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The Perfect
Son-in-Law

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The Perfect Son-in-Law

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Translation by the author

When you abandoned your fiancée a year ago, just days before the wedding, leaving only a post-it note on the refrigerator as an explanation, you better never come back...

Characters

Jessica
Stephen
Peter
Mary

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A messy living room. In a crib, a baby cries. Above the crib, a musical mobile plays one of those well-known tunes that are supposed to lull babies to sleep, while projecting kaleidoscopic reflections on the back wall. A young woman, Jessica, enters and picks up the baby to soothe him.

Jessica – Come on, it's time to sleep now... Why are you crying like that? You have no reason to cry! Me, yes, I would have good reasons to cry, but you? Why the hell are you crying like that? You've got a full stomach, a clean ass. You spend your days staring at trippy images on the ceiling while listening to chill music. What more do you want? Your teddy bear? I already told you – Mommy forgot your teddy bear on Grandma's Fiesta's roof yesterday, it flew off on the highway and a big truck ran over it. We managed to find one leg, but the rest must have been crushed under the wheels. Do you want me to give you the leg anyway?

Still holding the baby, Jessica goes to fetch the leg of the teddy bear and gives it to him.

Jessica – Here you go, but I warn you, it's not a pretty sight... It's all greasy and smells like diesel...

The baby stops crying.

Jessica – Hallelujah! If I could finally have some peace and quiet...

She gently places the baby back in the crib.

Jessica – The gasoline fumes seem to be calming him down...

The shrill ring of the phone suddenly restarts the baby's cries.

Jessica – This can't be true, it's a nightmare!

She answers the phone, in a bad mood.

Jessica (*exasperated*) – Yes, Mom... Yes, I know you're coming over soon, you've already called me three times to tell me... But of course, I'm here, where else would I be? Sunbathing on a beach in the Seychelles? A surprise... I don't really like surprises, but okay... Yes, yes, I'm looking forward to finding out what it is, of course... Okay, see you later, Mom... I love you too... Oh, Mom! Whatever you do, don't ring the doorbell when you arrive! In case I manage to put him to sleep by then... Just knock softly, I'll hear you! In a one-bedroom apartment, you know, you can't really go far from the door. Okay, see you later...

Jessica hangs up. The baby is still crying. She picks him up again.

Jessica – What do you want? Should I put some diesel on your teddy bear? Sorry, I don't have any! Maybe it could work with some White Spirit, but you'll have to promise me not to smoke in bed, like your father used to do... And don't ask me where your father went, okay? Mommy also lost her teddy bear. And she couldn't even retrieve a leg... Do you want me to sing you a song? I'm not sure I know many...

I have no memory for lyrics... But if you want, I can play you a piece that your daddy used to like. It's called Smoke on the Water.

Jessica starts to imitate the legendary opening notes of Smoke on the Water by Deep Purple with her mouth. Probably stunned by this unexpected performance, the baby immediately calms down.

Jessica – This is crazy! It's like he prefers Deep Purple over his usual lullabies....

The loud doorbell rings, reigniting the baby's cries. Jessica is momentarily taken aback before heading towards the door, exasperated.

Jessica – I'm going to strangle them...

Jessica opens the door and seems very surprised to see a young man in a suit, white shirt, and tie on the threshold.

Stephen – You recognize me, don't you...?

Jessica – Stephen?

The baby's cries have stopped.

Stephen – I absolutely need to talk to you.

Jessica – It's out of the question. Get lost, I don't want to see you anymore!

She tries to close the door, but he prevents her from doing so.

Stephen – I understand your reaction, Jessica... But you need to listen to me. Please, let me in for five minutes...

Jessica – What the hell, showing up like that without even giving a heads-up. After a whole year!

Stephen – If I had warned you, you wouldn't have even opened the door...

Jessica – Get lost, I'm telling you! To me, you're dead, you understand?

Stephen – Fine, I won't force my way in. But if you refuse to let me in, I'll sit on your doormat and won't move from here until you agree to hear what I have to say...

Jessica hesitates, visibly overwhelmed by the situation.

Jessica – Fine, but give me thirty seconds first. It's a mess in here... And after that, you leave, okay?

Stephen – Okay.

Jessica closes the door.

Jessica – Oh, no, this can't be true...

Jessica removes everything from the room that could reveal the presence of a baby – clothes, diapers, toys... Then she leans over the crib.

Jessica – If you stay quiet, mommy will buy you another teddy bear with a head and arms, okay?

She takes the crib to the next room, comes back, tidies up her appearance, and opens the door again.

Stephen – Thank you, Jessica...

Jessica – We said five minutes. (*She looks at her watch*) In five minutes, you leave, I'm warning you.

Stephen – OK.

Stephen enters the room, looks around, and then looks at Jessica.

Stephen – You haven't changed...

Jessica – Can't say the same about you... The last time I saw you, you had long hair, a beard, leather jacket, and cowboy boots...

Stephen – They say clothes don't make the man, but that's not always true. I've changed, I assure you...

Jessica – What do you want, Stephen?

Stephen – I understand if you're mad at me...

Jessica – Me? Why would I be mad at you? Exactly one year ago, at this time, we were a week away from our wedding, remember that? Invitations were sent out. The seating arrangement was already done.

