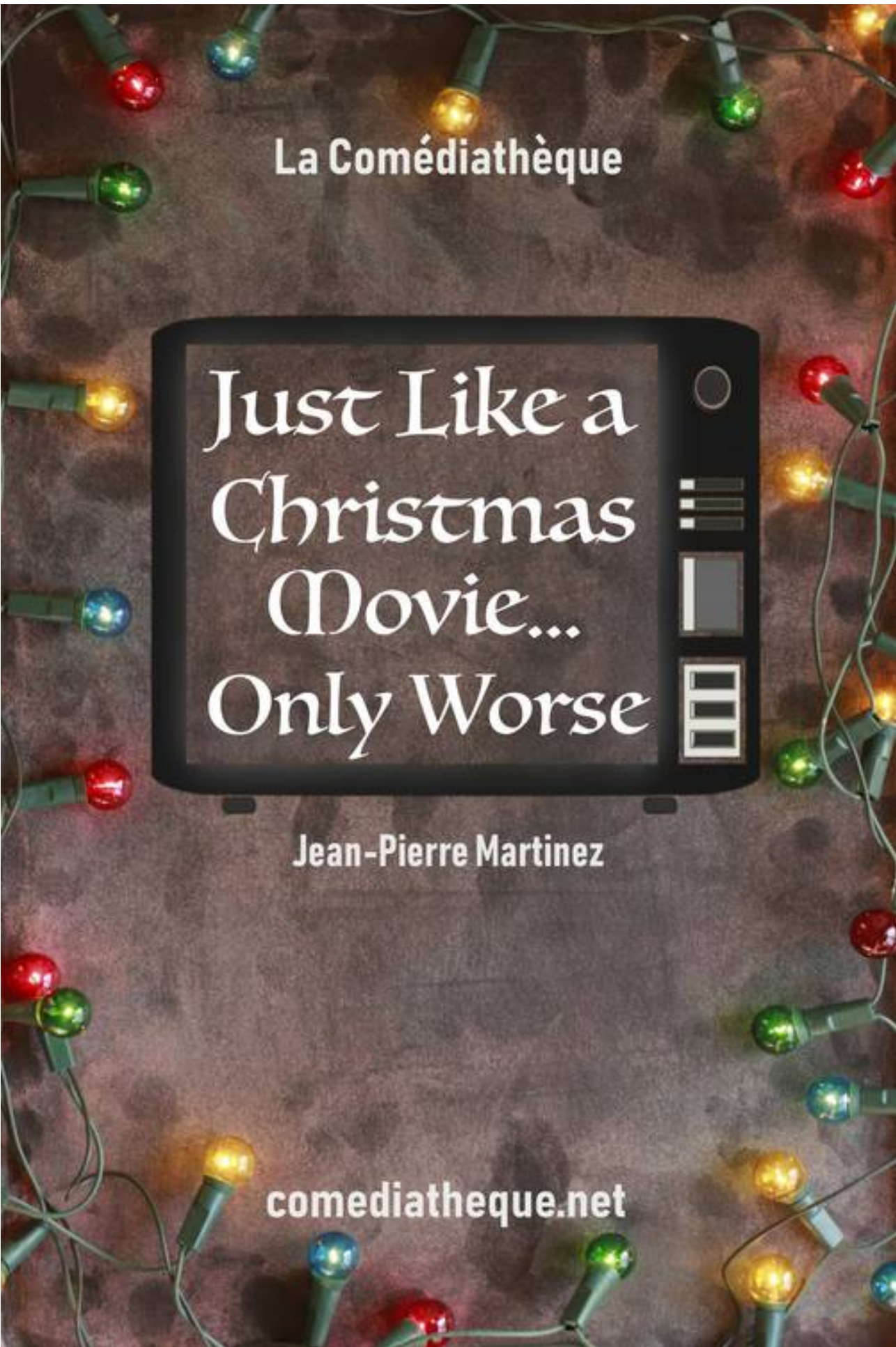




La Comédiathèque

Just Like a
Christmas
Movie...
Only Worse

Jean-Pierre Martinez

comediatheque.net

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Just like a Christmas movie... Only Worse

A comedy by Jean-Pierre Martinez
Translation by the author

Kimberley has inherited the secret recipe for her grandmother's famous cookies. On Christmas Eve, she and her best friend Jennifer are opening a tearoom on the ground floor of the building where Granny Maggie once lived. Kimberley has put all her savings into the venture. But a ruthless property developer is determined to buy the shop, demolish the building and put up a luxury residence in its place. Can Kimberley overcome the obstacles, save her dream and finally find true love? All the ingredients of an American Christmas TV movie... only worse.

Cast

Kimberley: the heroine
Jennifer: her best friend
Cindy: the wicked rival
Kevin: the official fiancé
Brian: the unlikely romantic hero
George: the supportive father
Samantha: the overbearing mother
William: the postman
Richard Bribery: the ruthless property developer
Ramirez: the detective
Sanchez: the investigating officer

George and Sanchez may be played by the same actor. The developer and either police officer may be played by a man or a woman.

*10 performers: 6 men / 4 women, 5 men / 5 women or 4 men / 6 women.
11 performers: 7 men / 4 women, 6 men / 5 women, 5 men / 6 women or 4 men / 7 women.*

A cosy, candy-box tearoom, currently furnished with just one table and three chairs. A decorated Christmas tree stands in a corner. Excessively sentimental Christmas music plays. This is a parody of the most formulaic American Christmas TV movies: everything, from the set to the costumes, should suggest a sugary holiday romance. The actors may cheerfully overact, especially when delivering the shameless clichés that make up so much of the dialogue. Kimberley comes in, climbs onto a stool and places an enormous star on top of the tree. Jennifer enters. The music stops.

Jennifer – So, is it happening? It's the big day!

Kimberley – I didn't sleep a wink all night...

Jennifer – Neither did I.

Kimberley – Nerves before the premiere, just like me...

Jennifer – Yes... and also the guy I spent the night with.

Kimberley – Oh, really...

Jennifer – An Italian I met last night...

Kimberley – Are you planning to see him again?

Jennifer – He's a pizza delivery guy... Just give him a call. I'll share the number with you if you want. I promise you, for the price of a four-cheese pizza, you won't be disappointed.

Kimberley – Okay...

Jennifer notices the tree.

Jennifer – Oh my God, it's truly beautiful!

Kimberley – Too bad Granny Maggie can't see it this year.

Jennifer – It's been a year already since your grandmother left us. Feels like it was yesterday...

Kimberley – And yet, it was exactly 365 days ago.

Jennifer – Crazy... so you've been counting the days.

Kimberley – Well, it's been a whole year, you know...

Jennifer – December 25th...

Kimberley – During the night of the 24th to the 25th, anyway. We found her early the next morning, blue in the face and slumped at the foot of the tree.

Jennifer – Amidst the gifts left overnight by Santa Claus... What a present... We never really knew what happened...

Kimberley (*pointing to the star at the top of the tree*) – She was still holding the star we usually fix at the top of the tree in her hand...

Jennifer – And there was an overturned stool at her feet.

Kimberley – She must have slipped while trying to hang up that star that fell from the sky.

Jennifer – Or maybe... she wanted to hang herself with the string of Christmas lights, and the tree couldn't bear her weight. Christmas can be depressing.

Kimberley – And towards the end, she weighed around four hundred and fifty pounds...

Jennifer – When you think that at twenty, she was Miss Pine County.

Kimberley – Miss Willow County. Miss Pine County was me.

Jennifer – I hope you don't end up like her...

Kimberley – Obese, you mean?

Jennifer – Or hanging... Anyway, instead of the Christmas star, she was the one who came crashing to the floor. Lucky no one was standing underneath...

Kimberley – You can't imagine how guilty I feel...

Jennifer – Oh, come on, it's not your fault!

Kimberley – If only I had hung that damn star more securely...

Jennifer – I'm sure Granny Maggie is up in heaven now, watching us from above.

Kimberley – I don't know if she would approve of my plans...

Jennifer – I'm certain she would. She loved treating us all to her famous cookies.

Kimberley – They're so good.

Jennifer – And so filling...

Kimberley – True... Since she passed away, I've not only lost a grandmother... I've also lost ten pounds...

Jennifer – Opening this tearoom will be an opportunity to make Margaret's cookies known throughout the city. And who knows, maybe even the whole country!

Kimberley – But I was thinking... I was still looking for a name for our establishment... What about simply calling it "Granny Maggie's Cookies"?

Jennifer – What a wonderful idea! It will be a beautiful homage to your grandmother, who passed on the secret recipe for her famous cookies before she left us.

Kimberley – Fortunately, she also left me this cozy ground-floor apartment in a neighbourhood that's becoming very trendy.

Jennifer – A rundown apartment that we're about to transform into the most elegant tearoom in all of Bellewood.

Kimberley – I hope we'll make it... because I've poured all my savings into the redecoration.

Jennifer – Life is like Santa Claus, Kimberley! Or the tooth fairy. All you have to do is believe, and they'll bring you presents and money.

Kimberley – You're right! I just need a bit of encouragement from time to time when I feel a bit down...

Jennifer – Of course! You can't just rely on secretly sipping whisky...

Kimberley – Sometimes, I wish I could rely a bit more on Kevin's support. After all, we're engaged...

Jennifer – Don't be too hard on him. He has his job too. But I'm here to help you, Kimberley.

Kimberley – I know... Since kindergarten, you've always been my best friend. Without you, I would never have had the courage to embark on such an adventure.

Jennifer – I can never thank you enough for giving me the chance to bounce back, Kimberley. Life hasn't been easy for me since I got out of prison... And if you hadn't kindly paid my bail, I'd still be behind bars...

Kimberley – You can pay me back bit by bit out of your first wages.

Jennifer – I'm sure you'll be a success. Everything always works out for you! Unlike me...

Kimberley – Yes... But to make it happen, I need to buy the shop next door to expand a bit. This place is way too small...

Jennifer – The flower shop! It's on the verge of bankruptcy! The florist agreed to sell it to you at a good price, and you just signed the agreement.

Kimberley – But I haven't received the bank's response for the loan yet...

Jennifer – I'm sure it'll work out. We'll make a killing!

Kimberley – A killing? I was hoping to open a tearoom, not a crime scene...

Jennifer – I mean we'll be a roaring success!

Kimberley – Oh, right... With all this talk of killing, I was beginning to wonder. Anyway, the customers aren't exactly queuing up yet.

Jennifer – We're supposed to open at eight, and it's only five minutes to eight. Don't be so worried!

Kimberley – You're right; I need to calm down. I didn't sleep all night, but at least, I didn't waste my time. The cookies are still warm. I made over a thousand!

Jennifer – A thousand?

Kimberley – Do you think that's too much?

Jennifer – If we get ten customers throughout the day, and they each take a hundred...

Kimberley – Or a hundred customers buying ten each...

Jennifer – Or fifty customers, and they each take... How many should they take in that case?

Kimberley – Wait, let me get my calculator, because you know, numbers...

The bell over the entrance door rings, announcing a customer.

Jennifer – Ah... Here comes your first customer!

