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BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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Translation by the author

You all know that famous website facilitating the reunion with long-lost schoolmates... Unfortunately, nostalgia nights can also turn into nightmares. Having invited over to his place two of his "best buddies" from high school whom he hasn't seen since graduation, a friendly loser triggers their unexpected reunion with a girl who has some unresolved issues with them...

Characters

Nico

Ivan

Alex

Brigitte

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ACT 1

An apartment filled with moving boxes in preparation for relocation. Nico, in his thirties, sporting a loser look, paces back and forth. He finally decides, picks up the phone, and anxiously waits while it rings on the other end.

Nico (*with forced friendliness*) – Hello, Brigitte Paradis...? Did you attend Saint-Sulpice High School in Villiers in the 1990s? (*Getting a bit carried away*) You're brunette, with hazel eyes, and a rather generous bosom... (*Abruptly correcting himself*) Sorry, I must have dialled the wrong number. I'm looking for a redhead with green eyes and small breasts...

He hangs up and lets out a sigh of relief, interrupted by the doorbell. Nico goes to open it. Ivan arrives, looking like an eco-friendly teacher.

Nico – Hey Ivan, come in...

Ivan – Nico! Well... If I had bumped into you on the street, I wouldn't have recognised you... It's been at least ten years, right?

Nico – Fifteen.

Ivan – Oh yes! The year of graduation... Remember? The strikes! We spent the whole month of May flirting on the lawns... It wasn't '68... or even '69, but well... We did nothing, and they handed out diplomas to everyone...

Nico – Yes... I must be the only one who failed that year...

Ivan – I'm sorry, I didn't bring anything... I wanted to grab a bottle on the way, but the convenience store downstairs was already closed...

Nico – Oh really...? Normally, they close at eight...

Ivan glances around Nico's squalid apartment.

Ivan (*hypocritical*) – You're well settled, I see...

Nico – It's a friend who's letting me use his apartment while he's away, to help me out... The advantage is that there's no rent to pay. It's just been declared uninhabitable...

Ivan, not really listening, nods.

Ivan – Still single?

Nico – Yeah...

Ivan – Lucky you... And what are you up to now?

Nico – I'm an actor...

Ivan – No way? You kept going, huh?

Nico – When you catch the bug... And you? Did you give up?

Ivan – Errare humanum est, perseverare diabolicum!

Nico – You're a Latin teacher?

Ivan – Gym teacher... I'm married, old man! I have two kids. So, theatre, you can imagine... And how about you, is it working out?

Nico – Have you seen that TV campaign against speeding?

Ivan – Oh yes, it rings a bell.

Nico – The scene where the cop discovers the corpse stuck in the car, you know?

Ivan – Yeah...

Nico – Well, that's me.

Ivan (*surprised*) – You're the cop? I wouldn't have recognised you...

Nico – Oh no, not the cop, the... The corpse...

Ivan – Oh yeah, okay... I wouldn't have recognised you either, wow... Well... That must be challenging to play...

Nico – It's a job... Well, mostly the makeup, which takes a lot of time...

Ivan – But the actor playing the cop, he's famous, right? Isn't he the one in...

Nico – Yes, yes, that's him...

Ivan – Great... And... is he nice?

Nico – You know, I didn't see much of him... Since my eyes were closed...

Ivan – Oh, yeah, of course... And otherwise, do you have other projects...?

Nico – For now, I'm on sick leave...

Ivan – Oh... (*Trying to joke*) It's not contagious, is it...?

Nico – No, no, don't worry... It's deadly, but it's not contagious...

Ivan takes it as a joke. He looks around, intrigued, noticing the absence of any other guests. He also sees the moving boxes...

Ivan – Are you moving...?

Nico – Uh... No... Well, not right away...

Ivan – I got scared... I thought you brought me here to help load the truck...

Ivan is starting to wonder why he's here. He looks at Nico, trying to keep a positive attitude, but he's not sure what to say anymore.

Ivan – It smells like a zoo in here, doesn't it? Do you have a cat?

Nico – An iguana.

Ivan – An iguana?

Nico – Yeah... My friend left it for me when he departed. He lends me his apartment, and in return, I feed his iguana...

Ivan (*not very reassured*) – And... is an iguana nice?

Nico – When it's small, it's very affectionate... Well, it doesn't move much. But as it grows, they say it can become aggressive.

Ivan – As it grows...

Nico – It can reach up to two meters.

Ivan – Okay... And yours, how big is it, roughly?

Nico – I don't know, I'd say... (*Under the other's worried gaze, he makes an uncertain gesture to estimate the size of his iguana*) But don't worry, I've locked it in the bathroom...

Embarrassed silence.

Ivan – Tell me, it's really nice of you to invite me, but... are we celebrating something here? Is it your birthday or...? I might be a bit early...

Nico – Uh... No, no... We're not expecting anyone else... Well, except Alex...

Ivan – Ah, you invited Alex...? (*Forcing his enthusiasm*) Oh yes, it'll be nice to see him again... We crossed paths once or twice... I'm not sure what he's up to...

Nico – I think he's in advertising...

A pause.

Ivan – So, you had the idea to bring the three of us together? To reminisce about the good old times...?

Nico – Actually, I had something to ask you. But I'd rather wait until Alex is here...

The doorbell rings again.

Ivan – Ah... Speak of the devil...

Nico goes to open the door.

Nico – Hi Alex...! Come in...

Nico returns, followed by Alex, dressed in a trendy business style, holding a bottle of Champagne.

Alex – Sorry, I'm a bit late... (*He hands Nico his champagne bottle*) Here, I got this at the downstairs convenience store...

Nico – Wasn't it closed...?

Ivan, feeling awkward, approaches Alex to greet him and change the subject.

Ivan – Hi Alex!

Alex (*surprised and not very enthusiastic*) – Oh, okay... It's a nostalgia reunion... The Three Musketeers, ten years later...

Nico – Fifteen... I'll get the glasses...

Nico puts the bottle down and rummages through a box for glasses, while Alex smiles at Ivan, with a somewhat forced joy.

Alex – You must have come a long way since high school, huh...?

Ivan – I'm still at Saint-Sulpice High School, actually... I just moved to the other side of the desk. Well, I don't even have a desk. I'm a gym teacher... And you? (*Considering his golden boy look*) It seems to be working out, huh... What exactly are you into?

Alex – In advertising... I'm an art director for a big agency...

Ivan – Maybe that's what I should have done, because being a teacher, you know... Well, okay, unlike our students, we get paid. But so little... And there's no discipline anymore... You can't imagine how violent young people can be nowadays... Although, we weren't that great either, right? Remember that kid in sixth grade we hung by the collar on the coat rack? We called it playing hangman. If another student hadn't come by to take him down... He was already turning blue...

Nico – Yes, I remember very well... It was me...

Ivan – You took him down...?

Nico – No, the... the hanged man... It was me...

Ivan (*embarrassed*) – Oh yeah... Oh, I totally forgot it was you, wow... I think that's how we first met, actually...

Nico – Yeah...

Ivan – Ah, those were the good times... (*Ivan decides it's better to change the subject*) And you, Alex? Still a big flirt? (*Alex modestly evades*) You're not married yet, so...

Alex – I'm getting engaged in three days...

Ivan – Engagement...? Does that still exist?

Alex – It's the daughter of my boss...

Ivan – Well... Hide your excitement...

Alex – But I'm very happy to marry her...

Ivan – And if, on top of that, by chance, it's your boss's daughter... But she's of legal age, right?

