

Beat Furrer a short play by Eddie Kohler

Cast

JONNA, TIM in their twenties
BEAT FURRER mid-fifties or older

Notes: “Beat Furrer” is a Swiss male name. I picture Jonna as black.

The poem that ends the play should not all be spoken by the characters in unison; the director may distribute the lines as she sees fit. I’ve used different typefaces to show one possible distribution: roman would be spoken by Tim alone, *italic* by Jonna, **bold** by both. The poem should be read lightly, charmingly, and without gravity.

The first production was on November 12–14, 1998 as part of MIT Dramashop’s evening of student-written, student-directed one act plays.

JONNA	Tara V. Perry
TIM	Jesse Barnes
BEAT FURRER	Premraj Janardanan
DIRECTOR	Rony Kubat
STAGE MANAGER	Julie Park
SET DESIGNER	Laura McGrath Moulton
LIGHT DESIGNER	Chris McEniry
COSTUME DESIGNER	Mary Tsien

Acknowledgements: Clarke Kohler, Julie Park, Tara V. Perry, Janet Sonenberg, and Andrea Zengion had important influence on the script.



(A side street in a city. A stoop. JONNA is sitting on the stoop. Pause.

Offstage we hear BEAT FURRER's inline skates used timidly and badly: mechanical, no gliding. After a while, BEAT FURRER enters stage left and clumsily crosses the stage; JONNA watches. He slowly exits stage right. Enter TIM on the stoop.)

TIM: Hey.

JONNA: Hello.

TIM: What are you doing up so early?

JONNA: You know—nothing.

TIM: (*touching her*) Nothing? Really? Not thinking? Not a little breathing even? Nothing?

JONNA: Oh fuck off. I wake up this early a lot.

TIM: I know. Too early. Why, is the question.

JONNA: Oh, so I have to have a reason?

TIM: Just a question.

JONNA: Not a very good one.

How was your bike ride?

TIM: Oh, great—I couldn't stop, almost. My legs just disappeared, like they were part of some machine, you know?

No one was around. Every path was empty. That was great, it's just what I wanted, but scary too—like what if some *heroin addict* knocked over my bike, what would I do? I mean everything—even the trees were scary. The branches were black robot arms going for my head! I mean, I don't get that scared much any more. I mean—

Anyway. It made me bike faster. By the end, I was going so fast it stopped looking real.—

Just shapes going by on either side, so quick you couldn't tell what they were. And the light, you know—

But yeah. It was great.

JONNA: So—so why'd you go?

TIM: "Oh, so I have to have a reason?"—I dunno.

JONNA: Did you stop anywhere?

TIM: Nope.

JONNA: See anyone?

TIM: No—well, yeah, one old woman. A jogger. In a cute pink jumpsuit. Even

she frightened me!—I guess she could've been a *heroin addict* in disguise.

JONNA: Brave woman! I bet you started talking to her.

TIM: No.

JONNA: Hm.

TIM: I mean, I would've, but she might've thought I was a mugger or something—

JONNA: So did you see anything nice?

TIM: No.

JONNA: Look at the river?

TIM: Not really. There isn't much to—

JONNA: Look at the sky?

TIM: Yes. Constantly. It was, *dark*. What are you talking about.

JONNA: I'm talking about you going on a two-hour bike ride for no reason at midnight and not seeing a damn thing.

I went for a walk after you left. A good, long, walk. And at least I looked at the sky.

The moon was still up and there was this—mist—like ice crystals in the air. You could taste how dark it was. Everything was black and sparkling. I felt the night settle on my skin and burrow in, to lay some eggs—

TIM: Cool. You win.

(*to the audience*) She's wrong: I know what it looked like. I can tell *myself*; and, okay, I can tell you: I remember the clouds. They were low in the sky, scraping the buildings, and lit up blue-white. They broke up the sky—made it closer—warmer, softer, like it was *mine*. I pretended the bike chain grinding was the noise of cloud shuffling overhead. Bicycle-powered cloud! Now why can't I tell *her*.