Brian enters: a good-looking young man wearing clothes that are obviously too big for him.

Kimberley – Oh my God! And nothing is ready yet...

Jennifer – Come on, calm down. Just serve him a cup of coffee... and ask if he'd like some cookies.

Kimberley – Our first customer! We have to do everything to satisfy him...

Jennifer (*teasingly*) – Everything? Really?

Kimberley – I didn't even have time to fix my hair.

Jennifer – Do you want me to take care of it?

Kimberley – No... It's up to me to handle it.

She makes an effort to compose herself, tidies up her hair a bit, puffs out her chest, and approaches Brian.

Brian – Hello.

Kimberley – Welcome to our humble tearoom... destined to evolve into an internationally franchised chain in the years to come, bearing the name of... "Granny Maggie's Cookies."

Brian (*caught off guard*) – Thank you... Can I have a coffee?

Kimberley – Of course. Would you like something to accompany your coffee?

Brian – No, thanks, I'm in a bit of a hurry...

Kimberley – You're not going to leave without trying Margaret's cookies...

Brian – Your name is Margaret?

Kimberley – No... Margaret has passed away, unfortunately.

Brian – I hope it's not after consuming one of those famous cookies...

Kimberley – That was my grandmother... She hanged herself on the Christmas tree... I mean... It was an accident. Well, I think...

Brian – I'm really sorry...

Kimberley – Don't apologise; it's not your fault... At least until the police prove otherwise... So?

Brian – Sorry?

Kimberley – Do you have a preference for cookies? We have over thirty different flavours... *(Confidentially)* But don't worry, they all contain chocolate...

Brian – Well, you see...

Kimberley – Alright. It's on the house. You'll only pay for the coffee...

Brian – Really?

Kimberley – We've just opened, and you're our first customer. *(Straightening up to emphasise her generous cleavage)* Consider it a launch offer...

Brian – In that case... I'll let you choose the flavour... Since they're all chocolate...

Kimberley smiles and walks away to prepare the order.

Kimberley – So, how did I do?

Jennifer – Very subtle...

Kimberley – Okay, maybe I went a bit overboard...

Jennifer – We can wait a bit before unveiling our international strategy. Currently, we only have one table...

Kimberley – Do you know this guy?

Jennifer – No...

Kimberley – His face seems familiar, but the body underneath doesn't...

Jennifer – True, he's dressed like a scarecrow... Anyway, he's not from Bellewood. I'd have noticed him...

Kimberley – Oh yeah?

Jennifer – He's quite well-built, though.

Kimberley – Yes...

Jennifer – Didn't you notice?

Kimberley – I remind you I'm engaged...

Jennifer – That doesn't mean you can't have eyes! Just because you have a stale cake at home doesn't mean you can't marvel at the pastries in a bakery...

Kimberley – You go ahead... It'll be a change from pizza delivery guys...

Jennifer – Yes... but clearly, it's not me he's interested in...

Kimberley – I wonder what he's doing here.

Jennifer – Why don't you ask him?

Kimberley – Come on, Jennifer... That would be intrusive.

Kimberley serves Brian.

Brian – Thanks...

Kimberley – This one is ginger-flavoured. According to my grandmother, it's an aphrodisiac. Let me know what you think... Enjoy...

Kimberley goes back over to Jennifer.

Jennifer – Enjoy...?

Kimberley – Well, he seems to be enjoying them. Granny was right when she said ginger is an aphrodisiac. Look, he looks much happier than when he arrived...

Brian glances at Kimberley with a broad smile.

Jennifer – Yes... He's practically drooling every time he looks at you... Are you absolutely sure you know what 'aphrodisiac' means?

Kimberley – Like a really strong joint? Something that puts a smile on your face...

Jennifer – A joint? You mean marijuana?

Kimberley – Well, that too...

Jennifer – I think you're confusing 'aphrodisiac' with 'euphoric'.

Kimberley – Really? (*Checking her watch*) Oh my God, I have to call the bank back... I'll leave you to look after him. Be friendly, but try to keep your distance, if you know what I mean...

She exits. Jennifer approaches Brian.

Jennifer – So... you don't say no to a cookie, then?

Brian – My mother always told me to refuse treats from strangers. But the waitress is so charming.

Jennifer – Kimberley is the owner of this establishment.

Brian – And apparently, she's not lacking ambition.

Jennifer – This place is too small. We'll have to expand.

Brian – Internationally, then...

Jennifer – We'll begin with the adjacent space. That'll allow us to add one or two more tables, at least.

Brian – Be cautious. Hitler started by invading Poland, and look where it led us...

Jennifer – It's a project close to our hearts. For her and for me, it'll mark a fresh start.

Brian – A fresh start, really...?

Jennifer – I just got out of jail.

Brian – Oh, I see... Yet, looking at you... One would think you're as innocent as a lamb...

Jennifer – I got married very young, and I didn't choose the right person.

Brian – That happens, unfortunately.

Jennifer – He told me he was a salesman. When I realised he was selling heroin, it was already too late.

Brian – You were already hooked...

Jennifer – Worse, I was already pregnant. The police raided our place. They found drugs in a jar of baby formula.

Brian – That's terrible...

Jennifer – I'm out on parole. I have an electronic bracelet. Want to see it?

She shows him the bracelet on her ankle.

Brian – I'd advise against showing that to just anyone... I'm more used to shady bars. But that could scare off the clientele of a tearoom...

Kimberley returns.

Kimberley – Everything okay?

Brian – Yes, yes... I was just chatting with...

Jennifer – Jennifer. And what's your name?

Brian – Brian.

Jennifer – And what brings you around here, Brian?

Kimberley glares at Jennifer.

Brian – A work meeting. I'm an architect.

Jennifer – An architect?

Brian – I design houses, buildings, offices...

Jennifer – Well, you seem to think big too... especially with the size of your clothes.

Kimberley (*changing the subject*) – So, how about those cookies? Did you enjoy them?

Brian – Excellent, really. But I fear after having a few, I won't be able to stop. It's hard stuff, isn't it? (*He gives an embarrassed look to Jennifer.*) I mean... I'm afraid it's very addictive...

Jennifer (*teasingly*) – I'll leave you. I've got things to do in the kitchen... So, see you soon! Since you clearly can't do without us any more...

Jennifer exits.

Kimberley – She meant our cookies, of course.

Brian – She's certainly very affectionate.

Kimberley – You mean a bit clingy, I suppose.

Brian (*checking his watch*) – I really must go... But I promise we'll meet again.

Kimberley – With pleasure.

He gets up to leave.

Brian – Actually, I lived around here for a few years. A long time ago.

Kimberley – In Bellewood?

Brian – Yes... in Bellewood. And you?

Kimberley – I was born here.

Brian – Who knows... We might have already met...

Kimberley – In any case, I don't remember it. And you...?

Brian – After high school, I went to try my luck elsewhere.

Kimberley – I can understand that. You know what they say about the people of Bellewood...

Brian – No...

Kimberley – Bellewood: beautiful faces, empty heads!

Brian – I suppose I wasn't good-looking or stupid enough to make it in a place like this.

Kimberley – Well... See you soon, then!

Brian – I'll be back to try some more of those delicious aphrodisiac cookies.

Brian gives a subtle farewell wave. Kimberley responds with a courteous smile as he departs. Samantha, Kimberley's mother, enters. Impeccably dressed, every aspect of her exudes an air of snobbery.

Samantha – Well... It doesn't appear to be bustling for an opening day...

They greet each other rather coldly.

Kimberley – Hello, Mom. Isn't Dad with you?

Samantha – He's parking the Jaguar. Finding a spot in this neighbourhood is quite a task... We might need a valet service.

Kimberley – It's a tearoom, Mom! Not a Michelin-starred restaurant...

Samantha – Who's that well-dressed young man who just came out of here?

Kimberley – My first customer.

Samantha – My dear, a woman of your standing, still single, shouldn't have customers... Only suitors. Are you really sure about running a saloon?

Kimberley – A tearoom, Mom! Not a saloon... And why not?

Samantha – I'm a baroness. I inherited that title from my father. And one day, I'll pass it on to you.

Kimberley – So what?

Samantha – A baroness can't be a waitress, even in a tearoom! When a baroness has tea, she gets served!

Kimberley – Grandfather might have been a baron, but Margaret, your mother, was a maid, I remind you. Before marrying Grandpa...

Samantha – Marrying his own maid... I'd rather not discuss such a disgraceful match...

Kimberley – Please don't speak ill of Margaret... I loved my grandmother very much.

Samantha – I'll never forgive her for burdening me with this name...

Kimberley – Samantha? It's very pretty.

Samantha – Maybe for the common folk, but Baroness Samantha Swindlemore von Hustlestein, you must admit...

Kimberley – I'd like to point out that you too married a commoner.

Samantha – At least he wasn't my servant...

Kimberley – He was your mechanic!

Samantha – Yes... But he had money!

Kimberley – And he paid for the repairs to your bodywork...

Samantha – When you say my bodywork, you mean the car I had back then, don't you?

Kimberley – Of course... Even though he also paid for your cosmetic surgeries...

Samantha – What can I say...? We had to restore the family finances. To give you a proper education and enable you to pursue decent studies. All that for today...

George, her father, enters. He is dressed in a more casual manner, and his overall demeanour reflects his working-class roots.

George – Hello, Kimberley!

Samantha – Anyway, if you don't like your name either, just remember it was your father who chose it...

Kimberley – Hello, Dad.

Kimberley and her father embrace much more warmly.

George – Wonderful! It looks beautiful. Congratulations on the decorations. Granny Maggie's apartment looks completely different now.

Samantha – Fortunately... It was a bit of a dump...

Kimberley (to her father) – Thank you. Jennifer was a tremendous help.

George – So, how's our little baby coming along?

Samantha – A baby? Don't tell me I'm about to become a grandmother! Not at my age!

George – No! By baby I mean this place, your new venture! The grand opening of the tearoom! How's it going?

Kimberley – For now, you know, we're still in the trial phase.

Samantha – Yes, with just one table... It's better not to have two customers at once...

Kimberley – We're also offering takeout.

George – I'm sure you'll be a hit with Granny Maggie's cookies. I loved them too...

Samantha – For now, she's already causing her mother's misery... You'd better find yourself a husband.

George – I remind you she already has a fiancé...

Kimberley – Mom, it's the twenty-first century!

Samantha – Yes, and it's a shame. In my time, women of society didn't need to work. And apparently, it's not your accountant who will be able to support you. By the way, I wonder if it's not your money that interests him...

Kimberley – My money?

Samantha – Let's say your inheritance, then.

Kimberley – Yes, not my dowry, in any case.

George – What can you do? Times change, Samantha. We have to adapt to our era. I find it commendable that our daughter is venturing into entrepreneurship. You wouldn't want her to feel compelled to marry a mechanic, like you did... or to tie the knot with her boss, like your mother.

Samantha – Well, anyway, we were just passing through.

George – Samantha, we won't leave without trying Maggie's cookies. Or rather Kimberley's cookies, because I'm sure you added your personal touch, didn't you?

Kimberley responds with a knowing smile.

Samantha – Well, alright, but make it quick.