Alex – She's eighteen.

Ivan – Well, well... And what's your little prepubescent sweetheart's name?

Alex – Olivia.

Ivan – Olivia... And you say her father is in advertising...? It wouldn't be Olivia Mariani, would it?

Alex – Yes...

Ivan – No way...? I'm her teacher in senior year this year!

Alex – So, have you chosen to teach in private Catholic education?

Ivan – Oh, yes... Public education is no longer an option...

Alex – You're not a member of the Communist Party anymore, then...?

Ivan – Now I'm with the environmentalists... We need to see reality as it is. I'll return to teaching in public schools when we reform the education system... Olivia Mariani... Oh, yes... It's interesting, I didn't picture you with a girl like her... Well, if she's the boss's daughter...

Alex doesn't respond. Nico puts Disney-style mustard glasses on the table.

Nico – Sorry, it's all I could find... The champagne flutes must be in another box. (*To Alex*) I'll let you uncork the bottle... I don't know if I have the strength anymore...

Alex and Ivan exchange a worried look, a bit perplexed by this last remark. Alex takes the bottle to open it. Ivan tries to revive the conversation.

Ivan (*to Nico*) – So, little sneak... Why did you bring us here? Are you getting married too? Do you need two best men, so you remembered your old high school buddies?

Alex starts untangling the wire securing the bottle cork.

Nico – Uh... No... Unfortunately, it's not about a bachelor party...

Ivan – Wait, it's not that bad... Marriage doesn't only have advantages, you know...

A pause.

Nico – Do you remember that play I wrote in senior year?

The other two, thinking he changed the subject, relax a bit.

Ivan – Oh, yes! We had a good laugh with that! What was it called again?

Nico – "First Love"...

Ivan – That's it! "First Love"... What a dud it was... Luckily, we never got to perform it... Do you still have it? It would be funny to read it now...

Nico – Of course, I adapted it a bit... Now it's called "First Love... and Last Will."

Alex – Last will?

A pause.

Nico – I wasn't sure how to tell you this, but... I only have six months left...

The bottle cork pops, and Alex, petrified, lets the champagne spill on the floor. Ivan is also frozen. Only Nico has the reflex to place a glass under the bottleneck to prevent the bottle from completely emptying. He picks up the bottle and finishes the service while continuing his explanations.

Nico – I found out last week that I have an incurable disease.

Awkwardness.

Ivan – And yet, looking at you like this... You seem perfectly healthy. Right, Alex?

Alex – Yeah, well... You look the same as usual, I guess...

Nico – There are almost no symptoms, but it disrupts the electrical currents in the brain. And one fine day, it's like the fuses blow... It shorts out... *(To illustrate this short circuit, he makes a sudden gesture with his arms, accidentally splashing the contents of the glass he's holding onto Ivan)* There's no more network...

The two others look at each other, not knowing what to say.

Ivan – And... when is it expected, roughly?

Nico – We don't know exactly. It could happen at any time. The advantage is that I won't suffer.

Alex – Sorry about the champagne...

Nico – You couldn't have known... But next time, bring flowers instead... *(He raises his glass for a toast)* Cheers... We won't let it go to waste...

They toast in a gloomy atmosphere.

Alex – But what's this disease, exactly?

Nico gets up and returns with a large envelope, from which he takes an X-ray.

Nico – It's an extremely rare anomaly. Doctors call it an orphan disease...

Ivan – At least you won't leave any orphans behind... Except for your iguana...

Alex gives him an astonished look.

Nico – Only three people in the world have this genetic disease. And the other two are Malagasy and Sri Lankan. You can imagine that labs aren't very eager to invest in research... *(Pointing to a spot on the X-ray)* You see, those two spots there?

The others look but see nothing, yet politely nod.

Ivan *(pretending to read the X-ray)* – Oh, yes, it's ugly...

Alex – And there's really no hope?

Nico – A great surgeon in Los Angeles has already attempted this kind of operation... But, of course, it's very expensive... You can imagine I don't have the means... I already can't afford my rent...

Alex and Ivan exchange a worried look.

Nico – I think I still have some peanuts somewhere. I'll go get them...

Nico exits. Alex and Ivan exchange a dismayed look.

Ivan – Poor guy! He really never had any luck... Three patients in the world, and it had to happen to him...

Alex – Okay, it's sad, but after all... It's not up to us to pay for his surgery. We haven't seen him in ten years, and suddenly...

Ivan – Especially between us, Nico... Even back then... We weren't that close, were we?

Alex – That's why I didn't quite understand when he called me...

Nico returns with a huge bag of unshelled peanuts, which he places on the table.

Ivan – Well...

Alex – I don't think I've ever seen so many peanuts at once...

Nico – Oh, yeah... No, it's because... I did a commercial three years ago, for peanuts, actually. And they let us take a bag at the end...

Ivan – That's really what they call being paid peanuts...

Nico – The worst part is that I can't even eat them. I'm allergic.

Alex – You're allergic to peanuts?

Nico – But go ahead, help yourselves...

Alex and Ivan start shelling and munching on the peanuts to fill an awkward silence.

Ivan – Listen, Nico, I would have been happy to help with your operation, but you know... With my teacher's salary... (*Slyly*) And you, Alex... Can't you do something?

Alex (*shooting a glare at Ivan*) – I make a good living, it's true, but... I have some debts... And then with my engagement...

Nico – Oh no, it's very kind of you, but I'm not asking for money... (*Surprised relief from the other two*) No... I gave up on getting the operation. It's too risky... I'm allergic to penicillin.

Ivan – In addition to peanuts!

Nico – I might not tolerate the anaesthesia and end up in a coma...

Alex – Ah, damn...

Nico – No, I know I don't have much time left... A few months at most... And I just wanted to fulfil one last dream... That's why I asked you to come...

Alex – Your last dream was to see us one last time before you die?

Nico – Not only that... Can I refill your glasses?

His two buddies, in need of a pick-me-up, don't say no. Nico refills their glasses, and they empty them in silence.

Ivan – Ah, it's good, huh?

General approval, giving each one time to collect their thoughts.

Nico – Have some peanuts...

Ivan helps himself, while Alex remains cautiously on the defensive.

Nico – No, it's about my play. The one we could never perform...

Ivan – Oh yes, remember? The leading lady disappeared a week before the premiere... (*Nostalgic*) Brigitte Paradis...

Nico – And what if I suggested you help me stage it... Fifteen years later...

Ivan – Help you...?

Alex – Financially, you mean?

Nico – No, let's perform it together! Like we wanted to do fifteen years ago. What do you say?

Silence.

Ivan – Well... Indeed... What do we say?

Alex – You're kidding, right...

Nico (*pathetic*) – I absolutely want to perform this play before I die... After that, I can depart in peace... With a bit of luck, I'll die on stage...

Ivan – Like Molière...

Alex – Yes, but... you're not Molière...

Nico – I completely rewrote the play, you'll see...

Alex – But... we're not actors... Well, not anymore...

Ivan – We never really were...

Nico – I'm not really an author either... I'm just asking you to help me fulfil this last dream. In the name of our friendship...

Ivan – Our friendship?

Nico holds his head in his hands, as if suddenly suffering from a headache.

Nico – Excuse me, it's time for my pills...

Nico leaves the room.

Ivan – Oh, damn!

Alex – As you said...

Ivan – What if we try to convince him to have the surgery anyway...

Alex – Did you hear him...? He's afraid of ending up in a vegetative state... Well, he wasn't very far from it already... I'm not sure we'd notice the difference...

