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BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT
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Back in the spotlight

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Translation by the author

You know those websites that help you track down classmates you lost touch with years ago? A reunion can be a wonderful trip down memory lane. Or an absolute nightmare. When a likeable loser invites two of his old schoolmates to his shabby Paris flat, they find themselves unexpectedly face to face with a former classmate who has unfinished business with all three of them...

Characters

Vincent

Antoine

Nicolas

Brigitte

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ACT 1

An almost empty Paris flat, furnished mainly with packing boxes. Nicolas, in his thirties and looking like a born loser, paces nervously. At last he picks up the telephone and waits anxiously for an answer.

Nicolas *(with exaggerated politeness)* – Hello, Brigitte Paradis? You went to Saint-Sulpice School, near Paris, about fifteen years ago? You had dark hair, hazel eyes and a rather impressive... *(Pulling himself together)* Sorry, wrong number. I was looking for a redhead with grey eyes and a very modest bust...

He hangs up with a sigh of relief. The doorbell rings. Nicolas opens the door. Antoine enters, dressed like a politically conscious PE teacher.

Nicolas – Hey Antoine, come in...

Antoine – Nicolas! Well... If I had bumped into you on the street, I wouldn't have recognised you... It's been at least ten years, right?

Nicolas – Fifteen.

Antoine – That's right! The year of our final exams. Remember the strikes? We spent the whole of May chatting up girls on the lawns. It wasn't May '68... or even '69, but still... Nobody did a stroke of work and practically everyone passed.

Nicolas – I think I was the only one who managed to fail that year...

Antoine – I'm sorry, I didn't bring anything... I wanted to grab a bottle on the way, but the convenience store downstairs was already closed...

Nicolas – Oh really...? Normally, they close at eight...

Antoine glances around Nicolas's squalid apartment.

Antoine *(insincerely)* – Well, you seem to have made yourself at home...

Nicolas – A friend has lent me the place while he's away. I don't even have to pay rent. It's just been declared unfit for human habitation...

Antoine, not really listening, nods.

Antoine – Still single?

Nicolas – Yeah...

Antoine – Lucky you... And what are you up to now?

Nicolas – I'm an actor...

Antoine – No way? You kept going, huh?

Nicolas – When you catch the bug... And you? Did you give up?

Antoine – Errare humanum est, perseverare diabolicum!

Nicolas – You're a Latin teacher?

Antoine – PE, actually. I'm married now, mate. Two kids. Theatre had to go. And you? Are you making a living at it?

Nicolas – Have you seen that TV campaign against speeding?

Antoine – Oh yes, it rings a bell.

Nicolas – The one where a police officer finds a body trapped in a crashed car?

Antoine – Yeah...

Nicolas – Well, that's me.

Antoine *(surprised)* – You're the cop? I wouldn't have recognised you...

Nicolas – Oh no, not the cop, the... The corpse...

Antoine – I wouldn't have recognised you either. That must take some acting...

Nicolas – It's a profession. Though most of the work is done by the make-up department...

Antoine – But the actor playing the cop, he's famous, right? Isn't he the one in...

Nicolas – Yes, yes, that's him...

Antoine – Great... And... is he nice?

Nicolas – You know, I didn't see much of him... Since my eyes were closed...

Antoine – Right, of course... Any other acting jobs lined up?

Nicolas – For now, I'm on sick leave...

Antoine – Oh... *(Trying to joke)* It's not contagious, is it...?

Nicolas – No, no, don't worry... It's deadly, but it's not contagious...

Antoine takes it as a joke. He looks around, intrigued, noticing the absence of any other guests. He also sees the moving boxes...

Antoine – Are you moving...?

Nicolas – Uh... No... Well, not right away...

Antoine – I got scared... I thought you brought me here to help load the truck...

Antoine begins to wonder what he's doing there. He looks at Nicolas, trying to be polite, but runs out of things to say.

Antoine – It smells like a zoo in here, doesn't it? Do you have a cat?

Nicolas – An iguana.

Antoine – An iguana?

Nicolas – Yeah... My friend left it behind when he went away. He lets me stay here rent-free, and in return I feed his iguana...

Antoine *(not very reassured)* – And... is an iguana nice?

Nicolas – When it's small, it's very affectionate... Well, it doesn't move much. But as it grows, they say it can become aggressive.

Antoine – As it grows...?

Nicolas – It can reach up to two meters.

Antoine – Okay... And yours, how big is it, roughly?

Nicolas – I don't know, I'd say... *(Under the other's worried gaze, he makes an uncertain gesture to estimate the size of his iguana)* But don't worry, I've locked it in the bathroom...

Embarrassed silence.

Antoine – Tell me, it's really nice of you to invite me, but... are we celebrating something here? Is it your birthday or...? I might be a bit early...

Nicolas – Uh... No, no... We're not expecting anyone else... Well, except Vincent...

Antoine – Ah, you invited Vincent...? *(Forcing his enthusiasm)* Oh yes, it'll be nice to see him again... We crossed paths once or twice... I'm not sure what he's up to...

Nicolas – I think he's in advertising...

A pause.

Antoine – So, you had the idea to bring the three of us together? To reminisce about the good old times...?

Nicolas – Actually, I had something to ask you. But I'd rather wait until Vincent is here...

The doorbell rings again.

Antoine – Ah... Speak of the devil...

Nicolas goes to open the door.

Nicolas – Hi Vincent...! Come in...

Nicolas returns, followed by Vincent in an expensive, fashionable business suit, carrying a bottle of champagne.

Vincent – Sorry, I'm a bit late... *(He hands Nicolas his champagne bottle)* Here, I got this at the downstairs convenience store...

Nicolas – Wasn't it closed...?

Antoine, feeling awkward, approaches Vincent to greet him and change the subject.

Antoine – Hi Vincent!

Vincent *(surprised, and not especially pleased)* – Oh. A school reunion. The Three Musketeers, ten years on...

Nicolas – Fifteen... I'll get the glasses...

Nicolas puts the bottle down and rummages through a box for glasses, while Vincent smiles at Antoine, with a somewhat forced joy.

Vincent – You must have come a long way since high school, huh...?

Antoine – I'm still at Saint-Sulpice, actually. I've just moved to the other side of the teacher's desk. Well, I haven't even got a desk. I teach PE. What about you? *(Eyeing his expensive clothes)* Things seem to be going well. What exactly do you do?

Vincent – In advertising... I'm an art director for a big agency...

Antoine – Maybe I should have gone into advertising. Teaching pays next to nothing. And the kids are so aggressive nowadays! We were no angels ourselves, mind you. Remember that little boy we hung by his collar on a coat peg? We called it Hangman. If someone hadn't taken him down, he'd have turned completely blue...

Nicolas – Yes, I remember it very well... It was me.

Antoine – You took him down...?

Nicolas – No, the one hanging on the peg... That was me.

Antoine *(embarrassed)* – Oh, right... I'd completely forgotten it was you. Funny, I think that's how we first met...

Nicolas – Yeah...

Antoine – Ah, the good old days... *(Deciding to change the subject)* What about you, Vincent? Still chasing women? You're not married yet, are you?

Vincent – I'm getting engaged in three days...

Antoine – Engaged? People still do that?

Vincent – It's the daughter of my boss...

Antoine – Well... Hide your excitement...

Vincent – I am very happy to be marrying her.

