

La Comédiathèque

Four stars

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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Translation by the author

Four passengers who have nothing in common are participating in a tourist trip in space. The cohabitation is going more or less smoothly until the control tower announces to them that due to an oxygen leak, they will have to be evacuated urgently. The problem is: there won't be enough air for everyone. One of them must sacrifice themselves, otherwise they will all perish. They have one hour to find the one who will show "The Right Stuff"

Characters

Edward

Igor

Kimberley

Natalie

Act 1

The main module of a spaceship. As it is a comedy, we won't shy away from a cheesy sci-fi futuristic look, like a B-movie. The back wall can be covered with a painted canvas depicting the starry sky visible from the glass window. On either side are two partitions, with the ship's radio terminal shaped like a telephone with a flashing red lamp on one side, and on the other side, a red emergency axe behind glass, like in trains (with the label "Break glass in case of emergency"). The fourth wall also features a glass window offering passengers a breathtaking view of Earth, the moon, and the stars, depending on the rotation of the ship. Stage right, there is an exit to the command post and the laboratory, and stage left, another exit to the cabins. Edward stands facing the audience, admiring the spectacle in awe.

Edward – It's incredible, look Kimberley! We can see Texas!

Kimberley, seeming to search for something, casts a distracted glance in his direction.

Kimberley – Ah, yes... It's really tiny...

Edward – You can clearly make out the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi Delta and Corpus Christi Marina ... You could almost see my yacht! That's where it's docked...

Kimberley – With Google Earth, Edward, you would see it. If I can find my phone...

Edward – It's amazing... Even though we know that today's world maps are strictly accurate, unlike the maps from the Middle Ages that didn't even mention America... Here we have visual proof!

Kimberley – Don't tell me you paid a fortune to participate in this flight just to verify that America really exists?

Edward – Look you can even see Puerto Rico! (*He approaches the glass window*) Oh no... That's a fly speck on the windshield...

Kimberley (*glancing anyway*) – And that thing shaped like a dick, what is it?

Edward – That's Florida.

Kimberley – Funny, from here you can't see the borders at all...

Edward – What were you expecting? To see them drawn in dots like on a road map? They say that back in the day, you could see the Berlin Wall from space.

Kimberley – Oh yes, it's a shame it's not there anymore.

Edward – The Great Wall of China still exists. At least that's something sturdy...

Kimberley – Yes...

Edward – And what about you? Why did you take this trip then?

Kimberley – It was the grand prize of a contest organized by NBC.

Edward – And you won! Congratulations!

Kimberley – I had to give the name of the candidate who was eliminated the night before on a reality TV show.

Edward – When I think that this little space trip cost me a million dollars!

Kimberley – Well, then there was a lottery... There were over a million of us who got the right answer. But to be honest with you, I would have preferred to win the second prize.

Edward – What was that?

Kimberley – A Fiesta.

Edward – Oh yeah...

Kimberley – But brand new, eh! With all the options – electric windows, car radio, air conditioning... It's a bit hot in here, isn't it?

Edward resumes contemplating the spectacle before him.

Edward – It's truly incredible! No need to watch the weather on TV. I can tell you right away that in an hour from now, a massive cyclone is going to devastate Nicaragua. And believe me, it's going to be chaotic. It's so funny...

Kimberley, still preoccupied with her search, looks around the cabin, everywhere but towards the window.

Kimberley – I had it in my hands earlier. It didn't fly away, did it?

She comes face to face with Igor, the captain, who arrives from the command center.

Kimberley (*coquettishly*) – Ah, Igor!

Igor – Are you looking for something, Kimberley?

Kimberley – Yes. My iPhone.

Igor (*handing her the iPhone*) – I found it floating on the ceiling in the toilet. We have a little malfunction in the artificial gravity system in this part of the spacecraft. I'll try to fix it...

Kimberley – Ah, thank you, Commander!

Igor – Unfortunately, your iPhone wasn't the only UFO floating in the toilet... But what are you planning to do with it?

Kimberley – Well, make a call!

Igor – Ah, I don't think that's going to be possible, Kimberley.

Kimberley – In airplanes, you only need to turn off your phone during takeoff, right?

Igor – Yes. But we're in a space shuttle now. You can try reconnecting your iPhone, but I highly doubt you'll get a network signal at 180 kilometers altitude. Unless you give me the name of your operator...

Kimberley – Oh no... So it's not possible to make a call for the entire duration of... It's worse than being at the theater, then!

Igor – Sorry...

Kimberley – Don't tell me we're completely cut off from the world!

Igor – Not necessarily cut off from the world... Let's just say that in space, if your iPhone were to ring, it wouldn't be a person from Earth on the other end of the line...

Kimberley's phone starts ringing, and she answers, puzzled.

Kimberley – Hello? (*Collecting herself*) It's the alarm function, I forgot to change the time.

Igor – It must be difficult to determine the actual time when you're in orbit around the Earth.

Kimberley – In case of an emergency, for example, wouldn't we even be able to call the fire department?

Igor points to the wall terminal of the onboard radio.

Igor – In case of an emergency, we are connected to the control tower through the onboard radio. But if it's to reschedule an appointment with your hairdresser, I'm afraid it will have to wait until we return to Earth...

Kimberley sighs.

Kimberley – I don't even know what to wear tonight... Is it a formal event?

Igor – I would come dressed up, but it's up to you...

Kimberley (*flirting again*) – Oh, Commander...

Natalie arrives and passes by Kimberley as she exits.

Natalie (*cold and distant*) – Hello Kimberley. Is everything going as you wish?

Kimberley (*imitating E.T.*) – Phone home...

Kimberley leaves.

Edward – Look, from this side, we can see the moon!

Igor watches Kimberley leave, paying attention to her curves. Natalie notices.

Natalie – From this side too... (*to Igor*) What did the shampoo girl want?

Igor – The address of your hairdresser. But don't worry, I didn't say anything. She would have to get past me first...

Natalie doesn't have time to respond.