Ivan – What do you suggest?

Alex – Can you see us going on stage to play this play about pimply teenagers?

Ivan – With a bit of luck, he'll kick the bucket before the premiere.

Alex – We're never safe from a remission...

Nico returns in high spirits, with two scripts, which he distributes to them.

Nico – I printed a copy for each of you. I changed the ending, you'll see... After reading it, you'll be thrilled! Well, you don't have to read it right away... I'll give you time to think... But not too long... Can I refill your glasses?

Nico pours them one last round. Serving himself last, he empties the remaining contents of the bottle into his glass.

Ivan – Ah, it's time to uncork another bottle...

Alex gives him a dismayed look.

Alex – Listen, Nico, we'd like to help, but you know... Ivan and I each have our own job now... Being an actor is a profession... It's yours, but it's not ours... And then we'd need to find a theatre... With headliners like us...

Nico – No, but wait, I'm not asking for the Comédie-Française... You, Ivan, with your high school, you could find us a venue... And you, Alex, since you're in advertising, you could do our posters...

The other two are running out of arguments.

Alex – But there was a female role in your play...

Ivan (*cheeky*) – Oh yes! The voluptuous Brigitte...

Alex gives him another look to remind him to be more measured.

Alex – You even wrote the play for her... Just to give her a kiss in the final scene... We can't play this play without her. It wouldn't make sense...

Ivan – Oh yes... Unfortunately, she disappeared a few weeks before graduation... That's why we could never perform your play... Fortunately, in a way... You remember... We never heard from her again.

Nico – Well, precisely...

The other two look at him, concerned.

Ivan – Precisely what?

Nico – I found her!

Alex – You found Brigitte Paradis?

Ivan – Brigitte Paradis?

Nico – The one!

Alex – But how did you do it?

Nico – Classmates.com

Ivan – What?

Alex – A website that allows you to reconnect with people who were in the same class as you.

Ivan – I didn't know.

Nico – It's great for finding friends you've lost touch with.

Ivan – Well, friends, when you've lost touch, there's often a good reason.

Alex – I can't argue with that...

Nico – Anyway, from time to time, I would do a search by typing her name... No results... And then last week, bingo! She lives in Paris...

Alex – And are you sure it's her? There might be more than one Brigitte Paradis on that site...

Ivan (*remembering*) – Not with a bust like hers...

Alex – Did you call her?

Nico – Well... Not exactly...

Perplexed looks from the other two.

Nico – Well, enough to be sure it's her...

Alex – And do you think she'll agree to act in your play? I don't know... She's over 30 now... She might be married...

Ivan – Given her physique, that's not the most likely scenario, but well... You never know... She might have run into a pervert...

Nico – She still uses her maiden name...

Ivan – And about... your illness, are you going to tell her too?

Nico – I'd rather not... At least not right away... I wouldn't want her to accept the role out of pity...

Ivan – You told us, though...

Nico – Well, I knew you wouldn't accept otherwise.

Alex – So what are you going to tell her? I found the play I wrote for you when we were seventeen... We're restarting rehearsals tonight, after a ten-year hiatus?

Ivan – Fifteen...

Nico – Well, I was kind of counting on you to try to convince her... She liked you too... We were very close, all four of us, right?

Embarrassment for the other two.

Nico (to Ivan) – Would you do that for me?

Ivan – Well... You know, we didn't really know each other that well... (To Alex) Why don't you call her?

Alex – Me? Why me?

Nico – You've always known how to talk to girls... And you work in advertising... Sweet-talking must be your thing, right?

Alex – No, sorry, Nico, but I really can't do that... What could I possibly tell this girl? She probably doesn't even remember us. Well, I hope...

Nico (getting up) – Well... (Thinking he's giving up, the others seem a bit relieved) Then I'll call her... I'll phone from the bedroom, I'll be more at ease.

Nico goes to the bedroom. The other two look at each other, perplexed.

Alex – We're in deep trouble...

Ivan – She'll hang up on him, it's obvious. And then he'll leave us alone with his lousy play...

Alex – I don't know... I have a bad feeling about this... I feel like I fell into a trap... I really want to bail now, while he's on the phone...

Alex gets up to leave.

Ivan – Wait, we can't do that to him... And what's the worst that can happen to us? If by some miracle, she agrees, the time it takes to organise everything... We'll play for time...

Alex – Brigitte Paradis...

A pause.

Ivan – She was very ugly, wasn't she?

Ivan – She was...

Nico comes back, looking worried. The other two are already relieved.

Alex – So?

Nico – She's getting into a taxi, and she's on her way.

Stunned looks from the other two.

Alex – She agreed to come? Just like that?

Ivan – What did you tell her?

Nico – I told her Alex was getting married, and we were throwing his bachelor party...

Ivan laughs, but Alex is horrified.

Alex – What?

Nico – Sorry, it's the first thing that came to mind...

Ivan (*laughing*) – So you told her... We're three guys, alone in an apartment, throwing a buddy's bachelor party... Come, we'll be four... What a slut! She hasn't changed, huh?

Nico (*offended*) – I didn't tell her about an orgy...

Ivan – Brigitte Paradis... Do you remember those breasts she had...

The other two are torn between disapproval at the vulgarity of this remark... and emotion at the mention of Brigitte's breasts.

Nico – And to think that none of the three of us ever got to touch those breasts...

The smiles of the other two freeze a bit.

Alex – Well, yeah...

Ivan – Come on, admit it... Your last wish wouldn't be to fuck Brigitte Paradis, would it?

Alex is dismayed by Ivan's clumsiness.

Nico – I'm not one to brag, but I think I was in pole position... If only she hadn't disappeared before the premiere.

Ivan – Oh, right, the play... I forgot...

Alex – And did you tell her about your play? Besides my wedding...

Nico – Well, no... I didn't dare...

Alex – Yeah, I get it... While my wedding...

Ivan – Brigitte Paradis...

Alex – Okay... You don't have to repeat that all evening...

Ivan – Maybe she got huge... She was already a bit chubby back then...

Nico – Chubby? She was just well-built...

Alex – Didn't she wear glasses?

Nico, embarrassed, takes an enlarged and framed photo from a box.

Nico – Here, I found a photo of her by chance while packing...

Nico looks at the photo for a moment, moved, before handing it to Ivan, who takes it, a bit concerned.

Ivan (*looking at the photo*) – Oh, wow... I didn't remember it being to that extent...

Ivan hands the photo to Alex, who looks at it with wide eyes.

Alex – No, but do you realise? If she was like this ten years ago... Now, she might have cellulite, varicose veins, and bifocal glasses...

Ivan (*laughing*) – That would explain her eagerness to rush into this trap set by three young and healthy boys... Sorry, Nico, I forgot about your illness...

Nico retrieves the framed photo of Brigitte.

Nico – It's okay...

The doorbell rings.

Ivan – Already?

Nico remains still, as if paralysed, holding Brigitte's photo.

Alex – Well, go and open!

Nico – I'm going...

Nico hides the photo in the drawer again and goes to open the door.

Nico – Yes? Oh, yes, thank you...

Nico comes back, looking worried, with an official paper in his hands, which he places somewhere.

Alex – Something serious?

Nico – No, no... An eviction notice...

Ivan – Ah, still...

Nico – The building is completely cracked... That's why I have to move...

Surprised looks from the other two, who glance at the boxes.

Alex (*worried*) – Cracked...?

Nico – It's beyond repair... It might collapse at any moment... Especially with the subway passing underneath... Don't you feel the vibrations every three minutes?

