

La Comédiathèque



# *Neighbours' Day*

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# Neighbours' Day

*Alex has just inherited a splendid apartment in the upscale neighbourhoods of Paris from an old aunt whose existence he was unaware of. He takes a tour of the property with his friend Clara. However, family secrets are like corpses; they always end up resurfacing...*

## Characters

Alex, literary director  
Clara, English teacher  
Mrs Sanchez, caretaker  
Mrs. Martin, property manager  
Dr. Bernard, physician  
M. Petit, lawyer  
Sam, prostitute and/or transvestite  
Colonel Leroy, cavalry officer  
Father Dessaint, defrocked priest  
Lady Lambert de la Cour, baroness  
Mrs Zebra, psychoanalyst  
Angela, painter  
Mr. Crampon, insurer  
Mrs. Crampon, his wife

Indicative Cast: 5M/9F

Many roles can be either male or female, the distribution varies widely by gender:  
3M/11F, 4M/10F, 5M/9F, 6M/8F, 7M/7F, 8M/6F, 9M/5F...

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*A living room with a bay window that one can imagine opens onto the rooftops of Paris, on the side facing the audience. The right side of the stage is supposed to lead to a terrace, and the left side to a corridor leading to an entrance. The furniture and decoration are outdated or kitschy. At the back of the stage, in a monumental frame, a pre-war painting depicting a young military figure, with a resemblance to Marshal Pétain*

**Alex** (off) – Wait a moment, I'm disarming the alarm. If I don't do it within thirty seconds, we'll wake up the whole building, and we'll be taken away by the cops like thieves... Damn, what's the code again... Oh yes, 14-18...

*Clara arrives. From the threshold, she casts a glance over the whole place and utters an exclamation, a mix of admiration and bewilderment.*

**Clara** – Wow!

*She advances into the room, and Alex arrives in turn.*

**Alex** – I warned you, a bit of refurbishment is needed...

**Clara** – You talk like a real estate agent. I remind you that you're the owner.

**Alex** – I'm still having some trouble realising... But wait until you see this...

*He accompanies her to the front of the stage to contemplate the view through the bay window. This time, Clara's exclamation is genuinely amazed.*

**Clara** – Wow!

**Alex** – You'll see. From the terrace, leaning a bit, you can even catch a glimpse of the Eiffel Tower.

**Clara** – Oh yes, that's going to be a change for us... From our place, without having to lean, we see the cemetery of La Garenne-Colombes.

*Alex approaches and hugs her.*

**Alex** – So? Are you willing to spend your first night with me in our new home?

**Clara** – It's true that all this is very exciting... But I'll wait until I've seen your great-grandmother's bed before giving you a definitive answer.

**Alex** – It's not my great-grandmother, it's my great-aunt Germaine.

**Clara** – Your great-aunt was German...?

**Alex** – Not German! Germaine, it's her first name. She was my grandmother's older sister.

**Clara** – Your father's mother?

**Alex** – My mother's. Well, supposedly...

*Clara walks around the room.*

**Clara** – And you never met her?

**Alex** – I didn't even know my grandmother had a sister.

**Clara** – That's crazy...

**Alex** – What?

**Clara** – That your parents never told you about this Aunt Germaine...

**Alex** – Yeah...

**Clara** – And today, you inherit her apartment.

**Alex** – Apparently, she had no children. And since my parents are also dead, the notary said I was her only heir...

**Clara** – It's still sad... Can you imagine? All these years, she lived here. Two metro stops away from the publishing house where you work. And you learn about her existence through an obituary...

**Alex** – An obituary? Not even... When I received the notary's letter, the funeral had already taken place.

*Clara picks up a photo in a frame on a pedestal.*

**Clara** – Is this her?

**Alex** – Yeah, I suppose...

**Clara** – She was beautiful... when she was young.

**Alex** – Yeah.

**Clara** – Is that all it does to you?

**Alex** – What?

**Clara** – I don't know... She's no longer here, and you'll never know her... All you have left is a photo...

**Alex** – And the apartment.

**Clara** – Doesn't it do something to you to know that Aunt Germaine is dead?

**Alex** – Oh yes. Yes, it does something to me, I assure you.

**Clara** – Really?

**Alex** – Honestly? I feel like I won the lottery.

*Clara puts the photo back.*

**Clara** – Clearly... We're not going to miss our two-room in La Garenne-Colombes."

**Alex** – Can you believe it? No more public transportation. I can walk to work!

**Clara** – And I can bike. Just the Seine to cross to get to the high school.

**Alex** – No rent to pay. Right in the centre of Paris. An apartment with a terrace, on the top floor with an elevator, in a beautiful Haussmannian building.

**Clara** – There you go, you're talking like a real estate agent again.

**Alex** – There's even a parking space!

**Clara** – We don't have a car...

**Alex** – Are you kidding? Do you know how much it costs to rent a parking space in a neighbourhood like this?

**Clara** – No. How much?

**Alex** – I'm not sure exactly, but... at least half of my current salary, probably.

**Clara** – Why don't you just rent the parking space and switch to part-time? You can start writing your first novel. You won't publish other people's books your whole life.

**Alex** – I'd need to find a subject first...

**Clara** – Well, you could write the story of this mysterious grandmother.

**Alex** – It's my great-aunt.

**Clara** – A woman who was almost a hundred years old, who must have been in her twenties during the last war. There's surely enough material for a novel.

*Clara takes another look around the room.*

**Alex** – It's true that the atmosphere is heavy...

**Clara** – Yes... I'd even say oppressive. It's like Germaine's ghost still haunts this apartment.

**Alex** – We might need to have it exorcised before moving in.

**Clara** – You think?

**Alex** – We'll start by getting rid of all these old things and repaint the walls.

**Clara** – Indeed... it's quite dark.

*Alex approaches the bay window again.*

**Alex** – Yeah... But look at this view! These thousands of rooftops stretching out before us.

**Clara** – And behind each of those windows, men and women, each with their own story. Each with their own destiny.

**Alex** – It's true. It's very romantic.

**Clara** – Paris...

**Alex** – The most beautiful city in the world...

**Clara** – And the most romantic.

**Alex** – Thousands of apartments like this one. Millions of people. Billions of stories being written.

**Clara** – Yes... Can you imagine? Right now, some are proposing marriage.

**Alex** – Others are in the midst of a breakup.

**Clara** – Babies are being born everywhere.

**Alex** – And old folks are kicking the bucket, like Aunt Germaine.

**Clara** – Some are doing the dishes.

**Alex** – And others are making love...

*They start to embrace. They are interrupted by the doorbell.*

**Clara** – Who could that be?

**Alex** – I have no idea... I don't know anyone in this building...

**Clara** – The ghost of Aunt Germaine?

**Alex** – I'll check...

**Clara** – Do you want me to come with you?

**Alex** – It's okay. But if I'm not back in five minutes, call an exorcist, okay?

*Alex exits. Clara examines the painting, intrigued.*

**Alex (off)** – Oh yes... No, not at all... But please, come in...

*Alex returns, followed by Madame Martin.*

**Martin** – I hope I'm not disturbing you. It's Madame Sanchez, the caretaker, who told me she saw you going up with your lady. (*Seeing Clara*) Well, I don't know if she's actually your wife... Hello, Miss.

**Clara** – Hello, Madame.

**Alex** – Clara, let me introduce Madame Martin, a neighbour who is also the building's syndic.

**Martin** (*with a solemn air*) – Dear Sir, on behalf of all the co-owners of this building that I have the honour to represent, please accept our deepest condolences.

**Alex** – Thank you, but you know...

**Martin** – Your aunt was an exceptional person. A woman of character, it must be said. But entirely charming. The residents of the building were very fond of Germaine.

**Alex** – I'm very glad to hear that, truly.

**Martin** – For all of us, Germaine was much more than just a neighbour, you know. We did small favours for her. We did her shopping on occasion. We assisted her with administrative matters when needed...

**Clara** – Really?

**Martin** – In short, we did everything we could to make her feel less alone. She received very few visitors, as you know. We surrounded her every day with our affection. And she returned it, believe me.

**Alex** – Ah yes, that's... Well...

**Martin** – In fact, for Germaine, her neighbours were a bit like family. By the way, I didn't know she had another one... In any case, she never mentioned it to me.

**Alex** – It doesn't surprise me... In fact, I knew very little about my Aunt Germaine...

**Martin** – Oh yes... I also don't recall seeing you at the funeral...

**Alex** – To tell you the truth, I...

*Clara, annoyed by this interrogation, intervenes.*

**Clara** – But I imagine you didn't come just for a chat, and we wouldn't want to keep you too long. Perhaps you had... something to ask us? Among neighbours. A corkscrew, some coarse salt, matches...?

**Alex** – A nutcracker...?

**Martin** – Oh, for the corkscrew, you're not far off... Well, it's a bit awkward... Given the circumstances...

**Clara** – Go on.

**Martin** (*clearing her throat*) – Excuse me, I have a frog in my throat.

**Alex** – Would you like something to drink?

*Clara shoots Alex a disapproving look.*

**Clara** – I don't know if we have anything to offer you.

**Martin** – Just a glass of water will do, thank you.

**Clara** – I don't even know where the fridge is...

**Martin** – Don't bother, tap water will be fine. It's of very good quality in the neighbourhood, you'll see. So why bother hauling packs of mineral water. Especially when you live on the top floor, like you. Even with the lift. (*Alex and Clara wait for her to get to the point.*) The tap is in the kitchen. The second door on the left in the corridor. You'll find glasses in the cupboard just above.

