La Comédiathèque



on Tap

Jean-Pierre Martinez

comediatheque.net

The text of this play is to free download.
However, an authorisation is required from the author
for any public representation.
To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez
and ask an authorisation to represent one of his works
https://comediatheque.net
https://jeanpierremartinez.net

Fake News on Tap

Jean-Pierre Martinez

In the only bar of a French village left almost deserted by the rural exodus, the owners and their last few customers make up outrageous news stories to escape the prospect of a slow decline. But some of their jokes may turn out to be self-fulfilling prophecies.

Characters

Robert and Maria: the bar owners (one man, one woman)
Chris and Jackie: funeral workers (any gender)
Nicky and Morgan: students (any gender)
Fred and Alex: political officials (any gender)
Sam and Max: journalists (any gender)

Fred and Alex may be played by the actors playing Nicky and Morgan.
Sam and Max may be played by the actors playing Chris and Jackie.

In this version, the pairs are mixed-gender. All roles except Robert and Maria can, however, be played by performers of any gender. The following cast combinations are possible:
10 performers: 9M/1W, 8M/2W, 7M/3W, 6M/4W, 5M/5W, 4M/6W, 3M/7W, 2M/8W, 1M/9W
9 performers: 8M/1W, 7M/2W, 6M/3W, 5M/4W, 4M/5W, 3M/6W, 2M/7W, 1M/8W
8 performers: 7M/1W, 6M/2W, 5M/3W, 4M/4W, 3M/5W, 2M/6W, 1M/7W
7 performers: 6M/1W, 5M/2W, 4M/3W, 3M/4W, 2M/5W, 1M/6W
6 performers: 5M/1W, 4M/2W, 3M/3W, 2M/4W, 1M/5W

© La Comédiathèque

A small village bar in France. Robert, the owner, is behind the counter, leafing through a newspaper and muttering angrily. His wife, Maria, is polishing glasses. Nicky and Morgan, two young people in T-shirts proclaiming their environmental and vegan convictions, are sitting at a table with two Cokes. Another newspaper lies on their table.

Maria – You look upset. What's wrong?

Robert – What's wrong? You're asking me what's wrong?

Maria – Yes, Robert, what's bothering you?

Robert – Nothing works in this country any more, Maria! Nothing!

She looks under the counter.

Maria – Well, for a start, the dishwasher doesn't work. You could take a look at it.

Robert – I'm telling you, they're all corrupt.

She glances out the bistro's window.

Maria – Yeah... Even the weather's rubbish.

Robert – What?

Maria – It's April, but the weather's awful, isn't it?

Robert – Yeah, it's terrible.

Maria – We got married thirty years ago in April. Do you remember? The weather was beautiful back then.

Robert – Climate change, my arse. It's just freezing here, that's all.

Maria – Or maybe it's us...

Robert – What do you mean, "us"?

Maria – As we get older, we feel the cold more.

Robert looks at the two young people sitting at the table.

Robert – Look at these two young ones, sitting there in T-shirts.

The two young people share a kiss.

Maria – At least they've still got a bit of warmth between them.

Robert – Yeah...

Maria – They're young...

Robert – It won't last forever.

Maria – They still have their illusions...

Robert – They call themselves vegans, but they drink Coca-Cola.

Maria – What, is there meat in Coca-Cola?

Robert – You know what I mean.

Maria – I'm not sure anyone does.

Robert – And to think we're supposed to count on them to pay for our pensions.

Maria – And there's hardly any work left round here since the tyre factory moved production to Belarus.

Robert – To find a job, they'd need to be looking for one!

Maria – I can't blame them for having fun. When they're our age...

Robert – What about when they're our age?

Maria – I've always wondered why workers burn tyres when they go on strike. Do you know why?

Robert isn't listening.

Robert – Tyres?

Maria – Why do they burn tyres? Every time we see strikers on the news, they're burning tyres. Do you know why?

Robert – At least they had brand-new tyres to burn at that factory.

Maria – Burning tyres, really... What's that about?

Robert – What do you want them to burn...?

Maria – I guess it's a tradition.

Robert – Right. Probably goes back to the Middle Ages...

Maria – If Joan of Arc were alive today, they would probably burn her on a pile of tyres in the middle of a roundabout.

Robert – Joan of Arc? Would you rather they used firewood, like in the old days?

Maria – At least today's young people don't burn tyres.

Robert – No, you're right. They don't burn tyres... They prefer cars...

Maria – Maybe in the city, but around here... The only time our car caught fire was when you left the barbecue ashes in the boot.

Robert – I'm telling you... If it were up to me, I'd bring back military service... and not just for twelve months, believe me.

Maria – Oh really? Did you do military service?

Robert – I was declared unfit.

Maria – Sure... And you never told me why...

Robert – Trust me, you're better off not knowing.

Chris and Jackie enter, dressed in funeral service uniforms.

Chris – Good morning, ladies and gentlemen...

Maria – Ah, here come the undertakers.

Jackie – We prefer to be called 'funeral directors' these days.

Robert – Might as well call you vultures. When you show up, there's usually a stiff nearby.

Maria – No kidding. Whenever you walk into the bar, I wonder if you've come to pick me up.

Chris – Your day will come. Everyone's a customer of ours eventually.

Jackie – Or you could call us the mayor and the deputy mayor. That sounds more cheerful.

Robert – Cheerful? When a village's mayor and deputy mayor are both undertakers, you know the place is dying.

Chris – You're right. There are only about thirty of us left here. If this keeps up, it'll turn into a ghost village.

Maria – There are more people in the cemetery than at the church, that's for sure.

Robert – And there are even fewer people at the bar than at the church.

Chris – Yeah, there's hardly anyone here except retirees.

Jackie – The priest can barely find anyone to be altar servers.

Maria – To be fair... who'd be crazy enough to leave their kid with a priest?

Jackie – Anyway, we're not short of work these days, with this virus going around.

Maria – So you're among those profiting from the crisis, then.

Chris – Yeah... We might even hire more staff. But it's like in the restaurant business —in our line of work, finding skilled people is tough.

Jackie – Yeah, it's not exactly the most attractive career path for them.

Robert points at the two young people with a nod of his head.

Robert – There are two of them looking for work right over there.

Jackie – Careful, we don't just hire anyone. Cremations require skill. It's not as simple as putting a pizza in the oven or lighting a barbecue.

Maria – Even with barbecues... Some people are crazy enough to put the ashes in the boot of their car...

Chris – Yeah... When we retire, I don't know who'll take over.

Robert – Maybe some adventurous pizza chefs from Belarus.

Jackie – In the meantime, let's have a drink.

Chris – Come on, Maria, two pastis. They say it protects you against every new variant.

Maria – The usual brand, or something different?

Jackie – The usual, please. I hear the other brand has side effects.

Chris – Yes. Cirrhosis and alcohol poisoning, apparently.

Robert – See? True patriots. They drink French, at least.

Maria serves them two pastis. From their table, the young people start to talk.

Morgan – God, this village is boring.

Nicky – It's the only bar for thirty kilometres.

Morgan – Can you even call this a bar? If there were at least a jukebox, a pinball machine, or a pool table, it'd feel a bit retro. But it's more like a scene from a zombie movie here.

Nicky – At least those folks over there never seem to get bored.

Morgan – Yeah... Looks like they're off to a strong start this morning...

Nicky – It's not even eight o'clock, and they're already drinking.

Morgan – Just look at their degenerate faces...

Nicky – Or maybe it's the effect of the virus...

Morgan – Who knows, maybe it's gone to their heads.

Nicky – Must be an alcohol-resistant strain, then. Because with them, even the brain might be pretty soaked.

Morgan – They take hand sanitiser by mouth. One drop of water for every two shots of pastis.

Nicky – Maybe they're mutating too, just like the virus.

Morgan – Do you know how viruses mutate?

Nicky – No.

Morgan – Normally, they replicate identically, but every time, there are little errors in the reproduction process.

Nicky – Darwin's principle of natural selection, right? Except here, it's always the duds that end up taking over.

Morgan – You're right, they seem to get dumber and dumber...

Nicky – And the stupidity virus, it's still evolving...

Morgan – Do you know what they remind me of?

Nicky – No... Cockroaches? Apparently, cockroaches can keep living even after you've cut off their heads.

