

CAT AS CAT CAN

By Alan Rossett

AUTHOR'S NOTE

"But how to play the cat?" The question was often asked before the play was performed. The answer: through IMAGINATION. The way children – with no costumes or acting training – totally convince us by their simple joy in make-believe that all by themselves they can add up to an entire zoo. That's how Gérard Martin, who created the part in Paris, became my cat...his left arm undulating like an "inquisitive" cat's tail...then he'd scratch his chin in fast motion with his right hand., used as a paw-with-claws. He'd sniff his acting partners to make their acquaintance. They were Anna Gaylor, Véronique Müller and François Lescurat. The comedy was premièreed April 6, 1988 at the Théâtre Essaion, Paris.

CAST :

4 actors who play:

1. Prince Charming
2. The Queen, The Aunt, Claudette, Merlin.
3. Valerie, Veronika, Gaston 2.
4. Gaston, Gustave, Gilbert, Valentine.

or 12 actors:

The Queen
Valerie
Veronika
Her Aunt
Claudette

Prince Charming
The Cat-Prince
Gaston
Gustave
Gilbert
Merlin
Valentine
Two passers-by

Time: the present.
A mobile set

(ACT 1)

1. AT THE PALACE

(Princess Valerie enters, in quite a flap, followed by Queen Clothilde.)

QUEEN

Princess Valerie, get this straight, I'm not only the Queen Mother, I'm your mother. Damn it, you are not going to marry Prince Charming!

VALERIE

I love 'im, Ma, love 'im!

QUEEN

Big deal! Love to a princess! Especially the one of Multiple Turnpikes... Principality in an economic boom and on the verge of bankruptcy. This is not the moment to wall yourself up in an obscure kingdom like Cat-Castle with its fatuous oaf. Darling, I am pleading with you. The boy is impooooossible!

VALERIE

But that's just what I love about him...the impossible promise he brings of utter obscurity! Yes, he's smug. Yes, his ignorance of anything outside his realm is awe-inspiring. He drifts through life like a cloud over a troubled planet. Ahhh, that banquet at Cat-Castle! All my life I'll remember. As your official envoy to our neighbouring kingdom's annual grape harvest, I saw Prince Charming for the first time in over fifteen years.

(The Prince appears in the shadows,
with a glass of wine...he's physically rather
bland, aside from his Ruritanian operetta
uniform, embellished with splendid epaulets.)

If anything, he was more insignificant than before.

PRINCE (tastes the wine)

Hum. Not too sharp, not too sweet. Better than '84, but worse than '69. Still incomparable by that how-to-put-it "in-between" flavour coming from I don't know where...I do...from here. Our wine doesn't travel...goes off if you move it down the block...doesn't sell...stays with us. We have to drink it. If we didn't we'd be swimming in it. All the better. I see that I shall have to elaborate ... Mmmmm ...

VALERIE (aggravated)

...Folding and unfolding my napkin...eyes wide open, I fell asleep along with all the other guests. A touching serenade of snores blended peacefully with distant murmurs through the window of television sets. Ah, the bouquet of his mediocre plonk began to turn my head. Gallantly, the Prince offered me his arm.

PRINCE (to Valerie)

Shall we stroll in the garden by moonlight, Princess?

(They stroll)

It's not too hot tonight, is it...not too cold. I've often noticed in official voyages that Cat-Castle is cooler than Cuba and warmer than Lapland.

(They stop. Moonlight.)

You're awfully beautiful, Princess. Did you know that? I've never seen such a beautiful princess in this garden. Not that we have any other princess in the garden at the moment, beautiful, awful or otherwise. What's more, your bone structure makes your cheeks stick out, that's original. Doubtless because you come from a far off land.

VALERIE

Located at the bottom of the mountain, just two and a half miles to the right?

PRINCE

The mountain is what makes we high-hung hangers-on of Cat-Castle look alike: we have to run the shop all by ourselves! Which doesn't stop your bones having a beauty of their own. What is your opinion on all this, Princess?

VALERIE (laughing at him good-naturedly)

My "opinion"...is...that I'm a Princess, yes...of a trivial little country. Oh bigger than yours! Twenty thousand inhabitants. Just big enough to be a little too much in view. At home I can never, I don't know, go down to the shopping mart without dolling myself up, as a princess, for a start. And of course sandwiched in between personal bodyguards.

PRINCE

It isn't true! I kick around my town relaxed, sometimes without a shampoo.

VALERIE

How I envy you. If I did that, some lunatic would take a pot shot at me. You can't imagine the filthy insults my mother and I endure. And with which we're entirely in agreement. We are, I hope, modern girls! Multiple Turnpikes is, I hope, a democratic monarchy, and Mom and I are mere caricatures of old-fashioned royalty, with a few ticks here and there of our real selves to humanise the merchandise. Don't people realise to what extent it's draining away my very youth? Really, I dream of an ordinary existence...high up on a sheltering mountain top. A minuscule castle whose prince kicks around a one-horse street, unshaven.

PRINCE

I said without a shampoo. And Cat-Castle is proud of three winding streets, classified as national monuments!

VALERIE

Mm this is forget-me-land and you're the landlord! If I lived up here, in no time, I'd turn out children like photocopies, get nice and fat, swilling down barrels of your innocuous wine.

PRINCE

Princess, I have the curious impression – correct me if my instincts are wrong – this is your way of asking my hand in marriage?

VALERIE

No. Though actually, why not?

PRINCE

Why not indeed. I am a bachelor.

VALERIE

We both are!

PRINCE

And of royal blood. Therefore, you are not inconceivable.
(He kisses her hand, prepares to go.)

VALERIE

Hey! Prince! Will you give me the love I need? Prince, do you love me a little already?

PRINCE

I'm sure I shall have to, Princess, since we'll be rolled up together inside the same royal quilt. (singing) Ah...Valerie...!
(He disappears...)

Change of lighting)

QUEEN (to Valerie)

So you had a little adventure. While we're on the subject... One morning recently...don't forget your mom's a widow...
(Sound: angry mob. Valerie disappears. Gaston – a young proletarian – leaps in.)

GASTON (seductively)
 Down with the two royal whores!
 (The roar of the crowd increases.)
 The Queen is screwing us up!

CROWD SOUND
 The Queen is screwing us up –

QUEEN (as if badly woken)
 Ahhhh the same ruckus every morning. You'd think he was doing it on purpose.

GASTON (slyly)
 You bet! (calling) The Queen is screwing us up!

QUEEN (calling)
 Up yours!

GASTON
 The Queen!

QUEEN
 Guards! I'm coming down.

GASTON
 Zounds ! Encircled!

QUEEN
 You bet! (to Gaston) C'rner, big boy. (He comes closer) Don't be afraid. A knife in the back? Noooo, they're near enough to see us. But too far away to hear us. So you can say what you like, Gaston Pflugg?

GASTON
 Rats! Recognised!

QUEEN
 Better. Computerised! What is the point, Pflugg, of busting my eardrums at six every morning?

GASTON
 Just a little warning...Since you look all warned out...Ciao... (He begins to slip away.)

QUEEN (holding on to him)
 Not so fast, sexy...you don't mind if I call you sexy...?

GASTON

Sure, why not...

QUEEN

Believe me, no one more than your Queen wants to see this country shake it's behind and take off. Why dissipate ourselves in futile deprecation when together we might get to the heart of the problem?

GASTON

Mommy, there's unemployment in your country! Every day's worse than the one before. You couldn't care less...with your gowns, jewels. Wish I could sprinkle myself with diamonds and go whoring at the opera house.

QUEEN

Gaston, the tiared Queen is the only gimmick that still brings a shekel into this dump. As long as there are a few tourists moronic enough to be fleeced. Aside from that, what are we? A country with mediocre natural resources, closed in on all sides by mountains, with a rusting airport that my late husband, the king of tightwads, wouldn't dream of modernising. Since the king's death, Parliament assiduously pursues his policies; youth spit in the soup and I spit along with you. No, we need a real shake-up. Right here in the guts. New elections for a new prime minister whose ideas will be as progressive as mine. Once in, he would...go on, improvise –

GASTON

Huh?

QUEEN

Huh, huh, yes. If I served you Multiple Turnpikes on a silver platter – what'll you do with it?

GASTON

...Fill it up with swimming pools.

QUEEN

What's that?