*Clara exits, somewhat miffed.*

**Martin** – So, today is Neighbours' Day, and ever since this celebration started, your aunt always insisted on hosting it at her place.

**Alex** – Well, well...

**Martin** – A tradition of sorts. Probably because of the large terrace and the view of Paris.

**Alex** – Probably...

**Martin** – It must be said that this apartment is the most beautiful in the building. And since Germaine was all alone, it provided her with a bit of company.

**Alex** – Unfortunately, she's dead, isn't she...

**Martin** – Of course... But she would have surely been very happy to see all of us here tonight, gathered one last time...

**Alex** – Well, you see... We hadn't planned...

**Martin** – Don't worry about that; we'll take care of everything. As usual. I mean, as we used to do with your Aunt Germaine.

*Clara returns with a glass of water, which she hands to Madame Martin.*

**Martin** – Thank you very much.

**Clara** – You're welcome...

*Martin places the glass without drinking from it.*

**Martin** – As I was saying to your husband...

**Clara** – We're not married yet, if that's what you wanted to know.

*Alex intervenes to ease the tension.*

**Alex** – Madame Martin came to invite us to Neighbours' Day.

**Clara** – Oh yes? That's... very kind of her. (*Surprised*) But when?

**Martin** – Well... But today!

**Alex** – And... the idea is that it happens at our place...

**Clara** – At our place? What do you mean, here?

**Martin** – Let's say that... it will be a sort of farewell gathering.

**Alex** – We've just moved in.

**Martin** – I mean, a farewell gathering... for Germaine. Since you couldn't attend the funeral...

**Alex** – Of course...

**Martin** – Alright then, since you agree, it's settled. I don't know how to thank you enough, really.

*Alex and Clara, taken aback, exchange an awkward glance.*

**Alex** – But... it's nothing, please.

**Martin** – So, do you... Do you plan on moving into this apartment?

**Alex** – Uh... Yes... Well...

**Martin** – Well then, that way, you'll get to know all your new neighbours... Kill two birds with one stone.



**Alex** – Yes, why not...

**Martin** – Alright, I'll take off. I still have a few preparations to finish... For this little reception, I mean... So, see you later?

**Alex** – See you later...

*Alex is about to follow her.*

**Alex** – Let me walk you out.

**Martin** – Don't bother, I know the way.

**Alex** – Very well...

*Martin leaves. Alex and Clara look at each other, perplexed.*

**Alex** – I feel like she sort of pressured us, don't you think?

**Clara** – You didn't exactly put up much of a defence..

**Alex** – You left me alone with her!

**Clara** – You sent me to get her a glass of water from the kitchen! A glass she didn't even drink, by the way...

**Alex** – We haven't even moved into the building yet; we shouldn't start a fight with all the neighbours...

**Clara** – From there to letting ourselves be overrun on the first day.

**Alex** – You're right... She really roped us into this Neighbours' Day thing.

**Clara** – Yeah... Especially considering that Neighbours' Day is usually in June...

**Alex** – No?

**Clara** – I thought you knew!

**Alex** – How was I supposed to know?

**Clara** – Everyone knows that Neighbours' Day isn't in late December. Late December is Christmas! You do know that, right?

**Alex** – It's crazy... Why do they have Neighbours' Day in December?

**Clara** – Probably another tradition... Like celebrating it at our place... What a great start...

**Alex** – Well... Let's look on the bright side... It will allow us to get to know all our neighbours at once.

**Clara** – There wasn't any urgency either. We've just arrived.

**Alex** – What can you do? We're co-owners now. That also implies certain constraints...

**Clara** – You're the co-owner.

**Alex** – Anyway, we'll have dealings with them in the future for the building's management. And Madame Martin is the syndic. I couldn't just brush her off like that.

**Clara** – I don't know why, but I have a bad feeling about this condominium.

**Alex** – It saves us from having to host a housewarming party. She said they'd take care of everything.

**Clara** – Indeed... they do seem to have a nasty habit of taking care of everything, even things that don't concern them.

**Alex** – We'll see... If they're not nice, we won't invite them again.

**Clara** – They invited themselves!

**Alex** (*hugging her*) – Come on... Let's not argue over this.

**Clara** – You're right... The main thing is that we're finally home.

**Alex** – How about we continue our tour of the property?

**Clara** (*turning towards the painting*) – Who's this? Your great-uncle? Germaine's husband?

**Alex** – No idea...

*They both look at the painting.*

**Clara** – He looks a bit like Marshal Pétain, doesn't he, with that moustache?

**Alex** – All military men look alike... And moustaches were quite fashionable at the time. But he seems a bit young, doesn't he?

**Clara** – Even Pétain was young once...

**Alex** – True... It's hard to imagine that all dictators weren't born with a moustache. That Pétain was once a young, clean-shaven man, Stalin a pimply teenager, and Hitler a chubby baby.

**Clara** – Anyway, it's probably not a masterpiece... despite what one might think seeing the frame.

**Alex** – Too bad... It could have helped me cover the inheritance taxes.

**Clara** – Inheritance taxes?

**Alex** – This apartment won't be free, after all. With this distant degree of relation, the tax rate is quite high. And since Germaine left nothing at the bank besides this property...

**Clara** – And how much are these taxes going to be?

**Alex** – The notary hasn't given me the exact figures yet. At worst, I'll take out a loan. It's still better than paying rent.

**Clara** – I don't know why, but I'm starting to wonder if all of this is really going to be as simple as we thought...

**Alex** – Shall I show you the terrace?

**Clara** (*with a hint*) – What if you showed me the bedroom first?

**Alex** – Okay...

*He takes her hand and is about to lead her into the corridor. They are interrupted by the doorbell ringing again.*

**Clara** – Again?

**Alex** – Let it ring! We're not obliged to open...

**Clara** – You just invited the entire building for Neighbours' Day! We can't leave them outside...

**Alex** – You think it's already them?

**Clara** – Who else could it be, in your opinion? Santa Claus?

**Alex** – I'll go...

**Clara** – Leave it... This time, I'll handle it.

**Alex** (*a bit worried*) – Try to stay friendly, though.

**Clara** – I'll play the perfect hostess, I promise.

**Alex** – Okay.

*Clara leaves. Alex stays there and sighs. He examines the painting in turn, intrigued. The landline phone, a relic from another era, rings. Alex hesitates, then answers.*

**Alex** – Hello... Yes, this is the right place... No, I'm her great-nephew... Neighbours' Day? Uh, yes, it's here... Well... Okay, see you soon then...

*He hangs up. Clara returns followed by Madame Martin, who carries a basin of sangria, and Madame Bernard, who carries a quiche.*

**Martin** – And here's the sangria!

**Bernard** – Hello, hello! I made an onion flamiche!

**Martin** – Ah, last year it was a leek flamiche, right?

**Bernard** – I thought I'd change it up. And to be honest, I didn't have any leeks on hand. I hope you like onions!

**Martin** – Well, Doctor! Everyone likes onions! And they're very good for your health. I put them everywhere.

**Bernard** – I hope you didn't put them in the sangria.

*They both laugh foolishly, under the horrified looks of Alex and Clara.*

**Martin** – But of course, I'm neglecting all my duties! Let me introduce you to Doctor Bernard, who has her office just below. Admit that it's convenient to have a doctor in the building. We also have a dentist, but he's currently deceased. I mean, he passed away last month, and his replacement hasn't arrived yet.

**Bernard** – Madam, Sir... Delighted.

**Alex** – Doctor...

**Bernard** – Please, call me Marianne. But... I'm not sure I caught your names...

**Clara** – Clara.

**Alex** – And I'm Alex.

**Bernard** – If you could clear this table, my dear Clara. We're going to set up the buffet here.

*Clara absentmindedly removes the Chinese vase that sits on the table.*

**Martin** – Alex, if it doesn't bother you, there should be a tablecloth in that small cabinet there. It would be more appropriate...

*Alex opens the cabinet but doesn't seem to find it.*

**Bernard** – At the bottom.

*Alex takes out the tablecloth and spreads it on the table. Martin places the sangria basin on it, and Bernard puts the tart.*

**Martin** – There you go. Guests will help themselves in the living room. By the way, I don't know what they're doing... But if you want to enjoy the terrace in the meantime.

**Alex** – Very well...

**Bernard** – After all, you're at home here.

**Clara** – Thanks for reminding us...

*The doorbell rings again.*

**Bernard** – Ah, you see, you were being judgmental. For once, they are on time.

**Martin** – I'll go... But afterward, I'll leave the door open, because otherwise, it'll never end...

*She exits. An exchange of slightly embarrassed smiles.*

**Bernard** – I was the one who assisted your aunt during her final moments...

**Alex** – Oh yes. Unfortunately, I didn't have the pleasure of... Well, I mean...

**Clara** – And... what did she die of, exactly?

**Bernard** – My God, you know... Past 90 years old... Do we really need to die from something specific? In any case, I can assure you she didn't suffer.