JONNA: (*to the audience*) I'm going to say something. Fuck. What am I going to say.

(*to TIM*) Ask me why I went for a walk.

TIM: What, last night?

Why should I, that's "not a very good question."

JONNA: Tim.

TIM: All right; why'd you go for a walk?

JONNA: Because—

(*to the audience*) I can't say it. It's an avalanche, and when I open my mouth it's gonna come out and I will believe it, and now I know what it is—oh, it's not out yet and all I want to do is stop it, keep my mouth shut and stop it,

but if I do I'll die—oh God, *stop me!*— —no—*help me keep going*—
(to TIM) Because I needed to think. And I thought, this is it, Tim. This is the end. I want you to leave. I want you to get the hell out. I want to see the back of your head and know it's the last time.

(*Far offstage right we hear BEAT FURRER's inline skates approaching.*)

TIM: You—

JONNA: That's what I thought.

TIM: Those night-eggs hatch some nasty-ass shit.

JONNA: Oh *fuck off!* I can't take this any more, it make me sick. I can't look at you any more. *I can't.* Your smell follows me around and I can't think, I don't know who I am any more. I mean the person I used to be would have dumped you *years* ago.

TIM: We've only been going out for six months.

(*to the audience*) What the fuck am I saying!!

JONNA: (*overlapping*) *Give me a fucking break, you toilet paper!* I want to fucking cut your face! Who *are* you? You've destroyed me and I don't even know who you are, you're like an empty space, empty or—

(BEAT FURRER *enters stage right and crosses the stage as before. He smiles at JONNA and TIM; eventually he exits stage left. We hear his inline skates retreating under the dialogue.*)

JONNA: (*to the audience*) Empty or inhuman. A television. A machine.

Oh someone tell me what's happening.

TIM: *Are you done?!*

Are you done cutting me apart? Are you done killing me? Can we talk now? I mean, holy fucking Christ, Jonna, what are you talking about? Nothing you've said this morning makes sense! I mean—

JONNA: (*overlapping*) Do you want me to say it *again*?

TIM: *No!* No, I mean—I mean what should I do now? What should I say? What do you want? *Help me!*

JONNA: *What?* (*to the audience*) Let me translate for you—

TIM: (*interrupting*) No, that's all right, let me. (*to the audience*) I remember the first time I saw her, at a party in a crowded room on Main Street. She was sitting down on a couch, and the light that made everyone else look sick folded over her like soft felt, and she smiled an island of peace and I fell in love. Who was that? Or who is this? And how can I get her back? I can't do it alone, so help me.

(to JONNA, *quieter*) What?

JONNA: *Say something, you asshole!*

TIM: What the fuck can I say? I don't even know what the fuck the problem is!

(to the audience) I don't understand. Oh, God, I don't understand what's happening. Tell me what's happening. I'm crying. I'm crying. Oh God.

JONNA: (to the audience) What is the problem? That every morning I wake up and see bruises that aren't there? That I cry on street corners when I'm walking alone? My self is falling apart, that's the problem; of course he doesn't fucking know. Now do I have to tell him?

(to TIM) —You're crying—

TIM: I'm crying. Of course I'm fucking crying. You're ripping me apart. Oh God, I hate this, I hate this so much. What's happening? Did I hurt you? What did I do?

JONNA: When I first hooked up with you, it was right after Tony and—remember?—I said something, and you laughed cause it was cheesy. I said: "I'm sick of being hurt."

Now, I'm sick of—something else. Of being hurt *by you*. The hurt you cause is so specific I can place it in my body (*her gut*), and every day you push it a little bit more, harder and harder, until I'm bent over with pain and sickness. It exhausts me. I'm tired of it. I'm just tired.

(to the audience) I'm so tired I want to run to you and sink into your chest and let my hands get lost in yours, and have sex and go to sleep and do the same thing tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. And if I did that would I realize one day that I was no longer alive?

