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New Year's Eve at the Morgue

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Translation by the author

On New Year's Eve, a man is on duty at the Forensic Institute. One hour before midnight, a woman appears in front of him, covered only by a sheet. She doesn't know who she is or where she comes from. And what was shaping up to be a deadly dull New Year's Eve at the morgue turns out to be full of surprises... A comedy with multiple twists and turns, absurdly romantic and darkly humorous.

Characters

Man

Woman

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A furnished room with only a desk and two chairs. On the desk, an outdated computer and an old phone. Above the desk, a sign that reads "Forensic Institute – Reception." Next to the desk, a hastily decorated Christmas tree. A man is sitting behind the desk, asleep. The phone rings, and he wakes up abruptly.

Man – Forensic Institute, speaking? Oh, mom, it's you... No, no, I... I was working. No worries, I'm not carving a turkey... And I don't plan on bringing work home for New Year's either... Listen, for now, it's pretty quiet. I have to say, my neighbours aren't very bothersome. Yes, I know, I would have preferred to be with you for New Year's Eve, but what can you do... I'm still on duty... Just like on Christmas, right. Being the only single nurse in the department, it's not all advantages. They must think that I have nothing better to do during the holidays... Yes, mom, you've already told me, if I wanted to, you could introduce me to plenty of well-mannered young women... I know, a morgue is the perfect place to meet widows, but come on... just after they've identified their deceased husband's body, it's not the best time to ask a widow out for a drink... And I'm not going to get married just to avoid being on duty on New Year's Eve! *(Thunder is heard, the lights go out for a brief moment and a flash of lightning is seen, then the lights come back on.)* Yes, there's a storm brewing, it seems. We're already almost fully booked... I can tell that tonight we'll be turning people away. The holiday season is always lively around here. And with bad weather... People get completely drunk. They struggle to breathe with an oyster or a turkey bone. Or they stab their turkey with the oyster knife after catching her in the arms of their best friend. Or they fall off their balcony while trying to hang up a garland. Or they crash into a plane tree on their way back from the party... In short, the end of the year often means a massacre. Yes, mom, I brought the meal basket you prepared for me for New Year's Eve. Cold cuts, right... It'll be a change for me... Of course, I will also think of you. Yes, I will be careful not to choke on a fish bone. Well, I have to let you go, Mom... I'll send my regards as well. That's right, we'll talk again of you too. Yes, I'll be careful not to choke on a fishbone. Alright, mom, I have to go now... I love you too. Yes, we'll talk again...

He puts down the receiver. He opens a drawer, prepares a line of coke, and snorts it.

Man – Phew... That would wake the dead... Another thunderclap.

The lights go out again, but this time they don't come back on. More lightning.

Man – Oh, damn... If the power doesn't come back on soon, we risk a break in the cold chain, and the meat will spoil. It must be a blown fuse. But where is the electrical cabinet? If I could find the flashlight, already...

He gropes his way in the darkness. Eerie music plays. Still in the darkness, a woman arrives, draped in a sheet like a shroud. She looks disoriented. She walks around the scene, then sits down at the desk on the chair previously occupied by the night nurse. The man returns with a flashlight turned on, but he doesn't see her.

Man – It's a nightmare... Where is that bloody meter...? This can't be real... I'm going to flip my lid... *(He also walks around the scene without noticing the woman, then disappears momentarily backstage.)* Ah, there it is! So... Oh, yes, that's it... It's tripped... It's okay, it could be worse... Just need to reset it... *(The lights come back on)* And there was light...!

He comes back with a satisfied smile, but his smile freezes as he notices the ghostly woman sitting in his place. He startles.

Man – What the hell are you doing here? Are you okay? I almost had a heart attack.

Woman – I'm really sorry...

Man – Dying in a morgue on Christmas Eve, that would be a stupid death.

Woman – A morgue...?

Man – What are you wearing? Did you just get out of bed?

She seems to only now notice that she is dressed only in a sheet.

Woman – Oh yes... You're right...

Man – Are you dressed up as a ghost or something? Are you going to a costume party?

Woman – No, I don't think so...

Man – Well, who are you anyway?

Woman – I... I don't know...

Man – You don't know?

Woman – No. I have no idea.

Man – Well, you have no business being here, that's for sure. And I'm asking you to leave.

Woman – Leave? Where should I go?

Man – Where? I don't know. Go back where you came from, that's a good start.

Woman – I would like to, but... I don't know where I came from.

Man – You don't know who you are, you don't know where you came from... But you certainly know where you are, right?

Woman – No. Where are we?