Kimberley presents them with a tray.

George – Thank you, darling... They look really appetising... What's this one?

Kimberley – Ginger. According to Granny, it's an aphrodisiac. Or Czechoslovakian, I forget. You know me and complicated words...

George looks at her in surprise but takes a cookie, smiling. Samantha declines the offer.

Samantha – Not for me, thanks. They're really delicious, but not conducive to maintaining my figure. I'm trying to watch my weight... And George, don't overdo it either... If you don't want to become as huge as your late mother-in-law.

George, who was on the verge of grabbing another cookie, has second thoughts as Richard, a prosperous-looking man, makes his entrance.

Richard – Ladies and gentlemen...

Samantha – We'll let you get on with it. Otherwise, your second customer might find it hard to get a seat...

George – Farewell, my darling.

He discreetly slips a banknote into her hand.

Kimberley – Dad, come on... It's complimentary...

George – No way. Business is business.

Samantha – So, ready to go, George?

George – I'm coming...

Samantha and George exit.

Kimberley – Hello. Please, have a seat here; it's our best table...

Richard glances around, visibly puzzled by the absence of other tables.

Richard – Thank you, but... I'm not here for a coffee. I came to have a conversation with you.

Kimberley – A conversation? Quite refined phrasing. Are you a journalist, perhaps? Interested in featuring our tearoom's opening in an article? I'd be delighted to cater to all your desires...

Richard – Really?

Kimberley – I mean, answer all your questions...

Richard – I'm not a journalist; I work in real estate.

Kimberley – Alright... Is it regarding the agreement I recently signed to acquire the adjacent space? I just got off the phone with my bank, but unfortunately, I still don't have a concrete answer on the loan

Richard – I'm a property developer, and I've got an interesting proposition for you.

Kimberley – I'm all ears...

Richard – A few years back, I began acquiring all the apartments in this building. However, your grandmother was the only one who consistently refused to sell hers.

Kimberley – I see. And what's the reason behind buying up all these apartments? They're quite run-down, you have to admit...

Richard – Well, as a developer, I have a comprehensive real estate project in mind.

Kimberley – A project, you say?

Richard – I intend to construct a new building at this prime location. It'll be taller, more elegant, with upscale apartments.

Kimberley – So, you're suggesting tearing down this building.

Richard – It's a necessary step.

Kimberley – I'm not surprised my grandmother refused.

Richard – But your grandmother is no longer here. And I'm here to propose buying your apartment.

Kimberley – That's out of the question.

Richard – I hold this project in high regard. I'm willing to offer you a substantial amount, well above market value.

Kimberley – As you can see, I have my own vision for this place, a legacy from my grandmother. I've recently finalised the agreement to acquire the adjacent space.

Richard – I'm open to compensating you if you reconsider purchasing this flower shop.

Kimberley – Cindy resisted selling her shop to you as well?

Richard – Her business faced financial challenges. I assumed there wouldn't be any complications.

Kimberley – So, you were waiting for her to face difficulties to acquire her space at a bargain.

Richard – Well, I only realised later that she had already committed to selling to you...

Kimberley – What are your intentions for these two ground-floor spaces then?

Richard – Given the premium nature of the building and the expected rental rates for these commercial spaces, a large national chain seems more fitting than a quaint tearoom.

Kimberley – A large national chain?

Richard – Starfucks has shown interest.

Kimberley – Starfucks? You'd have to go through me first.

Richard – Don't tempt me.

Kimberley – That's not what I meant.

Richard – Your current project might not be as feasible as you think. Accepting my offer could also turn out to be a lucrative deal for you.

Kimberley – I'm very attached to this tearoom.

Richard – If you dream so much of running a café, I could put in a good word for you with the Starfucks management. I'm confident they'd view your application to manage their establishment in Bellewood quite favourably.

Kimberley – Really?

Richard – With your enthusiasm and your charm, I'm confident you would do very well. Naturally, you wouldn't be able to retain your current staff... or your delightful homemade cookies.

Kimberley – Never!

Richard – Think about it. This is an unexpected opportunity for you.

Kimberley – I've made up my mind.

Richard – You might regret one day not having accepted my offer.

Kimberley – Are you trying to threaten me?

Richard – It's just friendly advice.

Kimberley – Now, I ask you to leave. I should warn you, I can be quite capable of defending myself, and I happen to hold a yellow belt in judo.

Richard – I'll leave you my card, just in case you change your mind...

He places the card on the table and exits. Kimberley seems very disturbed. Kevin enters, a handsome man with a stern elegance.

Kevin – Everything alright, darling? You look like you've just encountered the devil.

Kimberley – You're not too far off the mark...

Kevin – Has your mother paid a visit?

Kimberley – Worse...

Kevin – Worse?

Kimberley – A real estate developer. He's eyeing the building, aiming to demolish it and replace it with high-end apartments.

Kevin – Seriously?

Kimberley – He's even considering opening a Starfucks on the ground floor.

Kevin – Fantastic! (*Noticing Kimberley's less-than-enthused expression*) I mean... What did you say to him?

Kimberley – That I'm not for sale!

Kevin – Of course, darling... Well, it depends on the price...

Kimberley – He was incredibly persistent. Almost felt like a threat.

Kevin – It's not uncommon for developers to eye a location like this. The neighbourhood is going through a revitalisation.

Kimberley – That's precisely why I have faith in our project.

Kevin (*skeptical*) – Maggie's cookies...

Kimberley – I understand you've always been skeptical about my ideas, but this time, I'm asking you to have faith in me, Kevin. If you truly love me...

Kevin – Well, of course, I love you! After all, we are getting married, aren't we?

He hugs her briefly to offer comfort.

Kimberley – I need you to believe in me, you know?

Kevin – I believe in you, Kimberley, but let's calmly consider this offer. How much did he exactly offer you?

Kimberley – I don't even know, I didn't ask. Anyway, I won't accept it. It's not about the money. As Dad always says, there's more to life than just money...

Kevin – Easy for your father to say. He's sitting on a goldmine with his garage. If only he could spare some cash to help us kickstart things...

Kimberley – I'm sure Dad wouldn't be opposed to it. It's my mother who's against me diving into business...

Kevin – Business... By the way, any word from the bank regarding your loan?

Kimberley – Still waiting for a response.

Kevin – Without that loan, your project isn't exactly on solid ground, you know.

Kimberley – You're sounding like an accountant.

Kevin – Well, Kimberley, I am an accountant!

Kimberley – Today, I need the support of the man who loves me, not the perspective of an accountant.

Kevin – It's through my advice that I express my support, darling. And my advice is not to overlook the golden opportunity this developer just presented to you. It could be a chance for both of us to make a comeback!

Kimberley – My plan for a comeback involves opening this tearoom, Kevin.

Kevin – By selling it, we would have enough funds for me to launch my own accounting firm.

Kimberley – And what about me? Where do I fit into all of this?

Kevin – You could work for me! I mean, work with me...

Kimberley – No way. What I cherish is connecting with people, not crunching numbers. Plus, abandoning this project would mean letting go of my best friend.

Kevin – Jennifer? She'll find another job!

Kimberley – Not with her criminal record, I guarantee you...

Kevin – What? Jennifer has a criminal record?

Kimberley – At least she's sporting an ankle bracelet, and it certainly didn't come from the local jeweller.

Kevin – You never mentioned that before! So, you intend to open a coffee shop with a convict?

Kimberley – It's not just Jennifer... I made a promise to my grandmother six months ago.

Kevin – Your grandmother passed away a year ago.

Kimberley – We can still make promises to those who have left us.

Kevin – Promises that are much easier not to keep...

Kimberley – I swore to her that I would make her wonderful cookies known worldwide.

Kevin – Just that...

Kimberley – Remember, even Starfucks began with just one shop.

Kevin – Are you really sure about that?

Kimberley – No... but it's all that came to mind.

Kevin sighs.

Kevin – Alright... We'll try to find a solution. Together... But for now, I need to get back to work. Because, at the moment, I still have a boss... Promise me, though, that you'll consider this offer...

Kevin leaves, leaving Kimberley thoughtful and depressed. Brian returns.

Brian – Kimberley...?

She startles upon seeing him.

Kimberley – You scared me...

Brian – Opening a business means dealing with occasional unexpected visitors.

Kimberley – You're right, that's a bit silly.

Brian – And we're not total strangers, after all.

Kimberley – That's true, you were here earlier.

Brian – We've known each other for much longer than that.

Kimberley – Really?

Brian – Don't you remember me?

Kimberley – Should I...?

Brian – I told you, I lived in this town a few years ago. We were in middle school together!

Kimberley – I'm sorry... We've probably both changed quite a bit...

Brian – Not you, I assure you... You were already charming back then, and you're just as beautiful now...

Kimberley – I'm sorry, but I can't recall...

Brian – I'm not surprised. Back then, I was about four foot three and a bit overweight.

Kimberley – Oh, really...? But when you say a bit overweight...

Brian – They used to call me Chubby.

Kimberley (*suddenly remembering*) – Chubby!

Brian – I'd prefer it didn't spread too much... It took me years to shake off that silly nickname...

Kimberley – It's unbelievable... But then again, we weren't exactly friends back then, were we?

Brian – I wouldn't have dared approach you in middle school. Let's be honest, it was more like a Beauty and the Beast scenario between us.

Kimberley – You're exaggerating.

Brian – Anyway, it was nice to see you again. Just to break the spell.

Kimberley – Break the spell? I'd almost be disappointed...

Brian – I expressed myself poorly. What I meant is, now that I've mustered the courage to talk to you, it feels like I've broken free from a spell.

Kimberley – Well, that's positive...

Brian – I should get going. But I think we'll have the chance to see each other again soon.

Kimberley – Why not? With pleasure...

Brian exits. Cindy enters. She is dressed provocatively and might sport a noticeable wig, perhaps in red.

Cindy – Hey!

Kimberley – Oh, hello, Cindy.

Cindy – So, how's the first day going?

Kimberley – It's quiet... Well, in terms of customers, that is. Because as for everything else...

Cindy – It takes time to build a reputation. But I'm confident it'll work out.

Kimberley – Do you really think so?

Cindy – We've been friends since kindergarten, and you've always excelled at everything. Except for your studies, that's true... You were the "High School Queen," after all.

Kimberley – The High School Queen...? I had no idea...

Cindy – Oh, yes... There was even a clandestine vote. I still remember, I didn't get a single vote out of 437 voters...

Kimberley – You didn't even vote for yourself?

Cindy – Only boys were allowed to vote, of course. It was their idea to hold the ballot.

Kimberley – I'm really sorry...

Cindy – And then, you were crowned Miss Willow County.

Kimberley – Miss Pine County. Miss Willow County was my grandmother.

Cindy – You could have pursued a modelling career.

Kimberley – You see... Ultimately, success in everything wasn't meant for me.

Cindy – Unfortunately, nothing has changed for me... I opened my flower shop three years ago, and today, I have to close it down... If you hadn't offered to buy it...

Kimberley – It hasn't always been smooth sailing for me either, you know. Being the "prettiest girl in high school" is a full-time job. So, I stumbled in my exams three years in a row...

