

La Comédiathèque

OPEN HEARTS

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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Open Hearts

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Translation by the author

In a café across the street from a hospital, a decidedly odd landlord serves and observes the fate of his customers looking for hearts to steal... for a transplant or even a relationship.

- 1 – Heart up for grabs
- 2 – Tender-hearted
- 3 – Heavy-hearted
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- 5 – Gift of the heart
- 6 – Heartache
- 7 – Heartbeats
- 8 – One heart for two
- 9 – The heart on the sleeve
- 10 – Wholeheartedly
- 11 – A brand new heart
- 12 – Hearts in harmony

Up to 12 men and 12 women.

*Flexible casting in terms of numbers (several roles can be played by a single actor)
and gender (several roles can be either male or female).*

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1 – Heart up for grabs

A café. The landlord is behind the bar, wiping glasses. A woman arrives, not exuding joy. Without looking at him, she sits at the counter. The landlord observes her discreetly for a moment.

Landlord – Madam... What can I get you?

Her – Do you have arsenic?

Landlord – Is it for takeaway or to consume on-site?

Her – I'm still undecided...

Landlord – Have a coffee in the meantime. With a little calvados, it'll cheer you up. The calvados is for me.

Her – Calvados? At this hour?

Landlord – Calvados has been known since antiquity for its anti-depressive virtues. I prescribe it to my customers every day, and no one has committed suicide so far.

Her – That's kind, but I'll stick with the coffee. I work at the hospital, just across the street.

He prepares her coffee.

Landlord – A nurse... It must not be fun every day...

Her – Surgeon.

Landlord – Ah... Sorry, Doctor...

Her – It pays a bit better, but it's not necessarily more enjoyable.

Landlord – I can imagine...

Her – And that's just talking about my job. Thankfully, I work day and night. Not having a private life has its advantages, you know... when you have a crappy life...

He hands her a newspaper.

Landlord – Take a look at your horoscope, it might predict a temporary improvement.

She glances at the newspaper.

Her (reading) – "You will give your heart to a stranger"...

She puts the newspaper back on the counter.

Landlord – That's good news, isn't it?

Her – It depends.

Landlord – You shouldn't give your heart to just anyone, that's for sure.

Her – And especially, it's better to give it while you're alive.

Landlord – I'm not sure I follow...

Her – "You will give your heart to a stranger" ... Look, it's not in the love section, it's in the health section...

Landlord – It must be a mistake...

Her – I have a patient waiting for a heart transplant. We just need a healthy donor. Preferably dead.

Landlord – I see...

Her – We can do nothing but wait... Someone will have to die so that another can live.

Landlord – It's fate...

Her – An accident can happen so quickly. After all, it might be me. Since it's in my horoscope.

He places the coffee in front of her.

Landlord – You really are an optimistic, it seems...

Her – I never had a child; it would be my last chance to give life...

Landlord – Are you really sure you don't want that calvados?

Her – Never during work hours... If a donor comes in, and I have to operate in an hour...

Landlord – If you're the donor, there won't be anyone left to perform the operation.

Her – In the case of heart transplants, it's the donors who are lacking, not the surgeons. Such operations remain exceptional. I know some who would be willing to kill to perform their first transplant.

Landlord – Well, then I'll drink that calvados, and I'll offer you the coffee.

Her – You're a strange café owner. That's not how you're going to make a fortune.

The landlord pours himself a calvados and drinks it in one gulp.

Landlord – I gave up the idea of getting rich a long time ago. And I don't offer coffee to just anyone, you know...

Her – Why me? He can't say I'm pleasant company...

Landlord – I've always been wary of overly friendly people. I have my preferences, that's all. There are some who I like, and others, not so much.

Her – So, I'm lucky, then...

Landlord – Well, we don't know each other... Maybe I'm your handsome stranger...

Her – Who knows... Well, I have to go...

Landlord – Another life to save?

Her – No, but I parked in a "disabled" spot.

Landlord – With your medical symbol on the windshield, you can park anywhere without getting fined, right? Just for that, I would have liked to study medicine.

Her – Thanks for the coffee...

Landlord – Be careful crossing the street.

Her – We've only just met, and you're already a mother to me. If I'm still single in ten years, remind me to marry you.

Landlord – Alas... who would want to marry their mother? (*She exits.*) That's the tragedy of my life...

2 – Tender-hearted

The landlord is behind the counter, reading the newspaper. A man and a woman arrive and sit at a table.

Her – Just to let you know, I don't have much time... I have to get back to work in an hour. And my boss is just waiting for an opportunity to fire me...

Him – Thanks for sacrificing your lunch break for me.

Her – No, but I'm not sacrificing anything for you... (*Looking at the menu*) I'm going to have something to eat here. Aren't you?

Him – Yes, yes, of course, I mean... Thanks for agreeing to have lunch with me.

She puts the menu down. A pause.

Her – So, you had something to tell me...

Him – Yes...

Awkward silence.

Her – I'm listening...

The landlord glances intrigued at them.

Him – I'm not sure how to say it...

Her – Since we don't have much time, let me help you a bit... You want to go out with me, right?

Him (*taken aback*) – Yes, well...

The landlord interrupts this somewhat pathetic scene, arriving.

Landlord – What can I get you?

Her – A Niçoise salad... without anchovies and without tuna.

Him (*jokingly*) – A ham and butter sandwich... without butter. (*The woman doesn't laugh, and the landlord gives him a cold look.*) No, just kidding. A ham and butter sandwich, please.

Landlord – One Niçoise and one Parisian sandwich. Coming right up.

The landlord leaves.

Her – Do you eat meat?

Him – Uh... yes. Well, no.

Her – But you eat ham...

Him – Yes, but... Ham isn't really considered meat, is it?

Her – Have you seen the latest investigation by PETA on pig farming in cages?

Him – No.