Man – You're at the reception of the Forensic Institute, dear madam. *(Pointing to the sign)* You see, it's written right there. So if you're looking for the emergency room, you're on the wrong floor.

Woman – The emergency room? No, I'm not looking for the emergency room.

Man – You don't seem to be in your right state... Have you been drinking too much? It's not even eleven o'clock yet. Usually, it's around six in the morning that we come across people like you on New Year's Day.

Woman – Oh, because it's New Year's Eve?

Man – Well, in any case, you can't stay here.

Woman – I'm thirsty.

Man – Ah, yes... You're as pale as a dead person, by the way. Are you okay?

Woman – I'm okay... but I'm thirsty.

Man – I'll go get you a glass of water, and then you'll leave... But in the meantime, you don't move, understood...? Because here, it's a bit like Bluebeard's house. There are certain doors... and certain drawers that are better left unopened.

Woman – Do you have a mirror?

Man – A mirror?

Woman – Yes.

Man – I must have one somewhere. (*He opens several drawers.*) In the past, in morgues, they used a mirror to check if people were really not breathing anymore. It's still used occasionally...

From the last drawer, he takes out a mirror and hands it to the woman.

Woman – Thank you.

Man – But you know, before fixing yourself up, you'd better go get dressed again...

He exits. She looks at herself in the mirror, seeming not to recognize herself. She gets up, dazed, and looks around the scene again. The phone rings. She answers.

Woman – Yes...? Good evening, madam... Yes, yes, you've reached... (*looking at the sign above the desk*) the Forensic Institute. No, I'm not the nurse on duty... At least, I don't think so... Your son? I don't know. I think he just left. Okay... I'll tell him... Alright, happy New Year to you too. Goodbye, madam...

She hangs up. He returns with a glass of water, which he hands to her.

Man – Here you go...

Woman – Thank you.

She drinks the water in one gulp. He watches her with a worried look, remaining cautious.

Man – Feeling better?

Woman – I'm fine... (*She looks at him*) And you?

Man – Me?

Woman – You seem a bit disturbed too.

Man – No, no, I'm fine...

Woman – Oh, yes, the phone rang...

Man – And?

Woman – You should call your mother back.

Man – You answered?

Woman – Yes... Shouldn't I have...? Sorry... The phone rang... It was a reflex...

Man – You're at the morgue, here. You're not supposed to answer the phone.

Woman – It was your mother...

Man – Yes, I got that.

Woman – You seem... agitated. What's going on?

Man – You show up like this, in the middle of a storm, in the dark, wrapped in a sheet... We're at the morgue... And you're asking me what's going on?

Woman – I'm really sorry...

Man – Sorry... Yes, you can say that.

Woman – I should probably go...

She makes a move to leave. He stops her.

Man – Wait... Excuse me... You're right... I shouldn't get so worked up like this.

Woman – I don't know what's happening to me... (*Seeing his puzzled expression*) Do you have something to tell me, is that it?

Man – It's just that... it's a bit difficult to say, actually...

Woman – I'm listening...

Man – To get a glass of water, I crossed the cold room... Well, the room where they keep...

Woman – And?

Man – One of the drawers is open... Drawer number 99.... And it's empty.

Woman – Empty...

Man – Empty. (*A pause*) Is it possible that you came out of that drawer, by any chance?

Silence.

Woman – Are you saying... that I would be dead?

Man – I don't know... It's just a hypothesis... A body disappeared... You appear right after... wrapped in a sheet. You don't remember anything... Put yourself in my shoes...

Woman – Right now, I'd rather be in yours than mine, believe me.

Man – Yes, obviously.

Woman – So I would be dead... and I would have come back to life?

Man – I'm trying to understand.

Woman – Do you think it's possible?

Man – Theoretically, no.

Woman – But has it ever happened before?

Man – To my knowledge, apart from in the Bible, no. Well, I don't know, after all. You see so many things... In any case, I've never seen that in this morgue...

Woman – Are you sure?

Man – Believe me, I've seen many people arrive here feet first, and nobody has ever walked out on their own two legs.

Woman – So...?

Man – No, it can't be that...

Woman – But...?

Man – But I'm still missing the client from drawer 99.

Woman – Do you know all of them?

Man – Who?

Woman – Your... clients.

Man – Not personally, no. But it's true that when I have nothing else to do, I sometimes consult their files. We also get celebrities, you know...

Woman – Yes... Sooner or later, everyone ends up in the morgue.

Man – It's even rarer to come out of here and go somewhere other than the cemetery.

Pause.

Woman – What if other dead people woke up?

Man – You're really determined to ruin my holiday... It's not a joke, is it?

Woman – A joke?

