and toes. I'm a little teapot Short and stout Here is my handle Here is my spout. Hey diddle diddle, The cat and the fiddle, The cow jumped over the moon. The little dog laughed to see such sport, And the dish ran away with the spoon. Five little ducks Went out one day Over the hill and far away Mother duck said "Quack, quack, quack, quack." But only four little ducks came back. There was a young man from Leeds Who swallowed a packet of seeds Great tufts of grass Grew out of his arse!

*Lenu and Mara burst out laughing at "arse". They poke at each other with their feet for a while.*

**LENU** Mara?

**MARA** Yes, Lenu?

**LENU** Do you know how boys pee outside?

**MARA** How?

**LENU** They whip it out and pee. Do you know how girls pee?

**MARA** How?

**LENU** They hold it in.

**MARA** You have to say "piss".

**LENU** Why?

**MARA** Only little girls say "pee".

**LENU** Do you know how girls take a piss?

**MARA** Firmer!

**LENU** Do you know how girls take a piss!?

**MARA** With determination!

**LENU** DO YOU KNOW HOW GIRLS TAKE A PISS??

**MARA** Don't yell! With more nerve!

**LENU** (*in a man's voice*) Do you know how girls take a piss?

**MARA** What was that all about?

**LENU** I dunno.

**MARA** So, do you know what this is?

**LENU** Ibuprofen flavored condoms.

**MARA** And you know what they're used for?

**LENU** For what?

**MARA** When she has a headache.

**LENU** (*adultlike*) My mom needs those, she always has headaches. (*in her own voice*) More convincing?

**MARA** Keep it up. Who told you that?

**LENU** Women have headaches all the time.

**MARA** Really?

**LENU** Wanna hear a joke?

**MARA** Sure.

**LENU** Do you know what Halloween is?

**MARA** No, what?

**LENU** It's the same as the International Women's Day, but in the dark.

**MARA** Give me another.

**LENU** Why don't old ladies wear mini skirts?

**MARA** Why?

**LENU** So their boobs don't slip out.

**MARA** Another one!

**LENU** You'll have to do it with me.

**MARA** OK.

**LENU** (*issues a warning*) It's a serious one.

**MARA** But is it funny?

**LENU** Very. You ready?

*Mara gives a childlike nod.*

**LENU** Marija and her husband Omar are sitting down. A nurse approaches them and says: (*plays the nurse*) We have a new package deal. It's new so there's a promotional price. A real bargain. It includes delivery, inoculation, ear piercing, and circumcision.

**MARA/OMAR** (*in a man's voice*) Oh, so what's the hitch?

**LENU** He wouldn't say hitch, it makes him sound... like a pussy, I mean girly.

**MARA/OMAR** Oh, so what's the rub?

**LENU/NURSE** You have to buy it during the first trimester.

**MARA/OMAR** Why so?

**LENU/NURSE** Well, what if the child doesn't get born? Should we bear the blame? There's your "rub". We have to make a living too.

**MARA/OMAR** But this is a public institution.

**LENU/NURSE** That's right. This is a public institution.

**MARA/OMAR** Okay, okay... and what about this ear piercing business? If we lose that, how much is it then?

*Lenu is satisfied with Mara's playing.*

**LENU/NURSE** It doesn't work without it, it's a package deal.

**MARA/OMAR** But what if I don't want it?

**LENU/NURSE** You still get it.

**MARA/OMAR** Don't you have package that only includes delivery, inoculation, and circumcision?

**LENU/NURSE** We do.

**MARA/OMAR** Then we'll take that one.

**LENU/NURSE** But that one's pricier.

**MARA/OMAR** How can it be pricier?

**LENU/NURSE** The first one is a new package and we offer it at a promotional price.

**MARA/OMAR** All right, we'll take that one, but we'll skip the ear piercing.

**LENU/NURSE** But it's nice having their ears pierced, then everybody knows it's a girl right away.

**MARA/OMAR** This inoculation, is it compulsory?

**LENU/NURSE** Yes, it's required by law.

**MARA/OMAR** In Indonesia, they'd pay me 80 000 rupi to bring in my little girl for circumcision. Do you know, madam, how much that is in kuna?

