La Comédiathèque

Blue Flamingos



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Translation by the author

The season is off to a disastrous start for Romain and Fanny, who have just opened a hotel called the Pink Flamingos in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. A nationwide strike has caused a fuel shortage, and the cancellations are pouring in. To save the hotel from bankruptcy, they will have to persuade the few motorists stranded on their doorstep to stay a little longer — and perhaps lure in some other visitors. Fortunately, the Camargue, and the people who live there, have charms of their own. And their receptionist has more than one trick up her sleeve... An irreverent comedy paying tribute to France's legendary Camargue region.

Characters

Fanny and Romain: the hotel owner and her husband
Sara and Paco: the receptionist and her cousin
Folco and Marius: a Camargue cowboy and his son
Patrick and Christelle: the down-to-earth tourists
Victor and Diane: the aristocratic tourists
Sam and Fred: the environmentally conscious tourists

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Act 1

Scene 1

A bar counter also serves as reception and opens onto a terrace with a table or two, chairs and sun loungers. A wooden sign above the bar bears the hotel's name: Pink Flamingos. The terrace overlooks a swimming pool, imagined to be on the audience's side of the stage. Beyond the pool stretch lagoons inhabited, among others, by pink flamingos. Fanny enters, wearing an apron and looking exhausted. She drops into a chair and sighs. Romain follows, equally worn out, in overalls and a straw hat.

Romain – It's so hot...

Fanny – And the season's only just begun.

Romain – Imagine what it'll be like in August...

A pause.

Fanny – Then again, we're only this hot because we never stop working.

Romain – True...

Fanny – We'd be cooler lying on a sun lounger by the pool with a nice chilled glass of rosé.

Romain – We certainly won't have time for that this summer, when the hotel's full.

Fanny – Why don't we have a quick dip now?

Romain – I just checked. The pool's at fourteen degrees. We'd go into cold-water shock.

He collapses into a chair beside her.

Fanny – And to think we gave up our civil-service jobs to be our own bosses...

Romain – And have our own swimming pool.

Fanny – By the time the water reaches twenty-five degrees, all we'll be allowed to do is watch the guests swimming while we serve drinks.

Romain – Our own bosses? What a joke. We do all the work, and we haven't even managed to hire anyone to help.

Fanny – Hotel owners are the slaves of the modern world.

Romain – Any regrets?

Fanny – Not for a second. As long as we're both in the same boat. And rowing in the same direction...

They share a tender moment.

Romain – Shall we have that cold rosé anyway?

Fanny – Won't we go into shock...?

Romain – You have to live dangerously.

He gets up, goes behind the bar and pours two glasses of rosé.

Fanny – Speaking of the pool, did you put the robot in?

Romain – Yes... I've called him R2-D2.

Fanny – Who?

Romain – The robot. I thought he deserved a name. After all, he's our only employee...

Fanny – And he's the only one who gets to swim...

Romain returns with the two glasses.

Romain – If we had robots to do everything else, this place would be paradise.

He hands Fanny a glass. They raise their glasses.

Fanny – Here's to you, Lou!

Romain – It's Romain, actually.

Fanny – Delighted to meet you. I'm Fanny. Do you often holiday here?

Romain – Every year. I found this lovely little hotel on Overbooked.com. The owners seem a bit unhinged and hopelessly overworked, but they're very nice. I think I'll give them five stars...

Romain taps on his phone.

Fanny – Still no replies to our advert for an all-round receptionist?

Romain – Not one.

Fanny – It's ridiculous... We're offering a decent salary.

Romain – Well, she'd be the only one of the three of us actually getting paid.

Fanny – Perhaps the words 'all-round receptionist' are putting people off.

Romain – Especially since we said she had to speak English, preferably a third language too, and look immaculate.

Fanny – You're right. We should have said 'trilingual maid with the looks of a supermodel'. That would have been clearer.

Romain – We're offering more than the minimum wage. And food and accommodation...

They finish their glasses.

Fanny – This rosé isn't bad.

Romain – And it wasn't expensive. It's from a little local producer.

Fanny – A bit rough, perhaps, but it goes down well when it's cold.

Romain – You definitely need plenty of ice with it... Shall I pour you another?

Fanny – We'd better not. Our first guests arrive tomorrow. I've finished the cleaning, but I've still got all the beds to make tonight.

Romain – Well, you know what they say: you've made your bed, now lie in it.

Fanny – Yes, except I've counted thirty-two beds to make before I get to lie in any of them.

Scene 2

Sara enters. Her clothes are rather flashy, and her general appearance distinctly untidy.

Sara – Are you the Pink Flamingos?

Romain – Well... that's the name of our hotel, yes.

Sara casts a suspicious look around the place.

Fanny – Don't tell me you're from the health inspectorate. They came yesterday.

Sara – I'm here about the advert.

Romain – Oh, right... Sorry, we weren't expecting...

Fanny – As it happens, we were just discussing...

Romain – The requirements for the job.

Sara – So you're still looking for someone?

Fanny – Yes, well... That depends. Have you done this sort of work before?

Sara – Can't be that difficult. What exactly do you have to do?

Romain – Well... Answer the telephone, for a start. And welcome guests when they arrive. We have a very international clientele, you know.

Fanny – This is a three-star hotel.

Romain – Do you speak any English?

Sara – English?

Fanny – Italian, perhaps?

Sara – A bit of Spanish.

Romain – Ah. Well, that's...

Fanny – We don't get many Spaniards round here.

Sara – Anyway, how much does it pay?

Romain – Fifteen hundred euros a month. Take-home...

Fanny – With board and lodging.

Sara – All right, that'll do... For a start. Can I see my room?

Romain – Er... Yes, there's a little bungalow for a member of staff...

Fanny – It's the blue door just beyond the pool, but...

Sara – I've left my suitcase in the car, but don't trouble yourselves. I'll manage. It's got wheels.

Fanny – Right...

Sara is about to leave but turns back.

Sara – What time's breakfast?

Romain – Don't worry, the first guests aren't arriving until tomorrow afternoon.

Sara – No, I meant... my breakfast.

Fanny – Yours?

Sara – You did say board and lodging, didn't you?

Romain – Let's say seven o'clock, then.

Sara – Seven? I'm not much of a morning person...

Fanny – Would half past seven suit you?

Sara – Fine... But I'll have to set an alarm.

They watch her walk away. Silence.

Romain – Was that really a job interview...?

Fanny – More like checking into a hotel, wasn't it?

Romain – Or an armed robbery...

Fanny – I'd better go and see what she's up to.

She gets up.

Blackout.

Act 2

Scene 1

Sara is sitting behind the reception desk, talking on her mobile.

Sara – Well, I'm fine... Found myself a little job in a hotel. Pretty relaxed, actually. The bosses are stressed out of their minds, though. No idea why. It's their first season, but so what? It's my first season too! You've just got to stay cool... *(An old-fashioned desk telephone starts ringing.)* I'd better go. I've got another call... Hope it's not someone English...

She puts away her mobile and looks curiously at the landline.