Man – In the healthcare sector, we're used to macabre jokes, you know. We call them med student jokes. I admit that this one would be very funny... if it's a joke.

Woman – It's not a joke, I assure you. *(Pause)* Do you believe in ghosts?

Man – If I believed in them, do you really think I would have chosen this job? By the way, when I say "chosen"... Don't imagine that it's a vocation either.

Woman – So maybe I'm... a living dead. A zombie...

Man – A living dead or a zombie... I'm not sure which one I prefer.

Woman – Don't be afraid... I don't mean any harm. I could actually use some help...

Man – Besides the sheet, you don't really look like a ghost. *(He approaches her.)* Do you mind?

He takes her hand. She recoils.

Woman – What are you doing?

He checks her pulse.

Man – Your hand is cold. It is not surprising if you just came out of the fridge. But your pulse is normal. No, definitely, you're not a ghost.

Woman – Then what am I?

Man – I don't know.

Woman – If it was a true resurrection... it would be a miracle.

Man – Behind every miracle, there's often a misdiagnosis, you know. In Lourdes, they mainly cure imaginary patients.

Woman – I'm not sure I follow you...

Man – They could have declared you dead when you weren't.

Woman – Does that happen?

Man – It shouldn't, but yes, I suppose it has happened before.

Woman – It doesn't explain why I can't remember anything... What if I'm just crazy?

Man – Or maybe I'm hallucinating.

Woman – You?

Man – Maybe I'm imagining all of this, and none of it is real. *(Pause)* Pinch me!

Woman – Excuse me?

Man – Pinch me! If I'm asleep, I'll wake up, and this nightmare will be over.

Woman – Well...

She pinches him.

Man – Ouch...

Woman – So?

Man – Apparently, it's not a nightmare.

Woman – Or maybe you're dreaming that someone is pinching you.

Man – Yes, that's also a possibility, unfortunately. And you really have no memory?

Woman – None...

Man – Yet you haven't lost the ability to speak... You must remember something... Make an effort. Concentrate. What's the first image that comes to your mind?

She appears to concentrate.

Woman – A cake.

Man – A cake?

Woman – A birthday cake.

Man – A birthday... Yours?

Woman – Yes, I suppose.

Man – What's the name on the cake?

She concentrates again.

Woman – Cristina! Happy birthday Cristina!

Man – And are you sure it's your birthday?

Woman – I think so.

Man – How many candles are on the cake?

She closes her eyes to concentrate better.

Woman – Three!

Man – Ah, yes... That's not going to help us much...

Silence.

Woman – Maybe when you die, there's an automatic update. You forget everything, so you can be reborn as someone else. Like a newborn, for example.

Man – And something went wrong this time, you mean? A bug, in a way.

Woman – And instead of being reincarnated, I'm reborn in the same body...

Man – Still remembering your life until the age of three.

Silence.

Woman – Do you know the identity of this woman?

Man – Number 99...? Yes, it's in the file. But it's confidential.

Woman – Well, if it's me...

Man – You're right. If it is indeed you, we can't talk about medical confidentiality. *(He sits in front of the computer and types on the keyboard.)* Let's see, 96, 97, 98... Here it is, 99.

Woman – So?

Man – Her name is indeed Cristina... Cristina Wagner...

Woman – Like on the cake!

Man – Like on the cake, yes.

Woman – What else? Maybe it will help me remember...

He checks his computer screen again.

Man – She was born in 1989... on December 31st.

Woman – So... today would be my birthday!

Man – Happy birthday, Cristina. Sorry, I didn't bring a cake...

Woman – What else?

Man – Occupation, psychotherapist...

Woman – Psychotherapist?

Man – Do you not remember that either?

Woman – No. And... am I married?

Man – Yes... to a certain Richard.

Woman – Richard Wagner...

Man – Does that ring a bell?

Woman – Vaguely...

Man – Deceased on... It was yesterday.

Woman – And how did I die?

Man – Cause of death... medication poisoning. Autopsy requested.

Woman – Is there a photo?

Man – Yes... but I warn you, it's not very pleasant to look at.

Woman – Is the photo really that ugly?

Man – It's a post-mortem photo.

Woman – Show me anyway...

She takes a glance at the computer screen.

Man – I had warned you. It's not a flattering photo of you.

Woman – Yes, I don't look very well.

Man – Trust me, based on my experience, the deceased rarely look good...

Woman – Maybe we should inform my family... My husband...

Man – At the same time... We're not just a few minutes late, right? Because it's going to shock them, obviously.

Woman – That's for sure.

Man – I don't know if I can take the responsibility of informing your loved ones. We should first verify all this. Make sure we're not mistaken. Not give them false hopes. In short, officially validate your resurrection.

