

La Comédiathèque

OPEN HEARTS

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Open Hearts

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Translation by the author

In a café opposite a hospital, an eccentric owner watches the lives of men and women searching for someone to give their hearts to — for a transplant, or perhaps for something more...

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Up to 12 men and 12 women.

Flexible casting: several parts may be doubled, and several roles may be played by actors of either sex.

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1 – A Heart to Give

A café. The owner is behind the counter, polishing glasses. A woman comes in, looking thoroughly miserable. Without so much as a glance at him, she sits at the bar. He watches her out of the corner of his eye.

Owner – Madam... What can I get you?

Woman – Do you have arsenic?

Owner – To take away, or to have here?

Woman – I'm still undecided...

Owner – Have a coffee while you decide. A splash of Calvados will cheer you up. The Calvados is on me.

Woman – Calvados? At this hour?

Owner – Calvados has been known since ancient times for its antidepressant properties. I prescribe it to my customers every day, and not one of them has killed themselves yet.

Woman – That's kind, but I'll stick with the coffee. I work at the hospital, just across the street.

He prepares her coffee.

Owner – A healthcare assistant... That can't be much fun every day...

Woman – Surgeon.

Owner – Ah... Sorry, Doctor...

Woman – It pays a little better, but that doesn't necessarily make it any more fun.

Owner – I can imagine...

Woman – And that's just my job. Luckily, I work day and night. Having no private life isn't always a bad thing... when your private life is bloody awful...

He hands her a newspaper.

Owner – Have a look at your horoscope. Perhaps things are about to take a turn for the better.

She glances at the newspaper.

Woman (reading) – "You will give your heart to a stranger"...

She puts the newspaper back on the counter.

Owner – That's good news, isn't it?

Woman – It depends.

Owner – You shouldn't give your heart to just anyone, that's for sure.

Woman – Above all, it's better to give it while you're still alive.

Owner – I'm not sure I follow...

Woman – "You will give your heart to a stranger"... Look, it isn't in the love column. It's under health...

Owner – It must be a mistake...

Woman – I've got a patient waiting for a heart transplant. All we need is a healthy donor. Preferably one who's dead.

Owner – I see...

Woman – All we can do is wait... Someone has to die for someone else to live.

Owner – It's fate...

Woman – An accident can happen so quickly. After all, it might be me. Since it's in my horoscope.

He places the coffee in front of her.

Owner – You certainly look on the bright side of life...

Woman – I've never had children. It might be my last chance to give someone life...

Owner – Are you really sure you don't want that calvados?

Woman – Never during work hours... If a donor comes in, and I have to operate in an hour...

Owner – If you're the donor, there won't be anyone left to perform the operation.

Woman – With heart transplants, it's donors we're short of, not surgeons. Operations like that are still rare. I know surgeons who'd kill for the chance to perform their first transplant.

Owner – In that case, I'll have the Calvados myself, and your coffee's on the house.

Woman – You're a strange café owner. That's not how you're going to make a fortune.

The café owner pours himself a calvados and drinks it in one gulp.

Owner – I gave up the idea of getting rich a long time ago. And I don't offer coffee to just anyone, you know...

Woman – Why me? You can hardly say I'm good company...

Owner – I've always been suspicious of people who are too nice. Some faces I take to, others I don't. That's all.

Woman – So, I'm lucky, then...

Owner – Well, we don't know each other... Maybe I'm your handsome stranger...

Woman – Who knows... Well, I have to go...

Owner – Another life to save?

Woman – No, but I've parked in a disabled bay.

Owner – With your doctor's badge on the windscreen, you can park anywhere without getting a ticket, can't you? That alone would have made medical school worthwhile.

Woman – Thanks for the coffee...

Owner – Be careful crossing the street.

Woman – We've only just met, and you're already like a mother to me. If I'm still single in ten years, remind me to marry you.

Owner – Alas, who wants to marry their mother? (*She leaves.*) That's the tragedy of my life...

2. A Tender Heart

The owner is behind the counter, reading a newspaper. A man and a woman come in and sit at a table.

Woman – Just so you know, I haven't got much time... I'm back on duty in an hour. And my boss is looking for the slightest excuse to sack me...

Man – Thanks for sacrificing your lunch break for me.

Woman – No, but I'm not sacrificing anything for you... *(Looking at the menu)* I'm going to have something to eat here. Aren't you?

Man – Yes, yes, of course, I mean... Thanks for agreeing to have lunch with me.

She puts the menu down. A pause.

Woman – So, you had something to tell me...

Man – Yes...

Awkward silence.

Woman – I'm listening...

The owner looks over at them, intrigued.

Man – I'm not sure how to say it...

Woman – Since we don't have much time, let me help you a bit... You want to go out with me, right?

Man *(taken aback)* – Yes, well...

The owner arrives, interrupting this rather pathetic scene.

Owner – What can I get you?

Woman – A Niçoise salad... without anchovies and without tuna.

Man *(joking)* – A ham-and-butter baguette... without the butter. *(The woman doesn't laugh, and the owner gives him an icy stare.)* I'm joking. A ham-and-butter baguette, please.

Owner – One Niçoise salad and one ham baguette. Coming right up.

The café owner leaves.

Woman – Do you eat meat?

Man – Uh... yes. Well, no.

Woman – But you eat ham...

Man – Yes, but... Ham isn't really considered meat, is it?

Woman – Have you seen the latest PETA investigation into pigs being kept in cages?

Man – No.

Woman – I think if you had, you wouldn't eat ham anymore...

Man – I'm sorry, I... I didn't know...

Woman – That's what the Germans said after the war about the camps.

Man – What did they say?

Woman – "I didn't know..."

