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**Just a Moment Before
the End of the World**

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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Translation by the author

Three people who do not know each other are summoned to participate in a jury. At least, that's what they were told. But the place where they have been gathered is not a courtroom. They learn that they are there to decide together how to manage the consequences of an inevitable catastrophe that will strike the world in the very near future. Opinions diverge, and numerous twists and turns keep the debate alive. Throughout this immersive performance, the audience will also be called upon to express their opinions to guide them in their choices, so that they can make the best possible decision to face the worst imaginable situation.

Characters

Fred: Teacher
Max: Waiter
Alex: Musician
Sam: Advisor

All roles are interchangeable between male and female, with no changes to the dialogue. In this version, Max and Sam are men, while Alex and Fred are women.

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ACT 1

On stage only three chairs, a table and a refrigerator. Max enters, wearing a white sanitary mask over his nose and mouth, and a black blindfold over his eyes. He is guided by Sam. Max comes from a working-class background and is dressed accordingly. Sam is dressed in black and may wear black sunglasses. He has a holster with a pistol under his jacket, which is not immediately visible.

Max – Have we arrived?

Sam – Please have a seat there.

Sam helps Max sit on a chair.

Max – And the blindfold, what's it for exactly?

Sam – You can remove the blindfold now.

Max – And the mask?

Sam – The mask as well.

Max removes his blindfold and mask.

Max – What's the point of this circus?

Sam – Don't worry, you'll find out soon enough.

Max – Don't worry? How can I not worry? I received a summons to the police station because I was randomly selected to be a juror. When I got there, they blindfolded me, put me in a van, and brought me here without any explanation. Where are we anyway?

Sam – If we took the precaution to blindfold you, it's not to tell you where we are now. It wouldn't make sense, admit it...

Max looks around.

Max – This doesn't look like a courtroom... (*Pointing to the audience, in a lower tone*) And who are all these people? The audience attending the trial?

Sam – I'll explain everything once the others have arrived.

Max – The others? You mean... the rest of the jury?

Sam – The rest of the jury, yes...

Max – And how many of us will there be, exactly?

Sam's phone rings.

Sam – Excuse me... (*On the phone*) Sam... Okay... I'll be right there... (*He puts away his phone.*) I'll be back in a moment. If you're thirsty, there are cold drinks in the fridge.

Max – Thank you...

Sam exits. Max looks around again. He walks around the stage. He looks at the audience. After a moment of hesitation, he opens the fridge and takes a peek inside. He grabs a can of beer, opens it, and takes a sip. He seems to enjoy it. He then approaches someone in the audience and speaks to them.

Max – Do you know why we're here?

If the person he addresses responds, there can be a short improvisation to end the conversation. Sam returns, accompanied by Fred and Alex. Both of them are wearing sanitary masks and blindfolds. Fred is dressed quite elegantly, while Alex has a rocker look.

Sam – We have arrived. You can take off the blindfolds.

Alex – Luckily it's about time...

Fred – The masks too? It's suffocating...

Sam – Go ahead.

Alex – I hope when we open our eyes, we won't see a firing squad.

Fred – Or maybe a birthday cake... It could be a joke, after all.

Sam – It's not a joke, I assure you.

Fred – Besides, it's not my birthday.

They both remove their blindfolds, blink their eyes, slightly dazzled, and look around. They also take off their masks.

Alex – Where are we?

Fred – Are we in the courtroom? The audience is already here...

Alex – We're not the ones being judged, right?

Max still has his beer in hand.

Max – Why would we be judged? I haven't done anything!

Sam – You're not accused of anything, don't worry. And you're not the ones being judged.

Fred – Then who is being judged?

Alex – Terrorists? Is that why you're taking so many precautions?

Max – Hey! I didn't sign up for this! I value my life.

Sam – We're not judging anyone.

Fred – Then why are we here?

Alex – We were told we were randomly selected for a jury trial.

Sam – They told you about a jury. Not a criminal jury.

Fred – What kind of jury then?

Max – Definitely not the jury for the Miss France pageant...

Sam's phone rings again. He answers it.

Sam – Sam... Yes... Okay, I'll be right there... *(Putting his phone back in his pocket)*
Excuse me, I'll be back in a moment...

He exits. The others look at each other, suspicious, and look around.

Fred – It's a bit grubby for a courtroom, isn't it?

Max – I don't know... A courtroom... So far, I've never had the opportunity to see one. What about you?

Fred – Neither have I...

Alex – Did you find something to drink?

Max – In the minibar. Go ahead, help yourself...

Alex – I'll wait a bit... I'd rather know the room service rates first...

Max – Do you think it's paid?

Alex – I'm just being cautious, that's all.

Fred – You arrived before us. Have you been here for long?

Max – Five minutes at most. So, like me, you don't know anything more.

Fred – No.

Alex – They even confiscated our phones. We're completely cut off from the world.

Fred – If I had known this morning, when I left home, that I would end up in such an adventure...

Max – Where are you from?

They cautiously observe each other again.

Alex – The question is not really where we come from, but where we are.

Fred – And what are we doing here?

Max – They said we were randomly selected, apparently.

Alex – Yeah... For a criminal jury. But he just told us we're not here to judge anyone. So we have some reasons not to believe everything we're told.

Fred takes a paper out of her pocket and looks at it.

Fred – It's true that on the summons, it's not clearly stated that it's for a criminal jury...

Max – Yeah... but that's what we all understood.

Fred – Republic letterhead, a summons to the police to be part of a jury. Anyone would have understood that.

Max – And a criminal jury isn't just three people, right?

Alex – It's about a dozen, I believe.

Fred – Oh yeah, that's right. Like in the movie.

Max – Which movie?

Alex – *Twelve Angry Men.*

Fred – That's it. They have to decide whether to sentence an innocent man accused of murder to death.

Max – I don't know it...

Alex – And coincidentally, the accused is a Black man.

Fred – No, he's just a poor 18-year-old kid.

Max – Would you have sentenced him?

Fred – I don't know... You have to know the case first, right?

Max – As for me, I'm in favour of the death penalty.

Alex – Even for the innocent ones?

Max – The innocent ones? According to them, all the bastards in prison are innocent.

Alex – Well... That's promising...

An oppressive silence.

Max – Are you sure it's twelve?

Fred – There might be others who will arrive...

Alex – Anyway, you heard him. He said it's not for that.

Max – If it's not for a trial, then what is it for?

Fred (*lowering her voice, pointing to the audience*) – And do they know why they're here?

Max – I asked them. They don't seem to know either...

Fred – Well, all we can do is wait... (*Silence*) If we're going to spend some time together, we might as well introduce ourselves. I'm Fred, and you?

Max – Max.

Alex – Alex.

A new awkward silence.

Fred – I'm a bit thirsty, actually. Does anyone want something?

Alex – No, thanks.

Fred opens the fridge and takes a can.

Max – I hope they won't keep us too long because I have other things to do. And when I'm not working, I don't get paid.