Sara – How does this thing work...? *(She clumsily picks up the receiver.)* Yeah...? Yes, you've reached the hotel... *(She looks up at the sign.)* Pink Flamingos, that's the one. Yes... Yes... *(She consults the bookings register.)* Mr and Mrs Martin, of course... One week in a double room... You want to cancel? Why's that? A death in the family? Oh, I see... And who's died? Your husband? You're not joking, are you...? Well... What can I say? I suppose I'll have to believe you. No, I'm not questioning your word, but... No, I wasn't going to ask for a death certificate... All right, then. My condolences... And enjoy your holiday anyway. *(She hangs up.)* A death in the family. I've heard that one before... *(She crosses the name off the register.)* Good riddance. One less room to clean... I'm absolutely parched.

She opens the refrigerator behind the counter, takes out a can, opens it and drinks.

Scene 2

Fanny enters in overalls, carrying a broom in one hand and a bucket in the other.

Fanny – Everything all right, Sara? Not too difficult?

Sara – Fine...

Fanny *(sarcastically)* – If you're thirsty, do help yourself to something from the fridge.

Sara – Thanks. Already have.

Fanny – Any new bookings?

Sara – No, sadly... Oh, but I did get my first cancellation.

Fanny – What?

Sara – Mr and Mrs Martin.

Fanny – They were supposed to arrive today!

Sara – Well, they won't be coming. Mrs Martin's burying her husband tomorrow.

Fanny – Her husband is dead?

Sara – I assume so. Unless she's planning to bury him alive...

Fanny – That's awful.

Sara – Well, it's not as if we knew him personally.

Fanny – I'm talking about the cancellation! They booked for a whole week. What a start...

Sara – You know what they say...

Fanny – No. What do they say?

Sara – Plenty more fish in the sea.

Fanny – I'm delighted you're taking such a philosophical view... If you'll excuse me, I have some cleaning to do.

Fanny is about to leave.

Sara – I suppose it'll be my fault next. I had nothing to do with it...

The landline rings again. Fanny stops. Sara makes no move.

Fanny – Well, answer it!

Sara – All right, all right. There's no fire! *(She picks up.)* Pink Flamingos, hello... Sorry? Could you speak clearly, please? No, sorry, I don't speak a word of English... You're calling from Shanghai...? Yes... Yes... No... Why's that? Can you repeat it? Right... Okay... Noted... Look, I haven't understood a word you've said. Yes, I'm very disappointed too... I'm going to hang up now. The line's terrible. Have a nice day.

(She hangs up.) Honestly! People come to France on holiday and can't even be bothered to speak proper French...

Fanny – Who was that?

Sara – A Chinese lady from a travel agency in Shanghai. They'd booked five rooms for a group of fifteen...

Fanny – And?

Sara – They're cancelling as well.

Fanny – Why?

Sara – She said they're frightened of the demonstrations in Paris.

Fanny – Demonstrations? What demonstrations?

Sara – I don't know. She kept saying 'demonstrations'. They saw pictures on Chinese television... Rioters smashing up luxury shops on the Champs-Élysées and walking off with Louis Vuitton bags under their arms.

Fanny – The Champs-Élysées? We're a thousand kilometres from the Arc de Triomphe!

Sara – Yes, but they were flying into Paris for a bit of shopping before heading south. Now they've cancelled France altogether and they're going to Dubai instead. Apparently, they've got the same shops as Paris, only cheaper.

Fanny looks at the register, devastated.

Fanny – Almost all our bookings have been cancelled! Do you realise what that means?

Sara – Yeah. Rotten luck for you...

Fanny bristles.

Fanny – For us? Do you imagine we're going to pay you to sit around doing nothing if the hotel's empty? You can pack your bags. You weren't right for the job anyway!

Sara – So now you need a university degree just to answer the phone in your little hotel?

Fanny – Go on. Get out.

Sara – You'll be sorry you let me go...

Sara leaves.

Scene 3

Romain enters.

Romain – What's going on?

Fanny – Have you heard anything about a strike?

Romain – No... We've been working day and night for a week. We haven't even had time to listen to the news. What strike?

Fanny – The Chinese... They've cancelled...

Romain – No...!

Fanny – Five rooms in one go. And Mrs Martin rang to cancel as well.

Romain – Because of the strikes? I thought she was coming from Tarascon.

Fanny – Because of her husband! He picked the day before their holiday to drop dead.

Romain looks towards the counter.

Romain – Where's the receptionist?

Fanny – Let's say her trial period has come to an end. We can't employ staff if there's nobody staying here.

Romain – I'll put the radio on. I hope they're not on strike too...

Fanny – Don't worry. Even when they're on strike, they still manage to broadcast the bad news.

Romain – Now that's what I call a skeleton service...

He goes behind the bar and turns a knob.

Radio announcer *(off)* – Due to industrial action by Radio France staff, our usual news bulletin has been replaced by this special update. A week ago, France's newly elected female President stunned the country by announcing plans to raise the statutory retirement age to seventy-four. Trade unions immediately called a general strike, demanding the withdrawal of the bill. Aircraft are grounded at both Roissy and Orly airports. Trains and Paris Métro services have stopped running. Fuel supplies at petrol stations are running low, particularly along the Mediterranean coast...

Romain switches off the radio.

Fanny – It's a nightmare.

Romain – Six cancellations in a single day...

Fanny – Strikes are like the mistral, that wind we get round here.

Romain – They come from the north...

Fanny – And you know when they start, but never how many days they're going to last...

The telephone rings. Romain answers.

Romain – Pink Flamingos Hotel, how can I help? Yes... Yes... I see... No, of course... No, please don't apologise. I understand completely... Of course. Maybe another time... *(He hangs up.)* And that's cancellation number seven.

Fanny – I doubt it'll be the last.

Romain – They couldn't have picked a worse time to strike. Just before the holiday season. They could at least have waited until everyone got here...

Fanny – Retirement at seventy-four. That's insane.

Romain – If people die before they reach retirement age, the holiday hotel business is finished. Three-quarters of our guests are pensioners.

Fanny – At least our current customers are already retired.

Romain – Yes, but they won't live forever...

Fanny – And if there's no one to replace them before they're seventy-four, we won't be making much money...

Romain – We should have opened a care home instead of a hotel. With full nursing facilities.

The telephone rings again. They look at each other.

Fanny – You answer. I can't face it.

Romain picks up.

Romain – Pink Flamingos Hotel, we're all ears...

Fanny – And up to our ears in debt...

Romain – Yes...? Oh, hello. How are you? Yes, we're aware of that little problem, but it's only temporary, I assure you... Yes, of course, we'll deal with it straight away... Absolutely. Thank you for your understanding. Have a nice day.

He hangs up.

Fanny – Another cancellation?

Romain – The bank. About our overdraft...

Fanny – And we were relying on the first bookings to get us back into the black...

They both collapse into chairs, utterly dejected.

Romain – We should have kept our nice, comfortable jobs at the prefecture in Valence... instead of going into the hotel business and dreaming of making a fortune.

Fanny – Maybe not a fortune. But at least we'd be independent.

Romain – We've sunk every penny we saved into this place.

Fanny – Not to mention the loan...

Romain – We can't afford a bad start to the season. Round here, we make more than half the year's turnover in just three months.

Scene 4

Sara passes by, pulling her wheeled suitcase.

Sara – I've left the keys in the door...

She is about to go.

Fanny – Wait a moment. Don't leave like that... I'm sorry I lost my temper earlier. Believe me, we'd keep you if we could. But all our guests have cancelled.

Romain – And our bank account's in the red.

Sara – Don't worry, I understand. The banks blacklisted me three years ago...