Man – Okay... so... you're a vegetarian.

Woman – Vegan.

Man – Okay...

Woman – You don't know the difference, do you?

Man – No.

Woman – I don't eat any animal products. I don't wear leather either. No fur, obviously.

Man – In this weather...

Woman – Sorry?

Man – No, I mean... I don't wear fur either. That's a start, isn't it?

Woman – Listen, I'll be straight with you. I could never go out with a man who eats ham. But we can be friends if you like... We're not fanatics, after all.

Man – Is it that serious? I mean... It's just a slice of ham.

Woman – Do you know how that pig was raised? How it lived? How it was slaughtered?

Man – No.

Woman – Have you ever visited a pig farm?

Man – No.

Woman – Have you ever visited a slaughterhouse?

Man – No... and you?

Woman – Me neither, but I've seen many videos about it.

Man – Okay... No, but... I don't really care that much about ham... I mean, meat in general.

Woman – So, you could become vegan just to go out with me?

Man – Why not? Of course! Absolutely...

Woman – And if I were Muslim or Jewish, and asked you not to eat pork and convert to my religion, would you do it?

Man – Are you Muslim?

Woman – It's just a supposition. So?

Man – I don't know... Maybe... I'm Catholic, but... It's the same with meat, I don't really care that much...

Woman – You're rather easily led, aren't you?

Man – Or... I really want to go out with you.

Woman – Yeah... but it wouldn't be out of conviction.

Man – That I would date you?

Woman – That you would stop eating meat! It would just be to date me.

Man – Yes, well...

Woman – And as soon as I dumped you, you would go back to eating meat.

Man – We're not even dating yet, and you're already thinking of dumping me?

A pause.

Woman – What's your worst food experience?

Man – Sorry?

Woman – The worst meal of your life, if you prefer.

Man (*jokingly*) – I hope it's not going to be this one... (*She remains stone-faced.*) No, I... I don't know...

Woman – Well, I can tell you.

Man – Okay.

Possibly melodramatic music accompanies the narration of this traumatic episode.

Woman – I must have been about ten. My parents and I were invited to dinner by some friends of theirs. A doctor and his wife. Actually, they weren't friends at all, just our new neighbours. Mum had invited them round to welcome them to the neighbourhood, and now they were returning the invitation. My parents are very ordinary people. I suppose they were flattered to be invited to a surgeon's home. They probably expected a magnificent dinner. So we had drinks, chatted for a while, then sat down. The crockery was fine china, the tablecloth spotless, and there were so many knives and forks that we didn't know which to use first. After a green salad came the main course. And what did the surgeon put on the table?

The music abruptly stops.

Man – You're scaring me...

Woman – A heart!

Silence.

Man – A human heart?

Woman – Of course not... Well, I don't think so. An beef heart, I suppose.

Man – An beef heart... I didn't even know people ate those... Lungs, maybe, for cats... I think that's what they call lights... But a heart!

Woman – And those two sadists had the nerve to ask us if we liked it.

Man – And then?

Woman – My parents were terribly polite. And being guests in a doctor's home... So my mother said, very politely, 'Of course! We've never had it before, but there's a first time for everything, isn't there?'

Man – Oh, damn...

Woman – And Dad had to make it worse: 'Oh yes, beef heart, how unusual. A nice change. We never think of cooking it, do we, dear?' I felt sick, of course. I said I didn't like it. Mum insisted, 'You can't say you don't like something until you've tried it!' Then the doctor started lecturing us: 'Among certain ancient peoples, warriors ate their enemies' hearts to take on their strength.' And his wife added: 'Beef heart is very healthy. Full of protein. And aren't we always saying someone is as strong as an ox?' So there I was, with a huge lump of heart on my plate.

Man – Wasn't there anything else to eat?

Woman – Just green salad.

Man – Heart with salad...

Woman – It's terribly hard to cut, too. Like a rubber shoe sole. Have you ever eaten one?

Man – A rubber sole...?

Woman – And everyone chewing their beef heart before forcing themselves to swallow it. All the while, talking about the weather, as if it were perfectly normal.

Man – And is it good? I mean... What does it taste like?

Woman – Nothing. It was like chewing gum. I've never chewed gum since. And from that day on, I stopped eating animal products. I was vegan before the word was fashionable. Sometimes I wonder if I invented the idea...

Man – Oh yes... That's enough to be traumatized forever...

Woman – Wait... what if you were right...?

Man – Sorry?

Woman – Now I'm wondering if it really was a beef heart.

Man – No?

Woman – Well, he was a surgeon, you see... When they transplant a new heart into a patient, we don't really know what they do with the old one. I imagine there aren't many patients asking to keep it as a souvenir in a jar.

Man – Do you think there are cannibal surgeons?

The owner returns with the sandwich and salad.

Owner – Here we are. A ham-and-butter baguette and a Niçoise salad, no anchovies or tuna. I've put mackerel in instead. *(She gives him a murderous look. He remains perfectly deadpan.)* Just kidding. Enjoy.

The man looks at his sandwich before pushing it away.

Man – No, you're right. It wouldn't be honest of me.

Woman – What?

Man – Giving up meat just to get a date with you. I'd have to believe in it myself.

Woman – That's for sure...

Man – The problem is, quitting meat is like quitting smoking. When you're addicted...

Woman – So, you're giving up...

Man – I know what I have to do.

Woman – Now you're scaring me.

Man – I'm going straight to the butcher's opposite. I'll buy an beef heart and eat the whole thing. After that, I'll never want to touch meat again. Just like you.

Woman – You'd really do that for me? Eat an beef heart?

Man – What do you think?

He gets up. Surprised, she stands up too.

Woman – But... you're going now?

