

La Comédiathèque

perFECT

Jean-Pierre

Martinez

in-LAWS

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Perfect In-Laws

Jean-Pierre Martinez

After inviting the fiancé's parents over to get acquainted and plan the wedding, they soon realize that the parents of the perfect son-in-law don't always make for perfect in-laws...

Characters:

Anthony

Julia

Oscar

Jasmina

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A slightly outdated living room, furnished with a sofa and a coffee table. Anthony, anywhere from his early forties to sixties and dressed in indoor jogging attire, enters carrying a pile of papers, which he places on the table. He puts on a vinyl record—classical music or jazz—on an old record player and settles on the sofa to mark the papers. Julia, of a similar age, enters wearing a raincoat and carrying an old leather satchel. The music is quite loud, so Anthony doesn't notice her arrival. Julia stops the record player to get his attention.

Julia – What are you doing?

Anthony – Marking papers! What else would I be doing?

Julia – May I remind you we've got guests? They'll be here in half an hour! You could have started getting ready... Don't tell me you forgot?

Anthony – Forgot? Of course not! Let's just say it momentarily slipped my mind... But it would have come back to me sooner or later.

Julia puts down her satchel and takes off her raincoat.

Julia – Like when they rang the doorbell, perhaps.

Anthony – Relax. It's just drinks. It doesn't take hours of preparation. That's the whole point of not inviting them to dinner, isn't it?

Julia – Exactly... But even if we're not rolling out the red carpet, let's at least make it look like we've put in some effort. Now, put your papers away and give me a hand!

Anthony begins helping Julia tidy the room and set the table with what's needed for drinks.

Anthony – It would've been simpler if Sonia were here to greet them with us. They're her future in-laws, after all! She's the one who'll have to put up with them for the rest of her life, not us.

Julia – She thought we'd feel more comfortable getting to know them if she wasn't here with her fiancé. Makes sense, really. And it's hardly a chore. We never entertain anyone...

Anthony – Admit it, it's a bit awkward having strangers in your house whom you've never met before.

Julia – What did you expect us to do? Invite them for a beer at the pub next door just to avoid the hassle?

Anthony – They could've invited us.

Julia – They live in Lyon! If they'd invited us, we'd be looking at four hours on the train there and back. Not sure that's much of a win for us.

Anthony – Don't tell me they've come all the way from Lyon just for drinks with us?

Julia – They were polite enough to tell Sonia they’d planned a weekend in Paris anyway, but honestly... I wouldn’t be surprised if they made the trip especially to meet us. So if they arrive and see we couldn’t even be bothered to put out a few olives...

Anthony sets out olives and a saucisson, which he starts slicing.

Anthony – Here you go, olives.

Julia – I wonder if we should skip the saucisson...

Anthony – Why? I like saucisson. This one’s from Lyon, actually. Got it at the grocery around the corner in their honour.

Julia – Five minutes ago, you didn’t even know they were from Lyon!

Anthony – Call it intuition.

Julia – That’s not the issue...

Anthony – So there *is* an issue?

Julia – Our future son-in-law’s name is Djamel... His parents are probably Muslim, like him...

Anthony – Djamel? That’s an Arabic name?

Julia – Well, yes... And he’s quite... distinctive, wouldn’t you say?

Anthony – What do you mean by distinctive?

Julia – He’s a bit... tanned. Dark-skinned, actually.

Anthony – Our future son-in-law is Black?

Julia – You hadn’t noticed?

Anthony – Didn’t occur to me, no.

Julia – Well, not *Black* Black, like African Black... More like Obama, you know.

Anthony – Oh, right... So not really Black, then.

Julia – Very light-skinned... Mixed race, if you prefer.

Anthony – What’s his father’s name?

Julia – Omar, I think.

Anthony – Well, that’s definitely an African name.

Julia – North African, more precisely.

Anthony – Funny, I’d never really thought about this union in ethnic terms before...

Julia – Well, at least it shows we’re not racist.

Anthony – True... Probably because Sonia met Djamel at the most prestigious business school in France. If she'd picked him up in a bar in some rough suburb, we might've noticed sooner that his name's Djamel and not Jean-Baptiste.

Julia – You think?

Anthony – It's funny how visible minorities tend to fade into the background above a certain level of education, income, or fame. Look at Obama, for example. Honestly, you'd have to be American to immediately notice he's Black.

Julia – The main thing is she likes him. And that he's a decent chap.

Anthony – Still... For leftists teachers like us... Having a daughter graduating from a top business school... Do you think we failed somewhere in her upbringing?

Julia – *Leftists teacher?* Is that what you think we are?

Anthony – Just joking, don't worry... You know we only took this job for the holidays...

Julia – And to benefit from the civil servants' health mutual fund.

Anthony – And if our daughter can marry an African, even a North African, it might ease our guilt about turning her into a soldier of capitalism.

Julia glances at their preparations.

Julia – It's this sofa I feel guilty about. It's embarrassing, isn't it?

Anthony – What's wrong with the sofa?

Julia – What's wrong is that we bought it just after we got married! Look at it—it's sagging, Anthony. Like us. Don't you think it's time to get a new one before the wedding?

Anthony – I'm quite attached to this sagging old sofa. But if you insist, we'll replace it...

Julia – And the paintings! They're practically falling apart too...

Anthony – I feel like this wedding is going to cost us an arm and a leg... (*glancing at the table.*) Well, I think we're finally ready to properly receive our future son-in-law's parents.

Julia – Yes, but the worst is yet to come...

Anthony – What?

Julia – The wedding! That's partly why they're coming, obviously. To discuss the date and the ceremony arrangements.

Anthony – Just the thought of it depresses me.

They sit on the sofa. Anthony puts his arm around Julia.

Julia – It's a milestone, that's for sure. Twenty years ago, we got married. Now it's our daughter's turn...

Anthony – She'll leave home, and we'll just sit here like a couple of fools, sagging into our old sofa.