Woman – Validate? Like with miracles, you mean?

Man – The forensic pathologist would need to re-examine you. Admit that he made a mistake. That you weren't really dead. But you know how doctors are. If there's one thing they hate, it's admitting they were wrong.

Woman – We need to call the forensic doctor! Right away!

Man – Unfortunately, I don't have his personal number. I'm on duty tonight. It's New Year's Eve. He's probably out partying somewhere.

Woman – So, nothing is planned in case of an emergency?

Man – You know, it's extremely rare to have emergencies at the morgue...

Woman – I don't know, maybe we should at least alert the police?

Man – They'll take it as a bad joke... It's New Year's Day... Everyone's drunk. I myself have taken some banned substances to forget that I'll be celebrating New Year's Eve with a hundred corpses. I'd rather not be tested right away...

Woman – So what do we do?

Man – At this point, we can wait until tomorrow morning. My shift ends at six o'clock... I'll inform my replacement and see with him what we can do.

Woman – I'm sorry to cause you all this trouble.

Man – The main thing is that you're alive. But if you're really an undead, it won't be easy for you either, you know...

Woman – I thought that getting out of this drawer was the hardest part...

Man – Believe me, that's just the beginning of your troubles. When you've been declared dead, and people have already come to terms with that idea...

Woman – You may be right, unfortunately.

Man – Not to mention the rest. When the administration has decided that someone is dead, it's not always easy to change their mind.

Woman – I wonder if it wouldn't be easier for me to go back into my drawer.

Man – How do you feel?

Woman – Fine.

Man – No, because if you insist, I can still have you examined by a resident doctor.

Woman – You're a nurse, right? You examined me...

Man – At the same time, I'm not a specialist in the undead.

She looks around.

Woman – So this is where you work...

Man – Yes.

Woman – And... does everyone go through the Forensic Institute?

Man – No, generally people end up in a simple funeral room. If you're here, it's because it's a suspicious death.

Woman – Suspicious?

Man – Let's say... a death where the circumstances are not clearly established. A suicide... or a homicide.

Woman – Do you think someone could have poisoned me?

Man – That... The investigation will reveal... after the autopsy.

Woman – Autopsy?

Man – Well, I think in your case, it won't be an autopsy, obviously.

Woman – Who could have wanted to murder me?

Man – That...

Woman – My husband?

Man – That's why you should think twice before notifying him. If he's the one who comes to pick you from the morgue...

Woman – Why would my husband want to murder me?

Man – The reasons for murdering a spouse are not in short supply, you know...

Woman – I hope you're not speaking from experience... Are you married?

Man – No.

Woman – With such a view of marriage, I understand why.

Man – Besides, it's not certain that it's a murder. And even if it is a murder, there's no guarantee that your husband is the culprit.

Woman – A suicide, then? But why?

Man – Who knows...

Woman – I have a feeling you're going to tell me that there's no shortage of reasons to commit suicide... You're not naturally optimistic, are you?

Man – With the job I do, you know... I tend to see everything in black.

Woman – Yet even at the morgue, there are sometimes pleasant surprises. Proof...

Man – On the other hand, you seem to be a naturally optimistic person. So I think we can rule out suicide.

Woman – So it must be a murder...

Man – You must have some memories, though?

Woman – Just vague impressions. Flashes from time to time. The sensation that my mind is floating above my own body...

Man – Wow... I was thinking more of memories from your life before. But this sounds like an out-of-body experience... Although, in reality, it sounds a lot like how I feel when I've smoked a joint.

Woman – Well, I don't remember an old man with a white beard waiting for me at the gates of heaven.

Man – And your last moments? Just before your death?

Woman – No... Nothing...

Man – Well, if it was a murder, remembering could help the police.

Woman – Yes, I suppose it's very rare to be able to gather testimony from the victim of a murder...

Man – Too bad... It could help solve a lot of cold cases.

Woman – Unfortunately, I have no memory of the circumstances of my death... or even my life, for that matter... Strangely enough, I seem to remember my birth the most. I can see myself in that incubator at the maternity ward.

Man – Unless you also remember the name that was written on the little bracelet, that won't help us much.

Woman – No, unfortunately... And besides, I was only three days old, I couldn't read yet.

Silence.

Man – In any case, you could always write a book.

Woman – A book?

Man – To tell the story of your journey to the afterlife!

Woman – I told you, they're just vague impressions.

Man – You could embellish a bit... People write books for less than that, you know. Some people write a 400-page tome just to tell you how they lost a few pounds with a miracle diet. So an near-death experience... I'm sure it would be a hit.