GASTON

We young thugs get mighty sweaty while we're socially agitating – and there's nothing to dive into after. Just flip through the pretty pictures in foreign magazines like Marie-Claire's Home and Garden! And then my daddy's a plumber!

QUEEN

Who's going to pay the bill? Me?

GASTON

...Beuh no. We'll restore military service then...OK boys, put in those pipes...or you're in the jug. Hey, we could put in new jugs as well, you can never have enough of them. Think of the tourist blurb: "Multiple Turnpikes – Promenade pool prison. Bathe in security."

QUEEN

Clear as mud. So just might work! (flirtatiously) The Princess ...panting to meet her?

GASTON (flirtatiously)

She's not my type.

QUEEN

Big deal. Once you're married to her...

GASTON

Are you raving?

QUEEN

No, dreaming...of our alliance. With me on your side, you'll have all my royal reactionaries on yours. With you on my side, I'll be the new pop idol! I know, dear, in all this, there's a few loose ends. So tonight... just the two of us...we'll dine together...and fill in loose ends.

(They're gone. Valerie brings in a samovar.
Change of lighting.)

VALERIE

It's not the gimmick I find so revolting. That you replace my hoity-toity little prince at the altar with a loud-mouthed leftist...rather good, that, I must admit.

(The Queen and Gaston return; she helps him
on with a "folklorish" jacket and beret...)

Mr. Pflugg, you're on the way up. Instead of staying out in the cold braying "Hang the two royal whores" – in short shrift getting them to pour your tea? Hats off! You're on the brink of a brilliant political career...but it won't be with me! I do count, you know, if only for myself! I love Prince Charming! I've given him my word! Did you know that the word of a princess is "irrevocable??" Good, I'll have to leave you now, I'm late for my meeting. I'm on the reader's committee of the Four Turnpikes Hermetica Seal Theatre Factory and we're inundated with manuscripts! Delighted to have made your acquaintance –

QUEEN (to Gaston)

A little audacity, sweetie, charge –

GASTON

Get over here, garbage, I'll show you what love's really like, once your legs are wrapped around my neck –

VALERIE

Mater, is this the best you can do for your only child?

QUEEN

Valerie, you will underestimate the extremity of our current politico-economic predicament. I hope you don't think I loved your father when I was forced to jump on him?

VALERIE

...Not even a little?

QUEEN

Gawd.

VALERIE (to Gaston)

Keep your hands off! Tomorrow our PR man will announce my engagement to the Prince or – (to Gaston, grabbing at her) Leave me alone! Both of you!
(she runs out.)

QUEEN

You see the way she is, Gaston!

GASTON

Stuck on Prince Charming.

QUEEN

Who's on his way.

GASTON

On his way?

QUEEN

Without delay! I've invited him for tea.

GASTON

All alone with you and me?

QUEEN

I told him that's the way it had to be.
So...everything's been got?

GASTON (showing a deadly syringe hidden
inside his jacket:)

A shot from a shot ?

(And a large ring on one of his fingers:)

Then a shot of poison in his spot
Of tea.

QUEEN

No, no, no.

First a shot in the spot

Then a shot from the shot

Then if they don't work on the jerk –

GASTON (showing a pistol nested inside his beret)

A pistol shot.

QUEEN

But only if the rest goes berserk.

Ah bliss!

After which we genetically erase the slightest trace of felony.

In matters murderous

Science has gained a pace.

Not that we were bad at it before!

Through an opened door:

a vast subterranean mail chute unknown to all but we.

Thus shall we post this charming prince post-haste

back home to his own bed

where he obviously died in his sleep

In a state of

Amazing grace.

GASTON

Awesome.

QUEEN

Joyful.

(An operetta rhythm but with no
accompanying music:)

GASTON

...Mommy... (hesitantly) Have you ever killed anyone before.

QUEEN

What queen doesn't occasionally "kill anyone before". Naturally we try to do it as little
as possible.

GASTON

Poor tyke.

QUEEN

Gaston, think of all the interesting people having their eyes gouged out right now the world over and I'm sure you'll agree that we're talking about one paltry little schmuck. He's here today
Gone today
And thus tomorrow, our economy'll be on a dizzy spree
Thanks to...

GASTON

A shot in the spot!

BOTH (dancing with increasing delight as the Prince enters, noiselessly, unnoticed:)

A shot from a shot
If they don't work on the jerk
A pistol shot
But only if the rest goes berserk
Ah joy.
A shot in the spot
A shot from a shot

PRINCE (singing)

"A pistol shot!" A jolly ballad indeed! Lovely tune! "If they don't work on the jerk!" Who wrote the music? Is it on your hit parade? Oh!! I'll nip down to your local record dealer: If I find "A Shot In the Spot A Shot From A Shot" I'll gladly offer it to... (singing) Valerie!

QUEEN

Thank you, they're already more than present in the royal collection! Priiiiince... (coquettishly) I'm not happy! You're far too early!

PRINCE

No, I'm timed to the minute, I make a habit of that.

QUEEN

Yes but as the rest of us are chronically late, your punctuality makes one want to wring your neck! On top of which, you enter without having yourself announced!

PRINCE

But, Queen, you begged me not to tell a soul about our off the cuff tête-à-tête on the subject of my burning passion for (singing) ...Valerie! Would you order this gentleman who doesn't take off his hat to remove himself?

QUEEN

He's of no importance, it's Gaston.

PRINCE

Excuse me but this gentleman is all too present.

QUEEN ("temperamentally")

I have no secrets from Gaston! You'll never marry my daughter without Gaston! Even a Queen has the right to confide in a little friend! So there!

PRINCE

Calm down, gadzooks...I as well confide in a little friend!

QUEEN

Heavens, I hope you haven't confided anything to anyone on the subject of –

PRINCE

(singing) ...Valerie! And not just anyone! I told my tutor! I told Merlin!

QUEEN

Merlin? That ghastly old soak one avoids at your official receptions, pinching one's nose all the way?

PRINCE (child-like)

That's my Merlin! That's my Merlin!

QUEEN

But he's been dead for several years?!

PRINCE

Yes and we're very close.

QUEEN

Gaston!! The samovar!!

GASTON

The what?

QUEEN

You know, the automatic tea washer.

PRINCE

Not that Merlin approved of this visit...on a certain level. At the same time he thought it might do some good...on another level. Oh well with Merlin there were always so many levels that nothing ever got done! He exuded a kind of unique uselessness. That's why Cat Castle suited him to a T. What's more useless than a cat? And as Cat Castle is simply overrun with cats, Siamese cats ! Ah, the little darlings, they have a special place in my heart. They're prince of cats exactly as I'm prince of the people. We're regal, that's what.

GASTON (grumbling)

That's regal?

PRINCE (to Gaston)

My little man, you must think we're deaf! Watch out! (to the Queen) Have to know how to sling it back in the peasant's face. They love you for it after!

GASTON (humming)

"A shot in a spot"

PRINCE

Merlin's legacy, in fact, boils down to a vast body of knowledge...for which I had no use and consequently never worked. For example, the trick of turning myself into a Siamese cat.. As a child how I tried and tried...chanting away the magic word...which is "meow". Did you know that?

QUEEN

And nothing happened?

PRINCE

For hours, I cried "meow" and then I simply cried. Merlin would say "My little simp, of a truffled ravioli – that's what he always called me – "when the need overtakes you, you shall turn yourself into a cat – but not before!"

GASTON

Tea is serv-èd!

QUEEN

Aaah! Sugar, Prince? For you I suggest three lumps – four!

PRINCE

Since we're almost in the same family now...an intimate confession...

QUEEN (coquettish)

Five lumps?!

PRINCE

I loathe tea. And I never drink it.

QUEEN and GASTON (ferociously)

BUT!!!

PRINCE

The charm of your company will sufficiently warm the cockles of my heart.

QUEEN (severely)

Prince! A member of the nobility is supposed to drink that which makes him puke. To give the people a good example. Drink! I insist!

PRINCE (severely)

No one has ever forced me to drink a cup of tea! No one! Even Granny gave up! I'm a prince – and I don't want it!

QUEEN

I'm a queen and I want it!

PRINCE

We've got a real problem here: whadda we do?

GASTON

A shot from the shot?

QUEEN

No! First the shot in the spot!

PRINCE (singing)

"A pistol shot"!!

