

La Comédiathèque

CARDS ON THE TABLE

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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Cards on the Table

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He's looking for a job, even if it's only temporary. Sam is looking for a partner, but on a permanent contract. They should never have ended up alone together, face to face, in that restaurant. To get what they want, under the watchful eye of their server, who sees through their little games, they each play a part. But neither of them knows that the other isn't laying all their cards on the table either...

Cast

Nico (male)

Sam (male or female)

Alex (male or female)

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A restaurant dining room. A table is laid for two, with a “Reserved” sign prominently displayed. The profusion of glasses and cutlery, together with the long, immaculate white tablecloth, suggests a high-end establishment, while the rather raw décor gives the place a more fashionable, contemporary feel.

At a second, slightly smaller table, a woman is sitting alone, staring into space. The role is played by the same actress (or actor) who plays Sam, disguised so as not to be recognised (dark glasses and a wig).

Alex, the server, enters with a purposeful stride. Whatever Alex’s sex or age, their costume and bearing make them, at least at the beginning of the play, a highly sophisticated master of ceremonies with an air of sexual ambiguity. Without looking at the diner, Alex is already scribbling something in an order pad.

Alex (*cheerfully, slightly overexcited*) – Did you enjoy the stuffed mussels? They’re the chef’s speciality...

Woman (*gloomily*) – I had the daily special. The rabbit...

Alex (*unfazed*) – And what would madam like to finish with? A little dessert? A little coffee? The bill?

Woman (*looking at Alex intently*) – There’s nothing more depressing than eating alone in a restaurant...

Alex (*trying to maintain their composure, though slightly unsettled*) – A little liqueur?

Woman – Especially for a woman...

Alex – Marie Brizard? Cointreau? Grand Marnier?

Woman – Eating in a fine restaurant is a bit like making love, you see?

Alex (*flustered*) – Something sweet and ladylike, then...

Woman – Technically, whether you’re alone or with someone else, it all ends in more or less the same way. And yet it’s still better with two, isn’t it?

Alex – A herbal tea, perhaps?

Woman – You don’t even have to talk, do you? Not in bed, and not at the table. A few banalities will do. I don’t know... Pass me the butter...

Alex – Evening Calm? Peaceful Night?

Woman (*with concern*) – Are you sure you don’t want to sit down?

Alex – The thing is...

Woman – It can’t be easy for you either, can it?

Alex – Well...

Woman – Not that I look down on your profession, of course. But serving all this food and then walking away, without even being able to taste it... Have you eaten, at least?

Alex – Not yet...

Woman – Are you hungry?

Alex – Well, I...

Woman (*offering Alex the bread basket*) – At least have a piece of bread.

Alex – I don't know if...

Woman – Surely you're allowed a minute's break...

She stands up and firmly gestures for Alex to sit down. Alex obeys.

Alex – It's true that... after the lunchtime rush, I always feel a little drained...

She sits down opposite Alex.

Woman (*smiling*) – There. Now there are two of us.

Alex begins chewing the plain bread.

Woman – Would you like some butter? It'll go down more easily...

Alex – Thank you.

Alex takes the butter and begins spreading it on the bread.

Woman – Do you know what my grandmother used to say?

Alex clearly does not.

Woman – Hunger is the best sauce.

Alex seems struck by the profound philosophical truth of this remark.

Alex – That's true...

Woman – When you're hungry, even a simple slice of bread...

Alex (*sighing*) – It reminds me of my childhood... The slices of bread my mother used to give me after school... With salted butter...

Woman (*warmly*) – Would you like a little salt on it?

She offers Alex the salt shaker. Alex hesitates, then takes it and sprinkles some salt on the bread. She watches Alex eat with a tender expression.

Woman – It's good, isn't it?

Alex – To me, this is as good as caviar, you know...

Woman – That's what I had as a starter... Caviar... That's salty too... But the bill is even harder to swallow...

Alex smiles and continues chewing. She watches Alex for another moment, looking peaceful.

Woman – Talking to you has done me good.

She stands and gives Alex a grateful look.

Woman – Thank you. Really...

She puts on her coat.

Woman (*smiling*) – Next time, it's my treat.

Alex – Thank you...

She leaves, giving Alex a little wave on her way out. Alex remains sitting there, slightly lost, chewing on a piece of bread and staring into space.

Nico enters. He is in his forties and looks a little worn out. He is squeezed into a suit that is slightly too small for him, with a tie that is slightly too tight. It is obvious that he is used to neither this kind of outfit nor this kind of place, and his nervousness shows. He looks a little surprised at Alex, sitting at the table, nibbling on a piece of bread and staring into space.

Nico – Excuse me, I... I have a table reserved and...