Antoine – And if, on top of that, by chance, it's your boss's daughter... But she's of legal age, right?

Vincent – She's eighteen.

Antoine – Well, well... And what's your teenage sweetheart's name?

Vincent – Olivia.

Antoine – Olivia... And her father works in advertising? Don't tell me it's Olivia Desmarets...

Vincent – Yes...

Antoine – You're joking! I teach her this year. She's in her final year!

Vincent – You went back to teach at Saint-Sulpice?

Antoine – Oh yes. I couldn't stand the state-school system any longer...

Vincent – So you're not a revolutionary communist any more?

Antoine – I'm with the Greens now. One has to face reality. I'll go back to the state system when they've reformed it... Olivia Desmarets... Funny. I wouldn't have pictured you with someone like her. Unless, of course, she's the boss's daughter...

Vincent doesn't respond. Nicolas puts Disney-style mustard glasses on the table.

Nicolas – Sorry, it's all I could find... The champagne flutes must be in another box. *(To Vincent)* I'll let you uncork the bottle... I don't know if I have the strength anymore...

Vincent and Antoine exchange a worried look, a bit perplexed by this last remark. Vincent takes the bottle to open it. Antoine tries to revive the conversation.

Antoine *(to Nicolas)* – So, you dark horse... Why did you bring us here? Are you getting married too? Do you need two best men, so you remembered your old school friends?

Vincent starts undoing the wire cage around the champagne cork.

Nicolas – Er... no. Unfortunately, it's not my bachelorhood we're burying...

Antoine – Wait, it's not that bad... Marriage doesn't only have advantages, you know...

A pause.

Nicolas – Do you remember that play I wrote in our final year at school?

The other two, thinking he changed the subject, relax a bit.

Antoine – Oh, yes! We had a good laugh with that! What was it called again?

Nicolas – "First Love"...

Antoine – That's it! First Love! What a load of rubbish it was. Luckily we never performed it. Have you still got a copy? I'd love another laugh.

Nicolas – I've revised it a little. It's called First Love... and Last Wishes now.

Vincent – Last wishes?

A pause.

Nicolas – I wasn't sure how to tell you this, but... I only have six months left...

The cork pops. Vincent freezes and lets the champagne spill onto the floor. Antoine is equally stunned. Nicolas alone has the presence of mind to put a glass under the neck of the bottle. He takes it from Vincent and finishes pouring while continuing his explanation.

Nicolas – I found out last week that I have an incurable disease.

Awkwardness.

Antoine – And yet, looking at you like this... You seem perfectly healthy. Right, Vincent?

Vincent – Yeah, well... You look the same as usual, I guess...

Nicolas – There are hardly any symptoms. It interferes with the electrical signals in the brain. Then, one day, the circuit blows. Just like that. *(He throws out his arms, spilling his drink over Antoine)* Lights out. No signal...

The two others look at each other, not knowing what to say.

Antoine – And... when is it expected, roughly?

Nicolas – Nobody knows. It could happen at any moment. I never managed to pass my final school exams, but at least I've made it to the final stage... The good news is I won't feel a thing.

Vincent – Sorry about the champagne...

Nicolas – You couldn't have known. Next time, bring flowers instead. *(Raising his glass)* Here's to you. We mustn't waste the champagne...

They toast in a gloomy atmosphere.

Vincent – But what's this disease, exactly?

Nicolas gets up and returns with a large envelope, from which he takes an X-ray.

Nicolas – It's incredibly rare. Doctors call it an orphan disease...

Antoine – At least you won't leave any orphans behind... Except for your iguana...

Vincent gives him an astonished look.

Nicolas – There are only three people in the world with this genetic condition. And the other two live in Madagascar and Sri Lanka. You can imagine how keen the pharmaceutical companies are to spend money on research... *(Pointing at the scan)* See those two dark patches?

The others look but see nothing, yet politely nod.

Antoine *(pretending to read the X-ray)* – Oh, yes, it's ugly...

Vincent – And there's really no hope?

Nicolas – There's a brilliant surgeon in Los Angeles who's done this sort of operation. But it costs a fortune. I can't even afford to pay rent...

Vincent and Antoine exchange a worried look.

Nicolas – I think I still have some peanuts somewhere. I'll go get them...

Nicolas exits. Vincent and Antoine exchange a dismayed look.

Antoine – Poor guy! He really never had any luck... Three patients in the world, and it had to happen to him...

Vincent – Yes, it's awful, but we're not going to organise a charity telethon between the two of us. We haven't seen him for fifteen years, and suddenly...

Antoine – Especially between us, Nicolas... Even back then... We weren't that close, were we?

Vincent – That's why I didn't quite understand when he called me...

Nicolas returns with a huge bag of unshelled peanuts, which he places on the table.

Antoine – Well...

Vincent – I don't think I've ever seen so many peanuts at once...

Nicolas – Well, I was in a peanut advert about three years ago. They let us take a bag after the shoot...

Antoine – Now that's what I call being paid peanuts...

Nicolas – The worst part is that I can't even eat them. I'm allergic.

Vincent – You're allergic to peanuts?

Nicolas – Peanuts in any form... But go on, help yourselves...

Vincent and Antoine start shelling and munching on the peanuts to fill an awkward silence.

Antoine – Listen, Nicolas, I would have been happy to help with your operation, but you know... With my teacher's salary... *(Slyly)* And you, Vincent... Can't you do something?

Vincent *(shooting a glare at Antoine)* – I make a good living, it's true, but... I have some debts... And then with my engagement...

Nicolas – That's very kind, but I'm not asking you for money. *(The other two are visibly relieved)* I've decided against the operation. Too risky. I'm allergic to penicillin...

Antoine – In addition to peanuts!

Nicolas – I might not tolerate the anaesthesia and end up in a coma...

Vincent – Ah, damn...

Nicolas – No, I know I don't have much time left... A few months at most... And I just wanted to fulfil one last dream... That's why I asked you to come...

Vincent – Your last dream was to see us one last time before you die?

Nicolas – Not only that... Can I refill your glasses?

His two buddies, in need of a pick-me-up, don't say no. Nicolas refills their glasses, and they empty them in silence.

Antoine – Not bad, that champagne, is it?

General approval, giving each one time to collect their thoughts.

Nicolas – Have some peanuts...

Antoine helps himself, while Vincent remains cautiously on the defensive.

Nicolas – No, it's about my play. The one we could never perform...

Antoine – Oh yes! Remember? Our leading lady vanished a week before the dress rehearsal. *(Nostalgically)* Brigitte Paradis...

Nicolas – What if you helped me put it on... fifteen years later?

Antoine *(leering)* – If you mean getting Brigitte into bed, count me in...

Vincent – You mean help pay for the production?

Nicolas – No! Act in it with me. Just as we planned fifteen years ago. What do you say?

Silence.

Antoine – Well... Indeed... What do we say?

Vincent – You're kidding, right...

Nicolas *(pathetically)* – I have to perform the play before I die. Then I can go in peace. With a bit of luck I'll actually die onstage...

Antoine – Like Molière...

Vincent – Yes, but you're no Molière...

Nicolas – I completely rewrote the play, you'll see...

Vincent – But... we're not actors... Well, not anymore...

Antoine – We never really were...

Nicolas – I'm not really an author either... I'm just asking you to help me fulfil this last dream. In the name of our friendship...

Antoine – Our friendship?