(At that – Gaston aims his gun at the Prince's head.
The Queen takes the syringe:)

QUEEN

Come come, drink down your tea, Prince...and we'll forget this regrettable incident.

PRINCE

...It's...not possible...it's never happened...to me...

QUEEN

There's always a first time!

GASTON

And this'll be your last, asshole!

PRINCE
SILENCE!! (pleading) ...Silence...?

GASTON
Drink.

PRINCE
How very odd. I think I'm having a nervous breakdown. (to the public)
Is there a doctor in the palace? ...a, a chamber maid...Anyone?

QUEEN
All off to the football match – by order of the Queen!

PRINCE
What a strange portrait we do compose. You can almost see the angels overhead.
What think you, Queen?

QUEEN
That history books are illustrated with just such portraits. You are going to take your
place in history like a true prince.

PRINCE
Yes but...I don't know if that's right for meeeeEEE...
(Suddenly – disrupting the rhythm –
the Prince rises –)

M — E — O — W!

(As if they'd been struck, The Queen and Gaston seem
thrust away from him.)

QUEEN and GASTON
What? A cat?

(Without the least bothering with them – walking like a
cat – the Prince leaves:)

QUEEN
...A Siamese?!...it's not possible?!

GASTON
You don't think that...

QUEEN
Of course not. Still. Catch the cat!
(As she frenetically leaves, followed by Gaston:)
Cherchez the cat! The Siamese! Sound the alert! Let no Siamese leave the palace! Any
Siamese who tries – off with his head!

2. A STREET

(Outdoor lighting. The Prince enters, alone.)

PRINCE

What ill-mannered ruffians! (disdainfully) Meow!

(He licks one of his "paws"...)

...What are you doing, Charming old-chap? You're not really a cat...?

It was a joke...wasn't it?

(He hears a bird: immediately stiffens as if about to jump in the air!)

VOICE OF A BIRD FLYING AWAY

Bye bye, Mr. Pussycat!

PRINCE (patting his face)

Yeeeks I've got whiskers...And...a tail? Oh dear oh dear I don't like the tail. I don't like the tail at all ! It's out of kilter with the rest of the royal posterior.

(tries to catch his tail...whirls... and bites it:)

MEOW!! Am I...only a cat then? What can I do...

(He starts to "lick" himself)

Lick yourself. Oh endless landscape...that one is ordained to lick till the end of time.

Not, mind, that it's such a disagreeable task.

(licking lower and lower)

Far from it! But I can't help asking – is this a pastime worthy of a prince? For I am still a prince and meeeeeeow!! Wait a sec...there is a way...I'm sure of it...to rebecome a prince. It's...it's...deary me today my memory's a, ho ho, cat-astrophe!...Ah... Someone told me...some sort of a..."Merlin"? Yes! He assured me that – to rebecome "Charming" I'd simply have to find another someone...a human someone...willing to die in my place. Oh yes yes! No problem. Who wouldn't be delighted to die for a prince?! So! First I find...a someone...and then...

(A woman – the actress who played the "Queen" – wearing a raincoat, hood up, rapidly crosses the stage; then stops as if waiting for a red light:)

(following her) Madam! Prepare yourself for a great joy. You've been elected to die in my place!

WOMAN (kicking him)

Scat, filthy cat!

(A young man – ex "Gaston" – enters, in a raincoat as well:)

PRINCE (going to him)

Sir, sir...

YOUNG MAN (kicking him)

A boot in the arse!

PRINCE

I have a curious impression of "déjà vu"...They do look alike in this country.

(Thunderclap! The two "raincoats" scamper off:)

In such a hurry, all of them!...it's the storm...rising!

(Change of lighting: bad weather.)

Sir – Madam. Oh dear oh dear!

(Again, he's alone...) –

I'm beginning to wonder if today – or tomorrow – anyone will die for...a cat? Oh dear!

Better go home...where's that, Charming? This...gutter...? Am I small enough to squeeze in...just until...the sun shines, Nelly. It's not a gutter. It's more of a window...of a basement apartment. Oh my. How sad the light can be, far from chandeliers of crystal and solid gold!

("Veronika" shuffles in [ex "Valerie"]
in a dumpy bathrobe.)

A young girl. She's not bad. She looks like someone else too...like a... princess...a...
"Valerie .

3. AT VERONIKA'S

PRINCE

This Valerie here...can she be my Valerie there?

(As a cat, he discreetly approaches Veronika ...she doesn't notice him...He sniffs her...)

This Valerie doesn't grab me.

VERONIKA (speaking to someone, off)

I'll probably go to Green Dell for holiday...

(Her aunt enters – ex "the Queen" actress – little hat, apron, dish towel, newspaper in hand)

AUNT

That's nice...

VERONIKA

Is it?...I'd rather go to the seaside.

AUNT

The seaside's nice.

VERONIKA

Perhaps...Green Dell is cheaper...

AUNT

You're right.

VERONIKA

Well you know I'm a little yurrrk still, I don't know...

AUNT

That's normal. You were always a little "yurrrk"...

VERONIKA

More cake, Aunty?

AUNT

Any left...?

VERONIKA

Yes.

AUNT

...No thank you.

PRINCE

Cats loathe cake! It's not good for them!...Too bad, I'm starving!
(During the following, he manages to take hold of the cake in a feline way, and eats it:)

VERONIKA

It's not bad.I could find another pastry shop in the neighbourhood. Nice of you, Aunty, to do the dishes.

AUNT

Only normal when a nice niece is not well.

VERONIKA

Oh I'm better now. I am taking advantage of you.

AUNT

Which is the way it should be. You were sliced into recently. Dreadful. Sliced into.

VERONIKA

Yees...that's almost over now. And then, an appendicitis is not very serious. Though Mom could've come...more often. And Dad.

AUNT

They have problems.

VERONIKA

Still...I can't help feeling that, since I took my own flat, to punish me for growing up, they've let me know that I can't count on them anymore!

AUNT

And Gustave...?

(The Prince licks his face:)

VERONIKA

...Oh...him...He's not here. Travelling sales men are often not here...He must have another little Veronika in every town...so if one of us isn't up to snuff, he can always have his cheerios with another.

AUNT

That's normal. He's a man.

VERONIKA

And then he's married –

AUNT

Veronika!!! I didn't know that he was married!!!?

VERONIKA

Now you know.

AUNT

...Is it the right thing, dear...?

VERONIKA

...Oh, Gustave...isn't serious. Isn't going anyplace. Maybe I should find...look for...someone else? That would be better. Would it be better? Could be worse. Would be the same. Anyway, next week, I'm going back to work.

AUNT

Good idea. It'll keep you busy. (indicating the newspaper) ...May I...?

VERONIKA

Of course.

(As the Aunt opens and reads the newspaper
- her face covered behind a large smiling
photo of the Queen:)

(More to herself) I have my little idea...get a new job. Not that I'm unhappy where I am. But perhaps the time has come to change...? If I change...it could be the same sort of thing. So why change? But if it turned out to be different...very very different...perhaps it would be too different...and I'd get fired. So: I'll stay where I am.

AUNT

That's intelligent, dear. You know we don't live in an ivory tower.

VERONIKA

We're not living in misery.

AUNT

Read the newspaper. Nothing but misery. One feels so sorry.

VERONIKA

At the same time indifferent...

AUNT

This prince for example who disappeared.
(The Prince's ears perk up)

VERONIKA

At all events, it's not us who'll ever find a prince! We never find anything interesting, do we? Oh Aunt, is it just going to go on like this? Day after day? the same words, endless words, the same...and for the rest of my life? As a child I thought I had more in me, more!

AUNT

More of what, dear?

VERONIKA

I don't know. Oh I'm so depressed.

AUNT

You? Depressed? Lucky little you? How many young girls can brag about having spent five days...in a hospital? How many have been sliced into? My poor darling, it's terrible!

VERONIKA

...It makes a change. And then it becomes the same...and then it goes away. And then one is cured.

AUNT

Oh it's terrible.

PRINCE

They're bonkers. Both of them!

VERONIKA (noticing the Prince)

Oh look a cat.

AUNT

Pussy pussy. She's nice.

VERONIKA

You think so?

PRINCE

I'm a man!

VERONIKA

She's not beautiful like Gladys.

PRINCE

Who?

VERONIKA

Well my little cat hello.

PRINCE

What manners! I'm not yours!

AUNT

Perhaps it's the cat they're looking for in the newspaper.

