La Comédiathèque

REALITY SHOW

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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Reality Show

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Translation by the author

A presenter on an obscure cable channel is supposed to help promote an ambitious politician. But the live interview doesn't go quite as planned…

Characters

Maximilian (or Victoria): President of TV2
Donald (or Daisy): Vice-President of TV2
Bob: Technician (male or female)
Mike: Technician (male or female)
Brian: Host
Diana: Assistant
Charles: Politician
Chris: Guest
Alex: Guest
Cassandra: Guest
Ramirez: Detective (male or female)
Sanchez: Inspector (male or female)
Samantha: Intern
Pat: Audience member (male or female)

14 characters – 8 to 14 actors or actresses.

One actor (or actress) can play multiple roles:
The President and Vice-President can also play Ramirez and Sanchez.
The two technicians can play the three guests and the spectator.
Most of these roles can be performed by either men or women.
Possible casts:
2M/6F, 3M/5F, 4M/4F, 5M/3F
2M/7F, 3M/6F, 4M/5F, 5M/4F, 6M/3F
2M/8F, 3M/7F, 4M/6F, 5M/5F, 6M/4F, 7M/3F
2M/9F, 3M/8F, 4M/7F, 5M/6F, 6M/5F, 7M/4F, 8M/3F
2M/10F, 3M/9F, 4M/8F, 5M/7F, 6M/6F, 7M/5F, 8M/4F, 9M/3F
2M/11F, 3M/10F, 2M/12F, 3M/11F, 4M/10F

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PROLOGUE

(optional)

An empty stage, or the set that will be used at the beginning of Act One. The action may also take place in front of the curtain before it rises, or even among the audience.

Maximilian, the president of TV2, rushes in and crosses paths with his vice-president, who is strolling in, reading a sports newspaper.

Maximilian – Ah, Donald! Have you seen this? Our ratings have dropped again!

Donald *(folding his newspaper)* – Yes, I know, Maximilian…

Maximilian – It's bad enough that TV1 always beats us in the ratings. At this rate, we'll soon be behind the shopping channel!

Donald – Yes…

Maximilian – Be straight with me, Donald...

Donald – Yes, Maximilian…?

Maximilian – Where did you get that ridiculous name, Donald? Is it a stage name?

Donald – No…

Maximilian – What sort of idiot would choose a name like that? It must have been a nightmare growing up with it.

Donald – Good grief…

Maximilian – Anyway, back to our target audience. Assuming we still have one. Why do our ratings keep falling? And when I say falling, Donald, I mean sinking!

Donald – We could replace the head of programming…? And bring back the one we fired six months ago? He's in charge of drama now…

Maximilian – We're on the Titanic, Donald, and all you're suggesting is rearranging the deck chairs? How is that going to help? We even got rid of the ads.

Donald – Exactly…

Maximilian – Exactly what?

Donald – The ads were the only thing people still watched on TV2. So now that we've pulled them, the audience is dropping… They're tuning in to TV1 for the ads instead...

Maximilian – And what about our home-grown dramas? They're famous all over the world!

Donald gives him a look, suggesting he's exaggerating a bit.

Maximilian – Well, we did manage to sell one series to a tiny station across the border… But don't tell me nobody was watching our dramas even before we dropped the adverts!

Donald – They were watching. To fill the gaps between the adverts.

Maximilian – Tell me the truth, just this once…

Donald – Can I speak frankly?

Maximilian – I didn't hire you for that, it's true, but desperate times...

Donald – By trying to make programmes that wouldn't offend anyone, we've ended up with programmes nobody wants to watch. We were so determined not to upset viewers that we bored them to death. Do you watch them yourself?

Maximilian – I'm paid to…

Donald – But we can't pay millions of people to watch our shows…

Maximilian – Yet today's writers are supervised so closely, I don't get it.

Donald – Certainly. For every writer we employ, we have six executives to tell them everything they've written is rubbish.

Maximilian – So what's the problem?

Donald – Take comedy. It's hard enough to make one executive laugh. Try getting six of them to laugh at the same joke.

Maximilian – And where do all these advisers come from?

Donald – Nobody knows. When a cow leaves a pile of dung, do you ask where all the flies come from?

Maximilian – We need to turn this around, and fast, Donald. What do people still watch on TV, apart from ads?

Donald – Football. But we lost the broadcasting rights this year. We can't afford them without advertising. We managed to get the Winter Games, but ice-skating biathlon with air rifles doesn't seem to have found its audience.

Maximilian – Football? Perfect, there you go! We'll just replace the actors in our dramas with footballers.

Donald – Footballers?

Maximilian grabs the sports magazine from Donald's hand.

Maximilian – Here! This one, for example…

Donald *(sceptical)* – He's barely scored any goals this season…

Maximilian – Why else would he want to be an actor?

Donald *(unsure)* – I don't know…

Maximilian – If you've got a better idea… I'm paying you for that, aren't I?

Donald thinks for a moment.

Donald – What if, instead of exhausting ourselves trying to compete with TV1, we took our own programming policy to its logical conclusion?

Maximilian – Our editorial line...? I didn't know we had one…

Donald – We stop making fiction! We show television being made. We could call it Total Surveillance. We film a writer as they work and censor themselves, while six executives fail to laugh at jokes the writer didn't even dare put in. The ultimate reality show!

Maximilian – Brilliant, Donald! I always knew you were no Mickey Mouse. *(He laughs at his own joke.)* See? I can laugh when I want to. When do we start?

Donald – What?

Maximilian – Total Surveillance!

Donald points to the surveillance cameras.

Donald – We've already started…

Blackout.

ACT 1

A television studio. A sign on the back wall reads 'Direct Plus'. The set is empty except for a low table with three microphones. Bob, a technician in overalls, enters carrying an armchair and looks around to make sure he's in the right studio.

Bob – Mike!

Mike *(offstage)* – Yeah?

Bob – Is this Studio Two for One Will, One Destiny?

Mike *(offstage)* – Yeah.

Bob – Then get a move on. We're going live in fifteen minutes.

Bob puts the chair down on one side of the stage. Mike, also in overalls, enters with another chair. Depending on the casting, Bob and Mike could be male or female (with a slightly masculine look).

Mike – I'm not God. I can't be everywhere at once. *(Places the chair opposite the first.)* Besides, there's no rush. Our guest's still in make-up.

Bob – Where's the camera?

Mike *(pointing to the control room)* – Over there.

Bob *(calling to the control room)* – How are the chairs? Should they be more in the middle?

Mike and Bob move the chairs closer together.

Bob – Who's the guest today?

Mike – A politician.

Bob – Who?

Mike – I can't remember.

Bob – Left or right?