Alex – What do you do?

Max – I'm a waiter. In a brasserie. Now we are not allowed to open in the evenings. And you?

Alex – Musician.

Max – Ah, I see...

Alex – What's that supposed to mean?

Max – It must not be easy for you either.

Alex – No...

Max – Concerts have been over for a long time...

Alex – We're trying to make an album and release it online.

Max – I see... And you?

Fred – I'm a school teacher.

Max – We're all in the same shit, then. Because talking to kids through a mask...

Fred – Yeah...

Max – It can't be easy. Especially when you have to yell at them. Don't you feel like you're wearing a muzzle?

Fred – A little, yes...

Max – Waiter, teacher, musician... It's funny, they used to be very different jobs. Now we're all in the same boat.

Alex – It was already like that before, right?

Max – What do you mean?

Alex – We were already in the same boat.

Max – Yeah... But now, to be allowed to row, we have to wear masks.

Alex – And when we're done rowing, with the curfew, we have to go straight back home and not leave until the next morning. Commute, work, sleep... It's not just teachers who have been muzzled...

Max – Yeah... No more lingering at the bar to chat with friends.

Alex – Or even outside your own home to chat with neighbours...

Max – For us, it was mostly in the evenings that we worked. Our revenue has been cut in half. So, the tips...

Fred – It's not the end of the world either. We have to do something to try to stop this.

Alex – It's not the end of the world, no. It's just the end of a world. I'm not sure I want to live in the one they want to impose on us, under the pretext of protecting us.

Fred – If you have another solution...

Alex – Stop living to avoid dying, is that the solution?

Max – Well, for now, we're being held hostage here, without even knowing where we are, and our families remain completely unaware of our location.

Fred – Are you married?

Max – No, but I could be. And you?

Fred – Not me either.

Alex – None of us is married. At least we have one thing in common.

Fred – Maybe they chose us for that.

Max – So our spouses wouldn't worry about our disappearance?

Alex – I thought we were chosen by lottery.

A pause.

Fred – I have a cat.

Alex – Sorry?

Fred – I have a cat waiting for me at home.

Alex – And you're afraid it will worry?

Max – Cats are fine as long as you feed them.

Fred – Well, I only planned enough food for a day or two. I didn't think they would keep us here for several consecutive days. And I didn't bring anything with me. Not even a toothbrush.

Alex – Do you think we're going to sleep here?

A pause.

Max – You know what, I'm fed up, I'm getting out of here...

Fred – I'm not sure we're allowed to.

Alex – Allowed?

Max – Okay, I'm going outside to have a cigarette and try to figure out where we are.

He walks offstage.

Alex – What do you think?

Fred – The guy said he would come back.

Alex – Oh, yeah... Sam...

Fred – Sam?

Alex – The cop! The one who brought us here. That's his name, right? On the phone, he said Sam.

Fred – Oh yes, maybe.

Alex – Anyway, it's probably not his real name.

Fred – Do you think he's a cop?

Alex – I hope so... Because if he's not a cop...

Fred – You mean... we could have been kidnapped?

Alex – I don't know.

Fred – But why would anyone kidnap us?

Alex – Maybe he's an agent of the Department of Homeland Security or something like that.

Fred – They'll eventually tell us why we're here and what they expect from us.

Alex – Yeah... Probably...

Max returns.

Fred – So?

Max – We're locked in.

Alex – What?

Max – There's only one door. It's locked. And it's a reinforced door.

Alex – So, it's official. We're being held captive.

They all digest this information.

Fred – Maybe it's to protect us...

Max – Protect us? From what?

Fred – I don't know.

Sam returns.

Sam – Okay, we can start...

Alex – How about you tell us first why we're locked in?

Sam – I'll explain everything, but first let me introduce myself. My name is Sam, and I'm the President's special advisor...

Fred – The President? You mean... the President of the criminal court?

Sam – No... The President. The President of the French Republic.

General astonishment.

Max – The President of the French Republic?

Sam – His special advisor, yes. Well, one of them. As you can imagine, there are several.

Alex – But what is this all about?

Fred – This must be a joke.

Sam – It's not a joke. And if you allow me to speak, I will explain everything.

Max – I tried to leave, and the door was locked. Maybe you could start by explaining that.

Alex – Are we being held prisoners here? Because if that's the case, it's completely illegal, and I demand to speak to a lawyer.

Sam – I just ask for a little patience. We have an important matter to attend to. And in the meantime, indeed, no one is allowed to leave here.

Alex – And what if I want to leave anyway?

She takes a step forward.

Sam – It's not a good idea, in my opinion.

The tone he uses is decisive. He appropriately opens his jacket, and for the first time, we see that he's wearing a gun on his belt.

Fred – Are you armed?

Alex – And are you threatening us?

Sam – I carry a weapon, yes. But it's primarily for your protection.

Max – Sure... To protect us from ourselves... We know the drill...

Sam's phone rings again.

Sam – I beg your pardon... (*On the phone*) No, no, everything is fine... I have the situation well under control, I assure you... Yes, of course... Certainly...

He exits.

Alex – I'm sure we're being filmed.

Fred – You mean... this would be for a movie? A hidden camera show?

Alex – Filmed! Surveillance cameras! You saw it right on. I pretended to try to force my way out, and immediately he was offered reinforcements.

Silence.

Fred – The advisor to the President of the Republic...

Max – This is crazy.

Alex – If it's true, it means it's a state affair, and we're in the hands of a parallel police force that may be operating outside any legal framework.

Max – But what do we have to do with all this? We're not terrorists! Well, at least not me...

Fred – It's a nightmare, we'll wake up.

Alex – Well, there are nightmares from which it's better not to wake up.

Max – What do you mean?

Alex – What does a death row inmate dream of the night before his execution? And even if he has a nightmare, wouldn't he prefer to keep sleeping? Rather than waking up in his cell and hearing the executioner sharpening the blade of the guillotine in the next room.

Fred – Thanks for uplifting our spirits...

Alex – Sorry, I'm not naturally optimistic.

Max – Yeah, we noticed.

Alex – But don't you think the world we live in is already a nightmare?

Fred – You're exaggerating a bit, aren't you...

Alex – You say that because, like me, you're relatively privileged. What if you lived in Iraq or the Gaza Strip?

Fred – It's not funny for everyone, that's for sure.

Alex – Even in our country, it's better to live in Versailles than in Saint-Denis, right?

Max – And even when we don't live in Saint-Denis... With everything that's happening now. It's not like before, that's for sure...

Alex – We don't even realize it anymore, because it happened gradually. But if we look back ten years...

Max – Well, you know, it's not entirely false... With all these foreigners we welcome in France. Political refugees, economic refugees, climate refugees... And then we wonder why new diseases are appearing in our country...

Alex – I wasn't talking about those kinds of diseases... I'm talking about this creeping dictatorship that's gradually being imposed on us. In ten or twenty years, the new generation will have never known anything else, and we'll be the ones considered crazy.