At the sight of Nico, Alex snaps out of their daze, looks around and seems to come back to their senses. They jump to their feet and make a token effort to straighten their clothes.

Alex – Certainly, sir. Good morning, sir. (*Indicating the other table.*) This is your table, sir...

Nico – Right... So I'm the first one here...

Alex puts the chair back in place.

Alex – I'm sure the lady won't be long, sir.

Nico – Oh, no, but... I'm not meeting a woman.

Alex – Whatever you prefer, sir... Our establishment is gay-friendly...

Nico – No, but I'm not meeting a man either... Well, I am, but...

Alex – In any case, may I suggest our Valentine's Day menu, sir?

Nico – Why?

Alex – Well... because today is Valentine's Day.

Nico – Valentine's Day is today?

Alex – I'll leave you to think about that... An aperitif? Or would you rather wait for... your partner?

Nico – I'll wait, thanks.

Alex – I'll leave you the menu to keep you company.

Alex puts the menu on the table. Nico looks around the room. He awkwardly crosses and uncrosses his legs. To give himself something to do, he starts looking at the menu, but as he picks it up, he knocks over a glass and catches it just in time. He scans the menu.

Nico – Wow... It may be Valentine's Day for gay people, but this isn't a soup kitchen... Not a single starter under thirty euros... I can do a whole week's shopping at my local discount supermarket for that... Right, better forget the crab. I'm not much of a handyman... Better avoid the snails too... Why do places like this only serve stuff that's so difficult to eat? Must be part of the elimination process...

Nico's phone rings. He answers.

Nico – Ah, Leo... No, no, I can't talk for long, I'm in a meeting. Er... no, I'm still unemployed. But actually, I'm having lunch with this guy I sent my CV to about a job. When the phone rang, I was half afraid it was him calling to say he couldn't make it after all. Because I'm sort of counting on him to pay for the meal. No, not a reel. The meal! You're the one who's starting to have hearing problems... No, it's not for a part. Acting's not really for us anymore. We have to face facts. No, I'm looking for a real job. On a temporary contract, you know. Paid leave, days off, health insurance, meal allowance... And above all, real payslips I can show to rental agencies so I can finally get a place of my own. I'm staying at a friend's place at the moment, but I can feel things are starting to get a bit tense. No, no, it's a job in advertising. Yes, I know, having sat in on a few acting classes isn't exactly the usual background for this kind of job... That's precisely why I'm a bit nervous, actually.

Alex comes back to clear the other table, discreetly keeping an ear on the conversation. Nico looks slightly uncomfortable before continuing.

Nico – Let's just say... I've improved my CV a little. They wanted high school plus six years of higher education. I'm more like high school minus one. I say minus one because I didn't miss it by much. So this time I just put down that I graduated from a top business school. If you're going to make things up, you might as well go all the way, right? At least it got me an interview. We'll see what happens after that... And apparently, once you've got the job, nobody checks your qualifications anyway. Obviously, I didn't mention that I'm living on social benefits either... I told them I already worked for a major advertising agency, but that I wanted to rethink my career, take on new challenges and find something more stimulating. Have I ever worked in advertising? Listen, I delivered leaflets through people's letterboxes a few years ago... In communications, all you really need is to be good at talking, right?

And you know me: nobody can beat me at that... No, and it looks like more of a start-up kind of place, you know. An American company, I think. My English? Oh, I can get by... Anyway, what have I got to lose? If they put every unemployed person who'd padded their CV a little in the hope of getting a job in prison... Worst case, they fire me at the end of my probation period and I'll still have my three payslips. I'm meeting the boss himself. You never know, Steve Jobs might walk through the door. He started with nothing too. I'm sure he'd give me a chance... Oh, he's dead...? No, I didn't know... What did he die of? Oh, shit...

Alex moves away.

Nico – Right, I'd better go over my CV before he gets here... Actually, I just copied and pasted a CV I found on the alumni website of some top business school. Yeah, I can't remember all the details now... The restaurant? He chose it. Very trendy. One of those places where you feel like you're eating in a warehouse, but the moment you see the prices on the menu, you realise it's definitely not a soup kitchen for unemployed people without a penny to their name. Did you know today was Valentine's Day for gay people? Oh, it's Valentine's Day for everyone? I don't know why he asked me to meet him in a gay-friendly restaurant on Valentine's Day... And I'm starving. I didn't eat anything last night. I've got a bit of a cash-flow problem this month. Still, I assume he'll pick up the bill. At least I'll get a hot meal out of it... Anyway, I really have to go... Okay, I'll call you later and tell you all about it... Bye...

As he starts helping himself to the contents of the bread basket, Nico pulls a crumpled CV out of his pocket and begins going through it.

Nico – Let's see... Work experience... Education... Ah, yes, here it is...

