

La Comédiathèque

The President's Draw

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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In the only bar of a village emptied by rural exodus, the two owners and their few remaining customers create fake news stories to escape their bleak fate—some of which could become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Characters

Robert and Maria: Bar owners (husband and wife)
Chris and Jackie: Undertakers (any gender)
Nicky and Morgan: Students (any gender)
Fred and Alex: Politicians (any gender)
Sam and Max: Journalists (any gender)

*Fred and Alex can be played by the same actors who play Nicky and Morgan.
Sam and Max can be played by the same actors who play Chris and Jackie.*

*In this version, all character couples are mixed-gender.
However, all characters in the play, except for Robert and Maria, are gender-neutral. This allows for a wide variety of casting possibilities:*

10 : 9M/1W, 8M/2W, 7M/3W, 6M/4W, 5M/5W, 4M/6W, 3M/7W, 2M/1W, 1M/9W
9 : 8M/1W, 7M/2W, 6M/3W, 5M/4W, 4M/5W, 3M/6W, 2M/7W, 1M/8W
8 : 7M/1W, 6M/2W, 5M/3W, 4M/4W, 3M/5W, 2M/6W, 1M/7W
7 : 6M/1W, 5M/2W, 4M/3W, 3M/4W, 2M/5W, 1M/6W
6 : 5M/1W, 4M/2W, 3M/3W, 2M/4W, 1M/5W

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A bar. Behind the counter, Robert, the owner, is flipping through a newspaper, grumbling occasionally. Maria, the owner's wife, is wiping glasses. Two young people, Nicky and Morgan, are seated at a table with a Coke in front of them. They're wearing T-shirts that display their environmental and vegan beliefs. A newspaper is lying on their table.

Maria – You look upset. What's wrong?

Robert – What's wrong? You're asking me what's wrong?

Maria – Yes, Robert, what's bothering you?

Robert – Everything is a mess in this country, my poor Maria! Nothing works!

She looks under the counter.

Maria – Well, the dishwasher isn't working. Could you take a look at it?

Robert – I'm telling you, they're all corrupt.

She glances out the bistro's window.

Maria – Yeah... Even the weather's rubbish.

Robert – What?

Maria – It's April, but the weather's awful, isn't it?

Robert – Yeah, it's terrible.

Maria – We got married thirty years ago in April. Do you remember? The weather was beautiful back then.

Robert – Climate change, my arse. It's just freezing here, that's all.

Maria – Or maybe it's us...

Robert – What do you mean, "us"?

Maria – As we get older, we feel the cold more.

Robert looks at the two young people sitting at the table.

Robert – Look at these two young ones, sitting there in T-shirts.

The two young people share a kiss.

Maria – At least they're not cold.

Robert – Yeah...

Maria – They're young...

Robert – It won't last forever.

Maria – They still have their illusions...

Robert – Vegan, huh? But they're drinking Coke.

Maria – Why? Is there meat in Coca-Cola?

Robert – Yeah, I understand myself.

Maria – You might be the only one who does.

Robert – And to think we're supposed to count on them to pay for our pensions.

Maria – They'd have to find jobs first. There's not much work around here since they closed down the tyre factory to move it to Belarus...

Robert – To find a job, they'd need to be looking for one!

Maria – I can't blame them for having fun. When they're our age...

Robert – What about when they're our age?

Maria – I've always wondered why workers burn tyres when they go on strike. Do you know why?

Robert isn't listening.

Robert – Tyres?

Maria – Why do they burn tyres? Every time we see strikers on the news, they're burning tyres. Do you know why?

Robert – At least in their dodgy factory, they could burn brand-new tyres.

Maria – Burning tyres, really... What's that about?

Robert – What do you want them to burn...?

Maria – I guess it's a tradition.

Robert – Right. Probably goes back to the Middle Ages...

Maria – I'm sure if Joan of Arc were around today, they'd burn her on a pile of tyres in the middle of a roundabout.

Robert – Joan of Arc...

Maria – At least today's young people don't burn tyres.

Robert – No, you're right. They don't burn tyres... They prefer cars...

Maria – Maybe in the city, but around here... The only time our car caught fire was when you left the barbecue ashes in the boot.

Robert – I'm telling you... If it were up to me, I'd bring back military service... and not just for twelve months, believe me.

Maria – Oh really? Did you do military service?

Robert – Sort of...I was discharged early.

Maria – Sure... And you never told me why...

Robert – Trust me, you're better off not knowing.

Chris and Jackie enter, dressed in funeral service uniforms.

Chris – Good morning, ladies and gentlemen...

Maria – Ah, here come the undertakers.

Jackie – We prefer to be called 'funeral directors' these days.

Robert – Might as well call you vultures. When you show up, there's usually a stiff nearby.

Maria – No kidding. Whenever you walk into the bar, I wonder if you're here to pick up me.

Chris – Your day will come, just wait. With us, everyone eventually becomes a customer.

Jackie – Otherwise, you could say, "Look, it's the mayor and his deputy." That would sound a bit cheerier.

Robert – Cheerier? Don't make me laugh. When the mayor and his deputy in a town are undertakers, it's already a dead-end, isn't it?

Chris – You're right. There are only about thirty of us left here. If this keeps up, it'll turn into a ghost village.

Maria – There are more people in the cemetery than at the church, that's for sure.

Robert – And there are even fewer people at the bar than at the church.

Chris – Yeah, there's hardly anyone here except retirees.

Jackie – The priest can barely find anyone to be altar servers.

Maria – To be fair... who'd be crazy enough to leave their kid with a priest?

Jackie – Anyway, we're not short of work these days, with this virus going around.

Maria – So you're among those profiting from the crisis, then.

Chris – Yeah... We might even hire more staff. But it's like in the restaurant business—in our line of work, finding skilled people is tough.

Jackie – Yeah, it's not exactly the most attractive career path for them.

Robert points at the two young people with a nod of his head.

Robert – Well, you've got two right there looking for a job...

Jackie – Careful, we don't just hire anyone. Cremations require skill. It's not as simple as putting a pizza in the oven or lighting a barbecue.

Maria – Even with barbecues... Some people are crazy enough to put the ashes in the boot of their car...

Chris – Yeah... When we retire, I don't know who'll take over.

Robert – Maybe some adventurous pizza chefs from Belarus.

Jackie – In the meantime, let's have a drink.

Chris – Come on, Maria, pour us a beer. They say it protects against all illnesses.

Jackie – And there are no side effects.

Chris – Although they've reported some cases of liver cirrhosis.

Robert – See! These two are real patriots. They drink domestic beer. They don't go for imported drinks.

Maria serves them two beers. From their table, the young people start to talk.

Morgan – This place is dead boring.

Nicky – It's the only bar for thirty kilometres.

Morgan – Can you even call this a bar? If there were at least a jukebox, a pinball machine, or a pool table, it'd feel a bit retro. But it's more like a scene from a zombie movie here.

Nicky – At least those folks over there never seem to get bored.

Morgan – Yeah... Looks like they're off to a strong start this morning...

Nicky – It's not even eight o'clock, and they're already drinking.

Morgan – Just look at their degenerate faces...

Nicky – Or maybe it's the effect of the virus...

Morgan – Who knows, maybe it's gone to their heads.

Nicky – Must be an alcohol-resistant strain, then. Because with them, even the brain might be pretty soaked.

Morgan – They take hand sanitiser orally. A drop of water between two shots of whisky.

Nicky – Maybe they're mutating too, just like the virus.

Morgan – Do you know how viruses mutate?

Nicky – No.

Morgan – Normally, they replicate identically, but every time, there are little errors in the reproduction process.

Nicky – Darwin's principle of natural selection, right? Except here, it's always the duds that end up taking over.

Morgan – You're right, they seem to get dumber and dumber...

Nicky – And the stupidity virus, it's still evolving...

Morgan – Do you know what they remind me of?

Nicky – No... Cockroaches? Apparently, cockroaches can keep living even after you've cut off their heads.

Morgan – Good point, they don't seem to use their heads much. No, I was thinking more like termites.

Nicky – I see what you mean.

Morgan – Social creatures that eat away at the structure of their own homes.

Nicky – Until the roof comes crashing down on their heads...