Julia – It's the end of an era. The beginning of a new one. We'll have more time for ourselves now.

Anthony – And fewer expenses... Her business school cost us a small fortune every month. Thank goodness she never had to retake a year...

Julia – We'll be able to travel more.

Anthony – What do Djamel's parents do for a living?

Julia – Sonia told me his father works in security.

Anthony – An Arab working in security? That's progress, isn't it?

Julia – Why's that?

Anthony – Up till now, the stereotype was Arab equals delinquent. The fact they're now also cops or security guards is a sign of integration. Plus, it means they're creating jobs within their own community.

Julia – Just avoid making jokes like that in front of our future in-laws.

Anthony – Don't worry, I've no intention of sabotaging this marriage. We've been waiting long enough for a chance to get rid of our daughter. Preferably without a dowry... And what about the mother, what does she do?

Julia – Sonia didn't tell me.

Anthony – Well, just because our daughter is marrying their son doesn't mean we have to holiday together. By the way, have you noticed there's no word for this kind of relationship?

Julia – What relationship?

Anthony – The relationship between the groom's family and the bride's. For Sonia, they'll be her in-laws. But for us, they'll never really be... anything.

Julia – This is going to be a great aperitif. Stop being so pessimistic! They might be lovely, you know.

Anthony – Here's my plan: we meet them today for drinks, see them again at the wedding, and if we don't click, that's it.

Julia – Speaking of the wedding... What's your vision for it? Might as well agree between ourselves first.

Anthony – We got married at the registry office with four witnesses and had the reception in our garage.

Julia – Yes, I remember. It rained.

Anthony – Do you think they’ll want something grand?

Julia – I hope not... Especially since tradition says it’s the bride’s parents who foot the bill for the wedding.

Anthony – What? You must be joking.

Julia – It’s probably the modern equivalent of a dowry. Anyway, shouldn’t you get changed before they arrive?

Anthony – And what should I wear to welcome these people? I don’t even know them! If I wear a suit and they show up casual, it’ll make them feel awkward.

Julia – If you stay in your tracksuit, I’m the one who’ll feel awkward.

Anthony – So, what do I wear, then?

Julia – Put on a djellaba. That would be more appropriate than saucisson to honour them.

Anthony – I’m not sure I can find the one I bought in Marrakesh.

Julia – I’m joking... But maybe you should hide your collection of erotic comic books. Just in case they’re strict Muslims...

Anthony – Inviting people for drinks does feel a bit awkward, doesn’t it?

Julia – Why?

Anthony – How do we get rid of them when it’s time for dinner? We need a code word between us.

Julia – If they’re nice, we could always invite them to stay for dinner...

Anthony – There you go. That’s exactly what I was afraid of. I’m telling you, we’ve started down a slippery slope.

Julia – We can at least do this for Sonia. It’s the least we can do. And Djamel seems like a good lad... as far as we can tell.

Anthony – True, we don’t know him that well, actually.

Julia – You didn’t even notice he was Black.

Anthony – We’ve only met him once or twice!

Julia – This feels like a bad remake of that play with Sidney Poitier.

Anthony – *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*.

Julia – Except you’ve already met your son-in-law and didn’t even realise he was Black.

Anthony – Sorry, I wouldn’t call him Black.

Julia – Anyway, we’ve got fifteen minutes left, so I’m going to get changed.

Anthony – I'll wait until you're back. Wouldn't want them ringing the doorbell while we're both stark naked.

She exits. Anthony slumps onto the sofa. The doorbell rings. He goes to answer but returns alone after a few seconds. Julia, still not changed, hurries back in.

Julia – I thought it was them. Who was it?

Anthony – Jehovah's Witnesses.

Julia – Jehovah's Witnesses? And what did you say to them?

Anthony – I told them we weren't interested! (*The doorbell rings again.*) And now they're back, insisting...

Julia – Are you absolutely sure they were Jehovah's Witnesses?

Anthony realises his mistake.

Anthony – Oh, damn...

Julia glares at him and goes to open the door. The phone rings.

Anthony – Yes, Sonia... Yes, yes, they've just arrived...

Julia (*offstage*) – I'm so sorry... My husband mistook you for... But do come in...

Anthony – Everything's fine, darling, don't worry... But I'll have to let you go now. Yes, speak soon...

Oscar and Jasmina enter carrying a bouquet of flowers and a gift-wrapped box. Their appearance is, in fact, somewhat reminiscent of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Julia – Oh, but that's too much, really, you shouldn't have. It's just drinks...

Julia takes the flowers, and Anthony takes the gift.

Anthony – Hello, hello... Did you have a good journey?

Oscar – Very good, thank you.

Jasmina – Let me introduce myself...

Julia (*interrupting*) – We'll do introductions in a moment... Come and take your coats off first. I mean, lay them on the bed. Make yourselves comfortable, please. This way.

Oscar and Jasmina barely have time to speak before disappearing briefly into the next room.

Julia – Have you ever seen Jehovah's Witnesses knocking on doors with a bouquet of flowers?

Anthony – I didn't notice the flowers. They must have been hiding them behind their backs as a surprise... And anyway, it's partly your fault. You said we were expecting people of colour... Don't tell me they're Black!

Julia – I'm not sure... There's maybe a little something, isn't there?

Anthony – Are you absolutely certain they're not Jehovah's Witnesses? You didn't even let them finish introducing themselves!

Oscar and Jasmina return without their coats.

Julia – Please, come in, come in!

Anthony – I once knew someone called Omar, but I can't for the life of me remember who... Would you mind if I called you Omar?

Oscar – If you insist, why not... But my actual name is Oscar.

Julia – Oh, really...

Jasmina (*spelling it out*) – O-S-C-A-R.

Oscar – It's true, it's not a very common name, so I can understand the confusion.

Anthony – I see... So, I take it you're not Black either?

Oscar and Jasmina seem slightly taken aback by this comment.

Oscar – And this is my wife, Jasmina.