*Mr. and Mrs. Crampon arrive, one with a tabbouleh and the other with an endive salad. Followed by Martin.*

**Mr. Crampon** – Good day, everyone... Excuse me for not shaking hands, but I'm a bit burdened... Where can I put this?

**Mrs. Crampon** – Can't you see the buffet is here! As usual...

*Mr. Crampon places his dish, and Mrs. Crampon does the same. They turn to Alex and Clara.*

**Mr. Crampon** – Jacques Crampon, insurance broker. And this is Josiane, my wife.

**Mrs. Crampon** – You're Alex and Clara, I believe.

**Clara** – Yes... News travels fast, I see.

**Mr. Crampon** – Before working as the caretaker in this building, Mrs. Sanchez worked in East Germany for the Stasi.

**Mrs. Crampon** – I thought she was Portuguese...

**Mr. Crampon** – I'm joking, Josiane! I'm joking!

**Mrs. Crampon** – I made a tabbouleh and an endive salad.

**Mr. Crampon** – I hope you like endives.

**Mrs. Crampon** – Why do you say that?

**Mr. Crampon** – Personally, I hate endives.

**Mrs. Crampon** – Yes, that's why I also made a tabbouleh. But endives are very good. And it's the season. Do you like endives, Alex?

**Alex** – Yes, well...

**Mr. Crampon** – I didn't even know there was a season for endives... I thought endives were year-round...

**Mrs. Crampon** – These are Roquefort-stuffed endives. They're excellent; you'll see. And it's very good for your health. Isn't that right, Doctor?

**Bernard** – Anyway, in my entire career, I've never met anyone who died after eating Roquefort-stuffed endives.

**Mr. Crampon** – That's because none of your patients had tasted my wife's.

*Mrs. Crampon shoots him a look.*

**Mr. Crampon** – But come on, Josiane, I'm joking! We're here to have a good time together, right? Among neighbours!

**Clara** – Yes... And it looks like it's off to a good start...

*The landline phone rings. Before Alex can react, Martin answers automatically.*

**Martin** – Hello, yes? Ah, it's you, Father... Yes, yes, I understand... No, no problem, we're waiting for you... Okay, see you soon.

*She hangs up under the astonished gaze of Clara and Alex.*

**Martin** – That was Father Dessaint. He'll join us, but he was delayed by an emergency. Last rites.

**Clara** – Last rites...?

**Martin** – Father Dessaint is a holy man, you will see.

**Mr. Crampon** – He lives on the ground floor. Ever since his rectory was sold by the bishop to a gay couple who turned it into gay-friendly guest rooms...

**Bernard** – It seems the Church is in crisis too... They have to sell family jewels.

**Martin** – You couldn't be more right... Unfortunately, today, we sometimes feel like we're living in the kingdom of Sodom.

*Blank stares.*

**Bernard** – Can I offer you something to get us started?

**Mr. Crampon** – Go ahead! Let the party begin...

**Martin** – Sangria?

**Mrs. Crampon** – Sangria.

**Martin** – Very well... So, Sangria for everyone!

**Mr. Crampon** – And at least, for Sangria, you don't need a corkscrew!

*Everyone bursts into laughter, except for Alex and Clara.*

**Bernard** – It's an inside joke because Germaine never knew where she put her corkscrew.

*They all laugh again. Alex and Clara force themselves to smile but exchange a slightly worried look.*

**Martin** – In her last days, your poor aunt was losing her mind a bit, you know...

**Bernard** – At nearly a hundred years old, it's quite normal not to have such a good memory anymore... Otherwise, for her age, she was still very fit, believe me...

**Clara** – So, she died in good health, didn't she, Doctor?

*An awkward moment is dispelled by the arrival of Father Dessaint, accompanied by Baroness Lambert de la Cour*

**Dessaint** – Good day, everyone! And welcome to the newcomers!

**Mr. Crampon** – Ah, here's Mr. Peanuts.

**Alex** – Mr. Peanuts, hello.

*All the neighbours laugh again.*

**Bernard** – They're hilarious...

**Martin** – No, it's another joke among us because every year, without fail, he arrives at the Neighbours' Day with a pack of peanuts.

**Dessaint** – And here they are! Why deviate from tradition?

*He takes out a pack of peanuts and places it on the buffet before shaking hands with Alex and Clara.*

**Dessaint** – I am Father Dessaint, and this is Baroness Lambert de la Cour

**Mrs. Crampon** – Who, according to tradition as well, didn't bring anything, I suppose...

**Baroness** – There's always too much, anyway. And everyone has to leave with leftovers. Might as well eat the leftovers directly!

*A new burst of laughter.*

**Martin** – I feel like we're going to have a great time!

**Dessaint** – Not to mention that this year, Neighbours' Day has a very special resonance for all of us...

**Martin** – That's true, excuse me. I momentarily forgot that poor Germaine left us.

**Dessaint** – Yes, it's moving to be all gathered at her place tonight. I feel at any moment she'll come through that door to treat us to that delicious walnut cake she was so keen on keeping the recipe secret...

**Mrs. Crampon** – Your aunt was very secretive...

**Alex** – I certainly couldn't argue otherwise. All her life, she managed to hide her own existence from me.

**Dessaint** – I had the privilege of administering the last rites to your aunt before God called her back to Him. Rest assured she didn't leave us without the help of religion.

**Alex** – Oh yes, that's... That's quite reassuring indeed.

**Clara** – I gather Germaine was very religious...

**Dessaint** – Religious? I'd even say militant.

**Martin** – When they passed the law on same-sex marriage, believe me, she was not the last to protest in the streets. She had a holy aversion to homosexuals!

**Clara** – Really?

*Consternation from Alex and Clara.*

**Bernard** – Oh yes... Those were the good old days...

**Mrs. Crampon** – An opportunity to come together around common values.

**Martin** – And especially the pretext for a joyful picnic on the lawns of the Trocadéro, accompanied by that excellent sacramental wine. Isn't that right, Father?

**Dessaint** – I think Germaine would have wanted us to celebrate this moment of conviviality and sharing with joy again this year. (*He raises his glass.*) To the memory of this exceptional woman!

*They raise their glasses and drink. Angela's arrival, with a gothic look, creates a chill.*

**Martin** – Ah, dear friends, here is Angela.

**Angela** – Hi, old wrecks. Is there something to drink? I'm craving...

**Martin** – Angela is a painter, and she has her studio on the ground floor.

**Bernard** – Mrs. Crampon, would you be so kind as to serve Miss Angela a glass of blood?

**Mrs. Crampon** – You mean a glass of sangria, no doubt.

**Bernard** – Isn't that what I said?

*Mrs. Crampon serves a glass, which she hands to Angela, who drinks it in one gulp under the disapproving gaze of the other neighbours.*

**Angela** – Ah... I was thirsty...

**Clara** – And what kind of paintings do you create? Abstract? Figurative?

**Angela** – Right now, I'm in my red period.

**Alex** – Ah, very well... Like Picasso, then. I mean, his blue period.

**Angela** – Oh no, I just meant that right now, I'm fuelled by red wine. Otherwise, I paint very little.

*Forced laughter.*

**Martin** – You know how artists are...

**Dessaint** – Shall we move to the terrace?

**Mr. Crampon** – Certainly...

*They leave, leaving Alex and Clara alone with Angela.*

**Angela** – Don't worry, despite appearances, I'm not a vampire. The bloodsuckers would be more like them...

**Clara** – Really?

**Angela** – Do you know how your grandmother died?

**Alex** – She was my great-aunt... She was very old. To be honest, I didn't think about it.



**Angela** – Germaine was in great shape, believe me. She could have made it to a hundred.

**Clara** – I sense a hint of suspicion behind that conditional...

**Alex** – Did someone have a reason to bear a grudge against my aunt?

*Angela evades the question with a mysterious smile.*

**Angela** – Do you like this painting?

**Alex** – My God... It's very traditional, isn't it?

**Angela** – I painted it.

**Clara** – No, but it's a very nice painting. I find it has something...

**Angela** – Don't bother. It was just a commission from Germaine.

**Alex** – Really?

**Clara** – Is that her fiancé from that time?

**Angela** – In any case, to create it, she provided me with a photo of Marshal Pétain. Back when he was still just a Colonel...

*The baroness returns.*

**Baroness** – Don't mind me.

*The baroness fills her bag with various goodies from the buffet. Before pouring herself a drink, which she sips with a disgusted look.*

**Baroness** – Sangria... How vulgar...

*The baroness leaves.*

**Clara** – Is she really a baroness?

**Angela** – Who knows... You will discover with time that no one in this building is truly who they claim to be... Well... Unless you die before, of course...

*Silence.*

**Clara** – Do you know something about Germaine's death that we should know?

**Alex** – I thought she died of a heart attack or something like that.

**Angela** – I have no certainty, but apparently, not everyone agrees on the circumstances and causes of her death...

**Clara** – And what are the different scenarios?

**Angela** – According to the caretaker, she was found in the courtyard.

**Alex** – I thought she died at home, in her bed.

**Angela** – Seven floors...

**Clara** – The elevator might have been out of order... If she took the stairs, at her age... Do you think her heart could have given out?