**LENU/NURSE** (*bursts out laughing*) Oh, about 37 kuna.

**MARA/OMAR** Is something funny?

**LENU** (*with a laugh, in her own voice*) You couldn't buy a cup of coffee and a pack of cigarettes with that.

**MARA/OMAR** That happens to be my salary...

*Mara can't control herself either, so she joins in Lenu's laugh.*

**MARA** (*serious, in her own voice*) And what about Marija?

**LENU** Nothing, she's from another joke.

**MARA** What's that joke about?

**LENU** She thinks she's entitled to a free abortion.

**MARA** That one's even more funny. I like that part with the ear piercing, so everyone knows it's a girl... Where did you get that from?

**LENU** Off of TV.

**MARA** You were convincing.

**LENU** You too.

**LENU** pulls her hair down across her face.

**LENU** Guess who!

**MARA** Marija from Croatia?

*Lenu shakes her head.*

**MARA** Oh, I know! It's Farzaneh from Afghanistan!

*Lenu shakes her head.*

**MARA** It's your mom!

*Lenu shakes her head.*

**MARA** It's Nia from Africa!

*Lenu brushes the hair aside.*

**LENU** From Africa?

**MARA** What?

**LENU** Where in Africa?

**MARA** Africa's Africa, wherever.

*Lenu pulls her hair down across her face again.*

**LENU** Chen Jie, a twenty-year-old doctoral candidate from China.

*Mara turns serious.*

**MARA** You sure?

**LENU** I'm sure!

**MARA** *(in a high-pitched female voice)* You know what they say, in China there's three genders; male, female, and doctoral candidate!

**LENU** *(in unison with Mara)* ...female and doctoral candidate! Come one!

**MARA** Let's do Africa first.

**LENU** You got cold feet?

**MARA** I need to warm up for that one.

**LENU** *(emphasizes Morocco)* Khadija from Morocco?

**MARA/RADIO ANNOUNCER** *(imitates a female radio announcer)* The Moroccan court has disclosed that Mrs. Khadija, daughter of Ahmed, is searching for her husband Muhammad, son of Muhammad, who disappeared three years ago... *(in her own voice)* Listen, here, listen, that's you!

**LENU** Why do I always have to be the suspended wife?

**MARA** That's how we play it.

**LENU** I think it's silly we always play it the same way.

**MARA** But you already know her.

**LENU** She's boring.

**MARA** Wanna switch?

**LENU** You have to be convincing. You have talk really slow. Your life is over if you don't find him, you'll forever be the wife whose husband left her...

**MARA** I know everything.

*Mara gets into character.*

**MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE** *(slowly, wearily)* I've no money left to search for him.

**LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER** *(in the radio announcer's voice)* You have no other options, Khadija, you have to find him.

**MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE** They've told me he's living with some other woman.

**LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER** Do you know for sure, or is it just hearsay?

**MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE** They all leave because of that, don't they?

**LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER** It's your duty do find him if you want a legal divorce.

**MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE** I have nothing left to search with.

**LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER** And now what?

You give up, Khadija? Remain the suspended wife forever? Without rights? Without a man to protect you? Without children? Huh? What does that make you, Khadija?

**MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE** I would like to ask all your listeners to let me know if they know where he is!

**LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER** Dear listeners, you've heard, if you know the whereabouts of Khadija's husband Muhammad, son of Muhammad, contact our radio station! Khadija, hold on for at least another month, the court has to see you're doing your best. What's three years, right? I'm sure you're still young, even though your voice sounds old...

*Lenu approaches Mara and gives her a hug.*

**MARA** Khadija!!

*They both burst out laughing.*

**LENU/TEACHER** *(suddenly)* Why are you provoking him?

**MARA/STUDENT** *(goes along with it)* But I was just sitting here...

**LENU/TEACHER** Just look at you, making faces...

**MARA/STUDENT** It's because he...

**LENU/TEACHER** I don't want to hear it. Why aren't you minding your own business?

**MARA/STUDENT** But I was doing my homework...

**LENU/TEACHER** Why are you dressed like that?

**MARA/STUDENT** Like what?

**LENU/TEACHER** Where's your camisole? Would you just look at this!

*Lenu lifts Mara's t-shirt, revealing her bare, white belly.*

**LENU/TEACHER** Were you making eyes at him? Huh? Were you? She wants to know why he's touching her, and she's provoking him, not wearing a camisole! You should be ashamed! Say: I'm sorry, I won't do it ever again.