Edward – So Igor! Is it the Commander's party today? What have you cooked up for us? It's New Year's Eve after all! We're not going to have your freeze-dried turkey with lukewarm water again...

Igor – Don't worry, Edward, everything is planned to celebrate the New Year in style. We'll have freeze-dried turkey with chestnuts, washed down with our best Russian champagne... lukewarm.

Edward (*sighs*) – For the price I paid for my four-star stay, I was hoping to at least have some French caviar!

Igor – You should have brought some of your famous sausages, Edward...

Edward – I had a suitcase full of them, you know! But they told me I had excess baggage... It was either that or my DVD player and my complete collection of *The Simpsons*...

Natalie – And since you have good taste...

Edward – Well, in the meantime, to work up my appetite, I'll take another spin in the zero-gravity room. I never get tired of it...

Igor – I understand that... (*aside to Natalie*) It's the only place where he manages not to be heavy...

Edward – Spider Pig, Spider Pig, does whatever a Spider Pig does! So, Natalie? How are your researches coming along?

Natalie – God didn't create the world in a day... Give me a little week to try and understand how he did it.

Edward – What are you working on again?

Natalie – The Big Bang.

Edward (*skeptical*) – Ah... If you file a patent, let me know anyway. (*Edward leaves humming the tune from The Simpsons movie*). Spider Pig, Spider Pig, does whatever a spider does...

Igor – He made a fortune in industrial charcuterie.

Natalie – He's funny.

Igor – He's annoying.

Natalie – He's worth a billion dollars. And without these nouveau riche willing to pay astronomical sums to catch a glimpse of Earth from space, I wouldn't be able to continue my research...

Igor – To think that the mystery of the creation of the world might be solved thanks to the sponsorship of a sausage brand...

Natalie – And what about you? Without TV channels funding you, you'd be reduced to piloting charters to Cancun instead of a space shuttle... What's it about this time?

Igor – NBC is considering a new reality TV concept. Something like a loft in zero gravity... Or maybe a new version of Temptation Island, but on the Moon.

Natalie – Moon of Temptation. Quite a program... So that's why... Kimberley is here?

Igor – They want to verify that the human brain can withstand zero gravity with an IQ below 60. No way they're risking the lives of future contestants...

Natalie – They could have done the experiment with a real turkey.

Igor – At least we could have had it for New Year's Eve dinner.

Natalie – Well, maybe that's still possible for you...

Igor – I'm not sure if she's really my type.

Natalie – Judging by how you were eyeing her earlier, one could doubt that...

Igor (*sarcastic*) – Jealous...?

Natalie – Do you really think you could be my type?

Igor – At least for New Year's Eve dinner, I don't have much competition... Unless Mr. Slim Jim is really your type of man...

Natalie (*smiling*) – Tell me, your Star Trek version of Temptation Island, has it already started?

Igor is about to respond when the wall terminal of the onboard radio, shaped like a telephone, starts flashing red.

Igor – Oh, excuse me... (*He picks up the receiver*) Captain Spock, I'm listening... (*Natalie is about to leave but intrigued by the worry she sees on Igor's face, she hesitates*) Yes... Yes... Okay... No, no... Keep me informed...

Igor hangs up the receiver.

Natalie – A problem?

Igor – The control center just detected a leak in the oxygen supply system...

Natalie – Seriously?

Igor – We don't know yet... They'll call me back as soon as they know more... In the meantime, we need to connect the backup power supply...

Kimberley returns. She's wearing a very sexy evening gown.

Kimberley – Do you think I can wear this tonight?

Igor, preoccupied, doesn't seem to pay attention to her anymore.

Igor (to Kimberley) – Excuse me, I have a small issue to deal with... (*Aside to Natalie*) No need to worry the two tourists with that for now...

Igor leaves. Kimberley seems disappointed.

Kimberley – He didn't even look at me... I feel like I'm invisible to him... Do you find me invisible too?

Natalie – Your dress certainly is...

Kimberley – Isn't it a bit...?

Natalie – Oh yes, it's very much so, but well... Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve, it's only once a year! It's the only time of the year when a woman is allowed to dress like a Christmas tree and then like a hooker in the same week. We might as well make the most of it, right?

Kimberley – You don't like it...

Natalie – Did I say that?

Edward returns, still humming.

Edward – Spider Pig, Spider Pig, does whatever a spider pig does... Oh no, it's too cool! But I still prefer doing that before devouring the turkey.

Kimberley calls out to him.

Kimberley – And you, Edward, what do you think of me?

Edward – Oh no, I wasn't talking about you... I would never dare.

Kimberley – My dress!

Edward – Oh yes, it's... Do you want to climb the ceiling with me? I'm sure it'll be even more fun with two...

Igor returns, sparing Kimberley from having to respond. Natalie notices that he looks even more preoccupied.

Natalie – Is everything alright, Captain Spock?

Kimberley (to Edward) – I thought he was a commander, and his name was Igor...

Igor – Everything's fine. I've connected the backup ventilation system...

Edward – The backup system?

Igor (*reassuring*) – Just a minor technical issue, but it'll be resolved any minute now... Don't worry, we'll be able to celebrate New Year's Eve as planned.

Edward – All the better... But by the way, Commander, given that we are orbiting the Earth at almost the same speed as the sun... Well, you know what I mean... At what exact moment can we consider it midnight?

Igor (*with an innuendo*) – Believe me, Edward, this is going to be the longest New Year's Eve of your life...

Edward – What a crazy trip... Well, it's something you only do once in your life.

Natalie – You might not be far off...

Edward – It's true that it's a bit hot here, isn't it? (*To Kimberley*) You're right, you should have taken the Fiesta. At least it had air conditioning...

The wall-mounted radio terminal starts flashing again. Igor exchanges a glance with Natalie and picks up the receiver, while she tries to distract by pointing towards the window facing the audience.

Natalie – Look, we're flying over China!

Igor (*on the phone*) – Yes...?

Natalie – We can even see the Great Wall!

