

La Comédiathèque

# Special Dedication

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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# Special Dedication

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*Translation by the author*

*In a small bookstore, a book signing event is being prepared. Charles has finally decided to publish his first novel. Everything suggests that it won't be a bestseller. But in the era of the internet, a miracle is always possible...*

## **Characters**

Charles: the author  
Margaret: his wife  
Frederica: his daughter  
Vincent: his son-in-law  
Kevin (or Karla): his grandson (or granddaughter)  
Catherine: his sister  
Alice: the bookseller  
Gerald: the stranger  
Alan (or Aline): his ex-colleague  
Flora (or Florian): the journalist  
Jack: the deputy mayor  
Paula: the customer

*12 characters.*

*Some characters can be either male or female.*

*Possible cast distributions: 7M/5F – 6M/6F – 5M/7F – 4M/8F*

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*A bookstore. At the back some shelves with books. On one side, a table set with a simple buffet. On the other side, a smaller table with a stack of books. Charles, the author, in his elegant sixties, arrives with a few champagne flutes in hand. He wears a white shirt and a jacket.*

**Charles** – This should be enough for the glasses, right? We won't be that many...

*Alice, the bookseller, in her fifties, enters with a jerrycan of gasoline in hand. She is a rather attractive woman, but her somewhat severe clothing style and bun don't really highlight her beauty.*

**Alice** – First of all, these are not glasses, but champagne flutes. I'm surprised that a man of letters like you isn't more precise in his choice of vocabulary...

**Charles** – Like it's probably not real french champagne either...

**Alice** – Sorry, our communication budget still doesn't allow for Dom Pérignon.

**Charles** – No matter the bottle, as long as we have the ecstasy... (*He notices the jerrycan she's holding.*) But you're surely not planning to serve them premium unleaded, are you? In that case, we must absolutely forbid them from smoking, even outside...

**Alice** – It's cider...

**Charles** – Cider?

**Alice** – It's like champagne, but made from apples. And, of course, without alcohol.

**Charles** – Ah yes... The last time I had it was probably at my grandson's birthday party, I think.

**Alice** – At least, if someone dies on the road going back, we won't be accused of getting them drunk.

**Charles** – I recognise your optimism... But why in a jerrycan?

**Alice** – It would be a bit too complicated to explain... (*He gives her an inquisitive look.*) Let's just say it's a sub-brand I bought in bulk from a friend who works in the morning at a discount grocer and in the afternoon at a gas station...

**Charles** – Ah yes... It's much clearer to me now...

**Alice** – They say it's as good as real Champagne... And if it's not as good, they'll drink less of it... After all, we're here to celebrate the release of your novel, not to get drunk.

**Charles** – I still think it would be better not to leave the jerrycan directly on the buffet...

**Alice** – You're right. I must have some empty Champagne bottles in the kitchen...

*Alice goes back to the kitchen and returns with a few bottles, which she starts filling with the contents of the jerrycan*

**Alice** – With the pouring spout, it's convenient.

**Charles** – You really think of everything... I hope you also thought to rinse the jerrycan well... The taste of gasoline is very persistent, you know...

**Alice** – I took blackcurrant syrup, for making kir.

**Charles** – That's a very good idea. It will go down better with syrup.

**Alice** – I feel like I'm preparing Molotov cocktails... It reminds me of my youth...

**Charles** – Well... I think it's an episode of your life that you've omitted to tell me about until now...

**Alice** – That's for another time. Our guests will be arriving soon...

**Charles** – Do you really think anyone will come?

**Alice** – If not, we'll drown our sorrows in non-alcoholic cider...

**Charles** – I prefer to drink adulterated cider with you than vintage champagne with anyone else.

**Alice** – Even with your wife, Charles?

*A brief moment of hesitation, but Charles prefers to evade and nibbles on some seeds in a bowl.*

**Charles** – These peanuts taste strange...

**Alice** – Salted corn kernels, it was cheaper... But it tastes about the same, right?

**Charles** – In that case... Let the party begin!

*Kevin, about eighteen years old, arrives.*

**Charles** – Ah, hello, Kevin!

**Kevin** – Hey, Grandpa. What's up?

**Charles** – Alice, let me introduce you to my grandson. He's the one who introduced me to non-alcoholic cider a few years ago... But you might already know him...

**Alice** – Well, I've never had the privilege of seeing him in this bookstore...

**Charles** – I think there's a subliminal message there, Kevin.

**Kevin** – Subliminal?

**Charles** – I intentionally use a big word every day when talking to him, trying to enrich his vocabulary beyond two hundred words... What Alice meant by this barely perceptible innuendo, Kevin, is that you probably don't open a book very often...

**Alice** – What can you do? Nowadays, young people only enter a bookstore once a year, in September, to buy the books on the syllabus. So if Shakespeare doesn't appear on the school supplies list before graduation, they arrive at university thinking he's a You Tuber.

**Charles** – A You Tuber?

**Kevin** – You shouldn't use such complicated words with him... But hey, Grandpa, there's not exactly a crowd for your book signing...

**Alice** – They'll come... Charles has quite a few friends, after all!

**Kevin** – Did you create an event?

**Charles** – An event?

**Kevin** – A Facebook event!

**Charles** – Why would I do that?

**Kevin** – To invite your friends!

**Charles** – My friends?

**Kevin** – How many friends do you have?

**Charles** – I don't know... Real friends? Two or three...

**Kevin** – Ah, okay...

**Alice** – We just sent out a few invitations...

**Charles** – To the family as well, of course. By mail.

**Kevin** – Invitations to the family, okay... Like for a funeral, huh...

**Alice** – More like for a baptism! This book is a bit like your baby, Charles...

**Kevin** – But when you say by mail... You mean email?

**Charles** – Snail mail!

**Kevin** – Okay... Vintage vibes, then.

**Alice** – And, of course, we put up a poster on the wall.

**Kevin** – The Facebook wall.

**Charles** – The wall of the bookstore!

**Kevin** – Sure...

*Kevin's phone rings, and he answers.*

**Kevin** – Hey, sweetheart? (*Moving away*) No, I was with my grandpa, yeah... No, not that one. The one you know died three months ago. My other grandfather, the one who wrote his memoirs, you know...

**Charles** (*rolling his eyes*) – My memoirs...

**Alice** – Whatever... You are way too young to write your memoirs.

**Kevin** (*to Charles*) – I'll be back later, Grandpa, okay?

**Charles** – He insists on calling me Grandpa, I don't know why.

**Alice** – It suits you well...

**Kevin** (*to his phone conversation*) – Who, Karim? No? Oh yeah? That's cool... By the way, did I tell you about my new app?