A subway train passes. Silence.

Nico – I always wondered why she left like that, without telling anyone, a month before the exams... (*Embarrassment from the other two*) Take some peanuts...

Alex (*changing the subject*) – And you, did you never retake your exams after that?

Nico – No... After that, I tackled the driving test... But I failed that too...

Alex – But you retook it...

Nico – Oh, of course... Every year... But after eight times, I gave up...

A pause.

Alex – We had such a damn boring time in that cramming place, remember?

Ivan – 100% approval in high school, okay, but at what cost.

Nico – I haven't been approved...

Alex – It wasn't even co-ed...

Ivan – To prevent us from thinking about anything other than our studies...

Alex – Yeah... Brigitte was the only girl in the class.

Nico – They made an exception for her because she was the daughter of the math teacher and the English teacher...

Ivan – Teachers shouldn't be allowed to reproduce with each other. It weakens the breed. After three generations, with inbreeding, it can produce monsters.

Alex – Poor thing...

Ivan – Well, for her, it wasn't all disadvantages, huh? (*Laughing*) Given how she was built, in a co-ed school, she would probably have been much less in demand...

Disapproving look from Nico.

Ivan (*to Nico*) – Wait, can you imagine, all alone in a class of 30 girls in the middle of a school that would accommodate 300? Even with your ugly looks?

Nico – It's true she didn't have much competition...

Ivan – And we didn't have much choice either...

Alex – One girl to make an entire school of boys in the throes of adolescent lust fantasise...

The doorbell rings again.

Nico – This time, it must be her...

Ivan – Brigitte Paradis...

Alex – Don't forget she might weigh a hundred kilos more...

Nico goes to open.

ACT 2

Nico (off) – Brigitte! Well... I wouldn't have recognised you...

Ivan and Alex exchange a worried look.

Brigitte enters the room. She has indeed changed... for the better. Top model physique and a star look – blonde, miniskirt, sunglasses. Alex and Ivan are left speechless as they see her.

Brigitte – Hi, boys...

Ivan – Brigitte Paradis...

Brigitte – It's really me, I assure you... In the flesh.

She turns to Alex.

Brigitte – So congratulations, Alex...

Ivan – Congratulations?

Brigitte – On his wedding... *(To Alex)* You're getting married, right?

Alex – Yes, well... I'm engaged, actually...

Nico (to Brigitte) – Sit down, please. Would you like a glass of champagne? To toast Alex's engagement...

Alex – Champagne? We just finished the bottle...

Nico – Oh yes, true... Wait, I'll give you some of mine. Anyway, in my condition, it's better that I don't drink too much.

He pours a bit of his champagne into another glass.

Brigitte – In your condition? Don't tell me you're pregnant?

Nico – I'd prefer that, believe me.

Brigitte takes the glass Nico offers her and sits down, crossing her legs high. Silence. The three guys swallow hard.

Brigitte – Stop sticking your tongues out like that... If you were that thirsty, you shouldn't have waited for me...

Ivan – Well... Okay... But what happened to you? *(Brigitte gives him a questioning look)* I mean... It's really strange to see each other again like this... After all this time... It's incredible how much you've changed...

Brigitte – I'm not sure how I should take that...

Ivan – No, but changed... for the better, I assure you.

Brigitte – I don't know how to take that either...

Embarrassment for Ivan.

Nico – Shall we toast then?

Brigitte (*raising her glass*) – To the good old days, then?

They clink glasses.

Nico – Have some peanuts...

Ivan – Have you been living in Paris for a long time?

Brigitte – No, I came back a few weeks ago... I lived in the States for the last few years...

Alex – In the States?

Brigitte – Yes... In France, it was really too hard to make it in showbiz...

Ivan – In showbiz?

Brigitte – And then in the US, my older sister was able to help me...

Nico – Your older sister?

Brigitte – Are you going to systematically repeat the last word I say? Is this some kind of game? (*A moment*) Yes, my older sister. Vanessa.

Ivan – Vanessa?

Brigitte – Vanessa Paradis!

Stupefaction of the other three.

Nico – Vanessa Paradis? She's your sister?

Brigitte – Well, yes! When she married Johnny, she moved to Los Angeles... So naturally, she knows a lot of people in Hollywood.

Ivan – Vanessa Paradis married Johnny?

Brigitte – Johnny Depp! You're not aware? What have you been doing for the past fifteen years? Were you frozen or something? Well, now they're divorced, but they've maintained a good relationship. And as they have a child together... (*Sensing their astonishment*) You didn't know that Vanessa was my sister? It's kind of obvious, isn't it?

The three guys take the opportunity to scrutinise her from head to toe. The resemblance isn't striking, but still...

Nico – Ah, yes, that's true... Now that you mention it... There's a slight family resemblance... Don't you think?

Alex – I didn't know that Vanessa Paradis had a sister...

Brigitte – It's not that extraordinary, you know. Many people have sisters...

Alex – No, I mean... I didn't know that her sister was you, Brigitte...

Brigitte – What can you do... Unfortunately, being related to someone famous doesn't necessarily guarantee fame... It's like my friend Monica... Everyone knows her sister, but not her...

Alex – Monica...?

Brigitte – Monica Cruz! Penelope's sister! See, what I was saying? You barely know her... Yet, she's having a successful career.

Nico – Yeah, it's not easy to make a first name for yourself in showbiz... So you can imagine when you don't even have a famous last name, like me...

Brigitte – I mainly do theatre, so, of course, we're a bit less exposed... Obviously, I'm more known in the United States than in France...

Nico – No one is a prophet in their own land... It's like Woody Allen. In the United States, no one knows who he is, but in Europe, he is very famous... So, you did continue in the theatre...

Brigitte – I just finished a play on Broadway. Over a thousand performances... It was amazing but absolutely exhausting... So, I decided to come back to France, to rest for a while... And I guess I was a little homesick. (*A moment*) I'm waiting for offers...

Ivan – Offers...?

Brigitte – For a new play! I find you a little sluggish now... Back then, you were more lively, weren't you? (*To Alex*) So, you're getting married?

Alex – Yes...

Brigitte – And you thought of me for your bachelor party.

Alex – Yes, well...

Brigitte – You wanted me to come to the wedding with my older sister, right? But singing at weddings isn't really Vanessa's thing anymore... And she's very busy...

Nico – Especially now that she's a mom...

Ivan – What's the name of your niece again?

Brigitte – Lily Rose... But you know, she's grown up now.

Alex – Lily Rose... Oh yes, that's unusual... At least she won't have trouble making a first name for herself.

Brigitte – It's less common than Brigitte, that's for sure... But tell me, Alex, I guess you didn't invite me to your bachelor party to help you choose a name for your future children? (*Moment of embarrassment*) If you would really tell me why you asked me to come...

Alex – Actually, it's more of an idea from Nico...

Alex and Ivan turn towards Nico.

Nico – Well... I'm not sure if I dare to talk to you about it now...

Brigitte – Come on, go ahead... We're among old friends, right?

Nico – Well... Do you remember that play we almost performed in our senior year?

Brigitte – "First Love"...

Nico – I wanted to stage it... Well, to stage it together... Of course, that was before I knew you had become a star...

Brigitte (*amused*) – Are you really sure you didn't know?

Nico – I swear... To me, you were still the little Brigitte I knew fifteen years ago in high school...

A pause.

Brigitte – Why now?

Nico hesitates again.

Ivan (*with a meaningful look*) – Come on, tell her...

Nico – This play is a bit like my baby, and...