Sam enters. Blonde and in their thirties, Sam is wearing a provocative outfit they are clearly not used to, judging by the difficulty they have walking in high heels. Sam may also be played by a man in drag. In any case, there should be some ambiguity as to Sam's sex. Whatever the case, Sam is wearing a wig. They look around for someone and hesitate. It does not occur to Nico for a second that Sam might be the person he is supposed to meet, so he ignores them. Seeing that the table is laid for two and that Nico is alone, Sam approaches him.

Sam – Excuse me, I think I'm the person you're meeting... I'm Sam...

Nico, astonished and with his mouth full of bread, takes a moment to respond.

Nico – Sam... Oh, yes, of course... *(Getting to his feet.)* Nico... Please, sit down... I...

Sam sits down and Nico does the same.

Sam – You look surprised. Not disappointed, I hope...

Nico – No, no, it's just that... I wasn't expecting a woman.

Sam looks surprised too.

Sam – Oh?

Nico – I mean, a woman... as young and as elegant as you.

Sam – Thank you.

Nico – Not that I have anything against that, obviously.

Sam – Good.

Awkward silence.

Nico – Sam is quite an unusual name, isn't it...? I mean... for a woman.

Sam – That’s true... But it can be a woman’s name too. Short for Samantha, for example...

Nico – Of course...

Sam – I have to admit that... I wasn’t expecting you to be wearing a tie. That’s why I hesitated for a moment...

Nico – Oh, really...? Maybe it’s a bit much...

Sam – No, it suits you very well.

Nico – Thank you...

Sam – I appreciate the effort you’ve made with your clothes... I can’t stand people who don’t make an effort. Though you could just as easily have worn something a little more casual.

Nico – Of course...

Sam – I don’t know what sort of impression you have of me, but... I’m not as frigid as I look, you know.

Nico – Not at all...

Sam – I meant rigid.

Alex returns.

Alex – Would you care for an aperitif to whet the appetite?

Alex seems surprised to see Sam, and Sam seems equally surprised to see Alex. But neither gives anything away.

Sam – Er... Why not? What do you think?

Nico – Let’s go for it.

Sam – A glass of champagne, then.

Nico – Fine. Same for me.

Alex hands Sam another menu.

Alex – I’ll bring those straight away. In the meantime, I’ll leave you to look through the menu.

Alex leaves. Sam opens the menu and studies it.

Sam – Everything looks delicious... and scandalously expensive. You really didn’t have to go to all this expense, you know.

Nico stares at Sam, dumbfounded and speechless.

Sam – Let’s see... I’m not that hungry... And I wouldn’t want to bankrupt you on our very first date. I’ll just have a main course and dessert... What about you?

Nico – Two courses. Fine, me too.

Sam – Perfect.

Nico – I don't have much of a sweet tooth. I think I'll have a starter and a main course.

Sam (*surprised*) – Oh...

Nico – The chef's special... I wonder what that is...

Alex returns with two glasses of champagne and some peanuts and places them on the table.

Alex – Can I help you?

Nico – What's today's special?

Alex – Today's suggestion is rabbit chasseur.

Nico – Oh, right...

Nico – Isn't rabbit a bit dry?

Alex – It comes with plenty of sauce, sir.

Nico – Well, it can't be dry then. I'll have that. What about you?

Sam – I think I'll go for the crayfish à la nage. I'm trying to watch my figure at the moment...

Alex – Crayfish are very light. And swimming is excellent for the figure. You'll see, they go down very easily. You'll feel as though you haven't eaten a thing.

Nico – At that price... I hope they've done plenty of swimming. Just kidding...

Alex – So, no starter. And you can decide about dessert later, shall we say?

Nico – No. I'll have the chef's pâté as a starter.

Alex – The chef's terrine. Very good, sir. And for madam?

Nico – No starter, you said, didn't you?

Sam – Er, no, no...

Alex – I'll bring you the wine list.

Nico – What for...?

Alex – To accompany the rabbit... and the crayfish.

Sam – After the champagne, I'm not sure that would be very sensible, but...

Nico cuts Sam off before they can continue.

Nico – You're right. A jug of water will be absolutely fine.

Alex – Château Tap Water. Excellent.

Alex leaves. Awkward silence. Sam raises their glass.

Sam – Well, then... To our meeting... Here's hoping it's the beginning of something wonderful...

Nico – Absolutely... To our... success story.

Growing increasingly nervous, Nico drains his glass in one gulp, under Sam's appalled gaze. Sam has barely touched theirs.

Nico – That's good stuff...

Sam – Yes... Nice and cold. And you certainly looked thirsty.

Nico – Right, so who starts? Do you ask me questions, or...?

Sam – We're not in that much of a hurry. This isn't a job interview...