Morgan – Sounds like a pretty good metaphor for humanity, climate change, and the impending apocalypse.

Sighs.

Nicky – What can we do to stop it?

Morgan – Stop the end of the world? I don't have a clue. Honestly, I've kind of given up on politics.

Nicky – Same. I don't think you can fix things from the top down.

Morgan – People keep criticizing the government. But we have the government we deserve, don't we? When people stop acting like idiots, they'll get leaders who are actually competent.

Nicky – It's kind of like termites. The queen doesn't actually run anything – she just reproduces the system by laying eggs. As long as termites stay termites, there's no point in changing the queen.

Morgan – And as long as fools stay fools, there's no point in changing the king of fools.

Nicky – Yeah...

Morgan – Hey, I've got a philosophy exam topic: "Are the biggest fools destined to always be the majority among humans?"

Nicky – You'd need clinical trials to prove it... So far, our national variant of stupidity has only managed to prevail within the country.

Morgan – We can't even export our idiots. Makes you lose faith in the nation

Nicky – Meanwhile, let's see how far they'll go.

Morgan – I'm sure they'll surprise us... You ready?

Nicky – I'm all in.

Morgan – Let the show begin...

They stand up.

Morgan – Ladies and gentlemen...

Nicky – Have a good day...

The others nod in reply. They leave.

Maria – At least they're polite.

Robert – I didn't know there were still young people around here... Do you know them?

Maria – Maybe they came to visit their grandparents.

Chris – Or they came for the funeral.

Robert – What funeral?

Jackie – The body we've got in the van. He was the oldest resident in the village.

Maria – In a village of thirty people, it's not hard to be the oldest.

Robert – And it's even easier to be the mayor... Especially when you're the only candidate...

Chris – You could've run for office! You've already got lots of ideas to save the country, managing a tiny village should be a piece of cake.

Robert – Oh, yeah, right... So who's the oldest now?

Jackie – Why? Are you applying for the position?

Robert doesn't answer and starts clearing the table.

Robert – They could've taken their newspaper... This isn't a landfill...

Jackie – At least they can read.

Robert – See, Maria... They're not as polite as you thought...

Maria – Try being a bit nicer to the customers, okay? It's not like we're downing in business!

Chris – What are they doing in a bar, anyway? Shouldn't they be at school or work?

Maria – Probably the same thing as you lot, I suppose.

Jackie – At dawn, both the big cats and the young gazelles come to quench their thirst in the river's clear waters...

Chris – While keeping an eye out for the old crocodiles lurking in the mud.

Maria is taken aback by this cryptic comment.

Maria – It's not very warm for April, is it? *(No reaction from the two undertakers)* I'm wondering if I should turn the heating back on... *(Pause)* You wouldn't happen to know anything about dishwashers, would you?

The undertakers act as if they don't.

Jackie – If it were an oven, maybe...

Maria – I swear... They want to change the world but can't even fix a dishwasher.

Robert returns to the counter with the glasses and the newspaper. He clears the tray. Then he takes a look at the paper.

Robert (*reading*) – A woman kills her violent husband with a hunting rifle, cuts up the body with a chainsaw, and dissolves it in a bath of lye...

Chris – So that's what women's liberation leads to...

Maria – They say the husband was violent.

Robert – You'd be capable of doing that, wouldn't you?

Maria – If you ever try to hit me, you'll find out.

Robert – And she got acquitted!

Chris – Soon they'll be giving them medals.

Maria – Why not? One less scumbag. At least that one won't be hurting anyone else. True or not?

Clearly, no one wants to argue with her.

Jackie – Yeah...

Robert goes back to reading. A headline on the front page catches his attention.

Robert – I can't believe it...

Chris – What's up?

Robert – It's on the front page, and I didn't even notice. Usually, I go straight to the crime stories.

Jackie – Another murder?

Robert (*reading*) – Due to the record-low voter turnout in the last election, presidential elections by universal suffrage have been canceled.

Chris – You're kidding...

Robert (*continuing to read*) – The next President of the Republic will be chosen by lottery from all registered voters on the electoral roll.

Maria – That's not possible...

Robert – The elections will be organised by The National Lottery...

Chris – What day is it?

Maria – I don't know...

Jackie – Isn't it April Fool's Day?

Chris – I thought it was the second?

Maria – Are you sure you're not reading yesterday's paper?

Robert checks the newspaper.

Robert – If it's the second, then I'm reading tomorrow's paper.

Jackie – Tomorrow's paper?

Robert (*pointing to the headline*) – It says April 3rd, right here.

A moment of confusion.

Chris – If the politicians don't want to govern anymore, what's the world coming to?

Jackie – They just don't know what to come up with next...

Robert – They must really think we're a bunch of idiots.

Maria – You should be happy! You all have plenty of ideas to save the country...

Chris – Absolutely...

Jackie – No doubt about it...

Robert – Either way, it's not likely to be one of us.

Maria – Why not? A one-in-fifty-million chance. Even in the lottery, someone has to win.

Jackie – I don't believe it.

Maria – Why not?

Chris – Because it's all rigged!

Jackie – Exactly. It's just another scam...

Robert – The one who gets chosen will end up being a millionaire, you'll see.

Chris – You can't be naive. This is all fixed in advance.

Maria – Do you really think so?

Jackie – Of course!

Chris – Come on, Maria, pour us another round. Let's make sure we're fully immune.

Jackie – Yeah, me too, I still feel a bit vulnerable...

Chris – With all these variants coming in: the Chinese, the Indians, the Brazilians...

Robert – The Africans...

Jackie – The English...

Maria – The Irish...

Chris – Are you saying that for me?

Robert – Are you Irish?

Chris – Irish on my mum's side.

Jackie – And Scottish because of a friend of his dad's.

Maria fills the glasses.

Maria – Here you go...

Robert – Beer is good for everything.

Chris – It should be covered by health insurance.

Maria – Yeah, but even so you'd better settle your bill...

Robert looks at the newspaper again.

Robert (to Maria) – What do you think?

Maria – Oh, no... I don't get involved in politics.

Robert – I'm asking about today's date! What's the date today?

Maria – Give me a second... Yesterday was the first, right?

Jackie – So today must be the second.

Chris – And this really is tomorrow's paper?

Jackie – If only... I haven't even placed my horse bets yet. What's the winning combination?

Robert puts the newspaper on the counter. Maria takes a peek at it.

Maria – Hey, the County Council is giving us a compost bin.

Jackie – A compost bin? What's that for?

Maria – To save the planet, apparently.

Robert – A compost bin... I'm telling you, they really think we're idiots.

Maria – Yeah... Sometimes I wonder if they're right.

Jackie (to Chris) – Do you have a compost bin?

Chris – I've got a manure heap in my yard.

Robert – Back in our day, a compost bin was just a manure heap.

Jackie – That's true... Every family used to have a manure heap.

Chris (sententious) – The family is where there's a manure heap.

Robert – There have always been manure heaps everywhere.

Jackie – A rooster on a manure heap. It's even a symbol of France.

Chris – And the French haven't saved the planet with that...

Maria – I'm sure they were waiting for you to do that... Didn't you tell me you were hearing voices last time?

Robert – It's called tinnitus, not voices. Joan of Arc didn't have tinnitus, did she?

Maria – Who knows...

Chris takes a look at the newspaper.

Chris – So it's not a joke? They're really going to choose the next President of the Republic by lottery?

Jackie – Can you imagine? What if it were me...

Robert – If I were President, I know exactly what I'd do.

Chris – Same here.

Jackie – Yeah...

Robert – With everything that's going on right now.

Chris – For sure.

Jackie – It's always the same ones causing trouble.

Robert – We know who they are, and we do nothing.

A pause.

Maria – Who are they?

Robert – What?

Maria – Who?

Robert – Who who?

Maria – Who's causing all the trouble? You said you knew who it was. Well, tell us then, since you're so clever.

Robert – Yeah, well, you know what I mean...

Maria – Well, I don't. Can you be more specific?

Robert – Otherwise, I'll be accused of... (*To the undertakers*) You guys know who I'm talking about, right?

Jackie – Of course... There are more and more of them...

Maria – Right... And are there many of them around here?

Robert – Not around here, but...

Chris – Not yet.