Mike – A centrist, I think. Although these days, left and right…

Bob – I meant the chairs, you idiot. Is your centrist on the left or right?

Mike – That's the problem with centrists. You never know which side they're going to sit on.

Bob – Do you really think we have time to joke around?

Mike – Usually, the guest sits here. And the other idiots just take turns sitting across from him.

Bob – And the host?

Mike – You're right, we're missing a chair.

Bob – Thought so… *(Mike exits.)* What an idiot.

Mike returns with another chair, which he places in the centre between the other two.

Mike – There. All done.

Bob – Go on, sit there.

Mike sits in the guest's chair, and Bob takes the host's seat.

Mike – OK. I'll play the guest, then.

Bob *(to the control room)* – Can you hear us? Good. Microphone check. *(To Mike)* Mr Nonsense, you promised lower taxes and higher wages during your campaign. We got higher taxes and lower wages. How dare you show your face on television?

Mike – My dear friend, you mustn't take such a simplistic view. In reality, appearances can be misleading, and the situation is nowhere near as catastrophic as the opposition would have you believe…

Bob – Well, it looks like everything's working.

Mike – Yeah…

Bob – The show can begin…

Mike – Once the clowns finish up in make-up…

Bob – Who's hosting One Will, One Destiny?

Mike – It's that idiot who just arrived.

Bob – The one who got fired from TV1? I thought he'd have retired somewhere warm by now.

Mike – Yeah, well, we're not retiring anytime soon, are we?

Bob – Oh, here comes the star presenter now…

Brian, the presenter, enters. He may be a distinguished older heart-throb or a younger one.

Brian – So, lads, everything running smoothly? We're already behind schedule...

Bob – And whose fault is that? We had to do the sound check ourselves. Is your centrist done with make-up?

Brian – I'm only the presenter. Some guests need a lot more make-up than others to look presentable. Are the cameras ready?

Mike – Yeah, yeah, everything's fine.

Brian – What would we do without the camera operators?

Bob – Probably radio.

Brian – Ha, ha, ha! Brilliant… That's a good one... Reminds me of my early days in local radio. Ever tell you about the first time I met...?

Bob – Sorry, but we've got work to do.

Bob and Mike exit.

Brian – Work? What a pair of layabouts. One does the work and two watch. *(Calling offstage)* Diana! Where's that bird got to?

Diana enters, dressed somewhat provocatively.

Brian – Ah, Diana! How's my favourite girl? I was just about to call you.

Diana *(flirtatiously)* – I'm here, Doctor. Ready to fulfil your every desire…

Brian – Is the guest ready?

Diana – Yes, yes, he's on his way…

Brian – Politicians, I swear. They need more make-up than women.

Diana – Especially with all the work he needs…

Brian – He even made me promise to seat him on the right – his "best" side. Can you imagine…

Diana – I can't stand him…

Brian – He's no prize, I know, but he could be our next president! We were at university around the same time. Even then, he was climbing over everyone to get ahead.

Diana – He's so pretentious! And sexist!

Brian – Oh, that's not good… He hasn't disrespected you, has he?

Diana – He asked the intern to bring him some honey tea to clear his voice before the show. And you know what? He sent her back because it wasn't hot enough!

Brian – Not hot enough? The tea or the intern? *(He laughs loudly.)* I saw Samantha this morning, and she's quite… *(Seeing Diana's disapproving look.)* Right. We're running out of time. Shall we go through the last details?

Diana – I was just about to suggest that…

Brian – And those workers he invited to sing his praises, they're all here?

Diana *(pulling out a list)* – Yes, well... I wanted to discuss that with you…

Brian – No time, darling. Let me see. *(He takes the list from Diana.)* There's bound to be the teacher who gave him his first crush, the boarding-school friend who taught him what to do with his hands, and his mother's friend who introduced him to sex. Only joking…

Charles, the politician, enters, holding a cup.

Brian – Charles! How are you?

Charles – Very well, Brian, and you?

Brian – Sorry, I couldn't come and greet you in make-up, we're a bit behind schedule… Did they offer you a coffee?

Charles – Never coffee, it stains your teeth… I've also quit smoking and I'm on a little diet.

Brian – Oh yes, it shows.

Charles – My communications adviser says that when you've got political ambitions, your teeth should be white and you shouldn't look too well fed.

Brian – That's clever.

Charles – Trevor.

Brian – Trevor?

Charles – My communications adviser.

Brian – Ah, clever Trevor, then.

Charles – It's strange seeing you here again. It must be years…

Brian – I was just saying that to Diana. We were students back then.

Charles – At different universities.

Brian – Right. We were young and beautiful. Those were the days!

Charles – Yes, indeed…

Brian – They've certainly laid on the make-up. Did they use a brush or a paint roller?

Charles – Please don't make jokes like that when we're on air. Politicians aren't exactly popular as it is.

Brian – Better to be unpopular than… *(He notices Diana's expression.)* By the way, have you met Diana? She's my assistant.

Charles – Yes, yes, we've met, but… I didn't know she was your assistant.

Brian – To me, she's much more than an assistant, believe me… But hands off – don't even think about stealing her from me, alright?

Charles – You haven't changed, have you…

Brian – On air, of course, let's pretend we barely know each other.

Charles – Otherwise they'll start talking about the incestuous relationship between politics and the media again.

Brian – If only politicians didn't marry so many journalists!

Diana – When it's the other way round, we'll know we've made progress towards equality.

Brian – Alright, enough joking around – we need to get moving. We're on air in five minutes.

Charles – Everything ready, then?

Brian – Yes, yes, don't worry… Diana gave me the list of your surprise guests, carefully prepared by your spin doctor.

Diana – Actually, I wanted to talk to you about that…

Brian *(checking the list)* – Let's see who's first… Mrs Carpenter…

Charles – Mrs Carpenter? Who's that? I didn't put her on my surprise guest list!

Diana – Well… With this stomach flu going around, we had a lot of last-minute cancellations so… we had to replace some of your guests.

Charles – Replace them? Did you clear this with Trevor?

Brian – Who's Trevor?

Charles – Trevor! My comms director, for heaven's sake!

Diana – Well… we had to do it at the last minute…

Brian – Don't worry, Charles, it's all under control… We do this all the time… We've got this… And anyway, now they'll really be surprise guests!

Charles – I hate surprises… If I'm where I am today, it's because I never leave anything to chance.

Brian – Relax… Take it easy… Want me to call the intern for a little pre-show massage? She's really good, you know…

Charles – Speaking of the intern, that herbal tea she gave me makes me need the toilet… Do I still have time?

Brian – Yes, yes, go ahead… It's over there… But be quick… *(Charles exits.)* What the hell were you thinking? You could have told me!