Fanny – Sit with us for a minute. Let's have a drink. At this point, why not? A little rosé?

Sara – Okay.

Sara sits while Romain pours the drinks.

Romain – What did you do before embarking on a career as a trilingual, all-purpose receptionist?

Sara – I was a fortune-teller.

Fanny – Really? Well, the way things are going, we could use one of those...

Romain – We certainly didn't see any of this coming.

Sara tastes the rosé Romain has just poured for her and grimaces.

Sara – So firing me wasn't enough? Now you're trying to poison me?

Romain – Saves us paying you severance pay.

Fanny takes a sip too.

Fanny – Yes, I don't think we'll have another.

Sara – I can give you an address, if you like. A nice little local sand-grown wine. Fell off the back of a lorry.

Romain – I hope the bottles didn't smash when they fell.

Fanny – And how do you see our future?

Romain – Through rose-tinted glasses, like the flamingos?

Fanny – Or all in black, like poor Mrs Martin?

Sara – Show me your hand...

Fanny reluctantly holds out her hand. Sara studies her palm intently.

Romain – Well?

Sara looks up.

Sara – I see new guests arriving today...

Fanny – You can see that in the lines on my hand?

Sara – Yes. And in the car park. Someone's just pulled in...

Fanny and Romain look towards the car park.

Romain – You're right... But we're not expecting anyone else.

Scene 5

Patrick arrives, dressed like a thoroughly ordinary holidaymaker, notably in a Johnny Hallyday T-shirt. He is followed by his wife Christelle, whose clothes and manner are equally unsophisticated, even rather vulgar. Patrick is holding a road map.

Patrick – Ladies and gentlemen, sorry to interrupt your aperitif...

Christelle – Could we ask you a quick question?

Fanny – Of course.

Patrick – Do you know where we are?

Sara – Of course we know where we are. We live here!

Romain – You're in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, sir.

Patrick – You see, Christelle? I was right! Sainte-Marie-la-Mer. I saw the sign as we came in. I can read, you know!

Christelle – You are stubborn! Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, not Sainte-Marie-la-Mer! I told you you put the wrong place into the GPS.

Patrick – Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, Sainte-Marie-la-Mer... Same thing, isn't it?

Fanny – Not quite, I'm afraid. Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer is here in the Camargue, in the Bouches-du-Rhône department. Sainte-Marie-la-Mer is much farther west, in the Pyrénées-Orientales, near Spain.

Christelle – You see, Patrick! You always have to be right!

Romain – May I...? *(He takes Patrick's map, spreads it on the table and points to Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.)* We're here. Sainte-Marie-la-Mer is over there...

Patrick and Christelle study the map.

Patrick – Here?

Fanny – In the Camargue.

Patrick – What the hell are we doing in the Camargue? This isn't on our way!

Sara – Depends where you're going.

Christelle – We were trying to get to Spain.

Romain – Ah. Well, Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer is nowhere near the road to Spain.

Sara – In fact, Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer isn't on the road to anywhere. Nobody ends up here by accident...

Christelle – Well, Patrick, you've made history. The first person ever to end up here by accident. What a genius!

Patrick – So we're not on the road to Spain...?

Christelle – It's a dead end, I'm telling you! Sainte-Marie-la-Mer is on the road to Spain.

Patrick – We were going to meet some friends on the Costa Brava. We thought we'd stop off in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.

Romain – Sainte-Marie-la-Mer, you mean, I imagine...

Christelle – We booked a little hotel there. The Pink Flamingos, as it happens.

Fanny – There are pink flamingos over that way too. And apparently there's a hotel with the same name.

Patrick – I trusted my GPS. And I followed the signs...

Christelle – And just after the sign for Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, the car ran out of fuel.

Patrick – There aren't many petrol stations round here, and every one we found had run out of diesel!

Christelle – What are we supposed to do now?

Patrick – We'll find some diesel eventually. It's only a little detour...

Christelle – A little detour? You have some nerve!

Sara – May I see your hand?

Surprised, Christelle holds out her hand. Sara examines her palm.

Christelle – Well?

Sara – Whatever you do, don't go to Spain. Trust me.

Patrick – Why shouldn't we go to Spain?

Sara studies Christelle's palm again.

Sara – A terrible misfortune will befall you if you cross the border.

Christelle – Are you a fortune-teller?

Romain – A fortune-teller and... our receptionist.

Fanny – And believe me, she's a better fortune-teller than receptionist.

Sara – I can see... horns.

Patrick – Horns? I hope you're not saying my wife's cheating on me...

Sara – I see your husband being gored by a bull.

Christelle – There are bulls here too. We saw loads beside the road.

Patrick – At one point I thought we'd reached Spain already.

Sara – Yes, but this bull is definitely Spanish. No doubt about it.

Christelle – How can you tell?

Sara – Spanish bulls are much bigger... and much nastier. Your husband isn't a bullfighter, is he?

Christelle – My Patrick? A bullfighter? He can barely kill a mosquito in the bedroom, let alone a bull in an arena.

Sara releases Christelle's hand.

Sara – In any case, I strongly advise you not to go to Spain. It would be your last holiday together...

Christelle – We're hardly going anywhere if all the petrol stations are dry.

Patrick – We'll have to spend the night in this godforsaken place.

Christelle – It's like the Wild West out here, isn't it?

Fanny – More than you might think. They made quite a few Westerns here, you know. The Camargue is the land of cinema. It began as a story invented by a handful of people with a vision, and became a reality because the locals all believed in it. The Camargue is a place built on faith...

A silence.

Sara – Did you know Johnny Hallyday made a film here?

Patrick – No...

Fanny – Where Are You From, Johnny?

Patrick – Me? I'm Patrick. From Montreuil, just outside Paris.

Fanny – Where Are You From, Johnny? That's the title of his film. But you must know the song.

Patrick – What song?

Romain – 'Pour moi la vie va commencer.' *(Singing)* 'Pour moi la vie va commencer...'

A short musical interlude featuring Johnny Hallyday's song may follow, using a recording, a lip-synched performance or a live rendition with a little choreography.

Christelle – Oh, yes... That's one of your favourite songs, Patrick...

Fanny – You'll see... Your new life will begin in the Camargue too.

Sara – And it'll end rather suddenly if you go to the Costa Brava...

Patrick and Christelle exchange uncertain looks.

Patrick – Well... It's not as though we've got much choice. Have you got any rooms?

Sara – At this time of year we're fully booked, you know. But let me check. *(She opens the register and pretends to look.)* Ah, you're in luck. A room has just become available...

Christelle – We'll take it for tonight, then. Tomorrow's another day.

Romain – I'll show you up.

Romain leaves with Patrick and Christelle.

Fanny – I think I underestimated you. If you're willing, I'd like you to stay.

Sara – As a receptionist or a fortune-teller?

Fanny – We did ask for someone who could turn her hand to anything, didn't we? I'd better see how they're getting on...

Fanny leaves.

Scene 6

Sara stretches out on a sun lounger.

Sara – What would they do without me...?

She closes her eyes and appears to doze off. Victor and Diane enter. They are the very picture of old-school, aristocratic, devoutly Catholic France. Victor carries two fuel cans. His wife has Louis Vuitton suitcases.

Victor – Really, this little pilgrimage to Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer has become our own Stations of the Cross... Twelve petrol stations, and not a drop of fuel.

Diane – Don't blaspheme, Victor. We've simply run out of petrol. And we're in France, after all, not the middle of the Sahara.