Stephen – I know...

Jessica – You know...? Well, that didn't stop you from disappearing overnight without a word of explanation...

Stephen – You're exaggerating... I did leave you a note... Did you get it at least?

Jessica – Oh, yes, sorry... The post-it on the fridge... Here, in fact, I kept it as a souvenir. (*She opens a drawer and takes out a post-it note, which she reads.*) "You are out of my league. I don't deserve you. Forget me." Three sentences and as many spelling mistakes. (*She gives him a venomous look.*) And that's supposed to be enough for me to welcome you with open arms after twelve months?

He lowers his head.

Stephen – I'll explain...

Jessica – So, you couldn't find a girl worse than me, huh? After a year of searching, that's not very flattering for me, but alright.

Stephen – I didn't tell you everything, Jessica.

Jessica – Wait, let me guess... You were abducted by aliens. They took you to their planet to conduct scientific experiments on you, and they just released you, right?

Stephen – You're not far from the truth, you know.

Jessica – Seriously?

Stephen – I got arrested after robbing a store... I got a year in prison...

After a moment of shock, Jessica applauds with a sarcastic smile.

Jessica – Well done, artist... I'm impressed...

Stephen – I knew you wouldn't believe me...

Jessica – Oh, finally!

Stephen rolls up his shirt sleeve to reveal what is supposed to look like an electronic bracelet.

Stephen – I'm on probation. I have to wear an electronic bracelet. Just a few more days...

Jessica, impressed, goes from sarcasm to surprise.

Jessica (*suspiciously*) – Isn't it usually worn on the ankle? I saw that on TV.

Stephen – Maybe in American TV shows... In England, it's worn on the wrist. That's why it's called a bracelet...

Jessica – But why on earth did you rob a store?

Stephen – I needed money... to pay for our wedding, among other things...

Jessica – So that's how much you valued our love? The contents of a department store cash register.

Stephen – It was actually a small grocery store...

Jessica – If you were going to end up in prison anyway, you could have at least robbed a bank! But you've never had any ambition, Stephen. You're just a loser. In the end, you were right – I'm out of your league...

Stephen – It was the grocery store just down the street from my place... The owner recognized me and called the police. I barely had time to come to your place and leave you this message before the cops came to arrest me...

Jessica – And why didn't you tell me anything?

Stephen – I wanted to spare you a painful explanation with your parents!

Jessica – That's really considerate of you.

Stephen – Especially with your father. Since he's a police officer... Can you imagine the embarrassment for him if he had to tell his colleagues that our wedding couldn't take place because his future son-in-law was in prison? Your father never really liked me... He never trusted me...

Jessica – We wonder why, indeed...

Stephen – But during this year behind bars, I had time to reflect, Jessica, believe me. And there's one thing I've come to understand – the future is a dish best served cold.

She remains stunned by the depth of this aphorism.

Jessica – And it took you a year to figure that out?

Stephen – Now, no more foolishness, I swear. Look, I swear on the heads of our future children...

Jessica – Have you also given up music?

Stephen shows off his new business attire.

Stephen – It's a new Stephen you have in front of you, Jessica.

Jessica – I can see that... When I opened the door, I thought it was the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Stephen – Don't tell me you preferred the old Stephen.

Jessica – Let me get used to it...

Stephen – I even found a real job!

Jessica – And what do you do exactly? Work in a funeral home?

Stephen – I work... in the agri-food industry.

Stephen takes Jessica's hands.

Stephen – Trust me, Jessica. I've matured, you know. I want to settle down now. To share everything with someone...

Jessica – You have nothing! What do you want to share? You had to rob a grocery store even to buy our wedding rings.

Stephen – I mean... share my life with someone. With you, if you want...

Jessica – Yeah right... Until death do us part... You still know how to charm women, don't you?

Stephen – Can I kiss you?

Jessica pulls away suddenly.

Jessica – Okay, the five minutes are up, Stephen. I kept my word. I listened to you. Now it's your turn to keep yours. Get lost.

Stephen – I tried to write to you from my cell, I swear. But you had moved without leaving an address. The letters were returned to me. And given the situation, I didn't dare ask your parents...

Jessica – For that, at least, I think you did the right thing.

Stephen – After what happened, it took courage for me to come and knock on your door, you know.

Jessica – So you're really a hero...

Stephen – Give me another chance, Jessica.

Jessica – I don't have time, Stephen.

Stephen – I understand that you can't forgive me right away. That you need some time. I'll wait. As long as it takes. I have all the time in the world now...

Jessica – Well, I don't! Don't you understand what I'm telling you? I don't have time right now! I'm waiting for someone, you see?

Stephen – You have someone in your life, is that it?

Jessica – Yes, that's right. He's about to arrive. And I'd like to avoid him running into you here, you understand?

Stephen – I understand... You've moved on... You couldn't wait for me for months... You've forgotten about me, and that's it...

Jessica takes the post-it note and shows it to him.

Jessica – This is what you wanted, right? Look, it's written here – forget me! Well, that's what I've done. You're no longer a part of my life, Stephen...

Stephen – In that case, I'll leave... You won't hear from me again, Jessica... Unless you change your mind, of course... I'll still leave you my mobile number, just in case... *(He takes out a pencil)* Do you have a piece of paper?