*He exits. Charles and Alice exchange a disheartened look.*

**Charles** – Sometimes, I wonder if my grandson and I live on the same planet...

**Alice** – Sometimes, I wonder if the planet we live on still exists for you and me.

*Margaret, Charles's wife, a lively fifty-year-old, arrives.*

**Alice** – Ah, Margaret...

**Charles** – You're the first one, that's nice!

**Margaret** – Hello, Alice. I'm just popping in; I still have two or three clients to finish at the salon. (*To Charles*) I told you to drop by this morning too! Look at what you look like! I could have done your hair! If the journalist from local newspaper takes your photo, can you imagine...

**Charles** – Sorry, I really didn't have the time. We just finished setting up. And I'm not sure I want to look like a TV presenter...

**Margaret** – Between us, Alice, you should have come to see me too...

**Alice** – Do you think I have a bad hairstyle?

*Margaret prefers not to answer.*

**Margaret** – So, everything's ready?

**Alice** – At one point, we thought we might have to cancel everything. We were only delivered an hour ago, can you believe it?

**Margaret** – Which caterer did you hire?

**Alice** – Uh, no... I was talking about the printer... A book signing without the author's book...

**Margaret** – Ah yes, of course... I thought you were talking about the canapés...

**Alice** – So, what do you think?

**Margaret** – About the buffet?

**Alice** – About your husband's novel! I imagine you were his first reader...

**Margaret** – Actually, I preferred to be surprised... And besides, he writes so poorly... I mean, when he writes by hand... It's like my doctor, you know... I never manage to decipher what's written on my prescriptions. So an entire manuscript, can you imagine... Thankfully, doctors don't write novels! Well, sorry, I have to get back. I'm closing the salon, and I'll be there, okay?

**Charles** – Very well, see you in a bit...

*She exits.*

**Alice** – Do you also think I have a bad hairstyle?

**Charles** – You're styled as usual, aren't you?

**Alice** – I'm not quite sure how to interpret that... But I'll still freshen up before the first guests arrive. Can you mind the shop for a moment?

**Charles** – Of course.

**Alice** – Take the opportunity to review your speech.

**Charles** – My speech?

**Alice** – You did prepare a little speech, didn't you?

**Charles** – What kind of speech?

**Alice** – Like at the Oscars! Thanking your wife, your publisher...

**Charles** – I don't even have a publisher! Are you kidding me?

**Alice** – Did you hear your wife? The journalist from local newspaper will be here. What will she put in her article if you don't say a few words to introduce your book?

*Alice is about to leave, but Charles calls her back, handing her the jerrycan*

**Charles** – Can you put this in the kitchen on your way?

**Alice** – You're right, it will clear some space...

*She takes the jerrycan and exits. Charles seems disturbed. Reflecting on his speech, he mumbles a few inaudible words to himself. He is so focused that he doesn't notice Paula, a customer in her thirties, entering, looking for something.*

**Charles** (*aloud*) – Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this fantastic event! No, that sounds a bit too much like a TV show... Dear friends, I thank you first for coming in such numbers...

*Paula observes him for a moment, talking to himself, with a slightly worried expression. Charles finally turns around and startles upon seeing her.*

**Charles** – Excuse me, I was rehearsing my speech... But don't worry, I'll try not to be too long.

**Paula** – Oh, okay...

*The customer scans the store, seemingly searching for something.*

**Charles** (*pointing to the stack of books*) – The books are here.

**Paula** – Very well.

**Charles** – I'm the author.

**Paula** – Perfect...

**Charles** – Would you like me to sign a copy for you? You'll be my first...

**Paula** – Well, you see...

**Charles** – You're here for the book signing, right?

**Paula** – Uh... No, I'm looking for an ink cartridge for my printer. (*She hands him a paper with the reference.*) I noted the reference here. Do you have that?

**Charles** – Ah... For that, you'd have to wait for the bookseller to come back...

**Paula** – I'm sorry... I thought that... In that case, I'd better come back later...

**Charles** – She shouldn't be long... Can I offer you a cocktail while you wait? If you promise not to smoke right after...

**Paula** – Thanks, but my hairdresser said she could take me in five minutes...

**Charles** – Beware of hairdresser minutes.

**Paula** – Sorry?

**Charles** – They tell you five minutes, and for you, it feels like an hour... With hairdressers, time passes much more slowly, it's a well-known phenomenon.

**Paula** – Oh yes...

**Charles** – Believe me, I've been living with a hairdresser for thirty years, and it feels like an eternity...

**Paula** (*a bit embarrassed*) – Alright... See you later, then!

*She exits.*

**Charles** – Well... I guess I'll go comb my hair too...

*He exits. In come Frederica, Charles's daughter, and Vincent, her husband.*

**Vincent** – Damn, I think we're the first ones here, aren't we...

**Frederica** – You think so?

**Vincent** – Well, I don't know... Since we're the only ones...

**Frederica** – Is anyone here?

**Vincent** – Not so loud! Can't you see there's no one...



**Frederica** – It's to announce our arrival... That's what we do in these cases, right?

**Vincent** – In these cases, we could also leave and come back when there are a few more people. I told you not to arrive too early.

**Frederica** – He's my father, after all... For once, he's doing something...

**Vincent** – I would have preferred if he had a barbecue, like everyone else... Have you seen the look of the buffet?

**Frederica** – We're not here to eat...

*Vincent's gaze turns to the stack of books.*

**Vincent** – I wonder why we're here, actually. Did you read it?

**Frederica** – What?

**Vincent** – His book!

**Frederica** – Oh... Uh... Not yet... He just published it, right?

**Vincent** – At least we won't have to tell him what we think. (*Vincent approaches the stack and looks at the title.*) My Share of Shadow... Oh, damn...

**Frederica** – What?

**Vincent** – What a stupid title...

**Frederica** – True, it doesn't really make you want to read it...

**Vincent** – You bet. Unless you're already completely depressed.

**Frederica** – Mmm... It doesn't feel like the summer bestseller you read on the beach to forget your problems.

**Vincent** – Do you have problems, then? (*She doesn't respond.*) You know, I used to write too when I was a kid.

**Frederica** – Oh really? What did you write?

**Vincent** – Different things... Poems, for example...

**Frederica** – You wrote poems? You?

**Vincent** – Yes, well, it was a long time ago...

**Frederica** – Anyway, you never wrote me any poems...

**Vincent** – Yeah, well... I quickly realised that becoming a writer wouldn't make me successful in life...

**Frederica** – Of course...

**Vincent** – You'll see, they'll serve us sparkling wine...

**Frederica** – You think so? Sparkling wine gives me gas...

**Vincent** – Let's get out of here, I'm telling you... Actually, I have a few calls to make in the meantime...

**Frederica** – Are we going to leave the store like this?

**Vincent** – Like what?

**Frederica** – Unattended! Anyone could come in, grab something, and leave without paying...

**Vincent** – Who would steal books? Especially your father's...

**Frederica** – I don't know... People who like to read...

**Vincent** – Have you ever heard of a hold-up in a bookstore?

**Frederica** – No...

**Vincent** – We'll be back in half an hour, I'm telling you.

**Frederica** – Alright, fine.

*They are about to leave when Charles returns.*

**Charles** – Ah, Frederica, my darling!

**Vincent** (*aside to Frederica*) – Oh damn...

**Frederica** – Hello, Dad...

*He kisses his daughter on the cheek before shaking hands with his son-in-law.*

**Charles** – Good morning, Vincent.

**Vincent** – Hi Charles, how's it going? So, it's the big day?

**Frederica** – You could have worn a tie... With your white shirt and open collar like that, it looks like you're about to be hanged...