Morgan – Good point, they don't seem to use their heads much. No, I was thinking more like termites.

Nicky – I see what you mean.

Morgan – Social creatures who eat away at the beams holding up their own home.

Nicky – Until the roof comes crashing down on their heads...

Morgan – A fair description of the human race, climate change and the approaching end of the world.

Sighs.

Nicky – What can we do to stop it?

Morgan – Stop the end of the world? I don't have a clue. Honestly, I've kind of given up on politics.

Nicky – Same. I don't think you can fix things from the top down.

Morgan – People complain about the government. But don't we get the leaders we deserve? When people stop being idiots, they might elect someone better.

Nicky – It's kind of like termites. The queen doesn't actually run anything – she just reproduces the system by laying eggs. As long as termites stay termites, there's no point in changing the queen.

Morgan – And as long as idiots stay idiots, there's no point in changing the king of idiots.

Nicky – Yeah...

Morgan – I have a question for our philosophy exam: Is stupidity destined to become the dominant trait of the human species?

Nicky – You'd need clinical trials to prove it... So far, our national variant of stupidity has only managed to prevail within the country.

Morgan – We can't even export our idiots. Sometimes I despair of France.

Nicky – Meanwhile, let's see how far they'll go.

Morgan – I'm sure they'll surprise us... You ready?

Nicky – I'm all in.

Morgan – Let the show begin...

They stand up.

Morgan – Ladies and gentlemen...

Nicky – Have a good day...

The others nod in reply. They leave.

Maria – At least they're polite.

Robert – I didn't know there were still young people around here... Do you know them?

Maria – Maybe they came to visit their grandparents.

Chris – Or they came for the funeral.

Robert – What funeral?

Jackie – The body we've got in the van. He was the oldest resident in the village.

Maria – In a village of thirty people, it's not hard to be the oldest.

Robert – And it's even easier to be the mayor... Especially when you're the only candidate...

Chris – You could've run for office! You've already got lots of ideas to save the country, managing a tiny village should be a piece of cake.

Robert – Oh, yeah, right... So who's the oldest now?

Jackie – Why? Are you applying for the position?

Robert doesn't answer and starts clearing the table.

Robert – They could've taken their newspaper... This isn't a landfill...

Jackie – At least they can read.

Robert – See, Maria... They're not as polite as you thought...

Maria – Try being a bit nicer to the customers, okay? It's not like we're drowning in business!

Chris – What are they doing in a bar, anyway? Shouldn't they be at school or work?

Maria – Probably the same thing as you lot, I suppose.

Jackie – At dawn the big predators and the young gazelles gather at the river to drink...

Chris – While keeping an eye out for the old crocodiles lurking in the mud.

Maria is taken aback by this cryptic comment.

Maria – It's not very warm for April, is it? (*No reaction from the two undertakers)* I'm wondering if I should turn the heating back on... (*Pause*) You wouldn't happen to know anything about dishwashers, would you?

The undertakers act as if they don't.

Jackie – If it were an oven, maybe...

Maria – I swear... They want to change the world but can't even fix a dishwasher.

Robert returns to the counter with the glasses and the newspaper. He clears the tray. Then he takes a look at the paper.

Robert *(reading)* – A woman shoots her violent husband, cuts up his body with a chainsaw and dissolves it in caustic soda...

Chris – So that's what women's liberation leads to...

Maria – They say the husband was violent.

Robert – You'd be capable of doing that, wouldn't you?

Maria – Try raising a hand to me, and you will find out.

Robert – And she got acquitted!

Chris – Soon they'll be giving them medals.

Maria – Why not? One less scumbag. At least that one won't be hurting anyone else. True or not?

Clearly, no one wants to argue with her.

Jackie – Yeah...

Robert goes back to reading. A headline on the front page catches his attention.

Robert – I can't believe it...

Chris – What's up?

Robert – It's on the front page, and I didn't even notice. Usually, I go straight to the crime stories.

Jackie – Another murder?

Robert (*reading*) – Due to the record-low voter turnout in the last election, presidential elections by universal suffrage have been canceled.

Chris – You're kidding...

Robert *(continuing to read)* – The next President of the French Republic will be chosen by lottery from everyone registered to vote.

Maria – That's not possible...

Robert – The draw will be run by the national lottery.

Chris – What day is it?

Maria – I don't know...

Jackie – Isn't today April Fool's Day?

Chris – I thought it was the second?

Maria – Are you sure you're not reading yesterday's paper?

Robert checks the newspaper.

Robert – Then if today is the second, I'm reading tomorrow's paper!

Jackie – Tomorrow's paper?

Robert (*pointing to the headline*) – It says April 3rd, right here.

A moment of confusion.

Chris – If the politicians don't want to govern anymore, what's the world coming to?

Jackie – They just don't know what to come up with next...

Robert – They must really think we're a bunch of idiots.

Maria – You should be happy! You all have plenty of ideas to save the country...

Chris – Absolutely...

Jackie – No doubt about it...

Robert – Either way, it's not likely to be one of us.

Maria – One chance in fifty million. But somebody wins the lottery, don't they?

Jackie – I don't believe it.

Maria – Why not?

Chris – Because it's all rigged!

Jackie – Exactly. It's just another scam...

Robert – Whoever gets picked will have gone to one of those elite schools for politicians. Just you wait.

Chris – You can't be naive. This is all fixed in advance.

Maria – Do you really think so?

Jackie – Of course!

Chris – Come on, Maria, another round. We need to be completely immune.

Jackie – Yeah, me too, I still feel a bit vulnerable...

Chris – With all these variants going round: the Chinese, the Indian, the Brazilian...

Robert – The Africans...

Jackie – The English...

Maria – And the Breton...

Chris – Is that aimed at me?

Robert – Are you Breton?

Chris – On my mother's side.

Jackie – And from central France on his dad's best mate's side.

Maria fills the glasses.

Maria – Here you go...

Robert – Pastis is good for everything.

Chris – They should put it on prescription.

Maria – Perhaps, but you still have to pay your tab. I don't do free prescriptions.

Robert looks at the newspaper again.

Robert (*to Maria*) – What do you think?

Maria – Oh, no... I don't get involved in politics.

Robert – I'm asking about today's date! What's the date today?

Maria – Give me a second... Yesterday was the first, right?

Jackie – So today must be the second.

Chris – And this really is tomorrow's paper?

Jackie – If only... I haven't even placed my horse bets yet. What's the winning combination?

Robert puts the newspaper on the counter. Maria takes a peek at it.

Maria – Here you go. The county council is giving everyone a free compost bin.

Jackie – A compost bin? What's that for?

Maria – To save the planet, apparently.

Robert – A compost bin... I'm telling you, they really think we're idiots.

Maria – Yeah... Sometimes I wonder if they're right.

Jackie (*to Chris*) – Do you have a compost bin?

Chris – I've got a manure heap in my yard.

Robert – Back in our day, a compost bin was just a manure heap.

Jackie – A heap of manure. Every family used to have one.

Chris (*sententious*) – The family is where there's a manure heap.

Robert – There have always been piles of manure everywhere.

Jackie – A rooster standing on a dung heap. It is even a symbol of France.

Chris – And the French haven't saved the planet with that...

Robert – And we haven't saved France either.

Maria – Well, we were obviously waiting for you to save it. You said you were hearing voices the other day, didn’t you?

Robert – I said tinnitus, not voices! Joan of Arc didn't have tinnitus, did she?

Maria – Who knows...

Chris takes a look at the newspaper.

Chris – So it's not a joke? They're really going to choose the next President of the Republic by lottery?

Jackie – Can you imagine? What if it were me...

Robert – If I were President, I know exactly what I'd do.

Chris – Same here.

Jackie – Yeah...

Robert – With everything that's going on right now.

Chris – For sure.

Jackie – It's always the same ones causing trouble.

Robert – We all know who they are, and yet nothing gets done.

A pause.

Maria – Who are they?

Robert – What?

Maria – Who?

Robert – Who who?

Maria – Who's causing all the trouble? You said you knew who it was. Well, tell us then, since you're so clever.

Robert – Yeah, well, you know what I mean...

Maria – Well, I don't. Can you be more specific?

Robert – Otherwise, I'll be accused of... (*To the undertakers*) You guys know who I'm talking about, right?