Brigitte – Your baby... It's true that it takes a while to stage a play, but... fifteen years of gestation... It won't be premature... Why are you suddenly in such a hurry to give birth?

Nico – Well, because... I don't have much time left.

Brigitte – You don't have much time left... to finish writing it, you mean?

In response, Nico shows her his medical scans. Brigitte takes them and examines them carefully under the lamp.

Nico – See, in the middle, those two spots there?

Brigitte – Yes...

Nico – Those are brain tumours...

Brigitte looks at him bewildered.

Nico – I have an incurable disease, Brigitte... I'm going to die...

Silence.

Brigitte (*very serious*) – Give me your play. I'll read it...

Nico – Now?

Brigitte – I understood it was urgent, right?

Nico – Yes, of course... I'll go get it...

Nico leaves. Awkward silence.

Alex – We really aren't much, are we?

Ivan – Especially him...

Alex – I heard he won't suffer, though...

Ivan – If you could do something for his play... I imagine you must know a lot of people in showbiz... But don't feel obliged, either, okay? Don't do it out of pity... I don't think that's what he would want... *(A pause)* "First Love"... *(Laughing)* What a ridiculous title...

Brigitte – There's a play by Samuel Beckett with that title.

Alex – Well, if I remember correctly, it was closer to sappy romance novels than Beckett's theatre, right?

Nico returns and hands Brigitte the script of the play.

Nico – I completely rewrote it, you know... I've been working on it for fifteen years...

Brigitte – Don't worry, it won't take me fifteen more years to read it...

She gets up to leave.

Brigitte – Well... It was nice seeing you again... *(Gazing at them)* I see that deep down, you haven't changed much... But this time, I'm not sure it's a compliment... *(To Nico)* No need to walk me out, I know the way...

She leaves. They try to regain their composure.

Ivan – Brigitte Paradis... Vanessa Paradis's sister... Well, well...

Alex – She's messing with us, obviously...

Nico – Not sure... Even the Moon has a hidden side... Why wouldn't Brigitte Paradis have hidden her sister from us? *(The other two look at him with perplexity)* Can you imagine? For me, it would be fantastic! If she likes the play and decides to take the female lead, we'll have no trouble finding a producer. With a headliner like her!

Alex – Wait, don't get too excited... Even if she hasn't been lying to us, she's still just Vanessa Paradis's sister...

Nico – Are you kidding? A director I know just staged a play with the grandson of Gérard Depardieu, and the twin sister of the weather presenter on TV. It's a huge success!

Alex – The twin sister of...?

Nico – Well, of course, there's no secret... The playwright is the daughter of Miss France 2004...

Ivan – Anyway, Brigitte has changed a lot. She's classy, isn't she? If only I had known back then... I swear, compared to my wife now... Well, we can say the chubby caterpillar turned into a beautiful butterfly... (*Laughing, to Alex*) And between us, next to your fiancée, there's no comparison either...

Alex – Yeah, yeah, enough of that...

Ivan – Well, you can always hope that your caterpillar transforms into a butterfly too... True, your Olivia looks a bit like Brigitte did back then, right? But miracles are rare, huh... Even popes struggle to get one or two approved... Anyway... Since we're here now, let's celebrate your bachelor party... What are we drinking?

Nico – I must have one or two bottles of last year Beaujolais Nouveau somewhere...

He gets up and returns with a bottle, generously filling the glasses.

Alex – I never thought I'd see Vanessa Paradis's sister today...

Ivan – Me neither...

They toast.

Ivan – Come on... To your health, Nico! (Realising *his mistake*) Sorry, I keep forgetting...

Nico – Don't apologise, it's fine... And you know, maybe it's not such a big deal...

Alex – Oh really?

Nico – Well, I mean... Miracles are always possible here too...

They toast again.

Ivan – To our loves, then...

Ivan and Alex grimace.

Alex – Oh, damn... I didn't think I'd be drinking Beaujolais Nouveau tonight either. Does that stuff still exist? Hasn't it been banned...

Nico – Oh yeah, it's true, it's more of a man's drink...

Alex – Maybe you shouldn't be drinking that... In your condition...

Nico – Oh well, at least tomorrow morning, I'll know why my head hurts. And besides, you have to die of something, right?

Silence. Nico pours them more to drink. They quickly empty their glasses.

Alex – When you drink fast, you don't have time to taste it...

A pause.

Ivan – Brigitte Paradis... We were idiots...

Alex – We had that girl right there at the time... And ten years later, we realise we might have missed out on something... I mean, someone...

Ivan – Yeah... We didn't see her inner beauty...

Nico – It's true that she looks a bit like Vanessa Paradis as she grew up...

Alex – What's certain is that, as we age, we look less and less like Johnny Depp...

Ivan – Come on, pour us another shot of your elixir, to forget this cruel truth...

Nico opens the second bottle and serves them. They drink in silence.

Ivan – It seems like the second bottle is better than the first, huh?

Alex – It must not be from the same vineyard...

Ivan – Do you really think it's made from grapes?

Silence.

Alex – It's incredible that she continued in theatre..

Nico – Why not? I continued too...

Ivan – Yeah, well... Never mind...

Nico – Forget it... I know what you mean...

Alex – Maybe we should have continued, too... Ivan and I... We weren't that bad. Today, we might be stars... Even without having family in showbiz... Look at Depardieu. His father was a labourer, and he, when he was young, used to stutter.

Ivan – Yeah... And your play, in the end, it wasn't that bad... Really. We see so much nonsense in the theatre.. I swear, your play isn't much dumber... Anyway, I don't go to the theatre anymore... I don't know where to put my knees... And besides, I'm allergic to dust...

A pause.

Alex – Remember her father? Mr. Paradis?

Ivan – The math teacher... A real sergeant major... He made us do push-ups before every class...

Alex – He probably wanted us to atone for our sins with his daughter...

Nico – What sins?

The other two, embarrassed, don't respond.

Alex – And her mother, who was she again?

Ivan – Mrs. "Paradise"...

Alex – Oh yeah, that's right... the English teacher... That's probably why her daughter was so good with tongues. It allowed her to have an international career...

Ivan – We have to admit that back then, the mother was better built than the daughter. Remember? During English class, when she walked around the room, we spent our time lying on the floor, picking up erasers we threw behind her... Just to know the colour of her panties...

Alex – It goes to show that young people can put in effort at school when they're motivated...

Ivan – Yeah, we weren't lacking imagination... In the end, it wasn't erasers we threw on the floor, it was mirrors... She must have confiscated about twenty of them from us... She probably wondered what all these guys were doing with mirrors in their pockets...

Alex – Do you think she was that naive? Maybe she liked it, deep down... Because with her sergeant husband, she probably didn't reach the climax every day... *(Silence)* You said you found Brigitte on "Classmates.com"...

Nico – Yes, why?

Alex – I want to check something... Can I use your computer? I'm almost out of battery.

Nico – Yeah, sure, it's over there... *(He points to an ancient computer in the corner)* Wait, I'll connect it to the Internet...

Ivan – Connect it?

Ivan performs a few manipulations. Strange connection noises, like the ones early computers made when connecting to the Internet. Alex and Ivan watch the scene in amazement.

Alex – Well... It's not broadband, that's for sure...

Ivan – Given the look of your computer, I'm surprised you can even connect. Is it a family heirloom? Where did you find it?

Nico – At a flea market...

The connection noise persists.

Alex – Is it going to take much longer...?

Ivan – It seems like it's about to explode. Are you sure it's not dangerous?