Her – I think if you had, you wouldn't eat ham anymore...

Him – I'm sorry, I... I didn't know...

Her – That's what the Germans said after the war about the camps.

Him – What did they say?

Her – "I didn't know..."

Him – Okay... so... you're a vegetarian.

Her – Vegan.

Him – Okay...

Her – You don't know the difference, do you?

Him – No.

Her – I don't eat any animal products. I don't wear leather either. No fur, obviously.

Him – In this weather...

Her – Sorry?

Him – No, I mean... I don't wear fur either. That's a start, isn't it?

Her – Listen, I'll be frank with you. I could never date a guy who eats ham. But we can be friends if you want... We're not closed-minded, after all.

Him – Is it that serious? I mean... It's just a slice of ham.

Her – Do you know how that pig was raised? How it lived? How it was slaughtered?

Him – No.

Her – Have you ever visited a pig farm?

Him – No.

Her – Have you ever visited a slaughterhouse?

Him – No... and you?

Her – Me neither, but I've seen many videos about it.

Him – Okay... No, but... I don't really care that much about ham... I mean, meat in general.

Her – So, you could become vegan just to go out with me?

Him – Why not? Of course! Absolutely...

Her – And if I were Muslim or Jewish, and asked you not to eat pork and convert to my religion, would you do it?

Him – Are you Muslim?

Her – It's just a supposition. So?

Him – I don't know... Maybe... I'm Catholic, but... It's the same with meat, I don't really care that much...

Her – You're quite easily influenced, it seems.

Him – Or... I really want to go out with you.

Her – Yeah... but it wouldn't be out of conviction.

Him – That I would date you?

Her – That you would stop eating meat! It would just be to date me.

Him – Yes, well...

Her – And as soon as I dumped you, you would go back to eating meat.

Him – We're not even dating yet, and you're already thinking of dumping me?

A pause.

Her – What's your worst food experience?

Him – Sorry?

Her – The worst meal of your life, if you prefer.

Him (*jokingly*) – I hope it's not going to be this one... (*She remains stone-faced.*) No, I... I don't know...

Her – Well, I can tell you.

Him – Okay.

Possibly melodramatic music accompanies the narration of this traumatic episode.

Her – I must have been around ten years old. We were invited with my parents to their friends' house. A doctor and his wife. They weren't really friends, in fact. They were just our new neighbours. My mother had invited them over once to welcome them to the neighbourhood, and they were returning the invitation. My parents are very simple people. It must have flattered them to be invited to dinner by a surgeon. They probably expected these high-class people to go all out. So we have drinks, chat a bit, and then sit at the table. It's true that the dishes were made of porcelain, and the tablecloth was immaculately white. There were so many utensils on the table that we wondered which one to use first. Then comes the main course, after a green salad, and what does the surgeon place on the table?

The music abruptly stops.

Him – You're scaring me...

Her – A heart!

Silence.

Him – A human heart?

Her – No, not really... Well, I don't think so. I imagine it was a beef heart.

Him – A beef heart... I didn't even know that was edible... The soft one, maybe... For cats... It's the lungs, I think... But a heart!

Her – And those two sadists had the nerve to ask us if we liked it.

Him – And then?

Her – My parents are extremely polite people... So, invited to a doctor's house, you can imagine... My mother politely answers: "Of course, you bet. We've never eaten it before, but well, there's a first time for everything, right?"

Him – Oh, damn...

Her – And my father adds: "Oh yes, beef heart, that's original, it's a change of pace. That's true, we never think about it, we should have it more often, right, dear?" Meanwhile, I'm disgusted, of course. I say I don't like it. My mother insists: "Until you've tasted it, you can't say you don't like it!" And the doctor lectures us: "You know, in primitive tribes, warriors used to eat the hearts of their enemies to gain their strength." And the doctor's wife adds: "In any case, beef heart is very good for your health. It's full of proteins. And don't we say 'strong as an ox'?" And there I am, with a huge piece of heart on my plate.

Him – Wasn't there anything else to eat?

Her – Just green salad.

Him – Heart with salad...

Her – It's not easy to cut either, I can tell you. Like a rubber sole, you know? Have you ever eaten it?

Him – A rubber sole...?

Her – And everyone chewing their beef heart before forcing themselves to swallow it. All the while, talking about the weather, as if it were perfectly normal.

Him – And is it good? I mean... What does it taste like?

Her – Nothing. It had the texture of chewing gum. Since then, I've never chewed gum again. And, above all, from one day to the next, I became vegan. Even before the word existed. I even wonder if I didn't invent the concept...

Him – Oh yes... That's enough to be traumatized forever...

Her – Wait... what if you were right...?

Him – Sorry?

Her – Now I'm wondering if it really was a beef heart.

Him – No?

Her – Well, he was a surgeon, you see... When they transplant a new heart into a patient, we don't really know what they do with the old one. I imagine there aren't many patients asking to keep it as a souvenir in a jar.

Him – Do you think there are cannibal surgeons?

The landlord returns with the sandwich and salad.

Landlord – Here you go. A Parisian ham and butter sandwich and a Niçoise salad without anchovies or tuna. I replaced them with mackerel. (*The woman gives him a deadly look, and he continues deadpan.*) Just kidding. Enjoy your meal.

The man looks at his sandwich before pushing it away.

Him – No, you're right. It wouldn't be honest of me.

Her – What?

Him – To quit eating meat just to date you. I have to believe in it.

Her – That's for sure...

Him – The problem is, quitting meat is like quitting smoking. When you're addicted...

Her – So, you're giving up...

Him – I know what I have to do.

Her – Now you're scaring me.

Him – I'm going to the butcher's shop right across the street. I'm going to buy a beef heart and eat it whole. After that, I think I'll be permanently disgusted by meat. Just like you.

Her – You'd do that for me? You'd eat a bovine heart?

Him – What do you think?