**Charles** – That's kind of the impression I have, believe me... Even though with this apparent casualness, I was hoping more to resemble the writer I'm not really. Thanks for coming, anyway. I think you're the first ones...

**Frederica** – Yes, that's what Vincent was telling me, actually...

**Vincent** – We didn't want to miss it, of course. We took the opportunity to flip through your book... It looks good...

**Frederica** – The title, at least, is very catchy...

**Vincent** – What's it about exactly?

**Charles** – Oh... Well, it's the story of...

**Frederica** – Is Mom not here?

**Charles** – She's closing the salon and will be here soon.

*Vincent flips through the book.*

**Vincent** – One hundred and twenty-two pages! Is that all? Well, buddy... You didn't tire yourself out...

**Charles** – For a first novel... Let's say I didn't want to abuse the patience of potential readers too much...

**Frederica** – You're right! Personally, I'm always afraid of falling asleep before finishing overly long books... No, a small book like this, written in large letters, I'm sure it can sell well...

**Vincent** – If it's not too expensive... Do you have a lot of stock?

**Charles** – We printed an initial run of 300 copies.

**Vincent** – Oh, I see... You need more ambition than that, my old friend. Don't play it small! Believe in yourself!

*Alice returns in a much sexier outfit, without the bun.*

**Alice** – That's what I always tell him...

*Charles shows surprise seeing her so transformed.*

**Charles** – Let me introduce you to Alice. A bookseller like they don't make anymore...

**Alice** – Do you mean I belong to an endangered species? Unfortunately, that's all too true...

**Charles** – In any case, if Alice hadn't supported and encouraged me from the start, I would never have dared to publish this novel... Alice, let me introduce you to my daughter Frederica and her husband Vincent.

**Alice** – Your father has a lot of talent... Are you an artist too?

**Frederica** – No, I work with my husband.

**Vincent** – I'm the CEO of an industrial joinery company. I sell doors and windows.

**Alice** – A job not so far from mine. Books are also doors and windows open to the world...

**Vincent** – Mine are made of PVC.

**Alice** – Unfortunately, with the competition from the internet, the profession of a bookseller has become very difficult.

**Vincent** – You have to live with the times. Know how to adapt. Otherwise, you end up disappearing, like dinosaurs.

**Charles** – Even though dinosaurs only disappeared after dominating the world for 160 million years...

**Alice** – If this bookstore closes, unfortunately, it will probably be replaced by a bank, a real estate agency, or a laundromat...

**Charles** – Or an industrial joinery group.

**Vincent** – Paper books are like wooden windows. It's a rearguard fight. You should go digital.

**Alice** – Or change professions... Anyway, let's hope this book signing brings some readers back to this old-fashioned bookstore!

**Frederica** – Today's youth doesn't read anymore... That's what I always tell Kevin. When I was fifteen, I had already read all Harry Potter novels!

**Vincent** – Besides, she didn't go any further...

**Frederica** – Well, at that time, we didn't have the internet.

**Alice** – I'll serve you a drink... A little kir, perhaps?

**Frederica** – With pleasure...

*Alice approaches the buffet to serve.*

**Vincent** – By the way, Charles, I didn't know you were a writer! Did it come to you late in life?

**Charles** – No, it's a passion from my youth. I even sent manuscripts to the biggest publishers. But no one ever wanted to publish them...

**Frederica** – Oh really?

**Vincent** – What did they say to you?

**Alice** – It doesn't fit our editorial line... That's the standard response.

**Charles** – Apparently, what I write doesn't correspond to any editorial line listed to date... So, under the friendly pressure of my favourite bookseller, I decided to publish my first novel myself. At my own expense...

**Vincent** – Oh, I see...

**Frederica** – Now that you're retired, you can write more.

**Vincent** – Retired... at your age! And they wonder why our country's budget is in deficit... Sometimes, I'd also like to work at the post office.

**Alice** – For a former mailman, becoming a novelist is one way to remain a man of letters...

**Frederica** – A man of letters?

**Vincent** – Well, Frederica... a mailman, a man of letters...

**Frederica** – Oh, yes, I get it now! A man of letters... That's funny.

**Vincent** – Did you know I used to write when I was a kid too?

*Margaret returns with Jack, the deputy mayor.*

**Charles** – Ah, here's your mother!

**Margaret** – Hello Vincent... (*To Frederica*) Hello, my dear... You are already here?

**Frederica** – Yes, we arrived first...

**Margaret** – Charles, do you know Jack, the deputy mayor...

**Charles** – Very honoured, Jack. But I didn't know you were in charge of culture...

**Jack** – The deputy in charge of culture wasn't available unfortunately, but I'm pleased to replace him.

**Alice** – Oh, really... And what do you take care of?

**Jack** – Waste management services.

**Frederica** – Waste management services?

**Jack** – Garbage collection, selective sorting, recycling, all that...

**Charles** – I see... And I'm all the more honoured by your presence here, Jack.

**Jack** – In any case, you have a very charming wife. Always so well-coiffed...

**Charles** – My first dedication will be for you, Margaret. What should I write?

**Alice** – To my muse?

*Brief hesitation.*

**Charles** – I'll write "to my wife"...

*He signs a copy of the book and hands it to Margaret.*

**Margaret** – Thank you... That way, I can read it...

**Charles** – Well, why not?

*Jack glances at the book cover.*

**Jack** – "My Share of Shadows"... It's a very catchy title. What's it about?

**Charles** – Well...

*He is interrupted by Kevin's return.*

**Frederica** – Ah, here's Kevin! We don't know what to do with him. We just learned that he's repeating his year...

**Charles** – Again...?

**Vincent** – He must think high school is like the post office. That you progress based on seniority...

**Frederica** – He spends his time developing applications for smartphones... He probably thinks that's how he'll make a fortune...

**Kevin** – It's already happened...

**Vincent** – Well, dream on, Kevin!

**Charles** – What's this app about?

**Kevin** – Do you know what numerology is?

**Alice** – Vaguely.

**Kevin** – My idea is very simple, you'll see... *(To Charles)* Give me your phone, Grandpa, I'll install the app for you...

*Charles reluctantly hands his phone to Kevin, and the latter starts typing on the keyboard.*

**Kevin** – That's the idea... You ask a girl for her phone number. Or a guy from a girl, obviously, that works too. You enter it into your phone, and the app shows you the degree of love compatibility between you based on your respective phone numbers...