Man – If I think too much about it, I might not be able to do it.

Woman – And... do you have a recipe?

Man – I'm going to eat it raw. I'm a warrior, right?

Woman – Well...

Man – Okay, wish me luck.

He embraces her and, taking her by surprise, kisses her passionately on the lips. Then he leaves. She watches him go, speechless. The owner, who has seen everything, comes back.

Owner – Didn't he like the ham baguette?

Woman – He decided to become vegan.

Owner – Well, he seems really motivated...

Woman – Yes...

3. A Heavy Heart

The owner wipes down the counter. A couple come in and sit at a table.

Man – Are you sure this is a good idea?

Woman – What?

Man – Having one last drink together.

Woman – We were married for ten years. We can't just say goodbye in a judge's office. That would be too sad.

Man – Yes...

The café owner approaches.

Owner – What can I get for you?

Woman – What are you having?

Man – I don't know... *(Sarcastic)* Champagne?

Woman – Why not...?

Man – Then two glasses, please.

Owner – Sorry, all I've got is Blanquette de Limoux, for making kir. We're opposite a hospital, you know. We don't get many chances to open a bottle of Veuve Clicquot.

Man – All right then, just a coffee.

Woman – Same for me.

Owner – And two espressos.

The café owner walks away.

Woman – So, it's done... This time, it's really over?

Man – That's what we wanted, right?

Woman – Of course. But still...

Man – You don't have any regrets?

Woman – A divorce is always a failure. I regret that it didn't work out.

Man – Me too...

A moment of silence.

Woman – But, you're the one who cheated on me.

Man – Yes...

Woman – Sorry, I didn't mean to bring that up again... We're divorced, you don't owe me any explanations.

Man – No... *(A moment)* And you, you never cheated on me? You can tell me now.

Woman – No.

Man – Not even a one-time slip-up?

Woman – No.

Man – A fleeting little kiss one night, after a few too many drinks?

Woman – No.

Man – No, of course not... You're so perfect...

Woman – I gather that's not a compliment coming from you...

The café owner brings the two coffees.

Owner – Here you go...

Woman – Thank you.

The café owner walks away.

Man – Can I ask you something? Now that it's over anyway...

Woman – Again?

Man – You haven't admitted anything yet...

Woman – If it's an interrogation, then... Go ahead, I'm listening...

Man – Did you ever lie to me, at least once, during all these years we spent together?

Woman – Lie?

Man – Even by omission. Something important you kept from me. Something you're not proud of, obviously. Otherwise there's no point...

Woman – Why are you asking me this now?

Man – I don't know... If I could believe you weren't quite so perfect after all... perhaps it would help me get over it.

Woman – I'm not dead, you know.

Man – I mean mourn the end of our relationship. Our love, if I may put it that way.

Woman – You may.

Man – So?

Woman – If it can help you...

Man – I'm listening.

Woman – It's not that easy...

Man – Don't tell me you've got so much to choose from.

Woman – No, precisely. I'm thinking...

Man – I have all the time in the world.

Woman – Do you remember our first car?

Man – Yes.

Woman – One morning we found it parked outside with one wing completely dented.

Man – Yes.

Woman – Obviously, no one left a note for the insurance.

Man – No.

Woman – It was me. I backed into the gatepost. The car was brand new, and I couldn't bring myself to tell you. I was so ashamed. I parked it outside and said nothing.

Man – I knew.

Woman – You knew?

Man – There was paint on the gatepost. It's probably still there.

Woman – And you didn't say anything?

Man – You seemed so determined to stick to that lie... What difference would it have made?

Woman – Probably none. But why didn't you speak up?

Man – You wreck our brand-new car and tell a hopeless lie. I'm not the police. What was I supposed to say?

Woman – I don't know. You could have... scored a point.

Man – That's not how I saw our relationship. The lie was so childish. Almost endearing. I thought it must have been important to you. I preferred to let you keep your dignity...

Woman – Thank you... that's kind.

Man – Yes... (*A pause*) And you're taking me for a fool.

Woman – Not at all. It's true, I assure you.

Man – When you asked me if I had ever cheated on you, I was honest with you. I could have denied it. Maybe we'd still be married. Now it's your turn to play the game. There must be something else... Something more serious...

Silence.

Woman – All right... Remember when you went away to a conference in Toulouse for three days?

Man – Yes.

Woman – I told you I was going to the hospital for a routine examination.

Man – Oh yes... I remember.

Woman – It was for a termination.

Man – A termination...

Woman – An abortion, if you prefer...

Man – We'd decided to have a child... You'd stopped taking the pill...

Woman – Yes...

Man – I don't understand.

Woman – Neither do I...

Man – And then?

Woman – I don't know... I was scared.

Man – Scared?

Woman – That I couldn't cope. That you might leave me... And, to be fair, I wasn't entirely wrong.

Man – Don't turn the tables... If we had had that child, things might have been different.

Woman – Maybe...

A moment of silence.

Man – How could you do that to us?

Woman – Thank you for not saying 'to me'... I can't explain it. I just didn't feel capable. Capable of going through with it.

Man – Handling what?

Woman – Giving life. Becoming a mother.

Man – You could have talked to me about it. Shared it with me.

Woman – I never dared to tell you... I was too ashamed...

Man – Just like with the car.

Woman – I'm really sorry. I was scared...

Man – Did I scare you that much? Even about the car...

Woman – I was afraid of myself. (*A pause.*) Do you really think things might have been different?

Man – Things are what they are. There's no point rewriting the past. We obviously weren't meant to make it together.

Silence.

Woman – I think we should go.

Man – Yes...

They get up to leave.

Woman – Do you still see her?

Man – Who?