He gets up. Surprised, she stands up too.

Her – But... you're going now?

Him – If I think too much about it, I might not be able to do it.

Her – And... do you have a recipe?

Him – I'm going to eat it raw. I'm a warrior, right?

Her – Well...

Him – Okay, wish me luck.

He hugs her, playing on the element of surprise, he kisses her on the mouth for a long and passionate moment. He leaves. She watches him go, puzzled. The landlord, who saw everything, returns.

Landlord – Didn't he like the Parisian ham and butter sandwich?

Her – He decided to become vegan.

Landlord – Well, he seems really motivated...

Her – Yes...

3. Heavy-hearted

The landlord wipes the counter with a cloth. A couple arrives and sits at a table.

Him – Are you sure this is a good idea?

Her – What?

Him – Having one last drink together.

Her – We've been married for ten years. We can't just part ways like this, in a judge's office. It would be too sad.

Him – Yes...

The landlord approaches.

Landlord – What can I get for you?

Her – What are you having?

Him – I don't know... (*Sarcastic*) Champagne?

Her – Why not...?

Him – Then two glasses, please.

Landlord – Sorry, we only have Blanquette de Limoux. It's good a Kir cocktail. You know, we're near a hospital, so we don't often get a chance to pop open the Veuve Clicquot Champagne.

Him – Alright then, just a coffee.

Her – Same for me.

Landlord – And two espressos.

The landlord walks away.

Her – So, it's done... This time, it's really over?

Him – That's what we wanted, right?

Her – Of course. But still...

Him – You don't have any regrets?

Her – A divorce is always a failure. I regret that it didn't work out.

Him – Me too...

A moment of silence.

Her – But, you're the one who cheated on me.

Him – Yes...

Her – Sorry, I didn't mean to bring that up again... We're divorced, you don't owe me any explanations.

Him – No... (*A moment*) And you, you never cheated on me? You can tell me now.

Her – No.

Him – Not even a one-time slip-up?

Her – No.

Him – A fleeting little kiss one night, after a few too many drinks?

Her – No.

Him – No, of course not... You're so perfect...

Her – I gather that's not a compliment coming from you...

The landlord brings the two coffees.

Landlord – Here you go...

Her – Thank you.

The landlord walks away.

Him – Can I ask you something? Now that it's over anyway...

Her – Again?

Him – You haven't admitted anything yet...

Her – If it's an interrogation, then... Go ahead, I'm listening...

Him – Did you ever lie to me, at least once, during all these years we spent together?

Her – Lie?

Him – Even by omission. Something important that you would have hidden from me. Something you wouldn't be proud of, obviously. Otherwise, it's pointless...

Her – Why are you asking me this now?

Him – I don't know... Realizing that, in the end, you weren't as perfect as I thought... It would help me grieve.

Her – I'm not dead, you know.

Him – I mean grieving the end of our relationship. Our love, if I may say so.

Her – You may.

Him – So?

Her – If it can help you...

Him – I'm listening.

Her – It's not that easy...

Him – Don't tell me you have a range of choices.

Her – No, precisely. I'm thinking...

Him – I have all the time in the world.

Her – Do you remember our first car?

Him – Yes.

Her – One morning, we found it on the street with one fender completely smashed in.

Him – Yes.

Her – Obviously, no one left a note for the insurance.

Him – No.

Her – It was me. I hit the gate pillar while reversing. The car was brand new, and I didn't dare tell you. I was so ashamed. I parked the car on the street and said nothing.

Him – I knew.

Her – You knew?

Him – There was paint residue on the gate pillar. It's probably still there.

Her – And you didn't say anything?

Him – You appeared so invested in that falsehood... What difference would it have made?

Her – Probably none. But why didn't you speak up?

Him – You ruined our brand new car. You lied in such a pathetic way. I'm not a detective. What could I have said?

Her – I don't know. You could have... scored a point.

Him – That's not how I saw our relationship. The lie was so childish. Almost endearing. I thought it must have been important to you. I preferred to let you keep your dignity...

Her – Thank you... that's kind.

Him – Yes... (*A pause*) And you, you're making fun of me.

Her – Not at all. It's true, I assure you.

Him – When you asked me if I had ever cheated on you, I was honest with you. I could have denied it. Maybe we'd still be married. Now it's your turn to play the game. There must be something else... Something more serious...

Silence.

Her – Okay... Do you remember when you were away for three days in Toulouse for a conference?

Him – Yes.

Her – I told you I was going to the hospital for a routine examination.

Him – Oh yes... I remember.

Her – It was for an abortion.

Him – An abortion...

Her – If you prefer, a termination...

Him – We had decided to have a child... You had stopped taking birth control pills...

Her – Yes...

Him – I don't understand.

Her – Neither do I...

Him – And then?

Her – I don't know... I was scared.

Him – Scared?

Her – Scared that I couldn't handle it. Scared that you would leave me... Between us, I wasn't entirely wrong.

Him – Don't turn the tables... If we had had that child, things might have been different.

Her – Maybe...

A moment of silence.

Him – How could you do that to us?

Her – Thank you for not saying "to me"... It's not something I can explain. I didn't feel capable. Capable of handling it.

Him – Handling what?

Her – Giving life. Becoming a mother.

Him – You could have talked to me about it. Shared it with me.

Her – I never dared to tell you... I was too ashamed...

Him – Just like with the car.

Her – I'm really sorry. I was scared...

Him – Did I scare you that much? Even about the car...

Her – It was scared of myself. (*A pause*) Do you really think things could have been different?

Him – Things are always as they are; there's no point in imagining them differently in hindsight. It's probably just that we weren't meant to be.

Silence.

Her – I think we should go.

Him – Yes...

They get up to leave.

Her – Do you still see her?

Him – Who?

Her – The one you cheated on me with.

Him – Ah, that one...