VERONIKA

I thought they were looking for a prince in the newspaper.

AUNT

My dear, they're looking for both. And they give as much space to a dumb animal as to a prince.

VERONIKA

Then it's the newspaper that's dumb.

AUNT

The reward for finding it is enormous...because it's a royal cat! Therefore! If this cat in front of us is the cat they're looking for – Veronika!! You're rich!! Mind you, this one is a female, they're looking for a male.

PRINCE

...!!

VERONIKA

Oh crumbs, it's not the cat. This one is far too homely.

PRINCE

No but you've got your nerve you do!

VERONIKA

Wait...

(As, delicately, she takes the Prince by his legs and places him on his back:)

PRINCE

Would you kindly have the politeness to let me go.
(She spreads his legs apart and points:)

VERONIKA (triumphantly)

It's a male!

AUNT

Who would've thought!

VERONIKA

I know all about cats, I do.

AUNT

Why don't you have a cat, Veronika?

VERONIKA

It's cruel to keep them indoors all day long.

AUNT

But cats love that – when we leave them in peace!

VERONIKA
...Oh?...Then I'll keep this one...?

AUNT
It's nice.
(Veronika caresses the Prince.
He's not displeased:)

PRINCE
Purr-purr-purr-purr.

AUNT
He's affectionate.

PRINCE
Ah...Valerie? Is it she?
(He sniffs Veronika:)
It's not she.

VERONIKA
Look...the colour of his shoulders. (pointing to the Prince's epaulets:)
Makes me think of epaulets on a royal uniform!

AUNT
What imagination!

VERONIKA
I know! I'll call him..."Epaulet " !

PRINCE
Yuk.

AUNT
That's nice. Good, I've got to go now.

VERONIKA
Don't you want any more cake?

PRINCE
Ca – ca – ck? (slyly) Ouch. (He begins to sneak away.)

AUNT
No, not really, dear.

No no, not you!

VERONIKA
(He backs up.)

So you're going to keep the cat?

AUNT

I'm not a cat!!

PRINCE

AUNT (pedantically)
So, you mustn't let him out for three days. Otherwise, he'll get lost again

VERONIKA
I know, Aunty!! I know all about cats!!

AUNT
Good, I've got to go now. And Saturday morning, I'll be back to help you take the cat to the veterinarian.

PRINCE
...to the vet...

AUNT
For it's he – the veterinarian – who'll fix the cat.

PRINCE
"Fix?"

AUNT
You agree?

VERONIKA
Of course. He has to be fixed.

AUNT
Otherwise...it's too dirty.

PRINCE
You don't fix Prince Charming!!!

AUNT

After which – he'll never go out ever again.

(The Aunt leaves.

Change of lighting.

The Prince has a glassy-eyed look. So does Veronika, in her bed.)

PRINCE

...Ah when I was a prince, I did things...without realising it. Does she realise...that I'm a prince...somewhere or other? Do I still realise it...? (he sniffs himself) Vaguely... because I still smell an odour of royal flesh nearby. Memory, for a cat, is located inside his nostrils! I sniff therefore I am.

(He sniffs. And then he becomes inert again...glassy-eyed...)

VERONIKA

Epaulet...? Epaulet...? That cat doesn't budge. Come here! I'll pet you. You like that.

PRINCE (bored)

If you insist.

(She absentmindedly strokes him.)

VERONIKA (to herself)

What if...I commit suicide...?

PRINCE

What! You'd better not!

VERONIKA

Of course that would sadden my aunt.

PRINCE

And me? What'll become of me? Eh?

VERONIKA

But...more than sad? No. My parents'll feel bad? Very bad. All the better! They'll realise how scandalously they've neglected me! And then...after...they'll be relieved. Gustave ... He drops by so little as it is. I'll be forgotten by the whole wide world. Perhaps somewhere someone will say "Why did that poor girl do that?" But no one will shed a tear for me...not what I call a tear. Even I won't shed a tear for me. After...it will be as if I'd never been born. What can you expect? The world...is so vast. Too vast for me.

(The Prince turns to her directly;
Energetically he rubs his head against
her neck, caressing)

Oh you'll cry for me all right! Very loudly! Without me, who'll scoop out your disgusting
tinned muck! The worse it smells, the better it is!

PRINCE (Delicately he puts his "paw" on
her face...tracing her features)

You're pretty. You're like a child...you are like Valerie...Who was that Valerie anyway...?
(Tenderly he licks Veronika's hand – and
then he bites it)

VERONIKA

OH cats!! (He giggles, bolts away, rolls over on his back, hands feet and arms
straight up in the air!) They surprise you! You see! You surprised me!

PRINCE

That's why I did it, dumbbell. No, no it's just a fact: she's pretty dumb! And pretty pretty!
(She begins to take more interest in him than in her
suicide plans. She throws him little bits of paper...He
tries to "attack" them. He struts proudly.)

I'm beautiful! I'm beautiful!

(Suddenly does a music hall turn:)

"I'm singin' in the rain! I'm singin' in the rain...I'mmm-mmememeooooowl!"

VERONIKA (somberly)

He's so much less amusing than Gladys.

PRINCE (somberly)

I'm beginning to hate this Gladys.

VERONIKA

She was the best cat ever.

PRINCE (jumping to her, full of resentment)

Because she was your first pet, blockhead. The first is always the best!! Look at me
with Princess Valerie, my first great love! And you're just as beautifu!! More!

VERONIKA

OK, under the covers then.

(Grinning, the Prince disappears
under the covers.)

VERONIKA

At night...as a little girl, I rubbed Gladys's neck...like this...like rubbing Aladdin's lamp!
And wheee, eyes closed we flew, both of us, over the strangest landscape...brushed
with pure colour...borrowed from my lovely children's books! Castle after
castle...Enchanted forests that bewitch, teeming with genies...

(A "genie" appears in the shadows...)

and rabbits in top hats who ask you for the time of day! Caress me a little
more...Gladys...I love cats! More than anything else! I love them! Caress me! Oh yes!
Do that to me! Oh is that ever good...Oh... Oh...But why did you stop?

(The genie by now is in bed with her:
it's Gustave – ex Gaston.)

GUSTAVE

(disgruntled type)

Pleased to see me, eh.

VERONIKA

Take off your tie, Gustave, please, you must be hot?

GUSTAVE

Well that's exciting eh.

(He adjusts his tie. A third arm comes out
from under the covers. Counting his hands:)

One...two...But...it's not mine? Whose is it?

VERONIKA

My cat.

(Sound of the cat spitting)

GUSTAVE

And now she's got a cat. And he sleeps with you. How dirty.

VERONIKA

Dirty? Nothing is cleaner than a cat!

GUSTAVE

Get out of there – get.

(Sound of the cat spitting. Frightened,
Gustave jumps out of the bed:)

No but get him out of there, Veronika. If not – I'll leave.

VERONIKA

Already?? Epaulet, get out of there.

(She puts her hands under the cover and pulls the Prince up by the hair.)
 My little bundle, this gentleman and I have a transaction to conclude. So – out!
 (She pushes him out of bed. During the following, he sits with great dignity below the bed – and stares at them.)
 Now you can kiss me! Harder! Ah! Again! It's been so long!

Ah.
 GUSTAVE

Ah!
 VERONIKA

But...is that thing going to go on staring at us?
 GUSTAVE

Yes!!
 PRINCE

Him there, I can't, understand, can't, it's psychological.
 GUSTAVE

You're so complicated!
 VERONIKA

Go away! Filthy animal! Or I'll break your balls!
 GUSTAVE

Too late, already done. (He yawns)
 PRINCE (unruffled)

Yes, yes, sleep, Epaulet! Ah Gustave... (The Prince jumps on the bed, next to Veronika:) No! No! (She pushes him out of bed, he jumps back, she pushes him –)
 VERONIKA

Stop him! I'm getting seasick!
 GUSTAVE
 (The Prince spits in Gustave's face –)

What's wrong with you tonight, my baby?
 VERONIKA

PRINCE

This man is worthless, Veronika – let him go. You're vulnerable – just like me. It's true, my being thrust into your life was sheer accident, we hardly know each other, but I love you, Veronika, love you. Please feel sorry for me as I feel sorry for you.

GUSTAVE

Frankly, it's not working tonight, I'm going.

VERONIKA

Wait – give me the time to put the cat out!