**MARA/STUDENT** I'm sorry, teacher, I won't do it...

**LENU/TEACHER** Not to me, him!

**MARA/STUDENT** I'm sorry, I won't do it...

**LENU/TEACHER** What's that?

**MARA/STUDENT** I'm sorry, I won't provoke you anymore, I won't laugh, I won't... do anything anymore.

**LENU/TEACHER** Do you forgive her?

*Mara is looking at Lenu, who's staring eyes front.*

*Mara takes over her character.*

**MARA/TEACHER** Your teacher has a solution for everything. Hey, be quiet! Everybody, look here. What do you see?  
**LENU/CLASS** (*children's voices in unison*) Two bananas!

**MARA/TEACHER** Two bananas, that's right. What kind of bananas?

**LENU/CLASS** Two identical bananas!

**MARA/TEACHER** That's right! Two identical bananas! Do we all agree that the bananas are starting off on equal terms?

**LENU/CLASS** Yeeees!

**MARA/TEACHER** We'll put the two identical bananas next to each other on a shelf.

**LENU/CLASS** Okaaaay!

**MARA/TEACHER** We will never touch one of the bananas!

**LENU/CLASS** Neveeeeeer!

**MARA/TEACHER** The other banana we'll give a slight touch every time we pass by!

**LENU/CLASS** We wiiiiiii!

**MARA/TEACHER** Squeeze it!

**LENU/CLASS** Grab iiiit!

**MARA/TEACHER** Caress it!

**LENU/CLASS** Pet iiiit!

**MARA/TEACHER** Pinch it!

**LENU/CLASS** Grope iiiit!

**MARA/TEACHER** Smack it!

**LENU/CLASS** Whack it oooff!

**MARA/TEACHER** In a week's time...

**LENU/CLASS** Rape iiiit!

**MARA/TEACHER** Hey, settle down!

**LENU/CLASS** Huuush!

**MARA/TEACHER** In a week's time we'll see how one banana looks, and then the other. And that's how we'll learn the difference between girls who have been touched and those who haven't...

**LENU/STUDENT** (*interrupts her*) Miss, miss, he's touching me right now!

**MARA/TEACHER** Well, dear, you're a model student, and he's a mischievous boy! You should extend a positive influence on him, not the other way around!

**LENU** You're horsing around.

**MARA** I'm not horsing around.

**LENU** Sure sounds like you're horsing around. It's not convincing.

**MARA** I don't know how to.

**LENU** Try a man's voice.

**MARA/MALE TEACHER** Well, dear, you're a model student, and he's a mischievous boy! You should extend a positive influence on him, not the other way around!

**LENU** That clears it up.

**MARA/TEACHER** (*in a man's booming voice*) Dear!!!

**LENU** We have to quiet down, we'll wake up my mom!

*Absolute silence.*

**MARA** I've got a joke.

**LENU** Go ahead.

**MARA** They called her a whore. They called her a whore because she gave a blowjob to a fourth-grader. No, because they said she gave a blowjob to a fourth-grader. And that's what whores do, y'know, only whores give blowjobs. And then they called her a slut and said they did her mother and that her mother is a bitch. And that's even worse than a whore, because being a bitch means they did her from behind, y'know. And then they told her they'll fuck her. Then they told her she needs a good fuck. I don't know what that means, but it's what they told her. And then they said she has an ugly clitoris. Just like her mom. And d'you know what a clitoris is used for?

**LENU** Nothing.

**MARA** You already knew that one.

**LENU** Yeah.

**MARA** Why didn't you say so?

**LENU** It has a second part.

**MARA** What is it?

**LENU** They lunged at her, tore her t-shirt and her skirt and her head scarf and disheveled

her hair and made it down to her clitoris and they liked it and they rubbed it really hard, and then she was in pain and she screamed: "no!". But they have a hard time dealing with rejection so they kept on, even stronger and rougher, and clawed at her and held her hands while shoving at each other, taking turns.