**Alice** – The degree of love compatibility?

**Charles** – I've never heard him use such sophisticated terms...

**Kevin** – Anyway, it tells you if you have a chance to score, if you prefer.

**Alice** – Based on phone numbers?

**Charles** – Ah, yes, indeed, it's very simple. But I didn't know you were a numerology expert.

**Kevin** – I invented the program myself. The software adds up all the digits in your phone number, and those of the girl. If the sum is the same, bingo! It's love at first sight. Otherwise, the less difference there is, the more chances you have to hook up...

**Charles** – To hook up?

**Alice** – Come on, Charles, to get laid.

**Jack** – Oh yes, it's quite a clever idea.

**Kevin** – Obviously, you have to believe in numerology...

**Vincent** – If he's not good at studies, we'll send him to the Hotel Management School...

**Alice** – Please, help yourselves! The buffet is here...

*They move towards the buffet. Jack takes advantage to discreetly grab Margaret's buttocks.*

**Margaret (aside)** – Please, Jack, not here...

**Vincent** – Charles, want a drink? You're the hero of the day, right?

**Charles** – Yes, yes, I'll be right there! *(To Kevin)* It's strange, I never noticed your father was addressing me by my first name...

**Kevin** – Me neither.

**Charles** – I'm not sure I like it very much, actually. Just because he's sleeping with my daughter doesn't give him the right to be so familiar with me.

**Kevin** – You're talking about my mother, right?

**Charles** – I don't know where she found that guy... It's my fault... I shouldn't have let your grandmother handle her education.

**Kevin** – Do you know I put your book on Amazon?

**Charles** – Amazon? Don't utter that word here, for heaven's sake!

**Kevin** – Why not?

**Charles** – Don't talk about rope in the house of a hanged man! Amazon is the death of small neighbourhood bookstores!

**Kevin** – Yeah, but a paper book is not fun... And today, if you don't create a buzz on the internet!

**Charles** – Did you read it?

**Kevin** – What?

**Charles** – My book! Before putting it online...

**Kevin** – Not yet... But since you sent me the file... I quickly made an ebook and put it up for sale on Amazon.

**Charles** – For sale? *(Ironically)* And is it selling well, tell me?

**Kevin** – I haven't had time to check the statistics yet...

**Charles** *(sighing)* – After all, you're right, Kevin. You know what Einstein said? A man who is no longer capable of being amazed has already ceased to live... For me, it's too late. But you... If at your age, you've already stopped dreaming...

**Kevin** – You just published your first novel... At nearly seventy, man...

**Charles** – Sixty, Kevin... Seventy was your other grandfather. The one who died of old age three months ago, you know?

*Alice returns.*

**Alice** – What's with the hushed tones?

**Charles** *(embarrassed)* – We were talking about his mobile app... It's funny, isn't it?

**Kevin** – I'm going to have a little glass of champagne...

**Charles** – OK... But don't overdo it... It's strong, you know...

*Kevin moves towards the buffet.*

**Alice** – And what about me, do I get a dedication in this book or not?

**Charles** – Of course... This novel is a bit our baby, isn't it?

*Charles scribbles something in the book. Alice looks.*

**Alice** – That's kind... I'm very touched...

*Emotional moment. Tension between them. Flora arrives, the journalist from La Gazette, a camera hanging around her neck.*

**Alice** – Ah, here's Flora!

**Charles** – Flora?

**Alice** – The journalist from the local newspaper...

**Flora** – I hope I'm not too late.

**Alice** – Not at all! Would you like something to drink? We have kir...

**Flora** – That's fine for now, thank you...

**Charles** – Thank you for coming. I imagine you won't be winning the Pulitzer Prize with this coverage of my first novel...

**Flora** – It depends...

**Charles** – Oh yes? On what?

**Flora** – If with this first novel, you win the Nobel Prize...

*Alice seems eager to interrupt this friendly conversation.*

**Alice** – Charles, this might be the moment to say a few words...

**Charles** – You think? But not everyone is here yet, are they?

**Alice** – The press is here, that's the main thing! We shouldn't keep Madam waiting...

**Flora** – Especially since I can't stay for long. I still have the annual banquet of the Senior Ballroom Dance Club and the inauguration of the new roundabout.

**Charles** – In that case...

*Alan arrives, in a tight office worker suit and tie.*

**Alan** – Sorry, Charles... I'm a bit late...

**Charles** – Ah, Alan! We were just waiting for you...

**Alan** – I wouldn't miss this for the world, you know.



**Charles** – Let me introduce Alan, a former colleague from the post office who hasn't had the chance to be laid off like me...

**Alice** – Nice to meet you, Alan...

**Charles** – You came just in time... You almost missed my speech...

**Alan** – I'm taking advantage of my lunch break.

**Charles** – The lunch break is to the office worker what the walk in the courtyard is to the common-law prisoner.

**Alan** – You're not wrong.

**Charles** – That's why I'm happy they granted me early release...

**Alan** – You know it's getting worse and worse since you left?

*Alice taps a few times on a glass with a spoon to get everyone's attention.*

**Charles** – Excuse me for a moment; I need to say a few words to the press...

*Kevin receives a text message and moves away a bit.*

**Kevin** – Excuse me...

**Charles** – Dear friends, I would like to first...

**Kevin** (*out loud*) – Google wants to buy my app!

*Charles is cut off in his momentum.*

**Vincent** – What?

**Kevin** – My numerology app! I just got a text from the CEO!

*General astonishment.*

**Frederica** – Google's CEO?

**Vincent** – But when you say buy... Can selling a mobile phone application really make big money?

**Jack** – I heard about a story like that not long ago. A 17-year-old in England. He sold an app to Facebook for 30 million dollars.

**Vincent** – 30 million!

**Frederica** – It's even better than winning the lottery!

*His parents look at him in a new light.*

**Vincent** – I was sure my son was an unrecognised genius...

**Frederica** – Remember when he repeated the fifth grade? We had him tested to see if he wasn't a prodigy. We wondered if that's why he was so bad at school...

**Vincent** – Or because he was totally stupid...

**Frederica** – But the test didn't reveal anything abnormal.

**Jack** – Their tests aren't 100% reliable.

**Frederica** – What's the exchange rate for the dollar?

**Jack** – A little less than one euro, I think.

**Kevin** – He's offering me 10 million.

**Frederica** – Euros?

**Kevin** – Dollars.

**Vincent** – We'll tell him it's not enough.

**Frederica** – You think?

**Vincent** – If you want, I'll negotiate that for you... But we'll make him wait a bit first... Hey! You could invest your earnings in your father's business, make them grow...

**Kevin** – Yeah, we'll see...

**Vincent** – New technologies, the internet, all that is good for a quick hit... But for investing your capital, believe me... Industrial carpentry is solid...