Cindy – You had all the boys falling over themselves for you! Even today, actually. Well, the ones who aren't married yet...

Kimberley – By the way, do you remember Chubby?

Cindy – Chubby...?

Kimberley – The slightly overweight guy with glasses. We were in the same class in middle school. Guess what, he just left here!

Cindy – So what? Were you planning to introduce him to me?

Kimberley – If you saw him now, I assure you, you wouldn't mind... This time you can really say the toad turned into Prince Charming.

Cindy – I find it hard to believe. In the animal kingdom, caterpillars can turn into butterflies. But in humans, except in fairy tales, it's generally the opposite.

Kimberley – True. Despite advances in cosmetology, princesses end up with donkey skin... and princes with pumpkin-sized waists.

Cindy – Or the other way round... So, you've seen Chubby again?

Kimberley – Yes... Believe it or not, he became an architect...

Cindy – Fantastic...

Kimberley – Unfortunately, I had a much less pleasant visit.

Cindy – Oh really?

Kimberley – Richard Bribery... A developer...

Cindy – Richard Bribery? Another name that says it all. And what brought him to Bellewood?

Kimberley – He purchased almost the entire building, with plans to demolish it and construct a luxury residence in its place.

Cindy – Unbelievable!

Kimberley – Fortunately, my grandmother chose to leave me this apartment instead of selling it to him.

Cindy – So, he would have wanted to buy my flower shop too?

Kimberley – Luckily, I had just signed the agreement...

Cindy – Yes, as you say... Luckily... I guess he offered a good price?

Kimberley – More than the market value, according to him. But money isn't everything in life, right?

Cindy – No... Well... especially when you already have enough...

Kimberley – That's what Kevin use to tell me... I think you two would get along well...

Cindy – That's my opinion too. Unfortunately, once again, you beat me to the punch... You know I had a huge crush on him in high school...

Kimberley seems a bit embarrassed.

Kimberley (*changing the subject*) – How about a cookie?

Cindy – The famous cookies your grandmother left you the secret to... in addition to her apartment.

Kimberley – I'll get them for you... They've just come out of the oven... They're absolutely delightful, trust me.

Kimberley leaves.

Cindy – I'd like to shove your head in the oven too, bitch. If only you could choke on your cookies...

As soon as Kimberley departs, Richard returns on tiptoes, adopting a conspiratorial demeanour.

Richard – I saw you through the window... (*Hands her a business card*) Richard Bribery... I'm a real estate developer...

Cindy – Oh yes... Mr. Bribery... My friend Kimberley told me about you... In a good way, I might add...

Richard – I'm interested in acquiring your shop, and I'm prepared to offer a price significantly higher than hers.

Cindy – It's certainly tempting... Unfortunately, it's too late. I just finalised the agreement...

Richard – I'm aware... But if, hypothetically, this tearoom were to close, it would release you from your commitment, wouldn't it?

Cindy – What makes you think there's a chance of this tearoom closing?

Richard – Let's call it... intuition. Maybe you could help me turn that intuition into reality?

Cindy – Help you sink Kimberley's tearoom? But I told you, she's a friend...

Richard – I'll double what she's offering for your struggling shop that's on the verge of bankruptcy.

Cindy – At the same time... I've known her since kindergarten, and since then, I've wanted to kill her... What should I do?

Richard – We should be able to discuss it calmly...

Cindy – When?

Richard – Right now, if you want. But not here...

Cindy – I'll go back to my shop. You can join me there...

Richard – Very well... I'll leave before she comes back... I'd rather avoid encountering her. We didn't part on very good terms...

Richard exits, Kimberley returns with cookies.

Kimberley – And here they are!

Cindy – Thanks, but I'll take them to go... I really have to run. I have a job interview...

Kimberley – A job?

Cindy – Since I'm selling my shop, I need to find a new job.

She leaves with the cookies. Kimberley appears a bit unsettled. She notices something on the floor, bending down to pick it up, revealing a tuft of hair.

Kimberley – She's losing her hair, it's crazy...

William arrives, dressed as a mailman.

William – Hello, Kimberley. Mailman's here!

He hands her some letters.

Kimberley – Hello, Bill. Let's see, then... (*Checking the mail*) Bill, bill, bill...

William – My apologies... I wish I could deliver some checks...

Kimberley – That would be kind. Oh, there's also a letter...

William – Hoping it brings good news.

Kimberley opens the letter, and as she reads, her smile fades.

Kimberley – "You'll end up like your grandmother"...

William – Someone wishing you good luck, probably... For the opening of your tearoom...

Kimberley – It's not signed, and it's written with letters cut out from a newspaper...

William – I knew your grandmother well. I used to bring her mail every day. *(Nostalgic)* And she never failed to offer me coffee each time, with one of her famous cookies.

Kimberley – Well, now it's my turn to invite you to dunk your biscuit every morning.

She serves him coffee and a cookie.

William – Oh no, I didn't mention it for that... Well, yes, but... Now that it's a tearoom, I insist on paying.

He leaves a banknote on the table and takes a bite of the cookie.

Kimberley – So?

William – They're as delightful as ever... I'm sure your grandmother would have been very happy that you're carrying on her legacy.

Kimberley – Thank you... She talked about you often... She called you Willy...

William – She was a good friend... Her passing was a great loss for me... *(To hide his unease)* I need to go...

Kimberley – Of course... Feel free to come back whenever you want...

William – I'll be back tomorrow! I'm the one delivering your mail...

Kimberley – Of course! Silly me...

William *(elsewhere)* – Yes...

Kimberley – Yes?

William – No, I mean... Well, see you tomorrow, Kimberley...

Kimberley – Wait! You forgot your change!

William – It's to make up for only bringing you bills.

Kimberley – And an anonymous letter... Thanks anyway!

William leaves. Brian arrives.

Kimberley – Back so soon?

Brian – I warned you. Your cookies are seriously addictive. I'd rather not inquire about the secret ingredients.

Kimberley – Everything is organic, you know...

Brian – In that case...

Kimberley – Want a few more?

Brian – They might be organic, but they're not exactly low-fat... Remember, they used to call me Chubby...

Kimberley – Chubby... It's incredible how much you've changed. I wouldn't have recognised you.

Brian – I've only lost about forty-five pounds... but I've grown another sixteen inches. So the extra weight isn't nearly as noticeable. Back then, I didn't stand a chance with girls...

Kimberley – It's true; you weren't very...

Brian – Sexy? So, do you think I'd have a shot today?

Kimberley – If I weren't already engaged, maybe... I was talking about you earlier with Cindy. Do you remember Cindy?

Brian – Cindy... Oh, yes, I remember... A redhead, right? Losing her hair...

Kimberley – She still has a few left, thankfully... She runs the flower shop next door... Unfortunately, business isn't going very well for her...

Brian – Yeah, doesn't surprise me.

Kimberley – And why is that?

Brian – Even in school, she was nicknamed...

Kimberley – Yes?

Brian – Um... I can't remember right now... And nowadays, who gives flowers anymore, right?

Kimberley – In any case, my fiancé never gives me any... But what brings you around, Chubby? I mean Brian...

Brian – I'm an architect, as I mentioned. I was approached to draw plans for the new building that will soon replace this one.

Kimberley's smile freezes.

Kimberley – You work for that bastard who wants to evict me from my home and destroy the building where my grandmother spent her entire life?

Brian – But come on... I have nothing to do with it... Drawing plans is my job!

Kimberley – Why didn't you tell me the first time that you were coming to demolish my shop?

Brian – Because I didn't know! It was during that meeting with my client that...

Kimberley – Get out of here immediately!

Brian – Fine... But we'll inevitably see each other again...

He leaves.

Kimberley – Chubby... I should have been wary... The sneak...

Jennifer returns.

Jennifer – Wasn't he our first customer to leave here? The handsome Brian. What did you say to him to make him run away like that? Or what did you do to him...

Kimberley – Chubby, remember?

Jennifer – Chubby?

Kimberley – The kid we used to call Chubby in school.

Jennifer – Oh yes... Chubby... We all used to make fun of him...

Kimberley – Well, Chubby has become Brian.

Jennifer – How is that possible?

Kimberley – Probably by following a diet... And do you know why he came back?

Jennifer – To hit on you?

Kimberley – To blow up the building!

Jennifer – No way! To get revenge for the bullying he endured back then?

Kimberley – Who knows...

Jennifer – Chubby... A terrorist... That's crazy... Did you call the police?

Kimberley – Terrorist? No... He works for that developer who wants to demolish the building to build a luxury residence in its place!

Jennifer – Ah, I see... Chubby... Oh, nuts... And what are you going to do?

Kimberley – About what?

Jennifer – I don't know... In general...

Kimberley – Right now, all I want to do is hang myself on the Christmas tree with the fairy lights... Like my grandmother...

Jennifer – Don't do that... It would give them too much satisfaction.

Kimberley – Yeah, that's true...

Jennifer – For now, let's go have a few drinks at a bar to forget all our worries...

Kimberley – You're right. I could use something stiff myself.

Jennifer – We could also buy a few bottles and have pizza delivered to the house if you want...

Kimberley – Four cheeses?

They exchange a smile and leave, turning off the light.

Blackout.

Richard and Cindy enter, lighting their way with a flashlight.

Cindy – Are you sure we're not risking anything?

Richard – Don't worry. I have friends in the police and connections at the city hall.

Cindy – You know the Mayor personally?

Richard – To get that demolition permit, I had a pool built for his country house for free. It creates bonds, believe me. And after all, we didn't break into any doors to get in here...

Cindy – I didn't know there was a connecting door in the basement between my shop and Kimberley's...

Richard – No one knows it. It was hidden behind a cabinet. I learned about its existence by looking at the building plans. The kitchen is this way. Follow me...

Cindy – If we get caught, they'll think we're burglars.

Richard – But we're not stealing anything! On the contrary...

Cindy – Do you think it will work?

Richard – Trust me. *(Holding up a bag)* A bit of this cannabis resin in the chocolate used to make these cookies, and we'll turn them into delicious space cakes...

Cindy – And they won't suspect us?

Richard – The waitress at this coffee shop has already been convicted of drug trafficking. I think the cops will start by looking in that direction...

Cindy – You're truly diabolical.

Richard – I'm a real estate developer... And a real estate developer dares anything. That's how you recognise them.

Cindy – Like fools, you mean?

Richard – Never underestimate either fools or developers. Look at Donald Trump: he was the biggest fool of developers, and he ended up being elected President of the United States.

Cindy – I'm following you.

They head towards the kitchen with conspiratorial expressions.

Blackout.

Seated at the table, Kimberley does the accounts while Jennifer tidies up.

Kimberley – It's incredible! The tearoom has been packed for three days straight. And takeaway sales have skyrocketed!

Jennifer – I knew it would work, but to this extent... This morning, an hour before opening, there was already a line outside the shop...

Kimberley – And a lot of high schoolers too. I didn't think we'd attract that kind of clientele.

Jennifer – No, me neither... I was a bit afraid it would mainly be the elderly.

Kimberley – I'll ask Kevin to do the accounts. But that should reassure the bank. If this doesn't get me my loan...

