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A New Year's Eve to Die For

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That last-minute panic on 31 December when you've made no plans for the evening... Suddenly, any invitation will do, as long as you don't have to see in the New Year alone. Even if it means the worst New Year's Eve of your life...

Characters
Sissi: a depressed loser
Alex: the Parisian guest
Pat: the guest from the provinces
Ben: the Facebook guest
Jo: the sex worker (optionally played by a man in drag)

5 characters
Possible casts: 1M/4F, 2M/3F, 3M/2F

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The living room of an almost empty Paris flat, nevertheless prepared for a very low-budget New Year's Eve party: kitsch decorations and a meagre buffet. A few scattered cardboard boxes serve as chairs or tables. A collection of tobacco pipes, in all shapes and sizes, hangs on a display board against one wall. At the back of the stage stands a pop-up tent. The phone rings. The answering machine takes the call.

Sissi *(off)* – Hello, you've reached Sissi. I can't answer the phone right now. I've decided to kill myself. No point leaving a message either—I won't be calling you back.

Guest 1 *(off)* – Very funny voicemail, Sissi. Congratulations. Listen, I'm really sorry, but I won't be able to come to your New Year's Eve party after all. I'd completely forgotten I had another invitation. Anyway, have a lovely evening, Happy New Year, and above all, stay healthy.

The tent flap opens. Sissi emerges like a zombie rising from its coffin. A pale, androgynous young man, he swallows an entire box of tablets, one after another, then retreats into the tent. The phone rings again.

Sissi *(off)* – Hello, you've reached Sissi. I can't answer the phone right now. I've decided to kill myself. No point leaving a message either—I won't be calling you back.

Guest 2 *(off)* – Hi, Sissi. Hope you're well. Just calling to say tonight isn't going to work after all. There's a friend of mine who... Anyway, I can't make it. Have a good evening, darling, and perhaps see you next year.

Sissi re-emerges to gulp down the contents of a second box of pills, then disappears into the tent once more.

Blackout, suggesting that some time has passed. Lights up.

The sound of a doorbell. No one comes to open the door. Alex, the Parisian, trendy yet casually dressed, enters carrying a bottle of sparkling wine. She glances around suspiciously before stepping further inside.

Alex – Is anyone here?

When no one responds, she glances curiously at the tent and then moves towards the buffet on the opposite side. While her back is turned, Pat, a slightly uptight provincial woman who has put effort into her rather questionable New Year's Eve outfit, enters holding a bottle of champagne. Alex, unaware of Pat's arrival, hesitates before grabbing a handful of peanuts. She turns around and jumps when she sees Pat.

Alex – Oh, bloody hell, you scared me.

Pat – Sorry, the door was open, so I let myself in.

Alex – Right.

Pat – I'm... a friend of Chris. She's the one who invited me.

Alex – Right... It looks as though she hasn't arrived yet.

Pat – No… I hope you don't mind.

Alex – That Chris isn't here yet?

Pat – That she invited me.

Alex – Oh, no, it's just... This isn't my place. I'm a friend of... Actually, I've forgotten her name. Anyway, I had no plans for New Year's Eve, so she suggested I come.

Pat – Apparently, she hasn't arrived either.

Alex – No... I've never met her, but if she turns up, I'm sure I'll recognise her. Well, I hope so...

Pat – Who?

Alex – The woman who invited me. The one whose name I've forgotten and who isn't here.

Pat – Oh, right... Mind you, it's not always easy to recognise someone you've never seen before. Especially in a crowd...

Alex – A crowd...

Pat – Just kidding. Seeing as it's only the two of us so far…

Alex *(introducing herself)* – I'm Alex.

Pat – Pat.

Silence. Alex looks around.

Alex – I've no idea whose flat this is. I don't even know who invited me.

Pat – Same here. Well, I know who invited me, but...

Alex – New Year's Eve plans… always rubbish. Same story every year. You're terrified of ending up alone, like a complete idiot.

Pat – Yes…

Alex – I had plans, but… they fell through at the last minute. So this is Plan B…

Pat – I see...

Alex – And you?

Pat – No, I... I didn't even have a Plan A. And so you...

Alex – Shall we drop the formalities?

Pat – Of course. So you... You really have no idea whose flat this is?

Alex – No… Well, I know where we are, but… I was just sent the address.

Pat – Yeah, same here… A colleague gave it to me…

Alex – Chris.

Pat – That's right… But are you really sure… I mean, are you really sure this is the place?

Alex – What address were you given?

Pat hands her a scrap of paper. Alex looks at it.

Alex – Looks like this is the right one.

Pat – Maybe we got the wrong floor.

Alex – Meh… There's a buffet, isn't there? Whether it's here or somewhere else…

Pat – Yeah...

Alex – Did they say it was a formal party?

Pat – I don't think so. No. Why?

Alex – Just, with how you're dressed, you know...

Pat – It's New Year's Eve, isn't it?

Alex – I just came as I am.

Pat – Right… Still, it's a bit odd.

Alex – What is?

Pat – There's no one here.

Alex – Yeah, I don't know…

Pat – Maybe they didn't hear us.

Alex – Didn't hear us? You mean…

Pat – The people who invited us… I mean, the ones who live here...

Alex – Or maybe they're next door… still getting ready.

Pat – Next door? It doesn't seem very big.

Alex – In the bathroom, maybe.

Pat – That's probably why they left the door open—so we could come in and wait.

Alex – Yeah.

An awkward silence. Pat's gaze settles on the tent.

Pat – That's strange… What's with the tent?

Alex – I don't know… Maybe it's the guest room.

Pat – Yeah… For anyone who'd rather stay over after the party.

A pause.

Alex – You brought champagne.

Pat – Yeah.

Alex – Nice.

Pat – I was told to bring a bottle. You too, I suppose...