PRINCE

(hysterically clutching Gustave)

Don't put me out!! Don't put me out!!

GUSTAVE

OUCH! You're going to put him out?

VERONIKA

Why not?

GUSTAVE

He'll go astray.

VERONIKA

What nonsense. Cats always find their way home. You don't know anything about cats!
(The lights lower...the set changes. Suddenly the cat finds himself in unknown territory...)

4. "OUT"

PRINCE

They tame you, fix you, take away all initiative! Then with a casual smirk, put you out! I'll show you, Miss Veronika! First I'll take me for a little stroll.

(Haughtily he strolls.)

You'll wait up tonight...wouldn't be surprised to find you weeping like a washcloth when I come back...if I come back...after which, you won't get a purr out of me! Mmmmm I smell something good. Could it be "sardines à la garbage can"...with their own greasy tins on the side? Toothsome trash!

(An aging bag lady surges in: Claudette ex "The Queen". She's gathering anything she can find into a large bag slung over her shoulder:)

CLAUDETTE

What's poor old Claudette got to live for!!?

PRINCE

It's an obsession in this country!

CLAUDETTE (to the public)

Since not one of you offers the smallest crumb of bread to poor old Claudette! A little lady who's never harmed a soul?! And who hasn't eaten for three days: where were you?!...Insensitive brutes...exploiting my misery...making me work...endlessly searching...never finding. (poking in a garbage can) Rope? Would you eat this rope? Then why should I. No, it'll be a rope to hang me! You've been warned: unless someone opens their heart and their pocket book...to poor old Claudette? Eh? No? Too bad then! The next tree I bump into will crack under my weight..

PRINCE

Madam. Meow. Don't commit suicide. I feel sorry for you. Meow. (to the public)
Did what I could, it's only cricket.

CLAUDETTE (cautiously following him)

Ah ha, a cat, lost as well mid the rubbish of an ungrateful world. A lovely Siamese cat!
A real Siamese! Superb!

PRINCE

Finally! Someone with a modicum of culture!

(Claudette makes puckering sounds to attract him. Curious, the Prince approaches ...sniffs)

Purr-purr?

CLAUDETTE

And sim-sala- (adroitly, she seizes and attaches him to the end of the rope.)
– bim! I knew this rope would come in handy!

PRINCE (pulling on the rope)

There's been a terrible misunderstanding! I belong to "Veronika"! She'll be in a real state...pretty as she is! Not like you! Ugly as you are!

CLAUDETTE

You'll fetch a nice price. A real Siamese is worth its weight in gold.

(An even more sinister type appears in the shadows:
Gilbert – ex Gustave-Gaston –)

GILBERT

What's that, hand it over, Granny.

CLAUDETTE (to the Prince)

With riff-raff, we do not socialise.

GILBERT

What a little lady! Her behind delicately perched on the very best garbage! Her "kindred cat" in attendance at her feet. Adorable!

CLAUDETTE

For those capable of understanding, Claudette is not about to join their social club.

(A little "distracted", she pokes into her bag – Gilbert rushes at her – suddenly she draws out a deadly-looking knife – adroitly pointing it at him:)

Can I be of service?

GILBERT ("refined ")

Sweet goodness what a disappointment! And you seemed so pleasant! When the vicissitudes of existence twirl two solitary beings onto the same garbage heap, isn't it a sign that each should benefit from the other's battered charm? Must I pass an identity control before you'll accept my heart-felt homage? My pleasure then, here is my card.

(With a graceful swirl, he produces a card:)

A spotless one! Look at it, admire it, go on, it won't bite.

(She reaches for the card. Demented:)

"Look " doesn't mean " touch "!!

(Violently, he draws a knife – Claudette brandishes hers –)

No one touches that card except me! It's the only one I've got left! Without a card, what am I...?

CLAUDETTE

Pull yourself together, you poor dear.

GILBERT

A zombie, that's what!

CLAUDETTE

Not at all, darling, you're particularly well-built, if I say so myself...

PRINCE (reading the card)

"Gilbert Dupax, former professor of philosophy at the faculty of..." Oh wow!

GILBERT (mundane)

You understand, rather than going on and on indoctrinating today's youth with values that have no job outlet...Mondo doloroso!...I preferred to fade away...in solidarity with my students...who were marching against me. And then, there was the stupid incident turning round a piece of arse. I burned myself in effigy even before the administration filed their suit. (winking) And then I burned down the administration!

CLAUDETTE (they've put their knives down)

Who could blame you? Lately one meets so many victimised former professors on the city dump...confused, bemused, disabused. Not to hide things, I'm one myself!

GILBERT

It isn't true?

PRINCE

What luck! they'll teach me all sorts of things:

GILBERT ("gallant", coming closer to her)

And what was your chosen field, dear little lady?

CLAUDETTE

Dead languages.

GILBERT

Admirable! Which one, might I ask?

CLAUDETTE

All of 'em. There's nothing like a dead language! Alas I got so discouraged. Too many lazy students. Incapable of assimilating the structure of Hellenic beauty. At home at least, I knew how to impose dead languages with an iron fist. While he was eating, my husband had the right to speak in Aramaic. One fine day, he left me for the cleaning woman. Ooooh the dirty bitch! they threw me out! stole everything! I mean...I needed a breath of fresh air. So I began gipsying around, wherever my imagination led, monologuing in Persian or in Sanskrit depending on the phase of the moon. Soon I'll be celebrating twenty-five years of... temporary freedom! I've never regretted those years. Except now and then of course. What single woman has no regrets?...If you understand what I'm driving at. I am a woman as well...Gilbert Dupax! Aaaah I'll give you anything you want! Anything! Everything! You do want something from me, speak up!

GILBERT

I could use a bite to eat. Know where to find one?

CLAUDETTE

Oh my! Never have I seen such empty garbage cans!

GILBERT

It's the cats.

PRINCE

How's that?

GILBERT

They steal out of our garbage cans, eat our trash, want to marry our daughters! Ah, I'd pull that one's tail, all right! (which he does:)

PRINCE

OUCH-MEOW!

CLAUDETTE

Stop, some of my best friends are cats!

GILBERT

But it's such a relief, you can't imagine! There are so many people whose tails you want to pull...without being able to. If one can't at least pull the tail of a cat –

CLAUDETTE

But it's cruel!

GILBERT

My good lady, cats - since the beginning of the world - have given humanity such an exceptional example of cruelty, that it's a civic duty to torture them in return. Look at the cat in front of us. He'd scratch your eyes out and gobble you up, just for a lark!

CLAUDETTE

I know, I know but....he's my cat all the same. And if anyone tries to torture him...watch out...it'd better be me! (suddenly coquettish) You'll see, Gilly, that Claudie knows how to play with dirty little boys like you! (cackling, she pushes the Prince to the ground:)

GILBERT

Give him first a kick in the crutch! (which they both do)

PRINCE

AAH! AAH! They're catacidal maniacs! It's not a joke! HELP!

(They chase the Prince who frantically avoids them, spitting at them. Suddenly, he rears up and roars like a lion; they cower:)

CCCCCCCch-watchout! CCCChch oh boy yes I'll scratch and gobble you up! And when I become Prince again – I'll have you attached by the feet to the highest tree in Cat-Castle and oh, the pretty pair, swinging away like twin pendulums! Bing bong! all the live-long day! CHCHCHCHCHCH!

GILBERT ("objective")

Your cat makes a very bad impression. People might associate us with him. It could lower our image.

CLAUDETTE

Is that possible??!

GILBERT

Wouldn't it be more prudent to eat your cat? Once and for all? Before he eats us, if you see what I mean. Quick!! To table, dinner's served!!

CLAUDETTE (stupidly)

Wait...Wait...

GILBERT ("offended")

I hope M'lady isn't too much of a snob to eat a humble worker's dish?

CLAUDETTE

Not at all! What solitary lady hasn't eaten cat? On ancient parchments, there's many a proof that, in civilisations where we venerated cats the most, we 'et 'em the most! On the q.t. of course.

GILBERT (famished)

A good idea! Let's do what they did! In the open! Immediately!

CLAUDETTE

Wait, darling. How do we cook him, that's the problem.

(Discreetly the Prince tries to get away.)