Diana – I tried, but…

Brian – Well, it's too late now…

Diana *(gesturing to the audience)* – Maybe you should say a few words to them before we go live…

Brian – Oh yes, I'd forgotten about you. *(To the audience)* Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Direct Plus studios. As you know, you're about to watch a live broadcast of One Will, One Destiny. You may applaud from time to time. In fact, you're strongly encouraged to. *(Diana holds up an 'APPLAUSE' sign.)* Otherwise, keep quiet, understood?

Diana – So if you need to blow your nose, cough, or choke on your popcorn, now's the time.

Brian – No asthmatic babies in the audience? No elderly people with noisy breathing machines? No talkative mothers-in-law? Leave them at reception now. We'll give them back after the show.

Diana – Same goes for mobile phones.

Brian – Don't forget to label them, so there's no confusion later.

Diana – Brian's talking about the phones, of course.

Brian – Really, no last-minute regrets?

Diana – Right then, let's get started!

Charles returns.

Brian – Ah, Charles, finished your little visit to the bathroom? Then we can get started.

Charles seems to notice the audience for the first time.

Charles *(quietly)* – Who are all these people?

Brian – They're the audience.

Charles – The audience? What's the audience for?

Diana – The programme has a studio audience.

Charles – I didn't know it was being filmed in front of an audience…

Brian – They are your voters, Charles! Having them here is crucial…

Charles – My voters? Did you check with my comms adviser that they all voted for me?

Brian – I mean voters in general. If you want to be the next president, these are the people you need to convince. The people of this country! And Direct Plus is here to help you.

Bob *(coming back)* – Alright, I don't mean to rush you, but we're live in thirty seconds, so please take your seats and wrap up the chatter…

Brian – OK… If the tech is ready, then let's go…

They sit in their chairs. Diana, standing behind the cameras, counts down with her fingers: five, four, three, two, one, zero. She signals the host to start by pointing at him, as the show's intro plays.

Brian – Good evening to our loyal audience, whose numbers grow with every programme! Welcome back to One Will, One Destiny. Today's guest is a familiar face to some of you and a rising star in politics: Charles Blackwood. Mr Blackwood, welcome!

Charles – Good evening, Brian, and good evening, everyone. Thank you for having me on the programme…

Brian – Mr Blackwood, you represent our citizens living abroad in Parliament – an unfairly overlooked constituency, and one that's particularly hard to locate on a map.

Charles – Nevertheless, it's essential that our compatriots who contribute to our country's influence abroad are properly represented in Parliament.

Brian – Let me reassure our viewers that, by 'citizens abroad', Mr Blackwood doesn't just mean wealthy tax exiles. He also means all those unsung engineers exporting the best our industry has to offer – military aircraft and nuclear power stations, for instance.

Charles – Indeed. I consider these unsung workers the unknown soldiers of globalisation.

Brian – Beautifully put, Charles. That brings me neatly to my next question. It's no secret that you're being considered for a post as Minister of Defence or Minister of the Interior, and that you have your eye on the presidency.

Charles – All in good time, Brian. For now, I have only one goal: to serve our country to the best of my ability in the position I hold today.

Brian – Your modesty does you credit, Mr Blackwood. This programme will give our viewers the chance to know you better. The people living abroad who elected you know your political career, but some of the rest of us may be seeing your face for the first time.

Charles – I certainly hope they won't be disappointed…

Brian – Then show them your best side, Charles! We know the politician, but what about the man? You keep your private life rather private, don't you?

Charles – Indeed, I don't like talking about myself much. But these days, I believe it's necessary to put oneself out there a little more. And my fellow citizens, who entrusted me with the responsibilities I hold today, have the right to know who I am…

Brian – Without further ado, let's welcome our first surprise guest, someone who knew Charles long before the voters did – the first person who tried to teach him a lesson: his old schoolteacher!

Charles's face drops.

Charles – My teacher…

An elderly woman enters, possibly speaking with a marked local accent. From the wings, Diana raises the 'APPLAUSE' sign. Brian glances at his notes.

Brian – Hello Chris, and welcome to One Will, One Destiny! *(Charles looks surprised but composes himself.)* Charles, I'm sure you recognise Chris… even if it's been a few years since you last saw each other.

Charles – Yes, yes, of course… Well, no… I mean… Chris?

Brian – She's changed a little too. She's retired now, but this is indeed your teacher from St Mary's Primary School, where you first learned to sit still, Charles.

Charles – Ah, of course… Mrs Carpenter… That's why I didn't recognise "Chris".

Brian – First of all, Chris, was Charles a brilliant student?

Chris – Brilliant? Goodness, no... I'd say… Average. Yes, just about average. Maybe even a little below.

Brian – Just goes to show that in this great country of ours, even the worst pupils can grow up to become president.

Chris – Yes…

Brian – So Chris, describe what Charles was like as a child. What's the first adjective that comes to mind when thinking of him as a young boy?

Chris – An adjective?

Brian – Yes… or several, if you prefer.

Chris – That's not easy…

Brian – Go on, give it a try… Don't overthink it.

Chris thinks for a moment.

Chris – Sneaky.

Brian – Excuse me?

Chris – I wouldn't say he was nasty. Just… rather sly.

Brian – Well, I mean…

Chris – Or two-faced, if you prefer.

Brian tries to play it off with humour to lighten the mood.

Brian – I'm not sure Charles would be thrilled with either term, to be honest…

Charles – I admit, I wasn't the best-behaved child… Like most boys my age, I suppose…

Chris – Let's just say… when he did something wrong, he always managed to make someone else take the blame, you see?

Brian – I see, Chris… Thank you for that enlightening testimony, which I'm sure…

Chris – I remember once he broke the arm off a gnome while playing football at break time…

Brian – A gnome? What, did Mr Blackwood go to a school for gnomes?

Chris – No, not a real gnome. A porcelain one. A garden gnome, if that's clearer. Right in the middle of the playground flowerbed.

Brian – I see. A school for gnomes! But you're no Snow White, are you, Chris?

Chris – Anyway, Charles broke the gnome. It was Happy, my favourite. Sometimes I think the little rascal did it on purpose. Then he managed to get another child blamed for it.

Brian – Let's not be too hard on Charles. Nobody likes taking the blame. In any case, I'm sure the statute of limitations has expired. And surely he regretted it later. It all goes to show that he's human, with faults as well as virtues.

Chris – In any case, he hasn't changed…

Brian – Well, thank you, Chris, for that insight…

Chris – I remember another story…

Brian – Maybe another time, Chris… We've got plenty of other guests to get to…

Chris exits, almost escorted by Diana, while Charles tries to maintain his composure under her angry gaze. From the side of the stage, Diana holds up the "applause" sign for the audience.