Edward – Where is it?

Kimberley – I don't see anything...

Natalie – But yes, there!

Edward – Oh, yes, maybe...

Igor (*on the phone*) – No...?

Edward – Oh, yes, there it is!

Kimberley – I still don't see anything. I'm really starting to wonder why I came here.

Igor (*on the phone*) – Okay...

Igor hangs up the phone and exchanges a worried look with Natalie.

Edward – It's the best day of my life!

Natalie – Yes... And maybe the last...

Igor (*to Kimberley*) – Come on, Kimberley! I remind you that today, you haven't done your daily workout in zero gravity. You remember that it's part of our daily routine...

Kimberley (*sighing*) – It makes me feel sick to walk on the ceiling like a fly. I'm not a fly! Why do I have to do this?

Edward – I'll join you. You'll see, it's a lot of fun! (*He leaves with Kimberley humming*) Spider Pig, Spider Pig, does whatever a Spider Pig does...

Igor is left alone with Natalie.

Natalie – So?

Igor – It's a bit more serious than expected...

Natalie – You owe me the truth, Commander. I remind you that in addition to my scientific mission, I am also serving as the co-pilot of this spacecraft.

Igor – The main ventilation system is permanently out of service. We'll have to rely on the backup system.

Natalie – How much autonomy do we have?

Igor – Four hours.

Natalie – Enough to return to Earth if we leave right away. But not enough to spend New Year's Eve here. The two tourists will be disappointed, but it's not that serious. Edward will be refunded, and Kimberley will get her Fiesta...

Igor – It's not that simple, unfortunately...

Natalie – I suspected as much. Otherwise, why would you have that puppy dog face? What else is malfunctioning in this wreck? If it's about the Aliens floating in the toilets, I'm already aware...

Igor – The emergency oxygen system is only designed for three people...

Natalie (*horrified*) – Is this a joke?

Igor – Why would I have that puppy dog face if it were a joke...

Natalie – But... why?

Igor – You said it yourself, this spacecraft is a wreck. The propulsion system was salvaged from the shuttle that the Americans just scrapped, the cabin from the International Space Station that the Europeans just abandoned... and the emergency module we're in was cobbled together from an old Russian Soyuz capsule...

Natalie (*shocked*) – Designed for three people... But then how could they have let us leave with four?

Igor – Spider Pig paid a million dollars for his ticket. Without him, the flight would have been canceled due to lack of necessary credits... and you wouldn't have been able to carry out your research.

Natalie – So you knew!

Igor – I told you. It was our only chance to make this trip. If you had known, would you have given up this unique opportunity to verify your theories on the Big Bang?

Natalie – No.

Igor – No. Because if you succeed, it will probably earn you the Nobel Prize. So what would knowing have helped?

Natalie – Okay, but those two geniuses over there are not Nobel-worthy. They had the right to know.

Igor – Well, if they had known, they wouldn't have come...

Natalie – Spider Pig would have chosen the Club Med in Bora Bora instead...

Igor – And the Bimbo the Fiesta. With air conditioning...

Natalie – Well done... And now what do the Gentle Organizers propose down below?

Igor – Nothing... We're supposedly in charge now. But the equation is simple. We have air for four hours. For three people... Either we all die of asphyxiation before reaching Earth. Or one of us has to stop breathing. For an hour...

Natalie – And how do we do that?

Igor – With a cyanide capsule, for example.

Natalie – Sorry?

Igor – We also got the first aid kit from the Soyuz capsule. It was plan B in case of a worst-case scenario.

Natalie – Great... Now we just need to find a volunteer philosophical enough to drink hemlock.

Igor – I have a small idea, but you might not like it...

Natalie – Go ahead...

Igor – A little cyanide powder with freeze-dried chestnut turkey goes down smoothly. She wouldn't even realize...

Natalie – She?

Igor – The turkey.

Natalie – Are you joking, Commander?

Igor – Would you prefer Spider Pig?

Natalie – That would be murder, Commander! Even if our conscience could handle it, I remind you that it's an act condemned by the law.

Igor – But sending four people up in a flying wreck with only three parachutes, that's legal...

Natalie – Saving our own skin, alright. But if it's to end up in prison... or live with that on our conscience for the rest of our lives...

Igor – Alright then, what do you propose?

Edward and Kimberley return, clearly in a good mood, humming Boris Vian's song.

Kimberley – Hurt me, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, Fly me on the heavens

Edward – I wouldn't hurt a fly...

Kimberley – Hurt me, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, I'm not a fly...

Edward – So, Commander? Isn't it time for drinks? I'm starving!

Kimberley – Me too, I'm as hungry as a wolf.

Natalie (*to Igor*) – Anyway, it's going to be difficult to keep hiding the truth from them much longer... Without unnecessarily alarming them, of course...

Igor – Announcing to these two idiots that one of them is exceeding the baggage limit. But without unnecessarily alarming them, you say. I'm curious to see that...

Natalie (*embarrassed*) – I can always try...

Igor – If you can pull that off, you deserve the Nobel Prize in Psychology...

Fade out.

Act 2

A piercing scream from Kimberley in the darkness. The sound of shattering glass. Then the lights come on. Natalie and Igor rush to attend to the unconscious young woman, trying to revive her. Edward stands before them with bulging eyes, holding in his hand the hatchet previously fixed behind the window that he has just broken.

Igor (to Natalie) – I guess you'll have to settle for the Nobel Prize in Physics after all...

Edward (brandishing the hatchet menacingly) – I don't know what's stopping me from splitting both of your skulls!

Igor – The fact that we are the only two who can bring this spaceship back to Earth, perhaps...

Edward – I could kill just one of you! Like you, for example...

Igor – Are you capable of that, at least?

Edward – I made my fortune running a slaughterhouse...

Igor – I'm not a sheep. But nothing is stopping you from trying. I could always plead self-defense...

Natalie – Do you really think this is the right time?

Edward – Oh yeah? And when will be the right time? When we're all dead from suffocation?