**Angela** – Given the state of the body when they found her, she doesn't seem to have taken either the stairs or the elevator down from her apartment to the courtyard.

**Alex** – I see...

**Angela** – According to Mrs. Sanchez, it wasn't a pretty sight. You wouldn't have recognised her.

**Alex** – Especially since I never saw her.

**Clara** (*thoughtful*) – A fall? From the terrace...

**Alex** – The railing is quite high, though. Unless she deliberately climbed over.

**Angela** – Or someone helped her...

**Clara** – Murder? That's a very serious accusation...

**Alex** – But I don't understand... Dr. Bernard told me that she was the one who accompanied my aunt in her final moments...

**Angela** – In any case, she signed the death certificate. Which probably explains why there was no investigation. At over 90 years old, the police aren't interested anymore...

**Clara** – But that's monstrous...

**Angela** – I'm going to get some fresh air on the terrace too... But if they find me dead in the courtyard, you'll know it's not a suicide...

*She exits. Alex and Clara exchange a horrified look.*

**Alex** – I'm starting to wonder if this inheritance is such a good deal after all...

**Clara** – Maybe she's the one making things up.

**Alex** – Who?

**Clara** – This Angela! She doesn't seem quite right...

**Alex** – Let's just say she stands out from the rest.

**Clara** – But since the others aren't quite right either... Do you really think they could have murdered Aunt Germaine?

**Alex** – Why would they do that? They seemed to really like her.

**Clara** – Anyway, that's what they say... As for that priest, it's strange, his face looks familiar to me...

*Sam, a potentially transgender prostitute, arrives behind them without them noticing.*

**Sam** – Hello.

*They startle.*

**Clara** – You scared me...

**Sam** – Sorry... The door was open, so I walked in. The Neighbours' Day, is it here, right?

**Alex** – Yes, well...

**Sam** – You're probably Alex and Clara.

**Clara** – And you are?

**Sam** – Sam. I just moved into the apartment on the first floor. Yes, I know, I might not fit in well in the building. It seems to be mostly professionals here, apparently.

**Alex** – I assume you're neither a lawyer nor a doctor...

**Sam** – Yet, I'm on a fixed fee too...

*Mr. Crampon returns with Martin and Dessaint*

**Martin** – What's this?

**Sam** – I'm the new tenant.

**Martin** – The apartment downstairs?

*Sam kisses Crampon.*

**Sam** – How are you, darling?

**Mr. Crampon** (*flustered*) – Thank goodness my wife isn't here...

**Martin** – The apartment downstairs has been vacant for years...

**Sam** – Well, now it's not. I heard from the caretaker that you were celebrating Neighbours' Day. So, since I'm new too, I thought it would be an opportunity to...

**Mr. Crampon** – But you did very well!

*Mrs. Crampon arrives.*

**Mrs. Crampon** – What's this?

**Mr. Crampon** – Dear Madame, let me introduce my wife, Jeanine.

**Mrs. Crampon** – My name is Josiane.

**Mr. Crampon** – Right, sorry. Jeanine is my secretary. I mix everything up all the time...

**Sam** – Hello Josiane, nice to meet you. May I call you Josiane?

**Mrs. Crampon** – Madame... May I call you Madame?

**Sam** – Please, call me Sam.

**Mrs. Crampon** – And Sam, is it short for...

**Sam** – No, no... Just Sam.

**Mrs. Crampon** – Just Sam... I see... You prefer to keep an air of mystery...

**Mr. Crampon** – Anyway, we're counting on you to liven things up. Because so far, it's deadly... (*Noticing Alex and Clara*) Excuse me, I didn't mean that about Germaine... Her disappearance really affected us all...

**Mrs. Crampon** – Yes, it's something to find ourselves here, surrounded by her furniture and trinkets. By the way, I don't know if it's the right time, but Germaine always told me that upon her death, she would leave me this small dresser...

**Clara** – Really?

**Mr. Crampon** – As an insurer, I'm used to appraising antique furniture and other antiques, and I can tell you that this dresser has only sentimental value...

**Alex** – We were planning to change the decor a bit before moving in anyway, so why not?

**Clara** – And what if it was Germaine's last wishes...

*The Baroness returns.*

**Baroness** – Yes... And she's not here anymore to say otherwise, right? Besides, it seems that Aunt Germaine saw her end coming because she promised me that Chinese vase...

**Mrs. Crampon** – Really? She barely knew you...

**Baroness** – You don't always need to know people for a long time to form an opinion about them...

*Mrs. Sanchez, the caretaker, arrives.*

**Sanchez** – The Chinese vase? She wanted to give it to me!

**Mr. Crampon** – This is Mrs. Sanchez, our caretaker.

**Sanchez** – Who does she think she is?

**Baroness** – Are you doubting my word?

**Sanchez** – No need to act high and mighty with me. The Sanchezes have been caretakers in this building for three generations.

**Baroness** – Caretaker for three generations... Talking about nobility... Why don't you go back to your lodge?

**Sanchez** – Because, Baroness, do you live in a castle, perhaps? You only inhabit the ground floor...

**Baroness** – Anyway, this vase is mine. The old lady gave it to me as a gift. She appreciated my company a lot, you know.

*The baroness seizes the vase.*

**Sanchez** – It's mine, I tell you! Germaine promised it to me. I cleaned her place for thirty years, and I never broke anything.

*The caretaker tries to wrest the vase from the baroness.*

**Dessaint** – Ladies, please... A little restraint...

**Baroness** – Let go of it, you bitch!

**Dessaint** – Well, Baroness, it's up to you to set an example. Didn't Saint Martin give half of his cloak to a poor man?

**Baroness** – What a nonsense! It's a vase! How do you expect me to give half of a vase?

*The vase eventually falls to the floor, under the horrified gaze of Clara and Alex. The tension immediately subsides.*

**Dessaint** – There we go...

**Sanchez** – I'm really sorry...

**Baroness** – No, it's my fault. I don't know what got into me.

**Mr. Crampon** (to Clara and Alex) – Excuse us... Everyone is a bit on edge...

**Baroness** – Probably the emotions. We still find it difficult to accept Germaine's passing.

**Mr. Crampon** – Anyway, as I told you, all this clutter has no market value. They're just memories...

**Martin** – And memories, they're priceless, aren't they?

**Sam** – Let's get some fresh air on the terrace, it'll do us good...

*They leave, leaving Alex and Clara alone.*

**Clara** – They're dangerously crazy, I tell you...

**Alex** – It's true, at one point, I really thought they were going to kill each other.

**Clara** – All this for a vase...

**Alex** – We'll take inventory of this horror museum, and we'll see... But after all, if they could all take something...

**Clara** – It would save us from dumping everything.

**Alex** – True, that's an idea. We could suggest that each person takes something of their choice. In memory of our dear departed...

**Clara** – In that case, it would be better to draw lots to avoid a riot...

**Alex** – Do you think the old lady deliberately promised this vase to two different people?

**Clara** – Why would she do that?

*Mrs Zebra arrives.*

**Zebra** – Many people like to pass away thinking they're leaving a big mess behind... Whether it's a chamber pot to be shared in two or Palestine. In the Middle East, it's been going on for 5,000 years. I imagine for our dear elders, it's a way to achieve immortality. By continuing to be present among us after their passing, through the sum of troubles they leave us with... At least that way, they're sure we won't forget them right away... Mrs Zebra, psychotherapist. I'm your neighbour on the fifth floor...

**Clara** – Psychoanalyst? But please, come in. The more, the merrier...

**Alex** – I gather you knew Aunt Germaine well. Was she one of your patients?

**Zebra** – If that were the case, I couldn't tell you. Professional secrecy. But no. Germaine belonged to a generation that preferred to confide their secrets in a confessional rather than on a couch.

**Alex** – It is true that it costs much less.

**Zebra** – And it's much less painful. With me, you don't get away with two Our Fathers...

**Clara** – Well, yes... When you go to see a therapist, the goal is usually rather to figure out how to kill your own father...

**Zebra** – Have you managed to kill yours?

*Clara, feeling embarrassed.*

**Alex** – So, anyway, you knew Germaine?

**Zebra** – I observed her from a distance... Just professional habit...

**Clara** – Since she wasn't one of your patients, you can tell us a bit about her.

**Zebra** – Oh... They're just rumours... Rumours that your aunt seemed to enjoy spreading herself.

**Alex** – What kind of rumours?

**Zebra** – According to this urban legend, your aunt had a hidden treasure at home.

**Clara** – A treasure?

**Zebra** – If you believe the caretaker, Germaine's late husband amassed a fortune by engaging in black market activities during the war. With the blessing of the Germans.

**Alex** – Hence the need to hide that dirty money after the Liberation...

**Zebra** – She supposedly acquired this apartment during that troubled period, and we don't really know what happened to the previous owners, arrested overnight by the Gestapo on denunciation...

**Clara** – Really...?

**Alex** – So, we don't exactly know what this treasure was, or where it might be hidden.

**Zebra** – Unless all of this is just a myth, of course...

**Clara** – But you say that Germaine herself fuelled this legend. Why would she want to portray herself as a collaborator?