Woman – The one you cheated on me with.

Man – Ah, that one...

Woman – You never told me who she was. Can you tell me now? Do I know her?

Man – What would be the point...?

A moment.

Woman – You never cheated on me.

Man – No...

Woman – Then why...

Man – It was easier that way.

Woman – You mean easier for me.

Man – Easier for both of us... I think we'd better go now...

Woman – Let's go.

They leave.

4. Sick at Heart

The owner is polishing glasses behind the counter and rinsing them in a sink out of sight. A man and a woman come in. The man eyes the place with suspicion and distaste. They sit at a table.

Man – It's really grimy. I wonder why I keep coming here.

Woman – It's the only café across from the hospital...

Man – Just look at the hygiene rules we have to follow at work... If a patient catches a hospital-acquired infection on your ward, even a cold, they'll sue you. Then they come in here for a glass of red wine in a glass barely rinsed since the last customer — who might have had hepatitis, or Ebola for all we know.

Woman – Yeah...

Man – Look at that! Dirty glasses sitting in the sink all day. Just imagine the germs breeding in there... By closing time, you've shared them with half the town. Hospital-acquired infections, my foot. What do you call an infection caught in a café?

Woman – Cirrhosis of the liver?

The café owner approaches.

Owner – What can I get you both?

Man – I don't know... A tomato juice.

Woman – A coffee.

The café owner walks away.

Man – I don't know why I'm getting tomato juice, I can't stand it.

Woman – After a while, you run out of ideas for what to order.

Man – Soft drinks are so sugary. I should have ordered a fruit juice.

Woman – You still can...

Man – I don't know... Did you see the look on the café owner's face? He doesn't seem friendly.

Woman – Shall I go and ask him?

Man – It's too late, he just opened the bottle. That's just like me. I'll have to drink a tomato juice even though I hate it. Plus, tomatoes give me heartburn. Don't they do that to you?

Woman – No.

Man – Too bad, I won't drink it then...

Woman (changing the subject) – What are you doing this summer?

Man – I don't know yet... I'll probably spend a week or two at my parents' place, like every year.

Woman – You're close to your parents, then.

Man – Not really. They're bloody annoying, but they have a villa with a pool near Antibes.

Woman – When you're annoying, if you still want to see your children after they leave home, you have to invest in a pool. You should consider it for yours when the time comes...

Man – Yeah... Unless I don't want to see them too often.

Woman – Besides that, how are things?

Man – Well, my wife invited the neighbours over for dinner again.

Woman – So what?

Man – It's not that they're not nice, but... they're a bit annoying too...

Woman – Why did she invite them?

Man – We just moved into the neighbourhood. They kindly invited us to their place to get acquainted. So we felt obliged to return the invitation. I'm afraid it might become a habit, you know?

Woman – I can see that.

Man – Now that we've set the ball rolling...

Woman – I might have a solution.

Man – A solution?

Woman – To make sure they never come to eat at your place again.

Man – What do you mean?

Woman – I had the same thing happen a few years ago when I bought the house.

Man – And then?

Woman – The neighbours invited us round. Schoolteachers, you know. Subscribers to a highbrow magazine. Progressive politics, naturally. Very environmentally conscious. Almost vegetarian, although they'll eat meat if it's organic.

Man – I see. Nice, but totally boring. And how did you get rid of them?

Woman – When we returned the invitation, I served them a special dish.

Man – Special?

Woman – A heart.

Man – A heart? How do you mean, a heart?

Woman – A beef heart. Straight up. Just with a salad.

Man – A beef heart? I didn't even know you could eat that... Where did you find it?

Woman – At the butcher's around the corner.

Man – I didn't know it was sold.

Woman – Oh no, but he didn't sell it to me. He gave it to me.

Man – No way! And did they eat it?

Woman – They're very polite people, you see. Teachers. Tolerance, respect for differences, all that. They didn't dare say a word. They sat there thinking, 'I respect other people's customs, even if they're not mine, and I'll make an effort to share their food, even if I don't agree with it.' They held their noses and ate the lot.

Man – And then?

Woman – We never saw them again.

Man – Never?

Woman – We still bump into each other, of course. We're neighbours. But they've never invited us back, in case we'd return the invitation and serve something even worse. I tell you, we traumatised them for life.

Man – That's crazy...

Woman – Oh no, you should have seen their faces when I put it on the table... I should have taken a photo. Actually, I think I did...

Man – Damn... But then you had to eat it too.

Woman – You have to know what you want. It's an unpleasant moment, but afterwards you're free for life.

Man – Okay... Yeah, I'm not sure... I'll talk to my wife about it...

Woman – Definitely not, you fool!

Man – Why not?

Woman – She wouldn't agree, obviously!

Man – Yeah... There's a good chance.

Woman – No, surprise her. Tell her tonight, I'm the one cooking, darling.

Man – Oh yes, that alone will surprise her, for sure...

She gets up.

Woman – Well, I have to go now.

Man – Okay.

Woman – You'll tell me about your evening, promise?

Man – Wait, I haven't even been served my tomato juice yet...

Woman – Trust me, it works every time. If you want to stop inviting them without falling out, there's no better way... And there's a butcher's just opposite.

Man – Thanks for the advice! You're right, I'll do that...

Woman – Glad to help...

She leaves.

5. The Gift of a Heart

The owner is standing idly behind the counter. A man and a woman come in.

Woman – Hi, Jack.

The café owner nods in response. They sit at a table. The café owner comes over to take their order.

Owner – What can I get you?

Woman – The usual.

Owner – And for you?

Man – The same.

Owner – Same as the lady or the same as your usual?

Man – Sorry?

Owner – I don't know what you usually have!