Victor – In the Sahara we'd have found oil by now...

Diane – We may not be in the desert, but I can't see a soul.

Victor – The innkeeper can't be far away.

They look around and finally notice Sara, fast asleep.

Diane – Oh, there's somebody...

Victor – Another guest, I imagine.

Diane – We can't just wake her up...

Victor drops one of the fuel cans. Sara wakes with a start.

Sara – Oh, sorry... I must have nodded off.

Victor – Forgive us for tearing you from the arms of Morpheus, my dear lady. We were looking for the receptionist.

Sara – The receptionist? That's me. Well, I started this morning, got fired at about ten, then they hired me back.

Diane – We're spending a few days in the Luberon with friends who have a little manor house there. We decided to make a pilgrimage to Our Lady of the Sea, but we've become innocent victims of this peasant revolt over the retirement age.

Victor – Considering neither of us has ever done a day's work, it's rather amusing, isn't it?

Diane – In short, I fear we'll have to spend the night at this country inn. By some miracle, do you happen to have two rooms left?

Sara – Why? Don't you sleep together?

Victor – No, the second one's for our daughter. She's over there admiring the bulls... Rather excitable animals, aren't they?

Sara – How old is your daughter?

Diane – Thirty-two.

Sara – Two rooms, then. Thirty-two... A bit old to be a third wheel in Mum and Dad's bedroom. Let's have a look. *(She opens the register and pretends to study it.)* Yes, you're lucky. Those are my last two...

Victor – But there's only one car in the car park.

Sara – At this time of day everybody's out sightseeing. There's so much to do in the Camargue. More than in the Luberon, anyway.

Diane – Then we might take the opportunity to rest for a while.

Sara hands them two keys.

Sara – Here are your keys.

Diane – Thank you. Coming, Victor?

Victor – In a moment.

Diane – And leave those fuel cans in the courtyard. You're not taking them into the bedroom. They stink of diesel.

They go out.

Sara – It hasn't stopped all morning. At this rate we'll be turning people away...

Sara exits.

Scene 7

Sam and Fred enter. Both women look intellectual and distinctly green-minded. They wear cycle helmets and backpacks. Sam has a camera around her neck.

Sam *(looking towards the audience)* – Oh, look! Pink flamingos!

Fred comes closer.

Fred – Incredible... I've never seen real ones before. Are you sure they're flamingos?

Sam – Well, they're pink...

Fred – Oh, yes...

Sam – And I can see an egret, an avocet, a white wagtail... and a common buzzard.

Fred – A common buzzard?

Sam – A bird of prey. Though I've never seen one quite that big before.

Fred – Neither have I. Except perhaps my mother-in-law.

Sam – Your mother-in-law looks like a buzzard?

Fred – Not physically. But she's a bit of a birdbrain, and she changes her tune every five minutes.

Sara returns.

Sam – Speaking of birdbrains, I think another one has just landed...

Sara – Have you run out of petrol too?

Fred – We cycled here from Arles to spend a few days in the Camargue.

Sam – In fact, we gave up having a car years ago, even in Paris.

Fred – Petrol stations running dry is probably the best thing that could happen to the planet, wouldn't you say?

Sara – Oh, I don't get involved in politics. Have you booked a room?

Sam – As a matter of principle, we never book anything in advance. We prefer to improvise.

Fred – Always turning up where nobody expects us.

Sara – Then you've come to the right place. We weren't expecting you at all. Do you want a room, or...?

Sam – Two rooms, if you have them. And with a bathtub, if possible. I've been dreaming of a proper bath for three days.

Fred – But if you're full, don't worry. We're seasoned travellers. We're used to surviving in the most basic conditions.

Sam – Last year we went to Nepal and slept in a yurt with llamas.

Fred – Llamas? Wasn't that Peru?

Sam – Or yaks. I can't remember. Anyway, I can tell you it wasn't exactly fragrant.

Fred – So if you have no rooms, we'll be happy to sleep in the stables with the horses. It can't be any worse.

Sara – I don't know whether the horses would agree, but it won't come to that. I'll get your keys.

Fanny returns and smiles at the sight of the new arrivals.

Fanny – Good morning, ladies. Welcome to the Pink Flamingos.

Sam – Thank you.

Sara gives them two keys.

Fred – If it's all the same to you, I'd rather not have room thirteen.

Sam – My friend is a little superstitious...

Fanny – You won't find room thirteen in any hotel, madam.

Fred looks at her key.

Fred – Nine! My lucky number! Thank you!

Sam and Fred leave.

Fanny – Business seems to be picking up. An hour ago, every booking had been cancelled, and now we're almost full... I'm beginning to wonder whether you're our lucky charm.

Sam returns.

Sam – Sorry, I forgot to ask. What time is breakfast served?

Fanny – Oh, whenever you like, madam. You're on holiday, after all. We wouldn't dream of making you get up at...

Sam – Then I'll have mine at six. I'm a wildlife photographer. An amateur, of course. And sunrise is the best time for photographs, when the night birds are still around and the tourists are still asleep...

Sam leaves again. Sara gives Fanny a look of disbelief.

Sara – Six in the morning...?

Fanny – Don't worry, I'll see to it. I'm hardly sleeping at the moment anyway.

Blackout.

Act 3

Scene 1

Victor and Diane are sitting in sun loungers. Victor is reading the local newspaper, La Provence. Diane is reading White Mane.

Victor – What are you reading?

Diane – White Mane.

Victor – Oh?

Diane – I found it in the hotel's little library.

Victor – Any good?

Diane – It's about a horse.

Victor – I thought it was about a dog.

Diane – You're thinking of White Fang.

Victor – Ah, possibly.

Diane – Apparently, it's one of the stories that helped create the Camargue's identity. I can't see why. It's hardly flattering to the gardians...

Victor – The what?

Diane – Gardians. That's what they call the cowboys round here. In any case, it's a dreadful story.

Victor – Yes, well, surely it's all folklore nowadays? Cowboys don't really exist any more.

Folco enters. He is Fanny's father, dressed as a traditional Camargue gardian, and looks rather stern.

Diane – Evidently they do... That one looks like Buffalo Bill.

Victor – Good morning, sir.

Folco – Madam... Sir...

Victor – And what brings you here, my good man? Is there some sort of fancy-dress show in the village?

Folco takes offence at this familiarity.

Folco – Nothing brings me here, sir. I was born here. As were more than ten generations of my family before me.

Victor – Forgive me. I hadn't realised we moved in the same circles.

Folco – Circles? There's only one world as far as I'm concerned, and it's full of every kind of fool... Especially the happy fools who think being born in a particular place makes them superior, as Georges Brassens sang.

Victor gets up to greet Folco more formally.

Victor – Allow me to introduce myself. Victor de la Motte de la Taupinière, Baron de Coursensac...

Folco shakes Victor's outstretched hand.

Folco – Folco du Mas de la Renardière. I own the cattle ranch of the same name. I'm Fanny's father, your hostess. My family raises bulls for the arena and Camargue horses.

Diane – Victor, we're in the presence of a genuine manadier, a Camargue ranch owner. The gardians are modern-day knights, and the manadiers are rather like their feudal lords.

Folco – We already took a few horses as paying guests. Unfortunately, we've recently had to take in a few tourists as well...