She hands him the old post-it note.

Jessica – Here, you can add it to the post-it... And after that, you get lost, okay?

He scribbles on the post-it. There's a knock on the door.

Jessica – Oh, damn it!

Stephen – Is it him? Don't worry, I don't want to put you in a difficult position. I'll explain it to him. I'm sure he'll understand.

Jessica – It's my parents!

Stephen *(worried)* – Your parents? You mean... your mother and father.

Jessica – Yes, that's usually what I mean by my parents.

Stephen *(hopeful)* – So it was them you were waiting for... In reality, you're still single, right?

Jessica is completely panicked.

Jessica – It's absolutely critical that they don't see you here, you understand?

Stephen – It's true that they have some reasons to be angry with me too, but... I'll come up with something to tell them, and I'm sure they'll understand.

Jessica – That, I doubt, Stephen.

Stephen – Well, let's try to avoid my ending up in jail during my stay. Especially in front of your police officer father... But I'll try to come up with something else. Do you trust me?

Jessica – Yes, but no, it's really not possible, I assure you.

Stephen – But why?

Jessica – But... because it will shock them...

Stephen – I admit your father has always scared me a little... But your mother, she seemed to like me, right? I'll explain everything to them...

Jessica – I'm telling you, no way, damn it!

The doorbell rings.

Stephen – But why?

Jessica – Because I told them you were dead, that's why!

Stephen is taken aback. The doorbell rings again.

Stephen – You didn't do that!

Jessica – At the time, it seemed like the simplest way to avoid more humiliating explanations for me, if you know what I mean... And let me remind you that you told me to forget about you forever. You weren't supposed to come back...

Stephen – Your father is going to kill me...

Jessica – Well, this way at least you'll really be dead.

Stephen – So what do we do?

Jessica – It's too late to run. There's no emergency exit. It's a two-room apartment. And my parents are the intrusive type.

Stephen – The closets? That's where you usually hide bodies...

Jessica – We're not in a farce, Stephen... And besides, the closets are the first place my mother rushes to when she arrives to inspect my wardrobe.

Stephen – Not under the bed, then. I'm allergic. The slightest dust makes me sneeze.

Another insistent doorbell rings.

Jessica – I have to open it, otherwise my father will break down the door. For now, you go into the bedroom. I'll come and get you once I figure out something convincing to tell them about your resurrection...

Stephen – My resurrection... I hope you're feeling inspired... Because to explain something like that, it took writing the Bible...

Jessica points Stephen in the direction of the bedroom.

Jessica – You stay quiet in there and don't come out until I fetch you, understood?

Stephen – OK.

Stephen disappears into the bedroom. The baby starts crying again immediately.

Jessica – Damn it... I forgot about that...

Another doorbell rings. Jessica rushes to open the door. Her parents enter – Peter, with a policeman-like look in civilian clothes, and Mary, a lingering hippie type. Peter, who is holding a gift package, casts a suspicious glance around.

Peter – We were starting to wonder if something had happened to you. I was about to break down the door...

Jessica – What could possibly happen to me?

Mary kisses her daughter.

Mary – Hello, my darling! Are you okay? You look a bit tired...

Jessica – No, no, I'm fine... Well...

Jessica also hugs her father. Then she notices the gift.

Jessica – What's this? It's not Christmas yet... Or my birthday.

Peter – It's the surprise your mother told you about...

Mary – You'll never guess what's in this package. Believe me, it's going to shock you.

Jessica – Oh, really...? It's just one of those days...

Mary – Well, go ahead, give it to her!

Peter hands the package to his daughter.

Peter – Here you go, sweetheart.

Jessica starts to open the package.

Jessica – It's not a bomb, is it...

She takes out a rather shapeless teddy bear with one arm missing.

Jessica – What is this?

Mary – But it's Teddy!

Jessica – Teddy?

Mary – Luckily, I had the presence of mind to take down the license plate number of the truck. Your father asked his colleagues to issue a wanted notice, and yesterday, bingo!

Peter – We intercepted the suspicious vehicle on the highway just before Brighton. The teddy bear was lodged in the truck's radiator.

Mary – I didn't tell you earlier so as not to give you false hope...

Peter – Of course, he suffered a bit, but well... Did you at least keep the ripped-off arm?

Jessica – Indeed.

Mary – If you kept it in the freezer, we can sew it back on. Just kidding...

Jessica – Oh, yes, he'll be thrilled...

At that moment, the baby starts crying again.

Mary – Do you want me to go get the baby? That way we can give it to him right away.

Jessica intercepts her mother.

Jessica – No, wait, I need to explain something to you first.

Mary – But we can't let him cry like that.

Peter (to his wife) – At the same time, if you rush to pick him up as soon as he starts whining a bit... You're going to make him a wimp...

Mary – Okay? It wasn't you who made me get up twenty times a night when Jessica was a baby? You said we shouldn't let her cry!

Peter – She was a girl, it's not the same...

Mary – Yes... She was your daughter, especially... Alright, I'll go get him...

Jessica intervenes again.

Jessica – I really need to tell you something before.

Mary – What?

Jessica – I'm not alone...

Mary – But of course, sweetheart, you're not alone! We'll always be there for you! Right, Peter?