Igor – You're suffocating us, Edward. I suggest you stop breathing. That would solve our problem.

Natalie – She's coming to.

Igor – Too bad. That could have solved our problem too...

Kimberley – Tell me this is a nightmare... And that I won the Fiesta...

Natalie – Unfortunately not, Kimberley. You did win the jackpot...

Edward – You're not in an air-conditioned Fiesta, but in a flying coffin with rationed air.

Kimberley – So it's true? We're all going to die!

Natalie – Not all of us, I assure you.

Igor – At least you can see the bright side of things. That's your optimism shining through...

Kimberley – Is there any solution then?

Edward – Yes. (Sarcastically) The capsule...

Kimberley – We have a rescue capsule? Then we're saved!

Edward – The cyanide capsule! Haven't you figured it out yet? One of us is too many here. And we have one hour to decide who.

Kimberley – Oh my God, I knew I should have never left Earth. I should have listened to my mother. A lady's place is not in space. This must be a divine punishment! Remember the fall of Icarus...

Edward – Who is that again?

Kimberley – A character from Greek mythology! He claims to be able to fly like a bird up to the sky. But the Gods, to punish him, melt his wings in the sun...

Igor (*to Natalie*) – But tell them, you, that God doesn't exist. You work on the Big Bang, you're well placed to know that it's not the old bearded man who created the world!

Natalie – It remains to be seen who lit the fuse of the Big Bang...

Igor – Well, we don't have much time to philosophize unfortunately, so what do we do? Draw straws?

Edward – Oh no! That would be too easy!

Igor – If you started by putting down that axe...

Edward puts down the axe reluctantly.

Edward – You're the pilot, aren't you? You're the one who got us into this mess. You're the only one who knew and you didn't tell us anything! On a ship, it's the captain who goes down with his ship. After having put all his passengers on the lifeboats!

Igor – Hey, Spider Pig, come back down to earth!

Edward – I would like to, you know. And don't you dare address me informally!

Igor – We're not in the cinema, old chap!

Kimberley – Yet we're on the Titanic...

Igor – I'm just a subordinate. I followed orders.

Edward – That's what the kapos said in the death camps...

The two men are on the verge of confrontation. Natalie intervenes.

Natalie – There's no point in getting upset. It only serves to burn up the little oxygen we have left... But Igor is right. It would be unfair to look for a culprit. And even if we found one, I remind you that the death penalty has been abolished in most democratic countries.

Edward (*pointing to the glass window facing the audience*) – We could just wait until we fly over China or the United States.

Natalie – The real culprits are down below, we know that. And we all knew when we embarked on this journey that it was more dangerous than a week at a club hotel in Cuba.

Kimberley – I went to Havana last year, I came back with the runs...

The other three look at her somewhat puzzled.

Edward – Alright, forget the people's court. So what do we do? (*Dead silence*) We could try to identify among us the one whose loss would be the least great for humanity?

Igor (*sarcastic*) – Something tells me you have reasons to believe you're indispensable.

Edward – I run a company that employs over 200,000 people worldwide.

Igor – And do you really think your sausage factory wouldn't outlive you? The shareholders would appoint another CEO and that's it.

Edward – And what about you? Do you have reasons to believe you're more indispensable than me?

Igor – To begin with, I know how to pilot this spaceship.

Natalie – Me too...

Edward – So you see? One of you will be enough to be the driver and handle room service. The other one can disappear altogether. (*To Natalie*) Why not you?

Igor – Do you think you're more useful to humanity than a future Nobel Prize winner?

Edward – Why not?

Igor – You're right. If there was a Nobel Prize for sausages, I'm sure it would be for you.

Edward – My sausages feed nearly a third of humanity. (*To Natalie*) What are you working on again?

Natalie – The origin of the world.

Edward – What's the point?

Natalie – None.

Edward – And have you found the answers to your questions?

Natalie – No.

Igor – In that case, even though you may be Nobel-worthy, I don't see how you can claim to be more useful than us.

Natalie – I never said that...

New silence.

Edward (*to Kimberley*) – And what about you?

Kimberley – What about me?

Edward – Give us one good reason to believe that if you don't come back alive to Earth, the fate of the world would be changed...

Kimberley (*pathetic*) – I have two cats and a canary waiting for me at home... Not to mention my mother...

Natalie – That's enough! We won't get out of this by discussing the value of one life compared to another! It's monstrous! It's true, I may not have discovered much, but at least I know that no life is less precious than another.

Edward – Perfect. Then let's vote!

Kimberley – What?

Edward – You mentioned democracy earlier. And there can be a certain greatness in sacrificing oneself for others. So let's vote to decide among us who we believe is most worthy of this honor!

Natalie – I don't agree!

Edward – You're not obliged to participate in the vote. We're in a democracy. But nothing prevents us from voting for you, otherwise, it's too easy...

Edward takes out a notepad and a pencil.

Edward – Everyone writes a name on a piece of paper, folds it, and Natalie will proceed with the vote count. Igor?

Igor – Do you swear to abide by the outcome of this vote?

Edward – I swear.

Igor – Very well. I will make sure of it...

Edward writes a name on a piece of paper, tears it off, folds it, and places it on the table. Then he passes the notepad and pencil to Igor.

Edward – Your turn.

Igor – So, you are so sure of your popularity?

Edward – And you?

Igor does the same as Edward and then passes the notepad and pencil to Kimberley.

Edward – In any case, Kimberley, I promise you that if we both make it out alive, you'll get your Fiesta. I'll personally make sure of it...

Igor gives him a murderous look. Kimberley hesitates, then writes a name on a piece of paper, tears it off, folds it, and places it on the table.

Edward – Natalie... It's your honor to announce the results of the vote.

Reluctantly, Natalie takes a paper and reads.

Natalie – Igor... (*In palpable tension, she takes another paper*) Edward... (*She takes the third paper*) Kimberley... (*Relieved*) The vote does not yield a clear winner...

Igor (*to Edward*) – I voted against you... You voted against me... So who voted against Kimberley?