Fred – Excuse me for asking this question, but... does anyone here have anything to blame themselves for?

Alex – So, that's it... We've reached that point...

Fred – We're being held here against our will. So, all of this looks like an arrest. There must be a reason.

Max – And of course, you have nothing to blame yourself for.

Fred – Except for one or two speeding tickets years ago, no, I have no idea. Maybe it's a miscarriage of justice.

Max – Right. A miscarriage of justice. You mean in your case, I imagine. But for us, you're asking if we have anything to blame ourselves for.

Fred – Or maybe it's a terrorism case... In those cases, things can get quite tangled, and sometimes investigations push the boundaries of legality.

Alex – No, but we're diving into Kafka here! We're being arrested without any reason, and soon it will be up to us to figure out on our own what we could possibly be guilty of...

Fred – Anyway, we'll find out soon enough...

Sam returns.

Sam – Well... I'd rather warn you, what I have to tell you is not easy to hear. I would even say it's quite hard to believe. But it's the truth.

Max – We've been here for a while now, and we'd really like to go back home, so if you could spare us the preliminaries...

Sam – I understand your impatience, and I'll be as direct as possible. What I have to announce is... the end of the world.

The other three freeze.

Blackout.

Act 2

Alex, Fred, and Max are filled with consternation, oscillating between disbelief and anxiety. Sam remains stoic.

Max – The end of the world?

Alex – Exactly, we were talking about it before you arrived... Because you won't believe it either, but the world we loved, it has already ceased to exist long ago.

Max – Half of the population is unemployed, people are willing to accept anything just to earn a meager wage.

Alex – We're dying in hospitals because supposedly there aren't enough beds, and instead of building new hospitals, they increase the budget for the police and the army.

Fred – Well, it's not the end of the world, all of that. It's for our own good. And besides, it's temporary, isn't it?

Max – A temporary that has been lasting for over ten years, what do you call that? I call it permanent.

Alex – The state of emergency has become the norm, curfews are permanent, all public liberties have gradually been suspended...

Max – And people can't even go get drunk with friends at the bar to forget all of this.

Fred – But tell us, Sam... is that what you call the end of the world?

Sam – No, dear madam, unfortunately not. What I'm talking about is the total destruction of our planet.

Alex – Total destruction? You mean... a nuclear war?

Sam – No, not a nuclear war.

Fred – Then what? Pollution, climate change, rising sea levels, those sorts of things...

Max – We've been hearing about those for years. It's not happening tomorrow, is it? So, is that what we were urgently brought here to discuss, blindfolded?

Sam – It's also not about a gradual deterioration of living conditions on our planet. I'm talking about the end of life on Earth, and it's approaching very soon.

Silence.

Fred – Explain yourself.

Sam – As you know, every year our planet collides with thousands of celestial bodies of various sizes. Most of them are small enough to completely disintegrate upon entering our atmosphere. Some, of larger size, cause minor damages. Finally, others are large enough to potentially cause a major catastrophe.

Fred – For that, the Earth would need to be impacted by a very large asteroid, right?

Sam – Not necessarily, unfortunately. Once the diameter reaches a few hundred meters, the end of life on Earth is no longer a probability but a certainty.

Silence.

Alex – So, what does that mean?

Sam – Scientists detected the existence of a very large asteroid heading straight towards Earth several years ago. They have refined their calculations as it approached us, and the collision is now certain.

Fred – How big is it?

Sam – A thousand kilometres in diameter.

Silence.

Max – And is there nothing we can do to prevent it? I don't know, send a nuclear bomb to shatter the asteroid...

Fred – A laser beam to slightly alter its trajectory?

Sam – In science fiction movies, perhaps... Or with a much smaller object. Up to a kilometre long, possibly. Even though it has never been attempted before. But here we're talking about a monstrous object, as big as France... No technology on Earth is capable of even slightly altering the trajectory of an asteroid this size...

Silence.

Max – This is a joke...

Sam – I wish I could tell you that it is, I assure you. I have a family too. A wife. Children... I'm afraid of losing them. And like you, I'm afraid of dying.

Fred – But how is it possible that we've never heard about this until today? You can't keep information like this a secret. The newspapers would have talked about it...

Alex – The newspapers... I remind you that we have long abandoned press freedom. Prior censorship has been reinstated. We have a Ministry of Information again, like in the time of General De Gaulle!

Sam – Indeed, given the tragic consequences that this collision will inevitably bring about, scientists worldwide have been instructed by their governments not to disclose this information to prevent panic.

Fred – And they all agreed to keep silent?

Sam – Those who didn't agree were forced to do so.

Max – Are you saying they were imprisoned?

Alex – Or executed...

Sam – Most of them understood on their own that it was pointless to alarm the population since there is no way out anyway.

Max – I seem to recall reading something about this years ago.

Sam – Some information leaked, indeed. We arranged to present them as fake news. Speculations of this kind regularly appear when the press has nothing else to report. The probability of impact is usually very low or the deadline is very distant.

Fred – And now, what is the deadline?

Sam – One month.

Silence.

Fred – And you're saying there's no doubt?

Sam – We're never 100% certain, but today the probability is 99.99%. It's almost certain.

A pause.

Alex – What if we don't believe you?

Sam – What interest would we have in lying to you?

Alex – You've been lying to us for a long time already, haven't you? About that pandemic that hit us years ago. You took advantage of it to establish a dictatorship, which has the advantage of being endorsed by half the population.

Sam – We were democratically elected.

Alex – Yes, that's exactly what I was saying... Democracy... People are like sheep. As long as they're promised to be taken care of, they're willing to follow any shepherd and obey his dogs. As long as the road is safe and they're protected from wolves along the way, they prefer to forget that the final destination is the slaughterhouse.

Silence.

Sam – I'm going to make another confession to prove my sincerity...

Max – I fear the worst...

Sam – This pandemic was indeed real initially. But it's true, we exaggerated its consequences somewhat to justify the gradual implementation of an exceptional regime.

Fred – But why, after all?

Sam – The scientists had already warned us about the imminent apocalypse. It was a way to gradually prepare the population for much more radical measures. Not to avert this threat since it's unfortunately inevitable, but at least to avoid the chaos that would have preceded this end of the world if it had been announced to everyone.

Alex – So you admit that we were manipulated.

Sam – Yes, but not for the reasons you thought.

Max – And still for our own good, obviously.

Silence.

Fred – Let's say we believe you. Why inform us now?

Max – And why us? The three of us. Why were we chosen?

Alex – We're not scientists! We have no power. We can't perform miracles on your behalf!

Sam – We're no longer seeking solutions, unfortunately. Because there are none.

Max – So why are we here? Instead of enjoying the month we have left to live...

Sam – If you were brought here, it's because... (*His phone rings.*) Excuse me. (*He answers the call.*) Yes, Mr. President...