The "cat cuisine" is so terribly diverse –

(Claudette firmly holds the Prince in place)

- since every part of pussy can be eaten! His paws for example! They don't look like much! But stuffed with his own innards, now there's a treat! We could of course down the whole cat raw and voilà: "Catburger tartar", a kind of layer cake, exquisite! Decorated with his whiskers and crowned with his slanting eyes, the cat tartar stares at you suspiciously while you're eating him. Exactly the way he's staring at us now!

(The Prince looks away!)

GILBERT

I'll kill him. That'll stop the staring! (draws his knife)

CLAUDETTE

No no no! He's my cat! And my recipe! I'm going to kill him. . while you get ready...

GILBERT

Ready for what?

CLAUDETTE ("sexy")

For the corrida! Macho! "Hombre"!

(She pirouettes flamenco style, releasing the rope for the first time. The Prince tries to flee but Gilbert grabs and brings him back to Claudette. As if he were a bull in a ring, she thrusts her knife at him; with feline grace, he twists to avoid it; Gilbert and Claudette find their knives planted in each other's stomachs.)

PRINCE

Olé!

CLAUDETTE (spasmodic)

Ooh...Gilbert...I'm so sorry.

GILBERT (spasmodic)

You stinkpot of dead languages! When I think that I put up with your stench and your God-awful mug...

CLAUDETTE

Oh that's not very nice...

GILBERT

...in the sole hope of eating your cat. (he dies)

CLAUDETTE (dying and weeping)

And now I have nothing at all. I don't even have the rope to hang me.

PRINCE

She's pathetic. She would've parboiled me! Drained me! Cut me into little bits and swallowed me!

PRINCE

And I'm sorry for her! It's not possible! Pity for that? Well, yes, I do. For the moment, she's all I've got.

CLAUDETTE

I've...no...rope...

PRINCE (going toward her)

OK OK blow your nose. Take back your rope. And me with it. I'll forget quickly enough that I loathe and despise you!! Cats don't stay on not-speaking terms for very long. That's our problem, I suppose. You can have me...Why not...Since I'm no longer a prince...never again.

(Suddenly, happily, Claudette and Gilbert jump up together...and by their movements and inflections, play the following scene as if they were only one person:)

THE TWO (removing his rope)

You? Never again a prince? I'm going to laugh.You're still a prince...and Charming at that...if one pokes around a bit...my little simp of a truffled ravioli!

PRINCE

Of a truffled...rav...It isn't...it can't be...

THE TWO MERLINS

It is! Merlin! Peekaboo! Get a load of Merlin!

PRINCE

Oh! My tutor!

THE MERLINS

And learned egghead...hid 'neath the skirts of a lethal little lady...who was hiding someone else, who was hiding someone else, who was covering someone else! Don't trust appearances, Charming! You've got to beware of people from time to time...not too often though. Like everyone else, you need everyone else! Passionately! There we touch upon the paradox of "is it friend or enemy"? "Is it face or mirror?" "Is that me?" Dissertation on human relationships...on a certain level.

PRINCE

Wonderful! Which?

THE MERLINS

I dunno. What do you take me for? God or something? If I were, would I've permitted you to expose yourself in the form of a cat? No more questions! Now you're ready to find your own answers, if answers there are. My role is over. Having finally atoned for the very bad education I gave you, I'm allowed to go away, far, very far! Up there in the land of peace, where I'll wink at you now and again...twinkles mid the billion stars glittering on the Milky Way. As for you...

PRINCE

Me?

(Merlin disappears)

A YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE (off)

Prince Charming!...Prince Charming...Where are you?

PRINCE

I'm being paged?

VOICE

Charming! Yoo hoo!

PRINCE

But...it's the Princess! The real one! It's... (singing) Valerie!

(ACT 2)

(Valerie enters, radiant in the moonlight)

VALERIE

Full moon! Stars by the bushel! Noble Prince! Charming! Come back to me!
To a sleepwalking princess! Her steps guided by love! Love that never leads one
astray! Love that's brought me to this...horribly seedy spot, my word. Where I'll sniff you
out! Even, if need be, by plunging into the depths of garbage!

PRINCE

This romantic moment I'll stretch out a bit, just to enjoy it!

VALERIE

It's true that my instincts have taken me to other spots...lots...the result: blisters...
(takes off her shoes...) exhaustion...and...I'm fed up! I'll never find him!

PRINCE

Refound, dearest dear! (bounding over, licking her, singing) Valerie! Here's the Prince
you love! Meeeow!

VALERIE (violently sneezes)

Ugh a cat! And I'm allergic to the little monsters! Mangy brute! they make me break out!
(throws one of her shoes at him) You get the Hell away from me!

PRINCE

Another trial concocted to further strengthen my moral fibre? Thanks, Thou up there.

VALERIE

Look at that cat! The rest of us are moving heaven and earth to find Prince Charming...!
And it scratches its ear. Yuk! How repulsive. Even if I found cats adorable – which is not
the case! – this one's particularly deplorable! Yuk you cat –

PRINCE

Oh shut up!! I am fond of you, Val, but I've had a hard day!

VALERIE

When I think of the marvelous relationships one can enjoy with so many fabulous people... whom one will never meet...to waste a single second baby-talking to a cat? My mother! My own mother! Great sovereign! Driven mad by a stupid cat!

(Enter the Queen, demented, followed by Gaston:)

QUEEN

Police! Politicians! All my heavies! For Chrissakes call the cops! What are you waiting for, Mr. Prime Minister? Round everybody up and give them a good scolding! They've got to cherchez the cat! On all the roofs! See to it that the populace produces a paper proving his darling pussy has lived with him for at least six months! If not! Ha, no pity for the furry beasts! They all get deported! Herded together and sorted! Charming won't escape me! For the Siamese race, there'll be no saving grace, since we ain't gonna leave a single trace! What are you gaping at me for, stupid? Get going now and give the police force an activating goose!

GASTON

Why me, what do I care about cats you old crone? Why always me that has to do your dirty work

QUEEN

Why? Why? Why do you think I made you prime minister ? For your silly little cock?

GASTON (confused)

Uh...wasn't it that?

VALERIE (as Gaston disappears)

If you'll permit to have a say –

QUEEN

NAW!

VALERIE

Mother come to your senses! You distort everything, neglect everything! For Heavens sakes, pay a little attention to me!

QUEEN (moved)

Oh! My daughter!

VALERIE (moved)

Mama!

QUEEN (slyly)

Take away Princess Valerie's bodyguard. I need them myself to track down cats! (seeing a cat) Oh tabby tabby, another of those little monsters! (whipping a raw roast beef out from under her cape) Come to me so I can get a good look! Are you Charming? Quick! A cat-trap! A cat swatter! A club! (exits)

VALERIE

At three in the morning I leave the palace all alone and nobody even notices!! I'm unhappy! What's to become of me?

PRINCE

Oi vas mir, Valerie: you're on the threshold of a new life! A life of drinking water, breathing freely, licking your fur and chasing rats... (licking himself) improving your profile...

VALERIE

And he licks his fur...this...rather serene cat. Could he be a symbol of a sort of inner void? Then perhaps he does serve a purpose! To give me one tranquil moment where I can stop and think. Me...who so sought peace of mind by throwing myself into the arms of this prince Charming...Did this prince bring me peace? Disappearing like that? Perhaps he was compromised in some sordid business?

PRINCE

No, no!

VALERIE

Who needs that, I don't! Be honest, Valerie. Do I love him really? Or was it the mere fact of having drunk too much that night at Cat-Castle that muddled my thoughts...to the point of being enchanted by a man whom, before, I'd found a bit of a creep. What's he like in bed? I'm pretty demanding on that score! My God, it's clear to me! I don't love that creep! At all!

PRINCE

That's pretty clear!

VALERIE

But I'll marry him anyway!

PRINCE

NOOOO!

VALERIE

Yes! I gave him my word and the word of a princess is irrevocable!! I'd be terrified...that this prince would find some ghastly way of getting even! Creeps like that, you never know!

PRINCE

.....!

VALERIE

So I'll marry him! And he'll get what's expected – but my way of course! It is true. Cats do serve a purpose. They create a void. (putting her shoes back on) Oh ho ho. Gaston Pflugg! What if I stole him from my mother...? (chuckling) It wouldn't be the first time!
(She leaves.)

PRINCE

Actually...she's rather less nice than I thought!

QUEEN (bursting in)

A club! A cat basher!

(Running off as Valentine – ex Gaston-Gustave-Gilbert prances in:)

My kingdom for a faggot!