Her – You never told me who she was. Can you tell me now? Do I know her?

Him – What would be the point...?

A moment.

Her – You never cheated on me.

Him – No...

Her – Then why...

Him – It was easier that way.

Her – You mean easier for me.

Him – Easier for both of us... I think we'd better go now...

Her – Let's go.

They leave.

4 – Queasy heart

The landlord cleans glasses on the counter and rinses them in a sink out of view. A man and a woman enter. The man glances suspiciously and somewhat disgustedly at the bar. They sit at a table.

Him – It's really grimy. I wonder why I keep coming here.

Her – It's the only café across from the hospital...

Him – When you see the hygiene standards we have to follow in our work... If a patient catches a nosocomial disease in your department, even just a cold, they'll sue you. Then they come here and get their little glass of red wine in a barely rinsed glass between two customers, one of whom may might have hepatitis and the other the Ebola.

Her – Yeah...

Him – Did you see that? Dirty dishes sit in the sink from morning till night. You can imagine the culture broth... By the end of the day, you've shared your germs with half the town. Nosocomial diseases, my foot. What do you call a disease you catch in a café?

Her – Cirrhosis of the liver?

The landlord approaches.

Landlord – And what can I get for you, ladies and gentlemen?

Him – I don't know... A tomato juice.

Her – A coffee.

The landlord walks away.

Him – I don't know why I'm getting tomato juice, I can't stand it.

Her – After a while, we don't know what else to order anymore

Him – Sodas are so sweet. I should have ordered a fruit juice.

Her – You still can...

Him – I don't know... Did you see the look on the landlord's face? He doesn't seem friendly.

Her – Do you want me to go?

Him – It's too late, he just opened the bottle. That's just like me. I'll have to drink a tomato juice even though I hate it. Plus, tomatoes give me heartburn. Don't they do that to you?

Her – No.

Him – Too bad, I won't drink it then...

Her (*changing the subject*) – What are you doing this summer?

Him – I don't know yet... I'll probably spend a week or two at my parents' place, like every year.

Her – You're close to your parents, then.

Him – Not really. They're bloody annoying, but they have a villa with a pool near Antibes.

Her – When you're annoying, if you still want to see your children after they leave home, you have to invest in a pool. You should consider it for yours when the time comes...

Him – Yeah... Unless I don't want to see them too often.

Her – Besides that, how are things?

Him – Well, my wife invited the neighbours over for dinner again.

Her – So what?

Him – It's not that they're not nice, but... they're a bit annoying too...

Her – Why did she invite them?

Him – We just moved into the neighbourhood. They kindly invited us to their place to get acquainted. So we felt obliged to return the invitation. I'm afraid it might become a habit, you know?

Her – I can see that.

Him – Now that we've set the ball rolling...

Her – I might have a solution.

Him – A solution?

Her – To make sure they never come to eat at your place again.

Him – What do you mean?

Her – I had the same thing happen a few years ago when I bought the house.

Him – And then?

Her – The neighbours invited us. Teachers, you know. Subscribers to a cultural magazine. Politically progressive, naturally. Environmentally conscious, leaning towards vegetarianism, but they still eat meat occasionally if it's organic.

Him – I see. Nice, but totally boring. And how did you get rid of them?

Her – When we returned the invitation, I served them a special dish.

Him – Special?

Her – A heart.

Him – A heart? How do you mean, a heart?

Her – A beef heart. Straight up. Just with a salad.

Him – A beef heart? I didn't even know you could eat that... Where did you find it?

Her – At the butcher's around the corner.

Him – I didn't know it was sold.

Her – Oh no, but he didn't sell it to me. He gave it to me.

Him – No way! And did they eat it?

Her – They're polite people, you see. I told you, teachers. So it's about tolerance, respect for differences. They didn't dare say a word, you can imagine. Like, I respect everyone's customs, even if they're different from mine, and I make an effort to share something with them, even if it's not exactly my values. They held their noses, and they ate it all.

Him – And then?

Her – We never saw them again.

Him – Never?

Her – We bump into each other from time to time, of course, we're neighbours. But they never dared to invite us again, afraid that we would return the invitation and serve them something even worse than last time... We totally traumatized them, I'm telling you.

Him – That's crazy...

Her – Oh no, you should have seen their faces when I put it on the table... I should have taken a photo. Actually, I think I did...

Him – Damn... But then you had to eat it too.

Her – You have to know what you want, my friend. It's just a bad moment to go through. But afterwards, you're free for the rest of your life.

Him – Okay... Yeah, I'm not sure... I'll talk to my wife about it...

Her – Definitely not, you fool!

Him – Why not?

Her – She wouldn't agree, obviously!

Him – Yeah... There's a good chance.

Her – No, surprise her. Tell her tonight, I'm the one cooking, darling.

Him – Oh yes, that alone will surprise her, for sure...

She gets up.

Her – Well, I have to go now.

Him – Okay.

Her – You'll tell me about your evening, promise?

Him – Wait, I haven't even been served my tomato juice yet...

Her – You'll see, it works every time. If you never want to have them for dinner again without getting into a fight with them, it's the only solution, I assure you... There's a butcher's shop right across the street.

Him – Thanks for the advice! You're right, I'll do that...

Her – Glad to help...

She leaves.

5 – Gift of the heart

The landlord waits behind the counter, idle. A man and a woman enter.

Her – Hi, Jack.

The landlord nods in response. They sit at a table. The landlord comes over to take their order.

Landlord – What can I get you?

Her – The usual.

Landlord – And for you?

Him – The same.

Landlord – Same as the lady or the same as your usual?

Him – Sorry?

Landlord – I don't know what you usually have!

Him – Yet I come here every morning, like she does.

Landlord – That's how it is. There are faces I remember, and others I prefer to forget...

Him – Let's say the same as her, then.

Landlord – And two coffees...

