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An excerpt from **BAD BLOOD**
By Csilla Przibislawsky

The set at the beginning of the play is a large playing space sparsely furnished with a couch that can also function as a bed, a couple of chairs, and a table. These items of furniture are moved around according to the location and action within the scene.

Kati's sterile apartment and Tilia's claustrophobic, chaotic house should be differentiated through lighting and perhaps a cyc as the upstage wall.

Lights come up on a woman in her late twenties wearing a very perky obviously vintage fifties short dress.

Kati: Hello. My name is Kati. Welcome to my life!
I work as a nanny. I take care of four children during the day and then I cook dinner for them and their parents every night.

Male and female actor sit at table miming eating soup and enjoying it immensely, etc.

I watch with glee as they slurp up my savoury home-made soup, then wipe their mouths with the nappies I starched and ironed that very same day. I thrive on their after dinner glow and pat myself on the back for a job well done!

Then I go home to my one bedroom apartment which I pay for myself and I lock out everything and everyone that may rob me of my independent lifestyle.

Kati sits down.

Here, I have control.

Male actor sits down beside her and starts moving his hand from her knee up her leg.

Here, nothing happens that I won't be able to stop if it should threaten what I already know and understand to be true.

She slaps his hand away without looking at it.

Relationships are always a big question mark so I choose

not to have them. Sex is in a different category altogether.

She assertively pushes him down on the couch, lies on top of him and kisses him in one move. Male actor rolls off couch upstage and comes around front as a different man. He looks her up and down as Kati says the following line then looks away from her with disinterest.

Men relate well to my quirky playfulness and more often than not find me completely irresistible.

Without looking at male actor she punches him with the back of her hand and continues without missing a beat. Male actor exits.

Life was happening for me and I was happy as a plum - until not long ago when everything started to go a little wonky.

Tilia sits at a table as though she were in a restaurant. She should be lighted in a way that gives her an "other world"-ly feel. Restaurant background noise.

It all started one day when I was sitting having a bowl of latte in a cafe by myself - which I do often because I'm a hip kind of gal who can do that kind of thing without feeling in the least bit self-conscious - and I looked over at the next table and my gaze became transfixed on an older woman who happened to be sitting there.

Kati looks at Tilia and immediately goes into a trance. Tilia mimes having a conversation with an old friend.

Tilia's rhythm is much slower. She lives in real time.

She is also completely genuine. As the scene progresses Kati gets drawn more and more into Tilia's world.

Tilia: It's a very old-fashioned name. I don't know why my mother chose it for me.

Kati: -woman aged anywhere between 40 and 55
-very animated

Tilia: I would have much preferred being called Judith, or

Edith. Something more contemporary. You know.

Kati: -smiles easily
-hair a reddish-brown with grey roots pulled back into a tight bun - bun is braided and pinned

Tilia: Tilia would have been fashionable when my mother was a girl - but I've always felt that it was a bit too outdated for how I feel.

Kati: -lines deeply etched into her face
-dark-grey circles under her eyes

Tilia: I hope I didn't make the same mistake with my daughter.

Kati: -blue, blue eyes

Tilia: (giggling) Don't worry I didn't call her Cordelia or something horrible like that...

Kati: -beautiful, attentive, engaged face. Look how she laughs. So alive. So elegant.

Tilia: Marta. Her name is Marta.

Kati: -so much life, so much passion...

Tilia: Yes it is a good name but for a 13 year old girl just on the verge of bursting into womanhood...sometimes I wonder.

Kati: -so much experience and wisdom

Tilia: (sighs) Yes, 13 already. I just hope I'll live to see her turn 14. (pause) I'm sorry, of course you're right.

Tilia gets up to leave and catches Kati's eye. They exchange a long, very warm smile. Tilia exits.

Kati: (comes out of trance) I love her! But love isn't always a fuzzy, cozy feeling. Sometimes love really hurts and I gave that up a long time ago. Hurting I mean. Not loving. Well maybe that too. I don't know. Anyway, that same night I went to my favourite dance bar like I often do on Friday nights. (Not every Friday night mind you because predictability is the kiss of death to its' far more attractive antithesis -spontaneity- a.k.a. the

spice of life.)

Bourbon Tabernacle choir plays fairly
loudly in background

So there I was just hanging and listening to the band
when an old acquaintance of mine walked up.

Russell dances over.

Russell: (yelling over music) Hi! It's Kati right?