Diane – I quite understand. We have friends with a château in the Sarthe. To keep it, they had to dismiss the maid and turn it into a bed and breakfast.

Victor – And now they find themselves serving breakfast to passing commoners. Quite amusing, really...

The sombre Folco does not appear amused.

Diane – But tell me, hasn't the wind been howling since we arrived?

Victor – Strong enough to blow the horns off a bull.

Diane – This wind is infernal. Does it ever stop?

Folco – Madam, in Provence we don't have 'wind'. We have the mistral. It's an entirely different matter.

Victor – Well... It amounts to much the same thing, surely? A wind from the north, I believe...

Folco – Indeed, the mistral comes from the north. Just like you. But unlike you, the mistral is one of the family. That's the difference.

Fanny enters.

Fanny – Oh, Dad... I see you've met our guests.

Diane – Yes... Your father was telling us about the mistral.

Fanny – It is rather windy today. But at least it dries the washing and blows the clouds away. Look at that lovely blue sky!

Folco – The mistral also blows the mosquitoes away. Unfortunately, it isn't always strong enough to blow the tourists away too...

Fanny – My father is a true Camarguais, you know. He's got a thousand stories about the region. And if you'd like to go riding, his ranch is just next door.

Victor – Oh, why not? We belong to a riding club, and we often go out on horseback in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris.

Folco – You'll find the Camargue is nothing like the Bois de Boulogne. The wildlife's quite different. The birds here have feathers. In that Paris park, I've heard they wear high heels.

Fanny – My father is joking, of course. Come on, Dad. I wanted to show you the boiler. I don't know what's wrong with it, but it's been making a funny noise since this morning...

Fanny and Folco leave.

Diane – Folco... He really puts the 'folk' in folklore. Odd that he has the same name as the poor boy in White Mane... and that famous baron who supposedly invented the Camargue.

Victor – What do you mean, invented it? Are we in a country that doesn't exist, surrounded by fictional characters?

Diane – Some beautiful fictions are truer than rather dreary realities.

Victor – Next you'll tell me we're characters in a play...

They glance uneasily towards the audience, then return to the 'reality' of the play.

Diane – And what about your newspaper? Any good news?

Victor – According to this, people in the south do nothing but celebrate. Extraordinary! It's organised by village. Every day there's a festival somewhere...

Diane – Makes you wonder when they find time to work.

Victor – We should read regional newspapers more often, even in Paris. They're much less depressing than Le Figaro. Especially the obituaries. We don't know any of the people in them...

Diane – Speaking of which, I'm not sure I told you, but the Baroness de Casteljarnac passed away last week. Unfortunately, with these strikes, we won't be able to attend her funeral. Such a shame...

Victor – Yes. Her husband's funeral was beautifully done...

Diane – Say what you like, but in high society we still know how to give our dead a proper send-off.

Victor – Quite. They call it a 'funeral service' even for ordinary people. Yet half the time they don't even have a service in church...

Diane – Speaking of church, we must be going.

Victor – Where?

Diane – To Mass!

Victor – Ah yes, I'd completely forgotten. One does lose track on holiday...

Diane – And since we're here, we can't possibly miss Mass at Notre-Dame-de-la-Mer.

Victor and Diane leave.

Scene 2

Sam and Fred enter.

Fred – Have you seen that sky? That blue! It's like a Van Gogh!

Sam – Yes. Take away the swimming pool and it's a picture.

Fred – Did you know Vincent spent a week in the Camargue? In 1888, to be precise.

Sam – No, I didn't...

Fred – He wrote some beautiful letters to his brother from Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. And painted six pictures while he was here... *(A pause.)* What are you reading?

Sam – Mireille. She went on a pilgrimage to Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer too. It didn't end well for her.

Fred – Mireille Mathieu? Isn't she a singer from Avignon? She went on a pilgrimage here?

Sam – Mireille! The heroine of Frédéric Mistral's poem!

Fred – Oh, right... Why didn't it end well?

Sam – She died.

Fred – For a pilgrimage, that's hardly a ringing endorsement.

Sam – Probably why Lourdes gets more pilgrims than Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer...

Fred – On the other hand, here you've got the sea.

Sam watches the birds through binoculars.

Sam – All these birds... It's absolutely beautiful.

Folco returns.

Folco – Ladies...

Sam – Good morning. Judging by your plumage, I imagine you're a local, like the flamingos?

Folco – I was born here, madam. One of the last people to be born in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.

Fred – Is the birth rate falling?

Folco – No, but there isn't a maternity hospital within thirty kilometres.

Fred – May I ask you a question?

Folco – If you absolutely must...

Fred – I've always wondered why flamingos stand on one leg when they sleep.

Folco – Ornithologists have argued about that for years. But the most widely accepted theory is that if they lifted both legs, they'd fall flat on their faces.

Fred – Ah, yes...

Sam *(aside to Fred)* – Must be Camargue humour... *(To Folco.)* Anyway, this land really is flat. Even flatter than the Netherlands.

Fred – You could almost call this the Low Countries.

Folco – No wonder so many Flemings come down from Belgium in summer. They must feel right at home.

A pause.

Fred – Flemings? Oh, I thought you said flamingos... You're quite a comedian, aren't you?

Sam – Am I right in thinking you raise livestock?

Folco – I do not raise 'livestock', madam. I breed fighting bulls and Camargue horses.

Fred – Well, I should tell you we're against bullfighting.

Sam – And we don't eat meat, either.

Folco – Yet you ride electric bicycles whose batteries are made in China. The horses I ride were born and raised right here.

Fred – But you eat your bulls.

Folco – Yes... But first they spend their whole lives roaming free. Not locked up in some industrial meat factory.

Sam – Some still end up in the bullring.

Folco – True. But round here we mainly have the course camarguaise, the local form of bull sport. The bull isn't killed. Our bulls have names. They often live to a great age, out in the open. When they die, we bury them standing upright, facing the sea. Sometimes the greatest of them even have statues erected in their honour...

Fred – That's true. I think I saw a statue of a bull near the arena.

Folco – Vovo.

Sam – Sorry...?

Folco – That was the name of the legendary bull. How many cows or pigs do you know with statues in their honour?

Fred – None...

Folco – So you see, madam, we respect animals here. I'd even say we revere them.

Folco leaves.

Fred – I forgot to ask him why flamingos are pink.

Sam – Just as well. He was getting rather severe for someone who says he reveres animals... Shall we go for a bike ride?

Fred – Yes... He does have a point, though. It's so flat round here. I wonder if we really needed to hire electric bikes...

Scene 3

Marius enters, looking like a young playboy. Both women are visibly excited.

Marius – Hello, ladies!

Sam – Hello, young man.

Marius – I'm Fanny's brother.

Fred – Really? She didn't mention she had a younger brother.

Marius – I work with the horses at the neighbouring ranch, with my father. If you ever fancy going for a ride...

Sam – Oh, yes... I suddenly find horse riding very appealing.

Fred – I'm almost tempted to be the horse myself...

Marius – I see you're a photographer. A horse is actually the best way to get close to the birds without scaring them.

Sam – I'm sure it is. We'll definitely come and see you, won't we, Fred?

Fred – With pleasure...

Marius – Have either of you ridden before?

Sam – Actually, no. Normally I'm against exploiting animals, but... one shouldn't be too dogmatic.

Marius – Our horses are treated very well. You'll see.

Fred – I'm sure they are.