Jennifer – Have you talked to Kevin about that anonymous letter?

Kimberley – Not yet. I didn't want to worry him with that. He has so much work right now...

Jennifer – He doesn't help you much, though.

Kimberley – He handles the accounts, that's something. Without him, I would never have been able to put together this loan application for the bank.

William, the mailman, arrives. He's wearing jeans and a flowery shirt, a bit like an old hippie from the '70s.

William – Hi, ladies! Today, no bills or anonymous letters, I promise. Only cheques and a love letter.

Kimberley and Jennifer barely conceal their surprise.

Kimberley – Hello, William... What on earth has happened to you?

William – I burned the bills. And I signed the cheques myself. *(Holding up a letter)* As for the love letter, I'm not sure. But believe me from my experience... As a mailman, I have a nose for these things...

Jennifer – Are you sure you're okay?

William – Wonderful! I don't know what's come over me, but since I tried your chocolate cookies, everything looks rosy!

Jennifer – And when you say everything looks rosy... that's just a figure of speech, I hope?

William – They're even better than Maggie's.

Jennifer – And apparently, they really have an antidepressant effect.

Kimberley – That's what I meant by aphrodisiac...

William – Can I get a dozen to go?

Kimberley – Of course. Jennifer, can you handle it?

Jennifer – I'll do it right away...

Jennifer leaves. Kimberley opens the letter.

William – So? This love letter...

Kimberley (*reading*) – It's signed Chubby...

William – At least it's not an anonymous letter. And what does Chubby say? If it's not too indiscreet, of course...

Kimberley – He apologises and invites me to dinner...

William – Well, would you look at that! It was, in fact, a love letter! So, what's the verdict? Will you accept?

She crumples the letter.

Kimberley – Absolutely not!

William takes a cookie from the table and eats it.

William – Put that one on my tab. I can't get enough of them. Every time I eat one, I think of Maggie... And when I think of Margaret...

Kimberley seems startled by the familiarity of his tone.

Kimberley – Maggie? You were that familiar with my grandmother?

William (*with a knowing look*) – Well, you see, I didn't just bring her mail.

Kimberley – Oh, really...?

William – Margaret entered into a respectable union. However, the baron happened to be thirty years her senior. By the time they tied the knot, he was already quite feeble.

Kimberley – What happened next?

William – Well, your grandmother was still in her prime. She had certain... shall we say, desires?

Kimberley – Um... no. And frankly, I'd prefer not to know. We're talking about my grandmother here.

William – Did it never strike you as surprising that they managed to conceive a child together?

Kimberley – A child?

William – Your mother!

Jennifer returns with a small bag, handing it to William.

Jennifer – Your daily dose, William. I did warn you, it can be quite addictive...

William – Thank you. I must get on with my delivery round. With any luck, it'll soon be my farewell tour.

Jennifer – Farewell? You're leaving us?

William – I'm retiring... But before that, I need to straighten out a few things in my life. We'll talk about it later...

William exits.

Jennifer – He seemed a little strange, didn't he?

Kimberley – Yes... He almost admitted he was my grandmother's lover.

Jennifer – The postman? Auntie Maggie's lover?

Kimberley – You mean Granny Maggie?

Jennifer – Of course... Mind you, she'd be Auntie Maggie to your mother's brothers and sisters.

Kimberley – Yes... Lucky for us, my mother is an only child.

Jennifer – I'm beginning to talk complete nonsense.

Kimberley – Me too... And what do you think of these chocolate cookies?

They each take a bite of a cookie.

Jennifer – I don't know, these ones have a slight taste of... Did you change the recipe?

Kimberley – No... A taste of what?

Detective Ramirez and Officer Sanchez enter, their arrival marked by an inquisitive sweep of the surroundings without a word of greeting. Kimberley and Jennifer share a surprised glance.

Jennifer – It's strange... I feel like I've seen those two somewhere before.

Kimberley – Don't tell me they were at school with us too...

Jennifer – Who knows? It's a small town...

Kimberley – Bellewood: beautiful faces, empty heads.

Jennifer – These two look particularly empty-headed.

Kimberley – Gentlemen? Is that to take away here, or to eat straight away?

The two men do not answer at once and continue to inspect the premises.

Jennifer – Would you like to see the menu?

Ramirez (showing his badge) – I'd prefer to show you my card... Detective Ramirez, and this is my colleague Officer Sanchez.

Jennifer – Ah, I remember where I've seen them before... We used to play cops and robbers, but it wasn't back in our school days.

Kimberley – The police?

Jennifer – I swear I've complied with every condition of my release, Detective...

Sanchez – We'll deal with you later.

Kimberley – In that case... what can I do for you, gentlemen?

Ramirez – We've received reports of strange occurrences in the neighbourhood since you opened this coffee shop.

Kimberley – It's a tearoom, Detective, not a cannabis café.

Jennifer – What kind of strange occurrences?

Sanchez – Some residents of Bellewood have been behaving oddly.

Kimberley – Many people do strange things, you know. Without the need for a police investigation. Just last night, I ordered a four-cheese pizza, and it ended up...

Jennifer (*interrupting*) – Well, Kimberley, that's not the point... I don't believe these gentlemen are here for that either.

Kimberley – But when you mention strange...

Jennifer – Could you provide an example?

Ramirez – Well, for instance, the Reverend decided to serenade his congregation with a bawdy song right in the middle of his sermon.

Kimberley – Oh, really? Which song was it?

Sanchez – "The Drunk Scotsman." Need a refresher on the lyrics?

Jennifer – I think I vaguely recall. (*Humming*) "A Scotsman clad in kilt left a bar one evening fair..."

Kimberley – That brings back memories of a song my grandmother used to sing to me...

Ramirez – And right after his musical performance, he gave his congregation chocolate cookies instead of the usual communion wafers.

Kimberley – Is that so?

Ramirez – Cookies he purchased from your shop, and he seemed to have indulged in a rather excessive quantity.

Sanchez – Not to mention a potential overdose...

Kimberley – The Reverend is, indeed, one of our most loyal customers.

Jennifer – You know how it is, ever since they're no longer allowed altar boys... they compensate with the sin of gluttony.

Kimberley – Bawdy songs during mass, and cookies instead of communion wafers... That may be blasphemy, but it isn't against the law.

Sanchez – Right after the service, we arrested about ten of these eccentric parishioners engaging in a bit of skinny-dipping in the pool right in front of the church.

Ramirez – And that qualifies as a public disturbance.

Kimberley – It's indeed strange, but what do we have to do with this story?

Sanchez – After some thorough investigation, we found a common thread among all the individuals caught up in this madness.

Ramirez – They all happened to indulge in your chocolate cookies on the very same day.

Jennifer – And how did you arrive at that deduction, Lieutenant Columbo?

Ramirez – Ramirez. Detective Ramirez.

Sanchez – We received an anonymous letter.

Kimberley – Ah, you too...

Ramirez – Well, then, we'll have to confiscate the goods for analysis. Where is the kitchen?

Kimberley – It's this way...

Ramirez – Sanchez, you're free to go.

Sanchez – Right away, boss...

Sanchez exits.

Kimberley – I don't understand, Detective... I use the recipe my grandmother passed down to me for these cookies.

Ramirez – Can you assert that this recipe doesn't include cannabis as one of its ingredients?

Kimberley – Do you truly believe my grandmother would incorporate drugs into her cookie recipe?

Ramirez – I can't speak for your grandmother... What I can tell you is that this young lady has a prior conviction for drug trafficking.

Jennifer – I swear to you, Detective... Kimberley, I assure you that...

Kimberley – I believe you, Jennifer.

Sanchez returns with the cookies in a box. He chews something.

Ramirez – We'll analyse these and see what we find. *(Sanchez takes a bite of a cookie.)* And please refrain from eating these potential pieces of evidence, Sanchez!

Sanchez – Sorry, boss, the temptation is too strong.

Kimberley – Wait, Detective... I also received an anonymous letter.

Ramirez – Well, well...

Sanchez – Let me take a look.

Kimberley hands him the letter, and he examines it.

Sanchez – It's not signed, boss.

Jennifer – Well, it's an anonymous letter.

Sanchez – Oh, right...

Ramirez takes the letter from him.

Ramirez (reading) – "You'll end up like your grandmother"...

Kimberley – It's a death threat, isn't it?

Sanchez – Well, it depends on how your grandmother passed away. If it was due to old age, for instance, or a heart attack, or a road accident, or even a household mishap...

Ramirez shoots him an exasperated look, and he promptly stops.

Ramirez – Was your grandmother murdered?

Kimberley – I don't know... That's what I'm hoping you can tell me.

Ramirez – Auntie Maggie...

Kimberley – Granny Maggie. But I prefer you to call her Margaret.

Ramirez – Auntie Margaret... Yes, I remember... We investigated at the time. We considered murder, but there was no sign of forced entry...

Sanchez – So we concluded it was suicide.

Ramirez (to Sanchez) – Show me the anonymous letter we received at the station about this matter with the space cakes...

Sanchez (handing him the letter) – Here you go, boss.

Ramirez compares the two anonymous letters.

Ramirez – The same type.

Sanchez – The same type of police, Chief? I didn't know there were different types...

Ramirez – The same typeface, Sanchez! The same printed letters!

Jennifer – The letters must have been cut from the same magazine...

Ramirez – We'll investigate further... and keep you informed. In the meantime, I must request that you do not leave town.

Kimberley – Can I keep selling my cookies for now?

Sanchez – What do you think, boss?

Ramirez – Well... until the lab confirms they're not your usual cookies. These cookies are innocent until proven guilty...

Sanchez – Nonetheless, steer clear of selling them to minors...

Jennifer – They used to be our most devoted customers, but...

Ramirez and Sanchez exit.

Kimberley – That's all we needed... Are you sure you had nothing to do with this?

Jennifer – Why would I even consider doing such a thing?

Kimberley – If the goal was to boost sales, it worked. But now, we risk being shut down. Even facing the possibility of prison...

Jennifer – I swear on your grandmother's life that I had nothing to do with it.

Kimberley – My grandmother is dead!

Jennifer – Right... Under rather mysterious circumstances, actually...

Kimberley – We'll just have to wait for the investigation results. Neither you nor I put any drugs in those cookies.

Jennifer – And you're the sole key holder here.

Kimberley – I don't see how these tests could incriminate us.

Jennifer takes a bite of one of the cookies.

Jennifer – But these do taste strange...

William returns.

Kimberley – William? Do you have more mail for me?

William – No...

Jennifer – So, you're hooked on our cookies too...

William – That's not the reason for my visit either.

Kimberley – What's going on, then?

William – It's about Margaret. I haven't shared the complete story with you...

Kimberley – It's not really the right time, you know...

William – I was your grandmother's lover... when she was young.

Kimberley – Listen, William... I understand that my grandmother had a life before she became Granny Maggie, but as I told you, I'm not sure I want the details of her love life... Or the names of her lovers.

William – I have compelling reasons to believe that I am your mother's father.

Kimberley – My mother's father? You mean I'd be your granddaughter?

Jennifer – And therefore you'd be her grandfather.