Maria – If things keep going like this, there won't be anyone left around here. The old folks are dying. The young ones are leaving. Even the refugees don't want to settle here...

Robert – The refugees...

Jackie – Soon we'll be the refugees. Once we've finished burying everyone.

Chris – Refugees from rural exodus, offshoring...

A pause.

Robert – What we need is a good war.

Jackie – That would get everyone on the same page.

Chris – And it would boost the economy.

Jackie – Not to mention science. The greatest discoveries are made during wartime, that's well known. Penicillin, the atomic bomb, the microwave oven, the condom...

Robert – The condom? Are you sure?

Jackie – I think so.

Maria – And, of course, you'd be the ones to start this war...

Robert – Why not?

Maria – You didn't even do your military service!

Robert – Yeah, well... we're too old for that now, anyway...

Chris – Let the young ones do it.

Jackie – It'll be a learning experience for them.

Maria – A war... With whom, exactly?

Chris – That's the problem with Europe, my dear Maria. We don't have anyone nearby to fight with anymore.

Jackie – The Franco-German friendship, that's all they talk about.

Chris – And anywhere else, well... it's just too far.

Robert – We don't have the resources for it, obviously...

Chris – In the days when our country was great, we had world wars. Then we had to settle for colonial wars...

Robert – And now, we can barely afford to send the army to patrol our own streets...

Chris – So, all those soldiers end up getting bored...

Robert – And when they get bored, they end up getting restless.

A pause.

Jackie – Or a good old civil war.

Robert – Yeah... a military coup.

Chris – A putsch.

Jackie – A pronun... a pronun...

Maria – A pronunciamiento.

Jackie – That's it... A pronunciamiento... Not easy to say...

Maria – A dictatorship? Is that what you want...?

Robert – Now, now, no need to go overboard...

Jackie – Maybe not a dictatorship, but...

Chris – Take Franco. Everyone called him a dictator. But when August came around, everyone went on holidays to the Costa Brava.

Jackie – Well... So maybe things weren't that bad in Spain.

Robert – Yeah...

Maria – But during the Civil War, your parents crossed the Pyrenees on foot in the snow to seek refuge in France, didn't they?

Robert – Yes...

Maria – Why didn't they just go on holidays to the Costa Brava instead? Wait for it all to blow over...

Robert clearly doesn't know what to say.

Jackie – Yeah, well... It's all politics and whatnot...

Chris – And we'll never have any say in it, anyway.

Robert – It's always the same people lining their pockets.

Jackie – And now they don't even want to get their hands dirty. The National Lottery – what does that even mean?

They down their drinks. Silence.

Chris – What a bunch of idiots, I swear...

Another awkward silence.

Robert – Come on, pour us another round, Maria. My treat...

Maria refills their glasses. They drink in silence.

Jackie – Politicians are like viruses. Once you get rid of one strain, it mutates, and another one pops up.

Chris – I don't even vote anymore, to be honest.

Robert – Me neither.

Jackie – Only one in ten voters actually bothers to turn up. And nobody wants to hear about mandatory voting.

Robert – That's why they've decided to choose the next president by lottery. Given how things are going...

A pause.

Maria – And what would you do, then?

Robert – What?

Maria – You said, "If I were president, trust me, I'd know what to do." So what would you do?

Robert is at a loss for words.

Chris – Oh, that's not too hard to answer.

Jackie – To start with, you'd...

Pause.

Robert – There's just so much to do... We wouldn't even know where to begin, right?

Maria – Yeah, but what's the first thing you'd do?

Robert – Well... I'd start by getting rid of roundabouts, that's what.

Jackie – Roundabouts?

Robert – Roundabouts, yeah! Back in the day, there were no roundabouts, and we got along just fine, didn't we?

Chris – Yeah...

Robert – No, but think about it! When we were young, there weren't any roundabouts, were there?

Jackie – No, that's true.

Robert – Personally, I never saw a roundabout until I was twenty. What about you?

Chris – The first roundabout I saw was when I went to the capital. I'd never seen one before.

Jackie – A roundabout, we'd go to the capital to see it, like we were going to see the Eiffel Tower.

Chris – Besides, I think it was the only roundabout in the country at that time.

Robert – There definitely weren't any around here.

Jackie – None, that's right.

Chris – And then, little by little, from the capital, they spread roundabouts all over the country.

Jackie – Now, every town has a church and a roundabout.

Chris – The roundabout is the symbol of the centralism that oppresses this country.

Robert – We're surrounded by roundabouts, I'm telling you! True or not?

Jackie – Yeah, it's true.

Robert – And what do they build all these roundabouts with?

Chris – Our taxes.

Jackie – Yeah.

Robert – I'd start by getting rid of roundabouts, and then I'd get rid of taxes.

Chris – Not a bad idea...

Robert – Making us pay for roundabouts just to have us going in circles. What's the point of that?

Jackie – None, you're right, Robert.

Maria – And roundabouts – they're always magnets for a bunch of idiots burning tyres.

Robert – I'd get rid of roundabouts, taxes, and the State while I'm at it.

Chris – Yeah...

Pause.

Maria – Maybe not the State, though... Otherwise, who's going to pay for your pensions?

Jackie – Well, while we're waiting for retirement, we've got work to do.

Maria – I hope they don't make you take a breathalyser test.

Chris – No chance. Have you ever seen a cop pull over a hearse?

Robert – And it's not like the clients you're transporting are going to complain.

Jackie – The ones we transport, no, but the family... Last week, after we left your place, this idiot left the back door of the hearse open.

Robert – And?

Jackie – We lost the coffin on a bend.

Robert – Oh, bloody hell...

Chris – We only realised when we got to the cemetery.

Robert – What did you do?

Jackie – We went back to fetch it. It had rolled into a ditch. At a roundabout, no less.

Chris – At least the corpse was still okay.

Jackie – But the coffin took a bit of a beating...

Maria – What about the family? They must have been thrilled...

Chris – Luckily, we had a flag in the boot.

Jackie – A flag we "borrowed" from the town hall.

Maria – Borrowed? What for?

Chris – For the match on Saturday!

Robert – Oh, right...

Jackie – We draped it over the coffin instead of using the lid. They didn't notice a thing.

Chris – Quite fitting, really, since it was a cremation.

Jackie – The family was a bit surprised, though. The deceased was a German with a holiday home nearby...

Chris – We sang the national anthem, and everything went as smooth as silk.

Jackie – That's something I learned in this business. When you don't know what to say, just sing the national anthem – it calms everyone down.

Maria – Well... When I'm in your hearse, at least try to stay sober.

Chris – You have my word.

Chris and Jackie finish their drinks.

Jackie – Right, duty calls.

Chris – We'll be back later for another drink.

They leave.

Robert – A flag... I swear... How did we end up here?

Maria – What do you mean by that?

Manolo thinks for a moment but doesn't know what to say.

Robert – It's quiet this morning, isn't it?

Maria – The calm before the storm...

Robert – Why do you say that?

Maria – That's just what people say, isn't it?

Robert – Well, we don't get many storms around here.

Maria – Who knows... with all this climate change...

A young man and a young woman, Fred and Alex, enter. These characters can be played by the same actors who played Nicky and Morgan, or by different actors. If it's the same actors, they return almost unrecognisable. They're dressed and groomed in a very conventional way – he in a suit, and she in a business suit. She's wearing makeup, and he might also have makeup (for example, a moustache, a beard, or dark glasses). They seem about ten years older than Nicky and Morgan. They nod to the owners and sit at a table.

Robert – We've never seen those two around here, have we?

Maria – They must be tourists.

Robert – Tourists around here? That'd be a first.

Maria – They must be tired of the Costa Brava.

Robert – The only foreigner we had here was that German they buried last week.

The two newcomers talk to each other in a conspiratorial manner, but loud enough for the owners to hear.

Fred – So this is the place...

Alex – Apparently. (*Checking a note*) After the roundabout, the Sports Bar, across from the church. Anyway, it's the only bar in the village.

Alex hands the note to Fred, who takes it.

Fred (reading from the note) – Mr. Robert Sanchez... (*Glancing towards the bar*) Do you think that's him?

Alex – I'm afraid so...

Fred – He looks like a winner, doesn't he?