**MARA** I don't believe it, it's no good, you're exaggerating.

**LENU** I just only made it up.

**MARA** I could tell.

**LENU** I have a better one.

**MARA** Is it convincing?

**LENU** Yeah. Margaret (*Lenu points at herself*) and Jelena are sitting in a waiting room. (*Lenu points at Mara*) And a nurse approaches them.

**MARA** That one's new!

**LENU** Yeah. I've heard it from my mom and our neighbor, whose mother-in-law's sister's colleague had someone up there. It's fresh!

**MARA** You be the nurse.

**LENU** Sure.

**LENU/NURSE** (*hysterically*) Congratulations, it's a boy!

**LENU/MARGARET** (*timidly and quietly*) But I'm here for... I'm not giving birth.

**LENU/NURSE** Oh you're here for an abortion?

**LENA** as Margaret nods.

**LENU/NURSE** (*still hysterically*) Oh, in that case, I apologize.

**LENU/MARGARET** It's a baby boy.

**LENU/NURSE** Then you'll have to wait for a bit more, the doctor's just gone out for lunch. Have you filled out the form?

**LENU/MARGARET** Yes, yes.

*Lenu as the nurse gives a faint, slightly awkward smile, then sits down next to Mara, as Margaret, and they sit in silence for a while. Mara casts glances at Lenu, or Jelena at Margaret, and smiles at her affectionately.*

**MARA/JELENA** (*chattily*) You're so lucky. Carrying a baby boy. A son.

**LENU/MARGARET** Yes, but I can't, I'm not supposed to. I mean, I'm allowed, but I can't afford it without child benefit.

**MARA/JELENA** You come from a decent country, aren't you entitled to child benefit?

**LENU/MARGARET** No, not for a third child.

**MARA/JELENA** In my country, only the unemployed receive child benefit. The socially disadvantaged.

*Lenu as Margaret merely smiles.*

**LENU/MARGARET** It's nice here. They've decorated the place really well. The plants and everything.

**MARA/JELENA** Yes, it really looks fine. You should see some of the clinics I've been to. Good grief.

**LENU/MARGARET** Yes?

**MARA/JELENA** Well all right, it must be a lot nicer where you come from.

*Lenu nods at Mara, signaling she understands a monologue is due. Lenu as Margaret switches between a childlike and an overly adultlike air.*

**LENU/MARGARET** Back home, it's gray and raining. And it pours and pours and pours for days and days. Sometimes you're positive you'll never see the sunlight again. All you see is the concrete and the gloom and rows and rows of identical houses and office wallpapers and unwashed windowpanes, because who'd wash those in the constant rain. And then you ask yourself, why? (to *Mara as Jelena*) It's nice here too.

**MARA/JELENA** I'm sorry to ask such intimate questions, but is it legal for you to have an abortion?

**LENU/MARGARET** Yes.

**MARA/JELENA** Despite it being a boy?

**LENU/MARGARET** What do you mean?

**MARA/JELENA** And you can do it in any hospital?

**LENU/MARGARET** That's right.

**MARA/JELENA** And nobody asks any questions?

**LENU/MARGARET** You just fill out a form.

**MARA/JELENA** And the doctors do the procedure?

**LENU/MARGARET** I don't quite follow you.

**MARA/JELENA** And how much does it cost?

**LENU/MARGARET** It's free.

**MARA/JELENA** Free? Well, lucky you.

*Mara as Jelena and Lenu as Margaret just sit and wait. Mara notices Lenu is serious.*

**MARA/JELENA** I've just read in the papers that your princess is pregnant again. And it's her third. Oh, I think they're all so adorable. And she's wonderful, the way she dresses and that smile of hers. I sometimes have this dream: princess Jelena. Imagine; me, a princess?

**LENU/MARGARET** And what would you do as a princess?

**MARA/JELENA** First, I'd throw away all indoor clothing. I hate indoor clothing. But my mother's to blame, she never let me buy indoor clothing. What for? I never feel pretty at home, and it's not fair, you know. Do you work?

**LENU/MARGARET** Yes.

**MARA/JELENA** Well then, you must dress nice. Like now, I was just eyeing that blouse of yours, it's so elegant.

**LENU/MARGARET** Oh, this, just an old rag.

**MARA/JELENA** It's how old rags should look. And not like... you know what I like to wear? Oh, I'm too embarrassed to say.