Woman – Do you think so?

Man – Or maybe a play...

A pause.

Woman – I can't take it anymore... I'm going to get out of here...

She prepares to leave. He stops her.

Man – Wait...

Woman – I've just spent over a day in a drawer. I'm suffocating here. Do you want to prevent me from going outside to get some fresh air?

Man – No, but I strongly advise against it.

Woman – What if all of this is just temporary? Maybe I'm some kind of zombie Cinderella. I have permission until midnight, and when the clock strikes twelve, I'll return to nothingness. Definitely, this time. So in the meantime, if you don't mind, I prefer to go to the ball instead of staying at the morgue. After all, it's New Year's Eve, the whole world is celebrating. I'll find a party where they'll let me in without an invitation.

Man – Wrapped in a shroud?

Woman – There are also costume parties...

Man – Cases of resurrection are very rare, it's true. But nothing says that yours might not be temporary.

Woman – Even for Jesus, it only lasted forty days. So for a mere mortal like me... Let me pass!

She tries to leave again, but he stops her.

Man – Be reasonable... You were declared dead. You no longer have any legal existence. No rights. According to the law and society, you no longer exist. You're like a newborn who hasn't been registered yet.

Woman – Registered?

Man – I mean declared, obviously. If we were in a maternity ward and I was a midwife, would I let a baby go out into the street before being registered with the civil registry by its parents?

Woman – A baby...? I'm not sure I follow you...

Man – If you leave here, you won't have any kind of protection...

Woman – What do I risk? Dying a second time?

Man – And you don't remember anything... You have no money. You would be an easy prey, I assure you. If someone kills you, no one will be questioned. You're already dead. Your death certificate is here...

Woman – On the other hand, since I don't exist anymore, I can do whatever I want. Rob a bank or... even kill someone, especially you...

Man – Let's avoid getting to that point. If that's really what you want, I won't stop you from leaving.

Woman – I'm joking, don't worry.

Man – See, you can be dead and still keep a sense of humour.

Woman – I've never killed anyone, well, I think so. It's not now that I'm dead that I'm going to start.

Man – Stay with me, please...

Woman – Very well... I wouldn't want to cause you any more trouble.

Man – Thank you. It really relieves me...

A pause.

Woman – But I have the feeling that something else was bothering you about the idea of one of your residents leaving... Don't tell me that you've already grown attached to me...

Man – If a body is missing tomorrow morning, I'll be questioned. And it will be hard for me to explain that this corpse took off on its two feet to go revel in town. I'll be accused of concealing a body. Maybe worse...

Woman – Who would even think of stealing a corpse?

Man – It's happened before. Did you know that Charlie Chaplin was kidnapped several months after his death?

Woman – What for?

Man – To ask for a ransom from his widow, simply.

Woman – I'm not a celebrity. No one would pay to get me back alive. So to retrieve my corpse...

She sits down.

Man – Come on, enjoy your death a little longer. It's not an experience given to everyone.

A pause.

Woman – And will my resurrection bring only happiness?

Man – Surely there are many people who love you, right? Apart from your husband...

Woman – I don't know... I don't remember anything... Maybe I was a pain in the ass. Or even a monster. If someone wanted to murder me, maybe I deserved it.

Man – Yes, who knows...

Woman – Or maybe I leave behind a nice inheritance or a magnificent house that will make someone happy.

Man – Or maybe your loved ones have already grieved... and made new plans.

Woman – Thank you for cheering me up. It helps me a lot...

Man – Regardless, we'll have to make a decision. The autopsy is scheduled for tomorrow morning...

Woman – Yes, I can't stay dead forever.

Man – That's a sentence I never thought I would hear here one day.

Woman – Oh, and you're right, it's New Year's Eve. Everyone is celebrating. My resurrection can wait until next year.

Silence.

Man – What if all of this is just a misunderstanding, and you were never really dead?

Woman – That wouldn't explain why drawer number 99 is empty, would it?

Man – It could be a mistake, after all. Someone might have taken the body in preparation for the burial, forgetting to fill out the paperwork. Because you know, here, we only have transient customers. They only stay for two or three nights, waiting to move into their final resting place permanently.

Woman – You're forgetting that my name is Cristina, like that woman who died.

Man – It could be a coincidence, after all.

Woman – Admit that it would be a huge coincidence.

Man – Besides, there's no proof that your real name is Cristina. Except for that vague memory of a birthday cake... It's still a bit thin...

Woman – And the photo?

Man – A photo of a corpse... It's hard to really judge the resemblance. You wouldn't believe the number of people who come here to identify their spouse's corpse and don't recognize them.