Kati: (to audience) Very impressive! He got the
pronunciation right the first try!

(to Russell) Yeah! You're Rob's friend right?

Russell: That's right. My name is Russell.

Kati: Right! Is Rob here too?

Russell: No! I haven't seen Rob in years. (pause) No I'm with,
uh,... with...

Song ends. Loud applause.
Taped music begins.

Kati: You're with the slam dancers aren't you?

Russell: uh...

They both laugh

Kati: I know you doctor types. You're always up to no
good.

Russell: and you?

Kati: I'm here with my friend Sue but I haven't seen her in
hours.

Marta comes in and stands downstage of
them looking forwards.

You were in medicine right?

Russell: Right. Didn't you go out with someone in my class?

Kati: Matthias Pinz?

Russell: He was a year ahead of me.

Kati: Bob Scofield?

Russell: A year behind me.

Kati: I guess not then.

Russell: Didn't you go out with Michel Papineau?

Kati: Oh yeah. That was pretty brief. Was David Bremner in your class?

Russell: Yeah! Did you go out with him too?

Kati: Briefly.

He laughs at her

I know you won't believe this but the med school connection actually is a coincidence.

Russell: Sure. You were studying...was it social work?

Kati: Yeah probably.

Russell: Probably?

Kati: I've had other careers since then.

Russell: What are you doing now?

Kati: I'm a nanny.

Russell: Really?

Kati: Why does that surprise you?

Russell: I didn't peg you as the drifter type.

Kati: I'm not. I want to be a nanny. So does that girl look about 10 to you?

Russell: Approximately.

Kati: (to audience) There's nothing I hate more than being "pegged" - period.

Russell: (hesitantly) Kati...

Kati: Yeah?

Russell: I don't know why I'm telling you this right now but my father was your mother's oncologist.

Sudden break in music.

Lights up on Kati's mother (actress playing Tilia) lying in hospital bed hooked up to oxygen mask, etc.

Lights down on her and music comes back.

Kati's affected by this momentarily before she re-adopts her carefree tone

Kati: (to audience) What a weird thing to say! Bringing up a woman's dead mother is an immediate turn-off.

(to Russell) What made you feel like sharing that happy piece of information with me?

Russell: I just felt weird about knowing that connection and you not knowing it.

Kati: (to audience) Woah. Weird but super honest.
(to Russell) 2 Dr. Corbetts in one family huh?
I've met your dad actually. He and my father were buddies going through med school together.

Russell: I know.

Kati: Oh you knew that too did you? And what else do you know?

Russell: I know that you find me very dashing right now.

Kati: I do not!

Russell: Yes you do.

Kati: I don't!

Russell: Is that the truth?

Kati: You mean am I lying?

Russell: Right.

Kati: ...wait and find out.

They smile at each other.
The band starts up again playing a very fast, manic number. Kati, Russell, and Marta start dancing like maniacs. Marta's dancing is full of anger and she runs into Kati accidentally stepping on her foot.

Kati: Ow!

Marta: Sorry.

Lights and music cut out.

Tilia's voice in the dark:

Tilia: Do you know where she is Pam? Well I, I spoke to Jodi and she said that Marta mentioned going over to your house. You haven't spoken to her at all? Please think Pam! When was the last time you talked to her? What did she say? Did she say anything about where she was going tonight? I just don't know what to do I'm so worried about...

Her voice trails off sobbing. Pause.

Yes Mrs. York. No I haven't heard from her since she left home at 7:00 tonight. She's never done this before so I don't even know where to...

pause

Tilia: Mhm? Yes. Yes I understand. Alright. Sorry to have woken you.

click

Lights up on dimly lit living room of Tilia's house. It is early the next morning. Tilia sits in a chair upstage left. Sound of door slam offstage.

Marta: (offstage) Hi mom I'm home.

Marta enters

Tilia: (low) get to your room!

Marta: Oh great. You're mad.

Tilia: (low) I don't even want to see your face today.

Marta: I guess that means you're not interested in an explanation huh? You just jump to conclusions right away and of course I'm guilty without a trial.

Tilia: (silence)

Marta: I don't care if you don't want to hear it - I'm going to tell you anyway. I know I told you that I would be sleeping over at Jodi's house, but I ran into my friend Pam on the way and she asked me to sleep/

Tilia: You're a liar!

Marta: Mom!

Tilia: (low) I talked to your idiotic friend Pam-

Marta: Mom!