Nicolas holds his head in his hands, as if suddenly suffering from a headache.

Nicolas – Excuse me, it's time for my pills. As an actor, they're the only thing I get on a regular basis...

Nicolas leaves the room.

Antoine – Oh, damn!

Vincent – You can say that again...

Antoine – What if we try to convince him to have the surgery anyway...

Vincent – Did you hear him...? He's afraid of ending up in a vegetative state... Well, he wasn't very far from it already... I'm not sure we'd notice the difference...

Antoine – What do you suggest?

Vincent – Can you imagine us onstage in that dreadful play from our spotty teenage years?

Antoine – With luck, he'll kick the bucket before opening night.

Vincent – We can never entirely rule out a recovery...

Nicolas returns in high spirits, with two scripts, which he distributes to them.

Nicolas – I printed a copy for each of you. I changed the ending, you'll see... After reading it, you'll be thrilled! Well, you don't have to read it right away... I'll give you time to think... But not too long... Can I refill your glasses?

Nicolas pours them one last round. Serving himself last, he empties the remaining contents of the bottle into his glass.

Antoine – The last drop from the bottle! They say that means you'll be married within a year...

Vincent gives him a dismayed look.

Vincent – Listen, Nicolas, we'd like to help, but you know... Antoine and I each have our own job now... Being an actor is a profession... It's yours, but it's not ours... And then we'd need to find a theatre... With headliners like us...

Nicolas – I'm not asking for the Comédie-Française, for heaven's sake. Antoine, your school could lend us a room. And Vincent, you're in advertising. You could design the posters...

The other two are running out of arguments.

Vincent – But there was a female role in your play...

Antoine *(cheeky)* – Oh yes! The voluptuous Brigitte...

Vincent gives him another look to remind him to be more measured.

Vincent – You even wrote it for her, just so you could give her a proper kiss in the final scene. We can't do it without Brigitte. It wouldn't make sense...

Antoine – Oh yes... Unfortunately, she disappeared a few weeks before graduation... That's why we could never perform your play... Fortunately, in a way... You remember... We never heard from her again.

Nicolas – Well, precisely...

The other two look at him, concerned.

Antoine – Precisely what?

Nicolas – I found her!

Vincent – You found Brigitte Paradis?

Antoine – Brigitte Paradis?

Nicolas – The one!

Vincent – But how did you do it?

Nicolas – On one of those old-school-friends websites.

Antoine – What?

Vincent – A website where you can get back in touch with people you went to school with.

Antoine – I didn't know.

Nicolas – It's great for finding friends you've lost touch with.

Antoine – Well, friends, when you've lost touch, there's often a good reason.

Vincent – I can't argue with that...

Nicolas – I kept looking her up. Nothing. Then last week, there she was. And she lives in Paris...

Vincent – And are you sure it's her? There might be more than one Brigitte Paradis on that site...

Antoine *(remembering)* – Not with a bust like hers...

Vincent – Did you call her?

Nicolas – Well... Not exactly...

Perplexed looks from the other two.

Nicolas – Well, enough to be sure it's her...

Vincent – And do you think she'll agree to act in your play? I don't know... She's over 30 now... She might be married...

Antoine – Looking the way she did, that seems unlikely, but you never know. There are some strange men about...

Nicolas – She still uses her maiden name...

Antoine – And about... your illness, are you going to tell her too?

Nicolas – I'd rather not... At least not right away... I wouldn't want her to accept the role out of pity...

Antoine – You told us, though...

Nicolas – Well, I knew you wouldn't accept otherwise.

Vincent – What are you going to say? I found the play I wrote for you at seventeen, and we're starting rehearsals again tonight after a brief ten-year break?

Antoine – Fifteen...

Nicolas – Well, I was kind of counting on you to try to convince her... She liked you too... We were very close, all four of us, right?

The other two look uncomfortable.

Nicolas *(to Antoine)* – Would you do that for me?

Antoine – Well... You know, we didn't really know each other that well... *(To Vincent)* Why don't you call her?

Vincent – Me? Why me?

Nicolas – You've always known how to talk to girls... And you work in advertising... Sweet-talking must be your thing, right?

Vincent – No, sorry, Nicolas, but I really can't do that... What could I possibly tell this girl? She probably doesn't even remember us. Well, I hope...

Nicolas *(getting up)* – Well... *(The other two think he's giving up and look relieved.)* Then I'll call her myself... I'll be more comfortable phoning from the bedroom.

Nicolas goes to the bedroom. The other two look at each other, perplexed.

Vincent – We're in deep trouble...

Antoine – She'll hang up on him, it's obvious. And then he'll leave us alone with his lousy play...

Vincent – I don't know... I have a bad feeling about this... I feel like I fell into a trap... I really want to bail now, while he's on the phone...

Vincent gets up to leave.

Antoine – Wait, we can't do that to him... And what's the worst that can happen to us? If by some miracle, she agrees, the time it takes to organise everything... We'll play for time...

Vincent – Brigitte Paradis...

A pause.

Antoine – She was a bit of a fright, wasn't she?

Nicolas comes back, looking worried. The other two are already relieved.

Vincent – So?

Nicolas – She's getting into a taxi, and she's on her way.

Stunned looks from the other two.

Vincent – She agreed to come? Just like that?

Antoine – What did you tell her?

Nicolas – I told her Vincent was getting married and we were having his bachelor party...

Antoine laughs, but Vincent is horrified.

Vincent – What?

Nicolas – Sorry, it's the first thing that came to mind...

Antoine *(laughing)* – Three men alone in a flat, celebrating a bachelor party, and you invite her to make up the numbers? She hasn't changed a bit, then...

Nicolas *(offended)* – I didn't tell her about an orgy...

Antoine – Brigitte Paradis... Do you remember those breasts she had...

The other two are torn between disapproval at the vulgarity of this remark... and emotion at the mention of Brigitte's breasts.

Nicolas – And to think that none of the three of us ever got to touch those breasts...

The smiles of the other two freeze a bit.

Vincent – Well, yeah...

Antoine – Admit it. Your final wish is to sleep with Brigitte Paradis, isn't it?

Vincent is dismayed by Antoine's clumsiness.

Nicolas – I'm not one to brag, but I think I was in pole position... If only she hadn't disappeared before the premiere.

Antoine – I thought you meant before our final exams...

Nicolas – I meant the opening night of my play...

Antoine – Oh, right, the play... I forgot...

Vincent – And did you tell her about your play? Besides my wedding...

Nicolas – Well, no... I didn't dare...

Vincent – Yeah, I get it... While my wedding...

Antoine – Brigitte Paradis...

Vincent – Okay... You don't have to repeat that all evening...

Antoine – She may have put on a hundred kilos. She was rather plump even then...

Nicolas – Chubby? She was just well-built...

Vincent – Didn't she wear glasses?

Nicolas, embarrassed, takes an enlarged and framed photo from a box.

Nicolas – Here, I found a photo of her by chance while packing...

Nicolas looks at the photo for a moment, moved, before handing it to Antoine, who takes it, a bit concerned.

Antoine *(looking at the photo)* – Oh, wow... I didn't remember it being to that extent...

Antoine hands the photo to Vincent, who looks at it with wide eyes.

Vincent – And that was fifteen years ago. By now she could have varicose veins, cellulite and bifocals...

Antoine *(laughing)* – That would explain her eagerness to rush into this trap set by three young and healthy boys... Sorry, Nicolas, I forgot about your illness...