Jackie – Of course... There are more and more of them...

Maria – Right... And are there many of them around here?

Robert – Not around here, but...

Chris – Not yet.

Maria – Not here, maybe. But if this goes on, there will be no one left here to blame. The old are dying, the young are leaving, and even the refugees refuse to settle.

Robert – The refugees...

Jackie – Soon we'll be the refugees. Once we've finished burying everyone.

Chris – Refugees from rural exodus, offshoring...

A pause.

Robert – What we need is a good war.

Jackie – That would get everyone on the same page.

Chris – And it would boost the economy.

Jackie – Not to mention science. The greatest discoveries are made during wartime, that's well known. Penicillin, the atomic bomb, the microwave oven, the condom...

Robert – The condom? Are you sure?

Jackie – I think so.

Maria – And, of course, you'd be the ones to start this war...

Robert – Why not?

Maria – You didn't even do your military service!

Robert – Yeah, well... we're too old for that now, anyway...

Chris – Let the young ones do it.

Jackie – That should teach them a lesson.

Maria – A war... With whom, exactly?

Chris – That's the problem with Europe, my dear Maria. We don't have anyone nearby to fight with anymore.

Jackie – French and German friendship. That's all anyone talks about these days.

Chris – And anywhere else, well... it's just too far.

Robert – We don't have the resources for it, obviously...

Chris – In the days when our country was great, we had world wars. Then we had to settle for colonial wars...

Robert – And now, we can barely afford to send the army to patrol our own streets...

Chris – So, all those soldiers end up getting bored...

Robert – And when they get bored, they end up getting restless.

A pause.

Jackie – Or a good old civil war.

Robert – Yeah... a military coup.

Chris – A putsch.

Jackie – A pronun... A pronun...

Maria – A pronunciamiento. A military takeover.

Jackie – That's it... A pronunciamiento... Not easy to say...

Maria – A dictatorship? Is that what you want...?

Robert – Now, now, no need to go overboard...

Jackie – Maybe not a dictatorship, but...

Chris – Take Franco. Everyone said he was a dictator. Yet every August, people went on holiday to Spain.

Jackie – Well... So maybe things weren't that bad in Spain.

Robert – Yeah...

Maria – But your parents crossed the Pyrenees on foot to escape the Spanish Civil War, didn't they?

Robert – Yes...

Maria – Why didn't they go and spend a nice holiday on the coast until it all blew over?

Robert clearly doesn't know what to say.

Jackie – Yeah, well... It's all politics and whatnot...

Chris – And we'll never have any say in it, anyway.

Robert – It's always the same people lining their pockets.

Jackie – And now they don't even want to get their hands dirty. The National Lottery – what does that even mean?

They down their drinks. Silence.

Chris – What a bunch of idiots, I swear...

Another awkward silence.

Robert – Come on, pour us another round, Maria. My treat...

Maria refills their glasses. They drink in silence.

Maria – Didn't they abolish that elite school for politicians?

Jackie – The school, yes. But not the politicians it produced.

Robert – Politicians are like viruses. You get rid of one variant, and another takes its place.

Chris – I don't even vote anymore, to be honest.

Robert – Me neither.

Jackie – Only one in ten voters actually bothers to turn up. And nobody wants to hear about mandatory voting.

Robert – That's why they've decided to choose the next president by lottery. Given how things are going...

A pause.

Maria – And what would you do, then?

Robert – What?

Maria – You said, "If I were president, trust me, I'd know what to do." So what would you do?

Robert is at a loss for words.

Chris – Oh, that's not too hard to answer.

Jackie – To start with, you'd...

Pause.

Robert – There's just so much to do... We wouldn't even know where to begin, right?

Maria – Yeah, but what's the first thing you'd do?

Robert – Well... I'd start by getting rid of roundabouts, that's what.

Jackie – Roundabouts?

Robert – Roundabouts, yeah! Back in the day, there were no roundabouts, and we got along just fine, didn't we?

Chris – Yeah...

Robert – No, but think about it! When we were young, there weren't any roundabouts, were there?

Jackie – No, that's true.

Robert – Personally, I never saw a roundabout until I was twenty. What about you?

Chris – The first roundabout I ever saw was around the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

Jackie – People went to Paris to see a roundabout, as if it were the Eiffel Tower.

Chris – It might have been the only one in France at the time.

Robert – There definitely weren't any around here.

Jackie – None, that's right.

Chris – And slowly they spread from Paris until they covered the whole country.

Jackie – Now, every town has a church and a roundabout.

Chris – The roundabout is the perfect symbol of French centralisation.

Robert – We're surrounded by roundabouts, I'm telling you! True or not?

Jackie – Yeah, it's true.

Robert – And what do they build all these roundabouts with?

Chris – Our taxes.

Jackie – Yeah.

Robert – I'd start by getting rid of roundabouts, and then I'd get rid of taxes.

Chris – Not a bad idea...

Robert – Making us pay for roundabouts just to have us going in circles. What's the point of that?

Jackie – None, you're right, Robert.

Maria – And roundabouts – they're always magnets for a bunch of idiots burning tyres.

Robert – I'd get rid of roundabouts, taxes, and the State while I'm at it.

Chris – Yeah...

Pause.

Maria – Let's not get rid of the state altogether. Who would pay your pensions?

Jackie – Well, while we're waiting for retirement, we've got work to do.

Maria – I hope they don't make you take a breathalyser test.

Chris – No chance. Have you ever seen a cop pull over a hearse?

Robert – And it's not like the clients you're transporting are going to complain.

Jackie – The ones we transport, no, but the family... Last week, after we left your place, this idiot left the back door of the hearse open.

Robert – And?

Jackie – We lost the coffin on a bend.

Robert – Oh, bloody hell...

Chris – We only realised when we got to the cemetery.

Robert – What did you do?

Jackie – We went back to fetch it. It had rolled into a ditch. At a roundabout, no less.

Chris – At least the corpse was still okay.

Jackie – But the coffin took a bit of a beating...

Maria – What about the family? They must have been thrilled...

Chris – Luckily, we had a flag in the boot.

Jackie – We "borrowed" it from the town hall.

Maria – Borrowed? What for?

Chris – For the match on Saturday!

Robert – Oh, right...

Jackie – We draped it over the coffin instead of using the lid. They didn't notice a thing.

Chris – Quite fitting, really, since it was a cremation.

Jackie – The family was a bit surprised, though. The deceased was a German with a holiday home nearby...

Chris – We even sang the French national anthem. The family was too surprised to complain.

Jackie – That's something I learned in this business. When you don't know what to say, just sing the national anthem – it calms everyone down.

Maria – Well... When I'm in your hearse, at least try to stay sober.

Chris – You have my word.

Chris and Jackie finish their drinks.

Jackie – Right, duty calls.

Chris – We'll be back later for another drink.

They leave.

Robert – A flag... I swear... How did we end up here?

Maria – What do you mean by that?

Robert thinks for a moment, but cannot find an answer.

Robert – It's quiet this morning, isn't it?

Maria – The calm before the storm...

Robert – Why do you say that?

Maria – That's just what people say, isn't it?

Robert – Well, we don't get many storms around here.

Maria – Who knows... with all this climate change...

Two young officials, Fred and Alex, enter. They may be played by the same actors as Nicky and Morgan, with a change of hairstyle, clothes and, if necessary, a false moustache or glasses. They look several years older and much more conventional. They greet the owners and take a table.

Robert – We've never seen those two around here, have we?

Maria – They must be tourists.

Robert – Tourists around here? That'd be a first.

Maria – They must be tired of the Costa Brava.

Robert – The only foreigner we had here was that German they buried last week.

The two newcomers talk to each other in a conspiratorial manner, but loud enough for the owners to hear.

Fred – So this is the place...

Alex – According to the directions... After the roundabout, the bar opposite the church. Well, it is the only bar in the village.

Alex hands the note to Fred, who takes it.

Fred (reading from the note) – Mr. Robert Sanchez... (*Glancing towards the bar*) Do you think that's him?

Alex – I'm afraid so...

Fred – He looks a likely winner, doesn't he?

Alex – The lottery does not always pick the best.

Fred – And you're sure he has no idea?