The landlord walks away.

Him – Always so friendly...

Her – You have to take him as he is.

Him – What an idiot.

Her – Do you know his name, this idiot?

Him – No.

Her – Jack.

Him – You seem very familiar... with this idiot Jack.

Her – I come every day for a coffee before work...

Him – Me too... But he acts like he doesn't know me.

Her – Are you jealous?

Him – Maybe he's the jealous one... Do you know him that well?

Her – We've never really talked.

Him – How do you know his name is Jack?

Her – I don't know... Everyone knows... Anyway, everyone calls him Jack, and he's never complained.

A moment passes.

Him – How are you?

Her – Fine.

Him – What do you feel like doing?

Her – I don't know...

Him – It's a nice day... Let's not lock ourselves in a movie theatre. Shall we take a stroll?

Her – Whatever you want.

Him – Try to contain your excitement... Is something bothering you?

Her – No... Not particularly.

Him – I don't know... Something you want to talk to me about.

A moment passes.

Her – Okay... If something happens to me someday, I want to donate my organs.

He looks taken aback.

Him – To whom?

Her – I don't know! To someone who needs them.

Him – Needs...?

Her – Are you doing this on purpose or what? A transplantation!

Him – Oh yes... Okay...

Her – I have my donor card with me, but just in case...

Him – Alright.

Her – I need to tell someone. Because when you're no longer able to speak...

Him – Okay.

Her – And if I'm brain dead, I definitely don't want to be kept alive artificially.

Him – No problem... But you know, we're not even married yet. I'm not even sure I'd have a say. It would probably be up to your parents to make the decision.

Her – They're dead.

Him – Oh right, I forgot... Then your siblings.

Her – I'm not on good terms with my entire family.

Him – Well... We'll just have to get married then. So that I can have control over all your organs.

Her – Is this a marriage proposal? Because it would probably be the most original marriage proposal in history.

Him – Will you marry me?

Her – Yes... (*A moment*) And you?

Him – Well yes, since I just asked for your hand... Well, your hand, your heart, your lungs, your liver, and everything else...

Her – No, I mean, and you, if something happens to you. Now that I'll have access to all your organs too.

Him – Oh yes... That's peak romance...

Her – So?

Him – I don't know... I haven't really thought about it... I already don't donate my blood... except to a few mosquitoes.

Her – You're wrong.

Him – If, by dying, I could pass on my heart to save your life, I would probably do it. But giving my heart to a stranger... It's true, you can always end up with an idiot. Idiots can have heart problems too. Maybe not as much as others, but they do...

The landlord arrives.

Landlord – And two coffees... (*Addressing the man*) Can I take the payment now?

The man takes out a few coins and places them on the table. The landlord takes them and leaves without a word.

Him – Imagine if I die and that idiot needs a transplant. Honestly, I'd be pissed off to give him my heart.

Her – It's a risk to take.

Him – Well... If it makes you happy, I'll get my card too...

Her – Yes, it does make me happy. And now, I feel like going for a walk in the forest with you.

Him – In the forest?

She stands up.

Her – Shall we go?

Him – Can I finish my coffee first?

Her – Alright, but hurry up.

He drinks his coffee.

6 – Heartache

The landlord stands behind the counter. The man (or woman) enters, lost in thought.

Landlord – What can I get you?

The other – I don't know... Whatever you want...

Landlord – Whatever I want? Are you sure?

The other – At this point... What do I have to lose? Surprise me...

Landlord – Alright, I'll serve you an Oxo. You look pale, it might do you good.

He prepares the Oxo.

The other – An Oxo? Does that still exist?

Landlord – I admit, I don't sell it very often... and I don't plan on restocking it.

The other – Assuming they still make it. It hasn't exceeded the expiration date, has it?

Landlord – You said "whatever you want," so you have to make up your mind! So, will you take this Oxo or not?

The other – If I can help you get rid of your stock...

The landlord serves the Oxo.

Landlord – You don't seem to be doing well...

The other – No... I'm looking for a available heart.

Landlord – We're all in the same boat, you know... Once you reach a certain age... there's more demand than supply

The other – You couldn't be more right.

Landlord – Are you a widower?

The other – It's going to be my wife soon... if I don't find someone quickly to give me their heart.

Landlord – I'm not sure I follow...

The other – I just got out of the hospital. I'm waiting for a transplant. But for now, there's no donor.

Landlord – A donor? Ah, yes...

The other – Obviously, you don't give your heart like you give your blood. The donor has to be deceased, and all the conditions have to be met.

Landlord – I see...

The other – The donor should to be young, so it's more likely that they died in an accident. The heart has to be in good condition. The family has to agree.

The other prepares to drink.

Landlord – Are you sure you want to drink that?

The other – Well, you have to die of something...

He tastes the Oxo and grimaces.

Landlord – So...?

The other – Oh yes, you need a strong stomach... Have you never had one?

Landlord – I was waiting to see the effect it had on a guinea pig.

The other – If I'm still alive tomorrow morning, I'll come and tell you.

Landlord – If I had known, I would have served you something else. Now I'm going to worry.

The other – I wonder if it wouldn't be easier that way. I can already picture my photo in the news: desperate for not finding a compatible heart, he ends his life by swallowing an Oxo expired since... (*looking at the label on the empty bottle*) 1984!

Landlord – Oh, wow... That's quite something... Well, it's a great vintage... Anyway, don't lose hope. Accidents happen so easily.

The other – Accidents?

Landlord – For your donor! The street across is very dangerous. With all those trucks. There's a plan for a roundabout, but... Almost every month, a pedestrian gets hit on the crosswalk. And since the hospital is right across...

The other – Thanks... Talking with you has cheered me up...

Landlord – That's life... what goes around comes around.... One person's misfortune...

The other – I don't think I'll finish this Oxo after all. How much do I owe you?