Nicolas retrieves the framed photo of Brigitte.

Nicolas – It's okay...

The doorbell rings.

Antoine – Already?

Nicolas stands rooted to the spot, Brigitte's photograph still in his hand.

Vincent – Well, go and open!

Nicolas – I'm going...

Nicolas hastily hides the photograph in a box and goes to open the door.

Nicolas – Yes? Oh, yes, thank you...

Nicolas comes back, looking worried, with an official paper in his hands, which he places somewhere.

Vincent – Something serious?

Nicolas – No, no... An eviction notice...

Antoine – Oh. I see...

Nicolas – The building is completely cracked... That's why I have to move...

Surprised looks from the other two, who glance at the boxes.

Vincent *(worried)* – Cracked...?

Nicolas – It's beyond repair... It might collapse at any moment... Especially with the subway passing underneath... Don't you feel the vibrations every three minutes?

A subway train passes. Silence.

Nicolas – I always wondered why she left like that, without telling anyone, a month before the exams... *(Embarrassment from the other two)* Take some peanuts...

Vincent *(changing the subject)* – And you, did you never retake your exams after that?

Nicolas – No. Then I started taking driving tests, and failed those as well...

Vincent – But you kept taking the driving test...?

Nicolas – Every year. Eight attempts, then I gave up. *(Joking)* At least I failed my school exams at the first attempt.

A pause.

Vincent – God, that school was a prison. Remember?

Nicolas – Saint-Sulpice. We used to call it Saint-Suffering...

Antoine – A ninety-eight per cent pass rate in the final exams, but at what price? They wouldn’t even let girls in, in case we thought about something besides studying...

Vincent – Apart from Brigitte. She was the only girl in the whole class.

Nicolas – They made an exception because her father taught maths and her mother taught English...

Antoine – They should never let teachers breed with other teachers. It weakens the stock. After a few generations you end up with monsters...

Vincent – Poor thing...

Antoine – Well, for her, it wasn't all disadvantages, huh? *(Laughing)* Given how she was built, in a co-ed school, she would probably have been much less in demand...

Disapproving look from Nicolas.

Antoine *(to Nicolas)* – Imagine being the only boy in a class of thirty girls, in a school with three hundred pupils. Even looking the way you do, you'd have been a star!

Nicolas – She didn't have much competition, that's true...

Antoine – And we didn't have much choice...

Vincent – One girl to make an entire school of boys in the throes of adolescent lust fantasise...

The doorbell rings again.

Nicolas – This time, it must be her...

Antoine – Brigitte Paradis...

Vincent – Don't forget she might weigh a hundred kilos more...

Nicolas goes to open.

ACT 2

Nicolas *(off)* – Brigitte! Well... I wouldn't have recognised you...

Antoine and Vincent exchange a worried look.

Brigitte enters. She has changed, all right — for the better. She looks like a glamorous film star: blonde hair, miniskirt, dark glasses. Vincent and Antoine stare, open-mouthed.

Brigitte – Hi, boys...

Antoine – Brigitte Paradis...

Brigitte – It's really me, I assure you... In the flesh.

She turns to Vincent.

Brigitte – So congratulations, Vincent...

Antoine – Congratulations?

Brigitte – On his wedding... *(To Vincent)* You're getting married, right?

Vincent – Yes, well... I'm engaged, actually...

Nicolas *(to Brigitte)* – Sit down, please. Would you like a glass of champagne? To toast Vincent's engagement...

Vincent – Champagne? We just finished the bottle...

Nicolas – Oh yes, true... Wait, I'll give you some of mine. Anyway, in my condition, it's better that I don't drink too much.

He pours a bit of his champagne into another glass.

Brigitte – In your condition? Don't tell me you're pregnant?

Nicolas – I'd prefer that, believe me.

Brigitte takes the glass Nicolas offers her and sits down, crossing her legs high. Silence. The three guys swallow hard.

Brigitte – Stop staring with your tongues hanging out. If you were that thirsty, you needn't have waited for me...

Antoine – I mean... what happened to you? *(She gives him a look)* It's so strange seeing you again after all this time. You've changed so much...

Brigitte – I'm not sure how I should take that...

Antoine – No, but changed... for the better, I assure you.

Brigitte – I don't know how to take that either...

Antoine looks embarrassed.

Nicolas – Shall we toast then?

Brigitte *(raising her glass)* – To the good old days, then?

They clink glasses.

Nicolas – Have some peanuts...

Antoine – Have you been living in Paris for a long time?

Brigitte – No, I came back a few weeks ago... I lived in the States for the last few years...

Vincent – In the States?

Brigitte – Yes... In France, it was really too hard to make it in showbiz...

Antoine – In showbiz?

Brigitte – And then in the US, my older sister could help me...

Nicolas – Your older sister?

Brigitte – Are you three going to repeat the last word I say all evening? Is that some kind of game? *(A pause)* Yes, my big sister. Vanessa.

Antoine – Vanessa?

Brigitte – Vanessa Paradis!

Astonishment from the other three.

Nicolas – Vanessa Paradis? She's your sister?

Brigitte – Of course. When she married Johnny, they moved to Los Angeles. She knows everyone in Hollywood...

Antoine – Vanessa Paradis married Johnny?

Brigitte – Johnny Depp! Where have you been for fifteen years? Frozen in a block of ice? They're divorced now, of course, but they stayed on good terms. And they've got a child together... *(Seeing their astonishment)* You didn't know the famous French singer Vanessa Paradis was my sister? I thought it was obvious.

The three guys take the opportunity to scrutinise her from head to toe. The resemblance isn't striking, but still...

Nicolas – Ah, yes, that's true... Now that you mention it... There's a slight family resemblance... Don't you think?

Vincent – I didn't know that Vanessa Paradis had a sister...

Brigitte – It's not that extraordinary, you know. Many people have sisters...

Vincent – No, I mean... I didn't know that her sister was you, Brigitte...

Brigitte – What can you do... Unfortunately, being related to someone famous doesn't necessarily guarantee fame... It's like my friend Monica... Everyone knows her sister, but not her...

Vincent – Monica...?

Brigitte – Monica Cruz! Penelope's sister! See, what I was saying? You barely know her... Yet, she's having a successful career.

Nicolas – It's hard enough making a name for yourself in show business. Especially when you've never had much of a name to begin with, like me...

Brigitte – I mainly do theatre, so, of course, we're a bit less exposed... Obviously, I'm more known in the United States than in France...

Nicolas – A French singer can be unknown at home and famous abroad. In my case, of course, I'm unknown everywhere... So you stayed in theatre?

Brigitte – I've just finished a run on Broadway. Over a thousand performances. Wonderful, but exhausting. So I came home to Paris to recover. I was getting homesick, too. *(A pause)* I'm waiting for offers...

Antoine – Offers...?

Brigitte – For a new play! I find you a little sluggish now... Back then, you were more lively, weren't you? *(To Vincent)* So, you're getting married?

Vincent – Yes...

Brigitte – And you thought of me for your bachelor party.

Vincent – Yes, well...

Brigitte – You wanted me to bring my famous sister to the wedding? Vanessa doesn't sing at weddings these days. She's very busy...

Nicolas – Especially now that she's a mom...

Antoine – What's the name of your niece again?

Brigitte – Lily Rose... But you know, she's grown up now.