Jasmina – Delighted to finally meet you.

Julia – Jasmina... Oh, yes, that's not a very common name either.

Jasmina – And you must be Anthony and Julia?

Anthony – That's right. I'm Anthony, and she's Julia.

Oscar – Yes, that's what I thought too...

Julia – We're absolutely delighted to meet you. Sonia has told us so much about you. So, you live in Lyon, don't you?

Oscar – For now, yes.

Julia – And you had a good journey?

Anthony – I already asked them that a minute ago, darling. Our guests will think we've nothing else to talk about.

Oscar – Oh, you know, with the TGV, Lyon is practically a suburb of Paris now.

Julia – But please, take a seat!

Oscar – Thank you.

Oscar and Jasmina sit on the sofa.

Julia – Anthony, will you do the honours?

Anthony – What can I get you to drink? No alcohol, I imagine, like Djamel?

Jasmina (*slightly surprised*) – A fruit juice will do, thank you.

Anthony serves her.

Anthony – Omar? Sorry, Oscar?

Oscar – The same, please.

Anthony – I suppose I shouldn't offer you any saucisson either...

Julia – Have some olives. Be careful. They're not pitted.

Oscar and Jasmina take some olives but are unsure what to do with the pits. Anthony points to a plant pot.

Anthony – You can put the pits in there. It's cat grass.

Jasmina – Oh, very well...

An awkward silence.

Anthony – Do you know the difference between cat grass and catnip?

Oscar – I can't say I do...

Anthony – They're completely different plants with entirely distinct properties.

Jasmina – Really?

Anthony – Cat grass has therapeutic effects. It helps cats purge hairballs they've swallowed while grooming. Catnip, on the other hand, also known as catmint, has aphrodisiac and even hallucinogenic properties.

Oscar – Well, I never knew that...

Jasmina – So, you have a cat?

Anthony – Actually, no. It's for our personal use... Isn't that right, darling?

Julia glares at him.

Julia – My husband is joking, of course... Djamel looks a lot like his father, don't you think, Anthony?

Anthony – Er... Yes... Yes, absolutely.

Jasmina – Your daughter, on the other hand, is the spitting image of her mother. Isn't that right, Omar? I mean, Oscar! Now I'm doing it too...

Oscar – Yes, Sonia is definitely your daughter. There's no denying it.

Jasmina – Like father, like son.

Another slightly awkward silence.

Oscar – You're both teachers, I believe?

Julia – Yes, that's right.

Anthony – They say one in two French people meets their spouse at work. Among teachers, it must be closer to ninety percent.

Julia – The remaining ten percent probably met during the school holidays...

Anthony – And what about you, Oscar? What do you do for a living?

Oscar – I work in the security sector.

Julia – Ah yes, Djamel did mention that.

Anthony – But when you say security, do you mean... Cash transport? Security guard? Night watchman?

Oscar – A bit of all that, actually. I run a company with 300 employees.

Julia – Oh, wow...

Oscar – Security, you know, is a booming industry.

Jasmina – Especially with everything going on these days...

Anthony – That's exactly what I was saying to my wife before you arrived. Security is a career of the future and a fantastic tool for integration...

Julia – And you, Jasmina?

Jasmina – I'm a doctor.

Julia – Ah, good to know... A doctor in the family always comes in handy.

Jasmina – I'm a forensic pathologist.

Anthony – Well, that could be useful too... If I ever murder my wife and need a favour for the death certificate, I'll come to you...

Julia – A forensic pathologist... Ah, yes, that must be... fascinating, I imagine?

Jasmina – Oh, you know, it's not as exciting as it looks in TV crime dramas. And what do you teach, Anthony?

Anthony – Maths.

Jasmina – Well...

Anthony – Yes, it always leads a bit of an awkward silence in the conversation. In fact, no screenwriter, not even the most inebriated one, has ever thought to create a TV series about maths teachers.

Julia – And I teach English.

Jasmina – Funny, I had a feeling you were going to say that.

Julia – Oh, really? Do I look like an English teacher? I'm not sure that's a compliment, but never mind...

Anthony – Perhaps we should put these flowers in water...

Jasmina – Aren't you going to open the gift first?

Julia – Oh, yes, of course.

Anthony – It's not a bomb, is it?

Julia opens the gift and takes out a hideous, misshapen vase.

Anthony – Well, that's... interesting. What is it?

Julia – An umbrella stand?

Anthony – A spittoon?

Jasmina – It's a vase.

Oscar – For the flowers.

Julia – Oh, of course... Well, that's perfect. Now we can put the flowers in it...

Anthony politely examines the design on the vase.

Anthony – It's lovely... What's the design?

Julia – Looks like Brittany, doesn't it?

Oscar – Sonia told us you're from Brest.

Jasmina – It's local craftsmanship.

Julia – Ah yes, darling, look, it's the Bay of Brest.

Anthony – Let me see...

Julia awkwardly hands him the vase, which slips and shatters on the floor. Their guests look horrified.

Julia – Oh no... How clumsy of me!

Anthony – That's what you'd call a Freudian slip... I mean, my wife has always hated Brittany. We never go there. We spend all our holidays in the south of France...

Julia – I'm so sorry... I don't know what to say...

Oscar – Don't worry about it, it's not the end of the world...

Julia – I'll clean it up.

Jasmina – We'll help.

Julia – No, please, sit down. Maybe we can glue it back together...

Anthony (*helping pick up the pieces*) – Why not? The pattern might help us piece it back together.

Julia – Yes, it'll be like a 3D puzzle!

Anthony – Oh, that's odd, there's a piece of paper inside. Did you put it in there?

Oscar – Not me... Did you, darling?

Jasmina – Not at all...

Julia – What is it?

Anthony – I’m not sure... It’s not in French.

Oscar – Could it be in Breton?

Jasmina – Or Swedish...

Oscar – Maybe it’s the instructions?

Julia – For a vase?

Anthony – Looks more like Romanian.

Jasmina – Do you speak Romanian?