Alex – Yeah. Though we're not opening champagne just yet...

Pat – No. Especially since it'd make a noise. You know, with the cork.

Alex – That might get them to come out. *(She moves toward the buffet)* There's sangria. Sangria's quiet. Want some?

Pat – Maybe we should wait until they show up. Don't you think?

Alex – Yeah, you're right…

Pat – Still, it's not exactly crowded.

Alex – And to think, the whole point was not to spend New Year's Eve alone.

Pat – Well, at least there are two of us… Still, it's strange. It's nearly eleven. Surely they're not in bed already.

Alex – Or maybe they're having sex. *(Pat looks shocked.)* We can wait until they've finished. They can't be much longer.

Pat – I don't know...

Alex – Do you have another plan for New Year's? I mean, a party you could invite me to?

Pat – No… Like I said, no Plan B…

Alex – What time is it?

Pat – Five minutes ago, it was eleven. *(Checking her watch)* It's five past eleven now.

Alex – In that case, we don't have much choice. If we don't want to end the year alone.

Pat – At least there are two of us.

Alex – We've already said that, haven't we?

Pat – Yeah, maybe...

A pause.

Alex – That little moment of panic on New Year's Eve, around 8 pm, when you've got no plans for the night. It's enough to make you want to kill yourself, isn't it?

Pat – Yeah... Actually, did you know there's a spike in suicides on New Year's Eve?

Alex – No, but that doesn't surprise me at all. How do you know that? Are you a mortician?

Pat – I'm a postman.

Alex – A postman?

Pat – Well, a postwoman. And I've noticed we deliver way more death notices in January.

Alex – You're not confusing them with New Year's cards, are you?

Pat – I'm from Brittany... That's where I took the postal service entrance exam.

Alex – There's an exam to become a postman?

Pat – Of course... Though I can't have done very well. I asked to be posted to Concarneau, in Brittany, and they sent me to the nineteenth arrondissement of Paris.

Alex – Got it… But tell me, don't postmen throw a ball for New Year's Eve?

Pat – Postmen? No, that's for the firefighters.

Alex – That's right... Firefighters...

Pat – I don't know anyone in Paris. So Chris told me that…

Alex – Oh, I understand...

Pat – And you?

Alex – Me? I was born in Paris. But don't worry, I don't know anyone either.

Pat – Oh, I see...

Alex – Otherwise, you can bet I wouldn't be here tonight, alone with someone I don't know, invited by someone I don't know, in the home of someone I don't know.

Pat – And what about you? What do you do? I mean, for a living...

Alex – I collect rubbish.

Pat – Oh, right...

Alex – I'm a bin collector. And no, there isn't an entrance exam.

Pat – I suppose the refuse collectors don't hold a New Year's Eve ball either.

Alex – Shame, really. It could be quite a sight.

Pat – I didn't realise women collected rubbish.

Alex – More and more women are doing it these days. Another great victory for gender equality, no doubt.

Pat – Yeah, that's great… And… is it an interesting job? Sorry, that's a stupid question… Picking up other people's rubbish, obviously… It's already such a chore just dragging your own out to the kerb.

Alex – No, but it's… It's not that bad, actually.

Pat – Really?

Alex – At least you feel like you're doing something useful. I mean… more than a suburban teacher or a juvenile court judge.

Pat – Yes... Being a postal worker is underrated too, if you ask me. We provide a service, just like you. Our jobs aren't so different, really. In fact, this time of year we're practically competitors.

Alex – Competitors?

Pat – We both go door to door selling New Year's calendars!

Alex – Oh, right... Anyway, collecting rubbish is only temporary. It's to pay for my acting classes at Cours Florent.

Pat – Oh, I see... That's great… So you're an actress?

Alex – Yes... Although for the time being I'm mostly a bin collector. But I'm working on a production of a play I wrote.

Pat – No way!

Alex – The Games of Chance and Love.

Pat – Wow...

Alex – It's inspired by the famous play by Marivaux, you know?

Pat – Oh, I see...

Alex – It's a romantic comedy, but very contemporary at the same time.

Pat – And what's it about?

Alex – It's a bit complicated, but… Basically, it's the story of a young virgin who plays the lottery to afford a prostitute.

Pat – Oh, that's… It sounds interesting. But I imagine staging a play like that must be expensive.

Alex – I did a crowdfunding campaign. But just to be safe, I also bought a ticket for the New Year's Eve Superdraw.

Alex shows the ticket. Pat looks at it, sceptical.

Pat *(checking her watch)* – We'll wait. We don't really have a choice, do we? The other guests will surely arrive.

Alex – Yeah...

Pat – What's with all these boxes? Looks like someone's moving out...

Alex – The good thing is, if we get drunk, we won't break anything. And if we're too far gone to go home, we can always crash in the tent.

Pat – I don't know where we could chill the champagne if we're not drinking it straight away. Champagne's better when it's cold. Is yours cold?

Alex – It's Blanquette de Limoux, a much cheaper sparkling wine. Veuve Clicquot is beyond my budget. But it's certainly cold. I forgot it in the freezer.

Pat looks at the bottle.

Pat – Oh wow, it's completely frozen...

Alex – Yeah… A giant ice cube with bubbles inside.

Pat – You'd better not put it in the fridge, then.

Alex – You're right... We'll let it thaw a bit...

An awkward silence.

Pat – So we're literally waiting for a thaw...

Alex – Yeah.

Pat – How much is the New Year's Eve Superdraw jackpot?

Alex – Twenty million. If I win, you won't need to wish me a Happy New Year.

Pat – Twenty million… I can't even imagine… What would you do with twenty million?

Alex – I don't know… I guess you'd start by buying yourself some friends to spend New Year's Eve with. I mean… friends who are at least halfway decent. Not like us, you know.

Ben enters, goth look. Acne on her face, holding a bottle of cider.