Man – Yet I come here every morning, like she does.

Owner – That's how it goes. Some faces stick in my mind. Others I'd rather forget...

Man – Let's say the same as her, then.

Owner – And two coffees...

The café owner walks away.

Man – Always so friendly...

Woman – You have to take him as he is.

Man – What an idiot.

Woman – Do you know his name, this idiot?

Man – No.

Woman – Jack.

Man – You seem awfully familiar with this idiot Jack.

Woman – I come every day for a coffee before work...

Man – Me too... But he acts like he doesn't know me.

Woman – Are you jealous?

Man – Maybe he's the jealous one... Do you know him that well?

Woman – We've never really talked.

Man – How do you know his name is Jack?

Woman – I don't know. Everyone seems to know. We all call him Jack, and he's never objected.

A moment passes.

Man – How are you?

Woman – Fine.

Man – What do you feel like doing?

Woman – I don't know...

Man – It's a nice day... Let's not lock ourselves in a movie theatre. Shall we take a stroll?

Woman – Whatever you want.

Man – Try not to get too excited... Is something troubling you?

Woman – No... Not particularly.

Man – I don't know... Something you want to talk to me about.

A moment passes.

Woman – All right... If anything happens to me, I want my organs donated.

He looks taken aback.

Man – To whom?

Woman – I don't know! To someone who needs them.

Man – Needs...?

Woman – Are you being deliberately obtuse? For a transplant!

Man – Oh yes... Okay...

Woman – I have my donor card with me, but just in case...

Man – All right.

Woman – I need to tell someone. Because when you're no longer able to speak...

Man – Okay.

Woman – And if I'm brain-dead, I certainly don't want to be kept alive by machines.

Man – Fine... But we're not even married. I'm not sure I'd have any say in it. It would probably be up to your parents.

Woman – They're dead.

Man – Oh right, I forgot... Then your siblings.

Woman – I don't get on with the rest of my family.

Man – Then we'd better get married. So I can have a say over all your organs.

Woman – Is this a marriage proposal? Because it would probably be the most original marriage proposal in history.

Man – Will you marry me?

Woman – Yes... (*A moment*) And you?

Man – Well, yes. I've just asked for your hand... Your hand, your heart, your lungs, your liver, the lot...

Woman – No, I mean, and you, if something happens to you. Now that I'll have access to all your organs too.

Man – Oh yes... That's peak romance...

Woman – So?

Man – I don't know... I haven't really thought about it... I already don't donate my blood... except to a few mosquitoes.

Woman – You're wrong.

Man – If I could save your life by giving you my heart after I died, I'd do it. But a stranger...? They might be a complete idiot. Idiots get heart disease too. Perhaps not quite as often, but they do...

The café owner arrives.

Owner – And two coffees... (*Addressing the man*) Can I take the payment now?

The man takes out a few coins and places them on the table. The café owner takes them and leaves without a word.

Man – Imagine I die and this idiot needs a transplant. I'd be furious if he ended up with my heart.

Woman – It's a risk to take.

Man – Well... If it makes you happy, I'll get my card too...

Woman – Yes, it does. And now I'd rather like to go for a walk in the woods with you.

Man – In the forest?

She stands up.

Woman – Shall we go?

Man – Can I finish my coffee first?

Woman – All right, but hurry up.

He drinks his coffee.

6. Heartache

The owner is behind the counter. A customer, who may be played by a man or a woman, comes in looking preoccupied.

Owner – What can I get you?

Customer – I don't know... Whatever you want...

Owner – Whatever I want? Are you sure?

Customer – At this point... What do I have to lose? Surprise me...

Owner – Right, I'll make you an Oxo. You're looking pale. It might do you good.

He prepares the Oxo.

Customer – Oxo? Do people still drink that?

Owner – I don't sell much of it, I admit... And I don't intend to restock.

Customer – If they still make it, that is. It hasn't passed its use-by date, has it?

Owner – You said "whatever you want," so you have to make up your mind! So, will you take this Oxo or not?

Customer – If I can help you get rid of your stock...

The café owner serves the Oxo.

Owner – You don't seem to be doing well...

Customer – No... I'm looking for a heart to take.

Owner – Aren't we all? Once you reach a certain age, demand tends to outstrip supply...

Customer – You couldn't be more right.

Owner – Are you widowed?

Customer – My wife soon will be... unless someone gives me their heart, and quickly.

Owner – I'm not sure I follow...

Customer – I just got out of the hospital. I'm waiting for a transplant. But for now, there's no donor.

Owner – A donor? Ah, yes...

Customer – Obviously, you don't give your heart like you give your blood. The donor has to be deceased, and all the conditions have to be met.

Owner – I see...

Customer – Preferably a young donor, which usually means someone killed in an accident. The heart must be in good condition. And the family has to agree.

The customer prepares to drink.

Owner – Are you sure you want to drink that?

Customer – Well, we've all got to die of something...

The customer tastes the Oxo and grimaces.

Owner – So...?

Customer – Oh yes, you need a strong stomach... Have you never had one?

Owner – I was waiting to see the effect it had on a guinea pig.

Customer – If I'm still alive tomorrow morning, I'll come and tell you.

Owner – If I had known, I would have served you something else. Now I'm going to worry.

Customer – Maybe that would be easier. I can see tomorrow's headline: 'Despairing of ever finding a compatible heart, patient takes own life by drinking an Oxo that expired in...' (*Checking the label on the empty packet.*) '1984!'

Owner – Good grief... That's quite a vintage... Anyway, don't lose hope. Accidents happen every day.

Customer – Accidents?

Owner – For your donor! The road outside is dangerous, with all those lorries. They've been promising a roundabout for years... Almost every month somebody gets knocked down on the crossing. And with the hospital just opposite...