Alex – Shows that luck isn't always perfect.

Fred – And you're sure he has no idea?

Alex – No one knows yet. The announcement won't be made until tomorrow. (*Looking out the window*) But it seems there's been a leak. The TV crew's already here...

Fred – It's going to be a shock for him.

Alex – No doubt...

Fred's mobile rings, and he answers it.

Fred – Yes, Mr. President... Yes, I'm looking at him right now... Does he look the part? Oh, he's more of a good ol' boy... I mean, I'd need to see him in a suit or... No, I haven't told him yet... Okay, very well, Mr. President... Yes, you're right, the outgoing president... Okay, I'll let you pack your bags...

Robert and Maria, who have caught snippets of the conversation, exchange puzzled glances.

Alex – So?

Fred – We can't back out now... We need to tell him...

They stand up.

Maria – Are you going to see what they want?

Robert starts to approach to take their order, but then glances out the window.

Robert – What's with that car outside?

Maria also looks.

Maria – Looks like a TV crew car...

Robert, perplexed, turns to the two customers.

Robert – What can I get you?

Fred – Hello, Sir. Are you Robert Sanchez?

Robert – That's me... Why do you ask?

Alex – You'd better take a seat, Mr. Sanchez.

Robert – I don't usually sit with customers.

Fred – I'd recommend it, though.

Alex – We've come to bring you good news.

Robert – Good news? Ah, right... Maria! It's Jehovah's Witnesses, get the shotgun...

Maria leaves.

Fred – We don't belong to any sect, Mr. Sanchez. We've been mandated by the Government of the Republic.

Robert (*worried*) – The Republic...? Is it the tax office?

Alex – Relax, we're not here for a tax audit. We're here to offer you something.

Robert – To offer me something?

Fred – A seat, Mr. Sanchez.

Robert – I already told you I don't want to sit down.

Alex – Not just any seat – the seat of the President of the Republic.

Robert is clearly taken aback.

Robert – Is this for a hidden camera show or something?

Fred – No, not at all, Mr. Sanchez.

Alex – I assure you, this isn't a joke.

Fred – Did you notice the TV crew car outside?

Robert glances at the bar window again.

Alex – That's just the first one to arrive. In an hour, there'll be ten, maybe a hundred more.

Fred – They're here for you, Mr. Sanchez.

Robert – For me?

Alex – To get your first reaction after the announcement of your election victory.

Robert – What victory?

Fred – Mr. Sanchez, I'm officially informing you that you've been designated by the National Lottery to be the new President of the Republic.

Alex – Yes, Mr. Sanchez, you've been chosen by destiny to save the nation.

Robert – No way...

Fred – I'm afraid so...

Robert – I think I'd better sit down, then.

He drops into a chair, stunned.

Alex – We completely understand if this appointment has caught you a bit off guard.

Robert – A bit...?

Fred – But rest assured, you won't be moving into the Presidential Palace right away.

Morgan – For the next few days, you're still just the president-elect...

Alex – The outgoing president will handle day-to-day business until the transition.

Robert – A few days, you say...? How many?

Fred – Let's say... about two weeks.

Alex – That should give you time to get used to the idea.

Robert – Of course...

Maria returns with a shotgun.

Maria – What's going on here?

Robert – Maria, we've hit the jackpot. These people are from the National Lottery...

Maria – No way... (*Putting down the shotgun*) How much did we win?

Fred – It's not about money, Madam.

Maria – The National Lottery...? What else could it be about?

Alex – We're in charge of the presidential election by random draw.

Fred – Your husband is the lucky winner, Madam. He's our future president.

Maria – But... we didn't even play!

Alex – In this game, Madam, everyone's a candidate. You just need to be registered on the electoral roll.

Maria – So you're the new president, my Robert?

Robert – Now hold on, I haven't said yes yet...

Fred – Oh, but you can't say no!

Robert – Wait, what? You can't be serious.

Alex – It's mandatory, Robert. Like jury duty.

Fred – It's the law, Sir. You can't refuse this appointment.

Maria – Robert, why would you even think of saying no?

Robert – Are we seriously talking about me becoming the President of the Republic?

Maria – You always have an opinion on everything. And you keep saying, "If I were president, it wouldn't be this complicated..."

Robert – Yeah...

Alex – Well, now you can put your money where your mouth is, Mr. Sanchez.

Maria – I've always known you were destined for something big, Robert.

Robert – I guess I don't have a choice, but what do I do now?

Fred – Until you take office, start planning your new government.

Robert – My own government?

Alex – You're not going to govern alone! This is still a democracy.

Fred – A random democracy, maybe, but a democracy nonetheless.

Alex – You'll need to choose your ministers.

Maria – You could ask the undertakers...

Fred – The undertakers...?

Maria – The mayor and his deputy. They agree with Robert about roundabouts. They're simple folk, but at least they're honest. Although they should probably settle their bar tab, but still...

Fred – Very well... We'll give you some time to think this through?

Robert – Think? I'm not really used to that... What should I think about?

Alex – What policies do you intend to pursue?

Fred – The country is counting on you, Mr. President!

Maria – Did you hear that, Robert? The country is counting on you!

Alex – We'll let you celebrate this brilliant election victory with your most ardent supporters. An official car will come to pick you up tomorrow to take you to the Presidential Palace.

Maria – To the Presidential Palace?

Fred – The outgoing president is eager to meet you as soon as possible to prepare for the transition of power.

Alex – And, by the way, to give him the code for the briefcase, of course...

Maria – Oh, we already have a briefcase!

Robert – Yeah, yeah, we have a briefcase... One with wheels. Right, Maria? We bought it for our holidays to Costa Brava, remember?

Maria – It was the first time we flew on a plane, do you remember?

Robert – Actually, we haven't flown since then.

Maria – And the code for the briefcase, well...

Robert – Is it my birth date? Or yours? I can't remember...

Fred – I was referring to the nuclear briefcase, Mr. Sanchez...

Robert – The nuclear briefcase, of course...

Maria – You mean... the atomic bomb?

Fred – As President, sir, you are also the head of the armed forces. You have the power to start a war, even a nuclear war... Well, only if absolutely necessary, of course.

Maria – That's perfect... My husband has a few ideas about that, don't you, Robert?

Robert – Me?

Maria – Earlier you said, what we really need is a good war!

Alex – In any case, dear lady, the next time you fly, it'll be on the presidential plane.

Fred – Also, you'll need to consider which country will be the destination for your first official visit as president.

Maria – What do you think about the Canary Islands, Robert?

Robert – Is the Canary Islands a country?

Alex – Not yet... But for now, we'll leave you to answer the press...

Fred – They'll surely want some insights into the policies you plan to implement.

Alex – Especially regarding foreign affairs...

Fred – Just give them a few general points, without going into too much detail. We'll arrange a press conference after your official inauguration.

Alex – Mr. President... First Lady...

They exit.

Maria – Do you realise, Robert? You can finally put your plans into action!

Robert – I have plans?

Maria – All those grand ideas you have to save the country from decadence!

Robert – Oh, right...

Two journalists enter. They might be played by the same actors who portrayed the undertakers, but are suitably altered to look quite different or unrecognizable.

Max – Mr. Sanchez, Madam, would you mind giving your first statements to our 24-hour news channel?

Sam – We won't keep you too long, don't worry. We know your time is now very valuable...

Robert – Yes, well...

Maria – Of course! With pleasure!

Max hands Robert a microphone.

Max – Mr. President, the floor is yours... (*Robert remains silent.*) Please speak directly into the microphone, I can't hear you...

Robert seems a bit awkward.

Maria – Go on, Robert, say something!

Robert – It's just that... I didn't prepare anything, obviously...

Sam – So you're at a loss for words, which is quite ironic for someone who's just been elected.

Robert – Well, "elected"... It's all by chance, isn't it? It's not like I won the lottery. At least with the lottery, I'd have picked the right numbers...

Max – Don't be so modest, Mr. Sanchez. As the poet said, there are no coincidences, only encounters.

Sam – You had an encounter with the nation, that's clear.

Maria – Come on, Robert! Behind your bar, you always have something to say about everything! Now that you have a microphone...

Max – We understand that you might not have had time to fine-tune your programme, but at the very least, can you tell our viewers what your first symbolic act as President will be?