**Zebra** – Who knows? Perhaps she found it beneficial to spread the rumour that she possessed a hidden fortune, which she could eventually share after her death with those who had been kind to her in her lifetime...

**Clara** – I see...

**Zebra** – I'll join the others on the terrace... I assume that's where it's all happening, like every year...

*Zebra exits.*

**Clara** – Truly, your Aunt Germaine seems more and more likeable...

**Alex** – And her inheritance increasingly scandalous.

**Clara** – No wonder the rest of the family cut ties with her.

**Alex** – And what if they all came to get their hands on the old lady's treasure?

**Clara** – That's why they all want to leave with something.

**Alex** – Who knows, there might have been something hidden in that vase...

**Clara** – We would have noticed, wouldn't we?

**Alex** – The dresser might have a secret compartment...

**Clara** – Unless a masterpiece is hidden beneath the crust of that infamous painting.

**Alex** – Or maybe one of them has already found the treasure...

**Clara** – And they decided to get rid of the old lady afterward to split the loot.

**Alex** – But then why are they here today?

**Clara** – They haven't succeeded in getting hold of the apartment yet...

**Alex** – We're disrupting their plans, for sure.

*A pause.*

**Clara** – They might report us to the police too.

**Alex** – But we have nothing to hide.

**Clara** – And the Jews your aunt denounced, do you think they had something to hide?

**Alex** – Do you think they were Jews?

**Clara** – It's probable.

**Alex** – Anyway, we're not governed by Nazis anymore! And we're not Jews.

**Clara** – Speak for yourself.

**Alex** – You're Jewish?

**Clara** – Why, does that bother you?

**Alex** – Not at all, I didn't know, that's all.

**Clara** – Let's say I have... Jewish origins.

**Alex** – What do you mean, origins? We all have Jewish origins, don't we? I mean, before being Catholics, we were all Jews. Like Jesus Christ.

**Clara** – Are you sure about that?

**Alex** – Well... I mean... So, you have Jewish origins? I didn't know...

**Clara** – Yes, well... A week ago, you didn't know you had anti-Semitic origins either...

**Alex** – Come on, you're exaggerating! I'm not responsible for what my aunt did during the last war. I wasn't even born!

**Clara** – Anyway... Knowing that your Aunt Germaine denounced Jews during the war to seize their apartment. And that we might live in that apartment after inheriting it... That really bothers me, you see.

*Silence.*

**Alex** – I think we're just caught up in a delusion...

**Clara** – You're right. It's just the Neighbours' Day, after all.

**Alex** – Or maybe they put something in the sangria...

**Clara** – Let's go out on the terrace to see what they're plotting.

**Alex** – You think so?

**Clara** – It's our home, isn't it?

**Alex** – If you say so...

*They exit. Sam arrives and starts searching the room. Sanchez returns and catches her.*

**Sanchez** – Well, I hope I'm not bothering you...

**Sam** – Oh, Mrs. Sanchez... You're mistaken, I assure you. I'm not who you think I am...

**Sanchez** – I suspected that a bit, you see...

**Sam** – I'm sure I can trust you. After all, you're almost in the same business...

**Sanchez** – What business? Are you insinuating that I am a whore too!

*Sam shows her a police badge.*



**Sam** – Inspector Ramirez.

**Sanchez** – Inspector?

*Sam puts a finger to her lips, indicating that this information must remain confidential.*

**Sam** – I'm here... undercover.

**Sanchez** – Under what?

**Sam** – Disguised! Infiltrated! Under a false identity, if you prefer.

**Sanchez** – Oh, I see...

**Sam** – We have good reasons to suspect that the old lady... What was her name again?

**Sanchez** – Germaine.

**Sam** – Right... We think Germaine didn't die of natural causes...

**Sanchez** – Oh, really?

**Sam** – It could be murder, but we don't have proof... I'm here to investigate.

**Sanchez** – Oh, I see...

**Sam** – You're not very talkative for a caretaker, tell me...

**Sanchez** – No...

**Sam** – And besides that, do you know anything?

**Sanchez** – Well, no...

**Sam** – I sense that you're going to be of precious help. Do you know the exact circumstances of Germaine's death?

**Sanchez** – It was an accident, wasn't it?

**Sam** – Who knows... When one of the potential murderers issues the death certificate, and another gives the last rites right after...

**Sanchez** – Oh, I see...

**Sam** – And about this treasure that the old lady supposedly hid at home, I suppose you know nothing about it either...

**Sanchez** – No.

**Sam** – Alright... Let's mix a bit on the terrace, otherwise, we'll end up attracting attention. And if you happen to learn something interesting on your end, come immediately and report to me, okay?

**Sanchez** – Alright...

**Sam** – Consider yourself my deputy from now on, Sanchez...

*They exit. Colonel Leroy arrives with Maître Petit, the lawyer.*

**Petit** – No one...

**Leroy** – But the buffet is here, as it is every year...

**Petit** – They must be on the terrace...

**Leroy** – Let's take advantage of it and pour ourselves a drink.

**Petit** – Sangria?

**Leroy** – Certainly...

**Petit** – Anyway, I don't see anything else...

*They clink glasses and drink.*

**Leroy** – This sangria is absolutely undrinkable.

**Petit** – Yes, just like every year...

*They take another sip.*

**Leroy** – I still wonder if that damn priest knows something.

**Petit** – Father Dessaint? You think so?

**Leroy** – He was the old lady's confessor, right?

**Petit** – Do you think this son of a bitch might try to double-cross us?

**Leroy** – How can you trust a priest?

**Petit** – Especially a defrocked one...

**Leroy** – Why did his bishop force him to leave the Church, by the way? He claims he resigned, but I don't believe it too much.

**Petit** – For the Church to agree to part ways with a priest... He must have done something very serious.

**Leroy** – Clearly. They don't kick them out for a simple case of pedophilia.

**Petit** – Maybe because he wanted to continue saying Mass in Latin or something like that.

**Leroy** – But you were Germaine's lawyer, you must know something.

**Petit** – Ah... Attorney-client privilege...

**Leroy** – Hey, not to me...

**Petit** – I was only her lawyer, not her confessor.

**Leroy** – Anyway, I'm sure he knows where she stashed the loot. I'm going to confess him, you'll see...

**Petit** – Don't go too hard on him. We already have the old lady's death on our hands...

**Leroy** – Don't worry, I'll know how to use psychology. In any case, it won't leave any traces...

**Petit** – Who else could know something about the old lady's money?

**Leroy** – The insurance guy?

**Petit** – Doubtful. Germaine had good reasons not to trust him.

**Leroy** – Do you know why he went to prison, by the way?

**Petit** – He was pocketing the premiums from his clients, supposed to insure their property, but the money went straight into his pocket...

**Leroy** – I see...

**Petit** – He got caught after a fire. His client hoped to be reimbursed, and he realised he wasn't insured.

**Leroy** – Oh, that's unfortunate.

**Petit** – The worst part is that the guy set fire to his country house himself because he couldn't sell it... He hoped to make a good deal by claiming insurance...

**Leroy** – What an idiot... But you seem to know the case well...

**Petit** – Yes... The idiot was me...

**Leroy** – I see... Anyway, we don't have much time left... When these two idiots move in here full time, it will be much harder to search the apartment.

*Leroy starts opening some drawers and snooping around. Petit follows suit. Mr. Crampon returns, with Dessaint.*

**Mr. Crampon** – Are you looking for something?

**Petit** – Probably the same thing you are...

**Leroy** – You were her insurer, you must have made an inventory of her belongings, right?

**Mr. Crampon** – It seems that if she really had a treasure, she preferred not to include it in the inventory...

**Leroy** – And you, Father? You were her confessor!

**Dessaint** – Alas, my son, Germaine didn't tell me everything... And even if she did, I remind you that I am bound by the seal of confession...

**Mr. Crampon** – As long as you're not trying to pull a fast one on us...

*Petit and Crampon start searching everywhere.*

**Dessaint** – Let's stay confident, my children. Doesn't the Bible say: "Seek and you shall find, ask and it shall be given to you, knock and the door will be opened to you"...

**Mr. Crampon** – And on top of that, he's making fun of us!

*Leroy approaches Dessaint menacingly.*

**Leroy** – Are you sure you have nothing to confess, Father? Confide in me, and I will grant you absolution. But if you prefer martyrdom, I also administer the last sacraments...

*Alex and Clara return and spot them. Leroy releases the priest he had grabbed by the collar, and the other two, caught red-handed, immediately stop their search.*

**Petit** – Ah, dear friends... We were just about to join you... Allow me to introduce myself, Master Petit, a lawyer at the bar.

**Leroy** – No need to specify which one. All his clients end up behind bars...

**Petit** – And this is Colonel Leroy.

**Leroy** – Dear neighbours...

**Alex** – Have you... lost something?

**Petit** – Uh... Yes... The Colonel can't remember where he put his mobile phone.

**Clara** – Well, just call him then.

**Petit** – Why would I call him? Since he's right next to me...

**Clara** – To find out where his phone is.

**Petit** – Oh yes, of course, but... I'm not sure I have his number...

**Alex** – Well, just ask him. Since he's right next to you, in fact.

**Petit** – Of course, but... Oh, there, I think I've got it...

*He presses a button on his mobile. Leroy's phone immediately rings in his pocket.*

**Leroy** – It's silly, I'm still looking for it everywhere, and it's in my pocket...

**Petit** – Well, now that introductions are done...

*Awkward moment.*

**Leroy** – Would you accompany me to the terrace, Father? I have a little question to ask you. A matter of conscience, so to speak...