Alex *(lowering her voice)* – And definitely not like her.

Ben – Hi...

Alex – Hi.

Ben – Uh… Is this the right place?

Alex – You're a bit late. Halloween was two months ago, and we've run out of sweets. *(Ben doesn't get the joke.)* Sorry. Bad joke...

Ben – I'm Ben.

Pat – Pat.

Alex – Alex.

Ben – Thanks for inviting me, by the way...

Alex – Oh no, we didn't invite you.

Ben – Oh?

Pat – No, it's just that… We were invited too... I mean, this isn't our place either...

Ben – Oh, right… I'm a friend of Jeff. Well, a Facebook friend.

Alex – Jeff...?

Ben – He's the one who invited me.

Pat – Apparently, he's not here yet.

Alex – No… Looks like all the people who invited us to this party decided not to show up.

Ben – I've never actually met Jeff in real life. He's just a Facebook friend.

Pat – Oh, I see...

Ben – To be honest, I don't usually meet many people. I don't get out much.

Pat – Oh, really...

Ben – But my parents kicked me out. Well, out of their house.

Pat – On New Year's Eve? That's awful...

Ben – They're throwing their own party tonight too, but I wasn't invited... So I didn't really know where to go. That's kind of why I'm here.

Alex – Cool...

Ben – Are there going to be many of us?

Alex – No idea… So far, it's just the three of us.

Ben – But whose place is this, anyway?

Alex – Good question...

Pat – We were just given the address...

Ben – Oh, I see. Are you sure it's the right address?

Alex – No… Did you bring a bottle?

Ben – Cider.

Alex – Champagne, cheap sparkling wine, cider... The quality's going downhill. Next guest will turn up with sparkling water. Still, as long as it has bubbles...

Ben notices the other two staring at her.

Ben – What? What is it?

Pat – Oh, nothing, it's just that...

Alex – What's that on your face? It's not contagious, is it?

Ben – Oh, the spots... No, I'm doing trials for a pharmaceutical lab. It's a new medication. These are just side effects.

Alex – Well… I hope it pays well.

Ben – That's actually why my parents kicked me out. They didn't want me scaring their New Year's Eve guests.

Alex – Lovely.

Pat – So, is that your job?

Ben – Guinea pig? Oh no, it's just a way to make some extra cash. I have a regular job too.

Alex – And what do you do otherwise?

Ben – I work for a horse meat butcher.

Pat – A horse meat butcher? That's awful... I mean, sorry, but I didn't even know those still existed.

Ben – I manage their website.

Alex – You manage social media for a horse-meat butcher's shop?

Ben – Not exactly… It's actually a chain of them.

Pat – Oh, I see...

An awkward silence.

Alex – So, you don't know the guy whose place this is either?

Ben – No. I found this party through a Facebook event.

Alex – God, you've got to be really desperate to turn your New Year's Eve into a Facebook event.

Pat – And even more desperate to accept the invitation.

Ben – Yeah… Apparently, I was the only one who did.

The phone rings.

Alex – What do we do? Should we answer it?

Pat – That feels a bit awkward… It's not our place...

The answering machine picks up.

Sissi *(off)* – Hello, you've reached Sissi. I can't answer the phone right now. I've decided to kill myself. No point leaving a message either—I won't be calling you back.

The three exchange perplexed glances.

Mother *(off)* – Yes, it's Mum. I hope you're doing well. I'm feeling a bit down at the moment. I was counting on my son to cheer me up, but as usual, you're no help at all. Well… call me back if you're not dead yet. That was your mother.

Pat – That message was a bit worrying, wasn't it?

Alex – You think?

Ben – Maybe we should check the flat to make sure there's no corpse hiding in a cupboard.

Alex – Great idea… You two go ahead, I'll stay here and greet any other Facebook guests who might turn up.

Pat and Ben leave. Alex looks around the room, stopping in front of the tent.

Alex – A tent...

She goes to the buffet, pours herself a glass of sangria, and then stands in front of the panel with the pipes.

Alex – And a collection of pipes... Bloody hell, this place is weird...

Pat and Ben return.

Ben – We didn't see anything.

Pat – There's just a tiny kitchen and a bathroom.

Pat notices Alex has a glass in hand.

Pat – You know what? You're right. Let's not let this get us down—let's have a drink. It's New Year's Eve, after all.

She pours herself a glass too, while Ben looks around the room.

Ben – What's all this? Looks like someone's moving out.

Alex – If you find the box with the plates, it might make the buffet a bit easier to manage...

Ben checks what's written on various boxes.

Ben – Who knows… There's nothing written on them.

Pat moves towards the tent.

Pat – That tent is really odd, isn't it? Just sitting here in the middle of the room...

Alex – If you ask me, that's not the only weird thing here.

Pat – What's the point of pitching a tent in your living room?

Ben – Open it and find out...

Pat – You think? I'm not sure if… Oh, whatever...

Pat opens the tent flap and screams.

Pat – Oh my God!

Alex – What?

Pat – There's someone in there...

Ben – What do you mean, someone?

Alex and Ben come closer.

Alex – Oh yeah, there is.

Ben – Looks like he's sleeping.

Pat – That's crazy. *(To Alex)* Was he here when you arrived?

Alex – I don't know… I didn't see anyone...

Ben – Who is this guy?

Alex – Probably the one who invited us… Or, well… the one whose place we were invited to.

Ben – Is he already drunk?

Pat – Drunk? It's not even midnight yet.

Ben – Do you think we should wake him up?

Pat – He seems to be sleeping really deeply. It's a bit awkward...

Alex – Or maybe he's Frankenstein. He only comes out of his box after midnight...

Pat – So, nobody knows who he is?

Ben – No...

Alex – He kind of looks like a homeless guy.

Ben – Locked up in his own home, in a pop-up tent.