Nico – Oh, isn't it...?

Sam – I mean... It's not an interrogation. You have to leave a little room for mystery too.

Nico – I completely agree. Education, experience... Obviously they matter... But the most important thing is really wanting it, isn't it?

Sam – I already know you graduated from a top business school.

Nico – Yes, that's right...

Sam – And that you're a widower.

Nico – I put that...?

Sam – Isn't it true?

Nico – Yes, yes, of course, but... I don't always mention that particular detail on my CV... It's not exactly the kind of thing you want to boast about, is it...?

An awkward moment. Alex returns with Nico's starter and places it in front of Nico.

Alex – Here we are, sir.

Nico – Thank you.

Under Sam's horrified gaze, Nico prepares to tuck into his terrine.

Sam – Enjoy...

Nico – I'm starving... And I love pâté... *(To Alex, who is leaving.)* Could I have some more bread?

Alex gives Nico another bread basket and moves away. Nico starts eating.

Nico *(with his mouth full)* – If you want to ask me anything, go ahead.

Sam – If you don't mind, while you're eating your starter, I think I'll go and wash my hands.

Nico – Of course...

On the way out, Sam passes Alex, who is returning, and gives Alex a slightly embarrassed look. Nico devours his terrine. Alex places a jug on the table.

Alex – Your jug of water, sir.

Alex is about to take away the champagne glasses.

Nico – Excellent, that chef's terrine.

Alex – Thank you, sir. I'll tell the chef...

Nico – Though, thinking about it, it would be even better with a bit of red wine. Do you have wine... by the jug?

Alex – All our wines are served in decanters by our sommelier, sir.

Nico – No, I was thinking more of... a small carafe of house red, you know.

Alex – I'll bring you the wine list.

Alex leaves. Nico's phone rings. He answers. Suddenly, his English becomes painfully hesitant and ungrammatical.

Nico – Yes...? I mean, yes... Secretary of...? Yes, yes, of course... Right... Oh, shit... So, he cannot come to restaurant... OK... No, no, is not problem, don't worry... So he call me back...? Right... Thank you for warn me, anyway... Yes, yes... Hasta luego... Arrivederci.

Nico puts his phone away. Alex returns with the wine list.

Alex – If I may, sir, I would recommend our wine of the month...

Nico – Ah, er... No, let's forget the wine after all... My appointment's just been cancelled... And we can forget the rabbit too, all right? Obviously, I'll pay for the pâté...

Alex – And... shall I cancel madam's crayfish as well?

Nico – Madam?

Alex – The lady who is in the bathroom, sir.

Nico – Shit, that's right... So who the hell is she?

Alex – Who is who, sir?

Sam returns.

Alex – I'll leave you to think about it, shall I?

Alex leaves. Sam sits down.

Sam – Changed your mind?

Nico – About what?

Sam – The rabbit... Alex just said they'd leave you to think about it...

Nico – Oh, er... No, no, it's... It was about the wine... I was thinking that maybe, after all... Sorry, I'm just a bit nervous...

Sam – That's all right. So am I... It's the first time I've ever signed up for a dating site, you know...

Nico (*taking this in*) – Really...?

Sam – Anyway, it's certainly the first time I've agreed to meet someone...

Nico – Oh, right...

Sam – What about you?

Nico – Me too...

Sam – Really?

Nico – That part is absolutely true, I promise you...

Sam – I don't know why, but... your CV made me trust you straight away...

Nico – My CV...?

Sam – I mean, your profile... on the dating site...

Nico – Of course...

Alex comes back.

Alex – So? Shall we move on... or not?

Nico – Absolutely...

Alex hands Nico a menu.

Alex – Have you decided on the wine?

Alex clears away the terrine while Nico studies the wine list with some concern.

Nico – It's hard to choose... There are so many... Do you have half-bottles of the house red?

Alex – Certainly. Half a bottle of the house red. Excellent value for money, sir. And it will go very well with the rabbit.

Alex leaves.

Nico – You have to admit, the service is very... sophisticated.

Sam – And what was it about my profile that appealed to you?

Nico – Well... For a start, the fact that you were single. You are single, aren't you?

Sam – That's more or less the point of these dating sites, isn't it? Single... or widowed.

Nico – Available immediately, anyway.

Sam – On the market, as they say.

Nico – Although, as you said, this isn't a job interview, is it?

Sam – Especially not on Valentine's Day. So...

Nico – So what?

Sam – What made you want to meet me?

Nico – Let's say... your photo, for a start.

Sam – At least you're honest. You didn't start by telling me that, like you, I love opera and classical music. Or that I'm into hiking, cross-country skiing and women's wrestling.

Nico – I decided to be completely straight with you...