Anthony – I know a little...

Julia – I’ll type it into Google Translate... It’s very short anyway.

Julia takes out her phone and begins typing the text.

Anthony – I’ve heard of a message in a bottle, but a message in a vase...

Julia – Got it. Oh, my God...

Oscar – What?

Julia – It’s a cry for help!

Jasmina – A castaway who slipped a message into a vase?

Julia – Worse... A young Romanian orphan enslaved in a vase factory near Bucharest...

Jasmina – No...

Oscar – That’s horrible.

Julia – We actually sponsor a Romanian child... Can you imagine? This vase might have been made by him...

Jasmina – We’re so sorry, we had no idea.

Oscar – We bought this vase at IKEA.

Jasmina – We thought, at worst, it might have been made by well-fed Swedish children...

Anthony – So what do we do now?

Julia – What do you expect us to do? He didn’t leave an address! He says he doesn’t even know where the illegal factory holding him is located...

Anthony – In Romania... Making Breton vases for export... Honestly, where is the world heading?

Julia – We’ll report it to Orphans Without Borders tomorrow...

Anthony – This is exactly where globalisation leads us, the same globalisation so trendy in the business schools our children attend...

Julia – Sorry, we didn't mean to spoil your aperitif.

Jasmina – We're the ones who are sorry. If we'd known...

Oscar – Believe me, we're absolutely opposed to child slavery as well.

Jasmina – Even Romanian children...

Oscar raises his glass to propose a toast.

Oscar – Come on, let's not let this ruin the evening! Cheers!

They toast and struggle to restart the conversation.

Oscar – So, about the children... What are we planning?

Julia – The children?

Jasmina – Our children! For their wedding!

Julia – Oh, yes, of course... That too.

Oscar – You don't object to a religious ceremony, do you?

Julia – In principle, we're not against it, but it might be a bit complicated...

Anthony – I was Catholic in a past life, my wife is Jewish on her mother's side and Protestant on her father's. If you're Muslims...

Julia – Unless we do it on neutral ground, like in a Buddhist temple...

Anthony – We might be there all week...

Jasmina – But... what makes you think we're Muslims?

Awkward pause.

Julia – Of course, sorry.

Anthony – It's true, people always assume Arab equals Muslim, but some are Catholic as well.

Another awkward pause.

Anthony – So... you're not Catholic either?

Oscar – It's more that...

Jasmina – We're not Arab.

Anthony – Oh... See? What did I tell you? They're not Arab! And they're not Black either, obviously...

Julia – Clearly.

Anthony – My wife was convinced your son was Black...

Julia – We know what Black is. We also sponsor an orphan in Mali...

Anthony – We would've brought him to France, but Orphans Without Borders discovered at the last minute he already had parents...

Julia – You're right, racism will only disappear when native French people willingly give their children North African names.

Anthony – Today, children of immigrants have to Frenchify their names just to get their CVs read.

Julia – It's true, there are some beautiful Arabic names. Not Mohamed, Mouloud...

Anthony – Or Abdelkader or Abdelkrim...

Julia – But I don't know, Djamel or Jasmina, for example.

Anthony – People already name their kids American names like Stewie or Pamela.

Julia – Equally ridiculous.

Anthony – So why not North African names?

An awkward silence follows this tirade.

Jasmina – Jasmina is a Croatian name.

Oscar – As for Djamel, he was already a year old when we adopted him. Naturally, we kept his name.

Julia – Of course...

Jasmina – We understand the confusion. Djamel probably didn't mention he was adopted.

Julia – That's not the kind of thing people talk about easily...

Anthony – So, at least we can agree our future son-in-law is Arab, right?

Oscar – It's a bit more complicated than that, but...

Jasmina – I hope that's not an issue for you.

Julia – Not at all, on the contrary!

An awkward silence.

Oscar – Actually, there's something else we need to tell you about our son...

Jasmina – Something important you should know...

Julia – Don't worry, no one's perfect.

Anthony – We've all made youthful mistakes, haven't we? Even if he did a bit of time for drug trafficking before going to business school...

Jasmina – Rest assured, our son has a clean criminal record.

Anthony – Sadly, I can't say the same for my daughter...

Julia shoots him a disapproving look.

Oscar – As an adopted child, Djamel has very strong ties to his parents.

Jasmina – And of course, we have very strong ties to him.

Oscar – We're his only family, you see.

Jasmina – And we no longer have any close relatives ourselves.

Oscar – They're all gone.

Pause.

Julia – My goodness, that's terrible.

Anthony – How did that happen?

Oscar – It's a tragic story.

Jasmina – One we may tell you someday.

Oscar – Later.

Jasmina – Once we know each other better...

Oscar – After the wedding, at least...

Jasmina – We wouldn't want to ruin the celebration with tales of our family tragedies.

Jasmina wipes away a tear. Anthony and Julia, embarrassed, exchange a worried look.

Julia – Can I offer you a refill?

Anthony – A proper aperitif, then? Since you're not Muslims... It might cheer you up.

Julia – Pastis, whisky, port?

Jasmina – I'll have a small glass of port, then.

Oscar – Same for me.

Julia pours the drinks.

Anthony – Have some saucisson! It's from Lyon. We bought it especially for you... I mean, in case you were Arabs who weren't too strict about Islamic principles...

Jasmina's phone rings.

Jasmina – Excuse me, I'm terribly sorry... (*She answers.*) Yes? (*Speaking more quietly.*) I told you not to call me on this number...

Oscar gives her a suspicious look.

Jasmina – Would you excuse me?

She disappears into the bedroom where their coats are. Oscar stands and follows her.

Oscar – You're not going to...

Jasmina – Oh, leave me alone!

Oscar – Excuse us for a moment...

He follows her into the bedroom, and their muffled conversation continues offstage.

Jasmina – Are you spying on me? I know it's part of your job, but still...

Oscar – You could at least have the decency to...

Jasmina – Can you lower your voice, please? I'd like to remind you we're not at home...