Peter – I think that's not exactly what she meant.

Mary – Oh my God! Something happened to him! The doctor is here, right? Not the emergency services though...

Jessica – Don't worry, everything is fine, but... there's a man in the room.

The parents are momentarily stunned.

Mary – A man? But that's wonderful, my dear! We knew you wouldn't spend the rest of your life alone! We're not in Portugal, right Peter? You're not going to dress in black and mourn your husband for the rest of your days!

Peter – Especially since they weren't even married yet...

Jessica – It's a bit more complicated than that, Mom...

Mary – Two months after giving birth, indeed, you didn't waste any time, but well... I'm sure he's a good person.

Peter – For him to already be taking care of kids that aren't his, he must be a really nice guy...

Mary – Tell him to come in, introduce him to us, and that's it.

Peter – But who is he? How did you meet him?

Mary – If you could bring him out of hiding, maybe he can tell us himself.

Jessica – He's Stephen's brother.

Mary – I didn't know Stephen had a brother!

Jessica – He's actually his twin brother.

Peter – Your new boyfriend is Stephen's twin brother!

Mary – She didn't say he was her boyfriend, it's us who... He's not your boyfriend, right?

Jessica – No, of course not. He just arrived in London this morning... But he can explain it himself.

Jessica opens the door to the room.

Jessica – Stefano, can you come in?

Mary – His name is Stefano?

Stephen returns to the room.

Jessica – I'd like to introduce you to Stefano, Stephen's twin brother. He just arrived from Rome this morning...

Stephen looks somewhat puzzled.

Stephen – Buon giorno...

The parents are in shock.

Jessica – He's Italian, but he speaks our language perfectly, right Stefano?

Stephen – I studied in London.

Mary approaches him and hugs him.

Mary – Our deepest condolences, Stefano. I know what it's like to lose a brother.

Peter – Your brother passed away?

Mary – No, but I can imagine the pain I would feel if it were to happen.

Peter – You speak without any accent. Where are you from exactly?

Mary – You'll see, later he'll ask you for your ID... My husband is a police officer.

Jessica – It's a bit complicated, actually... Stefano is English, but he was born in Rome.

Mary – But Stephen was born in London, right?

Jessica – Yes, that's right...

Peter – It's a bit curious for twins, don't you think?

Jessica – I understand your surprise.

Stephen – Yes, people are always surprised when I tell them.

Peter – And then?

Jessica – Stefano will explain it to you.

Stephen – No, no, go ahead, please. You tell the story better than I do...

Jessica – It's your story after all. And your family's...

Stephen – A rather painful story... That's why I don't like to talk about it much, but well...

Mary – You don't have to, you know...

Peter – Oh, well... I'm curious to know how twins can be born in two European capitals that are two thousand kilometers apart.

Stephen – Well... It's quite simple, actually... My brother and I were born on an airplane, during a Rome-London flight.

Peter – Well, well...

Stephen – And...

Jessica – Stefano was born during takeoff, and Stephen during landing.

Mary – Ah, I see... So you're the older one!

Stephen – And that's why I'm Italian...

Jessica – And Stephen is English. Well, he was...

Peter – I see...

Mary – But you never told us that Stephen had a brother.

Jessica – Well... that's because Stephen didn't even know either. He didn't even know his parents! That's why he had never introduced me to them, by the way.

Peter – Really... Tell me about it...

Jessica – Well... It's a dreadful story... and hardly believable.

Peter – I can imagine...

Jessica – Stephen's father was very poor at the time.

Stephen – That's why he decided to immigrate to England with his wife to try to find work as a mason...

Peter – By plane...?

Jessica – It was a low-cost airline, of course.

Peter – Of course...

Jessica – Anyway, as I've already told you, Stephen's wife gave birth to Stefano shortly after takeoff from Rome. She was taken care of by the flight crew, and everything went well.

Stephen – And yet, it wasn't an easy delivery. I was born breech...

Mary – And I imagine it wasn't a first-class seat.

Jessica – But...

Peter – But there was another bun in the oven.

Jessica – Exactly! When it was time to land, Stefano's mother needed to use the restroom, and that's where she gave birth to Stephen.

Mary – No kidding?

Jessica – Since his parents had no money, they decided to keep only one child out of the two.

Stephen – Me...

Mary – It's a dreadful story...

Stephen – Well, I did warn you.

Peter – Yes, it brings tears to my eyes...

Jessica – It was the pilot himself who discovered the baby in the airplane restroom...

Stephen – When he was cleaning them before the plane took off for Rome again.

Peter – The pilot...

Stephen – You know how it goes in low-cost airlines. Everyone has to get their hands dirty...

Mary – And then what happened?

Jessica – The baby was passed from hand to hand... He was raised like that for a few years by flight attendants.

Stephen – Kind women who fed him with leftover meals from their trays.

Jessica – And then when he reached school age...

Stephen – They had to eventually hand him over to child protective services.

Jessica – You can imagine how heartbreaking it was for them.

Stephen – Of course, they had time to become attached to him...

Jessica – Anyway, a few years ago, Stephen started the process with child protective services to try to find out who his parents were...

Stephen – And it was just a few days after finally tracing his family that he died from the complications of that long illness...

Jessica – Well, from drowning, to be precise.