William – Yes, exactly. That's what I meant.

Kimberley is taken aback.

Jennifer – I'll leave you to your family matters...

She exits.

Kimberley – But why didn't you say this before, if it's true?

William – When I first met Margaret, she wasn't married yet. However, I was...

Kimberley – And she became pregnant by you.

William – I didn't find the courage to leave my wife. Margaret wanted to keep the child, so she agreed to marry the baron, whom she was already working for as a maid.

Kimberley – Did he know she was pregnant when he proposed to her?

William – Yes, he did. She didn't hide it from him. But he loved her, and she held deep affection for him. He agreed to give his name to the child she was carrying.

Kimberley – And then?

William – After that... time passed. Margaret was married. I didn't want to compromise her.

Kimberley – But when my grandfather passed away, you could have...

William – Your mother took great pride in being the descendant of the Baron Swindlemore von Hustlestein. I couldn't bear to shatter that image by revealing she was the daughter of the postman...

Kimberley – True, it might have been quite a shock for her...

William – You're still my granddaughter. I never imagined I'd be able to share this with you one day. I'm not sure why I'm doing it now...

Kimberley – It must be the effect of these space cakes...

Samantha returns and greets the postman.

Samantha – Sir...

William (*embarrassed*) – Hello, Samantha... I'll leave you to it...

He exits. Samantha seems odd too. Her attire is much more casual than the first time.

Samantha – That postman seemed awfully familiar... How did he know my name was Samantha?

Kimberley – Who knows? Perhaps he's the one who gave you that ridiculous name...

Samantha – I've always hated it...

Kimberley – The postman?

Samantha – My name! But why do you say the postman might have chosen my name?

Kimberley – Never mind... Are you all right? You seem a bit strange...

Samantha – I don't know. Ever since I had another of those cookies...

Kimberley – Oh no, not you too...

Samantha – I know I haven't always been a good mother...

Kimberley – Don't worry, I don't hold it against you. But I'm rather busy right now...

Samantha – And I haven't been a very good daughter either.

Kimberley – Oh, really...?

Samantha – I wanted you to know that, despite everything, I loved your grandmother very much.

Kimberley – Your mother, you mean... Is it really that hard to say?

Samantha – I admit I was rather ashamed of her. As far as everyone was concerned, she was the baron's maid, who'd married him in his old age to get her hands on his inheritance.

Kimberley – Come on... The baron was broke. More likely he married his maid so he wouldn't have to pay her wages.

Samantha – In any case, she was always very kind to me.

Kimberley – And...?

Samantha – Now I regret not telling her often enough how much I loved her...

Kimberley – You were saying something very different not so long ago...

Samantha – I don't know. It must be these cookies. My own little Proustian madeleine...

Kimberley – Madeleine? Who's she, then?

Samantha – You know, she originally invented the cookie recipe for me. I hadn't tasted them in years...

Kimberley sighs.

Kimberley – I loved Granny Maggie too... Every time I eat one of her cookies, it's like sharing a secret communion with her. Like taking communion at church, you know...

Samantha – Well, that's quite something...

Kimberley – I feel her presence all around this shop. There was even a day when I thought I saw her in the cellar...

Samantha – Now that's getting downright creepy...

Kimberley – By the way, do you know how my grandmother died?

Samantha – We never found out. But I always thought her disappearance might not have been an accident.

Kimberley – Interesting...

Samantha – Just before her death, a real estate developer came to see her. He wanted to buy all the apartments in this building, and your grandmother refused to sell hers...

Kimberley – The police just left, actually.

Samantha – The police? What did they want?

Kimberley – That's another story... You have to leave now; I have a lot of problems to deal with.

Samantha – You know you can count on me, my dear. I'm your mother, after all.

Kimberley – Oh, really? Are you sure about that?

Samantha – Come on, Kimberley...

Kimberley – I'll call you, I promise...

Kimberley pushes her mother out. Kimberley sighs. But her relief is short-lived. Kevin returns.

Kevin – I just saw your mother. She doesn't visit you often. What did she want?

Kimberley – I'll tell you another time...

Kevin – Perfect, because I'm a bit short on time... Have you considered the offer from that developer?

Kimberley – He's sending me death threats, and you expect me to give in to that blackmail?

Kevin – What's this story about?

Kimberley – I received an anonymous letter.

Kevin – If it's anonymous, how do you know it's from him?

Kimberley – My mother also suspects him of murdering my grandmother.

Kevin – I thought your grandmother accidentally died falling off a stool while trying to hang herself...

Kimberley – Who told you that?

Kevin – But Kimberley, it was you!

Kimberley – Oh yes, maybe... Well, it turns out I was wrong. People can make mistakes, right?

Kevin – So, how did she die then?

Kimberley – I'm leaning towards a murder disguised as an accidental suicide.

Kevin – Ah yes... That's much more believable...

Kevin absentmindedly takes a cookie, bites into it, and grimaces.

Kimberley – You don't like them?

Kevin – There's a hair in it. And when I say one, I should say several... You should be careful...

Kimberley – Me? But I don't shed my hair!

Ramirez and Sanchez return.

Ramirez – We've just received the lab results.

Kevin – The lab? *(To Kimberley)* Are you sick, darling? It's nothing serious, is it... *(More concerned)* Don't tell me you're pregnant...?

Ramirez – Sorry, we don't do pregnancy tests.

Sanchez – Do we look like gynaecologists?

Kevin – You look more like murderers... So, who are you?

Kimberley – These gentlemen are from the police.

Kevin – The police?

Ramirez – Detective Ramirez. We're investigating a narcotics case.

Kevin – So what?

Sanchez – The lab confirms: the analysed products contain, in addition to chocolate, a very high dose of cannabis resin.

Ramirez – In other words, Granny Maggie's cookies are space cakes.

Kevin – Granny Maggie?

Kimberley – But that's not possible. There must be an explanation!

Ramirez – Until our investigation is completed, this establishment will be closed very soon. We await the judge's decision...

Kimberley – Closing our tearoom that just opened? That would mean bankruptcy...

Ramirez – Of course, you'll be charged with drug trafficking.

Kevin – But Kimberley, tell me this is a joke...

Ramirez – Do I look like I'm joking, sir?

Sanchez – Unfortunately for you, we're not in Holland. Cannabis cafés aren't legal here. Was it your employee who supplied the drugs?

Kimberley – Jennifer?

Ramirez – She was already convicted in a drug case, and she has a record.

Kimberley – But I'm telling you, we're not involved!

Sanchez – In that case, how do you explain the presence of drugs in these cookies that you make yourself?

Kimberley – It must be a setup to get my establishment closed. Find out who benefits from this...

Sanchez – Speaking of crime, we'll reopen the investigation into your grandmother's death...

Kimberley – Why now?

Ramirez – This anonymous letter you received insinuates that she was murdered, doesn't it?

Kimberley – You're not accusing me of killing my grandmother, surely!

Sanchez – As you say, madam, consider who benefits from the crime. You did inherit from the victim, didn't you?

Kimberley – You should look into the developer who wants to buy the building too. My grandmother refused to sell him her apartment...

Ramirez – We won't overlook that. In the meantime, make yourself available to the police...

Ramirez and Sanchez leave.

Kevin – So, you're involved in a narcotics case... And to think we were planning to get married... Should I have the prison chaplain officiate our union?

Kimberley – Thanks for your support, that's comforting.

Kevin – Okay, I always thought opening this tearoom wasn't a good idea. Unfortunately, the facts prove me right. Now, I believe the simplest thing would be for you to sell, right?

Kimberley – Sell? To the guy who might have murdered my grandmother?

Kevin – Let's not jump to conclusions. This guy might be a scammer, but not necessarily a killer.

Kimberley – He's a developer!

Kevin – There are honest developers too...

Kimberley – Oh yeah? Like who, for example?

Kevin – No names come to mind right now, but they must exist.

Kimberley – I'll let you think. I have things to do, excuse me?

Kevin – Kimberley, wait! We can still talk...

Kimberley leaves. Cindy arrives.

Cindy – Hello, do you remember me?

Kevin – Madeleine?

Cindy – Cindy.

Kevin – Cindy...?

Cindy – We were in the same class in middle school. We even went out together for a while, remember?

Kevin – No...

Cindy – It's a bit upsetting, but well... I'm still proud to have spent a few hours with the high school heartthrob... Even if I had to get you drunk before it happened...

Kevin – Oh, really?

Cindy – Well, that was before you became a heartbreaker... You were eleven. Covered in pimples. Obviously, you had fewer choices. And it was well before you met Kimberley.

Kevin – Sorry, I... Cindy... Oh yes, maybe...

Cindy – Forget it, it's getting awkward... I heard about Kimberley's troubles... How is she?

Kevin – Not good... She's gotten herself into a very difficult situation.

Cindy – But when you say difficult...?

Kevin – She's facing prison.

Cindy – Oh damn... And her tearoom?

Kevin – I advised her to sell. While there's still time...

Cindy – You're right... In fact, I would prefer to sell my shop to that developer rather than to Kimberley. He's offering me double! Unfortunately, I've signed a compromise. So it's too late, right?

Kevin – Unless Kimberley voluntarily backs out of her purchase commitment.

Cindy moves closer to Kevin.

Cindy – Funny, I had the same idea...

Kevin (*unsettled*) – Great minds think alike.

Cindy – Yes... We could do great things together... if you weren't in love with Kimberley.

She hugs him.

Kevin – It was a navigation error, I realise that now...

Cindy – Then let me guide you back on the right path. I have plans for both of us. You won't stay an accountant forever...

Kevin – What kind of plans?

Cindy – Richard offered me the management of the Starfucks that will be opening at the base of this building...

Kevin – I think we're meant to get along.

Jennifer arrives, hears the end of the conversation, and sees them share a kiss. Kevin and Cindy leave. Kimberley comes back.

Kimberley – Who was that?

Jennifer (*embarrassed*) – Cindy. She said she would come back...

Kimberley – It's nice of her to come and check on me. True friends reveal themselves in adversity.

Jennifer – Yes...

Kimberley picks up another clump of hair from the floor.

Kimberley – She's really losing a lot of hair.

Jennifer – At least she hasn't lost her sense of direction.

Kimberley – With the amount she's lost already, it's a wonder she has any hair left on her head...

Brian arrives with a bouquet of flowers.

Brian – Hello.

Kimberley – What's this?

Brian – Well, you see, flowers... I bought them right next door...

Kimberley – It should have been a wreath you brought me. In tribute to this tearoom that will soon close its doors. Thanks to you...

Jennifer – To be replaced by a Starfucks Café...

Awkward silence.

Brian – Did you receive my letter?

Kimberley – Which one? The one you signed, or the anonymous one?

Brian – You got an anonymous letter?

Kimberley – I thought I told you never to come back.

Brian – I heard about what's happening to you.

Kimberley – It suits your interests, doesn't it? And those of your boss...

Brian – I'm really sorry. It's clear that you're being manipulated. But who could have done this, and why?

Kimberley – Someone who has an interest in this shop closing as soon as possible, for example...

Jennifer – Someone like Richard Bribery, your boss...?