**Kevin** – Yeah, maybe...

**Frederica** – And after all, you're a minor... You're not yet old enough to manage your money alone...

**Kevin** – I'll be 18 in a month...

**Vincent** – I'm still your father!

**Jack** – But who signed this message?

*Kevin looks at his screen.*

**Kevin** – Steve Jobs...

**Alan** – Steve Jobs, the CEO of Google?

**Jack** – Steve Jobs, that's Apple, isn't it?

**Alan** – Yes... And besides, he's dead... Long ago...

**Jack** – Maybe he started a start-up up there...

*Kevin looks at his screen again.*

**Kevin** – Damn, it's my friend Karim's number. He sent me the text. It's a joke...

*Disappointment from the parents.*

**Frederica** – We told you not to dream, Kevin...

**Vincent** – A genius, you say...

**Charles** – Well, I guess my little speech will have to wait... I suggest we go straight to the buffet...

*Alice hands a glass of champagne to Alan.*

**Alice** – Here, Alan, have something to drink.

**Alan** – Thank you.

**Flora** – Are you a postman too?

**Alan** – No, unfortunately. At least I would be outdoors and feel like I'm doing something. I'm a bank advisor.

**Alice** – Ah, yes...

**Alan** – Advisor... As if we were there to advise the clients...

**Alice** – And you, Charles? Don't you miss your postman job too much?

**Charles** – A little, yes. The contact with all those people during my round. Bringing them both good and bad news. A postman is a bit like a carrier pigeon...

**Alan** – Maybe in the past... Now we're just pigeons...

**Alice** – Unfortunately, handwritten letters delivered by mail are a thing of the past... Nowadays, Shakespeare would probably write text messages...

**Alan** – The Post Office has become just another bank. I was hired in a public service. And today, I'm reduced to pushing consumer loans on minimum wage workers already over-indebted.

**Charles** – Come on, there's more to life than work... So how do you do, Alan?

**Alan** – I'm doing badly, Charles... I swear. I'm really very depressed...

*Flora takes a photo of Charles before addressing him.*

**Flora** – Can I ask you some questions for my article? Since you didn't want to grace us with a speech...

**Charles** – Of course... *(To Alan)* Sorry, buddy, I'll be right back...

*Alan seems completely depressed. He speaks to Vincent.*

**Alan** – Have you ever thought about suicide?

*Vincent's phone rings.*

**Vincent** *(to Alan)* – Excuse me for a moment, I'll be with you shortly... *(To his phone interlocutor)* Yes? No, no, you're not bothering me. I actually wanted to reach out to discuss this small overdraft issue myself...

*He leaves the room to answer the call.*

**Alice** – I'll go fetch some bottles...

**Jack** – Can I help with the service?

**Alice** – Why not?

*Alice and Jack exit.*

**Flora** – You're the only writer we have in the town...

**Charles** – I figured as much; otherwise, you would have probably chosen to interview someone else...

**Flora** – So, Charles? What's this book about?

**Charles** – I'll dedicate a copy to you, so you can read it before writing your article...

**Flora** – That's kind, but I'd prefer you to give me a brief overview... My article needs to be out tomorrow morning...

**Charles** – I see... Well, let's say it's a bit autobiographical, actually...

**Flora** – "My Share of Shadow"...

**Charles** – It's meant to be taken with a sense of humour, obviously...

**Flora** – I see...

**Charles** – Really?

**Flora** – We all have our share of shadows, I suppose...

**Charles** – What's yours, Flora?

**Flora** – I killed my father and mother, and I've kept them stuffed in my attic for about ten years. I'll probably write a book about it someday. But we're here to talk about you, aren't we?

**Charles** – My share of shadow, I see it more like under a parasol... I hate being in the spotlight...

**Flora** – It's quite paradoxical... All authors seek some recognition, I suppose...

**Charles** – That's the subject of my novel, precisely.

*Alan approaches Kevin.*

**Alan** – Have you ever worked, my boy?

**Kevin** – No...

**Alan** – You'll see, when they assign you your social security number for your first job, it's like a life sentence...

*Kevin looks a bit taken aback. But his phone rings, and he answers.*

**Kevin** – Yes, Karim... You're really stupid, huh?

*He moves away to continue his conversation. Alan leaves the room. Vincent returns, apparently concerned.*

**Charles** – A problem?

**Vincent** – Just a minor cash flow issue. But you know what? I think I'll sell half the company to the Chinese to boost my development prospects. China is where you should have published your book. Can you imagine, over a billion potential readers? The Chinese, believe me, that's the future...

**Charles** – When I was young, we already imagined the Chinese invading the entire world. Today, it's an army of Chinese tourists parading in our streets with Louis Vuitton bags. In the end, we're not sure who won the Cold War...

*Alice returns, her clothes a bit disheveled and visibly flustered, followed by Jack, looking pleased.*

**Alice** – Please, that's enough...

**Jack** – Don't be so shy... Can't we have a little fun?

*Alice seeks refuge with Charles. Margaret gives Jack a wary look.*

**Margaret** – What where you doing in that kitchen?

**Jack** – I was just lending a hand...

**Margaret** – Lending a hand...?

**Charles** – Everything okay, Alice?

**Alice** – Yes, yes, it's fine...

*Catherine arrives, an attractive woman in her forties draped in a Columbo-style raincoat.*

**Catherine** – Hello, Charles!

**Charles** – Hello, Catherine! (*He gives her a kiss on the cheek, then turns to Alice*). She's my little sister.

**Catherine** – You sister...?

**Charles** – Yes... Well... The daughter of my parents, if you prefer...

**Alice** – Good afternoon, ma'am... But I didn't know Charles had a sister...

**Catherine** – Well, it's just that... I spent the last few years locked in a convent.

**Alice** – Really...?

**Catherine** – No, of course, I'm kidding... I just got out of jail...

**Alice** – Oh... Okay...

**Charles** – She's joking again, of course...

**Catherine** – So, my dear brother, I'm looking forward to reading your book...

**Charles** – It's my first novel, you know... I feel like I'm exposing myself a bit...

**Catherine** – I'm your sister, after all; I've seen you naked before. (*To Alice*) It was a very long time ago, don't worry.

**Charles** – And you, how have you been?

**Catherine** – I'd like to tell you that my life is exciting, but I love you too much to lie. And unlike you, I can't escape into literature to invent another one for myself.

**Charles** – My writing talent is quite limited. I don't invent another life, you know. Through my books, I simply laugh at my own. It helps me find it a bit more bearable.

*Gerald enters. He's dressed rather elegantly and has a somewhat mysterious air. He's holding a briefcase in his hand.*

**Alice** – And who's he?

**Charles** – No idea. After all, a book signing is like a theatre performance. Unexpectedly, someone the author doesn't know might accidentally slip into the audience...