Brian – Well, Charles, that's the beauty of live TV! At least no one can say we hand-picked your guests!

Charles – Quite right, Brian…

Brian – So, is it moving to see your old teacher again after all these years?

Charles – Very moving to see Cassy again…

Brian – Chris…

Charles – I'm afraid that poor woman isn't quite in her right mind anymore.

Brian – Well, without further ado, Charles, let's welcome our second guest.

From the side of the stage, Diana holds up the "applause" sign, and a young woman with a foreign accent enters. The role of Alex could also be played by a man with ambiguous sexuality.

Charles – Alex?

Brian – Ah, at least you recognise this one…

Charles – Yes, well…

Brian – Alex, you shared a flat with Charles when he was a student, isn't that right?

Alex – Alex is just a nickname… Because… Mr Charles couldn't manage my real name…

Brian – So, what is your real name?

Alex – Zasstermadmarmo. It's a name from a faraway land, meaning 'Goddess of Wealth'.

Brian – Zasster… Right, let's stick with Alex. So what sort of flatmate was Charles?

Alex – Very tidy.

Brian – A taste for order! That's a promising trait for a future Minister of Home Affairs…

Alex – I'd even say he was a bit… obsessive.

Brian – Obsessive?

Alex – There had to be a perfect crease down the front of his trousers, exactly in line with the tassels on his shoes.

Brian – You ironed his trousers for him? Well, Alex, I would have loved to have a flatmate like you when I was a student…

Alex – To be honest, I was more of a servant than a flatmate.

Brian – A servant? Alex, not just a model flatmate – the perfect woman!

Alex – I didn't have legal papers, so I couldn't rent a room in my own name. Mr Charles let me stay with him.

Brian – Well, that certainly shows his generosity…

Alex – In exchange, I did some household chores…

Brian – A few little favours between friends, then…

Alex – Mr Charles used my services in other ways whenever he felt lonely, if you see what I mean.

Brian – Of course – you probably read to him by the fireplace in the evenings… or gave him the occasional massage to help him de-stress before exams…

Alex – Yes, well…

Brian *(cutting in)* – And was he as conscientious about his studies as he was about his trousers?

Alex – I shouldn't say this, but I typed up his master's thesis for him…

Brian – Another little secretarial favour! People forget that word processors weren't always available. He gave you his notes, and you typed them up.

Alex – Yes, I typed it. But he never gave me any notes. I wrote the entire thesis myself.

Brian – Goodness! He must have trusted you a great deal.

Alex – In exchange, he arranged a temporary residence permit through his father, who was a minister at the time.

Brian – Well, ladies and gentlemen, that shows us that Charles can also be a man with a heart. Thank you, Alex, for sharing that touching story.

Alex – By the way, Mr Charles, if you could still help me with something… My visa expires at the end of the month, and… I'll do anything you want, I swear.

Brian – My assistant will take down your details. I'm sure that once Mr Blackwood becomes Minister of the Interior, he'll look favourably on your case. Won't you, Charles?

Charles – Of course…

Brian – Could someone escort Alex to the border – sorry, I mean backstage?

Bob and Mike arrive and escort Alex offstage. From the side, Diana holds up the "applause" sign for the audience.

Alex – Let go of me, you brutes!

They exit.

Brian – Well, Charles? Any final thoughts before we move on to the next guest…?

Charles – At first I thought I recognised her, but I'm now convinced she's an impostor.

Brian – I agree, Charles, and I'm terribly sorry. But this is live television. Anything can happen. Probably an activist trying to make a point…

Sounds of a struggle and commotion are heard backstage. An awkward pause follows.

Brian – Well, it seems we have a show full of surprises! What will our third guest reveal about you, I wonder…? *(Glancing at his list)* None other than, if I'm not mistaken, Baroness Cassandra von Rosenberg – your mother-in-law…

From the side of the stage, Diana holds up the "applause" sign for the audience.

Brian – Ah, I'm being told through my earpiece that this won't be possible…

A woman tries to enter the studio but Bob and Mike quickly haul her away. (If Act One is performed on its own, the baroness can remain offstage and her role can be heard only.)

Cassandra – Wait, let me through! I have things to say…

Brian – Sadly, we're out of time. We'll have to finish without hearing our last guest.

Charles – What a shame, that one was actually on my surprise guest list…

Brian – Ladies and gentlemen, our time is up. Thank you for staying loyal to One Will, One Destiny. Have a very good evening.

The closing theme plays. Everyone forces a smile.

Charles – What a nightmare… I need the toilet again… It must be the stress. You're going to pay for this, Brian!

Diana – Keep it down a bit… There are still a few people in the audience…

Charles – And nobody asked you, you silly woman! If you hadn't changed the guest list without telling me!

Brian – Come on, let's all calm down… It didn't go that badly, did it?

Charles – You think so? Whatever… we'll just cut all that in editing…

Brian – Cut it? Charles, we were live!

Charles – Live? Nobody told me it was live!

Diana – Come on, it wasn't that bad.

Brian – The important thing is just being on TV, you know.

Charles – You think so?

Brian – Between you and me, when it comes to politics, voters prefer crooks and con artists.

Charles – You really think so?

Brian – Absolutely! Honest politicians scare people. Nobody trusts someone who's always telling the truth.

Diana – People prefer someone they can identify with.

Brian – And after that interview, they'll feel they know you much better.

Diana – A nice, decent candidate might make a good prime minister. For president, voters want a world-class liar.

Brian – With a touch of down-to-earth charm, of course.

Brian – Voters want someone who looks as if he grew up on a farm.

Charles – I grew up in a penthouse.

Diana – That doesn't matter. You can always buy a farm.

Diana – To become president, you have to prove you can sell a cart horse as a thoroughbred.

Brian – And a fighter jet to a country that doesn't need one.

Diana – Or a cruise ship to Switzerland.

Charles – You think so?

Brian – Of course!

Charles – So, in your opinion, we don’t cut anything at all?

Diana – Otherwise, you’d have to cut everything.

Brian – And besides, it was live.

Charles – Well, you know, you’ve almost convinced me.

Brian – I’m telling you, it was a great show.

Charles – Say, Brian, how would you feel about replacing Trevor?

Brian – Who’s Trevor?

Charles – My communications adviser!

Brian – How about we have lunch and talk it over?

They leave together.

Blackout.

ACT 2

Bob and Mike, the two technicians, return.

Bob – So, what's on set number 2 now?

Mike – The home-shopping slot.

Bob – Whether they're selling detergent or politicians, they always promise to make everything whiter than white. Isn't all television just one long shopping channel?

They sweep the floor, clean the table, and adjust the microphones on set.