Tilia: and her two-bit mother. And you can tell Pam I said so! How dare she suggest that she is any better than I am. "In our house we have a rule that the kids tell us where they're going to be. That way we never have to disturb their friends' families."
The nerve of that bitch.

Marta: Mom! Just because they have a normal family doesn't make Pam's mom a bitch!

Tilia: Normal! If that's normal then why didn't you phone me to tell me where you were whoring around last night?

Marta: Okay that's it. That's exactly why mother. Because I knew you'd resent it if you found out that I was actually having fun for a change. Instead of staying home baby-sitting you every fucking weekend.

Tilia: Watch your language!

Marta: Just because you don't do anything any more, you want me to die of boredom too. That's what you'd like isn't it? If you had your way I would never leave this disease-infested hole.

Tilia: You'll regret you said that after I'm gone.

(pause)

Marta: I was waiting for when that would come up. You use that to shut me up when you know that I'm right, don't you? It worked on dad so you figure it'll work on me too. But don't forget mom. Dad left! He couldn't take it any more mom and soon I won't be able to either. Everyone will leave you and it'll be your own fault!

Marta storms off. Long pause.

Tilia: From now on... I don't ever want you to stay home with me again.

Lights down.

Lights up on Kati in her living room.
She is setting the table.

Kati: Russell intrigues me. What man in his right mind would bring up a woman's dead mother while trying to chat her up? (laughs) I mean who would want to be reminded of their mother's death? Especially once you've gotten well over the whole messy painful thing. It's in the past and the past is better left behind where it belongs. (thinks for a moment) Still - it is a strange coincidence - the connection between his father and my mother. And the double connection between his father and my father. I wonder if this means something. I mean I wonder if I should be paying attention to these... coincidences. Are the cosmos trying to tell me something? Something about Russell? My mother? My father? That Russell and I were destined to be together? Yeah right! That's a good one. (pause) And what about... that woman at the cafe - There was something about her...

Anyhow, best not to think about it too much. Thinking is productive and fun for a while, but too much of it can become unpleasant.

Now what I really wanted to talk about was my date with Russell tonight. I'm very excited. For the occasion I have a new dress, new jewelry, new shoes, and a new overdraft on my checking account. But I don't care - because tonight will be a night of love! Figuratively speaking of course. I'm not saying that all appearances of love-like feelings will definitely be absent. Sometimes even sex feels like love but the following day while paying off that overdraft by picking up some extra-curricular house cleaning jobs, one is always provided with that gentle reminder that romance and reality are not one and the same. Besides, love isn't what I'm after. I'm perfectly satisfied with my life exactly as it is. A few nights of companionship and then it's on to fresh new territory. And Russell will be no different.

Russell appears and gives Kati a bouquet of flowers from one hand

Kati: (to Russell) Oh thanks.

(to audience) so what if he brings me flowers...

He presents a bottle of wine with the other

(to Russell) Wine too?

(to audience) I will never be cheaply bought.

Russell: Mmm. Something smells fantastic. What is it?

Kati: Soup.

Russell: Home-made?

Kati: Of course.

Russell: My favourite.

Kati: I figured.

They smile at each other.

Russell: So you're a nanny.

Kati: ...yup.

Pause

Russell: You don't want to talk about it do you?

Kati: Oh I don't care. There just isn't much to talk about. I can think of far more interesting things to talk about than the logistics of child care. And not talking about it would spare you the embarrassment of feeling that you have to pretend to be interested in the small details involved in changing diapers and warming formula.

Russell: How about why you take care of kids?

Kati: That's easy. I like kids. They like me. I get a pay cheque at the end of every two weeks for spending time doing what I like to do. Much like you most likely. But without the same status. I realized years ago that things I did that gave me status made me miserable while taking care of kids made me happy. It wasn't a difficult decision really.

Russell: What else did you do?

Kati: (sighs) I have bachelors degrees in Commerce, Social Work, and Education.

Russell: Wow! You could do a masters in Public Administration in two years and set up your own/

Kati: No you don't get it! Why would I do that if being a nanny is what makes me happy!

Russell: ...I don't know.

She pours some wine

Russell: How about having children of your own?

Kati: Are you crazy?!

Russell: Wouldn't it be even more satisfying if the children you were taking care of were your own?

Kati: No. I'd probably grow to resent and hate them for getting in the way of the rest of my life. Like this moment for example - there would be so much screaming going on that I wouldn't even be able to hear you.

Russell: I see. So you get to play mom and then leave when

the going gets rough.