He exits. The others remain silent for a moment.

Max – Do you believe all of this?

Alex – I don't know anymore... And you?

Fred – Why would they tell us such a story if it wasn't true?

Max – Or maybe it's a game...

Fred – A game?

Max – It's like an escape game, isn't it?

Fred – What's that?

Alex – An escape game! You lock several people in the same room, and the game is to work together to find the right solution to get out.

Max – Except that this time, the place we're locked in is Earth, and apparently, there's no way to escape.

Alex – If they would just let us out of here...

Silence. Fred finishes his can and doesn't know what to do with it.

Fred – I didn't see a yellow bin...

Max – What's the point of recycling cans if we're all going to die in a month?

Fred – Yeah, obviously...

Max – We've been bothering to sort our waste for years to save the planet, and now they tell us that the end of the world is in a month! What a waste...

Fred – Do you really think that's the question?

Max – Oh, right, sorry, you're a clever one, aren't you? You're a teacher. So what's the question, in your opinion?

Alex – We would like to know, actually. Since apparently, we're supposed to answer it.

Sam returns.

Sam – Excuse me... Where were we?

Max – What the hell are we doing here? That's where we were!

Fred – What do you expect from us exactly? If we can be of help, we are more than willing to collaborate.

Max – We have nothing against the police, I assure you...

Alex – Speak for yourself...

Sam – Listen... We're all in the same boat. This boat isn't called the Titanic, but Earth. We know it will collide with a massive block of ice in a month, there's no way to avoid it, there are no lifeboats, no nearby ships to come to our rescue, and therefore, there will be no survivors.

Alex – And why reveal this supposed state secret to the three of us, which you've kept hidden from the entire world for at least ten years?

Max – That's true. We didn't ask for any of this.

Alex – You've been lying to us about everything for years, you could have hidden this from us too.

Fred – The time has come to tell us why we're here.

Sam – You're here to give us your opinion. Your opinion on the best way to manage this last month before the end of the world.

Alex – This is the best one yet. For over a decade, they've been making decisions for us. And now that we're all going to die, we're the ones who have to manage the end of humanity? I suppose we'll have to pay for the funeral as well, right?

Alex – But how long are we going to be stuck in here?

Fred – If we're going to die, we'd at least like to see the people we love and spend the remaining time with them.

Max – You're not going to keep us imprisoned until the end of the world, are you?

Sam – Rest assured, we won't hold you for very long. Given the circumstances, time is of the essence anyway. You have one hour to decide.

Alex – Decide... So now we're the ones deciding?

Sam – Let's say... your opinion will be taken into account, and it will be decisive.

Max – But decide on what, exactly?

Sam – Decide whether or not to inform the population about this imminent end of the world.

Alex – And we'll decide for everyone?

Sam – You were chosen randomly. You will represent... the voice of the French people.

Fred – The voice of the people? The three of us?

Sam – You will be the only ones speaking, but a larger panel of citizens will listen to your arguments and be called to vote.

Max – And where is this panel of citizens?

Sam gestures to the audience.

Sam – In front of you.

General astonishment.

Fred – No...?

Alex – So they are being held here against their will, as well...

Sam – We brought them here under the excuse of attending a show. They also won't be able to leave this room until we have reached a decision.

Fred – And like us, they are cut off from the outside world.

Sam – For one hour, at least. The doors of the room are closed, and they have been asked to turn off their mobile phones. We are all gathered here to decide what to do with the time we have left until the end of the world.

A moment.

Fred – It's an enormous responsibility...

Sam – Indeed.

Alex – And is it France that will decide for the whole world?

Sam – Meetings like these will be organized all over the planet. The results will be centralized, and the majority opinion will be taken into account.

Alex – And what about you?

Sam – Me?

Alex – Will you participate in the debate?

Sam – I'm only here to gather your opinions.

Silence.

Fred – Well... Can you ask us the question again?

Alex – Let's get it over with...

Sam – The question at hand is as follows: should we inform the population, risking panic, or keep them in the dark to avoid unnecessary worry? That's what needs to be decided. We are here to hear each person's viewpoint and arguments.

Silence.

Alex – I am in favour of transparency. In all circumstances. Regardless of the consequences. The people have the right to know.

Max – If we only have a month left to live, we might as well spend it on vacation and not at work.

Alex – One month. Let's consider it as the final balance of our last paid leave...

Fred seems lost in her thoughts. Sam addresses her.

Sam – And what do you think?

Fred – I find it hard to think... I'm scared, that's all... Do you mind if I take a pill?

She takes a pill out of her bag and swallows it.

Sam – Would you like a glass of water?

Fade to black.

Act 3

Fred gradually regains her composure. Alex and Max try to put on a brave face. Sam remains unwavering.

Sam – It's perfectly normal to be scared, dear madam. I'm scared too. We're all scared. At least those who know. But we're here to make a decision, and we need to hear what you have to say.

A moment passes as Fred tries to gather her thoughts.

Fred – Keeping silent... it's a bit like hiding from someone that they're going to die to spare their feelings. If I were diagnosed with an incurable illness and had only a month to live, I think I would prefer to know. So that I can fully enjoy my remaining moments, take stock, settle my affairs, in short, focus on what truly matters...

Sam – Of course, that's the first thing that comes to mind. And that argument is perfectly valid...

Alex – I feel like there is a "but" coming...

Sam – But on the other hand, as you mentioned: you're scared... The prospect of certain death on a predetermined date terrifies you. Perhaps you would have preferred not to know...

Fred – Maybe...

Sam – And then... to follow your analogy, the person with cancer who only has a few weeks to live is just an individual case. However that person reacts to the announcement of their impending death, it's unlikely to disrupt the order of the world. Here, we're talking about the entire population of Earth...

Alex – You said you were here only to gather our opinions, yet you're already trying to influence us.

Sam – I won't participate in the vote. My role is to facilitate the debate, so that all aspects of the problem are discussed and the decision is made with full awareness.

Fred – We're listening.

Sam – Let's think for a moment. Even if an isolated individual, knowing they're condemned in the near future and having nothing to lose, decides to kill their boss, rape their neighbour, or rob a bank, it would ultimately be just a news item.

Max – So what?

Sam – Imagine that on a global scale, for the entire population of the planet. No one would fear going to prison anymore. The only thing we would fear is death, and that's something we can't prevent. It would be chaos...

Silence.

Fred – It's a risk, indeed... Knowing that we can do anything without consequences, since we're going to die in a month...

Max – Exactly. It will be complete anarchy.

Alex – At the same time, we've never seen a patient who has just been told they have a short time to live rushing to their neighbour, with whom they have a dispute, to stab them in the back with an ice pick.

Max – Maybe because a terminally ill patient is too weak for that. But for an entire population in good health...

Sam – The gentleman is unfortunately correct. All the foundations of social order will collapse in one fell swoop. The police, the justice system... It's feared that no law will be respected anymore.