Woman – Let's say I'm not Cristina Wagner, Richard Wagner's wife. But then, who would I be? And where would I come from?

Man – Maybe you escaped from a psychiatric hospital.

Woman – Do you think I'm crazy?

Man – Well, you're definitely suffering from amnesia.

Woman – Yes, maybe...

Silence.

Man – Or maybe it's me who's crazy.

Woman – You?

Man – And in my madness, I invented this whole story. You know, working in a morgue, it can get to you after a while.

Woman – Yes, but I am here.

Man – In that case, we're both crazy.

Woman – Who knows?

Man – We escaped from an asylum and ended up in the morgue.

Woman – How did we even get here?

Man – Well, you just take the elevator. We're in a hospital. The psychiatric ward is on the top floor, and the Forensic Institute is in the basement.

Woman – Are we even sure we're in a morgue?

Man – There's a sign, after all.

Woman – What if all of this is just the result of our sick imagination...

Man – It's getting a bit too complicated for me.

Woman – You said that Cristina, who died, was a psychotherapist, right?

Man – That's what I read on her file.

Woman – Then maybe I'm your psychotherapist.

Man – A crazy psychotherapist?

Woman – Those people usually have issues of their own, to choose such a profession.

Man – A madman with a crazy therapist who is also dead. You're right, things are getting clearer now.

Woman – Yes... I don't know if we were crazy before, but we're definitely becoming crazy now.

The phone rings. He answers.

Man – Oh, Mom... Yes, yes, everything is fine. No, it's still calm here... No new admissions yet, in fact, quite the opposite... Discharges? No, not yet... Do I sound strange? No, no, I assure you, nothing strange to report here. Oh, yes, that woman you talked to earlier... Yes, it's Cristina... Well, yes, I call her by her first name, how else would I call her? No, Mom... she's just a colleague. Yes, she's very nice, of course, but... Okay, I'll call you back, alright? Have fun.

He hangs up.

Woman – You didn't tell her anything?

Man – What could I say? I'm spending New Year's Eve alone with a beautiful woman... but I have reasons to think she might be a zombie.

Woman – A beautiful woman...

Man – I wouldn't dare introduce a girl I found in a bar to my mother, let alone a girl I found in a morgue drawer... In any case, you made a very good impression on her. But don't get ahead of yourself. She would do anything to get grandchildren from me. Even set me up with a zombie.

Woman – So, you're a confirmed bachelor.

Man – According to my mother, I might even become an old bachelor...

Woman – Why haven't you gotten married?

Man – I don't know. I must not have met the right person. Until today...

Woman – Until today?

Moment of hesitation. They are visibly attracted to each other.

Man – This is all really unreasonable...

Woman – No, and what would your mother say...

Man – I would suggest that we go together to join my family to celebrate New Year's, but I'm on duty.

A pause.

Woman – And this woman, do you have her belongings?

Man – Her belongings...?

Woman – When your clients arrive here, I imagine they are still wearing their clothes, and you are the one who undresses them.

Man – Yes, of course...

Woman – Did you undress me?

Man – I... I don't remember... I think I would remember...

Woman – But you have my belongings somewhere, right? Well, the belongings of this woman.

Man – Yes.

Woman – If I saw my personal effects, maybe it would help me regain my memory... In any case, it would allow me to dress myself.

Man – Of course...

Woman – So?

Man – I'll see what I can do...

He exits. She remains alone, takes the mirror again, and looks at herself once more.

Woman – I don't look too bad... for someone who died yesterday.

She combs her hair. He returns with some clothes and a bag.

Man – Here are Cristina Wagner's belongings.

Woman – Thank you. (*A bit embarrassed*) May I get dressed?

Man – Please do...

In a skillful move, she removes the sheet covering her and holds it in front of her.

Woman – Can you hold the sheet and close your eyes?

Man – Well, if I close my eyes, the sheet becomes useless...

Woman – True, but if someone walked in...

Man – You're right.

Woman – And for some reason, I feel like we're being watched... Don't you?

Man – Yes... Probably just another trick of our sick imagination.

He takes the sheet and holds it taut. She dresses with the clothes he brought.

Woman – You can open your eyes.

She looks even more attractive dressed than wrapped in a sheet, and he seems dazzled.

Man – Ah, yes, that's... You look much less like a ghost that way.

Woman – Well, these clothes fit me like a glove. They must be mine...

Man – Yes...

She takes a few steps.

Woman – There was a bag too.

He hands her the bag.

Man – Here it is...

She opens the bag and looks at its contents. She takes out a mobile phone.

Woman – There's even a phone... It must be ringing constantly here.