Oscar – Fine, we'll discuss this later. But mark my words, you won't get away with this... you and your dark-skinned lover...

Anthony and Julia exchange alarmed looks, shocked by the tone of the conversation.

Anthony – Doesn't seem very secure for someone who works in security, does he?

Oscar returns, looking flustered.

Oscar – I'm so sorry.

Julia – Not at all, don't worry about it.

Oscar – My wife's been a bit depressed lately.

Julia – Oh, you know, isn't everyone? Just open a newspaper or look around. It's not exactly a world that inspires optimism.

Oscar – Actually, Jasmina attempted suicide three months ago.

Anthony – Oh, well... that's... significant.

Julia – We're so sorry to hear that.

Oscar – Of course, I'd ask you not to mention it in front of her...

Julia – Of course, we understand.

Jasmina returns, composed.

Jasmina – Please forgive me... You were talking about the wedding, I imagine?

Julia – Uh... Yes... Among other things...

Oscar – I think you'll agree with us that just a civil ceremony at the town hall is a bit... joyless.

Anthony – For us, it sufficed at the time... But I wouldn't go so far as to say our wedding was wildly entertaining, to be honest...

Julia – And what were you thinking of?

Oscar – A proper wedding is a church wedding, don't you think?

Anthony – So your son is Catholic?

Jasmina – We had him baptised when we adopted him.

Oscar – We kept his name, of course, but still. It seemed best for us all to share the same religion, don't you agree?

Julia – Yes, it does make things more convenient... Especially for meals...

Anthony – And family gatherings...

Julia – Though in your case, you don't have any family left...

An awkward pause.

Anthony – Don't worry, we won't make it a point of principle either...

Julia – Our daughter isn't baptised, but if you can find a priest who doesn't mind...

Anthony – As Henri IV said to his daughter: *A marriage is worth a mass!*

Jasmina – Actually...

Julia – Yes?

Oscar – We thought you already knew...

Jasmina – Sonia has decided to get baptised so she can marry Djamel in a church...

Anthony and Julia exchange a dismayed look.

Oscar – She didn't mention it to you?

Anthony – Apparently, she forgot that little detail.

Jasmina – I hope this doesn't upset you...

Anthony – Why would it? She's an adult, after all. If she wants to become a Mormon or a Salafist, there's nothing we can do to stop her anyway...

Julia – So, we're already in agreement. Our children will be married in the eyes of God...

Oscar wipes away a tear and stands.

Oscar – You can't imagine what this marriage means to us...

Jasmina – Yes... A true rebirth... What am I saying? A resurrection... After such a massacre...

Anthony – A massacre?

Jasmina – I was referring to my husband's family...

Oscar – I'm so overwhelmed... Would you mind if I gave you a hug?

Julia – Of course... We're practically family now, after all.

Oscar embraces Julia, then turns to Anthony.

Oscar – And you, Anthony?

Anthony – If it's absolutely necessary...

Oscar gives Anthony a long hug, then wipes away another tear.

Oscar – Excuse me... Could you tell me where the bathroom is? I think I need to freshen up.

Julia – Of course, it's past the bedroom, on the left.

Oscar exits. An awkward silence ensues.

Anthony – We men are entitled to our share of femininity too, aren't we?

Jasmina – I imagine he's told you I'm depressed...

Anthony and Julia remain awkwardly silent.

Jasmina – And that I even attempted suicide...

Julia – I... I can't recall if he mentioned that...

Jasmina – Actually, he's the one who's unwell. He's pathologically jealous. Since we got married, he's had one of his security agents follow me everywhere under the guise of protecting me...

Julia – Perhaps he's just a little too... protective, don't you think?

Anthony – A professional hazard, I suppose...

Jasmina – And then he accuses me of having affairs with my bodyguards.

Julia – Oh dear... Well, that's ridiculous...

Jasmina – What can I say? When you're forced to spend all day with a rather well-built man at your side... Sometimes even at night, when my husband is away on business...

Julia – It does create... temptations, naturally.

Jasmina – I'm only human, after all. And in my line of work, most of the men I interact with are already dead...

Julia – So you...?

Anthony – A momentary lapse, I imagine... Nothing more.

Julia – It happens to all of us, doesn't it...?

Anthony gives her a startled look.

Jasmina – Oscar goes around telling everyone that Djamel is adopted. In reality, he's the result of one of my many extramarital encounters... And, of course, my husband knows that perfectly well.

Julia – Naturally...

Anthony – It's obvious, really. Djamel looks nothing like him, despite what we politely said earlier.

Julia – It's true, Djamel is quite distinctive.

Anthony – Without going so far as to say he's Black...

Jasmina – That's why we chose a slightly exotic name for him.

Anthony – Of course...

Jasmina – My husband can't have children, you see. I sometimes wonder if that's why he subconsciously pushed me into the arms of all those "stallions" in his employ. Oscar couldn't bear the thought of not having a successor, you understand?

Anthony – In that case, it's less of an illegitimate child and more of... assisted reproduction, old-school style.

Jasmina – The problem is, my husband hasn't really come to terms with it.

Julia – And Djamel? Does he know who his biological father is?

Jasmina – He only knows it's one of my husband's 300 employees. As do I, for that matter... To avoid any close attachment, my husband changed the bodyguard assigned to me every day.

Julia – And you don't remember who was on duty that night...

Anthony – A guardian angel... That's not just assisted reproduction anymore—we're bordering on immaculate conception.

Jasmina – What worries me most is that, because of his job, my husband has a licence to carry a firearm...

Julia – Really?

Jasmina – I'm afraid one day he'll do something rash.

Anthony – What sort of rash thing?

Jasmina – Either harm himself... or someone else. You mustn't upset him; he has uncontrollable fits of rage. You saw earlier, didn't you?

Anthony – And... does your husband carry his weapon with him?

Oscar returns, looking composed.

Oscar – We are truly touched by your warm hospitality.