Fred – There will still be morality. Religion, for some.

Sam – Do you sincerely believe that good intentions will be enough to enforce the law when the fear of the police has vanished in the face of the certainty of imminent collective death?

Alex – Even when we're certain of dying, there is always a core of humanity within us. More than fearing death, we are afraid of losing our soul.

Max – Not everyone believes in God. Do you?

Alex – No. But what we all fear is not God, it's the Devil. And we're as afraid of burning in hell as we are of being among those who stoke the flames. Most of us don't want to be part of either the victims or the executioners.

Sam – We don't always have the choice not to choose... In the death camps, some prisoners were offered the opportunity to work for the executioners. Most accepted. To save their own lives and survive a few more weeks. Hoping to eventually get out alive...

Alex – Some did come out, but they left their souls behind... Just imagine the lives of those who survived at such a price.

Max – Anyway, we're being told that we have no chance of getting out of this.

Fred – As long as there's life, there's hope. A death row inmate, until the very last moment, awaits a presidential pardon, even though they're certain it won't come.

Max – We can always hope for a miracle, that's for sure...

Fred – We can't live without hope, even when the worst is almost certain. When we have no hope left, we're already dead. I will hold onto a glimmer of hope until the very last moment...

A pause.

Max – Yeah... Well, it's true that if I only had a month to live and I was sure there would be no consequences, there are one or two people I'd take out... Starting with my brother-in-law.

Fred – I thought you weren't married...

Max – My brother-in-law! My sister's husband!

Fred – Don't get worked up... I was just saying it casually.

Alex – At the same time, killing someone who's going to die in a month, is it even worth it?

Max – For the fun of it, then...

Sam – There you go... The word is out... For pleasure...

Fred – Eros and Thanatos...

Sam – All psychoanalysts will tell you that the fear of death and sexual desire are closely linked.

Max – Hey, I was just talking about offing my brother-in-law. I never said I wanted to sleep with him!

Alex – Eros and Thanatos... You're delusional... Next, you'll be telling us that the end of the world will be marked by a gigantic collective orgasm.

Sam – I was thinking more of an unleashed violence against the weakest. Women, children... The prospect of certain death may unleash humanity's worst instincts.

Alex – All of this is just fantasy... You know your neighbours. Do you really think that if they knew they were going to die in a month, they would rush to your house tomorrow to rape and kill you?

Fred – I don't know... Definitely not my neighbours.

Max – But what about your neighbours' neighbours?

Fred – I see... And the neighbours of the neighbours' neighbours... Those who live on the other side of the city limits or across the border... Suburbanites, foreigners...

Max – Suburbanites, foreigners... Often the same...

Alex – I see...

Max – And even your neighbour... All the little dirty tricks he pulls when you're not looking... Like putting his garbage in your bin in front of your house so he doesn't have to bother taking out his own... Or discreetly peeping at you from his window when you're showering and you forgot to draw the curtains.

Alex – Speaking from experience, it seems...

Max – Fuck you.

Fred – Come on, let's stay courteous.

Sam – And let's get back to the question at hand. We can't know for sure, of course. But social order primarily relies on the threat of punishment: a prison sentence or simply the shame of having deviant behaviour condemned by one's peers, neighbours, and society as a whole. Remove that restraint, and the worst is to be feared.

Fred – You're right. It's going to be the law of the jungle, meaning the law of the strongest. And the weakest will be the victims.

Alex – You still have the army, don't you?

Sam – Soldiers are also human beings. They obey orders out of obligation and to receive their pay. In the best case, out of duty and to protect society. But if that society is already doomed in the short term, do you really think they'll always be ready to sacrifice their lives to maintain order?

Max – So, in your opinion, it's better to hide the truth?

Sam – I don't know... The real question is whether telling the truth will turn this last month in human history into a true hell.

Alex – But we're not children! The people have the right to know! To preserve order at all costs, until the very last moment, should we keep humanity ignorant of its demise?

Sam – It's not just a question of maintaining order, you're right. It's also an ethical question. That's why it's important to debate it.

Alex – Protecting the population from the fear of the apocalypse and the chaos that may precede it... Fine. But in any case, if everyone is going to die, what difference does it make in the end? I prefer to know...

Max – Besides, I imagine that at some point, it will be impossible to hide the truth, right? When this asteroid is nearing Earth...

Sam – This time bomb is hurtling towards us at a dizzying speed, and although it's large enough to destroy us, it's not the size of a planet. According to scientists, twenty-four hours before impact, nothing will be visible to the naked eye yet.

Alex – Under the pretext of protecting us against terrorism and all kinds of epidemics, they have already imposed a militarization of society, based on the infantilization of the population. Because the people are afraid of everything, they're willing to accept anything. You started by silencing us, and now do you want to blindfold us so that we don't face death head-on?

Sam – I'm not certain either. We're here to discuss it. And to make a decision... What do the others think?

Max – I don't know...

Fred – I'm not sure anymore. We're not children, agreed. But precisely. What are we going to tell the children?

Max – That's a valid point. Can we hide this from children while their parents know the truth?

Fred – And at what age should we tell them?

Sam – Now you understand that it's not so simple...

Alex – Indeed, but hiding the truth is also the choice of an elite, isn't it?

Max – Explain yourself.

Alex – Apart from us and the people in this room, if we ultimately decide to hide the truth from the entire population, only a privileged few will know. The people, on the other hand, will be kept in the dark. And they will continue to lead their miserable little lives as if nothing happened, while this elite prepares for the grand finale, having a good time or praying to the good Lord, according to their preferences.

Sam – That's debatable, indeed.

Alex – You presume that the people would plunge the world into chaos if they were informed, while the elite would remain calm and quietly enjoy their final moments. Why? Because this elite is assumed to be more responsible?

Sam – I don't know...

Alex – Because the elite already has everything, that's why. And therefore, they have everything to lose if chaos were to result from the announcement of this impending end of the world. The people, on the other hand, have nothing. So, they have nothing to lose. What exactly do you fear? That trains won't run on time? That workers will stop showing up at the factory? That stores will be looted? That there will be a stock market crash? Is that your main concern? That everything stays intact until the final explosion?

Silence.

Sam – I hear your arguments, and they're all respectable. But a decision must be made. So, you three, personally, if you had the choice, would you prefer to know or not to know?

Fred – I would like to be able to answer you, but honestly... I don't know.

Max – Anyway, for us, it's too late. You didn't give us a choice.

Fred – Me, in the end... I think I would have preferred not to know.

Alex – Unless all of this is still bullshit. To further manipulate us.

Sam – Regardless, in exactly one month, you'll know if you've been lied to or not. In the meantime, since you're here, if it can reassure you, consider it an exercise at school. In the end, it doesn't change anything about our debate.

Fred – I believe it does. The answer each of us would give to your question wouldn't be the same if it were purely theoretical.

Alex – Do you think so?