Vincent – Lily Rose... Oh yes, that's unusual... At least she won't have trouble making a first name for herself.

Brigitte – Lily-Rose is a little more unusual than Brigitte, I'll grant you. But you didn't invite me to your bachelor party to discuss baby names, did you? *(An awkward pause)* Why did you really ask me here?

Vincent – Actually, it's more of an idea from Nicolas...

Vincent and Antoine turn towards Nicolas.

Nicolas – Well... I'm not sure if I dare to talk to you about it now...

Brigitte – Come on, go ahead... We're among old friends, right?

Nicolas – Remember that play we almost performed before our final exams?

Brigitte – "First Love"...

Nicolas – I wanted to stage it... Well, to stage it together... Of course, that was before I knew you had become a star...

Brigitte *(amused)* – Are you really sure you didn't know?

Nicolas – I swear... To me, you were still the little Brigitte I knew fifteen years ago in high school...

A pause.

Brigitte – Why now?

Nicolas hesitates again.

Antoine *(with a meaningful look)* – Come on, tell her...

Nicolas – This play is a bit like my baby, and...

Brigitte – Fifteen years in gestation? That should be a very healthy baby. So what's brought on this sudden urge to deliver?

Nicolas – Well, because... I don't have much time left.

Brigitte – You don't have much time left... to finish writing it, you mean?

In response, Nicolas shows her his medical scans. Brigitte takes them and examines them carefully under the lamp.

Nicolas – See, in the middle, those two spots there?

Brigitte – Yes...

Nicolas – Those are brain tumours...

Brigitte looks at him bewildered.

Nicolas – I have an incurable disease, Brigitte... I'm going to die...

Silence.

Brigitte *(very serious)* – Give me your play. I'll read it...

Nicolas – Now?

Brigitte – I understood it was urgent, right?

Nicolas – Yes, of course... I'll go get it...

Nicolas leaves. Awkward silence.

Vincent – We really aren't much, are we?

Antoine – Especially him...

Vincent – I heard he won't suffer, though...

Antoine – Perhaps you could do something about his play. You must know people in show business. But don't feel obliged. Don't do it out of pity. He'd hate that. *(A pause)* First Love... *(Laughing)* What a ridiculous title...

Brigitte – Samuel Beckett wrote a work with that title.

Vincent – Well, if I remember correctly, it was closer to sappy romance novels than Beckett's theatre, right?

Nicolas returns and hands Brigitte the script of the play.

Nicolas – I completely rewrote it, you know... I've been working on it for fifteen years...

Brigitte – Don't worry, it won't take me fifteen more years to read it...

She gets up to leave.

Brigitte – Well... It was nice seeing you again... *(Gazing at them)* I see that deep down, you haven't changed much... But this time, I'm not sure it's a compliment... *(To Nicolas)* No need to walk me out, I know the way...

She leaves. They try to regain their composure.

Antoine – Brigitte Paradis... Vanessa Paradis's sister... Well, well...

Vincent – She's making it all up, obviously...

Nicolas – You never know. Even a French president once managed to keep his own daughter a secret. Why shouldn't Vanessa Paradis have a secret sister? *(The other two stare)* Imagine if she liked the play! We could find a producer in no time. A star in the cast!

Vincent – Wait, don't get too excited... Even if she hasn't been lying to us, she's still just Vanessa Paradis's sister...

Nicolas – A director I know hired a film star's granddaughter, a rock singer's ex-wife and a television weather presenter's twin sister. The show was a smash hit!

Vincent – The twin sister of...?

Nicolas – Well, naturally, the playwright happened to be the secret daughter of a former president...

A pause.

Antoine – Still, Brigitte's changed. Look at her! Next to my wife... Talk about a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. *(To Vincent, laughing)* And next to your fiancée, too, frankly...

Vincent – Yeah, yeah, enough of that...

Antoine – You never know, Vincent. Maybe your caterpillar will turn into a butterfly as well. But miracles are rare. You could take her to Lourdes on your honeymoon. They specialise in those things there...

Nicolas – I've got a couple of bottles of Château Catastrophe somewhere...

He gets up and returns with a bottle, generously filling the glasses.

Vincent – I never thought I'd see Vanessa Paradis's sister today...

Antoine – Me neither...

They toast.

Antoine – Come on... To your health, Nicolas! *(Realising his mistake)* Sorry, I keep forgetting...

Nicolas – Don't apologise, it's fine... And you know, maybe it's not such a big deal...

Vincent – Oh really?

Nicolas – Well, I mean... Miracles are always possible here too...

They toast again.

Antoine – To our loves, then...

Antoine and Vincent grimace.

Vincent – I never thought I'd be drinking Château Catastrophe tonight, either. Is that stuff still legal?

Nicolas – It's an acquired taste. Not everybody lives long enough to acquire it...

Vincent – Maybe you shouldn't be drinking that... In your condition...

Nicolas – At least tomorrow morning I'll know why my head hurts. And anyway, we've all got to die of something, haven't we?

Silence. Nicolas pours them more to drink. They quickly empty their glasses.

Vincent – When you drink fast, you don't have time to taste it...

A pause.

Antoine – Brigitte Paradis... We were idiots...

Vincent – We had her right there in front of us. And fifteen years later we realise what we missed... Or rather, who we missed...

Antoine – Yeah... We didn't see her inner beauty...

Nicolas – It's true that she looks a bit like Vanessa Paradis as she grew up...

Vincent – What's certain is that, as we age, we look less and less like Johnny Depp...

Antoine – Come on, pour us another shot of your elixir, to forget this cruel truth...

Nicolas opens the second bottle and serves them. They drink in silence.

Antoine – It seems like the second bottle is better than the first, huh?

Vincent – It must not be from the same vineyard...

Antoine – Do you really think it's made from grapes?

Silence.

Vincent – It's amazing that she stuck with theatre...

Nicolas – Why not? I continued too...

Antoine – Yeah, well... Never mind...

Nicolas – Forget it... I know what you mean...

Vincent – Perhaps we should have kept going too. Antoine and I weren't that bad. We might be famous by now, even without relatives in show business. Look at Gérard Depardieu. He didn't come from a family of celebrities...

Antoine – Your play wasn't that dreadful, really. I've seen far worse in the theatre. I don't go any more, mind you. Never enough legroom. And I'm allergic to dust...

A pause.

Vincent – Remember her father? Mr. Paradis?

Antoine – The maths teacher... A real sergeant major... He made us do push-ups before every class...

Vincent – He probably wanted us to atone for our sins with his daughter...

Nicolas – What sins?

The other two, embarrassed, don't respond.

Vincent – And her mother, who was she again?

Antoine – Madame Paradise, as she liked to pronounce it in her English lessons...

Vincent – Oh yeah, that's right... the English teacher... That's probably why her daughter was so good with tongues. It allowed her to have an international career...

Antoine – We have to admit that back then, the mother was better built than the daughter. Remember? During English class, when she walked around the room, we spent our time lying on the floor, picking up erasers we threw behind her... Just to know the colour of her panties...

Vincent – It goes to show that young people can put in effort at school when they're motivated...

Antoine – Yeah, we weren't lacking imagination... In the end, it wasn't erasers we threw on the floor, it was mirrors... She must have confiscated about twenty of them from us... She probably wondered what all these guys were doing with mirrors in their pockets...