Alex – No one knows yet. The announcement won't be made until tomorrow. (*Looking out the window*) But it seems there's been a leak. The TV crew's already here...

Fred – It's going to be a shock for him.

Alex – No doubt...

Fred's mobile rings, and he answers it.

Fred – Yes, Mr President... I am looking straight at him... Does he look presidential? Well, more like the chap who fixes the roads... No, I haven't told him yet... Certainly, Mr President... Oh, sorry, Mr *outgoing* President... I'll leave you to pack.

Robert and Maria, who have caught snippets of the conversation, exchange puzzled glances.

Alex – So?

Fred – We can't back out now... We need to tell him...

They stand up.

Maria – Are you going to see what they want?

Robert starts to approach to take their order, but then glances out the window.

Robert – What's with that car outside?

Maria also looks.

Maria – Looks like a TV crew car...

Robert, perplexed, turns to the two customers.

Robert – What can I get you?

Fred – Hello, Sir. Are you Robert Sanchez?

Robert – That's me... Why do you ask?

Alex – You'd better take a seat, Mr. Sanchez.

Robert – I don't usually sit with customers.

Fred – I really think you should.

Alex – We've come to bring you good news.

Robert – Good news? Maria! The Jehovah's Witnesses are here. Get the shotgun!

Maria leaves.

Fred – We are not members of a religious sect, Mr Sanchez. We represent the government of the French Republic.

Robert (*worried*) – The Republic...? Is it the tax office?

Alex – Relax, we're not here for a tax audit. We're here to offer you something.

Robert – To offer me something?

Fred – A seat, Mr. Sanchez.

Robert – I already told you I don't want to sit down.

Alex – Not just any seat. The seat of the President of France.

Robert is clearly taken aback.

Robert – Is this for a hidden camera show or something?

Fred – No, not at all, Mr. Sanchez.

Alex – I assure you, this isn't a joke.

Fred – Did you notice the TV crew car outside?

Robert glances at the bar window again.

Alex – That's just the first one to arrive. In an hour, there'll be ten, maybe a hundred more.

Fred – They're here for you, Mr. Sanchez.

Robert – For me?

Alex – To get your first reaction after the announcement of your election victory.

Robert – What victory?

Fred – Mr Sanchez, I am here to tell you officially that the national lottery has selected you to become President of France.

Alex – The fate of France is in your hands, Mr Sanchez.

Robert – No way...

Fred – I'm afraid so...

Robert – I think I'd better sit down, then.

He drops into a chair, stunned.

Alex – We completely understand if this appointment has caught you a bit off guard.

Robert – A bit...?

Fred – But rest assured, you won't be moving into the Presidential Palace right away.

Alex – For the next few days, you will only be president-elect.

Alex – The outgoing president will remain in charge until the handover.

Robert – A few days, you say...? How many?

Fred – Let's say... about two weeks.

Alex – That should give you time to get used to the idea.

Robert – Of course...

Maria returns with a shotgun.

Maria – What's going on here?

Robert – Maria, we've hit the jackpot. These people are from the National Lottery...

Maria – No way... (*Putting down the shotgun*) How much did we win?

Fred – It's not about money, Madam.

Maria – The national lottery? What else would it be about?

Alex – We're in charge of the presidential election by random draw.

Fred – Your husband is the lucky winner, Madam. He's our future president.

Maria – But... we didn't even play!

Alex – In this lottery, everyone is entered. All you need is to be registered to vote.

Maria – So you're the new president, my Robert?

Robert – Now hold on, I haven't said yes yet...

Fred – Oh, but you can't say no!

Robert – Wait, what? You can't be serious.

Alex – You cannot refuse. It is compulsory, like jury service.

Fred – It's the law, Sir. You can't refuse this appointment.

Maria – Robert, why would you even think of saying no?

Robert – Are we seriously talking about me becoming the President of the Republic?

Maria – You always have an opinion on everything. And you keep saying, "If I were president, it wouldn't be this complicated..."

Robert – Yeah...

Alex – Well, now you can put your money where your mouth is, Mr. Sanchez.

Maria – I've always known you were destined for something big, Robert.

Robert – I guess I don't have a choice, but what do I do now?

Fred – Until you take office, start planning your new government.

Robert – My own government?

Alex – You're not going to govern alone! This is still a democracy.

Fred – A democracy by lottery, perhaps, but still a democracy.

Alex – You'll need to choose your ministers.

Maria – You could ask the undertakers...

Fred – The undertakers...?

Maria – The mayor and his deputy. They agree with Robert about roundabouts. They're simple folk, but at least they're honest. Although they should probably settle their bar tab, but still...

Fred – Very well. We will give you some time to take all this in and think it over.

Robert – Think? I am not in the habit. What am I meant to think about?

Alex – What policies do you intend to pursue?

Fred – The country is counting on you, Mr. President!

Maria – Did you hear that, Robert? The country is counting on you!

Alex – We'll let you celebrate this brilliant election victory with your most ardent supporters. An official car will come to pick you up tomorrow to take you to the Presidential Palace.

Maria – To the Presidential Palace?

Fred – The outgoing president is eager to meet you as soon as possible to prepare for the transition of power.

Alex – And, by the way, to give him the code for the briefcase, of course...

Maria – Oh, we already have a briefcase!

Robert – Yeah, yeah, we have a briefcase... One with wheels. Right, Maria? We bought it for our holidays to Costa Brava, remember?

Maria – It was the first time we flew on a plane, do you remember?

Robert – Actually, we haven't flown since then.

Maria – And the code for the briefcase, well...

Robert – Is it my birth date? Or yours? I can't remember...

Fred – I meant the nuclear briefcase, Mr Sanchez.

Robert – The nuclear briefcase, of course...

Maria – You mean... the atomic bomb?

Fred – As President, sir, you are also the head of the armed forces. You have the power to start a war, even a nuclear war... Well, only if absolutely necessary, of course.

Maria – Perfect. My husband has had a few ideas on that subject, haven't you, Robert?

Robert – Me?

Maria – Earlier you said, what we really need is a good war!

Alex – In any case, dear lady, the next time you fly, it'll be on the presidential plane.

Fred – Also, you'll need to consider which country will be the destination for your first official visit as president.

Maria – What do you think about the Canary Islands, Robert?

Robert – Are the Canary Islands a country?

Alex – Not yet... But we shall let you deal with the press.

Fred – They'll surely want some insights into the policies you plan to implement.

Alex – Especially regarding foreign affairs...

Fred – Just give them a few general points, without going into too much detail. We'll arrange a press conference after your official inauguration.

Alex – Mr. President... First Lady...

They exit.

Maria – Do you realise, Robert? You can finally put your plans into action!

Robert – I have plans?

Maria – All those grand ideas you have to save the country from decadence!

Robert – Oh, right...

Two journalists arrive. They may be played by the actors who played Chris and Jackie, with suitable changes of appearance.

Max – Mr. Sanchez, Madam, would you mind giving your first statements to our 24-hour news channel?

Sam – We won't keep you too long, don't worry. We know your time is now very valuable...

Robert – Yes, well...

Maria – Of course! With pleasure!

Max hands Robert a microphone.

Max – Mr. President, the floor is yours... (*Robert remains silent.*) Please speak directly into the microphone, I can't hear you...

Robert seems a bit awkward.

Maria – Go on, Robert, say something!

Robert – It's just that... I didn't prepare anything, obviously...

Sam – So you're at a loss for words, which is quite ironic for someone who's just been elected.

Robert – Elected? It was a lottery! At least in a proper lottery you have to pick the winning numbers.

Max – Don't be so modest, Mr. Sanchez. As the poet said, there are no coincidences, only encounters.

Sam – You had an encounter with the nation, that's clear.

Maria – Come on, Robert! Behind your bar, you always have something to say about everything! Now that you have a microphone...

Max – We understand that you might not have had time to fine-tune your programme, but at the very least, can you tell our viewers what your first symbolic act as President will be?

Robert – Symbolic?

Sam – The whole country is listening, Mr. Sanchez.

Maria – I think this is the moment to talk about roundabouts... (*Robert seems at a loss for words*.) Go on, Robert, just say it!

Robert – Oh, for goodness' sake! Why don't you tell them yourself!

Max – First Lady...?