Fred – If the question is only theoretical, we tend to reason, like you, from an ideal world, in which the majority of people will continue to behave as good citizens until the end. But if all of this were to become a reality... Are you really willing to bet on the goodness of human nature? And on the presumed benevolence of this abstraction you call the people?

Max – She's right. Do you sincerely believe that the people, as you say, are fundamentally better than the privileged who exploit us and the bastards who govern us?

Alex – I don't know...

Fred – All men are alike, especially in their worst aspects. Some are fortunate to be born on the right side of the tracks, that's all. But the others only dream of taking their place, not eliminating the tracks.

Silence

Fred – It's strange, by the way. We all know that we will die one day. Sooner or later. Whether it's in twenty years or in one month. But generally, as long as we don't know the deadline, we manage our lives as if we were immortal. In any case, we don't live with that sense of urgency.

Alex – That's what allows our rulers to make us swallow so many things. If people lived as if they were going to die in a few weeks, they wouldn't accept everything they're subjected to.

Fred – Moreover, everything is done to conceal death in our society, to make it as abstract as possible. We all die, most of us without ever having seen a dead body in our lives. Death is not just a taboo, it's a state secret.

Max – And when a death threat is brandished at us, it's only to control our lives. As if, in the end, we could really avoid death!

Sam – All of that is in the past. It's better not to delve too deeply into purely philosophical debate. We are here to make a decision. It's either yes or no. There is no middle ground.

Max – We haven't been prepared to make this kind of decision. We're not experts.

Sam – No one is trained to face such a situation that has never occurred before and will not happen again. Because in one month, we will all be dead...

A moment.

Fred – How terrible... And to think I left my cat alone at home. At least she has no clue.

Max – Not so sure... They say animals have a sixth sense to foresee these kinds of disasters...

Fred – You're right... During the last tsunami, for example, it seems that...

Sam – Time is running out... Does anyone have anything else to add?

Fred – No.

Max – Neither do I.

Alex – I've said what I had to say.

Sam – Very well, then we'll proceed to a show of hands vote.

Alex – And what about you?

Sam – I won't vote. There are three of you, there will inevitably be a majority. Abstentions are not accepted.

Max – Okay, let's get it over with then.

Sam – One last thing. If secrecy prevails, you must all conform to it. You mustn't tell anyone, not even your loved ones. Regardless of your personal choice.

Alex – And if we do speak up?

Sam – This is not a joke, madam, and I'll be very clear with you. In that case, we know where to find you to silence you permanently.

Alex – That's your idea of freedom of speech and democracy...

Sam – There's no time left to discuss it, we will proceed with the vote. Who is in favour of the truth?

Hesitation. Alex raises her hand.

Sam – One vote. Who is in favour of secrecy?

Alex – I would call it the lie. The state's lie.

Fred and Max raise their hands.

Sam – Secrecy is adopted, with two votes against one.

Alex – Can we leave now?

Sam – Not yet, it's not quite finished. The audience needs to vote as well. They have heard your arguments. It's up to them to express themselves now.

Alex – The audience?

Sam – The audience, yes. I mean the panel. So... Ladies and gentlemen... Those who are in favour of the truth at all costs, please raise your hand?

A portion of the public raises their hands.

Sam – Who is in favour of secrecy?

Another portion of the public raises their hands.

Sam – A majority for the truth (*or for secrecy in some cases*).

Alex – Is that it? Are we free? If I may still use that word...

Sam – We will come and get you in a moment to accompany you home.

Max – The sooner, the better...

Sam's phone rings.

Sam – Excuse me.

He exits to answer the call.

Fred – So it's as simple as that?

Max – Yeah...

Fred – We all knew we would have to die some day, but we didn't expect it would be all of us at the same time.

Alex – And that they would give us the exact date a few weeks in advance.

Max – One month before bankruptcy.

Fred – From today onwards, every passing day will represent a year of our lives.

A moment.

Max – How did you calculate that exactly?

Alex – It doesn't matter... What she means is that now, every minute counts.

Max – Yeah... Where would you like to spend your last day, then? In bed with good company? At the beach? In a church?

Alex – Ultimately, whether it's the last day or not... It's a question we should ask ourselves every day, right? What to do with our lives when we wake up each morning...

Max – Most people, when they wake up in the morning, are mostly concerned about how they will pay their mortgage until retirement. Hoping they will even have a retirement. Because as for me...

Sam returns.

Sam – Sorry, there's been a change of plans.

Max – A change of plans?

Sam – The President believes it's too dangerous to let you leave before the decision is made on a global level.

Alex – Dangerous? And why is that?

Sam – We fear there might be a leak and the rumour could spread completely uncontrollably.

Max – If it really is the end of the world, sooner or later people will figure it out, won't they?

Sam – Even if we ultimately decide to inform the public, it's important to prepare them psychologically for the announcement of this catastrophe.

Alex – How can one prepare psychologically for the end of the world? I'd like to see that...

Fred – So we're condemned to stay here until the end of the consultation?

Max – And how much longer will all this nonsense take?

Sam – About a week.

Max – A week!

Fred – That can't be possible...

Sam – I'm sorry, but I've received instructions.

Alex takes a step forward.

Alex – And what if we still want to leave...?

Sam draws his gun and points it at her.

Sam – Stay where you are.

Alex – You won't shoot.

Sam – That's true, in the world before, I probably wouldn't have. But I assure you, now I'm capable of it.

Max – What are you going to do? Kill all of us? (*Pointing to the audience*) And them too?

Sam – I'm waiting for instructions... For now, you'll stay here quietly. Try to relax a bit. There are also appetizers and peanuts in the fridge... We'll serve you a meal later...

He exits.

Alex – I told you, we can't trust them.

Fred – At the same time, it's not just about us.

Max – So you're defending them?

Fred – No, but I agree with him. We must avoid any haste to prevent chaos.

Alex – Chaos? We're talking about an asteroid crashing into Earth with a force millions of times that of the Hiroshima bomb. And you're only concerned about a little chaos?

Fred – You're pretending not to understand. Do you really want this last month on Earth to be hell? Especially for the most vulnerable. Children, for instance...

Alex is visibly moved by these arguments.

Alex – Fine. And what do you propose? That we let ourselves be taken down one by one, like sheep to the slaughter?

Fred – I don't know.

Max – As long as he's the one with the gun, anyway...

Alex – So what do we do?

A pause.

Max – How about starting with some drinks?

Sam returns.

Sam – There's news.

Alex – What now?

Sam – I warn you, it's not going to be easy to believe either. Even for me, it's quite hard to swallow.

Max – Just tell us...

Sam – We've just received an extraterrestrial signal...

General astonishment.

Fade to black.

Act 4

Alex, Fred, and Max try to gather themselves in the face of Sam, who remains impassive.

Alex – An extraterrestrial signal? Is this a joke?

Sam – I know, it's unbelievable. But you know, lately, nothing surprises me anymore.

Alex – No kidding...