Jasmina – Yes, truly...

Oscar – We're a family now, aren't we?

Jasmina – I think this will help us rebuild our marriage after all we've been through.

Oscar – In fact, we’ve decided to move closer to our son and future grandchildren. We’re looking at buying a house in the Paris area.

Julia – Really? Whereabouts exactly?

Jasmina – I saw there’s one for sale across the street...

Julia – Across the street from where?

Jasmina – From your house!

Oscar – As I said, we have no close relatives left. And we already feel such a strong connection with you...

Julia and Anthony are stunned. The phone rings, but they don’t even notice.

Jasmina – Aren’t you going to answer that?

Julia – Oh, yes, of course...

Anthony picks up the phone.

Anthony – Yes, my darling... I’m glad you called, actually. I wanted to ask if you’re planning to invite us to your baptism? What would you like as a gift? A bracelet with your name engraved on it? A little gold cross? A medallion of the Virgin Mary? (*His face freezes.*) What? No...? But why...? (*To the others.*) She hung up...

Julia – What’s going on?

Anthony – She doesn’t want to get married anymore... She says Djamel cheated on her!

Julia – That’s awful!

Anthony – Yes... So why do I feel like this is good news?

Oscar – Djamel? Cheat on Sonia?

Jasmina – Our son would never do such a thing...

Julia – Well, that’s a hard thing to be so sure of, isn’t it?

Jasmina – It’s completely at odds with the Christian values we instilled in him...

Oscar – Yes, but... like mother, like son...

Jasmina – What are you implying?

Oscar – You know exactly what I mean.

Julia (*to Anthony*) – You could’ve handed me the phone, at least!

Anthony – She’s the one who hung up!

Julia – What exactly did she say?

Anthony – I didn’t catch much; she was in tears. But I think she mentioned finding a condom under Djamel’s bed...

Jasmina – Was it... used?

Anthony – She didn't specify that... Shall I call her back to ask?

Jasmina – Are you sure it wasn't your daughter who...?

Oscar – She is a little...

Julia – A little what?

Jasmina – A little... free-spirited, no?

Julia – Free-spirited, my daughter? Let's say it's your son who's a little uptight... Though apparently not as much as we thought...

Anthony – Exactly. Let's not start shifting the blame here. It's clearly your son who cheated on my daughter, unless proven otherwise!

Oscar – Well, if you think about it, isn't it better this happened before the wedding?

Julia – What? That's outrageous! Is that the hypocritical morality you taught your son? The results speak for themselves!

Anthony – Either way, Sonia doesn't want to get married anymore. And to be honest, I'm not entirely upset about it...

Oscar – Oh? And why is that?

Anthony – If it spares her from having to deal with psychopathic in-laws...

Jasmina – Excuse me?

Julia – Honestly, I never felt great about this wedding either.

Jasmina – Oh, really?

Anthony – Let's face it, we don't have much in common.

Julia – And probably neither do our children.

Anthony – Frankly, I don't think Sonia and Djamel are meant to be together. She's our daughter—we know her well better than anyone.

Oscar – Says the man who didn't even know she'd decided to get baptised.

Anthony – Our daughter was raised according to the sacred principles of atheism and secularism. It's your son who's been a bad influence on her.

Anthony – To be perfectly honest, when you arrived, I mistook you for Jehovah's Witnesses...

Oscar – Really? I thought you mistook us for Black people?

Julia – Black people? Don't be ridiculous! It's obvious you're not Black...

Jasmina – Or Arab, for that matter!

Anthony – What's next? Accusing us of Islamophobia?

Oscar – Oh, just admit it—you don't want this marriage because you're racist!

Anthony – Racist? *Us*? Now you've gone too far!

Anthony throws the contents of his glass in Oscar's face. Outraged, Oscar grabs Anthony by the collar and gives him a slight shove. Anthony stumbles and falls.

Julia – Oh my God!

Julia rushes to Anthony's side.

Julia – Anthony, are you okay? He's unconscious!

Oscar – I'm so sorry, I barely touched him!

Julia – Murderer! (*To Jasmina*) Can't you do something? You're a doctor!

Jasmina – I'm a forensic pathologist...

Julia – I don't know what's stopping me from...

Jasmina – Go on, try it... You bitch...

Julia – You cow! Necrophiliac!

Julia lunges and starts strangling Jasmina. Oscar's phone rings, freezing the women mid-action.

Oscar – Yes, Djamel... Yes, we're with Julie and Antonia... No, wait—Anthony and Julia, that's it... (*To the others*) He says he didn't cheat on Sonia. It was a misunderstanding. They've reconciled and are getting married again... No, I... I can't put Anthony on the phone right now. He... had a bit of a fainting spell. No, no, nothing serious, I assure you... Probably something that didn't sit well with him... No, no, we're still on the aperitif... Alright, speak soon.

Jasmina bends over Anthony, examining him.

Jasmina – Well, as a forensic pathologist, I can confirm that this man is not dead.

Anthony groans and regains consciousness, sitting up and looking dazed. Everyone stands in awkward silence, visibly embarrassed.

Anthony – What happened?

Julia – Nothing, darling, you must have slipped, that's all.

Oscar – I think we may have let our words get the better of us. Don't you agree?

Julia – Yes... I suppose we all got a bit carried away.

Jasmina – We might have taken a wrong turn, but let's start fresh, shall we?

Anthony – After all, our children *are* getting married.

Oscar – It's entirely our fault. We shouldn't have...

Julia – No, no, it's us who...

Anthony – Would you like another drink?

Julia – I think that might not be very wise. We barely ate on the TGV at lunchtime...

Julia – You'll stay for dinner, won't you?

Anthony shoots her a horrified look.

Oscar – Oh, we wouldn't want to impose...

Julia – I haven't planned anything, but I'll see what's in the freezer. It'll be very informal, of course...

Jasmina – Well, in that case...

Julia exits. An awkward silence settles over the room.

Jasmina – I really like your sofa...