Kati: Personally, I wouldn't put it in those terms, but I suppose if that's what it sounds like to you...

(to audience) this guy's starting to piss me off.

then that's fine by me. And why don't you take your patients home with you at the end of your day? Ready for dinner?

Russell: I guess I hit a nerve.

pause

I'm sorry.

pause

Russell: I am sorry.

Kati: It's fine.

Russell: Listen Kati, umm... part of me feels like this is the worst possible time to bring this up but another part of me... I want to tell you.. (loses his nerve)

Kati: What?!

Russell: ...I was at your mother's funeral. I didn't know you or your family - I felt stupid about being there - I shouldn't have been there. I was 15 and I couldn't drive yet so I had to go after a soccer practice to meet my dad. It was the only way I could get a ride home -

Kati: (to audience) A real charmer this guy

Russell: but there was something about you - you could have been in my class and I probably would have had a crush on you. But there you were dressed in black before it was fashionable. I kept looking at you thinking... no one should be that sad... anyway... I thought a lot about that day. I kept remembering how you looked. Then years later at Rob's place... I recognized you as soon as I saw you.

long pause

Kati: Do you want some soup?

Russell: No.

She looks at him. He slowly raises his hand and strokes her cheek.

Kati: (to audience) So what if his eyes penetrate through me like two sharp arrows.

She takes his hand and studies it

Kati: So what if he has softer hands than any I've felt before; hands obviously well taken care of; maybe even protected; perhaps like his father's. Gentle hands used often for consoling dying patients and those they leave behind.

Russell gently kisses her bandaged hand, then her lips.

What could I find to love about any of this?

They lie down on the bed together.
Tilia emerges from the bed.
Lights down.

Lights up on Tilia's living room.
Tilia opens door

Kati: Hi I'm here to clean your... house

Tilia: Oh yes, hello. Come right in.
(they shake hands)
I'm Tilia Kertes
Didn't I see you...

Kati: I think I saw you in a cafe not long ago.

Tilia: Yes! I remember that. Well what a coincidence that you should have answered my ad.

They smile at one another. Tilia notices something about Kati's hand before she lets go of it.

Kati: (to audience) Holy weirdness!

Tilia: Well, everything is pretty much where you would expect it to be, and don't worry too much about missing any spots if you know what I mean. I'm not much of a perfectionist when it comes to house work. I'd just like to feel comforted with the knowledge that we won't be swallowed up by those dust balls that keep growing despite my efforts in willing them away.

Kati: Gotcha. (looks around) Is someone else home? I hear music.

Tilia: Yes my daughter Marta is in her room. She has very important teen-age business in there - I'm sure you understand. That room I give you permission to overlook altogether. She won't bother you I'm sure. Hunger seems to be the only temptation that draws her out of the cave. Much like a hibernating bear actually.

Kati: Ah yes. I remember it well.

They both laugh.

Kati starts to dust.

Kati: Tilia Kertes. That's hungarian, isn't it?

Tilia: Yes. My parents were hungarian.

Kati: My parents were hungarian too. My name is Kati.

Tilia: Well! We have something in common then.

They chuckle awkwardly.

Awkward Pause.

I'll get out of your way then.

Kati: Okey-dokey.

Tilia: I won't be long.

Tilia exits.

Music cuts out, then Marta enters.

Kati: Hi.

Marta: ...hi.

Kati: You must be Marta.

Marta: ...Yeah. Who are you?

Kati: I'm Kati. Your mom hired me to clean the house.

Marta: Why doesn't she just clean it herself?

Kati: I didn't ask.

Marta: What a waste of money.

Kati: Thanks. Thanks a lot.

Marta: I didn't mean that you were a waste of money.

Kati: Oh. My mistake.

Marta: Did my mom say when she was coming back?

Kati: No not really. Are you hungry?

Marta: Yeah why?

Kati: Just curious.

pause

Marta: Where do you know my mom from?

Kati: I don't know your mom. I answered an ad she put in the paper. (pause) This is a nice neighbourhood. Do you go to school around here?

Marta: No. I go to a private school.

Kati: Which one?

Marta: St. Mary's Academy.

Kati: No way! No! I went to St. Mary's too. How do you like it?

Marta: It's alright. I think it's stupid not to have guys in the school though.

Kati: Yeah, I remember that was a bit of an inconvenience. Is Sister Samantha still there?

Marta: Yeah.