Sam – We know that the end of life on Earth is a probability, if not a certainty in the long run, whose date we simply don't know. Yet we consider it science fiction.

Fred – We also know that it's highly improbable that we are the only representatives of life in the universe, and yet we also consider aliens as science fiction.

Max – And how did they contact you? Did they send you a carrier pigeon?

Sam – As you know, an American institute, SETI, has been exclusively dedicated to listening for possible communications from space since the 1960s.

Fred – Proof that it's not such a far-fetched hypothesis...

Sam – It was they who intercepted this message.

Alex – They've been listening to the sky for over half a century. We've never heard anything, and all of a sudden, a month before the end of the world...

Sam – Exactly... Faced with the imminent catastrophe, they decided to make contact with us.

Max – For what purpose? To bid us farewell?

Sam – They propose to save a few of us. So that the human species can continue to exist, even if it's not on the Earth where it originated.

Alex – Save the human species? We're starting to wonder if it's even worth it...

Fred – And how do they plan to rescue these privileged few?

Sam – They propose to come and pick them up with a spaceship.

Alex – Well, of course. An ark of the space now... We've heard it all...

Sam – They can only take a few thousand teenagers with them.

Alex – Teenagers...

Sam – Older people wouldn't be able to reproduce to perpetuate the species, and children too young would struggle to endure such a journey. Young adults will adapt more easily to their new environment.

Fred – So, another planet then.

Alex – Well, yes, if Earth is destroyed...

Max – Alright. And what do we have to do with this? Unfortunately, we haven't been teenagers for a long time.

Sam – We now need to choose which high school will be saved.

Fred – A high school?

Max – Why a high school?

Sam – These high school students will already be gathered in one place. It will be easier to come and pick them up.

Alex – Good for those who will be chosen. But why does it concern us?

Sam – We have the responsibility to designate the high school that will be saved... at least for France.

Fred – France?

Sam – One educational institution will be designated for each country. To have a sufficient diversity of population, I suppose.

Alex – You can simply choose randomly.

Sam – That's a possibility, indeed.

Fred – Why? Is there another option?

Sam – We could choose the best high school in France.

Fred – The best?

Sam – The one with the highest scores in the final exams, for example.

Alex – I see... One of those private Catholic schools where your children go, I presume.

Sam – And where do yours go?

Alex – I don't have children, and you know that very well. None of us here have children. Is that why you chose us?

Sam – Not only that...

A moment of silence.

Fred – Excellence or randomness?

Sam – Exactly. We will have to make a choice once again.

Fred – It's inhumane to ask us to do this... How can we choose among all these young people the few privileged ones who will be saved?

Sam – However, a decision must be made. Otherwise, all of humanity will perish.

Alex – Personally, I would be inclined towards this option.

Sam – We don't have time to waste. They want the name of this high school by tomorrow. After that, it will probably be too late...

Alex – Excellence, we know what that means. It's tied to social selection. Coincidentally, the best schools are located in affluent neighbourhoods.

Fred – On the other hand, if humanity is to endure, it's better not to do it with young people who have a vocabulary of only two hundred words, who write in phonetics, and who have never written anything longer than a text message.

Alex – Is that what you're saying? As an educator? Well done...

Fred – You're right, it's awful... (*A pause*) On the other hand, we need to be realistic...

Sam – We don't have any more time to debate, unfortunately. Let's go straight to the vote... Who is in favour of excellence?

Fred hesitates, then raises his hand.

Sam – Who is in favour of randomness?

Alex and Max raise their hands.

Sam – Let's see what the audience thinks. The supporters of excellence, first. Those in favour of saving the best high school in France, raise your hand. Now, the supporters of randomness. Those in favour of randomly selecting the high school to be saved? Very well. Excellence prevails (*or randomness*). Thank you for your input... (*His phone rings, and he answers while moving away towards the backstage.*) Yes... I'm listening...

He exits. Silence.

Alex – This time, everyone must have realized it's a joke, right?

The other two appear perplexed.

Max (*to the audience*) – What do you think? Is it true or not?

Possible improvisation to respond to one or more spectators.

Fred – I don't know what to believe anymore...

Max – After all, it's possible, isn't it?

Fred – Like he said, there are plenty of things we tend to consider as science fiction until they actually happen.

Max – Like this global pandemic, for example. And its consequences... If someone had told you about it before it happened, would you have believed it?

Alex – Probably not...

Fred – I don't know why, but I have a feeling it's true.

Alex – These people have been lying to us for ten years! In fact, they've always lied to us.

Fred – It's so huge... that it could be true.

Max – What do we have to lose by playing along?

Alex – So you agree, it's a game.

Fred – The question would rather be... do we have a choice not to play? Did you see? They're ready to kill us...

Sam returns.

Sam – The situation has evolved...

Alex – Given the initial situation, it can only be for the better, I suppose.

Sam – Indeed, although we're still not sure about anything.

Fred – So, what's the update?

Sam – Unexpectedly, the danger has slightly decreased.

Max – You announced the end of the world as an absolute certainty. How could the danger have decreased?

Sam – The asteroid threatening us collided with another celestial object. It broke into several pieces. But a huge fragment is still heading towards our planet...

Fred – How big is it?

Sam – Around a hundred meters.

Max – That's better, isn't it?

Sam – Yes, but it's still sufficient to end all life on Earth. Unless that fragment itself breaks into several pieces. But most importantly...

Fred – What?

Sam – The explosion has significantly increased the speed at which this debris is moving. It's hurtling towards us at almost the speed of light.

Max – How much time before the collision?

Sam – According to the new calculations... about a week.

Alex – And you call that an improvement...

Sam – The southern hemisphere will be hit head-on. But the consequences for the rest of the world will be terrible. Earthquakes, giant tsunamis...

Max – So, if I understand correctly, the end of the world is no longer certain? Do we still have a chance to survive?

Sam – A portion of the population could survive by hiding in shelters or seeking refuge at the top of mountains.

Alex – So, we have only one week left to organize. And if we don't warn anyone, the toll will be much heavier.

Fred – What do you expect from us?

Sam – We need to reconsider our decision in light of these new developments...

Fred – I don't know what to think anymore...

Sam – If we disclose this information right away, it will cause panic. The entire population of the southern hemisphere will rush towards the northern hemisphere. And in our hemisphere, there will be a rush to the mountains.

Alex – I suppose people like you all have a chalet in Megève or Switzerland.

Fred – Those who couldn't flee to the mountains will fight each other to reach the top of the hills, the upper floors of the towers...

Max – Hoping they won't be swept away by the waters too...

Alex – But if we don't tell anyone, only a few privileged individuals who are well-informed will take the necessary precautions to have a chance of survival.

Sam – Indeed... Regardless, we can't save everyone.

Fred – So, we'll have to vote again? But on what?