TIM: You're tired? You want to break up because you're *tired*? I hit you in the stomach every day? What are you talking about? I love you. I've never hit you in my life. And if you're tired, you fucking go to *sleep*. Oh fuck—I mean—

I mean what *happened*? I don't understand. You're talking and talking and your words come out and I don't know what they mean. Stop it, just stop it. Something must have happened. Tell me what happened. *What?*

JONNA: What happened. Fine.

Last night, God, I was in love with you. We watched TV, we bitched and played, and I loved you like nothing on this earth. And then the news came on at ten and you got quiet, and when you talked it was at the TV, not at me; and then I did the dishes and you watched TV; and then I came back and started playing with your hair. And you didn't look at me. And you didn't say anything.

And then at midnight you suddenly stand up like you've been shot and announce your fucking bike ride. And I say "when you gonna be back?" and you say "dunno" and out you go, the love of my life. I mean, what's wrong with *me*?

We've known each other a year and still three-quarters of the time I don't know what you're thinking. It's like we're under water: I can see you, but when I scream it's swallowed by the sea; and all I hear is myself drowning. We can't even have a conversation, how can we be in love?

(*Far offstage left we hear BEAT FURRER's inline skates approaching.*)

TIM: The first woman I slept with said afterwards "What are you thinking?" And I said "nothing", which was true. But she said it so many times that eventually it was a lie: I was thinking something: I was thinking "Shut up and get the fuck away from me." — That wasn't what I wanted to say. Fuck. Fuck.

That's not what I mean. I mean — I mean —

(*to the audience*) I mean *Fuck the English language!*

(*to JONNA*) What I mean is, I wish —

(*BEAT FURRER enters stage left.*)

BEAT FURRER: (*passing them*) Back again!

(*They wait until he exits stage right.*)

TIM: (*calmer*) Last night, I don't know what it was, something on the news or something you said, but I just got depressed. That must happen to you, it must. When everything good is sucked out of the air. And I wanted to say something, I wanted to talk to you, but anything I said would have come out wrong, and the more I sat there, under pressure, the more I wanted to explode or something. What could I do? I could go for a bike ride: scream inside my head for a couple miles and come back feeling — human. That's what I did.

I couldn't talk to you, I'm sorry, but I wished you were riding your bike with me. Just riding and breathing and listening to the clouds.

JONNA: Well. Riding together. That might've been nice. Why the fuck didn't you *ask*?

TIM: Oh Jesus Christ, I —

JONNA: (*overlapping*) No. No. No. I'm glad I didn't ride my bike with you. Wanna know why?

Because that whole ride, I would be *staring* at you. Staring *through* you. Needing you to look at me for one tenth of a second — to say something. And that whole ride you would be looking straight ahead. Or maybe you'd turn

once and point at some old pink jogger and laugh, and I would laugh too but nearly throw up, because I want you to look at *me*. I want you to say “*I love you! You beautiful woman!* I love your breasts and your hips and your face and the curve of your stomach, and I need you like I need food! Let’s fuck, now, by the river!”

TIM: Oh God—I mean—that would’ve been great, but— (*to the audience*) Oh Jesus shut *up!*—

(*to JONNA*) But I *do* love you. All of you. You’re beautiful, and I love every part of your body, and—*you*. You know that already.

JONNA: Do I? *Do I?*!

TIM: I thought you did. It’s true. Do you want me to say it again?

(*to the audience*) Oh God, “I love you”, it sounds so small. I have to say something huge, something that overwhelms us and crushes this bullshit to dust that we watch blow away, but I just can’t find—there’s nothing else to say!—

(*to JONNA*) I love you. You know that. What do you want? What do you want *now*? Isn’t that enough?

JONNA: No.

No. I want you to need to talk to me. I don’t want your love, I want to be your lover, someone you can’t just sit in the same room with because they make you want to *do* something.