Mike – What'd you think of the centrist?

Bob – Well, he's actually surprised me. In a good way.

Mike – Yeah, me too.

Bob – Should we move the chairs?

Mike – We need room for the products.

Bob – What products are they?

Mike – Boxes.

Bob – Ballot boxes? After selling us a candidate, are they trying to sell us the whole election?

Mike – No, boxes for ashes. Funeral urns!

Bob – Oh, right…

Mike – Our home-shopping audience is mostly elderly. It's hard to find products that still get them excited.

Bob – You're right. Nothing like a special offer on cremation to wake them up.

Mike – I can't wait for retirement, I'm telling you. So we can kick back and watch TV instead of working on it.

Bob – Who's presenting the shopping slot?

Mike – Samantha, the intern. I helped her rehearse earlier. The way she cradles a funeral urn, she almost makes cremation look attractive.

Bob – That good, huh?

Mike – She's a knockout, I'm telling you. Haven't you seen her yet?

Bob – I don't think so.

Mike – You'd remember if you had, trust me… Look, here she comes now…

Samantha, the intern, rushes in, looking panicked.

Bob – What's wrong, my dear?

Samantha – Have you seen Diana?

Mike – She was here a moment ago. What's wrong?

Samantha – I just found Charles Blackwood in the men's toilets.

Bob – The men's toilets? Is that so terrible?

Samantha – He's dead!

Samantha rushes off.

Mike – Blackwood? Dead?

Bob – Looks like your centrist will never be President…

Mike – It does seem rather unlikely now. Although there's something odd about this…

Bob – What is?

Mike – What was she doing in the men's toilets, anyway?

Bob – Who?

Mike – The intern!

Bob – A presidential candidate is dead, and that's what you find strange?

Mike – Do you think they'll still air the shopping channel?

Bob – We'd better find out before we do any more work for nothing.

Bob and Mike leave. Samantha returns with Diana.

Diana – Dead? Are you sure?

Samantha – I've seen corpses on television, and believe me, he looks very dead.

Diana – Just typical of him! We'd better tell Brian at once.

Samantha – You're right, I'll go look for him…

But Brian enters.

Brian – I know already. Just what I needed! It's my first day presenting One Will, One Destiny, and my guest dies almost live on air. What a start! Nobody's going to want to come on this programme now.

Diana – On the other hand, the ratings were tanking. This might spark public interest again…

Brian – You think so?

Diana – Either way, we need to call the police right now.

Brian – Already done. They'll be here any minute.

Diana *(to Samantha)* – But how did he die?

Samantha – How should I know?

Brian – Well, he didn't die of old age. *(To Diana)* Why don't you go and check?

Diana – I'm not sure if… maybe it's best if no one goes into those toilets for now. It's a crime scene...

Samantha – Do you think it's a crime?

Diana – No, I mean… I don't know… But that's where the body was found. It's probably best not to touch anything until the police arrive, right?

Brian – Samantha, dear, go put a sign on the door so no one uses the toilets until we sort out this little problem.

Samantha – And what should I write on it?

Brian – I don't know. Use your imagination!

Samantha exits.

Brian – What a dimwit…

Diana – You're the one who hired her…

Brian – You've got to give young people a chance.

Diana – So hiring her was an act of charity?

Ramirez and Sanchez enter. Either part may be played by a man or a woman.

Ramirez *(showing their badge)* – Detective Ramirez, and this is my assistant, Sanchez.

Brian – Good afternoon, Detective. Brian Cascaldi, presenter of One Will, One Destiny. This is my assistant, Diana.

Ramirez – Very good. I have one question for you to start with, Mr Cascaldi.

Brian – I'm listening.

Ramirez – Do you know the weather presenter on TV1?

Diana – Do you think he had something to do with Charles Blackwood's death?

Ramirez – Nothing suggests that. I just wondered whether you knew him. My mother-in-law adores him, and I'd love to get her an autograph. Are you friends?

Brian – Well, we've met. In television we all know one another. Besides, he has a country house not far from mine.

Sanchez – Really?

Diana – The body is in the toilets, Detective.

Ramirez – Ah yes, the body… Sanchez, go take a look at the body, will you?

Sanchez – Yes, Chief.

Diana – This way, I'll show you…

Ramirez – I hate corpses. You'd think I'd be used to them in my job, but I never am. As long as there's no blood, I can cope. What's it like?

Brian – I haven't seen it myself, to be honest. It was the intern who found the body, and… I have to admit, I'm not a fan of that kind of sight either.

Ramirez – The smell is the worst part. Decomposing bodies are a nightmare…

Brian – No need to worry about that. I spoke to him only fifteen minutes ago. The body's still warm, I promise.

Ramirez – That's a relief, Brian… So, we're talking about Charles Blackwood, right?

Brian – Yes, that's correct.

Ramirez – The name rings a bell…

Brian – He's a Member of Parliament, and they were talking about making him Minister of the Interior. If you didn't like him, there's good news: it looks as though he won't be your boss after all.

Ramirez – You know, for us, politics… Governments come and go, but the police stay the same… Was he left-wing or right-wing?

Brian – Centrist…

Ramirez – But who would want to kill a centrist? I mean, actually go to the trouble of doing it?

Brian – You think it's murder, Detective?

Ramirez – I'd rather it was murder. Otherwise I've come all this way for nothing… *(He notices the audience.)* Who are all those people watching us?

Brian – That's… the audience, Detective!

Ramirez – The audience? I thought people watched TV alone in their living rooms…

Brian – The show was broadcast live, with a live audience.

Ramirez – Then tell them they must all remain available for questioning.

Brian – You mean they can't go home?

Ramirez – I'm afraid not. For all we know, someone here has been dreaming of killing a centrist for years.

Brian – In that case, ladies and gentlemen, I'll have to ask you to remain seated until further notice. If this takes too long, we'll arrange for bottled water and blankets. Thank you for your understanding, and once again, apologies for this unfortunate and unexpected incident.

Ramirez – Some days are just like that. It's like going to the theatre: you can't leave before the end. Do you go to the theatre often?

Brian – Hardly ever, to be honest.

Ramirez – Sensible. My wife dragged me to a matinee last Sunday. Believe me, I'd have escaped at the interval if I'd had the chance.

Brian – They stopped you?

Ramirez – Worse. There wasn't an interval!

Brian – Plays without intervals ought to be banned.

Ramirez – So, who else was in this studio when Mr Blackwood died?

Brian – Let's see… The witnesses we invited to talk about him, the stage technicians…

Ramirez – Then nobody leaves, understood?

Brian – Very well, Detective.

Ramirez – Were you close to the victim?

Brian – Close… no, not exactly.

Ramirez – Yet you call him by his first name.