The noise finally stops.

Nico – There you go, you can go ahead.

Alex – Finally! *(He stands in front of the computer)* So... a quick search on Google... Vanessa Paradis... Biography... Ah, here it is... Vanessa Paradis, born on December 22, 1972... in Saint-Mandé, Val de Marne.

Ivan – Damn, that's nearby!

Alex – Two years later, they moved to Villiers-sur-Marne!

Ivan – Where we studied at Saint-Sulpice High School! Maybe she went there a few years before us!

Alex – Weird that we never heard about her...

Ivan – Maybe at that time, she wasn't famous yet...

Nico – Read on to see...

Alex – Oh damn, we got disconnected! I thought so...

Ivan – Well, try again...

Alex types again... The other two wait anxiously. Even stranger connection noises.

Alex – Oh, it's working again... So... I'm on it... First appearance at seven in Jacques Martin's show "The School of Fans"...

Ivan – So, she was already famous...

Nico – Maybe not that much... I've been on TV too...

Ivan – Yes, but not in "The School of Fans"...

Alex – Four years later, her little sister Alysson was born...

Disappointment for the other two.

Ivan – Alysson...

Alex – Vanessa's parents were not teachers at all... They ran a glass shop...

Nico – A glass shop?

Alex – They sold mirrors, you know!

Nico – Well, with all the mirrors Brigitte's mother confiscated from us, her parents could have opened a store...

Alex – Yeah... Anyway, Vanessa Paradis's parents were never teachers... And Vanessa's sister is not named Brigitte.

The three boys digest this information.

Ivan – So why did she make up that story...

Alex – Don't you have any suspicions...?

Ivan looks sheepish... and Nico looks intrigued. The doorbell rings.

Ivan – Are you expecting another star, tonight?

Nico – No. Who could it be?

Alex – Well, go open the door, and you'll find out!

Nico goes to open the door.

Nico – Brigitte?

Alex and Ivan exchange a perplexed look.

ACT 3

Brigitte returns to the room, wearing a much more serious expression. The three boys look at her, waiting for her to speak.

Brigitte – I stopped by the café downstairs.

Nico – Did you read my play?

Brigitte – I flipped through it.

Nico – You think it's terrible...

Brigitte – I'll tell you later. But I didn't come back to talk about your play.

Nico – Oh?

The other two boys look a bit uncomfortable.

Brigitte – Pour me a drink first... (*Nico pours her a glass of Beaujolais Nouveau, Brigitte dips her lips into the concoction and grimaces*) Well... Have you switched to hard drugs?

Nico – So, you're not Vanessa Paradis's sister.

Brigitte – Well, no... Are you disappointed?

Nico – Rather relieved...

Brigitte (*sarcastic*) – Feeling better now?

Nico – Why did you leave so quickly in our final year? Without saying goodbye to anyone...

Brigitte – Did you miss me that much? I thought no one would notice my disappearance... (*Smiling at Nico*) Except maybe Nico... (*Pause*) I left so quickly because I was pregnant.

Alex and Ivan look uneasy.

Nico – Pregnant?

Brigitte – When I announced that to my parents, my father kicked me out. You knew him... He was a real fascist. So, I left for London...

Alex – To have an abortion?

Brigitte – It was a while ago, but still... Abortion had already been legalised in France. No, I just wanted a change of scenery. I didn't know where to go... I found a job as an au pair.

Ivan – And did you live in England for a long time?

Brigitte – It was a job for a few months. And then I stayed longer than planned...

An embarrassed silence follows.

Nico – Pregnant... To think we were all three in love with you, and it's with someone else that...

Another awkward moment for Alex and Ivan.

Ivan – Does anyone want peanuts?

Nico – So, who was it? I mean... the father?

Brigitte – I'm not very sure, actually... It could be... Alex.

Alex is even more uncomfortable. Nico looks at him, astonished.

Brigitte – Or Ivan...

Ivan is also uncomfortable. Nico looks at him in turn.

Nico – Oh, okay... Nice, friends... Couldn't you have warned me... You didn't want to hurt my feelings, right?

Brigitte – Or maybe they didn't want to ruin their chances with the well-bred young girls they hung out with outside Saint-Sulpice High School... I was an easy girl since I agreed to sleep with them.

Ivan – We didn't know you were pregnant, I swear... Right, Alex?

Alex doesn't respond. A moment of awkwardness.

Brigitte (*sarcastic*) – And you, good pals? Did you see each other often during all these years?

Alex – You know, the war veterans who gather once a year to relight the flame... It's not really my thing.

Brigitte – War veterans... Yet, at the time, you didn't mind secretly bragging about your exploits... While I pretended not to know that you had passed the information around...

Ivan – We were really foolish, Brigitte, forgive us... If I had known you were pregnant...

Brigitte – Oh really? What would you have done? Would you have organised a fundraiser at school to finance my trip to London? If you had known, Ivan, you would have done exactly the same as Alex and the others. You would have turned the other way... Brigitte, she was the chubby girl with glasses... I even think among yourselves, you called her Miss Piggy, didn't you?

Alex and Ivan look at their shoes.

Nico – I thought you were very pretty...

Brigitte – That's kind of you, Nico... But for them, I was the slut they passed around among friends... Brigitte, only the train didn't run over her. Isn't that what you used to say among yourselves?

Alex (*weakly attempting to react*) – Come on, we didn't rape you either... You were willing, right?

Brigitte (*shaken*) – What do you want...? With the looks I had back then, I wouldn't have had a chance if there had been any competition... So, yes, I took advantage of the monopoly. I slept with almost every guy in school...

Nico – Except for me.

Brigitte (*on the verge of tears*) – And you, who thought you were little roosters in that Catholic henhouse where I was the only hen... I should rather say the ugly duckling... (*Embarrassed silence*) If only you had known, my chicks... No, you really weren't good at it... I hope at least the ones who came after me enjoyed what I taught you... I, on the other hand, discovered pleasure long after the one I gave you... In fact, what I was looking for at seventeen wasn't true love... Just a bit of tenderness. The kind I couldn't find at home... Just a bit of tenderness. But even that, you couldn't give me... So I ate all day to compensate... I ate... and I fucked. Bulimic and nymphomaniac. The ideal profile when you're the only girl in an all-boys school... (*To Alex*) What's your fiancée's name again?

Alex – Olivia...

Brigitte – And how old is she?

Alex – Eighteen...

Brigitte – She's still a bit older than my daughter...

Pause.

Nico – Do you have a child?

Brigitte (*after a hesitation*) – I said abortion was already legal in France. I didn't say I had one...

Ivan – So you didn't...

Alex – So by now, we might be fathers, Ivan and I...

Brigitte – You didn't think you'd have a child together tonight, huh?

Ivan looks dismayed. Alex prefers to slip away for a moment.

Alex – Can you tell me where the bathroom is, Nico?

Nico – At the end of the hallway...

Ivan – I already have two children waiting for me at home... Not to mention my wife... who doesn't have much of a sense of humour. (*Ivan's phone rings, and he answers*) Yes, dear... No, I'm still at Nico's... We're reminiscing about the good old

days... No, no, I won't be long... but don't wait for me for dinner... Okay, see you in a bit...

He hangs up. Alex returns.

Alex (to Nico) – Do you have a stuffed iguana in your bathroom?

Nico – Oh yes, sorry, I forgot to warn you... It can be surprising...

Alex – Yeah... I felt like it was staring at me while I was peeing. It almost looked like it was alive...

Nico – Alive? But...