Robert – Symbolic?

Sam – The whole country is listening, Mr. Sanchez.

Maria – I think this is the moment to talk about roundabouts... (*Robert seems at a loss for words.*) Go on, Robert, just say it!

Robert – Oh, for goodness' sake! Why don't you tell them yourself!

Max – First Lady...?

Maria – My husband would like to get rid of roundabouts, taxes, and the State.

Sam – Get rid of the State?

Maria – And also... reinstate compulsory military service, call for a military coup, and declare war on Germany...

Max – A coup? To overthrow himself, then...

Maria – What do you mean by "overthrow himself"...?

Sam – Since he'll already be the President of the Republic.

Maria – Oh right, Robert... You didn't think of that, did you?

Robert – No, but it was just a preliminary idea. It can be refined a bit. And when I mentioned Germany, it could just as well be Monaco, Andorra, or Belarus.

Maria – Oh, yeah, of course! The tyre factory! Now that's a real issue, isn't it?

Max – A tyre factory?

Maria – We had a tyre factory here. It closed about a decade ago. They moved it.

Sam – To Monaco?

Robert – To Belarus.

Maria – So obviously, that's not good for business.

Sam – For the country's trade balance, you mean?

Robert – Yeah, and especially for the bar's revenue.

Maria – The workers like to drink. They also smoke and spend their minimum wage on scratch-off tickets.

Robert – They're great customers for a bar. At one point, I even thought of hiring a few girls ,you know... but my wife wasn't too keen on the idea... And then, in the village, there were only old women left... Afterward, there was a strike, and the factory closed...

Maria – Speaking of strikes, you folks in the media, do you know why striking workers always burn tyres, especially when cameras are around?

Max – Well, I don't...

Maria – If I were the First Lady, I'd ban burning tyres during strikes. Honestly, what's the point? Plus, it's polluting, isn't it?

Sam – I see... So the First Lady will be very attentive to the environmental aspect of this new government.

Max – I'm sure our viewers will also be very interested in the feminist angle of your programme.

Sam – Would you agree to come and present it live on air?

Maria – Are we really going to be on TV?

Max – Starting tonight, dear lady. If you agree, you'll be on the 8 o'clock news.

Maria – Oh, that's fantastic! Right, Robert?

Robert – Yeah... Yeah, it's... It's fantastic.

Sam – So it's settled. A car will come to pick you up around 7 p.m. Or maybe 6... (*To Alex*) Considering there's quite a bit of work for the makeup artists...

They're about to leave. Max turns back to Robert for a final word.

Max – Just a word of advice...

Robert – What...?

Max – Today is April 1st, Mr. Sanchez. In fifteen days, you'll be in the Presidential Palace. Get yourself a new suit – preferably a dark one. It'll look better on camera...

Sam – As for the First Lady... I don't know... Maybe take inspiration from the Queen of England.

They leave. Robert and Maria remain for a moment, thoughtful.

Maria – So it really is April 1st...

Robert looks at her, puzzled.

Blackout

Lights up

Maria is wiping glasses behind the counter. Robert, in a suit that's a bit too small for him, discreetly looks out of the window.

Robert – What's the time?

Maria – Seven o'clock. Why?

Robert – Oh, nothing.

Maria – They're not coming, I tell you. It was an April Fool's joke.

Robert – Yes, I know! You really think I'm that stupid?

Maria – Then why did you put on a suit?

Robert – What if I feel like wearing a suit every now and then? You always say I dress poorly...

Maria – Your wedding suit?

Robert – It's the only one I have...

Maria – Well, just don't bend over, alright...

Robert – At least I can still fit into it.

Maria – What? What did you just say?

Robert – Oh, nothing...

Maria – I'd hope so... Remember that woman who killed her husband because he was unpleasant to her? Just so you know, I've got everything I need at home: shotgun, chainsaw, caustic soda...

Robert – We've got caustic soda at home?

Chris and Jackie enter.

Chris – Mr. President... First Lady...

Jackie – Got your best suit on, Robert?

Robert – Yeah, well, whatever...

Chris – We heard you were in the process of forming your government, so we thought we'd come by to check in...

Jackie – After all, we're already local councillors. We were elected in the first round... I know there were no other candidates, but still.

Chris – In any case, we also have ideas for getting the country back on track, right?

Jackie – Absolutely!

Chris – If the finance ministry's available and well funded, I'm interested. What about you?

Jackie – I wouldn't mind heading the Home Office.

Maria – Why?

Jackie – To cancel my traffic tickets, of course. Can you imagine? You get pulled over for speeding, completely drunk, and you pull out your official ID. "Hey guys, take it easy. I'm the boss here."

Chris – But I tell me, Robert... Did your suit shrink, or did you gain a bit of weight?

Maria – His head's gotten bigger, and maybe his ankles are swelling—it must be something like that

Robert – You're joining in on this too?

Maria – Come on, you've got nothing to regret. The presidential suit was probably too big for you anyway.

Chris – Oh well, never mind, what can you do... We'll just keep our roundabouts, and that's that.

Robert – I'm not going to lower myself to answer that.

Maria – Still, I wonder who could've pulled this prank on us.

Jackie – Yeah, me too...

Chris – You were ready to sacrifice yourself for the country... But, it didn't want you, huh?

Robert – Anyway, this is still a bar. If you want to stay, you'll have to order something.

Maria – So, undertakers, what can I get you? A small beer?

Jackie – Better give me a whisky. My stomach's a bit upset...

Chris – I'll have the usual. A small beer.

Maria serves them.

Jackie – A shame. I thought it was a good idea, honestly.

Chris – Millions of presidential candidates... 100% participation... No election campaigns...

Jackie – Now, with social media, everyone has ideas to save the world. Whether it's international politics or medical research, everyone's a specialist in everything.

Maria – And so what?

Chris – So you choose one at random, put them in the Presidential Palace to implement their plan. And if it doesn't work, you shoot them at the end of their term.

Jackie – That would definitely lead to fewer "experts," that's for sure... Did you know that a cockroach can keep living after its head is cut off?

Robert – How do you know that? Have you already cut the head off a cockroach?

Jackie – It was in the newspaper, in the science section.

Robert – If it was in the newspaper, then...

Maria – Yeah, well... Even before social media, it was the same, wasn't it? There was always some idiot giving their opinion on any topic...

Chris – Oh yeah? Where was that?

Maria – At the bar counter, for instance...

Robert – At least it didn't go beyond the boundaries of the town.

Jackie looks at the newspaper.

Jackie – What's new in the paper today? Unless it's tomorrow's paper?

Chris – Robert, what do you think – is this today's newspaper?

Robert – No, it's next week's. Keep up, dimwit.

Maria – Were you checking the political lottery results again?

Jackie – I usually go for the obituaries. Helps me plan my week...

He flips through the paper.

Maria – Anything interesting?

Jackie – Oh, looks like the new senior citizen just kicked the bucket.

Maria – What can you do... Being the oldest isn't a job with a lot of security.

Jackie – So there's a vacancy if anyone's looking...

Maria – Besides that?

Jackie – Other than that, business as usual.

Chris – With this vaccine, I bet the funeral business is in for a slump...

Maria – You're collateral damage, so to speak.

Jackie – No way... Really? *(To Chris)* Look at this!

He hands the newspaper to Chris, who takes a look.

Chris – Where?

Jackie – Right there!

Chris – It can't be...

Robert – What's up now?

Chris – You might not like this, Robert...

Robert – Just tell me.

Jackie – Your name's in the obituary section!

Robert – Oh, for crying out loud...

Chris – I'm serious! Robert Sanchez, take a look!

Maria – It must be another Sanchez. It's a common name, after all...

Jackie takes back the paper.

Jackie *(reading)* – Maria, his wife, Kimberley, his daughter, regret to announce the passing of Robert Sanchez, in his 63rd year, killed prematurely in a paragliding accident. The cremation will take place...

Chris – That's rather specific, isn't it?

Robert – Can't you stop with this nonsense for five minutes?

Jackie hands him the newspaper.

Jackie – But we're telling you it's right here! It must be true if it's in the paper!

Robert takes a look at the newspaper.

Robert – What's going on here?