**Alice** – What could be in that briefcase?

**Charles** – You can ask him yourself...

*Alice approaches Gerald.*

**Alice (to Gerald)** – Hello, can I offer you a drink?

**Gerald** – Why not?

**Alice** – Shall I take your coat?

*He hands her his coat, and she waits for him to give her the briefcase as well.*

**Gerald** – Thank you, but I prefer to keep my briefcase with me.

**Alice** – I'll be right back...

*Alice goes to store the coat backstage.*

**Catherine** – Are you here for the book signing?

**Gerald** – Seems to surprise you.

**Catherine** – No, no, not at all...

**Gerald** – Actually, I'm here somewhat by chance.

*Alice returns and hands a drink to Gerald.*

**Gerald** – Thank you.

**Catherine** – Are you a friend of Charles?

*Gerald takes a sip.*

**Gerald** – A very peculiar taste. You'll have to give me your supplier's details.

**Alice** – Yes, I have quite a good contact, indeed.

**Gerald** – A small producer in France, I imagine.

**Alice** – More of a petrol station around here, actually.

**Kevin** – Let me check if you managed to sell one or two copies on Amazon...

*He taps on his phone. Alan approaches Flora.*

**Alan** – You're a journalist, aren't you?

**Flora** – Yes...

**Alan** – You can't imagine the hell we're going through now, working as a financial advisor...

**Kevin** – No way!

**Charles** – What now?

**Kevin** – 2,700 copies!

**Charles** – What does that mean?

**Kevin** – It means you've gone viral! And big time!

**Charles** – Is this another joke of yours?

**Kevin** – Not at all, look! *(He shows the screen of his phone)* 2,700 copies sold! You've become a star, Grandpa! Well, under a pseudonym...

**Jack** – A star, let's not exaggerate, anyway... *(Worried)* What pseudonym?

**Kevin** – Charles Swindlemore von Hustlestein...

**Charles** – Charles Swindlemore von Hustlestein?

**Kevin** – I thought it sounded good for a novelist... My Part of Shadow by Charles Swindlemore von Hustlestein... Don't you think?

**Charles** – Oh, yes, that's...

**Alice** – So, you've gone to the other side? You've put your book up for sale on Amazon?

**Charles** – It's not me; it's my grandson! I didn't even know that...

**Frederica** – 2,700 copies? You must have made a little fortune then!

**Vincent** – How much per copy?

**Kevin** – 1 cent euro. It's not allowed to be free.

**Vincent** – Ah, okay.

*Vincent takes out a calculator from his pocket.*

**Vincent** – Let's see... 2,700 copies multiplied by 0.01 euro... That makes 27 euros...

**Frederica** – At least it will cover this sumptuous buffet...

**Kevin** – It might just be the beginning...

**Alice** – It still means that your book is likely to attract readers' interest.

**Vincent** – Yeah... But at 1 cent a book...

**Kevin** – We can always try raising the price.

**Frederica** – But would it still sell...

*Catherine joins Gerald near the buffet.*

**Catherine** – Are you a literature lover too?

**Gerald** – I love books, indeed. But I'm only in love with female readers. Especially when they're as charming as you...

**Catherine** – A nice phrase to avoid answering.

**Gerald** – What was the question?

*Amused smile from Catherine.*

**Catherine** – I guess it was something like: What do you do for a living, and what could be so precious in that briefcase that you don't want to leave it at the cloakroom with your coat?

**Gerald** – Let me cultivate my part of shadow a little longer too.

**Catherine** – You're a spy, right? Or a private detective? Investigating an adultery case?

*Jack intrudes into the conversation.*

**Jack (jokingly)** – It's not my wife sending you, is it?

*Embarrassed silence.*

**Gerald** – Excuse me for a moment.

*Gerald exits. Catherine seems disappointed.*

**Jack** – So, you're the author's sister.

**Catherine** – Yes, that's what they say...

**Jack** – And what do you do for a living?



**Catherine** – I work at the speaking clock. I'm the one who answers the phone.

**Jack** – That must be fascinating... And are you married?

**Catherine** – Not yet... But if I ever get married, I promise to have you as my best man. Excuse me, but if I don't go to the restroom right away, I might vomit on you. (*She's about to walk away.*) No, but don't worry, it has nothing to do with your physical appearance. I might have overindulged in this excellent kir...

*She exits.*

**Jack** (*to Charles*) – It's true; this kir has a strange taste. What exactly is it?

**Charles** – It's a cocktail, and I absolutely want to keep the recipe a secret. But its name will already give you a hint about its composition. I called it Kirose.

*The landline phone at the bookstore rings. Alice answers.*

**Alice** – Yes? Yes... Yes, of course. One moment, please...

**Alan** (*to Charles*) – Can I talk to you for a minute? I'm really afraid of doing something stupid, you know...

**Alice** (*to Charles*) – It's for you... A publisher...

*She hands him the receiver.*

**Charles** (*to Alan*) – I'm all yours right away...

*Charles takes the receiver. Alan exits, looking desperate.*

**Charles** – Hello? Yes... Really? Yes, I am very honoured... Good... Alright... I will call you soon to let you know my decision... Okay.

*He hangs up. Catherine returns with Gerald.*

**Alice** – Am I dreaming, or was that... the biggest publisher in the country?

**Charles** – It was them.

**Alice** – It's not another joke, is it?

**Charles** – I don't think so, no.

**Alice** – So?

**Charles** – They want to publish my novel.

**Alice** – That's wonderful! But how...?

**Kevin** – The buzz! On Amazon! (*Looking at his phone*) Sales went up to 53,000 copies in just a few hours! Apparently, old-school publishers also follow the statistics...

**Margaret** – My husband is going to publish a book?

**Catherine** – He had already published one, hadn't he?

**Margaret** – Yes, well, I mean... Now he could even win the Nobel... Can you imagine the customers' reactions at the salon if he made the cover of a magazine? (*To Flora*) Do you think my husband could make the cover of celebrity magazine?

**Flora** – If he wins the Nobel, certainly.

**Margaret** – It seems like you're not happy about it?

**Charles** – They want exclusive rights to this novel and offer me an advance on the next one...

**Frederica** – How much?

**Charles** – 50.

**Vincent** – 50 euros?

**Charles** – 50,000.

**Alice** – 50,000 euros?

**Margaret** – And you didn't say yes right away?

**Charles** – You don't sell the rights to a novel like you sell a used car... Let's say I'd prefer to remain the master of my work.

**Margaret** – Your work?

**Charles** – And this publisher rejected three of my manuscripts in the last ten years, including this one... And now, because I sold a few thousand copies on Amazon...

**Alice** – They're jumping on the bandwagon...

**Margaret** – The important thing is that you're published, isn't it? You might even get on TV...

**Charles** – Yes... At four in the morning, maybe...

**Alice** – Think about it, Charles... It's a proposal that could change your life...

**Charles** – Precisely... I'm not sure I want all this fuss now.

**Margaret** – But today, people would kill to be on TV!

**Charles** – What's the point of changing my life at my age? I prefer to stay calm. Have my works read by those around me. My friends. People who really know me and appreciate me...