Landlord – It's on me. Do you want something else? To get rid of the taste of the Oxo. A Bloody Mary? It's very invigorating too. Or maybe a Fernet-Branca?

The other – That sounds tempting, but... no, thanks, I'm good.

Landlord – Well then, until next time...

The other – Who knows?

He stands up to leave.

Landlord – Be careful crossing the road.

The other – Thanks for the Oxo.

He exits. The landlord picks up the cup and sniffs the steam coming out. He wrinkles his nose with a disgusted look.

Landlord – Oh, wow...

A screeching of brakes followed by a crash of crumpling metal is heard. He raises his head and glances toward the audience, representing the café window facing the street.

Landlord – Oh, yes, quite something...

7 – Heartbeats

The landlord is wiping glasses behind the counter. A couple arrives and sits down. Silence. The landlord approaches.

Landlord – What can I get you?

Her (*in a decisive tone*) – Nothing for now. We're waiting for the third...

Landlord – Alright...

The man looks surprised. The landlord walks away.

Him – I didn't know we were expecting someone...

Her – Neither did I.

Him – What do you mean? Who is it?

Her – I don't know... The person doesn't have a name yet...

Him – Are you pulling my leg?

A moment of silence.

Her – What would you say if I tell you I'm pregnant?

He takes a moment to process the question.

Him – First of all, I would say... there's a problem with verb tense agreement.

Her – Sorry?

Him – Normally, you should say "if I told you I was pregnant" and not "if I tell you I am pregnant." After a conditional clause in the past tense, we use the past tense.

Her – Ah, I see...

Him – Are you pregnant?

Her – I didn't say that...

Him – So it's a conditional statement.

Her – If you say so...

Him – Aren't you sure?

Her – Do you want to see a tampon?

Him – What tampon?

Her – Guess what? A tampon from the town hall!

Him – You shouldn't joke about that.

Her – I'm not joking. I just wanted to talk about it. So, what do you think?

Him – Having a child... it always starts as a conditional, right?

Her – It's up to us to turn this conditional into an indicative.

Him – As long as you don't conjugate it in the imperative...

Her – You didn't answer my question...

Him – What?

Her – What would you say if I told you... that I was pregnant?

Him – I don't know, I would say... great!

Her – Great?

Him – Yeah... But just to be clear, you're not pregnant...

The landlord returns.

Landlord – Are we still waiting for the third?

She places her hand on her belly.

Her – The third person is already here... We can place our order now...

The man looks at her with surprise.

Landlord – Great.

8 – One Heart for Two

The landlord is reading the newspaper behind the counter. Two men arrive and sit at a table.

One – Coffee? (*The other nods.*) Jack! Two coffees.

Two – His name is Jack?

One – I don't know... I call all barmen Jack. That way, I'm sure not to make a mistake.

Two – Okay...

One – He's one of my patients. I removed his appendix ten years ago, haemorrhoids five years ago, thyroid three years ago, and a lung last year.

Two – Well... He must be grateful. Thanks to you, he lost at least three kilos.

The landlord brings the coffees.

Landlord – Here you go, Doctor...

Two – At least he recognized you.

One – I'm not even sure. He calls all his customers "Doctor." Since we're in front of the hospital... At worst, if they're not doctors, it flatters them. (*They stir their coffee in silence before drinking.*) So, do we have a donor?

Two – It seems so...

One – A woman who threw herself under a truck, right in front of the hospital.

Two – Threw herself?

One – We're not entirely sure... It might have been an accident... Her head took the brunt of it. Brain dead. The rest is in perfect condition. We're waiting for the family's decision.

Two – I see.

One – Yes, except we have two patients waiting for a transplant...

Two – Oh, you too?

One – You know it very well.

Two – I thought it was a liver for you...

One – It's a heart.

Two – A heart for two... With two patients who have very similar profiles. It won't be easy to decide between them.

One – So what do we do? Flip a coin?

Two – I'm game!

The other takes out a coin.

One – Only one of our two patients will be alive in a month. Heads for yours, tails for mine.

He flips the coin, catches it, and looks at his palm before putting it away.

Two – But it doesn't work like that, we know it well...

One – No. (*A pause*) How long have we known each other?

Two – Since college...

One – Second year, I believe.

Two – Yes...

One – We were both in love with the same girl.

Two – A first-year student.

One – Who became your wife.

Two – I don't know what she saw in me... that she didn't see in you.

One – You spread rumours in college that I had a micro-penis. I think you even circulated a photoshopped montage....

Two – Ah yes, that's true. I had forgotten about that.

One – I only found out much later.

Two – I didn't think she would swallow something so big.

One – Are we still talking about my micro-penis?

Two – Do you really think that's why she chose me?

One – It must have played a part... I was truly in love with her, you know...

Two – A heart for two... There's inevitably one left by the wayside.

One – That time, it was me.

Two – She left me a few years later. Haven't you seen her since?

One – I did... Once... I had just gotten divorced as well... We had dinner together... And then nothing...

Two – But she knew about...?

One – I don't know... I didn't dare ask her... Can you imagine me slipping in, between coffee and the check, that contrary to what her ex said, I had a normal-sized penis?

Two – Yeah...

One – I think it was too late anyway... I don't know if revenge is a dish best served cold, but love isn't a dish that can be reheated.

Two – So you want to get revenge?

One – No, but it seems to me that you owe me a heart.

Two – You have a very personal interpretation of the Hippocratic Oath... What motivates you so much to save your patient?

One – Let's just say I have a... special connection with him.

Two – But you know it doesn't work like that either.

One – Oh no?

Two – Are you asking me to condemn my patient in advance?

One – That's what you said. A heart for two... There's inevitably one left by the wayside.

Two – It's not just up to me, you know that. It's a collective decision.

One – But you could slightly manipulate your patient's file so that mine appears more convincing.

Two – And if I refuse?