Man – Usually, we try to put them on airplane mode.

The phone starts ringing.

Woman – Apparently, not this one... (*Out of reflex, she answers the call.*) Cristina Wagner speaking...

Man – I advise you to hang up.

She ends the call and puts the phone back on the desk.

Woman – You're right, I think it's better for now.

Man – Probably someone wishing you a happy new year.

Woman – He must not have received the death notice yet.

Man – After all, you only died yesterday.

She looks into the bag again, and takes out a tube of lipstick. She applies some on her lips.

Woman – Does it suit my complexion?

Man – Very well... It gives you a more...

Woman – Alive?

Man – More feminine look.

Woman – Does a woman still remain feminine when she dies...?

Man – Ah, that's from a song by Brigitte Fontaine. Do you know Brigitte Fontaine?

Woman – Apparently, I know her songs. But mostly, I have the feeling I've heard that line somewhere before.

Man – What line?

Woman – What you just said : "It's from a song by Brigitte Fontaine."

Man – Oh, yes...?

Woman – It's coming back to me! It's from another play by the same playwright.

Man – Another play?

Woman – It seems that this playwright has a tendency to repeat himself.

Man – But when you talk about lines, do you mean... that we might both be acting in a play?

Woman – It's also a serious hypothesis, isn't it?

Man – Well, that would explain a lot of things.

Woman – It's true that in theatre, it's much more common for the dead to come back to life.

A pause.

Man – It's curious, I wouldn't have imagined you as a Brigitte Fontaine fan.

Woman – Why, do I look like a turkey?

Man – Not at all... I mean... You're a bit too young for that, that's all.

Woman – How old do you think I am?

Man – I saw your date of birth on the death certificate. But I would have easily given you ten years less.

Woman – That's very gallant of you.

Man – In any case, you're lovely... for a dead person.

She seems slightly flustered.

Woman – You're not bad yourself... for an undertaker.

Man – If I may continue with the metaphor, I'd say you're irresistible.

Woman – But that might lead us down a dangerous path, wouldn't it?

A moment of hesitation. They are increasingly drawn to each other. Sounds of celebration can be heard in the background – fireworks, honking, cheers...

Man – It's almost midnight.

Woman – Happy New Year!

Man – Happy New Year to you too.

Woman – What can we wish each other?

Man – I don't know...

Woman – We could always kiss, right?

Man – Well...

They lean in to give each other a peck on the cheek, but end up passionately kissing. They pull apart, embarrassed.

Woman – I'm really sorry, I apologize.

Man – No, it's me. I don't know what got into me.

Woman – Eros and Thanatos... Love, death... It's well known, opposites attract...

Man – You seem to know a thing or two about that. You must really be a psychoanalyst.

Woman – If I'm your psychoanalyst, it's no wonder you're in love with me.

Man – Really?

Woman – People always fall in love with their psychoanalyst. It's called transference.

Pause.

Man – I wonder how all of this will end.

Woman – Well... if it's a comedy. But if it's a tragedy...

Man – You'll go back where you came from, and I'll stay alone here. All of this will dissipate with the fumes of the New Year's Eve, as if it had been just a dream.

Woman – Yes, maybe it's just a momentary glitch due to the transition to the new year.

Man – And you'll disappear all of a sudden after this embrace. Like you said earlier, at the twelfth stroke of midnight.

The twelve strokes of midnight are heard. They both remain frozen.

Woman – Midnight has passed, and I'm still here.

Man – And still alive.

Woman – I'm scared.

Man – Me too.

Woman – Now I'm really scared of dying. Because I'm scared of losing you.

Man – If this is a dream, I wish I never wake up.

Woman – And if it's madness, I'd rather remain mad.

Man – It's completely unreasonable. I can't fall in love with you. Even if you're not dead, you're married. It's even worse.

Woman – On the other hand, my husband is already a widower. It will be much simpler.

Man – Do you think so?

Woman – So what do we do?

Man – My mother prepared a picnic basket for New Year's Eve.

Woman – I'm not very hungry.

Man – Neither am I... But we can always drink champagne.

He takes out the bottle, uncorks it, and fills two glasses. He hands her one of the glasses.

Woman – Thank you.

Man – To life...

Woman – To love...

They toast and drink. Cristina Wagner's mobile phone rings again. They exchange a bewildered look. The phone stops ringing.

Man – We can't keep pretending that everything is normal forever...

Woman – Now that I've found you, I don't want to lose you...

Man – If we ever have to make our union official, we need to first make your resurrection official.

The phone rings again. She glances at the screen.

Woman – It's him!

Man – Richard Wagner...