Pat – Looks like tonight's not the night we're finding a man...

Ben – Might as well get smashed too—just to forget we're ending the year the same way we started it: alone.

Alex – You're right. We're here to party, aren't we?

They pour themselves drinks and down them in one gulp.

Ben – This sangria tastes funny. Don't you think?

Pat – Yeah… It tastes like...

Alex – Well, it definitely doesn't taste like sangria.

They pour another glass.

Pat – I'll put on some music. Maybe that'll wake him up... *(Pat moves to the music player.)* Looks like he made us a playlist...

She starts the music—very loud and very strange. They begin dancing to the absurd music in a comical choreography. The doorbell faintly rings in the background.

Pat – Turn the music down. I think I heard something.

Alex lowers the volume. The doorbell rings again.

Alex – See? Never lose hope. More Facebook guests have arrived!

Pat – Maybe someone should go answer the door.

Ben – Isn't it already open?

Jo enters—a prostitute (possibly a drag queen).

Jo – What the hell is all this racket?

Alex turns off the music.

Alex – What? What's the matter?

Jo – What's the matter? The matter is I'd like to get some sleep!

Pat – Sleep? But it's not even midnight yet! Come on, it's New Year's Eve!

Ben – And who are you, anyway?

Jo – I'm the neighbour from downstairs. But I should be the one asking who you lot are. Huh? Who are you, first of all?

Alex – Us? Well... We're...

Pat – The guests.

Jo – The guests? And where's Sissi?

Ben – Sissi?

Jo – You don't know Sissi?

Alex – No. Who's Sissi?

Jo – Who's Sissi?

Pat – Yeah, who's Sissi?

Jo – You're at Sissi's place, and you don't know who Sissi is?

Alex – Uh… yes, yes, well...

Ben – Oh, right. His name's Sissi.

Jo – What the hell are you doing here, then?

Pat – I was invited by Chris...

Alex – And I was invited by...

Jo – And where's Sissi?

Alex – Well, he's over there... Sleeping.

Jo – It's New Year's Eve, he's sleeping over there, and he's left you his flat to party without him?

Pat – Yeah, it's... Well, put like that, it does sound a bit odd, but... Yeah, that's about right...

Jo – This isn't adding up… Maybe I should just call the police... Honestly, I'd like to get some sleep.

Ben – It's New Year's Eve; you can't go to bed before midnight!

Alex – Are you spending New Year's alone?

Jo – Well... yeah.

Pat – Come have a drink with us. Really, you can't be alone on a night like this.

Jo hesitates, then softens a little.

Jo – Fine. Just a quick one, though.

Alex – What can I get you?

Jo – Oh, whatever's going.

Alex – Got it.

Alex pours Jo a glass of sangria.

Pat – Shall we drop the formalities? What's your name?

Jo – Jo. *(She takes a sip)* What is this awful stuff?

Pat – Sangria, I think.

Jo – Doesn't taste much like sangria.

Alex – Honestly, none of this feels much like a New Year's Eve party.

Jo – True, it's pretty quiet tonight... I mean, business-wise.

Pat – Oh? What do you do?

Jo – Let's just say I'm self-employed in personal services.

Pat – I see... And do you... work from home?

Jo – You could say that. I have office hours, but I make house calls for people who can't come to me.

Pat – Right... And so... New Year's is a quiet night?

Jo – Yeah... No idea why. My clients are usually the depressive type. But the end of the year... The worst is Christmas Eve. Except for a few pervs who show up dressed as Santa.

Alex – Do you know the guy who lives here well?

Jo – Not really... But him? He's as depressive as they come.

Pat – That bad?

Jo – The sort of man you expect to find hanging from his shower curtain one day.

Alex – I see...

Jo – I have to say, I'm surprised he even has enough friends to throw a party. But where is he, anyway?

Ben – Over there... He's sleeping in the tent.

Jo – Oh yeah, right...

Alex – You don't seem surprised. Usually, when someone sleeps in a tent, it's outside, isn't it?

Jo – Maybe he's practising for when he ends up on the streets.

Pat – You think he'll end up working the streets? I mean... living on the streets?

Jo – Didn't you see the eviction notice on the door?

Ben – No...

Alex – So the boxes… That's what they're for. Moving out.

Jo – Exactly. Except when he moves out of this flat, he'll be moving into those boxes.

A pause.

Ben – Is he one of your clients?

Jo – No. At first, he never had the money to pay. And after a while, once you get to know people, it's hard to ask them for money...

Alex – Makes sense...

Jo – He did try to hit on me, though. And he's the pushy type. But I'm not desperate enough yet to sleep with a guy like that for free.

Ben – Got it...

Silence. Pat checks her watch.

Pat – Oh, it's almost midnight...

Alex – Yeah...

Ben – Strange he didn't wake up from the loud music earlier, isn't it?

Pat – Do you really think we should let him sleep? We can't celebrate the New Year without him...

Alex – You're right, try waking him up.

Pat *(to Ben)* – Why don't you try?

Ben – OK...

She opens the tent and gently shakes him.

Ben – This is weird.

Alex – What?

Ben – He looks dead.

Pat – Dead?

They move closer to look.

Alex – Oh crap...

Pat – That can't be possible!

Jo – He's already stiff as a board.

Ben – What do we do?

Pat – Maybe we should call the police.

A moment of hesitation.

Alex – Or we could just leave?

Ben – It's not even midnight, and there's still sangria. We can't just leave now.

Alex – You're right. If he's dead, it can wait until next year...

Jo – Yeah, well, I'm out of here. I don't want to get mixed up in this. *(She checks her phone)* Anyway, I've got a client in ten minutes.

Ben – I thought it was quiet tonight?

Jo – Business seems to be picking up. Either way, just so you know, I never saw you, and I don't know anything about this.

Jo leaves.

Pat – So, what do we do?