Brian – Mr. Bribery is not my boss. He's just a client. A significant client, but only a client...

Kimberley – What I don't understand is how he could have accessed my kitchen without forcing the door...

Brian – I think I have an idea...

Kimberley – Sorry, I don't have time to play guessing games.

Kimberley's phone rings, and she answers.

Kimberley – Yes? Oh yes, I was waiting for your call. So? Rejected? How come, rejected? For what reason? My accounts are in the red? But you told me that... Wait! He hung up...

Jennifer – Who was that?

Kimberley – The bank... My loan is rejected. I don't understand, we've had a very good turnover these past few days...

Jennifer – Thanks to the space cakes...

Brian – There are other banks, right?

Kimberley – It's the only one that was willing to review our file...

Brian – I see.

Kimberley – As a result, I can't complete the purchase agreement I signed. Richard will be able to buy Cindy's shop... And since my tearoom is about to be closed by court order.

Jennifer – It's the end...

Brian – Don't give up hope. We will fight. I'll help you.

Kimberley – Chubby is going to help us. I feel immediately more reassured...

Brian – Can I see the accounts of your tearoom?

Jennifer – You're an architect! Not an accountant...

Brian – I'm also an entrepreneur. I know how to read a balance sheet.

Kimberley and Jennifer exchange a skeptical look.

Blackout.

Brian finishes examining the accounts, in the presence of Kimberley and Jennifer.

Kimberley – So?

Brian – Your accounts have been tampered with.

Jennifer – Tampered with? What does that mean?

Brian – It means that your accountant understated assets and overestimated liabilities. So, your balance sheet appears in deficit when it's actually in a slight surplus.

Kimberley – Usually, when you manipulate your balance sheet, it's more in the other direction, isn't it?

Brian – Indeed. That's what surprises me.

Jennifer – Well... And then?

Brian – The good news is that your financial situation is not as catastrophic as it seems.

Kimberley – And the bad news?

Brian – It's too late to obtain another bank loan before the deadline for the agreement to buy the shop next door...

Jennifer – But who could have done this?

Brian – Who handles your accounts?

Kimberley – It's Kevin. My fiancé.

Brian – Of course, it could also be a big mistake on his part if he's not familiar with accounting. What does your... fiancé do for a living?

Jennifer – He's an accountant.

Brian – In that case, it's impossible that he did it by mistake.

Kimberley – He also prepared the file for the bank.

Jennifer – He intentionally presented accounts in the red to the bank.

Brian – It certainly looks that way...

Jennifer – But why?

Brian – If he wanted your loan to be rejected, he wouldn't have done it any other way...

Kimberley – Kevin has always tried to dissuade me from opening this tearoom. He wanted me to sell to that developer and use the money to open his own accounting firm.

Brian – Betraying you like this...

Kimberley – What could have driven him to do this?

Jennifer – Or who...?

Kimberley – Do you know something?

Jennifer – I saw him kissing Cindy. And I overheard them plotting something against you behind your back.

Kimberley – Why didn't you tell me?

Jennifer – I didn't dare! He's your fiancé...

Kimberley is shaken by the news.

Kimberley – Not anymore, I assure you...

Brian – Good... I mean... It's fortunate that we discovered this...

Kimberley – Yes...

Brian – We need to inform the police.

Jennifer – Speak of the devil...

Sanchez and Ramirez return.

Brian – Ah, you're right on time, Detective.

Ramirez – Thanks for your encouragement. It's a welcome phrase we unfortunately hear too rarely in our line of work.

Kimberley – Has the judge made a decision? Are you here to seal the door of this establishment?

Ramirez – Rest assured, we've just concluded our investigation, and the news is quite good. For you, at least...

Sanchez – We found several hairs in the cookie dough...

Ramirez – We could even say a big clump.

Sanchez – And this big clump belongs to a certain Cindy.

Brian – Cindy? The florist next door?

Kimberley – It's true that she's losing a lot of hair, isn't she?

Sanchez – We also found her fingerprints all over the kitchen of your tearoom.

Ramirez – Amateur work...

Kimberley – So what?

Ramirez – This proves that, indeed, you were the victim of a setup.

Sanchez – After a few hits with the phone book on her head, Cindy made spontaneous and complete confessions.

Kimberley – So, we're not closing the tearoom anymore?

Ramirez – No. You're completely exonerated.

Jennifer – And Cindy?

Sanchez – She's in custody. And she's tearing her hair out. It's impressive, believe me...

Ramirez – She claims to have acted on the orders of the developer who wants to demolish this building. But he took care not to leave any traces...

Brian – And he's more resistant to phone book hits...

Ramirez – Let's just say he has too many high-level connections for us to use these kinds of methods with him.

Brian – That's a shame. Well, at least your tearoom can remain open!

Kimberley – Unfortunately, without the loan for expansion, it won't change much. This shop is just too small.

Brian – Kimberley's fiancé tampered with her accounts... Consequently, her loan got rejected.

Ramirez – You can still file a complaint, of course, but it will take months, maybe years...

Kimberley – I'm really at a loss about how to deal with this.

Jennifer – We've had good sales lately, but it's clear they'll plummet if we return to the traditional recipe...

Ramirez – I still recommend dropping the space cakes...

Sanchez's phone rings, and he answers.

Sanchez – Yes? Okay, we'll be right there... *(He puts away his phone)* Chief, we've got to go. There's a robbery at Harmony Finance.

Kimberley – Harmony Finance? That's my bank!

Ramirez – And where is it?

Kimberley – Right across the street.

Jennifer – Don't tell me you're going to blame us for this robbery... You're witnesses; we haven't moved from here.

Ramirez – Please excuse us... Duty calls... To protect and serve, that's our motto...

Sanchez – Ladies and gentlemen...

Ramirez – Lead the way, Sanchez... I thought I heard gunshots...

Ramirez and Sanchez exit.

Brian – I'm really sorry... If I could, I would lend you the money you need myself. Unfortunately, my accounts are really in bad shape... I started my architecture firm six months ago, and I'm about to lose a big client. In fact, here he is...

Richard returns.

Richard – I'm very pleased to hear that you've been cleared of those drug charges, dear Madam.

Kimberley – A case you fabricated to force me to close the shop.

Richard – Unfortunately, as you know, it's too late for the bank. The deadline has passed. And the compromise you signed with Cindy is now void.

Kimberley – That suits you well...

Richard – I'm buying the shop next door. And I'm still interested in yours... You'd better sell it to me while I'm still willing to give you a good price. Be reasonable...

Kimberley – If you don't mind, I'll think about it a little more...

William returns.

William – I heard about your troubles. I brought my savings. It's not much, but if it can help...

He places a bag full of banknotes on the table. Jennifer looks inside.

Jennifer – How much is in there?

William – Twenty-three thousand dollars. I've emptied my savings account.

Kimberley – But William! You're out of your mind!

William – I'm your grandfather, after all.

Samantha enters, followed by George. Samantha overhears the last sentence.

Samantha – Your grandfather? The postman? Is this a joke...

Kimberley – I'm afraid not...

Samantha – But then... who is your mother?

Kimberley – Mom... You're well placed to know who my mother is, right?

William – I didn't think I'd tell you like this, but... I'm your father, Samantha.

Samantha – You? My mother's lover? And you would be my father?

George – And until now, I thought I had married the daughter of the baron Swindlemore von Hustlestein.

Samantha – Oh, you, that's enough... This is none of your business!

George – Easy, Baroness! It's not my business? For twenty-five years, you decided everything, claiming to have blue blood, when you were just the maid's daughter. And now, I find out you're also the postman's daughter.

Samantha – So what? What's your brilliant plan, clever guy?

George – My plan? To start, I'll help my daughter by giving her the money she needs, despite your objections until now. But tell me... she is my daughter, right?

Samantha – Oh, George, don't play dumb. Of course, she's your daughter!

Richard – What a heartwarming family scene...

George takes out his chequebook.

George – How much do you need to keep your tearoom, my dear?

Samantha – Just don't go overboard with the zeros, George...

Kimberley – Thanks, Dad, but...

Richard – But all this money won't save her. It's too late. I've just purchased the shop next door, and without that expansion, this tearoom project is doomed.

George approaches Richard, looking threatening.

George – What does he want, with his pimp face and dead fish eyes?

Richard backs away cautiously.

Kimberley – Forget it, Dad, it won't do any good.

George – And who is he anyway?

Kimberley – A bastard, I'll explain later... But this time, he won. Sometimes, you just have to acknowledge defeat.

Richard pulls out a contract.

Richard – All you have to do is sign here...

Kimberley – I feel like I'm selling my soul to the devil.

She signs.

Richard – That was the last signature I needed to start demolishing this building...

George – Watch yourself, though... Lay a finger on my daughter, I'll be the one to demolish you. With or without a permit...

Blackout.

Kimberley enters with a box containing a few personal items. Jennifer arrives with another box.

Kimberley – Well, that's it, it's over... By tonight this whole building will be nothing but a pile of rubble...

Jennifer – It's unbelievable... I never imagined things would end like this...

Kimberley – My entire youth is about to crumble to dust. Every day, after school, before going home, I would stop by Granny Maggie's for a snack. I wouldn't have missed the chance to savour her famous cookies for anything in the world...

Jennifer – Yes, me too... I was very attached to this building. My parents lived on the third floor. And in the evenings, after our afternoon snack, I used to deal a bit of weed in the lobby...

Kimberley – Those were the good old times...

Jennifer – And what's the plan now?

Kimberley – What's the plan for what?

Jennifer – To destroy it!

Kimberley – They've rigged the building with dynamite charges. All that's left is to push the button on the detonator. But don't worry, they won't set it off until we're far away.

Jennifer – Suddenly, I feel a little better...

Kimberley – That jerk gave me permission to come and pick up some stuff before blowing it all up.

Jennifer – We shouldn't linger here... There's a smell of death in the air, isn't there?

Kimberley – That's just the Christmas tree... Then again, Christmas always has a whiff of death about it.

Jennifer – What are we going to do with this bloody Christmas tree?

Kimberley – I couldn't bring myself to take the decorations down. We'll leave it here, in memory of Granny Maggie.

Jennifer – It'll be buried beneath the rubble, just like all the hopes we had for this place...

Kimberley – That's beautiful. You're going to make me cry...

Jennifer – Granny Maggie... She'll be turning in her grave when she hears her building come crashing down...

Kimberley – It's true... Even though she's gone, I can still feel her presence everywhere. Whenever I go down to the cellar, there's this mysterious draught. I can't work out where it's coming from. Sometimes I imagine it's my grandmother's ghost.

Jennifer – You're giving me the creeps... I've just come up from the cellar...

Kimberley – I'm really sorry I dragged you into this whole mess...

Jennifer – It's okay... I know this project meant a lot to you.

Kimberley – What are you going to do now...?

Jennifer – I don't know... I might go back to dealing a bit...

Kimberley – You're not really going to do that, are you?

Jennifer – I'm joking, don't worry... What about you? What are you going to do?

Kimberley – Dad offered me a job at the garage...

Jennifer – Working in a garage? I can't picture you changing oil or fixing cars. You don't even know how to change a tyre...