Stephen – Oh, he drowned?

Jessica – Yes, well, that's another story...

Mary – It's crazy.

Peter – Yes... Completely insane...

Mary – The most incredible part is how much they look alike, right?

Peter – Yes, it's like...

Mary – Twins.

Peter – Put a beard and long hair on him...

Mary – Swap the suit and tie for old jeans and a black jacket...

Peter – And those sparkling eyes of intelligence for a silly smile...

Mary – Well, now that we look closer...

Peter – What?

Mary – Stephen was a bit shorter, right? I mean, a little less tall...

Jessica – When you're fed from a young age with meals from a low-cost airline, obviously... It doesn't facilitate growth...

Peter – And what does this young man do for a living?

Jessica – Stefano... holds a high-level position in the agri-food industry.

Mary – Oh, yes...

Peter – It's definitely more reassuring than being a drummer in a rock band, that's for sure...

Mary – Peter, please...

Jessica – I always knew what you thought of Stephen, Dad, don't worry.

Mary – You've said it enough times: being a musician is for losers. But if you're going to be in a band, might as well be the singer.

Jessica – Anyway, being the leader...

Peter – The drummer, always the dumbest one in the band, everyone knows that...

Stephen (*offended*) – Stephen's band wasn't doing so bad, from what I've heard...

Mary – What was it called again?

Stephen – The Rebels...

Peter – That's right... The Rebels... What a stupid name... With rebels like that, the police can sleep easy, believe me... They ride the subway without a ticket and think they're revolutionaries.

Stephen – They had a tour scheduled, I think.

Peter – A tour! A guided tour on a double-decker in London, maybe...

Stephen – Who knows... If the drummer hadn't died prematurely, they might have made it big...

Mary – My husband doesn't understand anything about modern music, Stefano. I really liked your brother. And his loss made me very sad...

The baby's cries are heard again.

Stephen – And who's this baby? Are you babysitting, Jessica?

Peter – This baby?

Mary – But it's your nephew, Stefano!

Peter – Yep, old buddy, you're an uncle now...

Stephen – My nephew?

Mary – Well, yes, Stephen's son!

Peter – He's not aware?

Jessica – He just arrived... I haven't had the chance to tell him the happy news yet...

Mary – It's still sad to think that this child will never know his father...

Stephen – And why is that?

Jessica – Because he's dead!

Stephen – Oh, right... But how did he die, exactly?

Mary – Jessica didn't tell you that either?

Jessica – He just arrived, I told you...

Mary – I understand that it may offer little solace, Stefano, but rest assured that your brother passed away as a hero.

Stephen – Really?

Jessica – Maybe it's not necessary to go into details... It's still very fresh for Stefano. It might be too much to handle all at once, right?

Stephen – At this point...

Mary – Stephen passed away while rescuing a mother and her two children from drowning.

Stephen – No kidding?

Mary – He managed to bring all three of them back to the shore, but exhausted from his feat, he was swept away by the currents in turn...

Stephen – So Stephen was a hero...

Peter – And furthermore a very modest hero.

Mary – Before disappearing into the waves, he had the time to tell the family he had saved that he did not want his sacrifice to be reported by the media...

Peter – That's why the press never mentioned it.

Mary – Otherwise, I'm sure he would have been awarded the Order of the British Empire.

Peter – Probably... They give it to everyone these days.

Stephen – It brings tears to my eyes... Jessica, it must be a comfort for you to know that you carried the offspring of such an exceptional being for nine months. And that through his presence, he will forever remind you of the love you had for Stephen.

Mary – My daughter even wrote to the President of the Republic to request permission to marry Stephen posthumously, but she hasn't received a response yet...

Stephen – Oh, really...?

Peter – We collected some money for the funeral wreath.

Mary – But there wasn't even a funeral, since they haven't found the body...

Peter – And since we didn't know his family...

Mary – Just a small ceremony among ourselves, in strict privacy... It was very emotional...

Stephen – I can imagine...

Peter – Obviously, it's not easy to grieve under these circumstances.

Mary – And to think that you will never know your brother either...

Sighs.

Peter – Finally, this child lost a father, but gained an uncle

Mary – An uncle who miraculously looks exactly like his father, like two peas in a pod.

An awkward silence.

Jessica – Can I get you something to drink?

The baby's cries are heard again.

Mary – I think it's the baby who should be given something to drink first...

Peter – Isn't there a flight attendant on board to breastfeed him?

Jessica – I'll check...

She exits.

Mary – I'll come with you...

Mary leaves with her. Awkward silence.

Peter – What a story...

Stephen – Yes...

Another silence.

Peter – Tell me, young man...

Stephen – Stefano.

Peter – Stefano, right. Tell me, my young Stefano, I feel a bit uncomfortable talking about this with you, especially at a time like this, but...

Stephen – Please, go ahead, now I'm almost part of the family, right?

Peter – Alright... So, I had lent your brother the money he needed to pay for his wedding with my daughter.

Stephen – Oh, really...?

Peter – Well, since he didn't have a penny...

Stephen – Artists, you know how they are...

Peter – Yeah... The wedding reception... The restaurant... Even the wedding dress... Let me tell you, it all adds up...

Stephen – That's for sure...