The crackling of fireworks is heard, almost like gunshots.

Ben – What's that?

Alex – The armed police already?

Ben – Fireworks!

Pat – Oh yeah, let's head to the balcony. We'll get a better view!

The three go out onto the balcony to watch the fireworks. Sissi emerges from the tent like a zombie. The atmosphere is straight out of a horror film. He sees no one. Moving like a sleepwalker, he leaves briefly to vomit and lock the front door. Then he comes back and picks up the telephone.

Sissi – Yes, Mum, it's your son, Sissi. I failed this time, but next time I'll get it right. You'll see.

He leaves. Alex, Pat, and Ben return.

Pat – Well... That was a great fireworks display.

Ben – Yeah, brilliant.

Pat *(checking her watch)* – Two minutes to midnight!

Alex – While we're waiting, I'll check whether I've won the lottery.

She checks her phone.

Alex – Let's see... The French lottery... New Year's Eve Superdraw... No, sadly not. No miracles for me this year...

Ben – How much could you have won?

Alex – Twenty million euros.

Ben – Wow. That's a lot.

Pat – Here we go! Five, four, three, two, one... Happy New Year!

Alex and Pat kiss each other on the cheeks.

Alex – Happy New Year!

Pat – And good health, above all...

Ben moves in to kiss Alex, who instinctively pulls away.

Alex – Sorry, it's just... with those things on your face...

Ben – No, I understand...

The festive mood evaporates.

Pat – We'd almost forgotten about the corpse...

Alex – Right, enough fun and games. Let's get out of here. Now.

Pat – You're right. We've no business being here. We don't even know the man.

They head towards the front door, out of sight.

Alex *(off)* – What's wrong?

Pat *(off)* – The door's locked!

Alex *(off)* – Let me see... Oh, shit, you're right...

Ben *(off)* – Aren't the keys in the lock?

Alex *(off)* – No. And it's a reinforced security door.

Pat *(off)* – This is unbelievable.

Ben *(off)* – So what do we do?

Pat *(off)* – What do you think? It's locked. We're locked in...

They return.

Alex – I knew this party was a bad idea.

Pat – And I'm claustrophobic! We can't get out! We're trapped in here with a zombie!

Ben – I've got a horrible feeling about this. It reminds me of a film...

Alex – What film?

Ben – A horror film... Valentine.

Pat – What's it about?

Ben – Four girls humiliate a boy at school. Years later he comes back to kill them.

Pat – But there are only three of us.

Ben – Four, if you count Jo, the sex worker.

Alex – Fine, but that's not the point. Why would he want to kill us?

Pat – We haven't done anything to him. We don't even know him.

Ben – Who knows? Maybe he put something in the sangria to poison us.

Alex – Of course... First he drugs us, then he chops us up with an axe...

Pat – The sangria did taste strange.

Alex – Or maybe he's a pervert who wants to rape us.

Ben – You think?

Pat – We have to call the police. *(She takes out her phone and dials.)* We'll tell them he's holding us prisoner.

Alex – But he's dead!

Ben – Maybe he's the living dead.

Alex – A man who lives in a tent in his own flat...

Pat – It's ringing.

Ben – Perhaps we should check something first...

Pat – Check what?

Ben – Whether he's really dead.

Alex – Are you out of your mind? What are you doing?

Ben lifts the flap of the tent.

Ben – He's gone!

Alex – What?

Ben – The dead guy! He's not in the tent anymore!

Pat hangs up.

Pat – Then where is he?

Alex – Oh crap...

General consternation.

Pat – How does this horror movie end?

Ben – Badly. Very badly...

Alex – Horror films don't often end happily.

Pat – We've got no choice. We need to check if he's somewhere else in the flat.

Ben – And we'd better arm ourselves...

They each grab the bottle they brought, holding it by the neck, and head off to search the apartment. They return a moment later.

Pat – Nothing.

Ben – I'm not sure if that's comforting or not.

Pat – Do you think this zombie could have supernatural powers?

Ben – What do you think? How else could a corpse leave a flat through a locked reinforced door?

Alex – I don't know... Maybe by having the key? But you're right, we need to stay on guard.

Pat – I think I need a little pick-me-up.

Ben – Let's steer clear of the sangria for now.

Alex – This is the perfect moment to pop the champagne. It might be the last time we get to drink any.

Alex uncorks the bottle of champagne Pat brought, fills their glasses, and they toast.

Ben – Cheers, Happy New Year!

Alex – Yeah… Happy New Year to you too...

Ben stops in front of the panel displaying the pipes.

Ben – What's this?

Alex – Looks like a pipe collection.

Pat – You've got to be pretty disturbed to collect pipes...

While they're all standing in front of the panel, Sissi reappears behind them, his face slightly bloody. They turn around.

Sissi – Hello, ladies! Anyone fancy a little suck on my pipe?

Panic ensues. Pat grabs a bottle and, with surprising violence, smashes it over Sissi's head. He collapses.

Pat – This time, I think he's really dead...

Alex – Did you kill him?

Pat – But he was already dead, wasn't he? He's a zombie! You can't kill a zombie!

Ben – That's going to be hard to explain to the police.

They rush to Sissi's side, trying everything to wake him up. Sissi regains consciousness. His eyes fall first on Ben, the goth.

Sissi – So, this is it. I'm in hell?

Alex – No, no, don't worry. You're still at home.

He looks around, surprised to see so many people in his flat.

Sissi – What happened to me?

Alex – I don't know… Apparently, you had a bit of a fainting spell.

Sissi – What are you all doing here? I don't know any of you...

Pat – I'm a friend of Chris... She's the one who invited me. I hope you don't mind...

Sissi – Chris?

Alex – I'm a friend of… Well, you probably don't know her either...

Ben – And me, I'm… the Facebook guest!

Sissi – Ah, Ben! I can't believe you made it!

