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Just a Moment Before the End of the World

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Translation by the author

Three strangers are summoned to serve on a jury. Or so they have been told. But the place where they have been brought together is not a courtroom. They discover that they must decide how to deal with the consequences of an unavoidable catastrophe about to strike the world. Opinions clash, and unexpected developments keep changing the terms of the debate. Throughout this immersive performance, the audience will also be asked to give its views and help guide the jury towards the best possible decision in the worst imaginable circumstances.

Cast

Fred: Primary-school teacher
Max: Waiter
Alex: Musician
Sam: Adviser

All four roles may be played by either men or women, with the necessary adjustments to pronouns and forms of address.
In this version, Max and Sam are men, while Alex and Fred are women.

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ACT ONE

The stage is bare apart from three chairs, a table and a fridge. Max enters wearing a white surgical mask and a black blindfold. Sam guides him. Max comes from a working-class background and dresses accordingly. Sam is dressed in black and may wear dark glasses. Under his jacket he carries a holstered pistol, which is not yet visible.

Max – Are we there yet?

Sam – Sit down here, please.

Sam helps Max into a chair.

Max – What's the blindfold for, exactly?

Sam – You can take it off now.

Max – And the mask?

Sam – That too.

Max removes his blindfold and mask.

Max – What the hell is all this about?

Sam – Don't worry. You'll find out soon enough.

Max – Don't worry? How am I supposed not to worry? I get an official summons telling me I've been chosen at random for jury duty. I report to the police station, somebody blindfolds me, bundles me into a van and brings me here without a word of explanation. Where are we, anyway?

Sam – If we went to the trouble of blindfolding you, it would hardly make sense to tell you where you are now, would it?

Max looks around.

Max – Doesn't look much like a courthouse... *(Lowering his voice and indicating the audience.)* And who are all these people? Spectators at the trial?

Sam – I'll explain when the others get here.

Max – The others? The rest of the jury, you mean?

Sam – That's right. The rest of the jury.

Max – And how many of us are there supposed to be?

Sam's phone rings.

Sam – Excuse me... *(Into the phone.)* Sam speaking... Right... OK, I'm coming. *(He puts his phone away.)* I'll leave you for a moment. If you're thirsty, there are cold drinks in the fridge.

Max – Thanks...

Sam exits. Max looks around again, walks about the stage, and studies the audience. After a moment's hesitation, he opens the fridge, peers inside, takes out a can of beer, opens it and drinks. He likes it. Then he approaches the audience and addresses someone directly.

Max – Do you know why we're here?

If the spectator answers, Max improvises briefly to bring the exchange to a close. Sam returns with Fred and Alex, both blindfolded and wearing surgical masks. Fred is rather elegantly dressed; Alex looks like a rock musician.

Sam – Here we are. You can remove your blindfolds.

Alex – About time.

Fred – And the masks? We can hardly breathe.

Sam – Those too.

Alex – I hope there isn't a firing squad waiting for us when we open our eyes.

Fred – Or a birthday cake. This could all be a practical joke.

Sam – I assure you, it isn't a joke.

Fred – It's not even my birthday.

They take off their blindfolds, blink in the light and look around. Then they remove their masks.

Alex – Where are we?

Fred – Is this the courthouse? The audience is already here.

Alex – We're not the ones on trial, are we?

Max is still holding his beer.

Max – Why would we be? I haven't done anything!

Sam – You're not accused of anything, don't worry. And you're not the ones on trial.

Fred – Then who are we supposed to judge?

Alex – Terrorists? Is that why you've taken all these precautions?

Max – Hang on! I didn't sign up for anything like that. I want to stay alive.

Sam – We're not putting anyone on trial.

Fred – So what are we doing here?

Alex – We were told we'd been selected for a criminal jury.

Sam – You were told you'd be on a jury. Nobody said it was a criminal trial.

Fred – Then what sort of jury is it?

Max – Not the judges at a beauty contest, I suppose.

Sam's phone rings again. He answers.

Sam – Sam speaking... Yes... All right, I'll be there. *(Putting away his phone.)* Excuse me. I'll be right back.

He leaves. The others eye one another warily, then examine the room.

Fred – It's a bit grubby for a courthouse, isn't it?

Max – I wouldn't know. I've never actually been inside a courthouse. Have you?

Fred – No.

Alex – Did you find anything to drink?

Max – In the minibar. Help yourself.

Alex – I think I'll wait until I know what the room-service charges are.

Max – You think they're going to charge us?

Alex – I'm just being careful.

Fred – You got here first. Have you been waiting long?

Max – Five minutes, tops. So I know as little as you do.

Fred – Right.

Alex – They've even taken our phones. We're completely cut off.

Fred – If someone had told me this morning, when I left home, that I'd end up in a place like this...

Max – Where are you from, then?

They exchange another wary glance.

Alex – The question isn't where we come from. It's where we are.

Fred – And why we're here.

Max – They say our names were drawn at random.

Alex – Yes... For jury duty. But he just told us we're not here to judge anyone. So we've got good reason not to believe everything we're told.

Fred takes a piece of paper from her pocket and reads it.

Fred – Actually, the summons doesn't specifically say it's for a criminal trial.

Max – No, but that's what we all thought.

Fred – Official government letterhead, instructions to report to the police and serve on a jury. Who wouldn't assume it was a trial?

Max – And a criminal jury has more than three people on it, doesn't it?

Alex – About twelve, I think.

Fred – Of course. Like in that film.

Max – What film?

Alex – Twelve Angry Men.

Fred – That's it. They have to decide whether an innocent boy accused of murder should be sentenced to death.