Brian – In this business we all use first names and kiss on the cheek. Sometimes we even sleep together. It doesn't mean we're close. Anyway, we were at university at the same time, years ago.

Ramirez – Really? What kind of student was he? Was he a good student? A good friend?

Brian – A bit of a teacher's pet already. But are you sure this is relevant to the investigation?

Ramirez – Probably not. Anyway, we need to find out if Mr Blackwood's death was natural. Ah, here comes Sanchez now…

Sanchez enters with Diana.

Ramirez – Well? What did the body tell you?

Sanchez – Not much at first glance, Chief. No blood, no signs of a struggle, no marks around the neck. I haven't touched anything. We're waiting for the medical examiner.

Diana *(excited)* – This is crazy! I feel like I'm in a crime drama…

Ramirez – You don't seem too disturbed by the victim's death…

Diana – This was my first time meeting him… and he wasn't exactly friendly. I think our intern would confirm that…

Ramirez – The intern found the body, didn't she? I'd like to question her.

Brian – I'll go fetch her, Detective…

Sanchez's phone rings.

Sanchez – Yes… Okay, I'm on my way… The coroner's here – I'll handle it.

Ramirez – Take a seat, miss.

Diana sits in one armchair and Ramirez takes another.

Diana – This is funny. I feel as if I'm a guest on the programme.

Ramirez – Perfect. I've always wanted to host a television programme.

Diana – Can I offer you a coffee, Detective?

Ramirez – No thanks, never coffee. Otherwise I can't sleep in the afternoon. *(He notices Charles's half-full cup.)* What's this?

Diana – That's… herbal tea. The one Mr Blackwood asked for to clear his throat before the show.

Ramirez – I see… A little trick of the trade for TV appearances…

Diana – Looks as though he only drank half. It'll be cold by now, though.

Ramirez clears his throat.

Ramirez – That'll do. I've got a bit of a frog in my throat myself.

Ramirez drinks the remaining herbal tea while Diana watches in amazement. Brian returns.

Brian – Samantha's on her way…

Ramirez – Very well. Now, let's get started.

Diana – I'm ready to answer all your questions, Detective.

Ramirez – Surname, first name, age, occupation…

Diana – Diana Wilson. Single, no children, personal assistant to Brian Cascaldi. As for my age, you'll only get that out of me under torture.

Ramirez signals towards the control room, and a spotlight falls on Diana.

Ramirez – So, Diana, tell me about your relationship with Mr Cascaldi. I've read in the press that it isn't purely professional…

Diana – You know, they say a lot of things in the papers…

Ramirez – Don't dodge the question, Diana. The audience is listening, and they want to know too.

Diana – Ah, the public... naturally. Maybe we should let them go, don't you think?

Ramirez – Don't worry about them. They should have stayed home and watched television like everybody else. Now, you still haven't answered. What would your relationship status be? 'In a relationship'? 'Living together'?

Diana – Let's just say… It's complicated.

Ramirez – I see… Well, actually, I don't see at all…

Sanchez returns with Samantha, who is carrying a handbag with something bulky inside.

Sanchez – Here's the intern, Chief. She was about to leave, but I stopped her…

Ramirez – So, Miss? You don't like it here with us?

Samantha – Not at all! I was just…

Ramirez – We'll find out soon enough. Any news from the coroner?

Sanchez – The medical examiner thinks it may be poisoning, Chief.

Ramirez – Poisoning… you mean it was deliberate?

Brian – But who would want to poison Charles Blackwood?

Sanchez – The lab should have more information soon.

Ramirez – Very well, then, let's talk, Samantha.

Samantha *(inadvertently provocative)* – I'm fully at the disposal of the police, Detective…

Ramirez – We appreciate your eagerness to cooperate. *(He shifts uneasily in his chair.)* Sanchez, you take over. I need to visit the bathroom.

Diana – That's where the body is, though.

Ramirez – Well, I'll take a look at the body while I'm there.

Sanchez *(to Samantha)* – Set your bag down and sit here.

Diana – I'll come with you, Detective.

Ramirez and Diana leave. Samantha puts down her bag and sits.

Samantha – Thank you…

Sanchez – What's your name?

Samantha – Samantha White.

Sanchez – So, Samantha, what were you doing in the men's toilets when you found Mr Blackwood's body?

Samantha – Well, I…

Sanchez – You must admit, it's unusual for a young woman to be in the men's toilets. So?

Samantha looks very embarrassed.

Brian – She was with me.

Sanchez – Oh, really?

Brian – I'm a gentleman, I couldn't let the young lady feel embarrassed.

Sanchez – One thing puzzles me, Mr Cascaldi… Why would a gentleman like you need to meet his intern in the men's toilets?

Brian – I don't think I need to spell it out for you…

Sanchez – We'll see if that's necessary later. But can I ask you a question, Mr Cascaldi?

Brian – Yes…

Sanchez – Are you in a romantic relationship with Miss White?

Brian – Uh… Isn't that what I just said?

Sanchez – Ah, sorry, I didn't catch that… Right, I see… But in that case, Mr Cascaldi, why didn't you immediately say you were there when your intern discovered Mr Blackwood's body?

Brian – We were both locked in one of the cubicles! You can imagine why that was a little embarrassing.

Sanchez – Embarrassing for whom?

Ramirez returns with Diana.

Sanchez – Any news, Chief?

Ramirez – I couldn't use the men's toilets. There was a notice on the door saying they were closed for asbestos removal.

Brian and Diana both look at Samantha.

Samantha – I thought it was the most effective excuse to stop anyone from entering the toilets while the body was still in there…

Ramirez – In any case, from the initial analysis by the coroner, it seems Charles died of an overdose.

Brian – An overdose? I didn't know he was a drug addict.

Sanchez – An overdose of what, Chief?

Ramirez – An overdose of herbal tea, apparently.

Brian – If that's your most likely hypothesis, Detective, I'd be curious to hear what you think the least likely hypothesis might be.

Diana – An overdose of herbal tea? I didn't know it was poisonous.

Ramirez – According to the medical examiner, in very high concentrations this herbal tea can be dangerous. Mr Blackwood apparently drank an enormous dose of Sleep Well Tea in a single cup, enough to put him into a deep sleep, almost a coma.

Samantha – So he's not dead?

Ramirez – Not yet, but there's no telling if he'll ever wake up.

Sanchez takes the empty cup and examines it thoughtfully.

Sanchez – When you say 'herbal tea', Chief, do you mean the sort of thing that was in this cup?

Diana – Yes, I can confirm, it's the same tea Mr Blackwood drank before he… well, before he collapsed. But…

Ramirez suddenly feels unwell.