Ivan (*interrupting*) – Well, can we get back to serious matters? (*To Brigitte*) What do you want from us exactly?

Brigitte – When Nico called me, telling me Alex was celebrating his bachelor party, I thought it was now or never... Now it's up to you to decide what you want to do with this fatherhood...

Alex – We don't even know who the father is...

Nico – There are genetic tests now... We can find out quickly...

Brigitte – Well, each of you takes a ticket, we proceed with the drawing, and we'll find out who the lucky winner is...

Nico – I've never been lucky in games... In fact, I couldn't even play this time... It can't be me as the father...

Ivan – Fortunately... The poor girl... (*The others look at him, dismayed*) No, I mean... Because of your illness... It would be unfortunate for her to find her father after fifteen years, only for him to tell her that she'll soon be an orphan...

Silence.

Alex – And what's her name?

Brigitte – Alexia...

Alex – So you know she's mine?

Brigitte – No... It was a fifty-fifty chance... (*Trying to keep a straight face*) But I thought it sounded nicer than Ivana...

A moment.

Alex – And did you tell your daughter?

Brigitte – What could I have told her? I lied to you... I'm not the Virgin Mary... I hooked up with the Wise Men, and I don't know which one is the father...

Nico – I'm going to adopt her... (*Shock from the other three*) I've always been in love with you, Brigitte. I'll marry you, and I'll adopt Alexia. I'll get up at night to give her the baby bottle...

Ivan – I remind you she's at least ten years old... or even fifteen.

Alex – And if Alexia is my daughter, I can't let you adopt her... Are you stupid or what? I won't let you adopt my daughter! (*Alex's phone rings*) Damn it... (*He answers*) Yes, Olivia... Yeah, yeah. Everything's fine... I... I'm at a baptism, you know... Well yes, they do that in the evening... It's... It's a secular baptism... Okay, I'll call you back, alright... Yes, I love you too...

He hangs up.

Brigitte (*amused*) – Well, what a face your fiancée will make if you tell her just before the wedding that you already have a fifteen-year-old daughter? Well, it could almost give her a playmate... (*Alex looks uncomfortable*) Unless, of course, she's Ivan's after all...

Alex – But I don't know... You don't have a little idea...

Ivan – Who does she resemble?

Brigitte – Me... when I was her age. (*Alex and Ivan seem a bit worried*) Remember? The little chubby girl with glasses...

Ivan's phone rings again.

Ivan – No, Christine... I'm not yet on my way back home... I'm with Vanessa Paradis's sister... Can't I get drunk with old friends once every ten years, damn it! (*He hangs up, annoyed, the others are impressed*) Listen, Brigitte, if this child is mine, I'm ready to take responsibility, I swear... Of course, with my teacher's salary, child support won't be easy, but...

Alex – Alexia... That's a nice name...

Brigitte – Yes... Well, I might have called her Saint-Sulpice after all, or even Holy Spirit... That would have been more prudent... I mean, there were still 300 of you in that school...

Nico – Oh yes... We're far from the immaculate conception...

Alex – You're not even sure the father is one of us two?

Brigitte – You should be relieved, right? So, if I understand correctly, everyone wants to adopt this child today...

Nico – I'm ready to adopt the mother with her...

Silence.

Brigitte – She's downstairs...

The three boys are like paralysed.

Alex – Excuse me?

Brigitte – My daughter! I told her to wait downstairs at the café terrace... Just to see what your reaction would be... She's waiting for me to signal through the window. To know if she can come up or not...

Nico – That's fantastic!

The other two don't look as enthusiastic.

Brigitte (*overacting*) – I'm sure when her father sees her, he'll recognise his child. Fatherly instinct doesn't lie...

Alex and Ivan are on the verge of apoplexy. Nico goes to the window.

Nico – I'll tell her to come up...

Alex stops him.

Alex – Wait, we're not five minutes late!

Ivan – And we have to be gentle with the kid... It's true, it's going to be a shock for her...

Brigitte (*ironic*) – For her?

Ivan – For her... For us... And do you really think we're going to recognise her just like that...

Brigitte – Remember... When your wife gave birth at the maternity ward. When you held your baby in your arms. Didn't you feel something? Could you have mistaken another baby for yours?

Ivan – Yeah... But at the maternity ward, they have a little bracelet...

Brigitte – She has one too.

Nico – Did you leave her with her birth bracelet? All these years...

Brigitte – She has a little ID bracelet... With her name engraved on one side and on the other...

Brigitte is finding it increasingly difficult to hold back her laughter. But the three others await the continuation with anxiety.

Alex – What's engraved on the other side?

Nico – The father's name? And his address?

Ivan – Wait, she's not a dog...

Brigitte – No... It says... (*With an English accent*) "My heart belongs to daddy..." (*The three others look at her bewildered*) You know, like in Marilyn's song... (*Brigitte starts singing in a sexy Marilyn Monroe style*) My name is... Lolita. And... I'm not supposed to... play with boys! My heart belongs to Papa...

Alex and Ivan are stunned.

Alex – No?

Brigitte bursts into laughter.

Brigitte – You're going to make me regret not keeping this souvenir gift from the unknown little soldier...

Ivan – You mean... you really had an abortion?

Nico – So, there's no one downstairs... Oh, no... You didn't do that?

Brigitte – You almost seem disappointed!

Alex – But why did you tell us such lies?

Brigitte – Lies? You're asking me that? Why shouldn't I have the right to have a little fun too? (*Dryly, to Nico*) Can I see your X-rays again?

Nico reluctantly hands her the X-rays.

Nico – Here they are. But you know, when we're not specialists...

Brigitte (*pointing on the X-ray*) – You see that? Those two dark spots, as you said, are not tumours Those are your nasal cavities... Even a very shortsighted young intern couldn't mistake your nostrils for brain tumours..

Alex and Ivan are stunned.

Nico – It's nice of you to want to reassure me, Brigitte, but you're not a doctor...

Brigitte – I'm a veterinarian, Nico... so I'm also a doctor. And what I see on this X-ray is chronic sinusitis. It's incurable too, but fortunately, it's much less serious...

Alex and Ivan turn to Nico.

Alex – You really made a fool of us, huh?

Brigitte (*to Alex and Ivan*) – Don't tell me you didn't know?

Nico – I'm sorry... It's the only way I found to try to convince you to put on this play... It's so vital for me... Yes, you could almost say it's a matter of life or death... And I really wanted to see Brigitte again...

Alex starts to leave. Ivan catches him by the arm.

Ivan – Stay, Alex... For Brigitte, at least... It's been fifteen years since we saw each other... It's not every day you spend the evening with Vanessa Paradis's hidden sister...

Ivan gives up leaving.

Nico – So, you're a veterinarian?

Brigitte – Yes... (*Ironically*) Unfortunately for you.....

Ivan – Bravo... They say becoming a veterinarian is even harder than becoming a doctor...

Brigitte – Yes... But I don't know why, the more I know men, the more I like animals...

Nico – I thought you didn't even finish high school...

Brigitte – I retook it the following year. And I even got an honourable mention...

Alex – And you don't have any children?

Brigitte – Well, I do have a daughter. But this one wasn't born by the operation of the Holy Spirit... And rest assured, she's only five years old...

Nico – Five years old? But should we go get her then? We can't leave a little five-year-old girl alone on a café terrace...

Brigitte – She's not at the café, Nico, don't worry... She's with her father. Her real father...

Silence.

Ivan – Can you imagine? If Mary had gone for a little trip to London too, instead of telling such a story to Joseph... It would have changed the course of history...