Customer – Thanks... Talking with you has cheered me up...

Owner – That's life... One person's loss is another person's gain...

Customer – I don't think I'll finish this Oxo after all. How much do I owe you?

Owner – It's on the house. Would you like something to get rid of the taste? A Bloody Mary? Very invigorating. Or perhaps a Fernet-Branca?

Customer – That sounds tempting, but... no, thank you.

Owner – Well then, until next time...

Customer – Who knows?

The customer stands up to leave.

Owner – Be careful crossing the road.

Customer – Thanks for the Oxo.

The customer leaves. The café owner picks up the cup and sniffs the steam coming out. He wrinkles his nose with a disgusted look.

Owner – Oh, wow...

There is a screech of brakes, then the sound of crumpling metal. The owner looks up towards the audience, representing the café window onto the road.

Owner – Well, I'll be damned...

7. Heartbeats

The owner is polishing glasses behind the bar. A couple come in and sit down. Silence. He approaches.

Owner – What can I get you?

Woman (firmly) – Nothing just yet. We're waiting for a third person...

Owner – All right...

The man looks surprised. The café owner walks away.

Man – I didn't know we were expecting anyone...

Woman – Neither did I.

Man – What do you mean? Who is it?

Woman – I don't know... The person doesn't have a name yet...

Man – Are you pulling my leg?

A moment of silence.

Woman – What would you say if I told you I am pregnant?

He takes a moment to process the question.

Man – First, I'd say... you've got a problem with your tenses.

Woman – Sorry?

Man – You should say "if I told you I was pregnant", not "if I told you I am pregnant". In a hypothetical sentence like that, you normally backshift the tense.

Woman – Ah, I see...

Man – Are you pregnant?

Woman – I didn't say that...

Man – So it's purely hypothetical.

Woman – If you say so...

Man – Aren't you sure?

Woman – Do you want to see my pad?

Man – Your pad?

Woman – My notepad, obviously. What did you think?

Man – You shouldn't joke about that.

Woman – I'm not joking. I just wanted to talk about it. So, what do you think?

Man – Having a child... It always begins in the conditional, doesn't it?

Woman – It's up to us to turn the conditional into the indicative.

Man – As long as you don't make it an imperative...

Woman – You didn't answer my question...

Man – What?

Woman – What would you say if I told you... I was pregnant?

Man – I don't know, I would say... great!

Woman – Great?

Man – Yeah... But just to be clear, you're not pregnant...

The café owner returns.

Owner – Are we still waiting for the third?

She lays a hand on her stomach.

Woman – The third person's already here... We can order now...

The man looks at her with surprise.

Owner – Great.

8. One Heart for Two

The owner is reading a newspaper behind the counter. Two men come in and sit at a table.

One – Coffee? (*The other nods.*) Jack! Two coffees.

Two – His name is Jack?

One – I don't know... I call every café owner Jack. That way, I can't get it wrong.

Two – Okay...

One – He's one of my patients. I removed his appendix ten years ago, haemorrhoids five years ago, thyroid three years ago, and a lung last year.

Two – Well... He must be grateful. Thanks to you, he lost at least three kilos.

The café owner brings the coffees.

Owner – Here you go, Doctor...

Two – At least he recognised you.

One – I'm not even sure about that. He calls all his customers 'Doctor'. Being opposite the hospital... If they aren't doctors, they take it as a compliment. (*They stir their coffees in silence, then drink.*) So, have we got a donor?

Two – It seems so...

One – A woman who threw herself under a truck, right in front of the hospital.

Two – Threw herself?

One – We can't be sure... Could have been an accident. Her head took the impact. Brain-dead. Everything else is in excellent condition. We're waiting for the family's consent.

Two – I see.

One – Yes, except we have two patients waiting for a transplant...

Two – Oh, you too?

One – You know it very well.

Two – I thought it was a liver for you...

One – It's a heart.

Two – A heart for two... With two patients who have very similar profiles. It won't be easy to decide between them.

One – So what do we do? Flip a coin?

Two – I'm game!

One takes out a coin.

One – Only one of our two patients will still be alive in a month. Heads for yours, tails for mine.

He flips the coin, catches it, and looks at his palm before putting it away.

Two – But we know that's not how it works...

One – No. (*A pause*) How long have we known each other?

Two – Since medical school...

One – Second year, I believe.

Two – Yes...

One – We were both in love with the same girl.

Two – A first-year student.

One – And she ended up marrying you.

Two – I don't know what she saw in me... that she didn't see in you.

One – You spread rumours in college that I had a micro-penis. I think you even circulated a doctored photograph....

Two – Ah yes, that's true. I had forgotten about that.

One – I only found out much later.

Two – I didn't think she would swallow something so big.

One – Are we still talking about my micro-penis?

Two – Do you really think that's why she chose me?

One – It must have played a part... I was truly in love with her, you know...

Two – A heart for two... There's inevitably one left by the wayside.

One – That time, it was me.

Two – She left me a few years later. Haven't you seen her since?

One – I did... Once... I had just got divorced as well... We had dinner together... And then nothing...

Two – But she knew about...?

One – I don't know... I didn't dare ask. Imagine trying to slip into conversation over coffee, just before the bill, that contrary to what her ex-husband had said, my penis was a perfectly normal size...

Two – Yeah...

One – I don't know if revenge is a dish best served cold, but love certainly isn't something you can reheat.

Two – So you want to get revenge?

One – No, but it seems to me that you owe me a heart.

Two – You have a very personal interpretation of the Hippocratic Oath... What motivates you so much to save your patient?

One – Let's just say I have a... special connection with him.