**Dessaint** (*suspicious*) – If I can enlighten you, my son...

*They exit.*

**Petit** – I'll put on some music...

*He plays music. Screams are heard. Petit turns up the volume.*

**Petit** – I love this part. It's Chopin, isn't it?

**Clara** – It's Wagner.

**Petit** – Of course.. (*Sounds of struggle*) I'll see what they're doing... The Colonel has a bit of a fiery temper. When he talks theology with Father Dessaint, he tends to get heated...

*He exits. Clara lowers the volume.*

**Clara** – It's strange; that priest really looks familiar.

**Alex** – Where could you have possibly met a priest?

**Clara** – I did have my first communion...

**Alex** – You told me earlier that you were Jewish!

**Clara** – I didn't say I was Jewish! Let's just say... it's a bit more complicated than that.

*Zebra returns and pours himself some sangria.*

**Clara** – Do you know Father Dessaint well?

**Zebra** – Priests rarely undergo psychoanalysis. It's a shame, really. They're the ones who need it the most.

**Clara** – I feel like I know him, but I can't remember under what circumstances I might have met him...

**Zebra** – There are sometimes things we'd prefer not to remember. It's called repression.

**Alex** – True... It's like with Aunt Germaine. I didn't know I had an aunt, and yet, when I learned of her existence, it didn't really surprise me. I must have heard about her when I was a child.

**Zebra** – Family secrets... It's like throwing corpses into the water with their feet in a concrete block. With time, and decay helping, it always resurfaces.

**Alex** – Aunt Germaine...

**Zebra** – Banished for collusion with Germany.

*Silence.*

**Clara** – When I was a teenager, everyone used to make fun of me because I already had a large bust. I don't know why it's coming back to me like this, now.

**Zebra** – Father Dessaint.. From what I've heard, he has been excommunicated...

**Alex** – And he still administers the last sacraments...?

**Zebra** – As long as nobody complains.

*New pause. Clara appears troubled.*

**Clara** – That's it, I remember now... First communion... Catechism... It was him!

**Alex** – Him?

**Clara** – I wanted to have my first communion, like all my friends. To be like them. I did all my schooling in a Catholic school...

**Alex** – You never told me about that either. You swear by public school!

**Zebra** – You have to come to terms with it, my poor friend. Women don't tell you everything. Not even your saintly mother. Besides, she had hidden from you the existence of the Germanophile aunt.

**Clara** – The priest knew I had Jewish origins. He told me he could turn a blind eye... If I were kind with him An that's when... Oh my God... I remember now...

*She exits hastily. Petit returns and turns up the volume.*

**Petit** – I love this part...

*The baroness returns.*

**Baroness** – We can't hear anything in here.

**Zebra** – On the contrary, my dear, I assure you, we hear some very surprising things here. It must be because of this German music...

**Petit** – Don't they say that music soothes murders? I mean, manners...

*Leroy also returns.*

**Leroy** – Madam Baroness, my respects. Will you grant me this dance?

**Baroness** – Sorry, Colonel, but below the rank of General, I don't put anyone on my dance card. Unless they're very young...

**Leroy** – At the same time, Baroness, it's the lowest rank among the aristocrats, isn't it?

**Baroness** – And besides, unless you're military, you don't dance to Wagner...

**Petit** – Since no one is dancing, I'll lower the music a bit...

*He lowers the volume.*

**Leroy** – What if we went to congratulate Mrs. Martin for her sangria...

**Zebra** – Yes, besides, she'll have to give us the recipe.

**Petit** – You know she always refused to reveal the secret to us.

**Leroy** – Dear Sir, you forget that I fought in the Algerian War. I know how to make someone talk, even when they have nothing to say...

**Petit** – He's hilarious...

*Petit and Leroy exit. Clara returns.*

**Alex** – Are you okay? You look pale...

**Clara** – Yes, yes... I'm better now... It shouldn't be, but I'm better... I mean, it's true that it's a relief...

*Alex doesn't seem to understand.*

**Zebra** – I think she finally killed the Father.

*Zebra exits.*

**Alex** – They're all insane, I'm telling you...

**Clara** – And I'm starting to wonder if their madness isn't contagious...

**Alex** (*distracted*) – Oh yeah...?

**Clara** – I think I got a bit carried away earlier with Father Dessaint.. He tried to touch my chest again, so I pushed him away quite forcefully...

**Alex** – Still, there must be treasure in this house. Did you see? They were all rummaging around everywhere...

**Clara** – Let's search too...

**Alex** – But where do we start?

**Clara** – In any case, we have to search them all before they leave...

**Alex** – Ten minutes ago, we wanted to let each of them leave with something, to get rid of them...

**Clara** – Not anymore. (*A bit hysterical*) This treasure is ours, and we're going to find it!

*They start searching. Madame Sanchez, the caretaker, returns. They stop when they see her observing them.*

**Alex** – Ah, Madame Sanchez...

**Sanchez** – I'm looking for this lady, Sam... You haven't seen her, by any chance?

**Clara** – No...

**Alex** – So, you're the caretaker...

**Sanchez** – Mm-hmm...

**Clara** – So, you're the one we'll give tips to every January.

**Alex** – I hope my aunt was generous with you...

**Sanchez** – Germaine... Can't say that. I did clean her place every week. Not a tip in thirty years.

**Alex** – Unfortunately, I fear we can't afford to keep you employed for cleaning.

**Clara** – We don't have a hidden treasure like Aunt Germaine...

**Sanchez** – No, Germaine wasn't very generous...

**Alex** – Still, she seemed very well-liked in the building...

**Sanchez** – That's for sure... She had everyone believing she wouldn't forget us in her will.

**Alex** – Her will? Did my aunt write a will?

*Sanchez pours herself a glass of sangria.*

**Sanchez** – Anyway, no one found anything after her death... But who knows... It might resurface someday too... Excuse me, I absolutely need to talk to the inspector... I mean that whore.

*Sanchez exits.*

**Alex** – A will... Can you imagine, that changes everything!

**Clara** – Why is that?

**Alex** – I'm just the great-nephew! If I inherit this apartment, it's because they didn't find a will that specifically named someone else as the legatee.

**Clara** – But since you're the only family she had left.

**Alex** – I'm just an heir by default! If she made a will, she could have very well left her apartment to someone else! To her neighbours, for example.

**Clara** – I see... So, if they find this document...

**Alex** – We might just have to go back to La Garenne-Colombes.

**Clara** – So you think that's what they're looking for: the will.

**Alex** – In any case, if this paper exists, it would be good to get our hands on it before them.

**Clara** – We can't kick them out now...

**Alex** – Where could she have hidden that damn will?

**Clara** – Let's check her bedroom...

*They exit. Sam returns and resumes searching the room. She is interrupted by Sanchez's arrival.*

**Sanchez** – Ah, Inspector, I was looking for you. It seems that Father Dessaint has also been the victim of a domestic accident... I just saw his crushed body down in the courtyard.

**Sam** – Indeed, this railing seems dangerous. It would be best to have it repaired, Mrs. Sanchez. I'll mention it to the building manager.

**Sanchez** – I'm telling you someone is dead, and that's all it inspires in you?

**Sam** – You're right, I'll go take a look.

*They exit. Madame Martin returns with Master Petit and Colonel Leroy.*



**Martin** – You really lack finesse, Colonel. We didn't need a second corpse on our hands.

**Petit** – It's going to start looking suspicious, for sure...

**Leroy** – But it wasn't me, I swear! I just shook him a bit. Before leaving him in the company of the hostess.

**Martin** – Well, regardless, figure out a way to get rid of the body. Just put it in the basement for now. We'll see later...

**Leroy** – I'll take care of it...

**Petit** – A priest... No one will worry about his disappearance... No one goes to church anymore...

**Leroy** – Especially not for Latin masses.

**Martin** – Well, go ahead, Colonel, what are you waiting for?

**Leroy** – I'm going...

*Leroy exits.*

**Petit** – And to think the priest might have been the only one who knew where Germaine's will is...

**Martin** – Are you sure it even exists?

**Petit** – I myself suggested she write one. And she swore she did.

**Martin** – Yet, no document was deposited with her notary.

**Petit** – She could have made a holographic will.

**Martin** – Holographic?

**Petit** – A handwritten declaration, on plain paper. That she would have hidden somewhere in her home. It's just as legal. Provided we find it...