You just switch off, Tim. It happens all the time. You stop existing, like someone cut the wires, and your face goes slack and dark, and you are so far away that I can’t take it. I’m sorry. I’m weak. (*to the audience*) I’m—

(*to TIM*) No, it’s worse than that, because it’s *all* the fucking time. When you’re happy, too, you sit and smile at me like that’s enough, like sharing air is enough to keep us together, but it’s not, Tim. I need something else. I need you. And you are not in that silence. It frightens me. Nothing is real, and it’s breaking me apart.

TIM: But—I am there, I’m always there—

JONNA: No you’re not. How could you be? When you don’t say anything for hours and then you don’t tell me why? When shadows pass over your face that I can’t read? When you get depressed, you leave! You don’t trust me! How can I trust you?

TIM: Oh God.

What *I* want is—to *be* with you. To be. With you. You know? In the rest of my life, everything matters, everything has repercussions. Everything I say, I’m like did he hear me, or did that piss her off, or not, and does she like me,

and what do I say next, and bullshit, bullshit, bullshit. Jonna, I'm terrified. Everyone else seems to move through life so easily, but I care so much it's impossible, it hurts. And what I need more than anything is to shut off. To be comfortable. To not think. I can't do that with anyone except for you, because *I trust you*. Because I have since the day we met. Because you are magical.

When I shut off around you, I'm saying "I trust you." And you're hearing "I don't think you exist."—What can I do? I get depressed and I shut up and it has nothing to do with you. Or it does, and I don't want you to know that. So I leave, I have to. But it doesn't matter, because *I will always come back*.

JONNA: —I can't believe that.

TIM: *It's true.*

JONNA: (*to the audience*) "It's true." It's so simple and wonderful. "It's true."

Then why is my body screaming No? Am I too tired to hear the truth? Or am I right?

Oh God, it doesn't make any difference.

TIM: (*to the audience*) That was so hard to say. I feel empty and sick, like my guts have fused together, and I don't even know if it was enough. And if it wasn't, what do I do? What can I possibly do?

JONNA: (*to TIM*) Tim.

I believe you. I'm crying. But it doesn't make any difference. I have to listen to myself.

TIM: (*grabbing her*) *No. Listen to me.*

JONNA: *Please don't touch me.*

TIM: (*pulling back*) Oh my God. What—

JONNA: Oh God. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I can't take this.

TIM: No—don't—I mean—I—

(*Pause*)

JONNA: I love you. But—

TIM: But we're fucked.

(*Pause*)

JONNA: But it's too late.

It's late in the day, Tim—

TIM: It's only seven a.m.— (*to the audience*) oh God—

JONNA: *Will you listen to me!*

It's late in the day; we love each other, or we don't; who knows? But I'm tired. I'm hurt. And you can't put me back together, because you didn't mean it, but you took me apart.

I need something you can't give. I'd love to believe we could work it out, but I'm not sixteen any more.

TIM: It can't be too late.

JONNA: Why not? Shit happens. *(to the audience)* Doesn't it?

TIM: It can't be too late, it can't. I love you, and I know you love me, and I don't know what that means, but it's true. If you leave me I don't believe in the world any more. I can't save us because I don't know how, but somewhere else, someone must know. I still believe in the world. *Someone must know what to do!*

(Far offstage right we hear BEAT FURRER's inline skates approaching. A long moment of tension.)

BEAT FURRER *enters stage right, breathing harder than before. He smiles at TIM and JONNA. Suddenly, after he passes them:*)

TIM: *(to BEAT FURRER)* Hey excuse me!—Hey!!

(Startled, BEAT FURRER loudly falls. TIM and JONNA help him up.)

TIM: Oh my God, I'm so sorry, sir, are you all right?

BEAT FURRER: Don't worry about it, don't worry about it, I'm fine. Pretty tough for an old man!

(Finally standing, he looks at TIM) So who the hell are you?