Alex – You sure you're alright?

Sissi – I organised a party, but everyone cancelled.

Alex – Oh, damn...

Pat – But we're here!

Sissi – Luckily, because I'd planned on everyone chipping in.

Alex – Oh, crap...

Sissi – If no one had come, I'd have been in trouble...

Pat – Yeah, that's right...

Alex – So, how much is the...

Sissi – I haven't worked it out yet... I spent the last three hundred euros in my savings account. We'll divide it by however many people turn up...

Ben – Three hundred euros? Divided by...

Sissi – Three.

Alex – Oh wow, that's a lot...

Sissi – That's partly why I took the pills. When I realised no one was coming.

Pat – What kind of pills?

Sissi – Whatever I had in my medicine cabinet. Just aspirin and painkillers...

Alex – Well, no wonder it didn't do the trick...

Sissi – No, that's why I jumped out of the window.

Ben – But since it's only the first floor, that didn't work either.

Sissi – I landed on a hedge. Then I bounced off an old mattress.

Ben – Man, you can't catch a break...

Sissi – I still hit the pavement, though. That's how I scraped my face a bit. The good thing about the painkillers is, I don't feel a thing.

Ben – Yeah, that's lucky, I suppose.

Sissi – And you... What's that thing on your face?

Ben – I'm doing trials for a pharmaceutical lab.

Sissi – Wait, you get paid to take meds?

Ben – I'll give you the address if you want. Especially if they're looking to test suicide meds.

Sissi starts crying.

Pat – What? What's wrong?

Ben – Don't worry, we're here now.

Sissi – Exactly... You came... It means a lot to me that you're here.

Alex – Yeah, well...

Sissi – You could've been anywhere for New Year's Eve, but you chose to be here with me.

Pat – That's right...

Sissi – Anyone fancy a little suck on my pipe?

Pat – Excuse me?

Sissi – I've got a whole collection over there. Bought them second-hand online. Want to try one?

Alex – So they're used pipes...

Pat – Pre-owned, if you prefer.

Alex – Second-mouth, you mean. Very tempting, but...

Ben – How about another drink instead?

Pat – After all, we're here to party, right?

Alex – It's New Year's Eve!

They pour champagne and all drink together.

Ben – Let's put some music on, yeah?

Sissi – OK...

Ben turns on the music and dances with Sissi. Alex and Pat step aside a little.

Alex – This music really makes you feel like killing yourself, doesn't it?

Pat – I'm starting to wonder if it was a good idea to accept this invitation...

Alex – If you can even call it an invitation...

Ben – I've got a feeling he's going to drop dead before the night's over.

Sissi collapses onto the floor. Ben stops the music. Pat and Alex pick him up and sit him down.

Pat – Are you OK?

Sissi – Must be the pills... mixed with the punch.

Pat – Oh, that was punch? No wonder the sangria tasted so... unique.

Sissi – I just mixed all the leftover bottles I had in my cupboard. I'm not sure what to call it...

Alex – A toxic cocktail, perhaps.

Sissi – I'm not in a good place right now. I just got fired. I'm broke, and I've been served an eviction notice.

Alex – That's rough...

Pat – But you'll surely find another place to stay.

Alex – Though, without a job...

Ben – What kind of work were you doing?

Sissi – I was picking grapes.

Alex – Well, that's a pretty seasonal job.

Pat – Couldn't you stay with your mum for a while?

Sissi – My mother? She's on her fourth suicide attempt herself.

Alex – So it's a family tradition...

Ben – Well, if you end up on the streets, at least you've got a tent.

Sissi – Even my girlfriend didn't come tonight.

Ben – Oh, you have a girlfriend?

Sissi – Well, she's not really my girlfriend yet. She's the neighbour from downstairs.

Pat – Jo?

Sissi – You know her? I invited her tonight, actually, but... She didn't come either... *(He starts crying)* Sorry, I've completely run out of tissues.

He leaves.

Pat – Poor guy...

Alex – Yeah, but what can we do about it?

Ben – She lives just downstairs. Maybe we could help him out?

Alex – Help how? You want us to pitch in for another pipe for his collection?

Pat – He seems so clueless. I'm not even sure he realises what kind of "personal services" she offers...

Alex – Personal disservices, more like...

Ben – So, what do we do?

Alex – OK, fine. Guess I'll go and sort this out.

Alex leaves.

Pat – I don't like this...

Ben – What?

Pat – All of this! This awful evening... Worst New Year's Eve ever. Isn't it for you too?

Ben – Let me think... No, I don't think so.

Pat – No way... There's a worse New Year's Eve than this? Tell me!

Ben – I must have been about ten. My parents and I were invited to my uncle's place near Creil, north of Paris. He was an embalmer. Have you heard of Creil?

Pat – No...

Ben – Actually, I'm not even sure he was my uncle... Anyway, when we got there, he asked, 'Want to see where I work?' I was a bit wary. My parents had said he'd just come out of prison over some nasty business involving minors. But at that age, I thought 'minors' meant people who worked down coal mines. So I followed him to the mortuary, and then...

Pat – Sorry, but I really don't need to hear this right now...

Jo, the neighbour, returns with Alex.

Jo – Oh, come on... He does this suicide routine at least once a week. He's completely nuts. There's no way I'm giving in to his emotional blackmail.

Alex – But where is Sissi?

Pat – Oh no, crap.

She rushes out, then comes back just as quickly.

Pat – He was in the bathtub, trying to drown himself!

Alex – He's really determined to ruin our evening.

Pat – What do we do? Should we call an ambulance?

Jo – Wait, is he actually dead this time?

They rush to the bathroom and drag him back.

Pat – He's looking pretty dead, don't you think?

Alex – Not totally, though...

Ben – Someone should give him mouth-to-mouth...

Alex – I don't know how to do that... Who's going to do it?