Nico (*lost*) – Who's Mary? Was she with us in the final year?

Ivan – And to think you spent your whole school life in a Catholic school...

Alex – So, you thought we were in cahoots with Nico?

Brigitte – I thought, hey, they're celebrating Alex's bachelor party... They remembered Brigitte, the easygoing good friend... Just to have one last threesome joke before Alex settles down with the boss's daughter... After all, I was cheaper than a prostitute... (*She has tears in her eyes*) Yes... I wanted revenge... I know, it's not very charitable, for someone like me, who had a Christian education, but well... It relieves... Even fifteen years later...

Alex and Ivan look penitent.

Alex – Sorry, Brigitte. But you know... We're a bit stupid when we're seventeen...

Brigitte – You were little assholes, that's true... Try at least not to become old assholes... (*Brigitte wipes her tears and is about to leave*) Miss Piggy greets you well...

Ivan (*embarrassed*) – Anyway, you're quite an actress... We really believed your stories... (*Brigitte gives him a stern look*) I mean... Vanessa... Then Alexia...

Brigitte relaxes a bit and allows herself to smile.

Brigitte – Well, Nico wasn't bad either, with his incurable disease... Or maybe you guys are just easy to fool...

Nico – And what about my play, um...?

Brigitte – Your play is fantastic. I read a few passages... I laughed my head off...

Nico – It's supposed to be a tragedy...

Brigitte – Okay, I agree to perform it. If the other two are on board...

Ivan and Alex are caught off guard.

Ivan – Why not... Right, Alex? We wanted to get back into theatre anyway... It would be our grand comeback...

Nico – Awesome! And this play will be our baby, all four of us!

Silence.

Alex – Listen, Brigitte... We apologise, and...

Brigitte doesn't seem quite ready to forgive.

Ivan – Well, we're even ready to be the godparents of your daughter, if the position isn't already taken...

Brigitte – All three of you?

Nico – Fifteen years ago, we were like the three musketeers. (*Turning to the other two*) We shared everything, right? Well, almost...

Brigitte can't help but smile.

Brigitte – Give me some time to think... But why not... After all, it was fifteen years ago, and there's a statute of limitations, right...?

The atmosphere relaxes.

Nico – Have some peanuts...

Brigitte helps herself.

Ivan – But... when you said we weren't good in bed, was that also for revenge, or...?

Brigitte smiles but doesn't answer.

Nico – So, you don't hold it against me too much, right?

She approaches him.

Brigitte – You're the only one who was sincere in the end... But don't let yourself be pushed around, Nico. You just need to have confidence in yourself, that's all. Do you know why you're the only one of the three I didn't sleep with?

Nico – I'm not sure I want to know...

Brigitte – Because you were the only one in this school of 300 boys who was in love with me. I didn't want to disappoint you...

Nico – I'm not sure that really lifts my spirits... I feel like an abandoned old sperm that's the only one who missed its target...

Brigitte – Don't despair... I'm still on the market... I'm divorced... And now that your two "best buddies" are married...

Alex – Well, I'm only engaged...

Nico takes the manuscript of his play in hand.

Nico – And to think I wrote this play to give you a french kiss at the end... While these two little bastards...

Ivan – Oh, come on... Do you want us to talk about your X-rays again?

Brigitte approaches Nico.

Brigitte – Listen, Nico... 120 pages... And 15 years of rewriting... You earned it.

She gives him a long kiss on the mouth, leaving the other two in awe.

Nico (to Alex) – Well, we might as well not be the third wheel...

A last subway train passes with a terrible noise.

Brigitte ends the embrace, leaving Nico on the verge of suffocation.

Brigitte – You might still want to see a doctor. You seem to have a bit of trouble breathing...

On these words, Nico collapses lifeless. Brigitte is surprised. Ivan and Alex burst into laughter.

Ivan – Come on, stop fooling around, Nico...

Alex approaches and looks at Nico's lifeless body, laughing as well.

Alex – Damn, he plays dead really well, huh... What talent!

Ivan – He told me he did that in a commercial. He's got practice...

Brigitte leans over Nico and quickly examines him, including taking his pulse.

Brigitte – Damn, he's in cardiac arrest...

She performs a quick cardiac massage and leans over his chest to listen to his heart.

Brigitte – It's starting again, but he's in a coma...

Ivan and Alex begin to nervously laugh, unsure if it's a joke or serious.

Alex – Come on, that's enough now... You guys are being pushy...

Brigitte is still leaning over the body.

Brigitte – Do you know if he's allergic to anything?

Ivan and Alex think.

Alex – He said he was allergic to penicillin... and peanuts.

Ivan – Peanuts!

Alex – He didn't eat any...

Brigitte – But I did! Sometimes, a drop of peanut oil is enough to trigger an allergic reaction... And since I kissed him right after...

Ivan (*astounded*) – Did you use your tongue?

Brigitte, focused on the body, doesn't respond.

Alex – The deadly kiss... Damn, I can't believe it...

Brigitte – We need to get him to the hospital urgently... (*She takes out her phone and dials a number*) Hello, emergency services? Dr. Paradis speaking... Could you send an ambulance to...

She hesitates for a moment, and give the address of the theatre where the play is being performed...

Ivan – And he wanted to die on stage...

Brigitte – That's right... Peanut allergy shock... We'll be waiting for you at the bottom of the building to speed things up... Okay... (*Brigitte puts away her phone and examines Nico one last time*) Alright, grab him by the feet, we need to take him down...

The other two hesitate at the daunting task.

Alex – Seventh floor with no elevator! This is a nightmare...

They struggle to lift the body.

Ivan – Are you sure you're not pulling a prank on us?

Brigitte – Hurry up instead of chattering. The ambulance is on its way. I'll go ahead to meet them. I'll wait for you downstairs...

She exits first.

Alex – Oh, for God's sake, he weighs like a dead donkey...

In the distance, a firefighter siren approaches. Alex and Ivan also exit, carrying Nico's lifeless body with difficulty.

Ivan (*off*) – Watch out not to drop him, the stairs are steep. And hit the light switch, we can't see anything!

Alex (*off*) – Okay, okay, I'm turning it on...

A backstage light comes on, and the sound of a body falling is heard.

Ivan (*off*) – Damn, what did you do? He tumbled down to the sixth floor...

Alex (*off*) – I almost had a heart attack... But what is this monster?

Ivan – Oh, that? It's Nico's iguana. Someone must have forgotten to close the bathroom door...

Alex (*off*) – So... is it really alive?

Ivan (*off*) – I'm not sure we can say the same for Nico after a fall like that...

Alex (*off*) – You're right...

Ivan (*off*) – Yeah, our grand comeback is ruined...

Alex (*off*) – At least for him, it's over.

Ivan (*off*) – I think we really weren't meant to be actors.

The sound of the siren reaches its peak before abruptly stopping.

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 brief moment of eternity
A Cuckoo's nest
A Hell of a Night
A simple business dinner
All's well that starts badly
An innocent little murder
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Cheaters
Check to the Kings
Crash Zone
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but stable
Eurostar
Four stars
Fragile, handle with care
Friday the 13th
Heads or Tails
Him and Her
In lieu of flowers
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Just like a Christmas movie
Last chance encounter
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
One marriage out of two
Preliminaries
Quarantine
Running on Empty
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Ideal Son-in-Law
The Jackpot
The Joker
The perfect Son-in-Law
The Performance is not cancelled
The Smell of Money
The Window across the courtyard
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!

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