One – I could start a rumour as well. But I'm not sure this one would be false.

Two – Like what?

One – Nurses never stay long in your department, we all know why. And the girl who just got run over in front of the hospital, intentionally or not, she worked for you.

Two – I'll see what I can do...

He's about to take out a bill.

One – Leave it, the coffee is on me.

9 – The heart on the sleeve

The landlord dozes off behind the counter. Two characters (men or women) arrive and sit at a table.

One – He looks like he's in a deep coma too...

Two – What do we do? Should we wake him up?

One – Let's wait for him to wake up on his own.

Two – Miracles are always possible.

Silence.

One – And what about her, then? What should we do?

Two – Honestly... I don't know what to think about it.

One – We'll have to make a decision. The doctor said we need to act quickly.

Two – Yes.

One – Of course, logically we should say yes.

Two – Logic? She's our sister, after all...

One – Yes... Have you ever heard her talk about this in front of us?

Two – We hadn't seen each other for years... and even before that, it wasn't the kind of conversation we had together.

One – So it's up to us to decide. As if it were for ourselves.

Two – You mean... as if we needed a transplant?

One – As if we were in her place! In place of the deceased... What would you do? If you could decide to donate your organs or take them with you to your grave...

Two – Obviously, in principle... If we can save a life before dying...

One – On the other hand...

Two – To imagine that they'll open her chest and take her heart to put it in someone else's chest...

One – Someone we don't even know.

Two – Thank goodness... It would be worse if we knew them. Would you prefer to know them?

One – I would prefer her not to be dead.

A moment.

Two – Moreover, can we really say that she's really dead?

One – According to the doctors, she's in a state of brain death.

Two – What does that mean exactly? Do you know?

One – Basically, the house is still standing, the heating hasn't been turned off yet, but there's no one inside anymore. The owner has left, thrown away the key, and will never come back.

Two – I see.

One – So it's about retrieving the boiler to install it in another house where the boiler is broken, so that the owner can continue to live there without freezing.

Two – Are you done with your plumber metaphors now?

One – I'm trying to explain...

Two – So, you're more in favour, right?

One – You are too, aren't you? You knew we would end up here.

Two – Yes...

The other takes out a piece of paper.

One – Come on, let's get it over with... (*Hands the paper*) You need to sign here.

Two – Go ahead, do it for me... I won't be able to.

One – No, they need both of our signatures.

Two – Just imitate mine.

One – But that would be forgery...

Two – What are you afraid of? That I'll sue you for imitating my signature?

One – But if you agree, why don't you sign?

Two – I agree, but I can't sign, that's all. Can't you understand that? (*Getting up to leave*) For once, I'm asking you for something!

One – But... you hated her, after all.

Two – Exactly... If it were a gesture of love, it would be different... It would be easier for me. But in this case... I don't feel capable of deciding for her. (*The landlord emerges from behind the counter.*) Look, he woke up, this one... You see, you're never safe from a miracle!

The character exits, leaving the other perplexed. The landlord approaches.

Landlord – What can I get you?

10 – Wholeheartedly

The landlord waits behind his counter. A man, resembling a mobster or a dealer, arrives and takes a seat at the bar.

Landlord – What can I get you?

Him – A decaf. Long. With a drop of milk, please.

The landlord glances at the customer, whose appearance doesn't quite match his order.

Landlord – I'll see what I can do...

He prepares the coffee.

Him – This street is dangerous. I almost got run over by a bus.

Landlord – Yes... A woman was hit yesterday...

Him – Is she okay?

Landlord – She's dead... Well, practically.

Him – Did you know her?

Landlord – She was a customer... She had just left my place, and according to the tests, she had three grams of alcohol in her blood.

Him – In your line of work, as well as mine, it's better not to get too attached to customers.

Landlord – Are you new to the neighbourhood?

Him – I'm just passing through.

Landlord – We're all just passing through Earth...

Him – I'm afraid mine might end sooner than expected.

Landlord – If you pay close attention when crossing the road...

Him – I just came out of the hospital. I'm waiting for a heart transplant...

Landlord – Ah, you too...

Him – Sorry?

Landlord – Oh, nothing, just a story I heard... I hope you came across the right surgeon...

The landlord places the coffee on the counter.

Landlord – Here's your decaf with a hint of milk.

Him – How's business going?

Landlord – It's quiet. And you?

Him – Same here... It's pretty calm at the moment...

Landlord – What line of work are you in?

Him – Drug trafficking. Mostly heroin.

Landlord – Ah, I see... So you know what it's like to lose a customer.

Him – Fortunately, organ donations are anonymous, because I don't know who would want to give their heart to a dealer.

Landlord – Or to a tobacconist.

Him – You're right. In the end, we're in somewhat the same line of work, both of us...

Landlord – Mmm...

Him – They just received a donor at the hospital.

Landlord – It's your lucky day, then.

Him – I don't know... There are two of us in the running.

Landlord – Ah...

Him – Would you give me your heart? If you were dead, I mean... Knowing what I do.

Landlord – Why not? Among dealers, if we don't support each other a bit...

Him – I promised a suitcase full of cash to my surgeon if he finds me a brand new beating heart. Used bills, in small denominations. Do you think it might help?

Landlord – It depends on the surgeon, I suppose.

Him – This one has a reputation for jumping at anything that moves.

Landlord – I see... Can I pour you another decaf with a splash of milk? It's on me.

Him – Cheers... You only live once...

Landlord – And if your heart gives out on your way, it won't be because of what you drank here...

11 – A brand new heart

The landlord stands behind the counter as the customer (male or female) arrives.

Landlord – Sir, what can I get you?

The other – Don't you recognize me?

Landlord – We see so many people... What can I get you?

The other – Definitely not a Oxo...

Landlord – No...? I didn't recognize you. Well... it seems that Oxo did you some good after all. You look twenty years younger.