Sam – Fine by me... So, you graduated from a prestigious business school? And according to your CV, you were top of your class?

Nico – I was?

Sam – Sorry?

Nico – I mean... Did I tell you that too...?

Sam – Isn't it true?

Nico – Yes, yes, of course... absolutely. I was torn between two very prestigious business schools, and in the end I chose one because it was closer to home. There was a direct metro line too.

Sam – Metro?

Nico – Yes... The Green Line. Straight to Central Campus.

Sam – But isn't Central Campus where the other school is?

Nico (*uncomfortable*) – Yes... That one too... Anyway, excuse me for a moment. I need to put some more money in the parking meter. I only put in three euros, just in case this ended sooner than expected...

He gets up.

Sam (*slightly surprised*) – Of course... If you need some change...

Nico – No, I'm fine. I brought some coins for the tip, in case you ended up paying the bill...

Alex comes back with the wine. Nico leaves. Alex presents the bottle to Sam.

Alex – A young red from last year's vintage, madam. At least this one hasn't expired...

Sam – Alex? What are you doing here?

Alex (*ironically*) – How does madam think I pay for my acting classes?

Sam – Oh, right...

Alex – Besides, I’ve always thought there was something very theatrical about waiting tables. In fact, on stage I only ever get cast as servants. So it’s not really that different. And here, at least, I get to keep the tips...

Sam – I have to say, you’re very convincing in the part... It’s impressive.

Alex – And you, Sam? I didn’t know you went to places like this...

Sam – Look... I’ve decided it’s time to settle down, that’s all. Find myself some guy with plenty of money who’ll be happy to take me to restaurants I could never afford myself...

Alex – So you’re the one who arranged to meet him here? Pretending to be someone interested in hiring him?

Sam – You know what it’s like... Men will say anything on dating sites! You never know who you’re going to end up with.

Alex – It’s true. People usually lie a lot less to a prospective employer than to a woman they’re trying to impress. Generally speaking...

Sam – This way, at least, I’ve got some reliable information. For a start, I know he isn’t married and he’s available immediately. You’d have to be desperately single to agree to a job interview in a restaurant on Valentine’s Day...

Alex – And why would a man tell a prospective employer he was widowed or single if it wasn’t true? A woman might have a reason, but...

Sam – I’m also sure he really did go to a prestigious business school.

Alex – Who’d be stupid enough to put on a CV that they graduated top of their class from a prestigious business school if they hadn’t even finished high school?

Sam – Exactly. And frankly, I couldn’t bear to meet the kind of guys who use dating sites.

Alex – You’re right. Much better to leave it all to love and chance, like you.

Sam – Look... I don’t have time to leave things to chance anymore, all right?

Alex – And his... job interview?

Sam – I called him from the bathroom. Pretended to be the secretary and cancelled it.

Alex – That’s a pretty twisted little scheme, isn’t it?

Sam – You think...?

Alex – Aren’t you worried he might just make a run for it?

Sam – That’s where I’m counting on the element of surprise, my irresistible charm and the magic of Valentine’s Day. Anyway, I hope he comes back, because I’m warning you: I haven’t got a penny to pay the bill...

Alex – Very romantic...

Sam – Great artists have always had patrons. I’m sick of struggling through acting classes and meeting nothing but losers.

Alex – People like me, you mean?

Sam – Look, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but... I could never wait tables.

Alex – You're right... So you might as well put those acting classes to good use and find yourself a sucker to fleece.

Sam spots Nico in the distance.

Sam – Ah, here comes the sucker... And you doubted my sex appeal. I'm counting on your discretion, okay?

Nico comes back.

Alex – The gentleman is served...

Alex leaves after exchanging a knowing glance with Sam. Nico looks nervous.

Sam – For a moment, I thought you weren't coming back.

Nico – I have to admit, the thought crossed my mind...

Sam – That's not very flattering...

Nico – Quite the opposite... I was afraid I might not be up to it. Then I thought, why not? What have I got to lose? Apart from my virginity. I'm joking...

An awkward moment.

Sam – You didn't get a parking ticket?

Nico – No, but I'm going to finish the peanuts.

Sam – I meant the car... The parking meter.

Nico – Oh... Er, no... Luckily...

Sam – That big red sports car parked right outside the restaurant wouldn't happen to be yours, would it...?

Nico – What makes you think that?

Sam – I don't know... Your... sporty side, maybe.

Nico – You're making fun of me, aren't you...?

Sam – Not at all!

Nico – I know I'm not exactly...

Sam – Looks aren't the first thing I notice about a man, believe me.

Nico – Don't tell me the first thing you notice about a man is his car...

Sam – It's not as if I have a particular weakness for losers, if that's what you want me to say. But no... I don't know much about cars. The bull is Lamborghini, but the horse on those big red sports cars... what was that again?