Kimberley – It was me...

Natalie – Are you volunteering to sacrifice yourself?

Kimberley – I made a mistake... I thought we were voting for the one among the three of us who should be saved...

Sad looks from the other three.

Edward – Alright then, let's not decide anything!

Igor – In that case, we will all die. (*He looks at his watch*) In about two hours...

Edward – By the way, why are we here discussing instead of starting the descent as soon as possible?

Igor – Because the position of the spacecraft will only be favorable for re-entry into the atmosphere in about half an hour.

Natalie – Any earlier, we would bounce off into a higher orbit, and we would all be condemned to endlessly orbit the Earth.

Edward – And to think they sold me this one-way trip as a pleasure excursion...

Igor – So, we have about half an hour left to decide which of us four has what it takes to be a hero.

Natalie – It's a choice worthy of a Greek tragedy. If none of us is willing to die, we will all die. So each of us only has the choice between dying alone to save the other three, or dying for nothing with the other three...

Kimberley – Or lay low and hope someone else sacrifices themselves in our place...

Natalie – In any case, we won't get out of this by designating a scapegoat. The one who will die to save the other three must volunteer...

Edward – Perfect... A candidate...

Silence.

Natalie – I volunteer.

The other three are taken aback. But Edward is the first to react.

Edward – Very well. Then it's settled. And we have to thank you. Even though, as you said, it was either that or all four of us die...

Igor (to *Natalie*) – Why would you do that? Do you think you're Jesus Christ? You don't even believe in God...

Edward – Did anyone ask you anything? Since Madame says she's willing... In any case, I promise to take care of all the expenses for your funeral. Do you have any particular wishes?

Igor – Shut up. Natalie, you're not going to sacrifice yourself for a sausage seller and... a sausage, period.

Kimberley – What sausage?

Natalie – Who says I'm not sacrificing myself for you?

Igor – I'm not worth it, believe me.

Natalie – Let's say it's an act of pride, then. If I have to die, I prefer to do it with panache. It's my *Cyrano* side...

Igor – I won't let you do that.

Natalie – And how do you plan to stop me?

Igor – I'm the one who has the key to the medicine cabinet. And if someone has to sacrifice themselves here, it's me.

Edward – Alright, you're not going to fight now...

Natalie – Are you willing to sacrifice yourself for me? Why?

Igor – Because you're worth it...

Edward – What's certain is that both of you can't die. One of you has to bring this spaceship back to Earth. (*Referring to Kimberley*) I only have a heavy vehicle license. And this lovely young lady would barely be able to park her Fiesta in her garage...

Kimberley – I don't agree.

Edward – Excuse me, I take back what I said about the Fiesta.

Kimberley – I don't agree to let Natalie or Igor sacrifice themselves for us.

Edward – You're not joining in now, too. We were about to figure it out.

Kimberley – How can we continue living with this?

Edward – Well, believe me. (*Looking at his watch*) And we only have fifteen minutes left to decide!

Igor – So, what do you propose?

Kimberley – Random chance... It's the only solution that seems fair to me.

Edward – Fair, but risky...

Natalie – I wonder if Kimberley is right after all. If everyone agrees...

Edward – Do I have a choice?

Igor – Not really...

Kimberley – We just need to find the instrument of chance.

Igor – I would suggest Russian roulette. It would be fitting in a Soyuz capsule. But firearms are prohibited on board, unfortunately. Plus, if a bullet went through the brain and ended up in a wall, we would all risk depressurization. That would be too foolish...

Kimberley – We have an axe...

Natalie – Ah, yes... And how do we play Russian roulette with an axe...?

Silence. They think.

Edward – We could do it with poker? I brought cards... Each match represents a liter of air. And the loser has to stop breathing...

Kimberley – I don't know how to play poker.

Natalie – Neither do I.

Edward – I'll teach you! You'll see, it's very simple...

Igor – Don't try to confuse us yet. Poker is not a game of chance.

Edward – Do you have a better idea?

Igor – Maybe...

Igor is about to leave. Edward intervenes.

Edward – Where are you going?

Igor – To get refreshments. You said I was in charge of room service, right?

Edward – I suggest we stay together. How do we know you're not plotting something on the side?

Igor – You have my word. And you'll have to be satisfied with that. Unless you plan to physically stop me from leaving...

They glare at each other, and Edward eventually steps aside.

Edward – Fine. We're civilized people, after all...

Igor leaves the room. New silence. Natalie looks at the stars through the window.

Natalie – You'll find it strange, coming from an astrophysicist, but I had never taken the time to look at the stars this way. Uninterested...

Edward (indifferent) – Oh, yes...

Natalie – I wonder if the answer isn't there, after all...

Kimberley – The answer?

Edward – To what question?

Natalie – The origin of the world! What if the answer wasn't scientific, but purely aesthetic? What if God were an artist?

Edward shrugs. Kimberley also looks at the starry sky.

Kimberley – It's true, it's beautiful.

Natalie (*to Edward*) – You too, if you made this journey, it's surely to see the stars up close, right?

Edward – Yeah...

Natalie – I think that by coming here, we all knew that when it comes to reaching the sky, we had already done half the way...

Kimberley – It may sound strange, but I don't even regret the Fiesta anymore. Even if I have to die soon, at least I will have seen this before... I have never felt so alive...

Natalie – We will all disappear one day. We should be aware of that when we wake up every morning. It would help us to live. After all, stars also die. And even the sun, one day, will no longer rise.

Kimberley – So we are just stars among other stars?

Natalie – Four stars, yes. And one too many...

Edward – Four stars for this wreck? One too many, no wonder...

Natalie (*looking at the starry sky again*) – One star too many, but which one? Yes, maybe that's the mystery of the universe. The perpetual movement. An immense puzzle that we never manage to put back together... because in the end, there's always one piece too many.

Edward – But what the hell is he doing, that idiot!

Igor comes back carrying a tray with four glasses of champagne.

Igor – And what if we toast to the new year?