Oscar – Yes, it's very comfortable.

Jasmina – It's leather, of course. You can always tell real leather straight away.

Oscar – Leather ages so well...

Anthony – Better than we do, that's for sure.

Homer – Indeed...

Anthony – Oh, I didn't mean your wife, of course. She's clearly very well-preserved.

Homer – Yes...

Anthony – It's cowhide, isn't it?

Yasmina – Naturally...

Anthony – Did you know they're making shoes out of pineapple leather now?

Homer – I must admit, I didn't know that...

Anthony – And cactus leather, too.

Yasmina – You don't say...

Anthony – I just hope they remove the thorns first.

Julia returns.

Julia – I don't have much, but since we've already been nibbling quite a bit, shall we skip straight to dessert? I found a *galette des rois* in the freezer. I reheated it in the microwave...

Anthony – A *galette des rois*? But it's June!

Julia – Well, I bought a pack of two on special offer at the local supermarket in January, and since we only ate one, I froze the other...

Oscar – A *galette des rois* is perfect for us. We love *galette*, don't we, darling?

Jasmina – Absolutely, and we so rarely get the chance to have it.

Oscar – It's true, it's so delicious. Why limit it to once a year for Epiphany?

Julia cuts the galette into four pieces.

Oscar – Traditionally, the youngest goes under the table to call out the names...

Jasmina – But that would mean revealing our ages, wouldn't it?

Anthony – And the table is a bit low for that, don't you think?

Julia holds out a slice with the cake server.

Julia – For whom?

Anthony – Ladies first.

Julia serves the slices.

Julia – Enjoy!

They eat their galette in silence for a moment.

Oscar – Delicious, truly!

Jasmina – Yes, and the filling is just perfect.

They chew cautiously for another moment.

Oscar – Ah, it seems I've got the bean!

Julia – Then you're the king!

Anthony – The king of what, exactly, remains to be seen...

Julia hands the paper crown to Oscar, who places it on his head.

Oscar – There we go: King Oscar the First. And, of course, I choose my wife as my queen.

Jasmina – Naturally, as it should be.

Julia – Of course.

Jasmina – After all, the parents of Prince Charming must be a royal couple!

Oscar crowns his wife, and they kiss passionately for an uncomfortably long moment. Julia and Anthony exchange increasingly awkward glances. Julia clears her throat, trying to bring them back to reality.

Julia – Would you like some coffee?

Oscar and Jasmina break their embrace.

Jasmina – Why not?

Oscar – With pleasure...

Jasmina – Do you mind if I wash my hands? *Galette* is always a bit... sticky.

Oscar – I'll join you. I feel a bit... sticky too.

Julia – Of course, you know the way... I'll start the coffee machine.

Oscar and Jasmina exit, with Julia following briefly. She returns a few seconds later.

Anthony – If only he had choked on that bean...

Julia – You have to admit, they're a bit much...

Anthony – Then why did you invite them to dinner?

Julia – It's not dinner, it's just a *galette des rois*! And don't forget, Sonia is marrying their son...

Anthony – We absolutely have to stop this wedding, or it's going to be a nightmare...

Julia – Oh, really? And how exactly do you plan to pull that off?

They hear Oscar and Jasmina giggling offstage.

Anthony – They sound rather... frisky. Do you think they're... you know... in our bathroom?

Julia – Did you see him earlier, when he almost whipped out his gun? Do you think I should call the police?

Anthony – As his wife said, let's try not to upset him...

Oscar returns, affectionately groping Jasmina as they horse around like teenagers.

Jasmina – Oh, stop it, really... Please... Not here...

Julia (*awkwardly*) – I'll go check if the coffee's ready.

Julia exits. Jasmina and Oscar try to regain their composure and engage in small talk.

Jasmina – Sonia mentioned you have a holiday home in Provence?

Anthony – Yes, in Tarascon. We go there as often as we can.

Oscar – Incredible! We spend all our holidays in Beaucaire! Just across the Rhône!

Julia returns with the coffee.

Julia – No? That's extraordinary!

Anthony and Julia exchange a horrified look.

Oscar – Then we can see each other during the holidays too!

Jasmina – And why not have the wedding there?

Oscar – Exactly! We still need to sort out the wedding details... But I had another idea in mind...

Anthony – We were thinking of something small and intimate. And fortunately, you don't have much family to invite...

Oscar – It needs to be memorable. What would you think about hosting it at my company's premises? It'd be much more convenient for inviting my clients...

Anthony – Your clients? Do you have a lot of clients?

Oscar – Don't worry, I'll claim it as a business expense...

Anthony – Well, if it's a promotional event, that's... different.

Oscar – Djamel will be taking over the company in a few years. This would be the perfect opportunity to introduce my successor to his future employees. Honestly, I can't wait to retire and enjoy life a bit more.

Oscar opens his jacket to reveal his revolver.

Oscar – And when I retire and move in across the street from you, believe me, you'll have nothing to worry about security-wise... I'll personally keep an eye on your house.

Julia – Oh, how reassuring... You could even organize a neighborhood patrol with the local retirees! What do you think, Anthony?

Anthony – Why not? I'm not a fan of the term "neighborhood patrol," but during the war, they called it civil defense... Same concept, really.

Julia – Except we're not at war...

Oscar – Don't forget about our enemies within... the fifth column!

Pause.

Jasmina – We really do like Sonia a lot, and we're delighted about this union.

Anthony – Yes, it's... well, it's quite a triumph for her too.

Julia gives him a surprised look.

Oscar – A triumph?

Anthony – Over life...

Jasmina – Really?

Julia – It's true, she didn't have the best start.

Oscar – That bad?

Anthony – She didn't tell you? At birth, she was very fragile. Isn't that right, Julia?

Julia – Extremely premature...

Anthony – The doctors even questioned whether she might suffer physical or mental impairments.

Julia – And in school, well... let's just say she wasn't exactly ahead of her class.