Nico – Ferrari.

Sam – That’s what I thought... No, the first thing I notice about a man is... his eyes.

Nico – His eyes...

Sam – You know what they say... The eyes are the windows to the soul.

Nico – And what do you see through those windows...?

Sam leans towards him provocatively.

Sam – I’d have to get a little closer to see...

An uncertain moment. Now Nico is the one getting nervous. He picks up the half-bottle to give himself something to do.

Nico – Some more wine?

Sam – I’ll wait until my food arrives. I haven’t eaten anything yet, so it might go straight to my head...

Nico – Of course.

Sam – Have you finished the pâté?

Nico – Yes. All of it.

Sam (*provocatively*) – Good. Then we can move on to the next course...

Nico (*timidly*) – Alex shouldn’t be long.

Sam – Let’s use the time to talk a little. What exactly do you do, Nico?

Nico – It’s a little difficult to explain...

Sam – But you work in communications, right?

Nico – Yes... I... I work in advertising.

Sam – For a big agency...

Nico – Oh, you know that too.

Sam – It was on your CV... But you didn’t say which agency...

Nico – Well... I work for... Bullseye Media.

Sam – Bullseye Media?

Nico – You’ve heard of it?

Sam – Bullseye Media? Of course... (*A slight hesitation.*) Actually, no. I’ve never heard of it.

Nico – Really? You must know our slogan: “With Bullseye, you’ll always hit your target!”

Sam (*humouring him*) – Of course...

Nico – And with everything moving online, business is booming.

Sam – And you still want to leave...?

Nico – Well... Only if someone offers me even more money... Why? Are you trying to recruit me? I should warn you, I don't come cheap...

Sam – I'm sorry... I didn't mean to be nosy... Why don't you tell me about your first wife instead? (*Joking.*) You didn't kill her, did you?

Nico – No, she... (*Very seriously.*) She died of thirst during a trek across the Sahara organised by a travel company. It's less common than drowning on an Atlantic cruise, but unfortunately it does happen.

Sam cannot tell whether he is serious or joking.

Nico – I'm joking...

Sam – You're very funny... I was joking too... But you can understand why I wouldn't want to marry Bluebeard...

An awkward pause after this perhaps slightly premature reference to marriage.

Nico – Some water? I'm already letting you starve to death...

Sam – Yes, please...

As Nico tries to pour Sam some water, he knocks over his own glass of wine. Some of it spills onto Sam's lap. Sam recoils and jumps up.

Nico – I'm so sorry, really...

Sam – I'll try to get it out straight away, otherwise it'll stain...

Sam heads to the bathroom. Alex arrives and places the dishes on the table.

Alex – The lady's crayfish à la nage... and the gentleman's rabbit chasseur.

Nico looks puzzled.

Nico – Can I ask you something?

Alex – At your service, sir.

Nico – Do you think a CV posted on a job site could somehow end up on a dating site by mistake? Some kind of computer glitch...

Alex – Stranger things have happened, sir...

Nico – But how could something like that happen? It's unbelievable...

Alex – I'm not an IT specialist, sir...

Nico – Or maybe she really is the person who was meant to interview me, and she's trying to trap me into showing who I really am... I'd better keep my guard up...

Alex – Perhaps the lady has simply mistaken you for someone else.

Nico – What do you mean?

Alex – If the person you were supposed to meet didn't show up... The lady may have thought she was meeting you, when in fact she was meeting someone else who didn't show up either.

Nico looks completely lost.

Nico – Could you say that again, a little more slowly?

Alex – A misunderstanding.

Nico – I see what you mean... The strange thing is, the guy she was supposed to meet also went to a prestigious business school, just like me... Can you imagine? We could have been in the same class...

Alex – Did you really go to a prestigious business school, sir?

Nico – No...

Alex – In that case, the coincidence is rather less remarkable.

Nico – But then why didn't he show up?

Alex – Perhaps the man she was supposed to meet had also... embellished his CV a little. And that's why he decided not to show up...

Nico – Right... So what do you think I should do now...? Do you think I should take advantage of the situation...?

Alex – That's for you to decide, sir... But it looks as though you'll be paying the bill whatever happens, so... you might as well get something out of it.

Nico – Hmm... I see what you mean...

Sam comes back.

Nico – I'm so sorry...

Sam – It's all sorted out.

Nico – Please, eat your crayfish before they get cold. They're better hot.

Sam – I wouldn't know. I've never had them before.

Nico – Neither have I.

Sam – I don't even know why I ordered them. They're not exactly easy to shell. Especially in public...

Nico – That's why I ordered the rabbit. I hate rabbit.