Edward – Do you really think this is the right moment?

Igor – One of these glasses contains cyanide.

Silence from the other three.

Edward – You know which one it is!

Igor – That's why I'll take the last glass. The honor is yours, Edward...

He moves the tray towards Edward, urging him to take a glass. Edward hesitates.

Edward – Do you really know which one it is?

Igor – No. Otherwise, it wouldn't be fun.

Edward reluctantly takes a glass. Igor then offers the tray to Kimberley, who hesitates as well.

Kimberley – I can't stand champagne. It gives me gas...

Igor – Sorry...

Kimberley reluctantly takes a glass. Igor offers the tray to Natalie, who takes a glass without hesitation. Igor takes the last glass. They all come closer and raise their glasses to toast.

Igor – To the health of the survivors!

They all drink their glasses in one gulp.

Kimberley – It's quite chilled... Don't we have any peanuts?

Fade to black.

Act 3

They are all seated around the table. The atmosphere is heavy.

Kimberley – I thought rockets were much louder than this. Do you hear this silence? When you're not used to it... It's almost painful to the ears...

Edward – Fortunately, otherwise we might think we're already dead.

Kimberley – There's even less noise than at my grandmother's. She lives in Detroit...

Natalie – Sound can't travel in a vacuum. That's why we hear nothing.

Kimberley – In Detroit?

Natalie – In space!

Igor – Yet, the cosmos is anything but quiet. Most of those stars you see shining in the sky have already disappeared millennia ago, in a grand nuclear fireworks. If God exists, believe me, he probably looks more like Dr. Strangelove than Santa Claus...

Kimberley – So stars die too...

Igor – Yes. And they die in silence.

Silence.

Edward – Can't we play some music... It's getting creepy, isn't it?

Natalie – The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me...

Edward – Yes, that's sort of what I was trying to say.

Natalie – It's Pascal.

Edward – Pascal?

Igor – A philosopher who said something similar to what you just said. In his own words...

Kimberley takes another bite from her plate.

Kimberley – Actually, this freeze-dried turkey isn't so bad after all...

Edward – It gives me an idea. What if I started a dehydrated sausage business? It's much more convenient to transport, especially for exports. (*Showing the size with his fingers*) A little wrinkled sausage like this. Just before the meal, you dip it in water, and voila! It becomes a huge sausage...

Kimberley – Chestnuts, on the other hand, are definitely better fresh.

Igor – What do fresh chestnuts look like?

Kimberley – Like candied chestnuts?

Edward – More like roasted chestnuts, right?

Natalie – I still don't feel any symptoms. How about you?

Kimberley – Neither do I...

Igor – The poison takes time to work.

Edward – How much time?

Igor – A wee quarter of an hour, I suppose.

Kimberley – Is cyanide painful?

Igor – I don't know. I've never ingested it. Not until today, that is...

Natalie – Why would it be you? You said you didn't know which glass the poison was in.

Igor – Let's just say... an intuition.

Natalie – From what I remember, cyanide poisoning causes convulsions first, then unconsciousness, followed by a deep coma...

Edward – Oh, yes, indeed... You didn't tell us about all these side effects...

Natalie – Considering it's a highly toxic substance, the main side effect is death, which usually occurs due to heart failure...

Everyone swallows hard.

Igor – It was the favorite poison of the Nazi aristocracy. Göring committed suicide with it to avoid execution after the Nuremberg trial.

Edward – Committing suicide to avoid execution... I don't quite see the benefit...

Natalie – In any case, one of us will be dead in the next few minutes. I propose that each of us tells what they would change in their life if they had the chance to come back alive on Earth. We won't be able to continue exactly as before, right?

Igor – Very well... You first...

Natalie – Well... I think I would go back to that outrageously expensive store where I saw a pair of shoes to die for...

Edward – Is that all?

Natalie – I found the price utterly obscene at the time... But this adventure has taught me the importance of frivolity... And you, Edward?

Edward – To start with, I will never leave the solid ground again... The stars, in the end, are just as beautiful from down here. Trying to get too close to them, you end up getting burned, like your friend there... (*Inquisitive looks from the other three*) Icarus!

Natalie – Ah, yes... And then what?

Edward – I will create a foundation...

Igor – You?

Edward – Why not? Like Bill Gates!

Natalie – And what would be the purpose of this foundation?

Edward – I don't know, something like ending world hunger, for example...

Igor – Ah, yes, that's... That's good.

Edward – I haven't always been this wealthy, you know. I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth, as they say.

Kimberley – Don't they say a silver spoon, rather?

Edward – That's right, yes... For me, it was more like a silver spoon. My father was part of the junior branch. So when my grandfather died, I only inherited about one-fifth of his fortune. Well, it was already a nice sum, but... It was only when my uncle died that I inherited his industrial charcuterie empire...

Igor – In the end, you also had an unhappy childhood...

Edward – If I became the king of sausages, it was with the idea of feeding all of humanity... In my own way, I'm an idealist too...

Igor – And to think that no one saw the revolutionary that sleeps within you... Promise, if it's you who dies, we'll erect a statue in your honor. And what about you, Kimberley?

Kimberley – I will resume my studies at the Oriental Languages Institute.

Natalie – You studied?

Kimberley – Does that surprise you so much?

Natalie – No, I mean... Oriental languages?

Kimberley – Yes, I wanted to be an interpreter. But I stopped when I entered the Miss Oklahoma contest...

Edward – You were elected Miss Oklahoma?

Kimberley – I could have been! But I had to resign just before the final... One of my exes dug up a low-budget film I had made a long time ago on the internet... A youthful mistake...

Edward (*excited*) – Really...?

Igor – So you speak multiple languages?

Kimberley – Japanese and Mandarin fluently. And I'm pretty good at Russian.

Igor – If I had known, I would have called on your skills earlier to help me figure out that medicine cabinet. I had a hard time finding the cyanide. It was labeled in Korean... I think...

Kimberley – Yes, I have some knowledge of it too. Korean is a beautiful language, very musical.