Maria – My husband would like to get rid of roundabouts, taxes, and the State.

Sam – Abolish the state?

Maria – And bring back military service, organise a coup and declare war on Germany...

Max – A coup to overthrow himself?

Maria – What do you mean by "overthrow himself"...?

Sam – Since he'll already be the President of the Republic.

Maria – Oh right, Robert... You didn't think of that, did you?

Robert – No, but it was just a preliminary idea. It can be refined a bit. And when I mentioned Germany, it could just as well be Monaco, Andorra, or Belarus.

Maria – Oh, yeah, of course! The tyre factory! Now that's a real issue, isn't it?

Max – A tyre factory?

Maria – We had a tyre factory here. It closed about a decade ago. They moved it.

Sam – To Monaco?

Robert – To Belarus.

Maria – So obviously, that's not good for business.

Sam – For the country's trade balance, you mean?

Robert – Yeah, and especially for the bar's revenue.

Maria – They used to drink plenty, smoke plenty and spend their wages on scratchcards.

Robert – They were excellent customers. I even thought about putting on a little entertainment for them, if you know what I mean, but my wife objected. Besides, there were only elderly ladies left round here. Then the factory went on strike and closed.

Maria – Speaking of strikes, you folks in the media, do you know why striking workers always burn tyres, especially when cameras are around?

Max – Well, I don't...

Maria – If I were the First Lady, I'd ban burning tyres during strikes. Honestly, what's the point? Plus, it's polluting, isn't it?

Sam – So environmental protection will be a major part of the First Lady's programme.

Maria – And a free compost bin for every household in France!

Max – A compost bin?

Maria – France's national emblem used to be a rooster on a dung heap. It can be a hen on a compost bin instead.

Max – And I am sure our viewers would like to know about your plans for women's rights.

Sam – Would you agree to come and present it live on air?

Maria – Are we really going to be on TV?

Max – Starting tonight, dear lady. If you agree, you'll be on the 8 o'clock news.

Maria – Oh, that's fantastic! Right, Robert?

Robert – Yeah... Yeah, it's... It's fantastic.

Sam – Excellent. We shall send a car at seven... Better make it six. *(To Max)* Our make-up team will need a little time.

They're about to leave. Max turns back to Robert for a final word.

Max – Just a word of advice...

Robert – What...?

Max – Today is 1 April, Mr Sanchez. In two weeks you will be in the presidential palace. You might want to buy yourself a dark suit. It looks better on television.

Sam – And the First Lady might take a few tips from the wives of other heads of state.

They leave. Robert and Maria remain for a moment, thoughtful.

Maria – So it really is April 1st...

Robert looks at her, puzzled.

Blackout

Lights up

Maria is polishing glasses behind the bar. Robert, in a suit several sizes too small, looks nervously through the window.

Robert – What's the time?

Maria – Seven o'clock. Why?

Robert – Oh, nothing.

Maria – I keep telling you, they are not coming. It was an April Fool's joke.

Robert – Yes, I know! You really think I'm that stupid?

Maria – Then why did you put on a suit?

Robert – What if I feel like wearing a suit every now and then? You always say I dress poorly...

Maria – Your wedding suit?

Robert – It's the only one I have...

Maria – Just try not to bend over. The seams might give way.

Robert – At least I can still fit into it.

Maria – What? What did you just say?

Robert – Oh, nothing...

Maria – I'd hope so... Remember that woman who killed her husband because he was unpleasant to her? Just so you know, I've got everything I need at home: shotgun, chainsaw, caustic soda...

Robert – We've got caustic soda at home?

Chris and Jackie enter.

Chris – Mr. President... First Lady...

Jackie – Got your best suit on, Robert?

Robert – Yeah, well, whatever...

Chris – We heard you were in the process of forming your government, so we thought we'd come by to check in...

Jackie – After all, we're already local councillors. We were elected in the first round... I know there were no other candidates, but still.

Chris – In any case, we also have ideas for getting the country back on track, right?

Jackie – Absolutely!

Chris – If the finance ministry's available and well funded, I'm interested. What about you?

Jackie – I wouldn't mind heading the Home Office.

Maria – Why?

Jackie – To cancel my traffic tickets, of course. Can you imagine? You get pulled over for speeding, completely drunk, and you pull out your official ID. "Hey guys, take it easy. I'm the boss here."

Chris – Tell me, Robert, has that suit shrunk, or have you put on weight?

Maria – His head has swelled. The rest of him must be following.

Robert – You're joining in on this too?

Maria – Come on, you've got nothing to regret. The presidential suit was probably too big for you anyway.

Chris – Oh well, never mind, what can you do... We'll just keep our roundabouts, and that's that.

Robert – I'm not going to lower myself to answer that.

Maria – Still, I wonder who could've pulled this prank on us.

Jackie – Yeah, me too...

Chris – You were ready to sacrifice yourself for the country... But, it didn't want you, huh?

Robert – Anyway, this is still a bar. If you want to stay, you'll have to order something.

Maria – So, undertakers, what can I get you? A small beer?

Jackie – Better give me a whisky. My stomach's a bit upset...

Chris – I'll have the usual. A small beer.

Maria serves them.

Jackie – It is a pity. I rather liked the idea.

Chris – Millions of candidates, everyone automatically entered, and no election campaigns.

Jackie – Now, with social media, everyone has ideas to save the world. Whether it's international politics or medical research, everyone's a specialist in everything.

Maria – And so what?

Chris – So you choose one at random, put them in the Presidential Palace to implement their plan. And if it doesn't work, you shoot them at the end of their term.

Jackie – That would definitely lead to fewer "experts," that's for sure... Did you know that a cockroach can keep living after its head is cut off?

Robert – How do you know that? Have you already cut the head off a cockroach?

Jackie – I read it in the science pages.

Robert – If it was in the newspaper, then...

Maria – Yeah, well... Even before social media, it was the same, wasn't it? There was always some idiot giving their opinion on any topic...

Chris – Oh yeah? Where was that?

Maria – At the bar counter, for instance...

Robert – At least it didn't go beyond the boundaries of the town.

Jackie looks at the newspaper.

Jackie – What's new in the paper today? Unless it's tomorrow's paper?

Chris – Robert, what do you think – is this today's newspaper?

Robert – No, it's next week's. Keep up, dimwit.

Maria – Were you checking the political lottery results again?

Jackie – I usually go for the obituaries. Helps me plan my week...

Jackie flips through the paper.

Maria – Anything interesting?

Jackie – Oh look. The oldest person in the village has died.

Maria – What can you do... Being the oldest isn't a job with a lot of security.

Jackie – So there is a vacancy, if anyone is interested.

Maria – Besides that?

Jackie – Other than that, business as usual.

Chris – With this vaccine, I bet the funeral business is in for a slump...

Maria – You're collateral damage, so to speak.

Jackie – No way... Really? (*To Chris*) Look at this!

He hands the newspaper to Chris, who takes a look.

Chris – Where?

Jackie – Right there!

Chris – It can't be...

Robert – What's up now?

Chris – You might not like this, Robert...

Robert – Just tell me.

Jackie – Your name is in the death notices!

Robert – Oh, for crying out loud...

Chris – I'm serious! Robert Sanchez, take a look!

Maria – It must be another Sanchez. It's a common name, after all...

Jackie takes back the paper.

Jackie *(reading)* – Maria, his wife, and Kimberley, his daughter, regret to announce the death of Robert Sanchez, aged sixty-two, in a tragic paragliding accident. The cremation will take place...

Chris – That's rather specific, isn't it?

Robert – Can't you stop with this nonsense for five minutes?

Jackie hands him the newspaper.

Jackie – But we're telling you it's right here! It must be true if it's in the paper!

Robert takes a look at the newspaper.

Robert – What's going on here?

Maria looks over Robert's shoulder.

Maria – This can't be real... Does someone have it in for us, or what...?

Chris – Yesterday you were a president, and today you're deceased...

Jackie – The shortest term in the history of our Republic.

Chris – If you'd stuck around a bit longer, you might've had a state funeral...

Maria – Let me see... (*She looks at the newspaper*) Oh yeah, they're saying you're dead, Robert!

Robert – You said it might just be another Sanchez. A namesake.

Maria – He's not the only fool named Sanchez, that's for sure.