**LENU/MARGARET** Please, go ahead. (to herself) This one's probably already had an abortion. Her husband must be supportive

and waiting for her and when they go to bed tonight all relaxed he'll take her head on to his lap and caress her hair until she falls asleep. Look at her, all uninhibited, not smothered by the anxiety enveloping me, that's inside of me and squeezing me, pressing on my pelvis, my insides are crushing my lungs, I won't be able to endure this. I don't want them to burrow inside of me, rip out a part of me and throw it in the trash. I just want him to come up to me and tell me everything will be all right, that he'll find work, that he'll contribute, that I'm not alone. Tell me I'm not alone, you idiot! (to *Jelena*) Please, go ahead.

**MARA/JELENA** You're too kind. But don't tell anyone. I wear my husband's old shirts. And, sometimes, when my husband's at work and the kids at school or their grandma's, I get dressed and just sit there. And enjoy myself. There, that's the first thing I'd do. I'd forbid women to save clothes for special occasions.

**LENU/MARGARET** Who are we saving it for in the first place, what for?

**MARA/JELENA** Who knows.

**LENU/MARGARET** Have you already had an abortion? I'm sorry I'm asking that.

**MARA/JELENA** Yes, two times now. I hope I won't have to have a third one. Keep your fingers crossed!

*Mara laughs at her own quip.*

**LENU/MARGARET** And does it hurt?

*Mara laughs at Lenu's quip.*

**MARA/JELENA** You'll manage, don't worry.

**LENU/MARGARET** I'm really scared.

**MARA/JELENA** (*as if jokingly*) I'm more afraid of my husband. If I told him he's about to have another daughter... oh my, oh my.

**LENU/MARGARET** He doesn't like girls?



**MARA/JELENA** Of course he does. He has two daughters.

**LENU/MARGARET** So what's the problem?

**MARA/JELENA** He has two daughters.

**LENU** What kind of a man is he?

**MARA** A pussy.

**LENU** A girl shouldn't swear like that.

**MARA** (in a man's voice) Pussy!

**LENU** Better.

**MARA** I thinks the nurse should come up to them again now and tell them: It's a girl, I'm sorry.

**LENU/NURSE** (hysterically) It's a girl. I'm sorry.

*Mara as Jelena grabs Lenu as Margaret by the hand.*

**LENU/MARGARET** I'm sorry.

*Mara gestures she should continue.*

**LENU/NURSE** (hysterically) It's a girl. I'm sorry.

**LENU/MARGARET** I'm sorry.

**LENU/NURSE** (hysterically) Will you be staying for an abortion then?

**MARA/JELENA** Yes.

**LENU/MARGARET** I'm so sorry.

**MARA/JELENA** Imagine us switching, me carrying your baby boy...

*Silence.*

**LENU/MARGARET** Would you like me to get you something from the vending machine? Some coffee?

**MARA/JELENA** Tea might be better.

**LENU/MARGARET** We could have a cigarette now that we're both... since we're not going to...

**MARA/JELENA** That would be nice.

**LENU** as Margaret gets an empty cup, for the pretend tea, and gives Mara as Jelena a real cigarette.

**MARA/JELENA** I can't remember the last time I could finish a cigarette during the day, in peace.

**LENU/MARGARET** I don't usually smoke.

**MARA/JELENA** No? How come you are now?

**LENU/MARGARET** Well, just seems like one of those smoking moments.

**MARA/JELENA** You look good with it.

*Lenu takes a drag and coughs.*

**MARA** (under her breath) You don't have to inhale it!

**LENU** I have to! To make it more convincing!

**LENU/MARGARET** Do you have any kids, any other kids, from before?

*Mara as Jelena takes a drag with confidence and exhales it.*

**MARA/JELENA** Yes. There's Milica, she's four, and Sara, she's about to turn two.

**LENU/MARGARET** I have John, who's nine, and David, who's five.

**MARA/JELENA** Two sons? Just like princess Diana.

**LENU/MARGARET** Yes. I've always wanted a daughter. I'd call her Frances.

**MARA/JELENA** Isn't that a boy's name?

**LENU/MARGARET** No. Francis is for boys, Frances is for girls. It means, "free one".

**MARA/JELENA** Oh, Francis. Just like the pope, you know? In our language, that would be Franka or Francika. My third daughter is called Ljiljana, and my fourth is Dragana. And this one... we'll call her Francika.