Woman – What will his reaction be when he finds out that he's no longer a widower...?

Man – And that barely resurrected, you're already cheating on him with a morgue employee.

Woman – By the way, why is he calling me, since he thinks I'm dead?

Man – To hear the sound of your voice on the voicemail...?

Woman – I can't imagine him being that sentimental.

Man – Are you imagining or are you remembering?

Woman – Yes, my memory is gradually coming back. For now, it's just scattered fragments. Like pieces of a puzzle that I'm trying to put together.

Man – What if he was the one who called you first... By mistake, maybe. He heard your voice, and now he knows you're not dead...

A moment of silence. She looks completely absorbed in her thoughts.

Woman – I remember now... (*Frozen*) It was indeed him who poisoned me...

Man – But... why?

Woman – I see my last moments playing before my eyes. A very violent argument. I just found out that unbeknownst to me, my husband has been leading a neo-Nazi group that aims to stage a coup in England for years...

Man – A coup... Oh, yes, I vaguely remember that... Richard Wagner... It does ring a bell...

Woman – I inherited my parents' fortune. I think that's mainly why he married me. And with my money, he secretly funds this group of Nazis. I told him I'm getting a divorce, and that he won't get a penny...

Man – Of course, he doesn't want to hear about it. And it's to inherit your fortune that he murdered you...

Woman – Yes... He forced me to take those medications at gunpoint to disguise this murder as suicide.

Man – So he's armed, and he knows you're here. He's probably already on his way to finish the job he started.

Woman – He's not risking anything! Officially, I'm already dead!

Man – Don't worry, I'm here.

Woman – What are you going to do? If he arrives here with a gun... and maybe accompanied by his neo-Nazi buddies from the Wagner Group.

Man – First, I'll notify the police officer on duty in front of the hospital... It won't be easy to explain all of this to him, but I can try... (*He kisses her on the lips.*) You stay here, okay? I'll be right back...

He leaves. She remains alone for a moment, worried. Thunder sounds again. The light flickers. Lightning flashes. She feverishly writes a note on the computer. The room goes dark. She also leaves in the darkness. Melodramatic music plays. He returns and realizes that the room is in darkness.

Man – Cristina? The power went out again...

He exits briefly offstage to restore power. The lights come back on. He enters again and doesn't see her.

Man – Cristina?

He appears distraught. He notices the note on the screen. He reads it.

Man (*reading*) – I'm waiting for you upstairs... (*To himself*) Upstairs?

He exits again. Wagner's music plays. Thunder. Lightning. He returns, completely hallucinating. He snorts a line of coke and sits down to try to regain his composure. The phone rings. He answers the receiver.

Man – Hello? Police? Ah, yes... Yes, yes, it was me who alerted your colleague earlier, but... maybe I got a bit carried away... I confused the number 99 with the number 66. The label had flipped, you see? 66, upside down, it looks like 99. And since drawer number 66 wasn't supposed to be occupied tonight, that means all my patients are here... And the rest... must be figments of my imagination. No, I assure you, I haven't taken any hallucinogenic substances. No need to bother, I assure you. Alright, thank you. Yes, happy new year to you too...

He sits down, devastated.

Man – I really need to quit cocaine... I'm starting to have hallucinations...

He finishes the bottle of champagne.

Man – Ah, getting married this year... (*Completely spaced out*) Well, I need to relax a bit, because at this rate, I won't make it to the end of the year... A ghost... Where do I come up with all this...? Must have been a bad trip... I'll take a little nap, I'll feel better after...

He closes his eyes and dozes off with his head on the desk.

Blackout.

In the darkness, he flips the sign on the door from "Forensic Institute – Reception" to "Paradise – Waiting Room."

Lights up.

The woman reappears at the side of the stage, now wearing a white coat.

Woman – Sir? (*As he doesn't react, she takes a step forward and repeats louder*) Sir!

He snaps out of his daze and looks at her, surprised.

Man – Yes?

Woman (*with a friendly smile*) – What number do you have?

He looks at the card in his hand and reads.

Man – 99... (*She seems surprised, he flips the card*) Oh, no, sorry... 66.

Woman – Then it's your turn...

He gets up hesitantly, and he exits with her.

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

For those who prefer reading or working from books, printed versions of his plays can be purchased from Amazon for a price similar to that of photocopying this document.

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

A simple business dinner

An innocent little murder

Casket for two

Cheaters

Crisis and Punishment

Critical but stable

Four stars

Friday the 13th

Him and Her

Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall

Quarantine

Running on Empty

Strip Poker

The Perfect Son-in-Law

The Window across the courtyard

The Worst Village in England

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