All eyes turn to Jo.

Jo – What do you think? That you need a first-aid certificate to do my job?

Ben – I'll give it a try.

Alex – OK.

Ben performs mouth-to-mouth on Sissi.

Jo – Think he did all this just to get that?

Sissi regains consciousness and sees Ben's spot-covered face leaning over him.

Sissi – That's it. I'm in hell... A succubus was sucking my blood!

Jo – Right, I don't have time for this! So, kids! Do you have money to pay me or not?

Alex – Do you take cheques?

Jo – Of course. Why not pay me in meal vouchers while you're at it? Right, I'm off. I left some work unfinished, believe it or not...

Jo leaves. Sissi comes back to his senses.

Pat – He's failed again.

Alex – Honestly, it's just pitiful now.

Pat – Yeah...

Ben – Maybe we should help him.

Pat – You mean help him kill himself? That's called murder, isn't it?

Ben – No, I mean help him… find someone.

Pat – Then again, aren't we here tonight because we're just as desperate as he is?

Alex – Maybe we could let him believe, just for tonight, that he's got a shot...

Pat – With who?

Alex – You're right, it'd never work.

The phone rings. Sissi doesn't answer. Pat picks it up.

Pat – Hello? Oh, hello, ma'am. No, I'm not his fiancée. No, I'm not a prostitute, either. Yes, I'll put him on. *(To Sissi)* It's your mum...

Sissi *(taking the receiver)* – Yes… No, I'm not dead... Yes, I know, I've failed at everything—even my suicide... Yes, don't worry, I got your gift, thank you. I wish you a Happy New Year too. Bye, Mum...

He hangs up.

Alex – Everything OK?

Sissi – I was born on 31 December. And my mother couldn't think of anything better than naming me Sylvester.

Pat – Which explains the ridiculous nickname.

Alex – Sissi...

Sissi – So 31 December is my birthday and Saint Sylvester's Day. It's my name day too. And it's only a week after Christmas...

Ben – Oof, that's some bad luck...

Sissi – Every year since I was born, between Christmas and New Year's, my mum gives me a lottery ticket, with my birthdate as the numbers... That's both my Christmas and birthday present.

Ben – Life's a lottery.

He shows a lottery ticket and places it on a box.

Alex – I played too. The New Year's Eve Superdraw. But unfortunately...

Pat – Maybe you're in luck, Sissi... Unlucky in love, lucky at cards. Or the lottery...

Alex – Have you checked if you won?

Sissi – Not even. At first, every year, I'd wait eagerly for the results... Like a kid checking under the tree, hoping Santa came... But now, I don't even look. I've realised Santa doesn't come... And when it comes to love...

Ben – What?

Sissi – Let's just say Mrs Claus has never drawn my number either.

Pat – No? You're saying..

Sissi – Yes, I know, it's hard to believe, but I've never experienced love... Statistically, at my age, it's supposed to be pretty rare.

Ben – I didn't even know there were statistics on that.

Alex – The Games of Love and Misfortune...

Sissi – You'll understand why, at this time of year, I get a bit down... I just need a moment...

Pat – You're not planning to hang yourself with the shower curtain, are you?

Sissi – Don't worry, this time I'm just going to throw up in the toilet.

Sissi leaves.

Ben – We really should do something for him.

Pat – Like what?

Alex – Are you volunteering?

Pat – Not me, but… Ben?

Ben – I do feel sorry for him, but I'm pretty sure I'm not his type.

Pat gives her a sceptical look. Alex picks up the lottery ticket Sissi left behind. Sissi returns, and Alex quickly puts the ticket back.

Alex – Is the toilet that way?

Sissi – At the end of the hallway.

Alex – I think I'm going to throw up too.

Alex leaves.

Sissi – Go ahead and help yourselves to a drink, alright?

Ben – Sure...

Sissi – Still, it's nice of you to have come.

Ben – To be honest, it was this or spending New Year's alone.

Sissi – It's still kind of you. I'm sure some of the people I invited chose to spend New Year's alone instead.

Pat – Yeah… I think I'm starting to understand why.

Alex returns.

Alex – I already checked the lottery results—I set up an alert. I lost, but hey, you never know—maybe your birthdate came up.

Sissi – I don't know… I've stopped believing... In anything...

Alex – Here, let me check for you. Here, take a look...

Alex shows him her smartphone screen. Sissi looks at it, incredulous.

Sissi – Those aren't my numbers.

Alex – Oh yeah, right… Wait, hang on, look! You've still got four numbers!

Sissi – So what?

Alex – That's still a decent chunk of change.

Sissi – How much?

Alex – Wait a sec… Four numbers... That's fifty grand!

Sissi is stunned at first.

Sissi – This can't be real. Are you sure?

Alex – For sure. See? It's written right there!

Pat – That's crazy...

Sissi starts to believe it.

Sissi – So, I've won?

Alex – Yep.

Sissi – I've never won a cent in the New Year's Eve draw. I thought God had forgotten me. But now... it's thanks to you! A miracle! You're my Three Wise Men!

Alex – OK, let's not go that far...

Sissi – We're all going to share it.

Alex – That's just the meds talking. Trust me, you'll regret it in the morning.

Sissi – We were going to share the cost of the party, so it's only fair! With friends, we share everything—good or bad.

Ben – Well, when you put it that way...

Alex – No, you need to keep that money for yourself, Sissi. You need it more than we do.

Pat – Well said, Alex. I've got to admit, I misjudged you. I agree, this is a sign from above. This money is his chance for a fresh start in life...

Sissi – Well… At the very least, I'm not asking you to chip in for this party.

Alex – That's good, Sissi... That's very generous of you. Thank you.

Sissi – I'm going to tell Jo. Hang on for me, will you?

He leaves.

Pat – It's incredible. He was at the end of his rope, and then suddenly...