Ramirez – Then it won't be long before we feel the effects of this terrible poison ourselves…

Sanchez – But who could have poisoned the drink, Chief?

Ramirez turns to the audience.

Ramirez – And have you questioned them?

Sanchez – Uh… no, not yet…

Ramirez – The culprit could be sitting among them. Have a look round, Sanchez. See if anyone looks guilty. And I don't just mean the people who sneaked in without paying.

Sanchez walks among the audience, scanning the spectators suspiciously. This allows for a little improvisation, depending on the reactions in the room. He finally stops in front of an audience member (male or female) who is actually an actor.

Sanchez – Can you come with me, please?

Pat – Why me?

Sanchez – Let's call it… profiling. Don't worry. If we rough you up, we'll give you a receipt. And tattoo our badge numbers on both your buttocks. All right?

Pat reluctantly follows Sanchez onto the stage.

Ramirez – Search them.

Sanchez frisks the audience member thoroughly, finds something suspicious in a pocket and holds it up.

Sanchez – Bingo, Chief! A whole box of Sleep Well Tea.

Ramirez – Well, what do you have to say for yourself?

Pat – It's for personal use, Detective!

Sanchez – They all say that…

Ramirez – We'll have to trace the supplier. We can't let any more innocent people fall victim. This stuff may start out harmless, but it could have been mixed with something much more dangerous.

Sanchez *(reading the box)* – Linden blossom, verbena, camomile… You're right, Chief, there are additives and colourings in it too.

Ramirez – Sit over there. *(Pat obeys.)* You're in luck. Your fifteen minutes of fame have arrived. We're going to question you!

Pat – But I didn’t do anything, I swear!

Sanchez – You come to the theatre after drinking Sleep Well Tea, when everyone else needs coffee to stay awake, and you expect us to believe you?

Ramirez – Go fetch the phone book, Sanchez.

Pat looks terrified.

Brian – You can't beat up one of our audience members! We have enough trouble getting people to come here as it is. Imagine the publicity!

Ramirez – Don't worry, it's just to find a pizza delivery number. I'm starving. Aren't you?

Samantha – I'll find you the number, Detective. *(She exits.)*

Samantha returns with a telephone directory and gives it to Sanchez.

Sanchez – Let's see… Pizza, pizza… Ah, here's one. *(Dials.)* The usual, Chief?

Ramirez – Can't mess with a winning formula.

Sanchez – Yes, two pizzas, please. One margherita with extra cheese and a Neapolitan. The address? *(Proudly)* We're at the Direct Plus television studios. Yes, the channel. Oh, you know where it is? Excellent, thanks.

Sanchez puts away the phone.

Ramirez – So, where were we…

Sanchez – What are we drinking with that?

Ramirez – Wait – didn't you order the beers?

Sanchez – It completely slipped my mind, Chief.

Ramirez turns to Pat.

Ramirez – All right, go fetch us two cans.

Pat – Me?

Sanchez – Yes, you!

Diana – Aren't you worried he won't come back?

Sanchez – Not with this.

Brian – An ankle bracelet?

Sanchez – Combined with a taser. We rigged it up ourselves. It's foolproof.

Brian – I have something similar for training my dog.

Ramirez – We got the idea from that, actually.

Sanchez fastens an electronic bracelet around Pat's ankle.

Brian – We should use those at the theatre. It would stop audiences escaping at the interval.

Sanchez – Off you go! Fetch those drinks!

Pat leaves.

Ramirez – Now, back to business…

Sanchez – So, the intern is getting it on with the host in the toilets…

Diana – Excuse me?

Sanchez – Sorry, I mean... you didn't know?

Ramirez – I have a feeling your relationship status is about to change from 'It's complicated' to 'It's very complicated'.

Diana glares at Samantha.

Diana – You little tramp!

Samantha – You witch!

Sanchez – Ladies, please! Remember, this interrogation is being recorded live in front of an audience.

Ramirez – Attempted murder with a massive dose of Sleep Well Tea… Strange. It reminds me of another case.

Sanchez – You think we're dealing with a serial killer, Chief?

Ramirez – Unless it's simply a sordid crime.

Diana – But why?

Ramirez – It's true; we still don't have a motive.

Brian – He dreamed of becoming president, but let's face it, he had very little chance.

Samantha – He wasn't exactly a great statesman.

Diana – A centrist doesn't upset anyone.

Sanchez – A centrist in a coma, even less.

Brian – Though the difference between a centrist in a coma and one who isn't, isn't always easy to spot.

A puzzled silence.

Ramirez – Bring in the guests, let's grill them too.

Samantha – I'll go and get them. *(She exits.)*

Sanchez – Speaking of grilling, I'm starving. Aren't you, Chief?

Ramirez – I don't know what's wrong with me, I've lost my appetite. I hope it's not the first effects of that toxic tea I drank.

Sanchez – That's funny… When I smoke a joint, it just makes me hungrier…

Samantha returns with Chris.

Ramirez – All right, little lady. Enough messing around. Are you going to confess, or do I need to rough you up a bit first?

Chris – It's true that when he was my pupil at St Mary's Primary School, I couldn't stand him. I made him my scapegoat. But Christian charity forbids me from giving in to revenge.

Ramirez – Save it, Grandma. Hand me the taser, Sanchez. Perhaps it'll refresh the old lady's memory.

Chris – I admit I once thought of drowning him in the toilet during the break by holding his head in the bowl. But I never dared.

Sanchez – Was that the only time?

Chris – I also slipped some rat poison into his afternoon snack, but that didn't work either. It was years ago. The statute of limitations applies, doesn't it?

Sanchez – Of course, Grandma. If teachers can't deal with the noisiest children in their classes, how are we supposed to maintain order in our schools?

Ramirez – I hope no one in the audience left their children with a babysitter like this to come here… And where's our beer?

Sanchez – I'll speed this up, Chief.

Sanchez presses a button on a remote control. Pat immediately reappears with hair standing on end, as if they've just received a powerful electric shock, and hands over two pizza boxes and two cans of beer.

Ramirez – Ah, here we are!

Pat – I met the pizza delivery driver on my way back.

They open the boxes. Sanchez starts eating messily. Pat leaves.

Sanchez – Want some?

Diana – No, thanks…

Sanchez – You're missing out, it's really good.

Ramirez – Right, you can go, Grandma. Next!

Diana – You'll be given a funeral urn at reception, to make up for all this trouble.

Brian – So you don't go home with a bad memory of the show.

Diana – We had to cancel the shopping segment and don't know what to do with the products.

Chris – An urn? Thank you, that's very kind…

Chris leaves. Alex enters.

Ramirez – So, I'm guessing you hated the victim too?