VALENTINE

Speaking! Oooh a cat! I loooooove cats! You're mine!
(Indoor lighting.)

5. AT VALENTINE'S

(The Prince enters...sniffing, spitting a bit: a cat at odds with an unfamiliar place.)

VALENTINE

Yes, sniff, sniff. It's your new domicile! your new life!...with meeee! Valentine Pluff! Interior decorator. I loooove cats! Kiss me, you fool!

PRINCE

(averting his head)

Yuk, that smell of sugared lime!

VALENTINE

If you didn't wish to share my existence, why did you cruise me on a disreputable street?

PRINCE

I was deeeeeesperate.

VALENTINE

Anyway, I'm going to call you "Sado-Maso"!

PRINCE

Sado – Mama mia!

VALENTINE

Just to make me giggle every time I look at you! Oh hahahaha you're so silly. And what's life if you can't shriek with laughter till the tears gush down your cheeks ... 'specially after your last lover's slammed the door on you...and you're alone again. Oh pish-tosh I don't care! I have my own little personality – incisive! demanding! I'm a bloody cow! And you can take it or – and most people have left it! So you're in luck! I have room for you at the moment...all alone...we can do what we like...Eh?

PRINCE (spitting)

CHCHCHCHCH.

VALENTINE

Hm not exactly the friendliest of cats. Worse: he stinks. Oh! I'll run him a bath.

PRINCE

A buh-buh-buh???

VALENTINE

Yes! Just for you! A bubbly foam of lime-scented suds! Whipped right up to the ceiling! After which a dip in my own personal insecticide. Then it's "Operation Talcum Powder"!

(Backing away, the Prince has managed to find an exit:)

Bravo! He's found the bathroom all by himself!

(Valentine dashes off after him.)

The Prince jumps back onstage in a very bad mood. A pretty ribbon has been twined in his hair.

Valentine follows...)

VALENTINE

Oh! what if I stuff you into my new lavender-dot shorts! You'd look so smart!

PRINCE

(preparing his nails:)

Oh! And what if I sharpened my claws on your mug! You're such a fart!

VALENTINE

Oh ho ho ho! We do enjoy each other's company!...And, once wrung run through the wash, you're not so bad! Of course, tomorrow, I'll post notices all over the neighbourhood that I've found you. Don't think I'm tired of you already, but you probably belong to a poor little six-year-old as sweet as I!

PRINCE

This is sweet?

VALENTINE

Who cry-cry-cries as I would've bawled my head off at that age!
(Suddenly he grabs the Prince in his arms.
Really upset:)

Looooove me!!

PRINCE

He's the last straw! Gad, doesn't he see that he's not my type!
(held in Valentine's vise-like grip:)

Ok, get it over with...why not? I'll close my eyes!
(Delicately, Valentine scratches him
under the chin:)

Hmm...is that sado-masochism? Whaddya know! Not bad! Purrpurrpurr..

VALENTINE

Oh yes, you are Cat! Cat! Cat! With you around, I feel like a little boy again! Stepping out of my bath...six years old, naked, clean, my pussy cat always nearby. Life was so simple. At seven...oh my cat!...you were run over by a wicked tram. And my horrible father beat up my mother. And she let him do it! And my sister – whose tushy I so loved to touchy – told my cousin – who questioned my virility in front of the whole family. So "Childe Valentine" became "Churlish Valentine", a real bitch! Like my mother should've been with my ghastly father! But...I'm still me! Me! Baby, boy, bitch...nobody's ever loved me...

PRINCE

SOS Dr. Cat? I'm getting used to it.
(He "licks" Valentine.)

My little boy...your big fat tomcat loves you. I love the whole damned world. Purrpurr.

VALENTINE

Oh! You love me! Just a little?

PRINCE

Purrpurrpurrpurr yes. You're a trifle less repugnant than I thought. OK? Purrpurr.

VALENTINE

Oh! (ingenuously) Oh "Sado-Maso " ...I don't like that name.

PRINCE

If you must know, neither do I.

VALENTINE

I'm going to call you...Prince. You are a charming prince. The one we're all looking for. You listen to us. You understand us.

PRINCE

That's good. Now give me a little scratch on the tummy.

(Valentine tries to comply;
mechanically the Prince whacks
his hand away several times:)

The tummy I said!! Good, can we take a nap now? C'mon, my little fellow, it's Snooze-Land, under the radiant stars of childhood. C'mon...

(They exit together.

Knocking at the door!

Morning light.

Valentine returns.)

VALENTINE (to the Prince, off)

Stay hidden, Prince. Don't move. (to the audience)

Sssh!!

(Valentine lets in a woman, face
covered by a black veil: the Queen.)

QUEEN (to the audience)

Sssh!! (severely) This is Mr. Pluff's residence, I presume?

VALENTINE

Yes. And you?

QUEEN

I am a widow. Who saw a notice you'd put up...about a stray cat found.

(During the following, with the artlessness
of a cat, the Prince comes and goes
several times, unnoticed by the Queen:)

VALENTINE

Alas!

QUEEN

You do have a cat? Or am I wasting my time?

VALENTINE

That's to say...do you want one? I'm awfully fond of the one I've got!

QUEEN

A!! actually, you see. My little boy has lost his cat.

VALENTINE

Ooooh...

QUEEN

Therefore! he's lost his mind.

VALENTINE

Aaaah...

QUEEN

He's inconsolable! He's in agony! I've got to give him back his cat! Or else! My God my God my God – don't make me think of it!!

VALENTINE

Oh bring him in! Oh the poor poor boy!

QUEEN

NO!! He – he's playing on the street! having such fun!! He won't come in!! He's too shy!! And overjoyed!! And in dreadful agony!! And he's playing, damn it!

VALENTINE (has become suspicious)

And the cat?

QUEEN

Which cat?

VALENTINE

Yours. What's it like?

QUEEN

What do you mean "what"? It's exactly like yours – seeing as yours is mine! On top of which – filthy little monsters, they all look alike!

VALENTINE

Ah. There you've touched upon a real problem. When they who lose theirs burst into the homes of those who've found theirs – oft they leave with those who aren't theirs. And just 'cause we all love cats so much we want to keep 'em all! Cats are marvelous, aren't they?

QUEEN

Ah...that...

VALENTINE (cutting)

And people are pure shit. So – to find out what you're made of: describe your cat. Accurately. The colour of his eyes! The shape of his tail! Proof!

QUEEN

Buh he's like... (seeing the Prince who, curious, has taken a few steps toward her:) Pussy!

VALENTINE

Prince!

QUEEN

Ah! Prince...? (hums:) "The shot in the spot!"

PRINCE (sniffs her)

Queen Clothilde!!

(he spits in her face!)

QUEEN (calling)

GASTON! GASTON!

(Gaston bursts in. But – if he's played by the "Valentine" actor – he can't as he's already on stage. If this is the case: An uneasy moment: ...then sudden entry of the actress who plays "Veronika-Valerie" – stuffing herself into Gaston's costume to save the situation:)

GASTON 2

Yep yep.

QUEEN

The pistol!

GASTON 2 (draws the gun)

Yep yep.

QUEEN

Good show, Charming. But no one escapes his destiny. Charming... checkmate!
Gaston Pflugg!

GASTON 2

Yep yep.

QUEEN

Do your duty.

GASTON 2

Yep yep.

VALENTINE

No! No! You can't shoot a cat!

(With a pirouette, he places himself
between Gaston and the Prince:)

Kill me instead!

GASTON 2

Yep yep.

(He shoots Valentine who falls. Like a cat terrified by
noise, the Prince leaps off stage. At the same time:)

QUEEN (to Gaston)

Imbecile!!

GASTON 2

Yep yep.

QUEEN

Do you always do what people tell you to?

GASTON 2

Yep yep.

QUEEN

Oh shut up Gaston Pflugg, you're getting on my nerves!

GASTON 2

Yep yep.

QUEEN

Let's take a powder! But the cat? Tough titty! We're up to the neck as it is!

GASTON 2

Yep-yep-yep.

(They rapidly leave. Celestial lighting and music: the Prince reappears...looks at Valentine, dying...)

PRINCE

Oh...

VALENTINE

I die...for my prince...

PRINCE

He offered his life...to save mine! Therefore I have turned back into a man!

VALENTINE

(crestfallen)

But who are you, sir? Where's my cat?