The other – Yes... Oxo. And also the brand new heart I had transplanted a few months ago.

Landlord – You finally found a donor?

The other – You were right, this street is really dangerous...

Landlord – Well, it's on the house. What can I get you?

The other – A lemonade...

Landlord – You're not allowed alcohol anymore...

The other – Yes, but I decided to give it up. A sacrifice I'm making... to thank fate.

Landlord – Fate?

The other – Someone died so that I could live. I must take care of their heart.

Landlord – But you don't even know who it was...

The other – No... and I'm not sure I want to know. But hey, maybe they were a Muslim. All the more reason to stop drinking alcohol.

Landlord – So, you don't eat ham anymore either?

The other – I've become vegan, it's even simpler. And how about you? How are you doing?

Landlord – My wife just left me.

The other – Is she dead? Please don't tell me it's her heart beating in my chest...

Landlord – I wish that were the case. It would cost me less. Being a widower, you're twice as rich. Being divorced, you're twice as poor.

The other – That's four good reasons to prefer widowhood...

Landlord – I might have to sell the café to give her share.

The other – I'm sorry...

Landlord – In the end, it's probably better this way. Selling alcohol and tobacco... Tobacco already cost me a lung.

The other – So what are you going to do?

Landlord – I don't know...

The other – You should try acting.

Landlord – Acting?

The other – Has no one ever told you that you look like an actor?

Landlord – No... Well, to stay behind a counter all day and deliver lines to all sorts of customers, you already have to be a bit of an actor...

The other – That's true... I myself often go to cafés to write.

Landlord – What do you write?

The other – Plays, mostly.

Landlord – I've heard so many stories. There's enough material for comedies, dramas, tragedies...

The other – You'll have to tell me some of those stories.

A moment of silence.

Landlord – Is there still something bothering you?

The other – There were two of us waiting for a transplant. There was only one donor available. I learned that the other person died a few days after my surgery...

Landlord – Oh, I see...

The other – It seems I had a better medical profile.

Landlord – As you say... It's fate.

The other – Yes... Maybe they were a good person.

Landlord – Or maybe a scoundrel... Who knows...

The other gets up to leave.

The other – Thanks for the lemonade... Here, take my card. I'm looking for someone like you for a small role in my next play. A landlord. It'll be your debut on stage...

He leaves. The landlord looks at the card.

12 – Hearts in harmony

The landlord is behind the counter. She arrives. It's the same woman from the first scene.

Landlord – Have you come back to propose to me?

Her – It hasn't been ten years yet...

Landlord – Five.

Her – And you still remember me?

Landlord – I told you, I have a good memory for faces... Yours is one that's hard to forget. Still no Calvados?

Her – I won't be needing it anymore. At least, I hope not...

Landlord – That's good to hear.

Her – Do you remember? You read my horoscope to me...

Landlord – "You will give your heart to a stranger." (*Pointing to the newspaper*) It's in today's paper again.

Her – They often reuse the same phrases.

Landlord – This time, it's under the love section.

Her – They weren't wrong. I have a date with him.

Landlord – Here?

Her – In five minutes.

A moment of silence.

Landlord – Did you meet a stranger on a dating site?

Her – He's my ex-husband. We got divorced a few years ago.

Landlord – Ah yes... So, not exactly a stranger...

Her – We lived together for ten years, and during that time, I felt like I was living with a stranger. However, it was I who didn't know myself, and I was the one who wasn't doing well.

Landlord – Why now?

Her – He had a heart transplant a year ago.

Landlord – So you thought that with a brand new heart...

Her – When he found out he was sick, he didn't tell me. Things weren't going well between us already. He didn't want me to stay with him out of pity, I suppose.

Landlord – And you left him...

Her – He told me he had met someone else...

Landlord – But that wasn't true...

Her – He had a fifty-fifty chance of survival. He didn't want to make me a grieving widow...

Landlord – He preferred to make you a happy divorcée... And so, he survived...

Her – I work at the hospital... I found out by chance that he had a transplant. I called him... I asked him if he wanted to see me again.

Landlord – Hoping that his brand new heart would start beating for you again... Be careful... in your terms, that could be called therapeutic stubbornness!

Her – Do you think you can't love the same person twice?

Landlord – Well, you can marry the same man twice, and you can divorce the same woman twice.

Her – He's not quite the same man anymore. As you said, he has a brand new heart...

Landlord – Not brand new, not exactly... The one it belonged to before might have already been very unlucky in love.

Her – In the end, you're even more pessimistic than I am.

Landlord – I'm jealous, that's all. I told you, you're someone unforgettable....

Her – I hope he hasn't forgotten me either... (*On the verge of tears*) And that he has forgiven me...

He puts his hand on hers to comfort her.

Him – Have confidence in yourself.

She turns her gaze towards the café window, facing the public.

Her – There he is... My heart is racing...

Landlord – As strongly as when you first met him?

Her – Much stronger...

Landlord – Let's hope his heart doesn't give out now, that would be such a shame...

Her – You know what, I'll take that little Calvados after all.

He pours her a glass, which she drinks in one gulp.

Landlord – You'll be fine.

Her – Thank you.

She presses his hand one last time and walks away towards the public to meet her ex-husband.

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 theatre 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 theatre 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 Cuckoo's nest
A sailor went to sea...
A simple business dinner
All's well that starts badly
An innocent little murder
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Cheaters
Check to the Kings
Crash Zone
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but stable
Eurostar
Four stars
Fragile, handle with care
Friday the 13th
Heads or Tails
Him and Her
In lieu of flowers
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Last chance encounter
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
One marriage out of two
Preliminaries
Quarantine
Running on Empty
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Ideal Son-in-Law
The Jackpot
The Joker
The perfect Son-in-Law
The Performance is not cancelled
The Smell of Money
The Window across the courtyard
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!

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