Edward – Especially South Korean, I imagine.

Kimberley – Oh, why is that?

Edward – The southern accent! It's more melodic, isn't it?

Kimberley – Yes...

Natalie – And what about you, Igor?

Igor (*clearly upset*) – I think for me, this is not the right time to make plans for the future...

Kimberley – Oh my God! Are you experiencing contractions? I mean convulsions...

Igor – I'll let you finish your New Year's Eve celebrations in peace... (*He struggles to get up and hands a letter to Natalie*) Here, I wrote you a little note, just in case... (*Natalie mechanically takes the letter*) You can read it when I'm no longer here. I don't like goodbyes...

Natalie (*heartbroken*) – I'll accompany you.

Igor – No, thank you. I prefer to leave alone... I wish you all a safe journey...

Kimberley – You too...

He leaves the room, and the other three remain petrified.

Edward – It's always the best ones who leave first.

Natalie gets up, takes Igor's empty glass, examines the bottom, and holds it to her nose to smell it.

Natalie – There was no cyanide in his glass.

Edward – How do you know?

Natalie – Cyanide has a slight smell of bitter almond. I know. I've handled it in the laboratory before. And I have a keen sense of smell...

Kimberley takes the glass and smells it too.

Kimberley – Oh yes, me too. I have an anti-allergenic soap that smells exactly like that!

Edward (*worried*) – So it's just the turkey that he didn't digest well, and one of us three is going to die...?

Natalie smells the other three glasses.

Natalie – None of these four glasses contained cyanide.

Kimberley – But he really looked very sick...

Edward – What does that mean?

Natalie – It means he absorbed the poison even before filling the glasses. Deliberately. Moreover, you saw it well. He knew he was going to die. Otherwise, why would he have written this letter...?

Kimberley – But... why?

Natalie – He sacrificed himself for us. Willingly. But he didn't want us to know...

Edward – Why would he do that? It doesn't make any sense!

Natalie – Probably to leave us with a clear conscience. Making us believe that it was fate that saved us, and not his suicide. And true heroes don't seek honors...

Kimberley – My God...

Edward – What a man...

Natalie – Yes...

Edward – And what does the letter say?

Natalie – I prefer to read it later, if you don't mind...

Edward – Well yes, but... It might be important... He was the pilot after all... I don't know... It might be instructions for landing...

Natalie reluctantly opens the envelope and begins to read silently, under the intrigued gaze of the other two.

Kimberley – So?

Natalie – It's a kind of testament...

Edward – Did he leave us something? That's really generous of him...

Kimberley gives him a reproachful look.

Natalie – More like a moral will...

Edward – Ah, moral... And then?

Natalie – He would like you to name his foundation after him...

Edward – What foundation? (*The other two give him a dismayed look.*) Oh, yes, of course... The... The foundation...

Kimberley – Oh my God...

Natalie – You too, Kimberley, he would like you to keep your promise...

Kimberley – My promise?

Natalie – The one to resume your studies... He leaves you the contents of his Savings Book to enable you to do so...

Edward – How much?

Natalie – Fifteen thousand euros.

Edward – Oh yes, quite a sum...

Kimberley – There's a little note for you too...

Natalie – Some recommendations for landing, indeed. The second one cracks a bit, and...

Edward – And...?

Natalie (*upset*) – The rest is very personal...

Edward and Kimberley exchange an embarrassed look as they see Natalie on the verge of tears. Suddenly, the wall terminal of the onboard radio starts flashing red again. Natalie, in a daze, mechanically answers the call.

Natalie – Yes...? (*Distraught*) No...? And you're telling us now? OK, I'll call you back...

Edward and Kimberley give her a questioning look.

Edward – What's happening now?

Natalie – They managed to fix the leak in the main ventilation system...

Edward – In plain English?

Natalie – We have enough oxygen to return to Earth safe and sound, all of us.

Kimberley – Great! (*Realizing*) Oh my God! Igor...

Natalie leaves hastily.

Natalie – I'll see if there's still time to do something for him...

Edward and Kimberley are left alone.

Edward – Appalling, this organization... They'll hear from me when we get back. They presented it to us as a luxury train like the Orient Express... But it's all makeshift. The propulsion system from the American shuttle, the cabin from the European station, the ventilation system from Russia...

Kimberley – The first aid kit from North Korea.

Edward – It's the Babel Tower, that rocket! Oh no, I demand a refund. Well, the main thing is that we're alive! We've made it out of danger, Kimberley! Can you imagine? You don't seem happy...

Kimberley – Poor Igor...

Edward – Yes, indeed... That's what happens when you try to be a hero... You see, it's a good thing we didn't rush into it...

Kimberley – Still... What courage... And he was handsome, that's true...

Edward – But I'm here, alive! (*Cheerfully*) So, you were in a porn movie when you were young? Honestly, Kimberley, I'm rediscovering you... And you're multilingual too!

Kimberley – Thank you.

Edward – Tell me, Kimberley, this whole adventure has made me reflect. Mature, I would say. So, I have a proposal for you. I need someone I can trust to manage...

Kimberley (*enthusiastically*) – Your foundation?

Edward – What foundation?

Kimberley – Your foundation against world hunger!

Edward – Ah, that... No, I was thinking more... Well, it's the same thing... I'm looking for a sales manager to enter the Asian market...

Kimberley – The Asian market...?

Edward – I'm sure you would make a fantastic sausage ambassador in that part of the world.

Kimberley – You think so...?

Edward – You speak almost as many languages as the Pope, but with your looks... Looks are important in our time! How do you expect the Vatican to export to China with that old wrinkled thing that looks like a dehydrated sausage?

Kimberley – A dehydrated sausage?

Edward – A billion Chinese who only eat spring rolls and dumplings now! Can you imagine if you could convert them to sausage? It would be a slaughter!

Kimberley – Mmm...

Edward – And as for advertising, between us, I had a brilliant idea while admiring the sky with you earlier...