PRINCE

(to the audience)

I am his cat. But the Cat has two heads. One belonged to Prince Charming, transformed – till someone offered to die for him – into a feline for political reasons too complicated to ruin a goner's last good bit...and which I've never really understood myself...

VALENTINE

Ooooh...

(He goes stiff.)

PRINCE

Pax domini, rest in peace. Goodness, a tear! A real man's tear! I must be a man!

(Knocking at the door)

OK man, get your man's legs churning and – scram!

(Veronika bursts in; she and the Prince collide. As he flees:)

VERONIKA (still "convalescing:)

OOUUCHII You've got some nerve, you do...good, well...

(gaily)

Hello hello! I've come about the notice! that I saw at the bakery shop! About the cat! With military epaulets! Who's surely my cat! Whom I lost! Epaulet! Where are you?!!

(VALENTINE very weakly groans...
and closes his eyes again... Veronika
can hardly believe it:)

Oh! A corpse!! Terribly sorry to bother you, Mister Corpse but...I've come about
the cat! Cats are important!! Where is mine?

VALENTINE (weakly)

I love cats...

VERONIKA

Well so do I!

VALENTINE (reopens his eyes)

She's so beautiful! Ooooooh!

VERONIKA

He's so handsome! Ouch!

(Valentine's head falls back again...)

Are you under the weather, sir?

VALENTINE (gallantly)

It's nothing. A villain shot me...

VERONIKA

Ooooooh! something different!! Finally!! Ooooh!!

VALENTINE

They wanted to kill the cat !

VERONIKA

Scum of the earth!! More and more different!! Ooooh!!

VALENTINE

So I put myself in the place of the cat.

VERONIKA

Exactly the thing to do!

VALENTINE
(collapses)

Now I'm going to die.

VERONIKA

Come come come, not at all! Stiff upper lip! I know a very good hospital – just five
minutes away on foot. At this hospital – where I was recently sliced into with the
obvious results –

(just barely manages a graceful curtsy)
 they'll sew you up the way you were before! Come on, lean on me! Don't be shy! Cat lovers have to help each other out.

(They manage to lugubriously leave together, even changing the set if the director is sadistic.)

7. THE END OF THE PLAY

(The Prince enters, followed by the Queen.)

QUEEN

Now you know everything! You've got to marry my daughter! You've got to marry Princess Valerie! I want it!

PRINCE

There's where you lose me! All your wicked plots to prevent this marriage! And now that I don't want it anymore –

QUEEN

I do! Because I live in the present! When a gimmick doesn't work, I say: "Off with its head!" Then I dream up another! What matters today is that rumours about you and me are running rife! A Queen's solution: "Royal Marriage with all the trimmings" between two higgledy-piggledy heir apparents to the throne – you and Valerie to be exact – and peace furls over the land like a turtledove.

PRINCE

But I don't love her anymore!!

QUEEN

A prince has to marry the girl who inspires his disgust: if not how do you expect the common man to accept the hag staring him in the face over the breakfast table? Hey, the common man! I'll marry one of them myself! Gaston! GASTON!

(Gaston enters, shamefaced)

You're mine!

(Valerie enters, pulling down her skirt.)

PRINCE (to the audience)

Knowing that duty comes before sentiment, I accepted the "Double Marriage of the Century"...aimed at monopolising the headlines, at the same time resolving all economical, political and pathological conflicts. Our eight hands joined in the traditional "Multiple Turnpikes Marital Fingers", we two touching young couples descended into the delirious crowd – who gave vent to their enthusiasm by throwing rotten eggs at us and pipe bombs.

QUEEN (running away at the sound of rioting and bombs)

Whaddya know, that doesn't work either?

VALERIE (running)

Ingrates!! Mama!!

PRINCE (to the audience)

Thus the nobility of two principalities displaced their arses in the direction of the exit sign – heading to a country more worthy! A true democracy! We fledeth to (hums the Marseillaise) France, you know.

(The Queen and Valerie – without their jewelry – and Gaston return)

And the land of the rights of man welcomed us, like so many political exiles before, lending us, with its mythical generosity, a shack in the suburbs, closed in by a cement wall, with, for good measure, a heavily armed guard to protect us –

VALERIE

To terrify us! I'm still a human being damn it! Must I end my days in this heap of shit shit and shit!?

QUEEN

Oh Valerie shut up! You'd think you'd forgotten you were a princess or something! You want a paste in the kisser!?! Here take one –

GASTON

Fuck off you two monumental bitches how the fuck did I wind up with you two? There's isn't even room enough to do a proper jogging! We're in France aren't we? Can't we mail-order a portable swimming pool from the Galeries Lafayette?

QUEEN

Paid with what, precious? Who among the four of us can afford stamps for the return envelope?

PRINCE

Oh Veronika! Oh Valentine!

VALERIE

"Oh Veronika"!!

GASTON

"Oh Valentine"!!

PRINCE

Ah when I was a cat...

VALERIE

You still are a cat, my love – on a certain level. Gaston, how about our usual evening exercise...improper jogging...the cement...by moonlight...!

GASTON

Or-a-little-more you-little-whore...! (They jog off...)

PRINCE

And you put up with it!

QUEEN

On the contrary! My mind is in the midst of a vast reorganisation!! We are going to leave this hole ! Regain our true place among the elite! Recuperate the royal jewels! Suck up to bankers! Reinvest! You'll see, Charming! Clothilde will wear her crown again!

PRINCE

I dunno, Mom-in-law. Sounds like a lot of work.

QUEEN

Between us, I adore complications!

PRINCE

I don't! Let's end our lives in peace, eh?

QUEEN

I say yes to peace! To inertia never! All right, the double marriage was a disaster! I admit it! My right to a mistake! This time, I'm dreaming up...a double divorce! Me and Gaston! You and Valerie! They'll write about us again in the scandal sheets!

PRINCE

Not for very long!

QUEEN

That's where you're wrong! After the double divorce, it's another double marriage – but this time a trendy one! Valerie and Gaston – finally united, that I always dreamed of!

PRINCE

And the other couple?

But you and me. Of course.

QUEEN

Veronika!!

PRINCE (falls to his knees)

You and me!

QUEEN

Valentine!!

PRINCE

You and me!

QUEEN

MEOW!!

PRINCE (turns into a cat)

(He tries to get away – she chases him –)

QUEEN

Ah no! Not like that! It's just too easy! Take on a few responsibilities for a change!
(They're both gone.

At Veronika's. Valentine and Veronika enter.
She tries to entice him into bed:)

VERONIKA

Ah Valentine my newly-wed husband!...Come...!

VALENTINE (subtly resisting)

...Ah Veronika my tendrest sweet! You're so...different!

VERONIKA

Oooh! Why should I be...different...to you?

VALENTINE

Because you love me!

VERONIKA

It's hard not to...sweetly tender as you are! But come! Could it be...that you're not as happy with your own Veronika...as you pretend to be?

VALENTINE

No...It's just that...like all couples...we need...and don't yet have!...something for our ultimate fulfilment!

VERONIKA

Ah haha! An eensy-weensy little something? You're thinking about it already

VALENTINE

How can one not help thinking...with you so near...of...

VERONIKA and VALENTINE

Our own little cat!!

(The Prince enters)

VERONIKA and VALENTINE

Why it's a cat.

PRINCE

Through forests and winding rivers...the faithful cat...

VERONIKA

But wait...it's Epaulet!

VALENTINE

Prince!!

PRINCE

...courageously combating a million dangers to refind the cherished homestead of his beloved family...

VERONIKA (hitting him)

Take that!

PRINCE

Meow!

VERONIKA

That'll teach you to run away! Take that!

PRINCE

Meow!

VALENTINE

Veronika, that's enough! (He gets into bed. Macho:) Bring that cat to bed with us!
(not so macho) I looove cats!

VERONIKA

Well so do I of course!

(The three are in bed:)

PRINCE

(to the audience)

Thus the fairy tale ends with that luxurious calm of Sunday morning sleeping-in we so
much loved as children...and which adult life certainly doesn't much offer!

(The Aunt bursts in:)

AUNT

Veronika! Valentine! Still in bed?! Ah newly-weds! Ooh you found your cat,
Veronika! This time, you mustn't let him out for three days. Otherwise he'll get lost
again!

PRINCE

(in happy agreement)

Meow...

End of CAT AS CAT CAN

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