**LENU/MARGARET** Francika!

**MARA/JELENA** ...

**LENU/MARGARET** And, does your husband know you're here?

**MARA/JELENA** Of course he does. I don't have the money to pay for this, do you know how much for this test alone? Chorionic villus sampling, that's what it's called. 350 **EURO!** That's how much a stroller costs. And now an abortion! That's another 150, 220 euro. (pause) Your husband doesn't know? **LENU/MARGARET** Uhm... I'm, we're actually divorced.

**MARA/JELENA** Oh. But... is it his?

**LENU/MARGARET** No. A colleague from work.

*Mara has trouble finding the words, she doesn't quite understand, but she wants to and so she goes on playing.*

**MARA/JELENA** Oh, well, it's not, you know, unusual or wrong or, it happens every day.

**LENU/MARGARET** Actually. I didn't want to.

**MARA/JELENA** Of course you didn't want a baby, I mean, who would, being without a husband, no safety net, but...

**LENU/MARGARET** I didn't really want to...

**MARA/JELENA** But you slept with him?

*Lenu or Margaret is silent. Mara jumps up enthusiastically, she's figured it out, so she elatedly goes on as Jelena.*

**MARA/JELENA** But, but, that means you could have the baby, you just need to prove you didn't want it, that you didn't want the baby, that he'd, I mean, that he'd raped you, right? Yes, it's not your fault, you just need to prove you didn't want a baby and you can have the baby and you're entitled to child benefit. You don't have to be afraid of the... of the abortion.

**LENU/MARGARET** But you see, he didn't exactly rape me, we had dinner and we were kissing and snuggling and everything and, we didn't have a condom, you know, but he'd already, you know, had an erection and couldn't hold back anymore. I mean, I still didn't want to, but...

**MARA/JELENA** He couldn't hold back? You know, I often have a headache when my husband can't hold back. But easy for me to say, he's my husband, I have nothing to..

*Mara can't help but laughing, she's really amused by the whole headache business.*

**MARA** (under her breath) What happens when her husband finds the ibuprofen flavored condom? What then?

*Leno is not amused with Mara dropping out of character.*

**MARA/JELENA** I have nothing to complain about...

**LENU** You don't get it. The joke's about him not being able to hold back.

**MARA** Oh. Well that's circumstantial. But it's still rape.

**LENU** Just a little rape.

**MARA/JELENA** But isn't it rape? At least in your country that should be recognized as rape!

*Leno gives up playing.*

**LENU** She didn't report him. Tough for her.

**MARA** Jelena would also add that her friend said something in the lines of: I have three daughters and it doesn't matter – we think of them as our sons.

**LENU** Daughtersons!

**MARA** Listen to this: In every woman there lies a devil which needs to be killed either by work or childbirth or by both; and if a woman eludes both, then she should be put to death.

**LENU** That's not a joke. That's a quote.

**MARA** So what, isn't it funny? Or is it? Oh, I've remembered an oldy, wanna hear?

**LENU** Go ahead!

**MARA** How much does an abortion cost? – It depends; do you need a receipt?

**LENU** Well you need a receipt, how else are you supposed to file a complaint if they leave something inside your womb, if they don't clean you up properly, if they leave half of the fetus, if they don't stitch you up, if...

**MARA** Why're you taking everything seriously all of the sudden? A joke – quick!

**LENU** How do you call a men's theater performance?

**MARA** How?

**LENU** A theater performance. How do you call a women's theater performance?

**MARA** A women's theater performance.

**LENU** You already knew that one.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** Well this is a women's theater performance.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** It is. The text was written by a woman, it can't be anything else but a women's theater performance.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** Well, sure. There are women in the creative team.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** If they're not women, they're pussies.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** It's played by women, and if they're not women, they're fags. The only people watching this performance are women, and if they're not women, they're sissies.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** Wimps.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** Snowflakes.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** Wussies.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** Doormats.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** Momma's boys.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** The text won an award. Because there were women on the panel. Of course.