Chris – Yeah, but how many Robert Sanchez have a wife named Maria and a daughter named Kimberley...

Jackie – Your daughter's name is Kimberley, right?

Robert – Maria, his wife, and Kimberley, his daughter, regret to announce the death of Robert Sanchez, aged sixty-two, in a tragic paragliding accident...

Maria – And you are in your 63rd year.

Robert – Yeah...

Chris – Everything matches...

Robert – In a paragliding accident...? Like you say, everything lines up...

Jackie – You don't do paragliding, do you?

Robert – Of course. Most evenings. In the mornings I prefer surfing or water-skiing.

Chris – Really?

Robert – Of course not, you idiots! I've never been paragliding! I barely know what it is.

Maria – What is paragliding, anyway?

Jackie – It's a kind of sail you strap on your back. You launch yourself off a cliff and glide all the way down.

Maria – Oh yeah, I can totally see Robert doing that...

Chris – It does sound dangerous.

Jackie – No wonder there are accidents. Even fatalities...

Robert – But I'm telling you, I don't do paragliding!

Maria – He has a hard enough time getting down the stairs in the morning, especially after a few too many drinks the night before. So jumping off a cliff with a wing on his back and gliding all the way down...

Chris – Still, it says "Maria, his wife, Kimberley, his daughter, regret to announce..."

Jackie – It can't be a coincidence.

Maria – And if it's not a coincidence, then what is it?

Robert – I don't know...

Chris – As the poet says: there are no coincidences, only chance meetings.

Jackie – Are you sure that's what the poet says?

Chris – Isn't it? Maria?

Maria – Who?

Chris – The poet!

Maria – The poet...?

Jackie – Which poet are you talking about?

Maria – But seriously, do you feel okay?

Robert – Why wouldn't I feel okay?

Maria – Well... since they're saying you're dead...

Robert – Can't you see I'm not dead?

Maria – I don't know...

Chris – There's no smoke without fire, that's for sure...

Jackie – Especially when it's about a cremation.

Silence.

Robert – If I were dead, I think I'd have noticed, wouldn't I?

Maria – Especially in a paragliding accident...

Chris – That's not something you do without realising, obviously.

Jackie – Unless you're a sleepwalker.

Robert – A sleepwalker?

Chris – Sleepwalkers can do things at night that they cannot remember the next day.

Jackie (*to Maria*) – Is Robert a sleepwalker?

Maria – He snores, that's for sure, but a sleepwalker... As for doing things at night he'd rather not remember the next morning – well, that happens when he stays up drinking with you lot.

Robert – Do you know any sleepwalkers who do paragliding at night?

A pause.

Chris – Have you ever done water skiing?

Robert – What's that got to do with anything?

Chris – I don't know... Pour us another round, Maria, things are getting a bit muddled.

Jackie – Yeah, it'll clear our heads.

Maria fills the glasses. They drink. Chris looks at the paper again.

Chris – Sixty-two. Just imagine...

Jackie – Far too young to die.

Chris – As they say, it is hardest for the people left behind.

Jackie – So, that makes you a widow, my poor Maria.

Robert – If I were dead, you lot would be the first to know, wouldn't you? You're undertakers!

Maria – Or it could be another joke.

Chris – A joke?

Jackie – Who'd make a joke like that?

Robert – I don't know... Undertakers, maybe...

Chris – Oh come on, Robert, you don't really think that...

Jackie – We are professionals. We have a code of ethics.

Maria – Then who? There's only about thirty of us in the village... and we know everyone.

Nicky and Morgan enter and take a seat. This time, they're dressed in a more gothic style.

Nicky – Good evening, folks...

The others look at them with suspicion.

Robert – Those two haven't been around for long, have they?

Maria – Do you think they could be behind those ominous messages?

Chris – They look like harbingers of doom...

Maria – But they seem kind of nice...

Robert – Nice? They look like vampires!

Nicky and Morgan approach the counter. The others seem on guard.

Chris – Careful, they're coming over...

Morgan – Excuse me, could we leave some leaflets here?

Robert – Depends... What's it for?

Nicky – It's for a paragliding course.

The four others freeze.

Robert – Paragliding?

Morgan – If you're interested, the first session is free.

Nicky – We can fit you in tomorrow, if you like.

Maria – Fit us in? What for?

Morgan – Just a trial session.

Robert – A trial session? I don't fancy being the trial!

Chris – Paragliding... And the first session is free, he says...

Nicky – Yes, that's right. Or if you prefer, we also offer bungee jumping.

Morgan – We have some friends who hang out in the old tyre factory.

Nicky – They have a stash of inner tubes, which they use to make bungee cords.

Maria – At least they are not setting fire to them.

Morgan – Just jumping into the void. Letting go. It's quite a unique experience.

Nicky – A bit like skydiving. You feel like a bird...

Morgan – Well, more like a bird without wings that falls like a stone...

Nicky – But it's totally safe, don't worry...

Morgan – No one's died so far, at least.

Chris – Because you've had a lot of clients?

Nicky – To be honest... you'd be the first.

Maria – Oh, I see... Someone has to test the bungee cord...

Morgan – So can we leave the leaflets?

Robert – I'll make you eat those leaflets!

Jackie – Bunch of murderers!

Robert – You've got to be kidding me.

Nicky – All right, all right... Sorry about that...

Morgan – But can we still get two Cokes?

Maria – Coke?

Robert – Get out of here before I get my shotgun!

Nicky and Morgan leave, looking bewildered.

Jackie – Paragliding...

Chris – They really have no limits.

Robert – If it were up to me, I'd send them all to the army, I tell you.

Chris – Everyone into the paratroopers. After a year, let's see if they still want to bungee jump.

A pause.

Maria – Have you ever skydived?

Jackie – Skydived?

Chris – No.

Jackie – Why would we skydive?

Chris – We have enough trouble getting out of bed in the morning.

Robert – Come on, my round.

Robert fills the glasses, and they all take a drink.

Chris – It's true. They do have a funny look about them.

Maria – Bungee jumping... I wouldn't trust them with a taster session.

Jackie – Yeah. All they need is a scythe. To cut the bungee cord...

Robert – If I saw them at night in an abandoned factory, I'd be spooked, yeah...

Chris – Right, but we've got a client waiting in the car.

Jackie – And with this heat...

Maria – It's really warmed up since this morning.

Chris – Come on, let's go. Go! Go! Go! As they say in the paratroopers.

They get ready to leave. Jackie turns back to the counter one last time.

Jackie – Ah, Maria, you'll need to come see us soon.

Maria – Why's that?

Chris – For Robert's cremation. There are some papers to fill out, and a few details to arrange for the ceremony...

Jackie – And our condolences, by the way.

They leave. Robert and Maria exchange a look. Maria glances at the newspaper.

Maria (*reading*) – The ceremony will be held in the strictest privacy... (*To Robert*) It's in three days, do you realise?

Robert – Yeah.

Maria – What on earth am I going to wear?

Robert is taken aback.

Blackout

Lights up

The bar is covered in flowers and condolence cards: "We'll miss you", "We'll never forget you", "Your departure leaves an enormous gap". Nicky and Morgan come in, in their ordinary T-shirts. The bar appears deserted, so they take a table.

Morgan – This place is actually quite a laugh.

Nicky – You just need to know how to have fun in a smart way.

Morgan – But maybe we should stop now.

Nicky – Oh, it's a bit of entertainment for them too, isn't it?

Morgan – Exactly. No internet, no social media... The only way to get fake news to them is through the local paper. Don't tell me you've got another idea...

Nicky – Good ideas don't just happen like that...

Morgan – It's true that with the presidential election organised by the National Lottery, we've set the bar pretty high...

They look around.

Morgan – There's no one here, that's odd...

Nicky – Where could they have gone?

Morgan – And what's with all these flowers?

Nicky – A wedding?

Morgan – Who'd get married here? It's all just old folks...

Nicky – Or a funeral...

Morgan – A funeral?

Maria pops up from behind the counter like a jack-in-the-box. She's dressed in black, slightly more formal than usual.

Maria – What can I get you?

Nicky and Morgan are startled.

Nicky – Sorry, I didn't see you there.

Morgan – Two coffees, please...

Maria – Ah, sorry, I've already switched off the machine... We're about to close, you understand? Didn't you see the sign on the door?