TIM: I just want to ask you a question.

BEAT FURRER: *A question!* For me to answer?

TIM: Yes.

BEAT FURRER: Oh go ahead, I love surveys. Makes me feel like part of the system.

TIM: Well, it's not a survey, it's....

Okay.

When you love someone, but there's something wrong. Something terrible, something awful, like you both want to be in love, but there's something in the way, something small that's poisoned everything. Like you aren't paying attention to them, but you are, they just can't understand that, or they need a different kind of attention, but they can't ask for what they need, I don't know why, but—but you—But the person might not be able to change that part of him, even though he'd like to, cause he loves her. And she can't change either, or she doesn't think she can. And he's willing to try, but she wants to leave *now*, and that would kill him. And—anyway.

So what should they do? Should she stay and try to get used to him? Or should he let her go, then try and change himself and win her back? Or is this the end? Or—what?

(Pause)

BEAT FURRER: Okay. Let me tell you a story. This story is about me. (*to the audience*) I'm Beat Furrer.

(*to everyone*) So I'm a very very bad rollerblader, right? This is obvious to the smallest of children. People point and laugh. That's okay, I don't mind. Well I do mind, but not that much. Well, okay, a lot. But I haven't killed anyone yet.

People want to know why I started rollerblading at my stage of life. Meaning I'm an old fart. I say it's the way to meet women nowadays. But really the thing is, I want to be good at it. It's pretty cool, no? You glide like a god of pavement! Some of these kids, are they good? They jump up and down and terrorize people—I can't do anything that good, not a single blessed thing in my life. These people know how to rollerblade better than I know how to breathe.

So one day I was moping around and suddenly, I realized this thing, so simple and clear: I can still learn! So, I did. For six months now. And here's the thing for you two, so perk up:

When I got my rollerblades they were nice and new. And while my body wasn't new exactly, it did the job pretty well. Got me from place to place. Then our relationship began. The blades've gotten pretty scratched, pretty smooshed up, and as for my body, don't let me get started; at my stage of life, a skinned knee is emergency room material, and I can't even get out of bed some mornings with the sprains and the pains and the stiffness and all that stuff.

But you see, we're just getting to know each other.

It's great, it's like old lovers. We're wearing off each other's edges, them and me, like sandpaper. You have to do it. It's the only way you know you're together! I mean if the other person fits you like a glove, no edges to wear off, everything's perfect, how do you know they're not just an imaginary friend? It's the friction makes you say "Hey, I'm alive, and you're real, cause ouch, that hurt!" It's the friction lets you say "By God, at least I'm *trying!*"

And eventually, the edges *do* wear off, and you are happy. Full happy, like God.

(Pause)

Well, that's it.

(TIM *and* BEAT FURRER *look at* JONNA)

JONNA: (*to the audience*) They're staring at me. Jesus, what do I do?

(*to* BEAT FURRER) Listen.

When is it worth it?

Because I've been in relationships where I felt the friction, and I stuck around like a good girl, waiting to get happy, and it never happened. I almost got rubbed away. And it took forever to put myself back together.

Your friction doesn't work. There are losers. Take a bunny and rub it on a big hunk of granite for a while and you get friction, plus a dead bloody bunny. But the rock is just the same. And I'm not going to let myself get rubbed away again, just to have you walk away when there's nothing left of me to pick up.

So yeah. So, Mr. Friction Man, how do you know?

(*Pause*)

BEAT FURRER: What do I look like? A smart person? (*He blades off.*)

TIM: So—

JONNA: (*smiling*) So.

JONNA and TIM: (*to the audience; see note in introduction*)

The audience must make the choices.

We now, losing both our voices,

Exhausted in the warming morning,

Head back in where kettle's boiling

To drink some tea and read the paper

Either apart *or else together*—

No, we haven't found an answer.

There isn't one, as life unwinds,

But different answers for different times;

See them as they scatter on the winds.

(*End*)