Alex – Not at all! I adored him! I even worshipped him…

Ramirez – Search her. There's something about her face I don't trust. And when it comes to profiling, I'm rarely wrong.

Sanchez searches Alex and takes a little effigy of Charles, complete with a ceremonial sash, from her pocket. The doll is covered in pins.

Sanchez – Once again, you were right, Chief…

Ramirez – This doll with needles in its eyes… it looks a lot like our victim, doesn't it? So, that's the kind of "worship" you had for him?

Alex – All right, I tried to put a curse on him. But it never worked, I swear!

Sanchez – Until today, perhaps…

Ramirez – All right, let her go too. We deal in forensic science here, not exorcisms…

Alex leaves. A struggle is heard offstage, and Baroness Cassandra von Rosenberg bursts in despite the efforts of the security staff to restrain her.

Cassandra – Let go of me, you brutes! I have things to say, and you'll listen!

Ramirez – Who's this madwoman?

Diana – The victim's mother-in-law, Detective.

Ramirez – The mother-in-law? In ten per cent of family murders, it's the mother-in-law who kills the son-in-law. Or the other way round… Let her through. We'll question her.

Cassandra – At last! Thank you, sir. A true gentleman! *(She straightens her clothes and tidies her hair before sitting.)* Shall we begin? *(As if she's on television.)* Hello, everyone. I'm Baroness Cassandra von Rosenberg.

Ramirez – So, you knew Charles Blackwood very well…

Cassandra – Know him? He's my son-in-law! And despite all the outrageous things people have said, let me tell you that Charles is the perfect son-in-law!

Ramirez – The ideal son-in-law? You mean because of the state he's in now?

Cassandra – Just imagine: my daughter could be married to a future president! She'd be First Lady, and I'd be the nation's First Mother-in-Law. I'd like to say hello to my daughter, who must be watching…

She gives a discreet wave.

Ramirez – So, in your view, you had no reason to want him dead?

Cassandra – Murder my son-in-law? That's ridiculous! *(To Diana)* Miss, could you show me where the camera is? I can't seem to spot it…

Diana – The camera? But… there isn't a camera. I mean…

Cassandra – No camera? But this is One Will, One Destiny, isn't it? And that gentleman interviewing me is the famous Brian Cascaldi, isn't he?

Ramirez – What's she talking about?

Diana – She thinks you're Brian Cascaldi…

Brian – The lady believes she's being interviewed for the show…

Ramirez sighs wearily.

Ramirez – Right, take her away.

Sanchez leads Cassandra away.

Cassandra – This is outrageous! They're trying to silence me! This is a conspiracy!

Ramirez – Bring in the technicians. They're the only people we haven't questioned.

Diana ushers in Bob and Mike, still wearing their overalls. Sanchez returns.

Ramirez – Well, well, the dynamic duo. So, what did you two have against Blackwood? Seems like everyone hated him…

Bob – What, us? Have something against him?

Mike – Nothing at all.

Ramirez – Was he homophobic or something?

Bob – Homophobic? No. I mean, I wouldn't know.

Sanchez – Was he against same-sex marriage or something?

Mike – And what would that have to do with us anyway?

Sanchez – Come on, don't play innocent. You two aren't going to tell me…

Ramirez – The overalls, the moustaches…

Bob and Mike step threateningly towards Ramirez.

Mike – What exactly are you trying to imply?

Bob – How about we make you eat that microphone?

Diana steps between them to prevent a fight.

Diana – Please, gentlemen, no more violence! I confess, Detective. I was the one who put a sachet of laxative into Mr Blackwood's tea.

Ramirez – Laxative? But why?

Diana – To teach him a lesson! He'd been rude to everyone here… But I didn't think it could have killed him…

Ramirez – Laxative? Is that all? What a relief! I drank some of that tea myself… But it still doesn't explain what happened to Mr Blackwood.

Charles staggers in.

Sanchez – Well, this should add some life to the investigation. It's rare to get a statement from the victim in a murder case.

Ramirez – So what happened? Who tried to kill you?

Charles – Kill me?

Sanchez – You can't remember a thing, can you?

Charles – Wait, I remember. I needed the toilet badly, so I went into the men's room. When I came out I saw Samantha. I asked what she was doing there, and after that everything went blank.

Samantha – Brian had just left. Mr Blackwood tried to take advantage of me, so I hit him with my handbag to get away.

Ramirez – In that case, if a young woman's honour is at stake…

Sanchez – What do you have in your handbag? A sledgehammer?

Sanchez takes Samantha's bag and produces a printer.

Ramirez – Why are you carrying a printer in your handbag?

Sanchez – Is that in case anyone tries to take liberties with your virtue?

Ramirez – A little pepper spray would be much easier to carry.

Diana – And what's stranger is that it looks exactly like the printer that disappeared from my office this morning.

Samantha – I needed a printer, and this internship hardly pays anything.

Ramirez – A blow from that would certainly be more effective than a cup of Sleep Well Tea.

Sanchez – Do you want to press charges?

Charles – No, thank you. Given my position, I'd rather this didn't become public. May I go?

Ramirez – Of course.

Charles leaves. Samantha and Diana follow him.

Brian – Thank you, Detective. I really appreciate the tact and discretion with which you've conducted this investigation.

Ramirez – You owe me one.

Brian – Actually, would you like to appear on our programme?

Ramirez – As the guest of honour?

Brian – We also interview people who contribute to society. As a police officer, you're a kind of everyday hero.

Ramirez – Really?

Brian – We had to cancel our shopping segment, but since you're here, we could record an interview straight away.

Ramirez – So I'd be on television?

Brian – We're not TV1, but it's still television.

Ramirez – My wife would be delighted. Do I sit here?

Brian – Exactly. And this time I'm the one asking the questions.

Ramirez – I'm not used to answering them, but I'll do my best…

Brian – Let's have a quick rehearsal before the cameras roll. Ready? Mr Ramirez, as you know, the police aren't terribly popular in this country. Why do you think that is?

Shouting is heard. Samantha and Diana come back onstage, strangling each other.

Brian – Looks like we'll have to pause the interview…

Ramirez – Now what?

Brian – A little domestic squabble, by the look of it.

Ramirez – Unbelievable! Just when I get the chance to be on television…

Ramirez takes out his taser and aims it at the two women. They convulse and collapse.

Ramirez – There. That should keep them quiet for five minutes. Believe me, it's more effective than herbal tea.

Brian – Wow… Could you get me one of those? I think it would help a lot with my professional relationships.

Ramirez – If you can get me an autograph from the weather presenter for my mother-in-law…

Brian – I'll see what I can do. Right, let's go live. Control room, ready? Theme music!

The show's theme 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
Hold on, Butterfly
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/

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