Nicky – No, we didn't...

Morgan – Never mind. Two tonic waters, then.

Maria – I am afraid all I have left is whisky.

Nicky – Well, then ...

Morgan – Two whiskies.

Maria prepares the drinks.

Nicky (*to Morgan*) – She doesn't look like she's dressed for a wedding...

Morgan – No, not at all.

Nicky (*to Maria*) – It's quiet today. What's going on?

Maria – Everyone's at the ceremony. (*She shows them the local newspaper.*) Didn't you see it? It's in the newspaper.

Morgan – No, we didn't...

Nicky – The ceremony?

Maria – A ceremony for Robert. The mayor gave a beautiful speech. I nearly cried. But there is so much to sort out, I had to come back...

Maria puts the glasses on a tray.

Morgan – Do you think it's because of...?

Nicky – I hope not...

Maria serves them the whiskies.

Maria – Here you go... Two whiskies...

Nicky – Thanks...

Maria – These might be the last ones I ever serve.

Morgan – We're really sorry.

Maria – But you're not to blame, are you?

Nicky – No, of course not...

Maria – Look at all the flowers and the lovely cards. “We miss you already.” “We will never forget you.” “You leave an empty space in our lives.” *(Close to tears)* Everyone loved Robert... Still, life goes on. Make the most of yours. It passes in a flash.

Maria goes back behind the counter.

Nicky – He doesn't do paragliding, does he?

Morgan – From where? There is not a hill for miles. Just fields as far as you can see.

Nicky – The highest thing around here is a pile of tyres. What could have happened?

Morgan – Just announcing someone's death in a newspaper doesn't make it happen, does it?

Nicky – Who knows? It's called a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Morgan – A what?

Nicky – You predict something, and the prediction itself helps make it happen.

Morgan – Like what?

Nicky – Say a newspaper predicts that a candidate will win an election. People start believing it, so they vote for him, and he wins.

Morgan – Like Jesus predicting his own martyrdom, and then being crucified...

Nicky – Exactly...

Morgan – And with Robert?

Nicky – Suppose a false death notice gives someone such a shock that they have a heart attack. The lie comes true.

Morgan – In a paragliding accident?

Nicky – Yeah, that's where it doesn't quite add up...

A pause.

Morgan – You think we might get into trouble?

Nicky – I don't know... but I think we might have gone a bit too far this time.

Chris and Jackie arrive, looking solemn. Chris wears a mayoral sash.

Chris – Hello, Maria.

Maria – Mayor. Deputy Mayor.

Jackie – Forget about that, will you?

Chris – Today we're no longer elected officials, we're no longer undertakers...

Jackie – We're not even customers.

Chris – We're just friends.

Maria – Can I still get you something?

Jackie – Not today, thank you.

Chris – We promised to stay sober for him.

Maria – Is Robert with you?

Jackie – In the van, right out front. Waiting for us to take him on his final journey...

Chris – He's not in great shape, you know... Better if you don't see him like that.

Maria – I hope you've remembered to shut the back of the hearse this time. Don't go losing him on a bend.

Jackie – Of course we have. Don't worry.

Chris – Are you coming with us?

Maria – Just give me a moment to take care of my last customers, and I'll join you.

Jackie – Very well.

Maria – Come on, one last drink for the road.

Chris – But nothing too strong, eh?

Maria – What can I get you?

Jackie – A whisky.

Chris – Same for me.

She serves them.

Maria – This one's on the house. Enjoy it, it's the last one.

They down their drinks in one go. Nicky and Morgan exchange awkward glances.

Morgan – We didn't even go to the ceremony.

Nicky – We didn't know.

Morgan – Apparently, it was in the newspaper.

Nicky – If it's in the paper, then...

Morgan – Poor woman, look at her. They must have been married for thirty or forty years, and suddenly she's all alone...

Nicky – That's the risk with marriage. You rarely die together.

Morgan – Especially in a paragliding accident...

Nicky – At least they might have had a happy life together all those years.

Morgan – Happy? You sure about that?

Nicky – I don't know...

Morgan – If that's what marital bliss looks like, I'd rather live with a cat.

Nicky – Yeah. But the cat will probably die before you...

A pause.

Morgan – I do feel a bit bad...

Nicky – Me too...

Morgan – I mean, we don't really know, do we? Maybe it's just a coincidence. He might have had a weak heart, and died of a heart attack...

Nicky – A coincidence, you think...? If he had a weak heart, getting elected president might have been enough to push him over the edge...

Morgan – As someone once said, coincidence is just a cause we haven't understood yet.

Nicky – Yeah... (*A pause*) Is that really what you think?

Morgan – About coincidence?

Nicky – About marriage.

Morgan – I don't know... If it's just to leave our children a planet on its last legs...

Nicky – True... But I don't know... Our children... they might just change the world.

Morgan – Remember the termites...

Nicky – Yeah, of course.

Morgan – Why are you asking me that?

Nicky – Asking what?

Morgan – About marriage.

Nicky – Oh, no reason... She seems to be holding up, though...

Back at the counter.

Maria – Right, I'll have a drink with you guys. We're not going to let this get us down, are we?

She pours herself a whisky, refills their glasses, and they toast.

Chris – To you, Maria!

Jackie – As long as we've got our health.

Maria – To think he'll never walk through that door again...

Chris – Don't dwell on it. You're only hurting yourself...

Jackie – Besides, we can't stay long. He's bound to get impatient...

Robert walks in, looking visibly affected, and casts a nostalgic glance around the place. Nicky and Morgan see him first, and are utterly stunned. The others see him too, but seem unfazed.

Chris – Ah, there he is...

Jackie – So, Robert, is it retirement time?

Robert – What can you do? You have to know when to step aside...

Maria – The ceremony was quite nice, wasn't it?

Robert – Yeah... I liked your speech, Mr. Mayor. It felt a bit like a eulogy, but oh well...

Chris – What can I say...? It's an occupational hazard...

Jackie – You sure about this?

Robert – I won't change my mind. I won't be like those pop stars who retire from music three times a year.

Chris – We'll miss you, Robert. They don't make them like you anymore.

Maria – Thankfully...

Robert – Next week we are off to the Canary Islands, aren't we, Maria?

Maria – It won't be on the presidential airplane, but that's fine... Our bags are already packed. And we've finally cracked the code...

Jackie – What code?

Maria – The code for the suitcase!

Robert – Since the factory closed, we were living on borrowed time, really.

Maria – You can't run a bar with just two customers. Even if they drink as much as you do.

Jackie – We were doing our best to keep you in business, Maria.

Chris – I hear the factory's being squatted.

Robert – Squatted?

Jackie – Apparently, every day, a group of young people arrives from Paris. There are about fifty of them now, from what I hear.

Chris – If they start hanging around in public... they might end up repopulating the village.

Robert – Yeah, but the young ones don't drink nearly as much pastis as the old factory workers did.

Maria – What can you do, my Robert...? We didn't adapt in time, simple as that. We missed the internet café trend in the '90s, then we missed the coffee-shop trend in the 2000s.

Jackie – If you don't mind me saying, you even missed the juke-box trend in the '50s...

Maria – Yeah... And at our age, we're not going to change. We're dinosaurs, really.

Robert – So what are the young ones doing in that factory?

Chris – Not making tyres, that's for sure.

Maria – At least they're not burning them.

Jackie – They have turned it into a co-working space.

Robert – A what?

Chris – A shared place for young people to set up businesses.

Jackie – With coffee and table football, apparently.

Maria – In other words, a bar.

Robert – Anyway, thanks for lending us your hearse for the move.

Jackie – Always happy to help.

Maria – Do we need to make another trip or...?

Robert – No, no, that was the last trip.

A pause.

Chris – It was the only bar in the village. Where are we going to grab a drink now?

Jackie – When a bar closes, it's a sign the village is dying.

Maria – Or you could join the youngsters at the factory in their co-working space. You could have drinks with them.

Robert – I'm not sure if funeral services really count as a start-up.

Maria – Or maybe it's time to innovate.

Robert – True, there hasn't been much innovation in the funeral business lately.

Chris – Yeah, it's a field that's pretty traditional...

Jackie – What could innovation in the funeral business look like?

Maria – Organic is a growing market these days.