Anthony – She had to repeat several grades in elementary school.

Jasmina – And yet now she's about to graduate from one of the country's top business schools...

Anthony – Yes, and at least she's calmed down a bit...

Julia – We probably shouldn't say this, but... you weren't entirely wrong earlier...

Anthony – She's always been quite free-spirited, as you put it. Not to say... a bit wild.

Julia – She's had her fair share of adventures before meeting your son, that's for sure.

Anthony – Oh, we've seen plenty of boyfriends come and go...

Julia – And let's just say, not all of them were the best influence...

Anthony – That's why we were so relieved when she introduced us to your son...

Julia – Do you remember that time we had to pick her up from the police station? She'd stolen something from a supermarket. What was it again?

Anthony – Ham, I think.

Oscar and Jasmina exchange astonished glances.

Oscar – Ham?

Julia – Or lipstick, I can't quite recall.

Anthony – No, now I remember... It was a camping tent!

Oscar and Jasmina exchange looks of dismay.

Julia – Oh, and there's something else we thought was important to mention about Sonia...

Jasmina – Yes?

Julia – Her maternal grandmother had a rather debilitating genetic condition...

Anthony – Yes, a rare disease.

Julia – I can't remember the name, but I'll look it up. Fortunately, I didn't inherit it, and neither did Sonia. But apparently, it can skip one or two generations...

Anthony – We wouldn't want our daughter giving you grandchildren who don't live up to your expectations...

Julia – Of course...It's just a matter of a test. They can always keep the child if it's unaffected...

Oscar – Ah yes, that's... quite the concern. Especially since, on Djamel's side, we don't exactly have a certificate of origin...

Jasmina – What's that supposed to mean?

Oscar – You know *exactly* what I mean!

Jasmina – Oh, because your side of the family is perfectly normal, is it?

Oscar – What are you implying?

Jasmina – Your nephew murdered the entire family with his father’s shotgun while they were sleeping!

Oscar – It was a moment of madness. It could happen to anyone!

Jasmina – To anyone? Thank goodness we couldn’t spend Christmas with them that year, or we wouldn’t be here to talk about it...

Oscar – You bitch! You harlot! One day, I’ll kill you...

He reaches for his revolver. Anthony and Julia are frozen with fear. Jasmina’s phone rings. She answers.

Jasmina – Yes, everything’s fine, Sonia... (*To Julia*) It’s your daughter, actually...

Julia – I’ll just clear the table a bit.

She leaves with a few items from the table.

Jasmina – Yes... Understood... And don’t worry, my dear Sonia. We’ll accept you as you are, of course... No... No, I was just referring to your genetic condition. Your parents mentioned it, and... Of course, we’ll discuss it all later...

Anthony – Would you like some more coffee?

Oscar – Gladly, thank you...

Julia returns and speaks to Anthony quietly.

Julia – I called the police...

Jasmina – Alright, I’ll let her know. (*She puts her phone away.*) They’ll drop by for coffee...

Julia – Perfect. I’ll make some more, then...

Jasmina – I hope I didn’t slip up mentioning her genetic condition... She sounded surprised...

Anthony and Julia exchange guilty looks.

Oscar – By the way, how would you feel about spending Christmas with us? After all, every cloud has a silver lining... After the tragedy that wiped out my family, I inherited a chalet in the Alps.

Jasmina – We could all gather there for our first family Christmas!

Oscar – Our new family!

Anthony and Julia exchange horrified glances. Suddenly, Julia’s phone rings.

Julia – Yes, my dear? What do you mean, *what genetic condition*? I have no idea what you're talking about... Well, I'll explain later, alright? Love you...

She puts her phone away.

Anthony – We thought it best not to tell her until now... But since she's getting married and likely to have children... Didn't you hear the doorbell, darling?

Julia – No, I didn't hear anything...

Anthony discreetly signals her to play along.

Julia – Oh yes, maybe... That bell's so unreliable. Sometimes you can't hear it at all...

Anthony – That must be them. Will you come with me to greet them?

Julia – Right behind you.

They exit quietly. Oscar and Jasmina sit in silence for a moment.

Jasmina – We were right to be cautious—they are very strange, aren't they?

Oscar – Strange? They're downright insufferable...

Jasmina – A pair of leftists teachers, what do you expect?

Oscar – Honestly, people like that shouldn't be allowed to reproduce. Just look at their daughter!

Jasmina – What can you do? You don't get to choose your in-laws...

Oscar – Unfortunately...

A door slams, and a car engine revs loudly.

Jasmina – That's odd. It sounds like they've left...

Oscar – You think?

Pause.

Jasmina – You know, I never felt good about this wedding.

Oscar – Me neither... But I think we've done enough to stop it, don't you?

Jasmina – The real question is, did we go too far?

Oscar – Too far? Maybe. Either way, if the wedding goes ahead, I'm confident we've scared off the in-laws for good.

Jasmina – Yes, I can't imagine them ever inviting us over again after the scene we made.

Oscar – Or accepting any polite invitations we might feel socially obligated to extend.

Jasmina – Especially not to spend Christmas at the chalet of horrors. Honestly, where do we come up with these things?

They laugh. A police siren approaches in the distance.

Oscar – You know, now that I think about it... Maybe we did go a bit too far after all.

Blackout.

The End.

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez was first a drummer for several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then began a career writing television scripts before turning to theatre and writing plays. He has written close to a hundred scripts for television and as many plays, some of which have already become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). He is one of the most produced contemporary playwrights in France and in other francophone countries. Several of his plays are also available in Spanish and English, and are regularly produced in the United States and Latin America.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>). However, public productions are subject to SACD filing.

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Comedies for 2

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
Preliminaries
Running on empty
The Costa Mucho Castaways
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
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap
backward for Mankind

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
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
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
Quarantine
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
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 the savage beasts
Neighbours'Day
Nicotine
Offside
Open Hearts
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Enough is Enough
For real and for fun
Him and Her
Lost time Chronicles
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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