Kimberley – I'll be handling the accounting side of things. I did everything to avoid that...

Jennifer – Well, at least you won't be working for Kevin...

Kimberley – Let him go to hell.

Jennifer – And what about Brian?

Kimberley – I haven't seen him again...

Jennifer – That's a shame... You could have given him some fashion advice for his new physique...

Kimberley – You're right... Losing forty-five pounds is all very well, but not much use if he keeps wearing the same old clothes...

Jennifer – Well... We have to leave now. Are you coming?

Kimberley – You go ahead. I'll stay for one more second. To bid a final farewell to Granny Maggie.

Jennifer – If you see her ghost, give her my regards... Good luck, Kimberley.

Kimberley – You too, Jennifer.

Jennifer leaves. Kimberley looks at the Christmas tree. Brian arrives. He is wearing clothes that fit him well this time, much more flattering.

Brian – Hello Kimberley... I saw you come in... But what are you still doing here?

Kimberley – Murderers always come back to the scene of their crime...

Brian – Did you murder someone?

Kimberley – No... I was saying that for you...

Brian – Ah, I see... I didn't understand...

Kimberley – You know... The guy from Bellewood... Hunky but dummy.. But speaking of that, I find something different about you...

Brian – I finally decided to mourn my lost weight and bought clothes that fit me. But we shouldn't stay here, you know...

Kimberley – Are you the one going to push the detonator?

Brian – I've terminated my contract with Bribery. I don't work for him anymore. It won't help my finances, but at least I'll be in line with my conscience...

Kimberley – Unfortunately, it won't change much now... At least, Maggie won't see this building collapse.

Brian – I would have given anything to avoid this, believe me.

Kimberley – I believe you.

Brian – We have to go now.

She bends down and picks up the fallen star at the foot of the tree.

Kimberley – Just a moment, please... The star fell again. It's purely symbolic, but I'm going to put it back on top of the tree one last time. Like a final challenge...

Kimberley takes the star and looks at it curiously.

Brian – What is it?

Kimberley – A note scribbled behind the star... I never noticed it. It's my grandmother's handwriting...

Brian – A farewell note? While she was living her last moments? What does it say?

Kimberley – Richard killed me...

Brian – Richard? You mean...

Kimberley – That's what it says.

Brian – I knew he was willing to do anything to get his hands on this building... but I didn't think he could go this far.

Kimberley – Richard... But then... that changes everything.

Brian – If he's convicted of murder, he'll go to prison. The sale will be canceled. And everything becomes possible again!

Kimberley – Do you think so?

Brian – I'm sure, Kimberley. There's still time to stop the destruction of this building. Let's go to the police...

Kimberley – Thank you, Brian. And sorry for being so unfair to you.

They share a brief embrace.

Brian – There's no time to waste... After this, we'll have our whole lives ahead of us...

Richard arrives, seeming to appear out of nowhere.

Richard – Not so fast!

Kimberley – But where did you come from?

Brian – He slithered in like a rat, through the basement...

Kimberley – I know you killed my grandmother! You won't escape justice!

Richard pulls out a gun.

Richard – Not if you take this secret to the grave. Like your grandmother. The building is rigged. All I have to do is trigger the detonator.

Brian – Are you insane?

Richard – Drink this...

Brian – Poison?

Richard – Just a powerful narcotic.

Kimberley – Please, let's keep it civil! Or am I confusing it with an aphrodisiac again...

Richard – Your bodies will be discovered in the wreckage, and it will be deemed an accident. After all, you have no right to be here whatsoever.

Kimberley – You granted me permission to be here!

Brian – It was a ploy, Kimberley... and I got caught in the trap too.

Kimberley – You came back to save me... and now you're going to die because of me.

Richard – Enough talk... Drink, I said! *(To Brian)* You first.

Richard hands Brian a small vial. Brian pretends to take it, but then, in slow motion, like in a terrible movie, he makes a grab for the gun. A shot rings out. Brian collapses, still in slow motion. Normal speed resumes.

Kimberley – Oh my God... You killed him!

Richard – It doesn't matter. He was going to die anyway. And so are you. Drink!

Slow motion again. Kimberley takes the vial and is about to drink when the ghost of Granny Maggie suddenly appears: an enormous figure draped in a white sheet or a hideously patterned tablecloth. The ghost is played by one of the performers who happens to be offstage.

Ghost *(in a sepulchral voice, speaking in slow motion)* – You thought you could escape human justice, Bribery, but you won't escape divine justice!

Richard, petrified, drops his weapon. Back to normal speed. The ghost grabs the gun and throws it to Kimberley, who catches it in mid-air.

Kimberley – Thanks, Granny Maggie! You can depart now; I've got this under control...

The ghost exits with an echoing laugh that seems to come from the great beyond.

Richard – Did you witness what I just saw?

Kimberley – It must be the lingering effect of your space cakes.

Richard – Except I didn't eat any...

Kimberley – Never mind. Now you're going to join Granny Maggie in the afterlife, and I'm sure she'll take good care of you...

Richard – Don't shoot; I'm sure we can still negotiate something.

Kimberley – Go burn for eternity in the flames of hell.

She aims her gun at him.

Richard – Are you really sure you don't want to run this Starfucks?

Kimberley – You killed my grandmother, and you killed the man I loved. You're going to die...

Richard – Think about it! If you kill me, you'll end up behind bars.

Kimberley – Don't worry about me. I'll plead self-defence and crime of passion.

Richard – Hold on, which one is it? Self-defence or crime of passion? They're not synonymous.

Kimberley – Don't try to confuse me. Just because I mix up 'aphrodisiac' and 'narcoleptic' doesn't mean I'm quite as stupid as I look. If you've got any last prayers, say them now.

Sanchez and Ramirez arrive, guns drawn.

Ramirez – Hold your fire! Nobody make a move.

Sanchez disarms Kimberley and approaches Richard.

Sanchez – In the name of the law, you're under arrest.

Richard – What are the charges? This woman was threatening me with a gun!

Ramirez – Forget it. Your influential connections won't shield you now, Bribery. We've got evidence.

Richard – Evidence? What for?

Ramirez – The death threat you sent to Kimberley and the anonymous letter you sent the police, accusing her of drug dealing, were both made with letters cut out of the same magazine.

Sanchez – The Bellewood Municipal Bulletin... The Mayor probably gave you a copy as a thank-you for greasing his palm to get your building permits.

Ramirez – Yet, we discovered a copy of that magazine in the trash can of your office. The letters in both threatening notes were cut with scissors from this magazine.

Richard – I may be an anonymous poison-pen writer, but you can't throw people in prison for something so trivial. Otherwise, half the country would already be behind bars.

Ramirez – It is still a death threat. That should be enough for a judge to bring charges.

Richard – How about we discuss this outside? This building is rigged, and I've set a countdown that will expire in a few minutes...

Sanchez – Don't worry, we disabled the detonator... or, at least, I think we did...

Kimberley (*holding out the star*) – That's not all, Detective. I've got proof that he murdered my grandmother!

Ramirez (*reading the inscription*) – "Richard killed me"...

Sanchez – But she's already dead, Chief, isn't she?

Ramirez – Well, at least there aren't any spelling mistakes this time. Cuff him, Sanchez.

Richard – I will complain to the district attorney. You'll hear from me!

Sanchez handcuffs Richard.

Kimberley – Unfortunately, he also killed Brian... It's all my fault; I'll never forgive myself.

But Brian raises his head.

Brian – I'm just wounded, Kimberley, don't worry.

Kimberley – Oh my God, he's alive! He needs medical attention.

Sanchez examines Brian.

Sanchez – I have my first aid certificate, don't worry. It's just a superficial wound. The bullet just grazed him. With a small bandage and some adhesive plaster, he'll be fine.

Ramirez – You know how men are... A scratch, and they faint.

But, through a clever trick, a huge bloodstain soaks Brian's shirt.

Kimberley – He's losing a lot of blood, though, isn't he?

Brian – I feel like I'm fading, Kimberley... But I don't want you to feel guilty...

Kimberley – You risked your life for me. You're not going to die now...

Brian – I heard what you said earlier about me, thinking I was dead...

Kimberley – It's true, I admit it... I love you...

Brian – And I love you too.

They kiss, under the approving gaze of everyone else.

Richard – So, all's well that ends well.

Brian is still bleeding profusely.

Ramirez – Nevertheless, let's call the ambulance...

He steps away for a moment to make a call.

Brian – If I make it through this, Kimberley, I have a question to ask you.

Kimberley – I promise to answer. Unless it's about Granny Maggie's secret cookie recipe.

Brian – Will you marry me, Kimberley?

Kimberley – Yes, Chubby.

Ramirez comes back.

Ramirez – It's moments like these, Sanchez, that remind me why I chose this profession.

Sanchez (*teary-eyed*) – Me too, Chief...

Ramirez – A true Christmas movie...

Sanchez – Even worse...

Brian – I'll try to hold on until the paramedics arrive, Kimberley.

Kimberley – I beg you... I couldn't live without you.

Brian – Instead of demolishing this run-down building, I'll contribute to its renovation and revamp the shitty decor of your tearoom, for free.

Sanchez – That's moving, Chief.

Ramirez (*troubled*) – Do you have a tissue?

Sanchez hands him a dirty handkerchief. Ramirez looks at the handkerchief, frowns, gives a reproachful look to Sanchez but still blows his nose. Brian turns to Ramirez and Sanchez.

Brian – I've lost touch with everyone in Bellewood. Would you both be willing to be my witnesses?

Ramirez – It would be an honour for both of us.

Sanchez – You know our motto: protect and serve.

Kimberley – If someone had told me that one day I would be marrying Chubby...

Ramirez – Did you make sure to disconnect the detonator, Sanchez?

Sanchez – Me, Chief? Not at all! You were supposed to do it...

Ramirez – Me? But I never said that! It's you who...

Sanchez – I'm starting to worry; this comedy might turn into a tragedy after all...

An ambulance siren is heard.

Ramirez – Well, at least the ambulance won't come for nothing...

A deep rumbling is heard, getting louder, like the sound of a collapsing building.

Blackout.

The End.

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez first took to the stage as a drummer in several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then worked as a television screenwriter before returning to the stage as a playwright. He has written around a hundred scripts for television and 123 plays, some of which have become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). His plays have been performed in more than 100 countries and translated into around 50 languages.

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 Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (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](#).

Jean-Pierre Martinez recently returned to music, writing original songs inspired by his poems and plays.

With **Jean-Pierre Martinez Music**, he extends that creative universe through original songs: short stories in musical form, humorous or melancholy, in which each song sometimes becomes a miniature theatrical scene.

<https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/>

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

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
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
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
Cards on the Table
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 Ways 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
Hangover
Happy Hour
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
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police
Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's
Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
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 Most Beautiful Village in
France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Blackouts
Don't panic!
Dramedies
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
Every Colour under the Sun
For real and for fun
Funny Stories
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
Memoirs of a Suitcase
No Sense Off Limits
Now and then
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Open Letters
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

*All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded
free of charge from his websites:*

<https://jeanpierremartinez.net/>

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