Maria looks over Robert's shoulder.

Maria – This can't be real... Does someone have it in for us, or what...?

Chris – Yesterday you were a president, and today you're deceased...

Jackie – The shortest term in the history of our Republic.

Chris – If you'd stuck around a bit longer, you might've had a state funeral...

Maria – Let me see... (*She looks at the newspaper*) Oh yeah, they're saying you're dead, Robert!

Robert – Like you said earlier, maybe it's just someone with the same name. A synonym.

Maria – He's not the only fool named Sanchez, that's for sure.

Chris – Yeah, but how many Robert Sanchez have a wife named Maria and a daughter named Kimberley...

Jackie – Your daughter's name is Kimberley, right?

Robert – Yeah. (*He takes back the newspaper and re-reads the notice.*) Maria, his wife, Kimberley, his daughter, regret to announce the passing of Robert Sanchez, in his 63rd year, killed prematurely in a paragliding accident. The cremation will take place...

Maria – And you are in your 63rd year.

Robert – Yeah...

Chris – Everything matches...

Robert – In a paragliding accident...? Like you say, everything lines up...

Jackie – You don't do paragliding, do you?

Robert – Of course, I do. Mostly in the evenings. In the mornings, I prefer surfing or jet skiing.

Chris – Really?

Robert – Obviously not, you idiots, I don't do paragliding! I don't even know what it is!

Maria – What is paragliding, anyway?

Jackie – It's a kind of sail you strap on your back. You launch yourself off a cliff and glide all the way down.

Maria – Oh yeah, I can totally see Robert doing that...

Chris – It does sound dangerous.

Jackie – No wonder there are accidents. Even fatalities...

Robert – But I'm telling you, I don't do paragliding!

Maria – He has a hard enough time getting down the stairs in the morning, especially after a few too many drinks the night before. So jumping off a cliff with a wing on his back and gliding all the way down...

Chris – Still, it says "Maria, his wife, Kimberley, his daughter, regret to announce..."

Jackie – It can't be a coincidence.

Maria – And if it's not a coincidence, then what is it?

Robert – I don't know...

Chris – As the poet says: there are no coincidences, only chance meetings.

Jackie – Are you sure that's what the poet says?

Chris – Isn't it? Maria?

Maria – Who?

Chris – The poet!

Maria – The poet...?

Jackie – Which poet are you talking about?

Maria – But seriously, do you feel okay?

Robert – Why wouldn't I feel okay?

Maria – Well... since they're saying you're dead...

Jackie – But can't you see I'm not dead!

Maria – I don't know...

Chris – There's no smoke without fire, that's for sure...

Jackie – Especially when it's about a cremation.

Silence.

Robert – If I were dead, I think I'd have noticed, wouldn't I?

Maria – Especially in a paragliding accident...

Chris – That's not something you do without realising, obviously.

Jackie – Unless you're a sleepwalker.

Robert – A sleepwalker?

Chris – Sometimes, when you're a sleepwalker, you do things at night that you don't remember the next morning.

Jackie (*to Maria*) – Is Robert a sleepwalker?

Maria – He snores, that's for sure, but a sleepwalker... As for doing things at night he'd rather not remember the next morning – well, that happens when he stays up drinking with you lot.

Robert – Do you know any sleepwalkers who do paragliding at night?

A pause.

Chris – Have you ever done water skiing?

Robert – What's that got to do with anything?

Chris – I don't know... Pour us another round, Maria, things are getting a bit muddled.

Jackie – Yeah, it'll clear our heads.

Maria fills the glasses. They drink. Chris looks at the paper again.

Chris – Sixty-three, can you believe it?

Jackie – That's not an age to die at, is it?

Chris – As they say, it's the ones left behind who really feel the loss.

Jackie – So, that makes you a widow, my poor Maria.

Robert – If I were dead, you lot would be the first to know, wouldn't you? You're undertakers!

Maria – Or it could be another joke.

Chris – A joke?

Jackie – Who'd make a joke like that?

Robert – I don't know... Undertakers, maybe...

Chris – Oh come on, Robert, you don't really think that...

Jackie – We're professionals... We have a code of ethics...

Maria – Then who? There's only about thirty of us in the village... and we know everyone.

Nicky and Morgan enter and take a seat. This time, they're dressed in a more gothic style.

Nicky – Good evening, folks...

The others look at them with suspicion.

Robert – Those two haven't been around for long, have they?

Maria – Do you think they could be behind those ominous messages?

Chris – They look like harbingers of doom...

Maria – But they seem kind of nice...

Robert – Nice? They look like vampires!

Nicky and Morgan approach the counter. The others seem on guard.

Chris – Careful, they're coming over...

Morgan – Excuse me... Can we leave some flyers here?

Robert – Depends... What's it for?

Nicky – It's for a paragliding course.

The four others freeze.

Robert – Paragliding?

Morgan – If you're interested, the first session is free.

Nicky – We can fit you in tomorrow, if you like.

Maria – Fit us in? What for?

Morgan – For a taster session.

Robert – Did you hear that? A taster session!

Chris – Paragliding... And the first session is free, he says...

Nicky – Yes, that's right. Or if you prefer, we also offer bungee jumping.

Morgan – We have some friends who hang out in the old tyre factory.

Nicky – They have a stash of inner tubes, which they use to make bungee cords.

Maria – At least they're not burning them.

Morgan – Just jumping into the void. Letting go. It's quite a unique experience.

Nicky – A bit like skydiving. You feel like a bird...

Morgan – Well, more like a bird without wings that falls like a stone...

Nicky – But it's totally safe, don't worry...

Morgan – No one's died so far, at least.

Chris – Because you've had a lot of clients?

Nicky – To be honest... you'd be the first.

Maria – Oh, I see... Someone has to test the bungee cord...

Morgan – So, can we leave you the flyers?

Robert – I'm going to make you eat those flyers!

Jackie – Bunch of murderers!

Robert – You've got to be kidding me.

Nicky – All right, all right... Sorry about that...

Morgan – But can we still get two Cokes?

Maria – Coke?

Robert – Get out of here before I get my shotgun!

Nicky and Morgan leave, looking bewildered.

Jackie – Paragliding...

Chris – They really have no limits.

Robert – If it were up to me, I'd send them all to the army, I tell you.

Chris – Everyone into the paratroopers. After a year, let's see if they still want to bungee jump.

A pause.

Maria – Have you ever skydived?

Jackie – Skydived?

Chris – No.

Jackie – Why would we skydive?

Chris – We have enough trouble getting out of bed in the morning.

Robert – Come on, my round.

Robert fills the glasses, and they all take a drink.

Chris – It's true. They do have a funny look about them.

Maria – Bungee jumping... I wouldn't trust them with a taster session.

Jackie – Yeah. All they need is a scythe. To cut the bungee cord...

Robert – If I saw them at night in an abandoned factory, I'd be spooked, yeah...

Chris – Right, but we've got a client waiting in the car.

Jackie – And with this heat...

Maria – It's really warmed up since this morning.

Chris – Come on, let's go. Go! Go! Go! As they say in the paratroopers.

They get ready to leave. Jackie turns back to the counter one last time.

Jackie – Ah, Maria, you'll need to come see us soon.

Maria – Why's that?

Chris – For Robert's cremation. There are some papers to fill out, and a few details to arrange for the ceremony...

Jackie – And our condolences, by the way.

They leave. Robert and Maria exchange a look. Maria glances at the newspaper.

Maria (*reading*) – The ceremony will be held in the strictest privacy... (*To Robert*) It's in three days, do you realise?

Robert – Yeah.

Maria – What on earth am I going to wear?

Robert is taken aback.

Blackout

Lights up

The bar is empty, filled with flowers and cards bearing various inscriptions: "We'll miss you...", "We'll never forget you...", "Your departure leaves a big void..." Nicky and Morgan enter, now wearing T-shirts. Not seeing anyone behind the counter, they sit at a table.

Morgan – This place is actually quite a laugh.

Nicky – You just need to know how to have fun in a smart way.

Morgan – But maybe we should stop now.

Nicky – Oh, it's a bit of entertainment for them too, isn't it?

Morgan – You're right. They don't have internet, they don't use social media... You have to bring the fake news right to their counter, in the local paper...