**Martin** – What's the point of making a will if you hide it and no one finds it?

**Petit** – Who knows? Maybe she was afraid that this document would fall into the hands of unscrupulous people...

**Martin** – It must be somewhere, that damn paper...

**Petit** – Of course, a will would challenge the inheritance of this distant nephew.

**Martin** – Assuming that this old lady tested in our favour, of course.

**Petit** – Where did those two idiots go, by the way?

*Madame Sanchez arrives.*

**Petit** – You were the one cleaning at Germaine's, do you happen to know where she kept her important papers?

**Sanchez** – What do you think? Just because we're cleaning staff doesn't mean we snoop around everywhere...

*Zebra arrives, followed by Leroy.*

**Martin** – And you, Madame Zebra? Any idea?

**Zebra** – I'm a psychoanalyst, not a medium.

**Petit** – Still, you understand the mysteries of the human soul...

**Zebra** – Have you read Edgar Poe's letter?

**Martin** – I didn't even know he wrote us a letter. Is he a new tenant?

**Zebra** – When you want to hide something, it's sometimes easier to put it in plain sight, where those who are looking wouldn't think to look...

*She leaves.*

**Leroy** – I hate her mysterious airs and her know-it-all attitude.

**Martin** – In plain sight... She might be right. What's more obvious here?

*They all look around, perplexed, without noticing the painting that sits prominently in the centre of the room. They all start searching. Madame Crampon arrives.*

**Mrs. Crampon** – I think I've found something.

*Everyone looks at her. She holds up a wig.*

**Martin** – What's this?

**Mrs. Crampon** – A wig.

**Leroy** – So what?

**Martin** – Are you going to tell us that, in the end, Germaine was a cross-dresser?

**Sanchez** – It must be a keepsake.

**Petit** – A keepsake?

**Sanchez** – The wig she probably wore after being shaved at the liberation...

*Sanchez puts on the wig. Alex and Clara come back.*

**Alex** – What are you doing with that?

**Martin** – What? Can't we have some fun?

**Leroy** – That's true. It gets annoying. Are you spying on us or something?

**Clara** – Us, spying on you?

**Alex** – We're at our place, aren't we?

**Petit** – For now, yes...

**Clara** – For now? What does that mean?

**Leroy** – You know very well. You have no legitimacy to be here. You didn't even know Germaine.

**Alex** – Maybe, but blood ties exist. And the law is the law. Like it or not, I inherit this apartment.

**Sanchez** – We didn't even see you at Germaine's funeral!

**Clara** – And you? You only took care of her in the hope of being mentioned in her will!

**Martin** – Your aunt hated leftists. She would never have bequeathed all her belongings to people like you.

**Alex** – You're really starting to annoy us...

**Leroy** – Don't disrespect Madame Martin, young impertinent. Do you want to end up like your aunt?

**Alex** – So it's true, you're the ones who killed Germaine?

**Petit** – Come now, Colonel, regain your composure... You know very well that Aunt Germaine died accidentally...

*Bernard arrives, followed by Sam.*

**Clara** – I thought it was a heart attack. Isn't that right, Doctor?

**Bernard** – Actually, we're not entirely sure...

**Alex** – Yet, you issued the death certificate, didn't you?

**Bernard** – Forensic medicine is not an exact science, you know...

**Clara** – Still, you must know if she died of a heart attack, falling from the seventh floor, a bullet in the back...

**Alex** – From a massive intake of barbiturates or as a result of strangulation...

**Mrs. Crampon** – In fact, it's a bit of everything...

*An awkward silence follows.*

**Sanchez** (*aside to Sam*) – Why don't you arrest them already?

**Sam** – I'm waiting for more evidence... Trust me, let the police handle it...

*Sam leaves, followed by Sanchez.*

**Petit** – I think Mrs. Crampon has indulged a bit too much in this excellent sangria. What if her husband takes her for some fresh air on the terrace?

**Mr. Crampon** – Come on, dear...

**Mrs. Crampon** – Still, I can stand...

*Mr. Crampon leads his wife out. Zebra returns and pours herself a glass of sangria.*

**Petit** – I believe we've all had a bit too much of this delightful elixir concocted by Mrs. Martin.

**Bernard** – Yes, by the way, you still have to give me the secret of your recipe...

**Zebra** – The secret of sangria, like that of a good family gathering, is to let it all marinate in its own juices for a while.

*She walks away unsteadily, quite drunk.*

**Petit** – Anyway, I think we all need to regain our composure a bit. We're here just to celebrate Neighbours' Day and the memory of our dear departed.

**Mr. Crampon** – Yes, very dear...

**Bernard** – And... What do you do for a living, young Alex?

**Alex** – I work for a publishing house. I'm a collection director. I edit travel guides...

**Martin** – Travel guides... But it's fascinating...

**Petit** – So, you're a great traveler.

**Alex** – One can write crime novels without being a cop or a crook, you know.

**Clara** – Unfortunately, nowadays, you can even write novels without being a novelist...

**Bernard** – And you, Miss?

**Clara** – I'm an English teacher.

**Martin** (*elsewhere*) – Ah, that's good...

**Bernard** – And I imagine that to be an English teacher, you still need to speak English.

**Clara** – Yes... Although, we have such a hard time finding teachers nowadays. Perhaps soon, it won't be mandatory anymore.

**Martin** – It's like doctors. There aren't any anymore! We have to import them from abroad. Would you believe mine is black...

**Petit** – No way?

**Bernard** – And it's the same for priests. With the crisis in vocations... You'll see, soon it won't be necessary to believe in God to say mass.

*Mr. Crampon returns.*

**Mr. Crampon** – Shall I pour you a bit more sangria?

**Martin** – Go on...

*The atmosphere is a bit heavy.*

**Alex** – No thanks...

**Clara** – Me neither, I think I've had enough.

**Alex** – Besides, it's getting a bit late, isn't it?

**Martin** – Come on, one last one. For the road...

**Mr. Crampon** – We can't just part ways like this; we've just gotten to know each other...

*Martin hands a glass of sangria to Alex and Clara, who force themselves to drink a bit more.*

**Bernard** – It's good, isn't it?

**Clara** – Yes... I think I'm going to go throw up...

**Alex** – I'll come with you.

*They hastily prepare to leave.*

**Martin** – Do you know where the toilets are?

**Bernard** – At the end of the corridor, opposite.

*Alex and Clara exit.*

**Petit** – It's truly awful. What do you put in this?

**Mr. Crampon** – Are you trying to poison us too, to keep the inheritance all to yourself?

**Bernard** – Come now... You know that for Germaine, it was a regrettable accident.

**Petit** – At most, an involuntary manslaughter, in the eyes of the law.

**Martin** – One could almost say a domestic accident followed by a medical error.

**Mr. Crampon** – Nevertheless, if we don't find that will, we won't get anything.

**Martin** – The old lady led us on a wild goose chase.

**Bernard** – Does it even exist, this will?

**Sanchez** – We've searched everywhere.

**Petit** – What if they found it before us?

**Bernard** – Them?

**Petit** – Those two snoops!

**Martin** – And what if they made it disappear?

**Bernard** – It's in their interest, isn't it?

**Leroy** – Let's question them.

**Bernard** – But without unnecessary violence, then.

**Leroy** – We'll wait for them to come back.

**Martin** – We've already searched everywhere here...

**Mr. Crampon** – Let's take advantage while they're in the bathroom to search the rest of the apartment...

**Martin** – You see, my sangria has its merits.

*They exit. Alex and Clara return.*

**Alex** – Do you think they've run off?

**Clara** – I doubt it... As long as they haven't found that will...

**Alex** – Where could that old lady have hidden it?

**Clara** – In a safe?

**Alex** – In movies, safes are often behind paintings...

*They both try to take down the painting.*

**Alex** – Damn, it's heavy...

*They place the painting against a piece of furniture.*

**Clara** – No safe behind the painting.

*Alex seems to see something behind the painting.*

**Alex** – However, look...

*They flip the painting and see that the back of the canvas is covered with text.*

**Clara** – Aunt Germaine's will...

*As if frightened, they flip the painting back to avoid seeing the back.*

**Alex** – It's a strange feeling, though.

**Clara** – Yes... It's like a message left by a ghost.

**Alex** – What do we do?

**Clara** – We could act as if we hadn't found anything.

**Alex** – Or even destroy it for more safety and pretend this will never existed...

**Clara** – Maybe she still leaves you the apartment after all... You didn't know of its existence, but she knew she had a great-nephew, didn't she?

**Alex** – It would solve everything, but well... We shouldn't dream too much, though...

**Clara** – You never know. Might as well see what's inside before deciding whether to destroy it.

**Alex** – True, it would save us from a rather delicate moral dilemma...

**Clara** – If we can get this Haussmannian apartment without violating the wishes of an old anti-Semite.

**Alex** – You're right...

**Clara** – An inheritance accumulated by dispossessing my Israelite ancestors after deporting them.

**Alex** – On the other hand, it would allow us to reclaim your ancestor's apartment...

**Clara** – So, it would be an act of justice, you mean... A fair return of things...

**Alex** – It's a bit Jesuitical, but well... It makes sense.

**Clara** – And it's still a beautiful apartment...

**Alex** – OK. I'll look; try to keep them occupied over there...

*Clara goes into the hallway. Alex flips the painting again and reads what is written on the back.*

**Alex** – The bitch...

*He puts the painting back in place. Clara returns, followed by Mr. Crampon.*

**Mr. Crampon** (*a bit eager*) – So, we're going to be neighbours...

**Clara** – Yes... Maybe... But... I ran into Sam earlier, and I think she wanted to talk to you privately...

**Mr. Crampon** – Privately?

**Clara** – I don't want to presume, but I think you made a big impression on her. She's on the terrace.

**Mr. Crampon** – I'll go there...

*Mr. Crampon leaves.*

**Clara** – So?

**Alex** – The neighbours inherit only furniture and trinkets.

**Clara** – And the apartment?

**Alex** – She bequeaths it to charities.

**Clara** – A way to redeem herself before the final departure, to compensate for her past misdeeds with Marshal Pétain

**Alex** (*embarrassed*) – Well, yeah...

**Clara** – Which charities?

**Alex** – I need to reread that passage; I only had time to see the general idea...

**Clara** – Well... In any case, we don't have much time left. We need to decide.

**Alex** – So, what do we do?

*Alex hesitates.*

**Clara** – It's still Aunt Germaine's last wishes.

**Alex** – Not to mention it won't be easy to get rid of this painting...

**Clara** – And if someone ever gets the idea to look behind...

**Alex** – So, do we give up? Do we tell them we found Germaine's will?

**Clara** – Can you imagine us living in this apartment? Surrounded by these psychopathic neighbours who might have murdered your aunt after torturing her to extract her inheritance.