Vincent – Do you think she was that innocent? Maybe she liked the attention. With that sergeant-major husband of hers, she probably didn't have a thrilling sex life... *(A pause)* You found Brigitte on a school reunion website, you said?

Nicolas – Yes, why?

Vincent – Could I use your computer? My phone battery is almost dead.

Nicolas – Sure. Over there. *(Pointing to a prehistoric computer)* Hang on, I'll connect to the Internet...

Antoine – Connect it?

Nicolas fiddles with the computer. It makes the strange chirping and screeching noises of a very early Internet connection. Vincent and Antoine watch in disbelief.

Vincent – Well... It's not broadband, that's for sure...

Antoine – Given the look of your computer, I'm surprised you can even connect. Is it a family heirloom? Where did you find it?

Nicolas – At a flea market...

The connection noise persists.

Vincent – Is it going to take much longer...?

Antoine – I think we're picking up a radio broadcast from the Second World War. Are you sure it's safe?

The noise finally stops.

Nicolas – There you go, you can go ahead.

Vincent – Finally. *(At the computer)* Let's see... Vanessa Paradis... biography... Born in Saint-Mandé, near Paris...

Antoine – Practically next door!

Vincent – And her family later lived in the Paris suburbs...

Antoine – The same area as Saint-Sulpice! Perhaps she went to our school!

Vincent – Strange that nobody ever mentioned her...

Antoine – Maybe at that time, she wasn't famous yet...

Nicolas – Read on to see...

Vincent – Oh damn, we got disconnected! I thought so...

Antoine – Well, try again...

Vincent types again... The other two wait anxiously. Even stranger connection noises.

Antoine – Are you sure that thing isn't about to explode?

Vincent – Here we are... She was already performing on television as a child...

Antoine – So she was famous even then...

Nicolas – Maybe not that much... I've been on TV too...

Antoine – Yes, but not for looking dead in a road-safety advert...

Vincent – Then her younger sister Alysson was born...

Disappointment for the other two.

Antoine – Alysson...

Vincent – And her parents weren't teachers. They were in the glass business...

Nicolas – A glass shop?

Vincent – They made and sold mirrors, that sort of thing.

Nicolas – Well, with all the mirrors Brigitte's mother confiscated from us, her parents could have opened a store...

Vincent – In any case, her sister isn't called Brigitte, and her parents weren't teachers.

The three men digest this information.

Antoine – So why did she make up that story...

Vincent – Don't you have any suspicions...?

Antoine looks sheepish... and Nicolas looks intrigued. The doorbell rings.

Antoine – Are you expecting another star, tonight?

Nicolas goes to open the door.

Nicolas – Brigitte?

Vincent and Antoine exchange a perplexed look.

ACT 3

Brigitte returns to the room, wearing a much more serious expression. The three men look at her, waiting for her to speak.

Brigitte – I stopped by the café downstairs.

Nicolas – Did you read my play?

Brigitte – I flipped through it.

Nicolas – You think it's terrible...

Brigitte – I'll tell you later. But I didn't come back to talk about your play.

Nicolas – Oh?

Vincent and Antoine look rather uncomfortable.

Brigitte – Pour me something first... *(Nicolas fills her glass with Château Catastrophe. She takes a sip and winces.)* Good grief! Have you moved on to industrial solvents?

Nicolas – So, you're not Vanessa Paradis's sister.

Brigitte – Well, no... Are you disappointed?

Nicolas – Rather relieved...

Brigitte *(sarcastic)* – Feeling better now?

Nicolas – Why did you leave so quickly in our final year? Without saying goodbye to anyone...

Brigitte – Did you miss me that much? I thought no one would notice my disappearance... *(Smiling at Nicolas)* Except maybe Nicolas... *(Pause)* I left so quickly because I was pregnant.

Vincent and Antoine look uneasy.

Nicolas – Pregnant?

Brigitte – When I told my parents, my father threw me out. You knew what he was like — a complete tyrant. So I went to London, as so many French exiles have done before me...

Vincent – To have an abortion?

Brigitte – That was years ago, but abortion was already legal in France. No, I simply needed to get away. I didn't know where to go, so I found work as an au pair...

Antoine – And did you live in England for a long time?

Brigitte – It was a job for a few months. And then I stayed longer than planned...

An embarrassed silence follows.

Nicolas – Pregnant... To think we were all three in love with you, and it's with someone else that...

Another awkward moment for Vincent and Antoine.

Antoine – Does anyone want peanuts?

Nicolas – So, who was it? I mean... the father?

Brigitte – I'm not very sure, actually... It could be... Vincent.

Vincent is even more uncomfortable. Nicolas looks at him, astonished.

Brigitte – Or Antoine...

Antoine is also uncomfortable. Nicolas looks at him in turn.

Nicolas – Oh, okay... Nice, friends... Couldn't you have warned me... You didn't want to hurt my feelings, right?

Brigitte – Or perhaps they didn't want to ruin their chances with the respectable girls they dated outside Saint-Sulpice. I was fair game because I'd agreed to sleep with them...

Antoine – We didn't know you were pregnant, I swear... Right, Vincent?

Vincent doesn't respond. An awkward silence.

Brigitte *(sarcastic)* – And you, good pals? Did you see each other often during all these years?

Vincent – Old soldiers meeting once a year to relive their campaigns? Never been my thing...

Brigitte – Yet you had no trouble boasting about your conquests behind my back. And I pretended not to know you'd passed me round like a dirty joke...

Antoine – We were really foolish, Brigitte, forgive us... If I had known you were pregnant...

Brigitte – You'd have done precisely what Vincent and the others did: looked the other way. I was the fat girl with glasses. You even had a name for me, didn't you? Miss Piggy...

Vincent and Antoine look at their shoes.

Nicolas – I thought you were very pretty...

Brigitte – But to them I was the slut they all took turns with. 'Everyone's had a ride on Brigitte — except the train.' Isn't that what you used to say?

Vincent *(weakly attempting to react)* – Come on, we didn't rape you either... You were willing, right?

Brigitte *(shaken)* – What do you want...? With the looks I had back then, I wouldn't have had a chance if there had been any competition... So, yes, I took advantage of the monopoly. I slept with almost every guy in school...

Nicolas – Except for me.

Brigitte *(close to tears)* – You strutted about like cockerels in that Catholic henhouse, with me as your only hen. No, more like the ugly duckling. *(An awkward silence.)* If only you'd known, boys... You weren't much good in bed. I hope the girls who came after me benefited from everything I taught you. I discovered real pleasure much later, with other men. Including the one I eventually married. I've been divorced for years, by the way. *(To Vincent)* So, you're marrying Olivia...

Vincent – Olivia...

Brigitte – And how old is she?

Vincent – Eighteen...

Brigitte – She's still a bit older than my daughter...

Pause.

Nicolas – Do you have a child?

Brigitte *(after a hesitation)* – I said abortion was already legal in France. I didn't say I had one...

Antoine – So you didn't...

Vincent – So by now, we might be fathers, Antoine and I...

Brigitte – You didn't think you'd have a child together tonight, huh?

Antoine looks dismayed. Vincent prefers to slip away for a moment.

Vincent – Can you tell me where the bathroom is, Nicolas?

Nicolas – At the end of the hallway...

Antoine – I already have two children waiting for me at home... Not to mention my wife... who doesn't have much of a sense of humour. *(Antoine's phone rings, and he answers)* Yes, dear... No, I'm still at Nicolas's... We're reminiscing about the good old days... No, no, I won't be long... but don't wait for me for dinner... Okay, see you in a bit...