Sam starts struggling with the crayfish. Nico attacks his rabbit.

Nico – And what do you do, Sam?

Sam (*reproachfully*) – You don't remember?

Nico – I'd rather hear you tell me again...

Sam – Well... I started studying law, and then... I decided to go into the arts...

Nico – Really... In my case, it would be more the other way round... But the arts...?

Sam – I think you said you liked theatre... At least, that's what you told me online...

Nico – That's true. I wanted to be an artist, but... unfortunately, I got into one of the most prestigious business schools. And when I graduated, Max Hunter offered me a job at Bullseye Media that I simply couldn't refuse, so...

Sam – Max Hunter...?

Nico – The boss of Bullseye Media! You haven't heard of him either?

Sam – No...

Nico – I didn't have the courage to turn down the outrageous salary he offered me. Sometimes I regret it. I could have taken a completely different path, you know? But anyway...

Sam – He can't be very young now, can he?

Nico – He died a few months after hiring me. That's why I want to leave the company. Max and I were very close. I never really got over losing him. Max Hunter was the Steve Jobs of advertising... So now I'm looking for another job. I still have to pay for the fuel somehow.

Sam – So that Ferrari parked outside really is yours...

Nico – With fuel prices these days, sometimes I wonder if I should have bought a hybrid.

Sam – Don't regret anything, Nico. What matters is who you really are inside. And I get the feeling you're a good person. And, above all, very honest...

Nico – I have to admit, you've really thrown me, Sam... I'm not used to meeting women like you...

Sam – What do you mean?

Nico – Women who are so... elegant.

Sam – But you must meet plenty of them in your world, surely? Driving a Ferrari...

Nico – Yes, but... It wasn't the same. They were only interested in my money...

Sam – I understand...

Nico – You're sensitive, but... at the same time, you know exactly what you want.

Sam – I know exactly what I want?

Nico – I think I need someone like that, Sam... Someone with character. Someone who brings out the best in me.

Sam – But... you've already done pretty well for yourself, haven't you?

Nico – I don't know what's happening to me, Sam. I've never felt like this before, I swear. Do you feel the same way?

Sam – Yes... Well...

Nico reaches out a hand. Sam doesn't pull away. They kiss.

Alex arrives with two dessert menus and interrupts them.

Alex – Any room left for dessert?

Nico and Sam pull apart awkwardly.

Alex – I'll leave you to look at the menu...

Sam – I'm just going to freshen up...

Sam leaves.

Nico – What's your name?

Alex – Alex, sir.

Nico – Alex, I'm a little embarrassed to admit this, but... I think I got carried away and took advantage of the situation.

Alex – So it would seem...

Nico – How do I get out of this now?

Alex – The day isn't over yet... and there may still be a few surprises in store. You could suggest going back to your place for one last drink...

Nico – I'm afraid that might be difficult, Alex. First, because I don't have a car, and second, because I don't have a place of my own either...

Alex – In that case, all you can do is tell the truth and hope Sam has a good sense of humour.

Nico – Sam's going to hate me, I know it...

Alex – Sam certainly doesn't seem like someone who's only interested in money, sir. Sam may not even be a woman. If Sam really has feelings for you, I'm sure they'll understand...

Nico – Do you really think a woman like that could fall in love with a man like me?

Alex looks unconvinced. Sam comes back.

Alex – I'll leave you to choose.

Alex leaves.

Sam – So, are you having dessert after all?

Nico – I don't think that would be very sensible...

Sam senses that something is wrong.

Sam – Is something wrong? You seem tense...

Nico – I haven't told you everything, Sam, and... Alex has just convinced me it would be more honest to tell you the truth before this goes any further.

Sam – Alex?

Nico – I don't want our relationship to get off on the wrong foot.

Sam – You're not really a widower, is that it?

Nico – No...

Sam – I see...

Nico – I'm not a widower because I've never been married.

Sam – So you're single...

Nico – As single as it gets.

Sam – Then there's no problem!

Nico – It's the rest that I... embellished a little.

Sam – You lied to me?

Nico – But at first, it wasn't you I was lying to... It was... the prospective employer I was supposed to meet... About a job... I'd padded my CV a little, like everyone does, and... I still don't know how I ended up sitting here opposite you...

Sam – Neither do I... But when you say "padded"...?

Nico – I didn't go to any prestigious business school, Sam. In fact, I didn't even finish high school. I'm an actor. Well, right now I'm mostly still training... I take acting classes. And I'm not even officially enrolled. I just sit in on the classes...

Sam – Is this a joke?

Nico – No...

Sam – So you've been making fun of me this whole time?

Nico – That wasn't my intention, I promise...

Sam – It wasn't your intention? You took advantage of me! You took advantage of how trusting I was!