Marius – I can also take you out on a boat, or give you an introduction to water sports...

Sam – Water sports... Now that could be interesting too, couldn't it, Fred?

Fred – Provided we start gently. We haven't had much practice lately...

Sam – As for you... All that sport and fresh air must be what gives you that healthy complexion and athletic figure.

Marius – I'm a volunteer firefighter as well.

Fred – Of course you are...

Sam – With that physique, you could be a model, I'm sure...

Fred – Or sing in a Camargue boy band.

Sam – Have you ever thought of going into films?

Marius – Actually, a friend talked me into entering the Mister Camargue contest.

Sam – Mister Camargue?

Marius – Like Miss Camargue, only for men.

Fred – Obviously...

Sam – When is it?

Marius – Saturday night. In the bullring.

Fred – Personally, I'd give you the full bullfighter's prize: both ears and the tail...

Marius – Then come along! Anyone can vote, you know.

Sam – Normally we don't go anywhere near bullrings...

Fred – Or beauty contests...

Sam – But perhaps we could make an exception.

Marius – See you soon, then!

Marius leaves.

Fred – He really does look as though he's stepped out of a firefighters' calendar, doesn't he?

Sam – He certainly makes me want to vote for him.

Fred – Hang on. We haven't seen the other candidates yet.

Sam and Fred leave.

Scene 4

Patrick and Christelle enter, dressed for the beach. Folco returns.

Folco – Good afternoon. Have you had a nice day?

Patrick – We tried to go swimming, but the water was freezing!

Christelle – Are you sure this is the Mediterranean? It's even colder than Brittany!

Folco – That's the mistral. It pushes the warm surface water out to sea.

Patrick – How much longer is this mistral going to last?

Folco – It should ease off this evening.

Patrick – Actually, I think it's already calming down.

Christelle – Yes, but the mosquitoes are back.

Patrick – Doesn't the local council do anything about mosquitoes?

Folco – Oh, yes. Every year we have an aerial spraying campaign.

Christelle – Aerial?

Folco – With helicopters. We drop napalm over the rice fields to the music of Wagner. You have to see it once in your life. Quite a spectacle, I assure you.

He leaves. Patrick and Christelle exchange baffled looks.

Patrick – Did you know they use napalm on mosquitoes in the Camargue?

Christelle – No...

Patrick – That probably explains why nothing much grows round here.

Patrick and Christelle leave.

Scene 5

Fanny returns with Sara.

Fanny – It's a disaster! The boiler's just broken down! There's no hot water anywhere in the hotel.

Sara – Have you asked your husband to take a look?

Fanny – Romain? Before we opened this place, he worked in the vehicle registration office at the Drôme prefecture. I wouldn't trust him to change a light bulb without electrocuting himself.

Sara – I don't know... Haven't you got a plumber?

Fanny – Yes, but he's stuck on a job in Marseille. You don't happen to know one, do you?

Sara – I've got a cousin who's quite handy with tools. I could ask him to pop round.

Fanny – Fine.

Romain enters.

Romain – I'm afraid bad news never comes alone...

Fanny – What now?

Romain – The petrol station just across the road has had a delivery.

Fanny – No hot water in our taps, diesel back at the pumps... If only we could swap the pipes! All our guests are going to leave! They only stayed because they couldn't get enough fuel to drive away...

Romain – We have to find something that'll make them want to stay.

Fanny – It's not as though we're short of things to do round here.

Romain – Yes, but with these strikes, people aren't going on holiday. Once these stranded travellers have gone, the hotel will be empty.

Sara – Yeah... It would take a miracle to save the season.

Fanny – Thanks for cheering us up. Have you got an idea?

Sara – I could light a candle in the church and ask Sara the Black for help.

Romain – Thank you. I feel much better already.

A pause.

Fanny – We could organise a musical evening. *(To Sara.)* You don't know any local musicians, do you?

Sara – I've got a cousin who sings flamenco, but unfortunately he's stuck in Marseille too, like your plumber.

Fanny – On a building site?

Sara – No... In Les Baumettes prison.

Fanny – Was his singing really that bad?

Sara – It's a bit complicated...

Romain – Well, unless we can spring him from jail...

Blackout.

Act 4

Scene 1

Victor and Diane are sitting at a table, having breakfast. Patrick and Christelle enter.

Patrick – Morning, everyone. Enjoy your breakfast!

Victor – Thank you, that's very kind.

Diane – Did you sleep well?

Christelle – Not bad... Getting up was a bit of a shock, though. No hot water! And it's still quite chilly in the mornings.

Diane – Indeed, we had to take cold showers too. Supposedly they firm up ageing skin, but still...

Victor – At least we can set off for the Luberon now. The petrol station's had a delivery.

Patrick – And we'll get back on the road to Spain.

Diane – Mind you, it's rather nice here.

Patrick – Yeah... I went fishing yesterday and caught two cod. Gave them to the landlady. What was I supposed to do with a couple of cold fish in a hotel bedroom?

Victor – Are you sure they were cod? Cod usually live in northern seas, don't they? I rather doubt you'd find them in the Mediterranean...

Diane – Well, the water was so icy yesterday, I wouldn't be surprised if a few cod had come down here for their holidays...

Christelle – Anyway, you made a new friend.

Patrick – He lives in Montreuil too, just two streets from us. Comes here every summer in his camper van.

Christelle – Meanwhile, I topped up my all-over tan. Did we tell you there's a nudist beach a little farther along?

Diane – A nudist beach? Good heavens...

Patrick – If you fancy it, you could come with us tomorrow...

Victor – Well, I don't know... *(To Diane.)* What do you think, my dear?

Diane, embarrassed, says nothing.

Christelle – The sea was even colder than our shower, but... there were flamingos in the lagoons and horses on the beach. It was gorgeous.

Patrick – What did you get up to?

Victor – We visited the ornithological park.

Christelle – The what park? What's in it?

Diane – Birds. It's a bird sanctuary, really.

Patrick – There are birds everywhere round here, aren't there? Even in the lagoon behind the swimming pool. No need to go to a museum to see them.

Diane – Yes, but there you can get closer. And each species has its name on a little sign.

Christelle – Are they stuffed?

Victor – No, they're alive! There are signs by the places where you can see them.

Patrick – So they're in cages?

Diane – No, they roam free.

Christelle – But if they fly away, they won't be next to their signs any more.

Victor – No, that's quite true.

Patrick – And if they're not shut in, they can even leave the museum, can't they?

Diane – Yes, I suppose they can.

Christelle – What a funny sort of museum! Imagine the Louvre, with the Mona Lisa popping out for a stroll round Paris with the Venus de Milo!

Patrick – We ended the day at a paella restaurant. There were Gitans playing flamenco. Really authentic. Wasn't it, Christelle?

Christelle – Oh, yes. And a jug of sangria to wash it all down. We had a brilliant evening.

Patrick – Makes you wonder why we drive all that way to Spain. The Camargue's got bullrings and bulls, sangria and paella, flamenco and Gitans...

Christelle – I didn't know there were Gitans in the Camargue.

Scene 2

Folco enters with Fanny.

Patrick – Ah, here's Folco. He'll be able to tell us...

Christelle – He knows everything about the history of the Camargue. You only have to ask.

Patrick – Tell me, Folco, are there many Gitans round here?

Folco – Depends on the season. The Gitans, the flamingos, the tourists... They're all travellers. Though some have settled down here permanently.