He hangs up. Vincent returns.

Vincent *(to Nicolas)* – Do you have a stuffed iguana in your bathroom?

Nicolas – Oh yes, sorry, I forgot to warn you... It can be surprising...

Vincent – Yeah... I felt like it was staring at me while I was peeing. It almost looked like it was alive...

Nicolas – Alive? But...

Antoine *(interrupting)* – Well, can we get back to serious matters? *(To Brigitte)* What do you want from us exactly?

Brigitte – When Nicolas called me, telling me Vincent was celebrating his bachelor party, I thought it was now or never... Now it's up to you to decide what you want to do with this fatherhood...

Vincent – We don't even know who the father is...

Nicolas – There are genetic tests now... We can find out quickly...

Brigitte – You can each take a number. We'll draw the winner out of a hat...

Nicolas – I've never been lucky in games... In fact, I couldn't even play this time... It can't be me as the father...

Antoine – Fortunately... The poor girl... *(The others look at him, dismayed)* No, I mean... Because of your illness... It would be unfortunate for her to find her father after fifteen years, only for him to tell her that she'll soon be an orphan...

Silence.

Vincent – And what's her name?

Brigitte – Vinciane...

Vincent – So you know she's mine?

Brigitte – No, it was a fifty-fifty chance. *(Struggling to keep a straight face)* But it sounded nicer than Antoinette...

A moment.

Vincent – And did you tell your daughter?

Brigitte – What could I tell her? That I'm not the Virgin Mary, that I slept with the Three Wise Men and can't remember which one's her father?

Nicolas – I'll adopt her! *(The other three stare)* I've always loved you, Brigitte. I'll marry you and adopt Vinciane. I'll get up at night to give her a bottle...

Antoine – I remind you she's at least ten years old... or even fifteen.

Vincent – If Vinciane's my daughter, you can't just adopt her! I won't have it! *(His phone rings)* Oh, damn... *(Answering)* Hello, Olivia. Yes, everything's fine. I'm at a christening. Yes, an evening christening. A civil one... I'll call you back. Love you too...

He hangs up.

Brigitte *(amused)* – Imagine your fiancée's face if you tell her just before the wedding that you've already got a fifteen-year-old daughter. They'd practically be playmates... *(Vincent looks sick)* Unless Antoine's the father, of course...

Vincent – But I don't know... You don't have a little idea...

Antoine – Who does she resemble?

Brigitte – Me... when I was her age. *(Vincent and Antoine seem a bit worried)* Remember? The little chubby girl with glasses...

Antoine's phone rings again.

Antoine – No, Christine, I'm not coming via the bakery! I'm with Vanessa Paradis's sister. Can't I get drunk with old friends once every fifteen years? *(He hangs up, exasperated. The others are impressed.)* Brigitte, if the girl's mine, I'll accept responsibility. Though paying maintenance on a teacher's salary...

Vincent – Vinciane... That's a nice name...

Brigitte – I could have called her Saint-Sulpice. Or Holy Spirit. It might have been safer. There were three hundred boys in that school...

Nicolas – Oh yes... We're far from the immaculate conception...

Vincent – You're not even sure the father is one of us two?

Brigitte – You should be relieved, right? So, if I understand correctly, everyone wants to adopt this child today...

Nicolas – I'm ready to adopt the mother with her...

Silence.

Brigitte – She's downstairs...

The three men freeze.

Vincent – Excuse me?

Brigitte – My daughter! I told her to wait downstairs at the café terrace... Just to see what your reaction would be... She's waiting for me to signal through the window. To know if she can come up or not...

Nicolas – That's fantastic!

The other two don't look as enthusiastic.

Brigitte *(overacting)* – I'm sure when her father sees her, he'll recognise his child. Fatherly instinct doesn't lie...

Vincent and Antoine are on the verge of apoplexy. Nicolas goes to the window.

Nicolas – I'll tell her to come up...

Vincent stops him.

Vincent – Wait, we're not five minutes late!

Antoine – And we have to be gentle with the kid... It's true, it's going to be a shock for her...

Brigitte *(ironic)* – For her?

Antoine – For her... For us... And do you really think we're going to recognise her just like that...

Brigitte – Remember... When your wife gave birth at the maternity ward. When you held your baby in your arms. Didn't you feel something? Could you have mistaken another baby for yours?

Antoine – Yeah... But at the maternity ward, they have a little bracelet...

Brigitte – She has one too.

Nicolas – Did you leave her with her birth bracelet? All these years...

Brigitte – She has a little ID bracelet... With her name engraved on one side and on the other...

Brigitte is finding it increasingly difficult to hold back her laughter. But the three others await the continuation with anxiety.

Vincent – What's engraved on the other side?

Nicolas – The father's name? And his address?

Antoine – Wait, she's not a dog...

Brigitte – No... It says... *(With a theatrical American accent)* "My heart belongs to Daddy." *(The others stare.)* You know, like Marilyn Monroe. *(She strikes a seductive Marilyn-style pose and hums a few notes.)* What a touching little family heirloom, don't you think?

Vincent and Antoine are stunned.

Vincent – No?

Brigitte bursts into laughter.

Brigitte – You're making me regret not keeping that little souvenir of the unknown father...

Antoine – You mean... you really had an abortion?

Nicolas – So, there's no one downstairs... Oh, no... You didn't do that?

Brigitte – You almost seem disappointed!

Vincent – But why did you tell us such lies?

Brigitte – Lies? You're asking me that? Why shouldn't I have the right to have a little fun too? *(Dryly, to Nicolas)* Can I see your X-rays again?

Nicolas reluctantly hands her the X-rays.

Nicolas – Here they are. But you know, when we're not specialists...

Brigitte *(showing him the scan)* – Those two dark areas aren't tumours, Nicolas. They're your nasal cavities. Even a half-blind medical student wouldn't mistake a pair of nostrils for brain tumours...

Vincent and Antoine are stunned.

Nicolas – It's nice of you to want to reassure me, Brigitte, but you're not a doctor...

Brigitte – I'm a vet, Nicolas. That makes me a doctor of sorts. And your scan shows chronic sinusitis. That's incurable too — but happily, rather less serious...

Vincent and Antoine turn to Nicolas.

Vincent – You really made a fool of us, huh?

Brigitte *(to Vincent and Antoine)* – Don't tell me you didn't know?

Nicolas – I'm sorry. It was the only way I could think of to get you to act in my play. It matters so much to me... almost a matter of life and death. And I wanted so badly to see Brigitte again...

Vincent starts to leave. Antoine catches him by the arm.

Antoine – Stay, Vincent... For Brigitte, at least... It's been fifteen years since we saw each other... It's not every day you spend the evening with Vanessa Paradis's hidden sister...

Vincent gives up trying to leave.

Nicolas – So, you're a veterinarian?

Brigitte – Yes... *(Dryly)* My lucky day...

Antoine – Bravo... They say becoming a veterinarian is even harder than becoming a doctor...

Brigitte – Yes... But I don't know why, the more I know men, the more I like animals...

Nicolas – I thought you didn't even finish high school...

Brigitte – I took my school-leaving exams again the next year. Passed with honours, too...

Vincent – And you don't have any children?