Kimberley – Oh, yes...?

Edward makes a theatrical gesture towards the moon to illustrate the grandeur of his project.

Edward – Projecting the image of my sausage on the surface of the moon with my name in big letters using a laser from a satellite! Can you imagine the impact? It would be visible from the whole Earth! We're in the era of globalization, damn it!

Kimberley, taken aback, doesn't have time to respond. Natalie returns, devastated.

Natalie – He's lying unconscious on his bunk... Can't seem to bring him back... So I decided to go join him...

Edward – What do you mean, go join him?

Kimberley takes the pill tubes from Natalie's hands.

Kimberley – Oh my God... She swallowed a cyanide capsule too...

Edward – Oh no! But then we're all going to die! (*Kimberley gives him a surprised look*) Who's going to pilot the spacecraft back to Earth?

Natalie – Sorry, I hadn't thought of that... Farewell. And be very happy together. I'm going to join the man I love. For eternity... But first, I'm going to make a detour to the toilet...

Natalie leaves.

Edward (*devastated*) – They've done everything to us...

Kimberley – Still, it's quite moving, isn't it...?

Edward – What?

Kimberley – Igor... Natalie... He agreed to die to save her, and she's going to join him in death. It's wildly romantic!

Edward – It's just plain stupid, if you ask me.

Kimberley – It's Shakespearean! What proof of love! Would you be willing to die for me, Edward?

Edward – I think now, I don't have much choice anyway. We're all going to die.

Igor comes back at that moment, staggering, with a medication tube in his hand as well.

Kimberley (*taken aback*) – Now they're totally recreating Romeo and Juliet...

Igor – I don't understand, I swallowed two cyanide capsules, and I only feel slightly drowsy...

Kimberley curiously examines the tube Igor has in his hand.

Kimberley – This isn't North Korean, it's South Vietnamese... (*She looks at the tube again*) And it's not cyanide, it's an expired sedative... from 1973.

Edward – No wonder it's not very effective anymore. But then we're saved! He can pilot the spacecraft back to Earth. If we can keep him awake for just a little while longer...

Igor – Where's Natalie?

Kimberley (*embarrassed*) – Well, you see...

Edward – Do you feel up to driving? If not, show me quickly before you fall asleep again. It can't be that complicated to drive a rocket... I told you, I got my heavy vehicle license in the army...

Igor – What happened?

Kimberley – We're saved, Commander. They managed to fix the main ventilation system. We can go back home...

Igor – And Natalie? Tell me the truth!

Kimberley – That is to say...

Edward – Come on, one lost, ten found.

Kimberley – As she thought you were dead...

Igor notices the tube that Natalie left on the table and picks it up.

Igor – Don't tell me that...

Kimberley – Unfortunately, yes, Igor... But you can at least be sure of one thing. She loved you too...

Igor – Oh, my God... I'd rather just end it too...

Igor takes the tube that Natalie left on the table.

Edward – Oh, no! Not again! It's getting tiresome!

Kimberley takes the tube from Igor's hands and examines it.

Kimberley – Edward is right. If I were you, I wouldn't do that... (*Igor and Edward give her a questioning look*) It's not North Korean either, it's Tibetan... (*She looks at the tube again*) And it's not cyanide, it's a powerful herbal laxative...

Edward – Expired?

Kimberley – Unfortunately not...

Edward – With the zero-gravity toilets...

Kimberley – It's going to be a real tsunami...

Natalie comes back at that moment.

Natalie – Do you happen to know where the toilet paper reserve is on this ship... (*Spotting Igor*) Igor? So you're not dead!

Igor – No, Natalie! It's a miracle! We're saved! I just took a sleeping pill! And you'll be dealing with a nasty case of traveler's diarrhea!

Natalie – But that's wonderful!

Igor – I love you, Natalie. Since the moment I laid eyes on you. Will you be my wife?

Natalie – Yes, Igor... (*She's about to kiss him, to the tender gaze of the other two*) But excuse me for a moment, I'll be right back...

She hurries out while holding her stomach. And Igor falls back into a deep sleep.

Edward – I think they'll need both of them to take this garbage back to the garage...

Kimberley, on the verge of tears, seeks refuge in Edward's arms.

Kimberley – Oh Lord! With all these emotions... I think my poor heart might give out...

Edward (*troubled*) – You're right... All this made me realize how short life is... And after everything we've been through together... Will you marry me, Kimberley?

Kimberley – You would be willing to marry me, Edward? Despite my youthful mistakes...

Edward – We've already experienced the worst. We still have the best to come! I promise you the moon, Kimberley!

Kimberley – The moon?

Edward – By marrying you, I'll give you my name! Remember? The laser! The name of the sausage king projected in big letters on the moon! Will you be my queen, Kimberley?

Kimberley – And can I also have my Fiesta?

Edward – It will be your wedding gift! With all the options! Even the cigarette lighter and the sausage roaster!

Kimberley – Oh, Edward... Then yes... I accept to be your wife...

They are about to kiss, but the wall phone starts flashing red. They exchange worried glances. Edward decides to answer.

Edward – Yes...? (*He listens for a moment with gravity, then turns to Kimberley with a big smile*) They've also managed to unclog the toilets!

Kimberley – Well, all's well that ends well...

Black.

The End

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez was first a drummer for several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then began a career writing television scripts before turning to theater and writing plays. He has written close to a hundred scripts for television and as many plays, some of which have already become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). He is one of the most produced contemporary playwrights in France and in other francophone countries. Several of his plays are also available in Spanish and English, and are regularly produced in the United States and Latin America.

Amateur and professional theater groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>). However, public productions are subject to SACD filing.

For those who prefer reading or working from books, printed versions of his plays can be purchased from Amazon for a price similar to that of photocopying this document.

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

A simple business dinner

An innocent little murder

Casket for two

Cheaters

Crisis and Punishment

Critical but stable

Friday the 13th

Him and Her

Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall

Quarantine

Running on Empty

Strip Poker

The Worst Village in England

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