**PERFORMER 2** This text really sucks dick.

*Mara laughs at the swearword.*

**PERFORMER 2** What? The author's female so she can't write "dick"?

**PERFORMER 1** I'm an actress so I can't say "dick"? Pathetic. And selfish.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** The text didn't win an award because it's littered with swear words, I mean dicks. Only real men can write texts littered with dicks and win an award. Only real men can put chauvinistic remarks in Adam's mouth, yeah, yeah, that's right, his mouth, and make it subversive and masculinely powerful.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** This is a women's performance, but it might even be performed by men.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** Because we're pussies!

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** Wait, wait, as in "I'd like to have me some of that pussy", or as in "stop being such a pussy, or are you afraid of being in a women's theater performance"

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** Pussies as in losers. Pussies as in inadequate men.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** I could create a women's theater performance played entirely by men because I'm a woman.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** I'm allowed to make a women's theater performance played entirely by men because I'm a woman.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** Why is this called a women's theater performance?

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** Because it's about women and women's issues.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** Does that mean it's not intended for a male audience?

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** It means it's not intended for men on either side of the stage.

**PERFORMER 1** Why do we call theater performance created by women "women's theater performances"?

**PERFORMER 2** So we don't bother the men.

**PERFORMER 1** How do you stop a theater performance from being degraded to a "women's theater performance"?

**PERFORMER 2** With men.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** Actors are fags anyway, I mean pussies, I mean women.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** We're women! We really are women.

**MARA/PERFORMER 1** This theater performance is actually being performed by women.

**LENU/PERFORMER 2** So, we are women, and this is the theater performance "You Can Be Anything".

**MARA** You really can be. Barbie can be anything she wants to be, and so can you.

**LENU** Barbie? This is stupid. Let's try the Chinese doctoral candidate, that one's really funny.

**LENU/CHEN JIE** Chen Jie, twenty-seven-year-old doctoral candidate from China.

**MARA/ANCHOR** (*in a male TV anchor's deep voice*) Chen Jie! You're a, you're a, what we'd call a "sheng nu"...

**LENU** The voice is wrong!

**MARA/ANCHOR** (*in an even deeper voice*) Chen Jie! You're a "sheng nu" or "leftover woman"...

**LENU** No, it can't be a man's voice.

**MARA** Why?

**LENU** It's kinda chauvinistic.

**MARA** Then we'll do a woman's voice.

**LENU** Then it won't be chauvinistic.

**MARA/ANCHOR** (*voicing a female TV anchor*) Chen Jie! You're a, you're a, what we'd call a "sheng nu"... or "leftover woman". Ladies and gentlemen, the leftover woman... Chen Jie came here to fulfill her familial and social, not to mention political, duty to get married! To finally get married to one of the 20 million available men outnumbering the women! Chen Jie, tell us a little something about yourself, please!

**LENU/CHEN JIE** Chen Jie, pleased to meet you. I hold a doctoral degree in...

**MARA/ANCHOR** No, no, no...

**LENU/CHEN JIE** What?

**MARA/ANCHOR** No! You shouldn't say that at all, no one will have you. Rather pretend you're a second-class woman.

**LENU/CHEN JIE** Second class?

**MARA/ANCHOR** Yes, if you want a first-class man.

**LENU/CHEN JIE** But I can't lie!

**MARA/ANCHOR** You have to lie, otherwise no one will have you! You know the saying, there's three genders in China: male, female, and doctoral candidates!

**LENU** You know, this is just a lousy story. I'm going to go to university.

**MARA** Don't take it too seriously.

**LENU** Mara?

**MARA** Lenu?

**LENU** I'm having the painters.

**MARA** What?

**LENU** You know.

**MARA** No I don't.

**LENU** It's the painters. I'm having the painters in.

**MARA** What painters?

**LENU** You know... my aunt is here.

**MARA** What aunt?

**LENU** My aunt Flo.

**MARA** I didn't know you have an aunt Flo.

**LENU** Well neither did I, Mara!

**MARA** So she just showed up and brought some painters along?

**LENU** I have the blob!!

**MARA** They painted a blob?!

**LENU** Mara, I'm bleeding down there!

**MARA** Oh!

**LENU** How about you?

**MARA** Oh, sure.

**LENU** Why didn't you tell me?

**MARA** Why does it matter all of the sudden?

**LENU** Aren't you in pain?

**MARA** No. Why?

**LENU** No pain at all?

**MARA** No. Why?

**LENU** Aren't you ashamed?

**MARA** Ashamed?

**LENU** Yes, ashamed.

**MARA** Ashamed ashamed?

**LENU** Ashamed.

**MARA** You feel ashamed?

**LENU** We all feel ashamed.

**MARA** I wanna feel ashamed!

**LENU** Mara, why were you lying?

**MARA** My grandma told me it's time I start bleeding and that I shouldn't play with Barbies anymore, but that I'll lose interest in them when I start to bleed anyway.