Sam – There's no point in rushing anymore. The situation is evolving by the hour. I should say, by the minute. *(His phone rings, and he answers.)* Yes... Okay... Let me know as soon as you have any updates... *(He puts away his phone.)* The scientists have further refined their calculations. There's now only a one-in-ten chance that Earth will be hit by this asteroid fragment.

Max – All this for that...

Alex – And what about the little green men?

Fred – And that school to be relocated to another galaxy?

Sam – I have no news on that front...

Fred – Maybe they're the ones who blew up this asteroid to protect us...

Sam – That's a possibility, indeed. *(Sam's phone rings, and he answers.)* Sam... Yes... Okay... Alright, I'll take care of it...

He puts away his phone, appearing shaken. The other three anxiously wait for him to speak.

Max – Well?

Sam – I've just been informed that all danger has now been averted... What remains of that asteroid will pass well beyond the orbit of the Moon. There will be no consequences for our planet, and the population will remain unaware.

Silence fills the room, a mix of dismay and relief.

Fred – So, it's over?

Sam – Yes. It seems so...

Alex slowly and quietly applauds with a sarcastic expression.

Alex – È finita la commedia...

Max – So, we can go back to our miserable little lives, then? Just like before... I'm almost disappointed...

Fred – It's true... With all this, I've never felt more alive in my entire life.

Max – What was it you were saying? Eros and Thanatos... Soon she'll tell us she had an orgasm...

Fred – I could tell you I have what you need at home, but unfortunately, only my cat is waiting for me there.

Max – If that's all it takes, it can still be arranged... I'm available too...

Alex – Available, that remains to be seen...

The gazes turn towards Sam, who remains silent.

Fred – Sam?

Alex – You still plan on informing the population about the catastrophe they just narrowly avoided, right?

Sam – The decision has been made at the highest level. The population will not be informed.

Fred – If you hide the truth from people and they find out anyway... They will be furious. They will hold you accountable.

Alex – Since the end of the world is no longer imminent, there is no risk of widespread panic. Why keep people in the dark?

Max – Are we going to have to vote again?

Sam – There will be no vote. Nobody will be informed. And nothing that happened here will ever have existed.

Alex – Fine, you'll do as you please... and we'll say what we want.

Sam – I've also received instructions regarding that. I'm truly sorry. All of this falls under state secrecy. We cannot take the risk of letting you speak...

Alex – Oh yeah? And what are you planning to do to stop us? Kill us?

Fred – You can't do that! You're a police officer, aren't you? You represent the Law!

Alex – They've been making the Law for a long time now. Do you still believe the police are here to protect the citizens?

Max – Why bother killing us? Anyway, no one would believe us.

Fred – After all... you just have to tell us that all of this was just a game, and we won't talk about it anymore.

Max – An escape game. And we finally managed to get out...

Sam – I'm sorry, but none of you will leave here...

He theatrically draws his gun from its holster, like a cowboy in a duel, but the gun slips from his hands and falls to the ground in front of him. Alex grabs the weapon and points it at Sam. One could also imagine a comedic slow-motion scene, with Sam drawing his gun and Alex lunging at him to take control.

Alex – So, you're not feeling so tough now.

Sam – What are you going to do, kill me?

Alex – Don't tempt me.

Fred – Don't do it.

Max – And why not? This bastard wanted to eliminate the three of us.

Sam – You won't shoot.

Alex – Oh yeah?

Sam – Go ahead, pull the trigger.

Alex – After all, what do I have to lose? You said it yourself, none of this ever existed.

Alex hesitates.

Sam – It's not so easy to kill a man, you know... Even when you know you can do it with impunity. Millennia of moral order, since the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, don't vanish in an hour.

Alex – I told you, I'm not a believer.

Fred – Please, let go of that weapon...

Max – So, it's him who's going to shoot us? No way. Go ahead, shoot! If we have a chance to survive, we might as well try...

Alex hesitates once again before lowering his weapon.

Alex – Okay, I won't shoot... not right away. But I'll keep this gun on me, and if you try to take it back, believe me, I know how to use it.

Sam – Anyway, it doesn't matter. You can shoot, but you won't kill me.

Alex – Really?

Sam – Unless I decide to play dead, of course.

Max – Do you think you're immortal or something?

Fred – Or maybe he's wearing a bulletproof vest.

Sam – This gun isn't loaded.

Alex – You're still lying.

Sam – That's true, I'm lying.

A pause.

Fred – A rather difficult sentence to interpret.

Max – What?

Fred – He said, "That's true, I'm lying." If it's true, then he's not lying.

Alex – And if he's lying, then it's not true.

Max – It's too complicated for me...

Sam – Anyway, it's not a real gun.

Alex – No kidding...

Sam – It's a prop for the theatre...

Max – A prop?

A pause.

Alex – So, according to you, we're in a theatre now?

Max – He's done it all to us...

Fred – But come on, it's impossible, all the theatres have been closed for years because of the pandemic.

Sam – Almost all of them, indeed. But some are resisting, unbeknownst to the health and police authorities.

Alex – So... we were in the middle of performing a play?

Sam – And the play is over. We're going to applaud you, well, I hope so. You'll go back to your dressing room, and then you can go home. Nobody is going to die. At least not today. The show is over.

Fred – So, you're not a cop?

Max – Then... who are you?

Sam – I am the director.

Alex – So, all of this was fake...

Sam – No, it was fake, and it was the truth. It was theatre.

Max – But we're not actors!

Sam – You were selected to participate in an improvised performance. All these people are spectators.

Fred – So, you're the ones defying the law. All theatre performances are strictly forbidden.

Sam – I belong to a secret organization that is trying to clandestinely revive the once-thriving performing arts...

Alex – And where are we?

Sam – We are at the Theatre... (*He'll mention the name of the theatre where the play is being performed*).

A pause.

Fred – The theatre... It's been so long since we last went there...

Max – We don't even remember what it was for.

Sam – Nothing... To reflect...

Max – Reflect on what?

Sam – On the meaning of life, for example...

Fred – It's true that after all this, I think I'll see life differently.

Sam – Whether we die in a month or thirty years, whether we die individually or all together, in the end, what does it change?

Fred – The question is what we want to do with the rest of our lives.

Max – The question? And what's the right answer?

Sam – In theatre, there are no right answers. There are only good questions.

Alex – Regardless, we should never give up living out of fear of dying.

Fred – And when the curtain falls, and we leave the stage, amidst applause or boos, let us at least have fully played the role of our lives.

They all stand facing the audience for the greetings.

Sam – Ladies and gentlemen, the performance you have just witnessed is, of course, completely illegal, so when you leave here, even if you enjoyed it, please don't mention it to anyone. Thank you in advance for your discretion...

Blackout.

The end.

About the author

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

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

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 Cuckoo's nest

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

Is there a pilot in the audience?

Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall

New Year's Eve at the Morgue

One marriage out of two

Quarantine

Running on Empty

Strip Poker

The Ideal Son-in-Law

The Window across the courtyard

The Worst Village in England

Welcome aboard!

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