Peter – And since the wedding never happened, I was thinking that... maybe I could get my security deposit back.

Stephen – I see...

Peter – Do you happen to know what he might have done with that money?

Stephen – Honestly, I have no idea... But of course, if...

Peter – Fifteen thousand euros is still a substantial amount.

Stephen – Yes, indeed...

Peter – Almost the price of a new car... And I need to change mine soon, actually...

Stephen – I'll see what I can do, I promise...

Peter – I would appreciate it, yes... After all, now you're the one who's going to inherit from your brother.

Stephen – With benefit of inventory, at least...

Mary and Jessica return.

Mary – He just wanted his pacifier... Must be teething. (*To her daughter*) Haven't you lost a little weight, sweetheart?

Jessica – I don't know...

Mary – Well, you do look great. Motherhood suits you. Isn't that right, Stefano? Don't you think my daughter is glowing?

Stephen – Yes, absolutely...

Mary – Life goes on, right? We mustn't let adversity bring us down.

Peter – It's like a horse. After a fall, you have to get back on the horse right away, otherwise...

Mary – Are you married, Stefano?

Stephen – Uh... no. Not to my knowledge. I mean... not yet.

Peter – And between us, this Stephen, now that he's no longer here, he wasn't really the right man for you.

Mary – Come on, Peter... Show some respect for the dead.

Peter – You know, in my line of work, you come across all kinds of people... You develop a sixth sense. And him... I always thought he would end up in prison...

Stefano pulls on his sleeve to hide his supposed electronic bracelet.

Mary – But he died a hero after all...

Peter – It's all well and good to die a hero, but it's even better to live as an honest man. The truth is, he got my daughter pregnant and bailed out just before the wedding!

Mary – But... since he's dead!

Peter – Yes, well, that's a bit too convenient, don't you think...? You, on the other hand, Stefano, you seem like a serious young man. A man of his word...

Stephen – Thank you...

Peter – Why don't you marry him, Jessica? He's the perfect son-in-law!

Mary – Peter, please... Show some tact... Although it's true that Stefano is a very handsome man... Isn't that right, Jessica?

Jessica – Marry the twin brother of the father of... That would be a bit strange, wouldn't it?

Mary – On the other hand, you wouldn't be too far from home. It's the same person!

Peter – Better even...

Jessica – No, honestly, Stefano is not at all my type of man.

Stephen – That's not very nice of you...

Jessica – I'm sorry, but... I've been through a lot lately. I don't think I'm ready yet to...

Peter – In that case, maybe this young man would be interested in your sister... What do you say, Mary?

Mary – But come on, Peter, it's not up to me to say anything! You sound like a camel salesman trying to get rid of part of his herd...

Peter – Well, you could at least show him a photo of Jessica's sister, so he can get to know the family of his nephew!

She takes out a photo from her bag and shows it to Stefano.

Mary – I always carry a photo of my children with me... Here it is, in a bikini on the beach of Brighton. That's where we spend our vacations at Yellowwave Beach Campsite.

Jessica – Mom...

Stephen – Oh yes, it's true that the monokini suits her well.

Mary – Did you know she was Miss Campsite?

Stephen – But that doesn't surprise me at all...

Peter – Maybe we could give her a call, and she could come have tea with us?

Mary – That way she could meet Stefano...

Peter – And since the wedding is already paid for...

Jessica – What wedding?

Stephen – I'll explain...

Peter – Huh? What do you say, Stefano? Can I call you Stefano?

Stephen – Of course.

Peter – After all, you're already somewhat part of the family, right? So?

Stephen – It's true that she's very pretty...

Jessica – Yeah, yeah, alright... And I'm not sure she would be re-elected Miss Campsite in the first round of voting today. Or even that she would be in a favorable run-off. This photo is from ten years ago, and she's gained at least one kilo per year since then...

Mary – You're exaggerating...

Peter – Aren't you a little jealous, maybe? I thought Stefano wasn't at all your type of man...

Jessica – Well, in any case, it seems a bit premature to organize a big family gathering. The situation is complicated enough as it is, right? Let me remind you that Stefano has just learned that his brother has died...

Mary – You're right, darling...

The baby's cries are heard again.

Mary – I'll take care of it... (*With an innuendo*) Are you coming with me, Peter?

Peter – For what?

Mary – These two young people must have a lot to talk about...

Mary and Peter leave the room.

Peter – Don't do anything stupid, alright?

As soon as they leave, Jessica turns to Stephen with an exasperated look.

Jessica – So now you want to go after my sister too?

Stephen – I only said that to see how you would react. It's with you that I want to spend the rest of my days, Jessica. And now that we have a child...

Jessica – "We"?

Stephen – He's my son, isn't he?

Jessica – It's a little late to start caring now, don't you think?

Stephen – Okay, I messed up. But now I'm here. I have a real job and...

Jessica – I will never trust you again, Stephen, so as soon as my parents leave, you get out of here and never come back, okay?

Stephen – I can't live without you, Jessica. I would rather end it all.

Jessica – Well, go ahead then!

Stephen – You don't take me seriously, huh?

Jessica – Admit that until now, you haven't given me many reasons to believe you.

Stephen heads towards the door.