Brigitte – Yes, I do have a daughter. But this one wasn't conceived by divine intervention. And relax — she's only five...

Nicolas – Five years old? But should we go get her then? We can't leave a little five-year-old girl alone on a café terrace...

Brigitte – She's not at the café, Nicolas, don't worry... She's with her father. Her real father...

Silence.

Antoine – Imagine if Mary had gone off to London instead of explaining herself to Joseph. History might have turned out quite differently...

Vincent – And perhaps abortion would have become legal a few centuries earlier...

Brigitte – And there would be a lot fewer Christmas songs...

Nicolas *(lost)* – Who's Mary? Was she with us in the final year?

Antoine – All those years in a Catholic school, Nicolas, and you still missed that lesson...

Vincent – So, you thought we were in cahoots with Nicolas?

Brigitte – I thought you'd invited me to Vincent's bachelor party because you remembered the old Brigitte, the girl who'd do anything to please the boys. One final bit of fun before Vincent settles down with the boss's daughter. Why pay a prostitute when Brigitte used to come free? *(Close to tears)* Yes, I wanted revenge. Not very Christian of me, perhaps, but it felt good...

Vincent and Antoine look penitent.

Vincent – We're sorry, Brigitte. We were stupid at seventeen...

Antoine – Isn't there a poem about how nobody's sensible at seventeen?

Brigitte – You were little bastards, all right. Just try not to grow into old bastards. *(She wipes her eyes and prepares to leave.)* Miss Piggy says goodbye...

Antoine *(embarrassed)* – Anyway, you're quite an actress... We really believed your stories... *(Brigitte gives him a stern look)* I mean... Vanessa... Then Vinciane...

Brigitte relaxes a bit and allows herself to smile.

Brigitte – And Nicolas was pretty convincing with his incurable disease. Or perhaps you're simply a very gullible audience...

Nicolas – And what about my play, um...?

Brigitte – Your play is fantastic. I read a few passages... I laughed my head off...

Nicolas – It's supposed to be a tragedy...

Brigitte – Okay, I agree to perform it. If the other two are on board...

Antoine and Vincent are caught off guard.

Antoine – Why not? Vincent? We've been thinking of getting back on stage. It could be our grand comeback...

Nicolas – Awesome! And this play will be our baby, all four of us!

Silence.

Vincent – Listen, Brigitte... We apologise, and...

Brigitte is not quite ready to forgive them.

Antoine – We'd even be willing to be godfathers to your daughter, if the places are still vacant...

Brigitte – All three of you?

Nicolas – We were like the Three Musketeers fifteen years ago. We shared everything. Well, almost everything...

Brigitte can't help but smile.

Brigitte – Let me think about it. But why not? It was fifteen years ago. Perhaps the statute of limitations has expired...

The atmosphere relaxes.

Nicolas – Have some peanuts...

Brigitte helps herself.

Antoine – But... when you said we weren't good in bed, was that also for revenge, or...?

Brigitte smiles but doesn't answer.

Nicolas – So, you don't hold it against me too much, right?

She approaches him.

Brigitte – You were the only one who was honest with me. But you need more confidence, Nicolas. Do you know why you're the only one I never slept with?

Nicolas – I'm not sure I want to know...

Brigitte – Because you were the only one who really loved me. I didn't want to disappoint you...

Nicolas – That's not exactly cheering me up. I feel like the one pathetic sperm cell that never reached the finish line...

Brigitte – Don't despair... I'm still on the market... I'm divorced... And now that your two "best buddies" are married...

Vincent – Well, I'm only engaged...

Nicolas takes the manuscript of his play in hand.

Nicolas – And to think I wrote that whole play just to kiss you in the final scene, while these two bastards...

Antoine – Oh, come on... Do you want us to talk about your X-rays again?

Brigitte approaches Nicolas.

Brigitte – A hundred and twenty pages and fifteen years of rewrites? You've earned this...

She gives him a long kiss on the mouth, leaving the other two in awe.

Antoine *(to Vincent)* – Perhaps we'd better leave them alone...

A last subway train passes with a terrible noise.

Brigitte ends the embrace, leaving Nicolas on the verge of suffocation.

Brigitte – You might still want to see a doctor. You seem to have a bit of trouble breathing...

On these words, Nicolas collapses lifeless. Brigitte is surprised. Antoine and Vincent burst into laughter.

Antoine – Come on, stop fooling around, Nicolas...

Vincent approaches and looks at Nicolas's lifeless body, laughing as well.

Vincent – Bloody hell, he's brilliant at playing dead. What talent!

Antoine – He told me he did that in a commercial. He's got practice...

Brigitte leans over Nicolas and quickly examines him, including taking his pulse.

Brigitte – Damn it, his heart's stopped!

She performs a quick cardiac massage and leans over his chest to listen to his heart.

Brigitte – I've got his heart going again, but he's in a coma...

Antoine and Vincent begin to nervously laugh, unsure if it's a joke or serious.

Vincent – All right, that's enough. You've taken the joke too far...

Brigitte is still leaning over the body.

Brigitte – Do you know if he's allergic to anything?

Antoine and Vincent think.

Vincent – He said he was allergic to penicillin... and peanuts.

Antoine – Peanuts!

Vincent – He didn't eat any...

Brigitte – But I did! Even the smallest trace of peanut oil can trigger a serious allergic reaction. And I kissed him straight afterwards...

Antoine *(aghast)* – With your tongue?

Brigitte, focused on the body, doesn't respond.

Vincent – A kiss of death. I don't believe it...

Brigitte – He needs a hospital, now! *(Taking out her phone and dialling)* Emergency ambulance, please. Dr Paradis speaking. We're at... *(Hesitating for a moment)* 337 Rue de Belleville, Paris... *(Or give the address of the theatre where this play is being performed.)*

Antoine – And he wanted to die onstage...

Brigitte – Yes, anaphylactic shock. We'll bring him down to the street. *(Pocketing her phone)* Come on, take his legs. We need to get him downstairs...

The other two hesitate at the daunting task.

Vincent – Seventh floor, no lift. This is a nightmare!

They struggle to lift the body.

Antoine – Are you sure you're not pulling a prank on us?

Brigitte – Hurry up instead of chattering. The ambulance is on its way. I'll go ahead to meet them. I'll wait for you downstairs...

She exits first.

Vincent – For heaven's sake, he's dead weight!

In the distance, a firefighter siren approaches. Vincent and Antoine also exit, carrying Nicolas's lifeless body with difficulty.

Antoine *(off)* – Don't drop him! These stairs are steep. And press the timer for the lights. I can't see a thing!

Vincent *(off)* – Okay, okay, I'm turning it on...

A backstage light comes on, and the sound of a body falling is heard.

Antoine *(off)* – What have you done? He's gone all the way down to the sixth floor!

Vincent *(off)* – I nearly had a heart attack. What the hell is that thing?

Antoine *(off)* – Oh, that's Nicolas's iguana. Someone must have left the bathroom door open...

Vincent *(off)* – You mean it's actually alive?

Antoine *(off)* – More than can be said for Nicolas, after that fall...

Vincent *(off)* – You're right. Those stairs are steep, but he looks pretty stiff too...

Antoine *(off)* – So much for our big comeback...

Vincent *(off)* – At least he's not coming back.

Antoine *(off)* – We were never cut out to be actors, were we?

The sound of the siren reaches its peak before abruptly stopping.

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 ...
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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