Fanny – The Camargue has always welcomed outsiders, you know. It's deeply rooted in its history and traditions, but it's also open to the modern world.

Folco – Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer is the capital of the Camargue... and of everyone who refuses to see borders as barriers.

Fanny – Twice a year, Romani pilgrims from all over Europe come here to honour Sara the Black, their patron saint. It's something you really must see.

Christelle – We'll have to come back for that, won't we, Patrick?

Diane – Yes, so must we. Mustn't we, Victor? It sounds terribly picturesque...

Fanny – I'm so sorry about the hot water. The boiler's broken down, but we're trying to get it fixed as soon as possible.

Sara enters with Paco, a handsome, dark-haired man with a distinctly Mediterranean look.

Sara – This is Paco, the cousin I told you about.

Fanny – Good morning. So... you're a plumber?

Paco – Among other things, yes...

Sara – Paco's entering the Mister Camargue contest on Saturday, at the bullring.

Fanny – Oh, really? That I can believe. But... haven't you brought any tools?

Paco – I work by ear.

Fanny – By ear?

Sara – It's a gift. He can tell what's wrong with a car just by listening to the engine. Boilers can't be that different.

Fanny – Well, I'll leave you to have a look. Or rather... a listen.

Sara and Paco leave. Romain enters.

Romain – Who's the Latin lover?

Fanny – The man who whispers to boilers...

Romain – What?

Fanny – Sara's cousin. I'll explain later.

Romain – He looks more like a flamenco singer than a heating engineer, but never mind...

Patrick – Wasn't he the bloke singing at that restaurant last night?

Christelle – Oh yes, could be...

Fanny – So, what are you all doing today?

Victor – We'll start by packing. Our friends are expecting us for lunch in Lourmarin.

Romain – You're leaving us already?

Diane – I'm afraid so. But we will come back, I promise.

Victor and Diane leave. Sam and Fred enter.

Fanny – And you, ladies? I hope you're staying a few more days?

Sam – We'd love to, but we have to catch the train in Arles tomorrow to go back to Paris.

Fanny is close to tears.

Fanny – So everyone's leaving... It's silly, I know, but you're our very first guests, and I've already grown quite fond of you.

Romain – You'll have to get used to it, darling. We opened a hotel, not a care home. If you cry every time a guest leaves...

Fred – We'll be back! Won't we, Sam?

Sam – Of course...

Fred – Meanwhile, we're going to make the most of our last day.

Sam – We've arranged a horse ride with Marius.

Fred – And tonight we're going to the bullring to vote for Mister Camargue.

Fanny – Oh, really? Have you decided who'll get your votes?

Sam – Your brother is a very handsome young man...

Paco and Sara return.

Fred – Although this one's not bad either...

Fanny *(catching sight of Paco)* – Already?

Sara – I told you, he's got a gift. It runs in the family...

Romain – Well? What's the verdict?

Paco – If it goes tick-tick, it's an electrical fault. If it goes gurgle-gurgle, it's something in the water pipes.

Fanny – And this one?

Paco – It goes knock-knock.

Romain – Is it serious, doctor?

Paco – Knock-knock usually means trouble with the carburettor.

Romain – The carburettor? I didn't know gas boilers had carburettors...

Fanny – But can you repair it?

Paco – I don't repair boilers. Cars are more my line of work.

Sara – Second-hand cars, mainly.

Fanny sinks into a chair.

Fanny – We've spent months preparing to open this hotel... And now the boiler's let us down. Without hot water, the season's ruined! All our guests are leaving! Where are we going to find a plumber?

Fanny bursts into tears.

Christelle – There, there, love. Don't cry like that...

Fanny – Sorry. It's just my nerves...

Christelle – You've got trouble with your boiler, is that it?

Romain – It suddenly stopped working at midnight last night.

Christelle – Patrick! Don't just stand there. Do something!

Patrick – All right, I'll have a look.

Christelle – My husband's a plumber and heating engineer.

Fanny – No! You're a gift from heaven! Can I show you where the boiler room is?

Fanny and Romain leave with Patrick and Christelle. The others go out too.

Scene 3

Marius enters. He takes a car key from his pocket and presses it to unlock the doors. From nearby comes the spluttering noise of an old car repeatedly failing to start. Marius looks curiously towards the sound. A car door slams. Paco enters. The two men size each other up. Paco glances towards Marius's car.

Paco – What kind of car is that?

Marius – Mercedes.

Paco – Oh, yeah? Didn't see the star on the bonnet...

Marius – Someone stole it. At first I kept replacing it. Then I gave up. They pinch it every time.

Paco – Putting stars on cars... Only the Germans would think of that.

Marius – I wonder what they do with them all.

Paco – With what?

Marius – My stars! Must be collecting them.

Paco – On the other hand, better they take the star and leave the car. Mine didn't have a star, and someone stole the whole thing anyway. So I bought this one. Second-hand... *(A pause.)* Happy with yours?

Marius – It's solid.

Paco – Not much to look at.

Marius – It's German.

Paco – Good make.

Marius – Mercedes.

Paco – Yeah.

Marius – You know what you're buying.

Paco – And you know what you've got.

Marius – German quality. *(A pause.)* What's yours?

Paco – Never did find out.

Marius – What?

Paco – The bloke who sold it to me said it was a Renault. There wasn't a badge on it. But the garage says it isn't.

Marius – So what is it?

Paco – They don't know.

Marius – Bloody hell!

Paco – It runs all right, though. Just needs an oil change now and then. Which is lucky, because finding spare parts for a car when you don't know the make...

Marius – Right...

Paco – Yeah. A car of unknown parentage, really. They reckon it might have been built somewhere in Eastern Europe. Or China. By a manufacturer that's since disappeared. Or changed its name.

Marius – But what does it say on the registration document?

Paco – I registered it as a Renault.

Marius – You had to give it a name, I suppose...

Paco – An official identity, so to speak.

Marius – You give a name to a baby abandoned in the street. Why not to a car?

Paco – Everything else is legal, mind. It is a car. I mean, it has wheels and it moves. It's just that nobody knows who made it.

Marius – How old is it?

Paco – Don't really know that either. Thirty years, perhaps. It was definitely around before the Wall came down.

Marius – What wall?

Paco – That's the thing. We don't know. The Berlin Wall, maybe. Or the Great Wall of China. Take your pick.

Marius – The Great Wall of China came down?

Paco – We'd need carbon dating. Take a sample straight from the exhaust pipe.

Marius – I take it there's no catalytic converter...

Paco – No seat belts either, as you can imagine. But because it qualifies as a classic car, I'm still allowed to drive it. Otherwise it's a good car. Most of the time. At the moment, of course, it won't start...

Marius – Classic cars can be temperamental... What does it run on? When it runs, I mean.

Paco – I put domestic heating oil in it, the stuff you use in boilers. Might run on something else. I've never tried.

Marius – I see...

Paco – And are you absolutely sure yours is a Mercedes? *(Marius gives him an uneasy look.)* I only ask because there's no star...

Marius – Well, I'd better be going.

Paco notices the sign bearing the hotel's name.

Paco – Pink Flamingos... Funny name for a hotel. Is it run by Belgians?

Marius – Belgians?

Paco – Well, the Flemings are Belgian, aren't they? I thought that sign said 'Pink Flemings'.