Morgan – Don't tell me you already have another idea...

Nicky – Good ideas don't just happen like that...

Morgan – It's true that with the presidential election organised by the National Lottery, we've set the bar pretty high...

They look around.

Morgan – There's no one here, that's odd...

Nicky – Where could they have gone?

Morgan – And what's with all these flowers?

Nicky – A wedding?

Morgan – Who'd get married here? It's all just old folks...

Nicky – Or a funeral...

Morgan – A funeral?

Maria pops up from behind the counter like a jack-in-the-box. She's dressed in black, slightly more formal than usual.

Maria – What can I get you?

Nicky and Morgan are startled.

Nicky – Sorry, I didn't see you there.

Morgan – Two coffees, please...

Maria – Ah, sorry, I've already switched off the machine... We're about to close, you understand? Didn't you see the sign on the door?

Nicky – No, we didn't...

Morgan – It's okay, we'll have... two tonics.

Maria – All I have left is... whisky.

Nicky – Well, then ...

Morgan – Two whiskies.

Maria prepares the drinks.

Nicky (to Morgan) – She doesn't look like she's dressed for a wedding...

Morgan – No, not at all.

Nicky (to Maria) – It's quiet today. What's going on?

Maria – Everyone's at the ceremony. (*She shows them the local newspaper.*) Didn't you see it? It's in the newspaper.

Morgan – No, we didn't...

Nicky – The ceremony?

Maria – In honour of Robert! The mayor's speech was very moving. I almost cried. But I decided to come back. With everything going on, I still have loads to sort out...

Maria puts the glasses on a tray.

Morgan – Do you think it's because of...?

Nicky – I hope not...

Maria serves them the whiskies.

Maria – Here you go... Two whiskies...

Nicky – Thanks...

Maria – These might be the last ones I ever serve.

Morgan – We're really sorry.

Maria – But you're not to blame, are you?

Nicky – No, of course not...

Maria – Did you see all these flowers? And the little messages that come with them? Honestly, it's heartwarming (*She reads some inscriptions on the ribbons and cards.*) "We already miss you..." "We'll never forget you..." "Your passing leaves a big void..." (*Tearfully*) Yes, everyone loved my Robert... Anyway, life goes on. Make the most of it. You know, it goes by quickly...

Maria goes back behind the counter.

Nicky – He doesn't do paragliding, does he?

Morgan – Where would he jump from? There's no cliff around here. Not even a small hill. It's just fields of wheat as far as the eye can see...

Nicky – The tallest mound I've seen around here is a pile of tyres. What could have happened to him?

Morgan – Just announcing someone's death in a newspaper doesn't make it happen, does it?

Nicky – Who knows? It's called a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Morgan – A what?

Nicky – You predict something, and just by announcing it, it comes true.

Morgan – Like what?

Nicky – You predict a candidate will win an election, and because you do, he becomes the favourite. As the favourite, people vote for him, and he ends up winning.

Morgan – Right... Like with Jesus Christ. He declares himself the son of God and announces that he'll die a martyr. So they crucify him, and because he dies on the cross, he becomes a god.

Nicky – Exactly...

Morgan – And with Robert?

Nicky – You announce his death as a joke, it shocks him, and he dies from it.

Morgan – In a paragliding accident?

Nicky – Yeah, that's where it doesn't quite add up...

A pause.

Morgan – You think we might get into trouble?

Nicky – I don't know... but I think we might have gone a bit too far this time.

Chris and Jackie arrive, looking solemn. Chris wears a mayoral sash.

Chris – Hello, Maria.

Maria – Mayor. Deputy Mayor.

Jackie – Forget about that, will you?

Chris – Today we're no longer elected officials, we're no longer undertakers...

Jackie – We're not even customers.

Chris – We're just friends.

Maria – Can I still get you something?

Jackie – Not today, thank you.

Chris – We promised to stay sober for him.

Maria – Is he with you?

Jackie – In the van, right out front. Waiting for us to take him on his final journey...

Chris – He's not in great shape, you know... Better if you don't see him like that.

Maria – Anyway... I'm sure he's happy to be leaving with you. You didn't forget to lock the back door this time, did you? You don't want to lose him on a sharp turn...

Jackie – No, don't worry.

Chris – Are you coming with us?

Maria – Just give me a moment to take care of my last customers, and I'll join you.

Jackie – Very well.

Maria – Come on, one last drink for the road.

Chris – But nothing too strong, eh?

Maria – What can I get you?

Jackie – A whisky

Chris – Same for me.

She serves them.

Maria – This one's on the house. Enjoy it, it's the last one.

They down their drinks in one go. Nicky and Morgan exchange awkward glances.

Morgan – We didn't even go to the ceremony.

Nicky – We didn't know.

Morgan – Apparently, it's in the paper,.

Nicky – If it's in the paper, then...

Morgan – Poor woman, look at her. They must have been married for thirty or forty years, and suddenly she's all alone...

Nicky – That's the risk with marriage. You rarely die together.

Morgan – Especially in a paragliding accident...

Nicky – At least they might have had a happy life together all those years.

Morgan – Happy? You sure about that?

Nicky – I don't know...

Morgan – If that's what marital bliss looks like, I'd rather live with a cat.

Nicky – Yeah. But the cat will probably die before you...

A pause.

Morgan – I do feel a bit bad...

Nicky – Me too...

Morgan – I mean, we don't really know, do we? Maybe it's just a coincidence. He might have had a weak heart, and died of a heart attack...

Nicky – A coincidence, you think...? If he had a weak heart, getting elected president might have been enough to push him over the edge...

Morgan – You're right, as the poet says, coincidence is the purgatory of causality...

Nicky – Yeah... (*A pause*) Is that really what you think?

Morgan – About coincidence?

Nicky – About marriage.

Morgan – I don't know... If it's just to leave our children a planet on its last legs...

Nicky – True... But I don't know... Our children... they might just change the world.

Morgan – Remember the termites...

Nicky – Yeah, of course.

Morgan – Why are you asking me that?

Nicky – Asking what?

Morgan – About marriage.

Nicky – Oh, no reason... She seems to be holding up, though...

Back at the counter.

Maria – Right, I'll have a drink with you guys. We're not going to let this get us down, are we?

She pours herself a whisky, refills their glasses, and they toast.

Chris – To you, Maria!

Jackie – As long as we've got our health.

Maria – To think he'll never walk through that door again...

Chris – Don't dwell on it. You're only hurting yourself...

Jackie – Besides, we can't stay long. He's bound to get impatient...

Robert walks in, looking visibly affected, and casts a nostalgic glance around the place. Nicky and Morgan see him first, and are utterly stunned. The others see him too, but seem unfazed.

Chris – Ah, there he is...

Jackie – So, Robert, is it retirement time?

Robert – What can you do? You have to know when to step aside...

Maria – The ceremony was quite nice, wasn't it?

Robert – Yeah... I liked your speech, Mr. Mayor. It felt a bit like a eulogy, but oh well...

Chris – What can I say...? It's an occupational hazard...

Jackie – You sure about this?

Robert – I won't change my mind. I won't be like those pop stars who retire from music three times a year.

Chris – We'll miss you, Robert. They don't make them like you anymore.

Maria – Thankfully...

Robert – We'll take the opportunity to enjoy ourselves a bit. Next week, we're off to the Canary Islands, aren't we, Maria?

Maria – It won't be on the presidential airplane, but that's fine... Our bags are already packed. And we've finally cracked the code...

Jackie – What code?

Maria – The code for the suitcase!

Robert – Since the factory closed, we were living on borrowed time, really.

Maria – You can't run a bar with just two customers. Even if they drink as much as you do.

Jackie – It was all in solidarity, my poor Maria.

Chris – I hear the factory's being squatted.

Robert – Squatted?

Jackie – Apparently, every day, a group of young people arrives from Paris. There are about fifty of them now, from what I hear.

Chris – If they start hanging around in public... they might end up repopulating the village.

Robert – Yeah, but the young ones aren't like the old factory workers, they don't drink as much beer.

Maria – What can you do, my Robert...? We didn't adapt in time, simple as that. We missed the internet café trend in the '90s, then we missed the coffee-shop trend in the 2000s.