Two – But you know it doesn't work like that either.

One – Oh no?

Two – Are you asking me to condemn my patient in advance?

One – That's what you said. A heart for two... There's inevitably one left by the wayside.

Two – It's not just up to me, you know that. It's a collective decision.

One – But you could slightly manipulate your patient's file so that mine appears more convincing.

Two – And if I refuse?

One – I could start a rumour as well. But I'm not sure this one would be false.

Two – Like what?

One – The nurses never last long in your department, and we both know why. And that girl who was run over outside the hospital — deliberately or not — she worked for you.

Two – I'll see what I can do...

He reaches for his wallet.

One – Leave it, the coffee is on me.

9. A Heart of Gold

The owner is dozing behind the counter. Two characters, who may be played by actors of either sex, come in and sit at a table.

One – He looks like he's in a deep coma too...

Two – What do we do? Should we wake him up?

One – Let's wait for him to wake up on his own.

Two – Miracles are always possible.

Silence.

One – And what about her, then? What should we do?

Two – Honestly... I don't know what to think about it.

One – We'll have to make a decision. The doctor said we need to act quickly.

Two – Yes.

One – Of course, logically we should say yes.

Two – Logic? She's our sister, after all...

One – Yes... Have you ever heard her talk about this in front of us?

Two – We hadn't seen each other for years... and even before that, it wasn't the kind of conversation we had together.

One – So it's up to us to decide. As if it were for ourselves.

Two – You mean... as if we needed a transplant?

One – As if we were in her place! In place of the deceased... What would you do? If you could decide to donate your organs or take them with you to your grave...

Two – Obviously, in principle... If we can save a life before dying...

One – On the other hand...

Two – To imagine that they'll open her chest and take her heart to put it in someone else's chest...

One – Someone we don't even know.

Two – Thank goodness... It would be worse if we knew them. Would you prefer to know them?

One – I would prefer her not to be dead.

A moment.

Two – Moreover, can we really say that she's really dead?

One – According to the doctors, she's in a state of brain death.

Two – What does that mean exactly? Do you know?

One – The house is still standing and the central heating's on, but there's nobody home. The owner has gone away, thrown away the key, and isn't coming back.

Two – I see.

One – We're salvaging the boiler and putting it in a house where the old one's broken, so someone can go on living there without freezing.

Two – Are you done with your plumber metaphors now?

One – I'm trying to explain...

Two – So, you're more in favour, right?

One – You agree too, don't you? You knew we'd end up here.

Two – Yes...

One takes out a piece of paper.

One – Come on, let's get it over with... (*Hands the paper*) You need to sign here.

Two – Go ahead, do it for me... I won't be able to.

One – No, they need both of our signatures.

Two – Just imitate mine.

One – But that would be forging your signature...

Two – What are you afraid of? That I'll sue you for imitating my signature?

One – But if you agree, why don't you sign?

Two – I agree, but I can't sign, that's all. Can't you understand that? (*Getting up to leave*) For once, I'm asking you for something!

One – But... you hated her, after all.

Two – Exactly... If I were doing it out of love, it would be easier. But this... I can't bring myself to decide on her behalf. (*The owner appears from behind the counter.*) Look, he's woken up! You see, you can never rule out a miracle!

Two leaves while One looks on in bewilderment. The owner comes over.

Owner – What can I get you?

10. With All My Heart

The owner is behind the counter. A rather sinister-looking man, like a gangster or a drug dealer, comes in and sits at the bar.

Owner – What can I get you?

Man – A decaf. A long one. With a splash of milk, please.

The owner eyes the customer. His appearance hardly matches his order.

Owner – I'll see what I can do...

He prepares the coffee.

Man – This street is dangerous. I almost got run over by a bus.

Owner – Yes... A woman was hit yesterday...

Man – Is she okay?

Owner – She's dead... Well, practically.

Man – Did you know her?

Owner – She was a customer... She'd just left here, and the tests showed three grams of alcohol per litre of blood.

Man – In your line of work, as well as mine, it's better not to get too attached to customers.

Owner – Are you new to the neighbourhood?

Man – I'm just passing through.

Owner – We're all just passing through this world...

Man – I'm afraid mine might end sooner than expected.

Owner – If you look both ways when you cross...

Man – I just came out of the hospital. I'm waiting for a heart transplant...

Owner – Ah, you too...

Man – Sorry?

Owner – Oh, nothing, just a story I heard... I hope you came across the right surgeon...

Man – Yes...

The café owner places the coffee on the counter.

Owner – Here you are. Your long decaf with a drop of milk.

Man – How's business going?

Owner – It's quiet. And you?

Man – Same here... It's pretty calm at the moment...

Owner – What line of work are you in?

Man – Drug trafficking. Mostly heroin.

Owner – Ah, I see... So you know what it's like to lose a customer.

Man – Fortunately organ donations are anonymous. I can't imagine anyone willingly giving their heart to a drug dealer.

Owner – Or to a tobacconist.

Man – You're right. In the end, we're in somewhat the same line of work, both of us...

Owner – Mmm...

Man – They just received a donor at the hospital.

Owner – It's your lucky day, then.

Man – I don't know... There are two of us in the running.

Owner – Ah...

Man – Would you give me your heart? If you were dead, I mean... Knowing what I do.

Owner – Why not? Among dealers, if we don't support each other a bit...

Man – I've promised my surgeon a suitcase full of banknotes if he finds me a new heart. Used notes, small denominations. Do you think that'll help?

Owner – It depends on the surgeon, I suppose.

Man – This one has a reputation for jumping at anything that moves.

Owner – I see... Can I pour you another decaf with a splash of milk? It's on me.

Man – Why not... You only live once...