Stephen – Fine, you won't hear from me ever again... Except maybe in a newspaper. Since Stephen drowned, I'll throw myself into the Thames. That way you won't even have to lie to your parents anymore... Goodbye Jessica...

Jessica grabs his wrist abruptly to stop him from leaving.

Jessica – No, wait...

Stephen – It would be better for everyone if I were really dead, Jessica, I assure you...

Jessica – Stay... Please...

Stephen tries to leave anyway, and in the process, the supposed electronic bracelet remains in Jessica's hand. Jessica, astonished, examines the object.

Jessica – What is this? Are you kidding me?

Stephen – I'll explain...

Jessica picks up the object and brandishes it.

Jessica – This is an electronic bracelet? Isn't it a bike lock, rather?

Stephen – What's true is that I love you, Jessica. Look, the code for the lock is your birthdate!

Jessica – So you've never been to prison, huh?

Stephen – I went on tour with the band, but I had a falling out with the lead singer.

Jessica – Marco?

Stephen – Do you know him?

Jessica – Yes, well, sort of... Didn't you introduce us?

Stephen – And then I realized that I missed you, especially. And that it was time to let go of my teenage dreams and build something solid with you.

Jessica – I'm thrilled to know that marrying me symbolizes the end of all your teenage dreams... A real fairy tale...

Stephen – Listen, understand me too! I'm only human, after all... The prospect of this marriage... It scared me. I panicked and chose to run away. I know it's not very noble, and I hurt you a lot. But I've grown up, I assure you.

Jessica – Well, yes... Leaving is a way to grow up a little...

Stephen – I still think I don't deserve you, Jessica, but now that we have a child together... It's a sign, isn't it?

Jessica – You call that a sign?

Stephen – Give me a second chance, Jessica... Our child needs a father, after all!

Jessica – For now, I remind you that according to my parents, this child is supposed to be an orphan...

Stephen – I forgot about that...

Jessica – Even dead as a hero, my father considers you a traitor, so if you come back as a deserter... Especially if he has his service weapon on him...

Stephen looks devastated.

Stephen – Maybe we can avoid telling them that we lied to them...

Jessica – Oh, really? And how do we do that?

Stephen – Since your parents care so much about it, why don't you just marry Stefano! He's the perfect son-in-law!

Jessica – Don't you think the role of the perfect son-in-law is a bit too big for you? In the long run, at least... Especially since, of course, I imagine you're not working as an executive in the food industry.

Stephen – Let's just say I embellished a bit...

Jessica – Embellished?

Stephen – I'm a pizza delivery driver. But it's temporary...

Jessica – Well, we're still in the food industry, I suppose... So, what's your proposal?

He thinks for a moment.

Stephen – I have an idea!

Jessica – I'm not sure if that should reassure me...

Peter and Mary return, interrupting them.

Mary – It's incredible how much they look like you!

Peter – You think so...?

Mary – Oh, yes, quite a bit... Are you sure you're not the father, at least?

Stephen pretends to answer his phone.

Stephen – Excuse me, I have a call... Buon giorno. Si. Pronto. Mamma mia... Excuse me, an important call.

He goes out onto the landing.

Peter – I hope it's not a new family drama, at least...

Baby cries.

Mary – I think it's time for the bottle...

Jessica – I'll go...

Jessica leaves.

Peter – Do you believe this story about twins, then?

Mary – Don't you?

Peter – No, but it's hilarious...

Mary – Why didn't you say anything, then?

Peter – Let them dig themselves deeper, to see how far they can go before hitting rock bottom...

Mary – Well, one thing's for sure, this baby can't be Stephen's. He was born ten months after he disappeared.

Peter – Oh, really?

Mary – And besides, this baby looks more like the lead singer of the band than the drummer, doesn't he?

Peter – Marco?

Mary – You're right, in a rock band, the alpha male is the lead singer...

Peter – On the other hand, if that idiot can play the role of a father...

Mary – He may not be the ideal son-in-law, but he's the only one we have on hand.

Peter – And we're not sure if this airhead will find another one anytime soon to put an electronic ankle bracelet on him.

Mary – Pardon?

Peter – To put a ring on his finger, if you prefer...

Stephen returns, displaying a strange expression.

Peter – Is everything alright, Stefano? You look like you've seen a ghost...

Stephen – You're close...

Peter – Really...?

Stephen – I just received an incredible phone call.

Mary – From...?

Stephen – From my brother, Stephen!

Peter – Stephen?

Mary – No? But he's dead!

Peter – Don't tell me that now there's network coverage even in the afterlife?

Stephen – Believe it or not, Stephen is not dead!

Peter – No?

Mary – But how is that possible?

Peter – It's true, we never found his body...

Mary – But where is he?

Stephen – Downstairs, at the café. He's waiting to come up until I break the news gently to Jessica. You can imagine what a shock it will be for her...

Peter – Oh, yes, for sure... It's going to be a shock...

Jessica returns from the room.

Jessica – Well, you all have such serious faces, what's going on?

Stephen – It's better if you sit down, Jessica...

Jessica – I'm fine standing... What do you have to tell me that's so important?

Mary – You'll have to be brave, my dear.

Stephen – Stephen is alive...

Jessica – You... You mean he's not dead.

Stephen – Yes, that's exactly it.