Jackie – If you don't mind me saying, you even missed the juke-box trend in the '50s...

Maria – Yeah... And at our age, we're not going to change. We're dinosaurs, really.

Robert – So what are the young ones doing in that factory?

Chris – Not making tyres, that's for sure.

Maria – At least they're not burning them.

Jackie – They've turned it into a co-working space, apparently.

Robert – A what?

Chris – A place where young people with start-ups can work together.

Jackie – They've also got a space to have coffee and table football.

Maria – So, basically, a bar, then...

Robert – Anyway, thanks for lending us your hearse for the move.

Jackie – Always happy to help.

Maria – Do we need to make another trip or...?

Robert – No, no, that was the last trip.

A pause.

Chris – It was the only bar in the village. Where are we going to grab a drink now?

Jackie – When a bar closes, it's a sign the village is dying.

Maria – Or you could join the youngsters at the factory in their co-working space. You could have drinks with them.

Robert – I'm not sure if funeral services really count as a start-up.

Maria – Or maybe it's time to innovate.

Robert – True, there hasn't been much innovation in the funeral business lately.

Chris – Yeah, it's a field that's pretty traditional...

Jackie – What could innovation in the funeral business look like?

Maria – Organic is a growing market these days.

Chris – I've already got the slogan: "Reduce your dearly departed's carbon footprint – compost them. The planet will thank you."

They finish their drinks.

Jackie – In any case, it won't bring Robert back.

Chris – A bar owner is even harder to replace than a country doctor.

Maria – And yet, running a bar doesn't require fifteen years of study. Right, kids?

Nicky and Morgan give polite smiles.

Robert – I don't have any degrees. It didn't stop me from finding my way.

Jackie – Yeah, you're an autodidact, as they say. A self-made man.

Maria – Well... An autodidact is someone who studies on their own, and a self-made man is someone who succeeded on their own... So in Robert's case...

A pause.

Chris – And what about these young ones? Couldn't they take over your bar?

Nicky and Morgan seem taken aback.

Jackie – That's true, kids. Instead of doing pointless studies.

Chris – What do you want to do with your life?

Morgan – I'm vegan. And I work for an animal welfare organisation. I want to open a sanctuary for animals rescued from slaughterhouses.

Maria – Well, a bar's pretty much the same thing. It's a sanctuary for the castaways of work. The shipwrecked of life. They come here seeking a bit of conversation. A bit of human warmth.

Jackie – And you, kid, what do you want to do?

Nicky – Theatre. I want to be an actor...

Robert – Theatre... I've been playing the fool behind my counter for forty years. (*Pointing at the counter*) This is my theatre. The counter is the stage and the audience sits in the room.

Maria – Fewer and fewer, sadly...

Robert (*pointing to the undertakers*) – And my fellow cast members, there they are...

Maria – They're not stars, but they work hard, believe me.

Robert – They always have something silly to say.

Maria – Always a joke.

Robert – Never in a bad mood.

A poignant moment. Some dab away a tear with their handkerchief.

Jackie – And today, the curtain comes down.

Chris – It's the final showing.

Robert – Our farewell to the stage.

They try to hold back their emotions.

Maria – Come on, let's go before we start crying.

Robert (*to the youngsters*) – Just remember to bring down the curtain when you leave...

Nicky – The curtain?

Maria – The metal shutter at the front.

Chris – They don't seem very awake today...

Robert – No, they're a good match.

They head towards the exit, casting nostalgic glances around.

Jackie – Here, I'll leave you tomorrow's newspaper – I saw something in there that might interest you...

She places the newspaper on their table.

Morgan – Thanks...

Robert, Maria, Chris, and Jackie leave.

Nicky – At least he's not dead.

Nicky – And thankfully, he's not the president either.

Nicky and Morgan remain silent for a moment.

Nicky – What do you think?

Morgan – About what?

Nicky – What if we took over this bar?

Morgan – Are you kidding?

Nicky – Why not? We could turn it into a theatre bar.

Morgan – Bar theatre at night, and a cat bar during the day... It's true, that's trendy now.

Nicky – Isn't that what we wanted? We don't believe in politics anymore. We want to change the world from the bottom up.

Morgan – That's for sure, we can't start any lower.

Nicky – Or we'd have to start digging. So, what's the plan?

Morgan – With all the young people moving into the factory, we could revive the village.

Nicky – A bar theatre... You have to admit, it's a better fit for the region than a paragliding club.

Morgan – Yeah, it's way too flat here for paragliding.

Nicky – I don't know which idiot said the Earth was flat, but they probably lived around here.

Morgan – No, it's a great idea... We should celebrate!

Morgan heads to the counter where the bottle of whisky still sits. Nicky joins her, a bit hesitant.

Nicky – Do you think we can just help ourselves like this?

Morgan takes the bottle and pours two glasses.

Morgan – If we're the bosses now... why not? Come on, let's toast to our new project!

They clink glasses and drink.

Nicky – I've already got a title for our first play: "The President's Draw".

Morgan – Fake news...? So you were joking?

Nicky – I don't know... What about you?

Morgan – I'll let you know when the effects of the whisky wear off, I'm not used to it.

Nicky – No, me neither... Actually, this whisky tastes a bit weird, doesn't it?

Morgan – They probably make it themselves with tractor ethanol.

Nicky – That might explain a lot...

He pours them another whisky. They're starting to get a little tipsy.

Morgan – What were they saying about this newspaper?

Nicky – I don't know... They mentioned an article that might interest us...

Morgan goes back to the table, picks up the newspaper, and gives it a quick glance. Nicky joins her.

Morgan – What could possibly interest us in this hick-town paper?

Nicky – Maybe they think we're looking for a job in farming.

The two youngsters are seated facing the audience, so they can't see what's happening behind them. The others sneak back to watch the scene, laughing quietly but keeping out of sight. They occasionally poke their heads through the backdrop curtain.

Morgan – This is insane...

Nicky – What's insane?

Morgan – In the paper, in the announcements section. It says we're getting married in three weeks.

Nicky – Who's 'we'?

Morgan – Us!

Nicky – Us...? You mean you and me... together?

Morgan – It's written right here!

Nicky – Let me see... (*He takes the newspaper and looks at it.*) Blimey, you're right... Must be a mistake...

Morgan – Of course it's a mistake! If we were getting married in three weeks, we'd know about it, wouldn't we?

Nicky – Yeah, definitely...

They're a bit disoriented... and also a bit tipsy.

Morgan – And you have no clue about this?

Nicky – None at all...

Morgan – Better to be in the announcements section than in the obituaries, right?

Nicky – Oh, absolutely.

Morgan – Or maybe it's another one of those self-fulfilling prophecies...

An awkward silence.

Nicky – So... if I became President, would you agree to be my First Lady?

Morgan – If it's in the newspaper...

Nicky – Besides, we've already got the flowers.

Morgan – In three weeks, they'll be wilted...

Nicky – In thirty years, so will we.

She raises her glass again.

Morgan – As the poet says: Gather ye rosebuds while ye may...

She finishes her drink. Nicky takes a small bouquet, kneels, and offers it to Morgan.

Nicky – Will you marry me?

Morgan – I thought you'd never ask...

Nicky – So, what do you say?

She takes the rose to indicate that she accepts.

Morgan – Yes, I will.

Chris and Jackie come forward. Chris is still wearing a mayor's sash, and Jackie has a crucifix around their neck. Jackie blesses them by making the sign of the cross with a hand.

Jackie – Amen...

Chris – My children, I hereby unofficially declare you married.

Jackie – You may kiss the deceased.

Maria – The deceased?

Jackie – Sorry, I meant the bride, of course...

Nicky – A wedding officiated by two undertakers...

Morgan – With two zombies as witnesses...

Nicky – This should be fun...

Nicky kisses Morgan.

The others (*in unison*) – Long live the newlyweds!

They applaud and throw rice. Morgan tosses the bouquet. The undertakers try to catch it. Wedding music plays.

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:

Comedies for 2

EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Preliminaries
Running on empty
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Joker
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap
backward for Mankind

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Quarantine
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools

Comedies for 7 or more

Backstage Comedy
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Neighbours'Day
Open Hearts
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Him and Her
Lost time Chronicles
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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