Chris – I can see the slogan already: "A greener farewell. Compost your loved ones."

They finish their drinks.

Jackie – In any case, it won't bring Robert back.

Chris – A bar owner is even harder to replace than a country doctor.

Maria – And yet, running a bar doesn't require fifteen years of study. Right, kids?

Nicky and Morgan give polite smiles.

Robert – I left school as soon as I could. It hasn't stopped me getting somewhere.

Jackie – Yeah, you're an autodidact, as they say. A self-made man.

Maria – Well... An autodidact is someone who studies on their own, and a self-made man is someone who succeeded on their own... So in Robert's case...

A pause.

Chris – And what about these young ones? Couldn't they take over your bar?

Nicky and Morgan seem taken aback.

Jackie – That's true, kids. Instead of doing pointless studies.

Chris – What do you want to do with your life?

Morgan – I'm vegan, and I campaign for animal welfare. I want to open a sanctuary for animals rescued from slaughterhouses.

Maria – A bar is a kind of sanctuary too. Somewhere for people who have had enough of work, or of life, to come for a bit of company and warmth.

Jackie – And you, kid, what do you want to do?

Nicky – Theatre. I want to be an actor.

Robert – Have you picked a stage name yet?

Nicky – Nick Nobody.

Maria – Well, at least there is room for improvement.

Robert – Theatre? I've been putting on a show behind this counter for forty years. *(Gesturing at the room)* This is my theatre. The bar is the stage, and the customers are the audience.

Maria – Fewer and fewer, sadly...

Robert (*pointing to the undertakers*) – And my fellow cast members, there they are...

Maria – Not exactly stars, but they certainly know how to play to the gallery.

Robert – They always have something silly to say.

Maria – Always a joke.

Robert – Never in a bad mood.

A poignant moment. Some dab away a tear with their handkerchief.

Jackie – And today, the curtain comes down.

Chris – It's the final showing.

Robert – Our farewell to the stage.

They try to hold back their emotions.

Maria – Come on, let's go before we start crying.

Robert (*to the youngsters*) – Just remember to bring down the curtain when you leave...

Nicky – The curtain?

Maria – The metal shutter at the front.

Chris – They don't seem very awake today...

Robert – No, they're a good match.

They head towards the exit, casting nostalgic glances around.

Jackie – Here, I'll leave you tomorrow's newspaper – I saw something in there that might interest you...

She places the newspaper on their table.

Morgan – Thanks...

Robert, Maria, Chris, and Jackie leave.

Nicky – At least he's not dead.

Nicky – And thankfully, he never became president.

Nicky and Morgan remain silent for a moment.

Nicky – What do you think?

Morgan – About what?

Nicky – What if we took over this bar?

Morgan – Are you kidding?

Nicky – Why not? We could turn it into a theatre bar.

Morgan – Bar theatre at night, and a cat bar during the day... It's true, that's trendy now.

Nicky – That was the idea, wasn't it? We'd given up on politics. We wanted to change things from the bottom up.

Morgan – That's for sure, we can't start any lower.

Nicky – Or we'd have to start digging. So, what's the plan?

Morgan – With all those young people at the old factory, we might actually bring this village back to life.

Nicky – A bar theatre... You have to admit, it's a better fit for the region than a paragliding club.

Morgan – Yeah, it's way too flat here for paragliding.

Nicky – I don't know which idiot said the Earth was flat, but they probably lived around here.

Morgan – No, it's a great idea... We should celebrate!

Morgan heads to the counter where the bottle of whisky still sits. Nicky joins her, a bit hesitant.

Nicky – Do you think we can just help ourselves like this?

Morgan takes the bottle and pours two glasses.

Morgan – If we're the bosses now... why not? Come on, let's toast to our new project!

They clink glasses and drink.

Nicky – I've already got a title for our first play: "Fake News on Tap."

Morgan – Fake news? So you weren't serious about taking over the bar?

Nicky – I don't know. Were you?

Morgan – I might know when this whisky wears off. I'm not used to it.

Nicky – Neither am I... There's something odd about this whisky, isn't there?

Morgan – They probably make it themselves from tractor fuel.

Nicky – That would explain a lot.

Nicky pours another round of whisky. Both are beginning to feel tipsy.

Morgan – What were they saying about this newspaper?

Nicky – I don't know… They mentioned an article that might interest us...

Morgan goes back to the table, picks up the newspaper, and gives it a quick glance. Nicky joins her.

Morgan – What could possibly interest us in this hick-town paper?

Nicky – Maybe they think we're looking for a job in farming.

The two youngsters are seated facing the audience, so they can't see what's happening behind them. The others sneak back to watch the scene, laughing quietly but keeping out of sight. They occasionally poke their heads through the backdrop curtain.

Morgan – This is insane...

Nicky – What's insane?

Morgan – It says here, in the wedding announcements, that we're getting married in three weeks.

Nicky – Who's 'we'?

Morgan – Us!

Nicky – Us...? You mean you and me… together?

Morgan – It's written right here!

Nicky – Let me see... (*He takes the newspaper and looks at it*.) Blimey, you're right... Must be a mistake...

Morgan – Of course it's a mistake! If we were getting married in three weeks, we'd know about it, wouldn't we?

Nicky – Yeah, definitely...

They're a bit disoriented... and also a bit tipsy.

Morgan – And you have no clue about this?

Nicky – None at all...

Morgan – Better to be in the announcements section than in the obituaries, right?

Nicky – Oh, absolutely.

Morgan – Or maybe it’s another self-fulfilling prophecy...

An awkward silence.

Nicky – So... if I became president, would you be my First Lady?

Morgan – If it's in the newspaper...

Nicky – Besides, we've already got the flowers.

Morgan – In three weeks, they'll be wilted...

Nicky – In thirty years, so will we.

She raises her glass again.

Morgan – As the poet said, pick the roses while you still can.

She finishes her drink. Nicky takes a small bouquet, kneels, and offers it to Morgan.

Nicky – Morgan, will you take Nick Nobody to be your husband?

Morgan – Mrs Nobody... I’ve always wanted to be somebody.

She takes the rose to indicate that she accepts.

Chris and Jackie come forward. Chris is still wearing a mayor's sash, and Jackie has a crucifix around their neck. Jackie blesses them by making the sign of the cross with a hand.

Jackie – Amen...

Chris – My children, I now declare you unofficially married.

Jackie – You may kiss the deceased.

Maria – The deceased?

Jackie – Sorry, I meant the bride, of course.

Nicky – Married by two undertakers...

Morgan – With a pair of zombies as witnesses...

Nicky – A promising start...

Nicky kisses Morgan.

The others (*in unison*) – Long live the newlyweds!

They applaud and throw rice. Morgan tosses the bouquet. The undertakers try to catch it. Wedding music plays.

Blackout.

The End.

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez first took to the stage as a drummer in several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then worked as a television screenwriter before returning to the stage as a playwright. He has written around a hundred scripts for television and 123 plays, some of which have become classics (*Friday the 13th, Strip Poker*). His plays have been performed in more than 100 countries and translated into around 50 languages.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his websites :

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the contact form on his websites.

Jean-Pierre Martinez recently returned to music, writing original songs inspired by his poems and plays.

With **Jean-Pierre Martinez Music**, he extends that creative universe through original songs: short stories in musical form, humorous or melancholy, in which each song sometimes becomes a miniature theatrical scene.

https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues
Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

Comedies for 2
A Thwarted Vocation
EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3
A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cards on the Table
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Horizons
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap backward for Mankind
The Ways of Chance

Comedies for 4
A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Hangover
Happy Hour
How to get rid of your best friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6
All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more
At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe ...
Neighbours' Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a lovely village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Most Beautiful Village in France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches
Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Blackouts
Don't panic!
Dramedies
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
Every Colour under the Sun
For real and for fun
Funny Stories
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
Memoirs of a Suitcase
No Sense Off Limits
Now and then
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Open Letters
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded free of charge from his websites:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

This text is protected under copyright laws.
Criminal copyright infringement will be investigated
and may result in a maximum penalty of up to 3 years in prison
and a EUR 300,000 fine.

Avignon – May 2024
© La Comédiathèque – ISBN 978-2-38602-205-0
https://comediatheque.net/
Play available for free download