**Margaret** – But your friends doesn't care about your novels! You tell your life, and they already know it!

**Vincent** – Your life has no interest!

**Alice** – It depends on how you tell it...

**Margaret** – Think for a minute, Charles! At least this can make us some money.

**Charles** – Us?

*Alice sees fit to lighten the mood.*

**Alice** – Does anyone want something else to drink? To celebrate the virtual success of this novel...

**Margaret** – I'm going to take charge of your career; you'll see.

**Gerald (to Catherine)** – Family... It's important, family...

**Catherine** – Mmm...

**Gerald** – And you?

**Catherine** – Me?

**Gerald** – What do you do for a living?

**Catherine** – When you find out what I do, you might be horribly disappointed... You're right, it's better to keep the suspense going as long as possible.

**Gerald** – True. We are currently experiencing the most beautiful moment of our love. That magical moment where we still know nothing about each other.

**Catherine** – In twenty years, perhaps, sitting on our couch watching TV, we'll fondly remember this wonderful moment when we didn't yet know who the other really was.

**Gerald** – And the memory of this shadowy part will make our relationship last.

*Paula, the customer, returns.*

**Paula** – Excuse me for bothering you; I'm looking for a printer cartridge... Here, this is the reference.

**Alice** – I'll get that for you right away... There you go, 47 euros 50.

**Paula** – Oh yes, quite pricey.

**Alice** – Yes, it is. And yet, this is just a compatible one. The original cartridge costs more than the printer.

**Paula** – It's for printing an ebook.

**Alice** – At that price, it's cheaper to buy a paper copy at the bookstore, isn't it?

**Paula** – True... Anyway, thank you.

*She leaves.*

**Alice** – So, what are you going to do?

**Margaret** – But he'll sign with that publisher, of course! And pocket that 50,000 euros cheque!

**Alice** – It's true; that would be good for the bookstore too...

*Alan returns with a jerrycan in hand. No one pays attention to him. He pours the contents of the jerrycan over his head. Everyone watches him, bewildered.*

**Flora** – I think I've got a scoop here.

**Catherine** – But he needs to be stopped!

**Charles** – It's non-alcoholic cider...

*Alan takes out a lighter and tries to set his clothes on fire, obviously without success.*

**Flora** – This is the first time I've seen someone trying to self-immolate with apple juice... Is this a happening you've specially organised for the book launch to alert the public about the programmed death of neighbourhood bookstores?

**Charles** – Come on, Alan...

*Charles takes him by the arm and leads him away. General astonishment.*

**Alice** – Everything's fine. It was just a depressed bank advisor looking for his fifteen minutes of fame.

**Frederica** – It's crazy, though. He could have set it on fire. With all this paper around us.

**Vincent** – At least digital books are like PVC windows. They're non-flammable.

*Gerald then crosses the stage to head to the bar, still holding his briefcase. In the middle, he gets bumped by Jack, who walks without looking ahead.*

**Jack** – Oh, sorry...

*The briefcase opens, and bundles of banknotes spill out. General consternation.*

**Gerald** – Excuse me...

*Undisturbed, Gerald picks up the banknotes, and in the general silence, puts them back in the briefcase, which he closes.*

**Flora** – This is the first time I've covered a book signing in a neighbourhood bookstore. I didn't think it would be this eventful...

**Alice** – And yet, tonight is rather calm... Do you really not want to drink something?

**Flora** – Yes, I'd like something now...

*Alice hands her a glass, which Flora mechanically empties.*

**Flora** – It's even surprising that after dousing himself with this, he didn't really catch fire...

*Charles returns.*

**Margaret** – So?

**Charles** – He'll rest a bit, and he'll be fine...

**Margaret** – I was asking about your book!

**Charles** – I've decided not to sign.

**Gerald** – It's an independent spirit that honours you...

**Margaret** – We didn't ask you anything!

**Frederica** – Are you joking, Dad?

**Charles** – Maybe ten years ago. It happens when I no longer desire it. I prefer to remain free. The system didn't want me. Now, I don't want this system. I'm nearly sixty; I no longer chase after money or fame.

**Margaret** – As far as money is concerned, speak for yourself...

**Charles** – I won't entrust my book to those dusty publishers who always ignored me because I wasn't part of the family.

**Frederica** – The family?

**Vincent** – It's a metaphor, Frederica...

**Charles** – And I don't want writing to become a job for me, even if it's a well-paid one.

**Margaret** – You disappoint me, Charles...

**Vincent** – You disappoint all of us a lot...

**Frederica** – You've always disappointed us.

**Margaret** – You prefer to remain a failure, is that it?

**Charles** – Yes, I think it's exactly what it is. Over time, I've discovered there's a certain greatness in wanting to remain a failure.

**Frederica** – You are selfish...

**Margaret** – I'm divorcing you, Charles... I've had enough of your grand airs and your little phrases... (*Pointing to Gerald*) And no need to bankrupt yourself on a private detective. Everyone here knows well that I'm sleeping with the deputy mayor...

**Frederica** – You're sleeping with the deputy to culture?

**Vincent** – Who isn't sleeping with the deputy to culture...

**Flora** – But he's not the deputy to culture! He is the deputy to garbage!

**Jack** – I'm replacing him...

**Kevin** – Anyway, I think open data is very trendy...

**Charles** – You're right, Kevin. I'll take you as a webmaster. We'll make our own site, and I'll offer all my novels for free download! That way, even the Chinese can know about my dark side! Right, Vincent?

**Vincent** – But then you won't make any money!

**Charles** – It will bring me fame!

**Kevin** – We're going to screw the system, Grandpa!

**Charles** – Yes, Kevin! Let's fuck the system!

**Flora** – If you're looking for a press attaché...

**Gerald** – Does this champagne have a bit of shale gas, or am I mistaken?

**Jack** – It seems that the Champagne region is full of it.

*Vincent approaches Gerald.*

**Vincent** – I understood you have some savings to invest. Can I recommend a good investment? The PVC window market is exploding in China right now...

**Gerald** – Sorry, but I prefer exotic wood... Excuse me for a moment? (*He goes to Charles.*) So, this is your first novel?

**Charles** – Yes. I imagine you haven't read it either.

**Gerald** – No, but it makes me want to.

*Charles hands him a book.*

**Charles** – Here, have a copy. I'll give it to you if you don't ask me for a dedication. I realise I'm not at all suited for this kind of exercise...

**Gerald** – Thank you... I thought I'd meet the deputy to culture here...

**Charles** – From what I just heard, he was arrested this morning for embezzlement of public funds. Excuse me...

*He goes towards Alice. Gerald leaves.*

**Charles** – Can I ask for your phone number?

**Alice** – Why, when I'm right here beside you?

*Charles hands her his phone.*

**Charles** – Go ahead!

*Alice enters her number into Charles's phone. Charles looks at the screen.*

**Charles** – 13% compatibility...

**Alice** – Is that not very encouraging?

**Charles** – So why do I still want to give it a try?

**Alice** – We could share the same phone. This means that the sum of our respective numbers would be exactly the same...