**LENU** Is that a joke?

**MARA** I'll go again. You be me.

**MARA/GRANDMA** Have you started to bleed?

**MARA** And her huge boobs are hanging down to her navel.

**LENU/MARA** No.

**MARA/GRANDMA** When are you going to start?

**MARA** And she's walking around all stooped, I think her boobs are pulling her down.

**LENU/MARA** I don't know. Is it something you can tell?

**MARA/GRANDMA** It's high time you start. All the other girls have stopped being girls, you're the only one still playing with those ninnies.

**MARA** Then she lifts up her t-shirt because she thinks her boobs are funny.

**LENU/MARA** Lenu is not a ninny!

**MARA/GRANDMA** Nobody said Lenu is ninny, you ninny! Those 29.21 cm tall plastic dolls of yours.

**MARA** That's how she plays with us. She shows us her boobs.

**LENU/MARA** They're not ninnies. I can be anything with them.

**MARA/GRANDMA** Mara, this is a big deal.

**MARA** Then she grabs the Barbie by her hair.

**LENU/MARA** What?

**MARA/GRANDMA** You can buy this plastic ninny who can be anything, but you can't be anything.



I PHOTO BY KATARINA ZLATEC

**LENU/MARA** Yes I can!

**MARA/GRANDMA** No you can't!

**LENU/MARA** Yes I can!

**MARA/BAKA** No you can't!

**LENU/MARA** Yes I can!

**LENU** Your grandma is right.

**MARA** Lenu!

**LENU/MARA** (*unconvincingly*) I can be anything!

**MARA** You're not convincing.

**LENU** This game is not convincing.

**MARA** Oh, c'mon Lenu, why're you acting up now!

**LENU/MARA** (*more convincingly*) I can be anything I want!

**MARA/GRANDMA** You can't even start bleeding! What could you possibly do with that girlish body of yours?

**LENU AND MARA** Why would I need a body to be anything I want to be?

**MARA/GRANDMA** What, do you think this silly Barbie can be anything?

**LENU/MARA** Well, she listens to her mom like I do mine, she studies, does her homework,

is mindful during class, she doesn't provoke anyone, she's persistent...

**MARA/GRANDMA** Because she has nice boobs and she married rich and divorced even richer.

**LENU/MARA** Barbie's divorced?

**LENU** Your grandma told you that?

**MARA** My brother says that.

**LENU** Your brother's good-looking.

**MARA** My brother's dumb. According to him, Divorced Barbie costs three times more than all the others?

**LENU** Makes sense.

**MARA** How?

**LENU** She gets Ken's car, Ken's house, Ken's dog, Ken's cat, Ken's furniture, and Ken's yacht.

**MARA** But that's hers as well. Isn't it?

**LENU** Do you think Barbie bleeds?

**MARA** But she doesn't have a hole down there.

**LENU** When you start to bleed it really hurts!

**MARA** I don't want to be a woman after all!

**LENU** You'd rather be a boy?

**MARA** Yuuuuuuuck! Boys are rough!

**LENU** Interesting!

**MARA** Ugly!

**LENU** Mischievous!

**MARA** Dumb!

**LENU** Fun!

**MARA** We never used to play like this.

**LENU** I don't wanna be here anymore.

**MARA** But here you can be a boy and everything.

**LENU** Really?

**MARA** You can be anything.

**LENU** Really?

**MARA** So, what do you want to be?

**LENU** What do you want to be?

**MARA** My mom's calling me.

**LENU** You're a momma's girl.

**MARA** Don't go right now, Lenu.

**LENU** I have to.

**MARA** Tell me another joke.

**LENU** Stop being such a girl, Mara.