Alex – You're right—it really is a miracle.

Pat – God really does exist... I think I've found my faith again.

Alex – Just goes to show—you should never lose hope.

Ben – I could really use a little boost myself...

Pat – Why not try your luck too?

Alex – Maybe the Devil will cut you a deal...

Sissi returns with Jo, dressed as Mrs Claus.

Jo – So it's true? He won?

Alex – Fifty thousand euros.

Ben – They called you a loser, but I always knew you had the face of a winner.

Sissi – Really?

Jo – Wait a second, witchy—I was here first.

Ben – Weren't you calling him a depressive creep earlier? Well, I can make him happy, right, Sissi?

Alex – Sorry, Ben, but what gets him going is Mrs Claus. Isn't that right, Sissi?

Jo – Yeah, well… Mrs Claus doesn't do freebies. Got any money?

Alex – The corner shop is closed right now, but he'll have the money tomorrow morning, guaranteed!

Sissi – And now that I'm a billionaire, women are going to flock to me like bees to honey.

Pat – Don't get ahead of yourself, Sissi. It's only fifty thousand euros. If I were you, I'd just enjoy the good things as they come.

Alex – She's right. As the poet said, 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.' Mind you, the choice of roses here isn't exactly dazzling...

Pat – As my grandmother used to say: beggars can't be choosers.

Alex – I'm sure Ben has everything it takes to make a man happy. At least she doesn't ask for payment upfront.

Sissi – She's not, like, contagious or anything, right?

Alex – Ben?

But Ben collapses like a sack of potatoes.

Alex – Must be the meds kicking in...

Pat – Plus the sangria. I'm feeling a bit dizzy too...

Alex – Come on, Jo—it's New Year's. Show a little generosity.

Jo – Fine. But I want my money tomorrow, understood?

Alex – Promise. Tomorrow at dawn, when the lottery office opens its doors.

Jo – OK, sweetheart, let Mummy take care of you...

Jo leads Sissi away.

Pat *(touched)* – Seems like couples are pairing off.

Alex – Yep… Well, I guess we're the last ones standing.

Pat looks slightly startled.

Blackout.

The next morning. Ben is still slumped in a corner against a box. Alex and Pat emerge from the camping tent.

Alex – You OK?

Pat – My head's still spinning... What the hell was in that sangria?

Alex – I'd rather not know.

Pat – I don't remember anything... But what are we doing in this tent?

Alex – You seriously don't remember?

Pat shoots her a worried glance. Sissi enters, looking radiant.

Alex – So, Sissi, feeling happy?

Sissi – Happy? You bet! I'm rich! No more money problems—I can pay my rent and unpack my boxes.

Alex – If I were you, I'd hold off on unpacking those boxes.

Sissi – Why's that?

Pat – Now that you're rich, you might want to move into a bigger place.

Sissi – Yeah, that's true.

Alex – No, when I said “happy,” I meant the night you just spent… with Mrs Claus.

Pat – It was your first time, wasn't it?

Sissi – Honestly, with all the painkillers I took last night, I didn't feel a thing...

Alex – Oh no, that's a shame...

Sissi – I was so out of it, for all I know Mrs Claus was actually Father Christmas...

Pat – Oh, I see...

Sissi – Anyway, the important thing is I won the lottery. I'm heading straight to the

corner shop to cash in my winnings.

Alex – I don't think they'll hand you ten grand on the spot, but they'll tell you what to do.

Sissi – Ten grand? Yesterday, you said fifty.

Alex – Oh yeah, sorry, fifty... Maybe...

Ben regains consciousness.

Ben – Hi...

Sissi – Ah, Ben! Thanks for coming to my party. Hope you had a good time.

Ben – Yeah, but I'm not really sure where I'm going now. My parents kicked me out.

Sissi – You can have my pop-up tent. I don't need it anymore.

Ben – That's kind of you, thanks.

Sissi – Right, I'm off...

Ben – Can I come with you?

Sissi – Sure...

Ben *(to the others)* – We'll keep in touch on Facebook, yeah?

Alex – OK. Let's hope you get Wi-Fi in your camping tent.

Pat – Happy New Year...

Sissi – Don't forget to shut the door on your way out.

Sissi and Ben leave.

Alex – We'd better leave before he returns.

Pat – Why?

Alex – Because he didn't win anything!

Pat – What?

Alex – Those lottery numbers I gave him? Completely fake. He didn't win a thing.

Pat – You're kidding...

Alex – You didn't really fall for that, did you?

Pat – That's awful! When he realises it's not true...

Alex – He might have a reason to kill himself, but at least he won't die a virgin!

Pat – Who knows if he even spent the night with a real woman...

Alex – The main thing is he had a good evening. And so did we... Besides, it's not

like we told him he was a millionaire. It's just fifty grand, after all.

Pat – Tell me it isn't true...

Alex – I wanted him to hit the jackpot, but I might have got the numbers a little wrong.

Pat – This is terrible!

Alex – We had a free New Year's Eve party! And he's not charging us for his crappy evening. Let's get out of here before he changes his mind.

Pat – This is crazy... Where did you even come up with that story?

Alex – The Games of Chance and Love, remember? It's almost straight out of my play.

Pat – Well... I guess you're right. At least he got to experience love...

Alex – Technically, I'm not sure spending the night with a man in drag means he's no longer a virgin, but never mind.

Pat – Either way, you're right—we should be gone before he gets back...

Alex – We didn't forget anything, did we?

Pat – I don't think so...

Alex – Oh, let me grab my bottle of sparkling wine. It should have thawed by now. I might need it for next New Year's.

Pat – I think this is the worst New Year's Eve I've ever had. And you?

Alex – Let me think... No. My worst New Year's Eve was three years ago...

Pat – I'm not sure I want to hear this...

They leave together.

Blackout.

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:

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