Owner – And if your heart gives out on your way, it won't be because of what you drank here...

11. A Brand-New Heart

The owner is behind the counter when a customer, who may be played by a man or a woman, comes in.

Owner – What can I get you?

Customer – Don't you recognize me?

Owner – We see so many people... What can I get you?

Customer – Certainly not another Oxo...

Owner – Ah... Now I recognise you! Well, the Oxo seems to have done you good. You look twenty years younger.

Customer – Yes... Oxo. And also the brand new heart I had transplanted a few months ago.

Owner – You finally found a donor?

Customer – You were right, this street is really dangerous...

Owner – Well, it's on the house. What can I get you?

Customer – A lemonade...

Owner – Aren't you allowed alcohol any more?

Customer – I am, but I've decided to give it up. A sacrifice I'm making... to thank fate.

Owner – Fate?

Customer – Someone died so that I could live. I must take care of their heart.

Owner – But you don't even know who it was...

Customer – No... and I'm not sure I want to know. But hey, maybe they were a Muslim. All the more reason to stop drinking alcohol.

Owner – So, you don't eat ham anymore either?

Customer – I've become vegan, it's even simpler. And how about you? How are you doing?

Owner – My wife just left me.

Customer – She hasn't died, has she? Don't tell me it's her heart I've got in my chest...

Owner – I wish. It would be cheaper. When you're widowed, you're twice as rich. When you're divorced, you're twice as poor.

Customer – That makes four excellent reasons to prefer being widowed...

Owner – I may have to sell the café to pay her share.

Customer – I'm sorry...

Owner – In the end, it's probably better this way. Selling alcohol and tobacco... Tobacco already cost me a lung.

Customer – So what are you going to do?

Owner – I don't know...

Customer – You should try acting.

Owner – Acting?

Customer – Has anyone ever told you that you look like an actor?

Owner – No... Well, to stay behind a counter all day and deliver lines to all sorts of customers, you already have to be a bit of an actor...

Customer – That's true... I myself often go to cafés to write.

Owner – What do you write?

Customer – Plays, mostly.

Owner – I've heard so many stories. There's enough material for comedies, dramas, tragedies...

Customer – You must tell me some of those stories.

A moment of silence.

Owner – Is there still something bothering you?

Customer – There were two of us waiting for a transplant. There was only one donor available. I learned that the other person died a few days after my surgery...

Owner – Oh, I see...

Customer – It seems I had a better medical profile.

Owner – Just as you say... Fate.

Customer – Yes... Maybe they were a good person.

Owner – Or maybe a scoundrel... Who knows...

The customer gets up to leave.

Customer – Thanks for the lemonade... Here's my card. I'm looking for someone just like you for a small part in my next play. A café owner. It could be your stage debut...

The customer leaves. The owner looks at the card.

12. Hearts in Harmony

The owner is behind the counter. A woman comes in: the same woman as in the first sketch.

Owner – Have you come back to propose to me?

Woman – It hasn't been ten years yet...

Owner – Five.

Woman – And you still remember me?

Owner – I told you, I have a good memory for faces... Yours is one that's hard to forget. Still no Calvados?

Woman – I won't be needing it anymore. At least, I hope not...

Owner – That's good to hear.

Woman – Do you remember? You read my horoscope to me...

Owner – "You will give your heart to a stranger." (*Pointing to the newspaper.*) It's in today's paper again.

Woman – They often reuse the same phrases.

Owner – This time, it's under the love section.

Woman – They weren't wrong. I have a date with him.

Owner – Here?

Woman – In five minutes.

A pause.

Owner – Did you meet a stranger on a dating site?

Woman – He's my ex-husband. We got divorced a few years ago.

Owner – Ah yes... So, not exactly a stranger...

Woman – We lived together for ten years, and all that time I felt I was living with a stranger. In truth, I was the one who didn't understand myself. I wasn't happy with my life.

Owner – Why now?

Woman – He had a heart transplant a year ago.

Owner – So you thought that with a brand new heart...

Woman – When he found out he was sick, he didn't tell me. Things weren't going well between us already. He didn't want me to stay with him out of pity, I suppose.

Owner – And you left him...

Woman – He told me he had met someone else...

Owner – But that wasn't true...

Woman – He had a fifty-fifty chance of surviving. He didn't want to leave me a grieving widow...

Owner – He preferred to make you a happy divorcée... And so, he survived...

Woman – I work at the hospital... I found out by chance that he had a transplant. I called him... I asked him if he wanted to see me again.

Owner – Hoping his new heart might start beating for you again... Careful. In your profession, you'd call that overtreatment!

Woman – Do you think you can't love the same person twice?

Owner – Well, you can marry the same man twice. And divorce the same woman twice.

Woman – He's not quite the same man anymore. As you said, he has a brand new heart...

Owner – Not brand new, not exactly... The one it belonged to before might have already been very unlucky in love.

Woman – In the end, you're even more pessimistic than I am.

Owner – I'm jealous, that's all. I told you, you're not someone I'll easily forget...

Woman – I hope he hasn't forgotten me either... *(On the verge of tears)* And that he has forgiven me...

He lays his hand over hers to comfort her.

Owner – Have faith in yourself.

She turns her gaze towards the café window, facing the public.

Woman – There he is... My heart's racing...

Owner – As strongly as when you first met him?

Woman – Much stronger...

Owner – Let's hope his heart doesn't give out now. That really would be unfortunate...

Woman – You know what, I'll take that little Calvados after all.

He pours her a glass, which she drinks in one gulp.

Owner – You'll be all right.

Woman – Thank you.

She squeezes his hand one last time, then moves towards the audience to meet her former husband.

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:*

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