**Alex** – We could be next on the list...

*Moment of hesitation.*

**Clara** – And it's not that great of an apartment, anyway.

**Alex** – Don't exaggerate; it has to remain believable...

**Clara** – Damn it, an apartment in the centre of Paris with a view of the Eiffel Tower.

**Alex** – Well, on the other hand, we would have had to pay quite a bit in inheritance taxes.

**Clara** – You're right; it's better to let it go.

**Alex** – Let's still go see the Eiffel Tower one last time...

**Clara** – That's going to hurt...

**Alex** – We can still change our minds.

*They leave. Martin returns with all the other neighbours, except Sam and the baroness.*

**Martin** – Nothing...

**Mr. Crampon** – That old hag played us well.

**Bernard** – I think we'll have to come to terms with it. We'll never receive the rightful reward for all these years of selflessness in the service of an ungrateful person.

**Leroy** – Yeah. We smoked the old lady for nothing.

*Alex and Clara also return.*

**Petit** – And of course, you're going to tell us that you didn't find anything either?

**Alex** – Well, it's just that...

*To Alex's surprise, Clara plays innocent.*

**Clara** – Find what?



*But the poorly hung painting falls. They all see what is written on the back.*

**Petit** – Germaine's will...

**Bernard** – Thank God...

**Mr Crampon** – Proves you should never give up on your neighbour.

**Martin** – On the back of a painting?

**Mr. Crampon** – Is it valid?

**Petit** – The law specifies that the will must be handwritten, but it doesn't specify on what medium. Once we even validated one written in blood on the side of a washing machine.

**Sanchez** – So, what does it say?

**Petit** – I will read it to you...

*He takes out his glasses and clears his throat. Alex and Clara exchange a resigned look.*

**Petit** – This is my authentic will, written by my hand, and it revokes all others...

**Sam** – Well, we could maybe skip the preliminaries...

**Petit** – I bequeath the apartment of which I am the owner in Paris, half to the League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, and the other half to the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Memory of Marshal Pétain

**Zebra** – That's what you call splitting the difference.

**Mr Crampon** – If they decide to share the premises, cohabitation won't be easy...

*General disappointment.*

**Bernard** – Is that all?

**Petit** – The painting goes to the syndicate, Mrs. Martin, as the representative of the condominium. It must be placed in the building's hall so that everyone can enjoy it.

**Martin** – Great...

**Petit** – Followed by an exhaustive list of other worthless items in this apartment, down to the last teaspoon, bequeathed by name to each of us. The Chinese vase is jointly bequeathed to the baroness and the caretaker.

**Clara** – In the end, it appears that Aunt Germaine had a great sense of humour...

*Martin looks at the painting.*

**Angela** – For everyone to enjoy... This eyesore... And on top of that, this old hag is pulling our leg.

**Alex** – Please, she's still my aunt...

**Petit** – Who, by this will, disinherits you.

**Mrs. Crampon** – The bitch...

**Sanchez** – We're not putting that in the entrance.

**Martin** – Well, it could scare away thieves.

**Mr Crampon** – I think we have nothing more to do here.

**Alex** – And what about the will?

**Bernard** – Do whatever you want with it; in either case, we're not inheriting anything.

**Mrs. Crampon** – Except for all this worthless junk.

**Mr. Crampon** – Just burn the will. That way, the apartment will rightfully be yours.

**Bernard** – Whether it's you or others as neighbours, what does it change?

**Martin** – And besides, you're already a bit of family.

**Petit** – Yes, we are destined to meet again...

*They all prepare to leave.*

**Mrs. Crampon** – Thank you for this delightful evening, really...

**Martin** – And once again, our condolences...

*They all leave one by one, passing in front of Alex and Clara to shake hands or kiss them with a solemn air, as at a funeral. Alex and Clara sigh when the last one has left.*

**Alex** – Back to square one.

**Clara** – Not quite... We still need to decide what to do with this will.

**Alex** – Too late to make it disappear; there are too many witnesses. They would have us by the balls...

**Clara** – So?

**Alex** – I don't know...

**Clara** – In any case, I really don't want to sleep here tonight...

**Alex** – No, me neither... What do we do with the painting? I mean the will...

**Clara** – We can't take it with us. It's too heavy.

**Alex** – Let's take the night to think, and we'll see tomorrow.

**Clara** – We're going back to our suburb. We don't have a view of the Eiffel Tower, but at least it's home.

**Alex** – Yeah, it was too good to be true.

**Clara** – You can always turn it into a novel.

**Alex** – Or a play...

**Clara** – If it's a bestseller, we can still buy an apartment with your royalties...

*Alex hangs the painting back and gives it a last look.*

**Alex** – You were right; it was indeed Marshal Pétain

**Clara** – When he was still a lieutenant...

**Alex** – Should I set the alarm before leaving?

**Clara** – For what there is to steal here...

**Alex** – I'll set it.

*They leave.*

*Blackout.*

*The beam of a flashlight exploring the area. Then a second one. The beams intersect. One of the two characters turns on a switch, and the light comes back. We discover two people dressed as Santa Claus.*

**Sam** – Ah, battle...

**Baroness** – What do we do?

**Sam** – We're not calling the police...

*They remove their beards. It's Sam and the baroness.*

**Baroness** – I gather you're not really a police officer...

**Sam** – No more than you're really a baroness...

**Baroness** – In fact, you're a type like me.

**Sam** – What kind?

**Baroness** – The kind that changes identities more often than underwear.

**Sam** – But who told you I was a cop? Well, supposed to be...

**Baroness** – When you want to keep a secret, it's better not to confide in a caretaker. *(With a glance at the baroness's disguise)* It's curious that we had the same idea.

**Sam** – A Santa Claus, this time of year, attracts less attention. Especially at night...

**Baroness** – I would even say it inspires confidence.

**Sam** – I guess you're not here to drop off gifts under the tree either?

**Baroness** – No... So, shall we share?

**Sam** – If there's something to share...

*They inspect the apartment.*

**Baroness** – The loot looks rather slim.

**Sam** – I had good information though. You too, I suppose...

**Baroness** – Rumour had it that the old lady had money at home. But apparently, it was just a rumour...

**Sam** – A safe?

*They look behind the painting.*

**Baroness** – Nothing behind the painting.

**Sam** – And the painting?

*They examine it.*

**Baroness** – A piece of junk.

**Sam** – All this effort for nothing.

**Baroness** – I was counting on it to restore my reputation.

**Sam** – And me to bask in the sun. In the tropics...

**Baroness** – Alas, Santa Claus doesn't exist.

**Sam** – Come on, let's go.

**Baroness** – I'll stay a bit longer... It's better not to leave at the same time.

**Sam** – You're right... Two Santas together attract more attention.

**Baroness** – Yes... One wonders which one is the real one.

*Sam leaves. The baroness waits until she has moved away and scratches the frame with her fingernail. Sam returns, suspicious, and sees her.*

**Sam** – That's what I was thinking too, upon reflection... Anyway, the frame is very heavy, isn't it?

**Baroness** – It's solid gold.

**Sam** – You knew?

**Baroness** – I had tea with her from time to time. One day, I slipped a little pill into her Earl Grey. On ecstasy, she was a charming woman.

*They look at the painting.*

**Sam** – A nice Christmas present.

**Baroness** – Yes. Even split in two...

**Sam** – And the two of us won't be too much to carry it away.

**Baroness** – I think, in the end, we can thank Aunt Germaine.

**Sam** – And now, it's up to us to prove the famous saying wrong...

**Baroness** – What saying?

**Sam** – Ill-gotten gains never prosper.

**Baroness** – Oh... I'm not superstitious.

*They take down the painting. An alarm starts ringing. They look at each other, dismayed.*

**Sam** – She really was a bitch...

*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 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 brief moment of eternity*  
*A Cuckoo's nest*  
*A Hell of a Night*  
*A simple business dinner*  
*All's well that starts badly*  
*An innocent little murder*  
*Back in the spotlight*  
*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 13<sup>th</sup>*  
*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*  
*Just like a Christmas movie*  
*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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