Marius – Oh, right... The Flemings...

Paco – Still, why would the Flemings be pink...?

Marius *(dryly)* – Maybe it's a Belgian hotel... that happens to be gay-friendly.

Paco – Yeah...

Marius – Belgians are funny birds too...

Paco – Migratory ones.

Marius – Except they migrate to the Camargue in summer.

He prepares to leave.

Paco – Could you help me push it?

Marius – Push what?

Paco – My car! It won't start.

Marius *(reluctantly)* – All right...

They go out.

Scene 4

Sam returns and watches the flamingos through binoculars. Fred enters, then Folco.

Fred – Ah, Folco... There's something I've been meaning to ask you.

Folco – Yes...?

Fred – Do you know why flamingos are pink?

Folco – If it's another joke, like the one about why they sleep on one leg, I must admit I don't know the answer. But I'd be interested to hear it.

Fred – Er... No, it's not a joke.

Folco – Oh. I thought as much...

Fred – So?

Folco – Flamingos are pink because they eat tiny shrimps containing a red pigment.

Fred – Really? Did you hear that, Sam? *(But Sam is absorbed in her birdwatching.)* It's a bit like us taking carotene tablets to give our skin a healthy glow.

A pause.

Sam – That's odd. I haven't smoked anything this morning...

Fred – What?

Sam hands her the binoculars.

Sam – Look! Don't you notice anything?

Fred – No...

Sam – The flamingos! They're blue!

Fred – Oh, wow... They really are! *(She hands the binoculars to Folco.)* Can you see them in blue too?

Folco looks through the binoculars.

Folco – Yes...

Sam – We can't all three be colour-blind.

Fred – Perhaps the females are pink and the males are blue.

Sam – There must be a scientific explanation.

Folco – Yeah...

Fred – Maybe they've been eating blue shrimps.

Sam – That wouldn't explain why the shrimps had turned blue...

Folco – Or perhaps it's a miracle of Sara the Black.

The women turn to Folco.

Fred – Sara the Black?

Folco – The patron saint of the Gitans, the Romani community who come here on pilgrimage.

Sam glances at the front page of La Provence.

Sam – Oh, look! It's in La Provence... Blue flamingos appeared out of nowhere in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer this weekend!

Folco picks up the newspaper and scans the article.

Folco – Says curious visitors are coming from everywhere. *(He puts down the paper.)* At this rate it'll be Woodstock here in three days...

Fred – Blue flamingos... It's not as if the Virgin Mary has appeared before us.

Sam – It's still extraordinary. Must be climate change.

Fred – Or somebody's staged the whole thing...

Sam – Staged it?

Fred – Fake miracles to attract tourists. It's been done before, hasn't it?

Sam – So you think Bernadette Soubirous saw the Virgin Mary on the Lourdes tourist office's payroll?

Sam and Fred leave. Folco exits too.

Scene 5

Patrick returns with Fanny and Romain.

Fanny – Can you do anything about it?

Patrick – It's just a blown fuse. Mind you, your electrics are pretty ancient.

Romain – So?

Patrick – I replaced the fuse, and the boiler started up again.

Fanny – It's a miracle! Can I kiss you?

She kisses him while Romain glances at the newspaper.

Romain – Speaking of miracles, have you seen the paper?

Fanny – As if I've got time to read the paper...

Romain – You should have a look all the same.

He offers her the newspaper, but the telephone rings at that moment. She answers.

Fanny – Pink Flamingos, hello... A booking? Of course! For how many people? Eight?

Patrick *(to Romain)* – Looks like business is picking up...

Blackout.

Act 5

Scene 1

A silent, surreal scene. Music reminiscent of the Western Once Upon a Time in the West. Marius enters first, dressed as a cowboy with pistols at his hips. Paco enters in similar attire. They both move in slow motion, then stop and face each other as if about to fight a Western-style duel. Blackout. The music stops. Two gunshots ring out. A short musical interlude plays in the darkness while the whole cast takes their places for the final scene.

Scene 2

The lights come up on a farewell party attended by all the characters. A small band, made up according to the performers' talents (or with musicians who have had no acting roles in the play), plays a tango. Alternatively, recorded music may be used. Some couples are dancing, but they are not the original couples. Victor is dancing with Christelle, and Patrick with Diane, making the class contrast all the more striking. Patrick, in particular, holds Diane firmly, which she seems to enjoy. Marius and Paco are each wearing a 'Mister Camargue' sash. Fanny and Romain watch the dancers. The music is turned down whenever someone speaks.

Fanny – In the end, they all stayed...

Romain – And the chemistry seems to be working...

Fanny – This little party was a good idea. A way to celebrate the start of our rather chaotic season.

Romain – While we wait for all the new guests who are flocking here to see our blue flamingos.

Fanny – We're fully booked for the next three weeks already.

Romain – Another miracle we can thank Sara for...

Fanny – Yes... But which one should we thank?

Romain – The one whose statue is in the crypt of our church, or the one we hired to answer the phone?

They exchange a friendly wave with Sara.

Fanny – I think we should rename the hotel Blue Flamingos...

Romain – At least we can be sure no other hotel will have the same name.

The dancing continues.

Sam – Who did you vote for?

Fred – Marius. What about you?

Sam – I ended up voting for Paco.

Fred – No wonder it was a tie.

Sam – He's gorgeous too...

Fred – Look at that bottom...

Sam – I think we're turning into a couple of sexist pigs...

Fred – I think so too...

Sam – What's the female equivalent of 'macho'?

Fred – 'Macha'?

The dancing continues.

Diane – Good heavens, Patrick, you're a wonderful dancer... My husband hasn't swept me off my feet like this for years... I'm quite dizzy!

Patrick – We'll have to do it again next year...

Victor dances with Christelle in a far more restrained manner.

Victor – This little impromptu gathering is utterly charming. We should do it more often.

Christelle – Come over to our place for drinks some time. Montreuil isn't all that far from the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris. As the crow flies...

Sam and Fred watch the dancers while sipping glasses of rosé.

Sam – This rosé really is dreadful...

Fred – Yeah... But it's organic.

Sam – Who cares what comes out of the bottle, as long as it gets us drunk?

Marius approaches Fred.

Marius – Would you like to dance?

Fred – I'd love to, but I don't know how to tango.

Marius – I'll teach you. It's easy. You just have to let me lead.

Fred – In that case, I surrender myself entirely to your arms...

Marius and Fred go off to dance, as do Romain and Fanny, while the two other couples return to their seats. Paco approaches Sam.

Paco – May I have this dance?

Sam – Let me check my dance card... *(She pretends to look at the screen of her phone.)* Yes, I believe I've got a free slot.

Paco and Sam go off to dance.

Victor – These are the best holidays we've had in ages, wouldn't you agree, my dear?

Diane – At least we're not bored shitless like we are in the Luberon...

Victor – Mind your language, Baroness. I fear our new friends from Montreuil are having a bad influence on you...

They laugh. Folco approaches.

Christelle – After all, the Camargue is every bit as good as Spain.

Patrick – And a lot closer.

Christelle – We'll come back to Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer next year.

Folco – You'll be most welcome. Here in the Camargue we're proud of our pink flamingos. But even blue flamingos are welcome, as long as they love our region and respect its traditions.

Sara turns over the sign above the counter, revealing the words 'Blue Flamingos' on the other side.

The party goes on.

Fade to black.

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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