*Complicit smiles. Alan returns.*

**Flora** – So, my dear? What prompted you to take such a desperate step? It might make a good article for my newspaper...

**Alan** – I'll explain everything to you...

*Flora's mobile phone rings.*

**Flora** – Excuse me for a moment... Yes, yes, I'm coming... Okay, see you in a bit...  
(*To Alan*) I'm sorry, but I won't have time right now. Can I contact you later?

*Flora is about to leave. Paula, the customer, returns.*

**Paula** – I'm really sorry, but the cartridge you sold me is not compatible with my printer...

**Alice** – Ah... Compatibility is not an exact science.

**Paula** – Unlike accounting.

**Alice** – We'll look into it...

*Charles's mobile phone rings.*

**Charles** – Hello? Yes... Please wait a minute... (*To Alice*) It's a producer who wants to adapt my novel into a film. He's thinking of casting Gerald Depardieu for the lead role... (*To the person on the phone*) I'll transfer you to my agent...

*He hands the phone to Alice, surprised and flattered.*

**Alice** – Yes... Yes, I'm the agent for Charles Swindlemore von... Of course, but... I won't hide that we already have another quite tempting offer. Alright... Thank you... So, talk to you soon... He's offering double what the other producer is proposing.

**Kevin** – What other producer?

**Charles** – And then?

**Alice** – I accepted...

**Charles** – What an adventure...

*The others are amazed.*

**Alice** – Double is fantastic!

**Charles** – But double of what?

*Paula approaches Charles, but she is intercepted by Jack.*

**Jack** – May I offer you a drink?

**Paula** – Why? Is the buffet not free?

*Paula continues towards Charles.*

**Paula** – I overheard your conversation... So, you're Charles Swindlemore von Hustlestein...? I actually downloaded your novel on Amazon because I saw it was topping the sales charts...

**Charles** – Have you read it?

**Paula** – Not yet. I hate reading on a screen. But I didn't know it was published on paper... Otherwise, I wouldn't have spent a fortune on ink cartridges for my printer. Can you sign a copy for me?

**Charles** – Of course... What's your name?

**Paula** – Paula.

*He takes a book from the stack, scribbles a dedication on the title page, and hands her the novel.*

**Charles** – There you go, Paula. You can read it on the beach...

**Paula** – Thank you...

**Charles** – Didn't your hairdresser keep you waiting too long?

**Paula** – Hairdressers, you know... They are so talkative. With all you hear at the hair salon, I assure you, one could write a novel.

**Charles** – I should go more often then...

**Paula** – Here, for instance, from what I heard earlier, the salon owner would have a lover...

**Charles** – No way?

**Paula** – Anyway, congratulations on your novel!

*Margaret approaches.*

**Margaret** – That's my husband...

**Charles** – Was my husband, Margaret... Was...

*Charles turns away from Margaret.*

**Kevin** – I'm his manager... Can I help you?

*Kevin's mother seems offended.*

**Paula** – Help me?

**Kevin** – You could start by giving me your phone number, just in case?

**Paula** – Oh, yes, of course...



**Kevin** – I'm listening.

**Paula** – 01 47 20 00 01.

**Kevin** – 84%! Excellent...

**Paula** – It's a pizzas delivery number. Are you of legal age, at least?

**Kevin** – Well, I will be in a few months...

*Amused smile from Paula.*

**Catherine** – It's an app my nephew invented. The degree of romantic compatibility based on the comparative analysis of each other's phone numbers.

**Gerald** – I don't know if it works, but it's amusing.

**Catherine** – Anyway, love, you never know what it depends on, so why not numerology.

**Gerald** – Will you leave me your mobile number?

**Catherine** – You'll laugh, but I don't have one...

*Exchange of smiles.*

**Charles** – So, Alice, happy?

**Alice** – Very...

*The author feels very close to the bookseller. Alan approaches, refreshed in his suit and tie.*

**Alan** – Sorry, but it's the end of my lunch break. If I don't want to be late. But I think it did me good to chat with all of you...

**Alice** – That's great, that's great...

**Charles** – It was nice to see you too, Alan... Call me if you're feeling down, promise?

**Alan** – I promise.

**Charles** – By the way, I didn't even sign my book for you!

*Charles takes a book from the stack, scribbles a few words on the first page, and hands it to Alan who reads the dedication.*

**Alan** – To my friend Alan... Thank you, that's kind...

*Alan leaves. Charles doesn't even dare to look at Alice.*

**Charles** – Well... It's not always easy to come up with an original word for everyone...

**Catherine (to Gerald)** – Are you really a private detective?

**Gerald** – No.

**Catherine** – Don't keep me in suspense any longer, I might get bored.

**Gerald** – Let's say I'm in business.

**Catherine** – And business seems to be going well apparently.

**Gerald** – Well you know... It's all about having a bit of imagination and trying your luck... Besides, Kevin doesn't know it yet, but I'm going to buy his app.

**Catherine** – So he's really going to become a millionaire?

**Gerald** – I'll give him a few hundred euros. On the other hand, I'll offer him a research and development position in the startup I just created in the Cayman Islands. His idea is completely silly, but at least he has ideas.

**Catherine** – The Cayman Islands... So, that's your dark side...

**Gerald** – I told you that you would be disappointed when you found out who I was...

**Catherine** – I didn't say I was disappointed.

**Gerald** – Would you like a spot in the shade under my parasol?

**Catherine** – In the Cayman Islands? I'm a bit afraid of old crocodiles...

**Gerald** – In my tax haven, there are just a few sharks. But no one goes to the Cayman Islands for its beaches, right? And I have my own swimming pool... So, is it a yes?

**Catherine** – Why not? I'll enter the convent right after... But what brought you to this bookstore today?

**Gerald** – Destiny, probably. And a suitcase full of money that I was supposed to hand over to the deputy to culture of your charming town. But apparently, he couldn't make it...

**Catherine** – He must have had a prior engagement... I knew you were a friend of the arts and letters. I'm also discovering you're a generous patron.

**Gerald** – Don't tell anyone, but in this case, it's more of an obscure matter of covert financing, tax fraud, and money laundering.

**Catherine** – Yes, that's what I was saying.

**Gerald** – But you still haven't told me what you do.

**Catherine** – I'm an inspector at the financial crime unit. We get paid peanuts, you know... But I was also going to offer you a spot in the shade...

**Gerald** – You hide your game well.

**Catherine** – Shall I handcuff you right away, or do we wait until we're outside?

**Gerald** – Handcuffs are just the symbol of the love that will unite us for life, aren't they?

**Catherine** – Let me keep my share of mystery for a few more minutes...

*They both exit. Fade to black.*

**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*  
*Back to stage*  
*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 13<sup>th</sup>*  
*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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