Jessica – Oh my God, but that's terrible... I mean, it's wonderful... Are you sure?

Stephen – I just talked to him on the phone...

Jessica – I feel like I'm going to faint...

She pretends to faint, but Stephen catches her in his arms. Their lips brush against each other.

Jessica (*recovering*) – No, Stefano, it's not possible between us anymore...

Stephen – You're right...

Peter – We could be in a soap opera.

Jessica – No, I mean... But how is this possible?

Mary – Yes, that's what I asked too...

Stephen – He'll explain everything himself. He's waiting downstairs for me to signal him to come up.

Peter – Do you want me to give him a call? What's his number?

Stephen – I'll go get him, it'll be better...

Stephen leaves.

Jessica – This is unbelievable, isn't it?

Peter – Oh, yes, unbelievable... I think that's the word of the day...

Jessica – I can't wait to find out how something like this could happen...

Mary – What twists and turns!

Peter – Are you sure you're okay?

Jessica – I don't know... I hope he hasn't changed too much...

Peter – Well, yes... If he's been underwater for a year...

Mary – Oh, because you think...

Peter – I don't know... I'm trying to imagine...

Mary – There must be an explanation...

Peter – And I must admit, I'm quite curious to know it...

Stefano returns as Stephen, wearing jeans, a leather jacket, and a fake mustache.

Stephen – Hello, Jessica...

Jessica – Is it really you, Stephen?

Stephen – It's me, I assure you...

Mary – Didn't he have a beard before?

Jessica falls into Stephen's arms.

Jessica (*aside*) – Aren't you overdoing it a bit? It's like a gang of imposters...

Stephen – There's a prank shop downstairs, I thought it would make it more realistic...

Jessica – You've changed so much, it's unbelievable...

Peter – Yes, and not for the better...

Mary – It's true, the beard suited him better. But where is Stefano?

Stephen – He preferred to disappear... I gathered from his hints that he had fallen in love with your daughter and was about to propose to her.

Mary – That's terrible...

Peter – The happiness of some...

Stephen – His heart is broken. But of course, he decided to step aside for his brother.

Jessica – We may never see him again...

Peter – What a pity...

Mary – It's a tragedy...

Peter – A real melodrama, that's for sure.

Mary – You should write a play, I'm sure it could be a success...

Peter – But you still haven't told us how a man declared drowned can reappear alive twelve months later.

Stephen – I admit, it's very surprising...

Peter – At this point, you know, I believe that nothing can surprise us anymore...

Stephen – I was found unconscious at the mouth of the Thames, in Portsmouth.

Mary – I thought the Thames had its mouth in Southend-on-Sea.

Peter – That's probably what makes this story even more astonishing...

Stephen – Anyway, I was completely amnesiac. I was taken in by nuns in a convent. I just regained my memory... Obviously, I immediately rushed here.

Peter – Well, all's well that ends well, then!

Mary – You can finally get married!

Peter – Yes, everything will end in a wedding, just like in fairy tales. And since the wedding is already paid in advance. Tell me, Stephen, you lost your memory, but you didn't lose the money I gave you to marry my daughter, right?

Stephen – Well, you see...

Jessica – What's this about?

Stephen – I'll explain, darling...

Peter – As long as you put the ring on her finger, everything's fine. (*Aside*) Otherwise, I might have to put handcuffs on you...

Mary – In any case, it's going to be strange to see the two twins at the wedding.

Stephen – Given the situation, I don't know if Stefano will want to attend the ceremony...

Jessica – Well, now you'll understand that we need some time alone...

Mary – Of course, my dear... Come on, Peter...

Peter – So, see you soon... Stephen.

The parents leave.

Jessica – Well, bravo...

Stephen – Do you think they believed it?

Jessica – When dealing with a professional liar, you never know... But tell me, what's this money that my father supposedly advanced you for our wedding?

Stephen – Well, you see...

Jessica – Don't tell me that's the money you used to go on tour with The Rebels?

Stephen – I'm willing to pay you back, Jessica. Even if it means working full-time for the rest of my life...

Jessica – That's what most people do to support their family, you know. (*Baby crying*) Anyway, you won't get away with it...

Jessica leaves and comes back with a crib.

Stephen (*touched*) – By the way, what's his name? You didn't tell me...

Jessica – This one is Orpheus.

Another baby cries, and she goes to get another crib.

Jessica – And this one is Eurydice... They're twins. Must run in the family, I guess... Must be genetic...

Stephen – Orpheus and Eurydice... Oh, damn... Hell... I mean... But it's wonderful.

Jessica – Yes, you'll see... When they both start crying at the same time, it's like having stereo.

He leans over the two cribs with concern.

Stephen – And... are you sure they're both mine?

Jessica – Who knows...

Stephen – It's strange, this one vaguely reminds me of someone...

Babies cry in unison. Jessica tries to calm them down. The doorbell rings.

Jessica – Can you go and answer the door? I'm a little busy here, you see... It must be my parents again... They must have forgotten something.

Stephen – I'll go.

He disappears for a moment to open the door before reappearing with a big smile.

Stephen – You'll laugh... It's Marco!

Jessica looks puzzled.

Jessica – Marco?

Rock music plays (possibly "Smoke on the Water" by Deep Purple).

Fade to 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

Four stars

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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