Nico – One thing is true: I really like you, Sam. And this whole misunderstanding... Maybe it's a sign from fate, don't you think? Proof that we were meant to meet...

Sam – Oh, really...?

Nico – Qualifications, bank accounts, cars... They're not the most important things in life. You said so yourself.

Sam – I said that?

Nico – And what about you? I'm sure you embellished your profile on that dating site a little too, didn't you?

Sam – Absolutely not! Well... not the important parts, anyway...

Nico – I'm ready to accept you exactly as you are, Sam.

Sam – Really?

Nico – If there are one or two things you haven't told me that I should know, I'm listening. And I promise it won't change how I feel about you.

Sam – All right... The truth is, I haven't been completely honest with you either, Nico.

Nico – I'm listening...

Sam – It's not very easy to say...

Sam leans towards him and whispers something in his ear.

Nico freezes. Alex comes back.

Alex – Coffee? A digestif? *(Faced with their silence.)* The bill, then. Right...

Alex leaves.

Nico – No...?

Sam – Yes.

Nico – You'd never know.

Sam – Well... It depends...

Nico – But... how did you find out? Sorry, that's a stupid question...

Sam – It doesn't matter to you, does it? You promised to accept me exactly as I am...

Nico – Of course... No problem, Sam... I... accept you exactly as you are. Absolutely.

Sam – Good... Then let's go... I'll get my coat...

Sam leaves for a moment. Nico turns to Alex, who comes back with the bill on a small tray.

Nico – Tell me, Alex, I've suddenly got a terrible doubt... Someone who takes a long time to stop bleeding when they cut themselves is called a hermaphrodite, right?

Alex – No, that's a haemophiliac, sir.

Nico – That's what I was afraid of...

Sam comes back with the coat. Alex leaves.

Sam – Shall we have one last drink at your place?

Nico – Look, Sam, I've been thinking and... I think maybe we'd be better off just staying friends...

Sam – I knew you'd react like that... I'm disappointed in you, Nico... Very disappointed...

Nico – I'm really sorry, but... I'm sure one day you'll find someone like you, someone you can start a family with, and...

Sam – Don't bother. I take acting classes too.

Nico – Seriously?

Sam – Unfortunately, yes...

Nico – It's incredible we've never run into each other...

Sam – Incredible. That's exactly the word.

Nico – Well, I go in the evenings. Maybe that's why...

Sam – I think this little comedy has gone on long enough, don't you?

Nico – Look, it's true we both got off on the wrong foot, but...

Sam – The wrong foot?

Nico – The guy you were supposed to meet probably lied on his profile too...

Sam – The guy I was supposed to... Oh, right... I'd forgotten about him...

Nico – Who knows... Maybe he wasn't even a man...

Sam gives him a murderous look. Alex comes back.

Alex – Cash or card?

Sam – I think you at least owe me lunch, don't you?

Nico carefully opens the bill folder and looks at the total.

Nico – Wow... There goes my whole month's benefits...

He takes out his bank card and places it on the table.

Sam – Thanks for lunch anyway.

Nico – I've just had an idea, Sam...

Sam – Oh, really? How about keeping it to yourself?

Nico – When you said this little comedy had gone on long enough, something clicked. It's a great idea for a play, don't you think?

Sam – What is?

Nico – What just happened to us! We could write it together. We've already got the plot. I'm sure it would be a hit...

Sam – Why not...? In the gay-friendly category... And Alex takes acting classes too...

Nico – Nothing could surprise me today... But I'm really excited about this play. Aren't you?

While Alex helps Sam put on the coat, Nico takes out his phone.

Sam – What are you doing? Calling your agent?

Nico – I'm going to call the secretary of that guy who was supposed to meet me here. I'll tell her I'm giving up advertising... I'd rather stick with acting... And I have a feeling this play could really launch my career. (*He presses redial.*) All we need now is a good title...

Sam's phone rings. Nico stares in astonishment.

Alex – Cards on the Table?

Sam looks uncomfortable and takes off the blonde wig.

Sam – OK...

Sam takes out a bank card as well and places it on the table beside Nico's.

Alex – Ah... War...

Blackout.

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 websites :

<https://jeanpierremartinez.net/>

<https://comediatheque.net/>

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the French Society of Authors (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the [contact form on his websites](#).

Other plays by the same author translated in English

Comedies for 2

A Thwarted Vocation
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
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Joker
The Rope
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
Horizons
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman,
one giant leap backward for
Mankind
The Way of Chance

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night A Skeleton in
the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
How to get rid of your best
friends
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
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

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
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more

At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
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
Music does not always soothe
the savage beasts
Neighbours'Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a Lovely Village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not
cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Don't panic ! Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
For real and for fun
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
No Sense Off Limits
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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