Kati: Does she still play with her dentures when she thinks no one is looking?

Marta: (laughing) Yeah.

They both laugh.

Marta: Did you have Sister Margaret?

Kati: Old Mag dressed in drag,
(Marta joins in)
She's a big fat hag and she makes me gag!

Kati: Oh my god! I can't believe that clever witticism has lasted this many years! Wow! She must be ancient by now.

Silence as Kati continues to dust and Marta watches her.

Marta: Can I help?

Kati: Sure! (she passes her a rag) Don't expect to get a cut though.

Marta: Rats.

Kati: (to audience) Haha! The old Kati charm comes through once again. Chopping through huge blocks of ice with a single stroke!
(to Marta) What are you doing cooped up inside on such a beautiful Summer day?

Marta: I don't know. I can't think of much else to do.

Kati: Friends are away on holidays huh?

Marta: Yup. (pause) What did you used to do on your holidays?

Kati: Me? (laughs) Oh I did my best not to be around much.

Marta: Around home you mean.

Kati: Around anywhere.

Marta: What do you mean? Where would you go?

Kati: I don't know.

Marta: You must remember some places where you hung out.

Kati: Nope.

Marta: You can't remember a single place/

Kati: Just leave it Marta, it's none of your business!

pause

Sorry about that... I didn't mean to snap at you.
(long sigh) My mom died when I was 14 so I don't have very happy memories from around that time. Actually I don't really have any memories at all.

Silence.

Are you okay?

she sees that Marta is hiding tears

Oh no! What have I done? I'm a monster!

Marta cries harder and harder trying to hide it at first but then no longer able to.

Kati: (slowly catching on) Oh Marta.....your mom?.....Oh god. (long pause) I'm sorry Marta.

Marta keeps crying. Kati walks to her, wraps herself around her and holds her.

Lights down.

Lights up on Kati finishing up the cleaning.
Tilia enters.

Tilia: Everything go alright?

Kati: Oh for sure! Yeah!

pause as they look at each other.

Tilia: You weren't waiting for me I hope/

Kati: Oh no!

Tilia: because I could have/

Kati: No really I was just finishing up when you... I guess it took me longer than it usually... takes because Marta and I got into a fascinating conversation!

pause

Tilia is struck as she instantly catches the meaning of this. She looks embarrassed.

Kati: We talked about school. I went to St. Mary's Academy too. And as it turns out we had some of the same teachers!

Tilia: I see.

awkward pause.

Kati: Well I guess I should go.

Tilia: Yes of course. I'll write you a cheque.

They stand very close as Tilia writes out the cheque. Kati smells something familiar. She becomes more and more involved in trying to name for herself the exact smell.

Tilia: (hands Kati cheque) Are you alright?

Kati: Oh yes! Yes. Sorry. (she giggles) This is stupid, but - I was just trying to figure out what perfume you're wearing.

Tilia: Oh! (she laughs) It's Chanel No. 5.

Kati: Ah! That's it!

Tilia: Do you wear it?

Kati: No, no I don't.

awkward pause.

Tilia: Well I suppose I should/

Kati: Yeah I should go too.

Tilia: The house looks very nice.

Kati: Thank you.

pause

Tilia: Do you normally clean houses weekly or bi-weekly?

Kati: Well normally I don't.... weekly usually.

Tilia: Would you be interested in coming again?

Kati: yes! Certainly!

Tilia: Good. Same time next week then?

Kati: Great. I'll see you then.

Tilia walks away and Kati during the following speech makes her way to what is now once again her bed in her apartment; pulls open a drawer in the bottom; pulls out a sweater wrapped in several plastic bags. She pulls off each bag separately.

Kati: I didn't want to tell her right then that Marta and I had already made plans to go to the art gallery the next day. I was afraid that she might take it as a betrayal - and I didn't want to say or do anything that might jeopardize getting to know either one of these two incredible people. Why have I met them? Why do I feel like I've known them all my life? Marta and I for instance - knew without having to say anything that we would be friends for a very long time. Maybe forever.

pause

You see Marta and I share a terrible secret... and that secret unites us in a way that nothing else could. Marta and I were born infected. We were both born from a smelly disease-infested hole - and try as we might - we will never forget.

She inhales into her lungs the smell of the sweater and just at the peak of the inhalation lights go up on her mother in hospital bed hooked up to various machines and the sound of the monitor beeping. The beeping fades in unison with the lights fading and in unison

with Kati's exhalation.

Lights down.