Max – Never seen it.

Alex – And wouldn't you know it, the accused is Black.

Fred – No. He's just a poor eighteen-year-old boy.

Max – Would you have convicted him?

Fred – How could I say without hearing the evidence?

Max – Personally, I'm all for the death penalty.

Alex – Even for innocent people?

Max – Innocent? Ask anyone in prison and they'll tell you they're innocent.

Alex – This is going to be fun.

An uncomfortable silence.

Max – Are you sure there were twelve?

Fred – Perhaps more people are still coming.

Alex – You heard him. He said it wasn't a trial.

Max – Then what is it?

Fred *(in a low voice, pointing at the audience)* – And do they know what we're doing here?

Max – I asked. They don't seem to know either.

Fred – Then all we can do is wait... *(A pause.)* If we're going to be together for a while, we might as well introduce ourselves. I'm Fred. And you?

Max – Max.

Alex – Alex.

Another awkward silence.

Fred – Actually, I am thirsty now. Would anyone like a drink?

Alex – No, thanks.

Fred opens the fridge and takes a can.

Max – I hope they don't keep us long. I've got a living to earn. And if I don't work, I don't get paid.

Alex – What do you do?

Max – I'm a waiter. At a restaurant. We're already banned from opening in the evenings. What about you?

Alex – I'm a musician.

Max – Ah. Right.

Alex – What's that supposed to mean?

Max – Can't be easy for you either.

Alex – No.

Max – Haven't been any concerts for ages.

Alex – We're trying to record an album and release it online.

Max – I see. And you?

Fred – I teach young children.

Max – We're all in the same bloody mess, then. Just try teaching children through a mask.

Fred – Yeah...

Max – It can't be easy. Especially when you need to yell at them. Don't you ever feel as though you're wearing a muzzle?

Fred – A little, yes.

Max – Waiter, teacher, musician... Strange, isn't it? We used to do such different jobs. Now we're all in the same boat.

Alex – Weren't we already?

Max – What?

Alex – In the same boat.

Max – Yeah. Except now we have to wear a mask before we're allowed to row.

Alex – And once we've finished rowing, the curfew sends us straight home till morning. Work, home, sleep, repeat. Teachers aren't the only ones being muzzled.

Max – No more hanging about in the pub chatting with friends.

Alex – Or standing outside your house chatting to the neighbours.

Max – Evenings were when we did most of our business. Our takings have halved. And as for tips...

Fred – It's not the end of the world. We have to do something to stop the spread.

Alex – No, it's not the end of the world. It's the end of a world. And I'm not sure I want to live in the one they're imposing on us in the name of keeping us safe.

Fred – Unless you've got another solution.

Alex – Stop living so you don't die? Is that your solution?

Max – Well, right now we're being held hostage, we don't even know where, and nobody back home knows where we are.

Fred – Are you married?

Max – No, but I could be. You?

Fred – No.

Alex – None of us is married. At least we've found one thing in common.

Fred – Maybe that's why they picked us.

Max – So there'd be no spouses to worry about us disappearing?

Alex – I thought we were picked at random.

A pause.

Fred – I have a cat.

Alex – Sorry?

Fred – There's a cat waiting for me at home.

Alex – Are you afraid it'll be worried?

Max – Cats don't care, as long as you feed them.

Fred – That's the point. I've only left enough food for a day or two. I wasn't expecting to be kept here for days on end. I haven't even brought a toothbrush.

Alex – You think we're going to spend the night here?

A pause.

Max – That's it. I've had enough. I'm leaving.

Fred – I'm not sure we're allowed to.

Alex – Allowed to?

Max – I'm going outside for a cigarette. And I'll try to find out where we are.

He walks offstage.

Alex – What do you think?

Fred – He said he'd be back, didn't he?

Alex – Oh, yes... Sam.

Fred – Sam?

Alex – The policeman! The man who brought us here. That's his name, isn't it? I heard him say 'Sam' on the phone.

Fred – Oh. Perhaps.

Alex – Probably not his real name, anyway.

Fred – You think he's a policeman?

Alex – I hope so. Because if he isn't...

Fred – You mean we might have been kidnapped?

Alex – I don't know.

Fred – But why would anyone kidnap us?

Alex – Maybe he's with the national security service, or something like that.

Fred – Sooner or later they'll have to tell us why we're here and what they want.

Alex – Yes... Probably.

Max returns.

Fred – Well?

Max – We're locked in.

Alex – What?

Max – There's one door. It's locked. And it's reinforced.

Alex – So that settles it. We're prisoners.

They take a moment to absorb this.

Fred – Perhaps it's for our protection.

Max – Protection from what?

Fred – I don't know.

Sam returns.

Sam – Right. We can begin.

Alex – Why don't you start by telling us why we're locked in?

Sam – I'll explain everything, but first let me introduce myself. My name is Sam, and I'm a special adviser to the President.

Fred – The President? You mean the judge presiding over the trial?

Sam – No. The President. The President of this country.

They are all stunned.

Max – The President of the country?

Sam – I'm one of the President's special advisers. There are quite a few, as you can imagine.

Alex – What on earth is going on?

Fred – It must be a joke.

Sam – It's no joke. If you'll let me speak, I'll explain everything.

Max – I tried to leave. The door was locked. Why don't you start with that?

Alex – Are you holding us prisoner? Because if you are, that's illegal and I demand a lawyer.

Sam – Just a little patience. We have an important matter to discuss. And in the meantime, yes, nobody is to leave this room.

Alex – And what if I decide to go anyway?

She takes a step forward.

Sam – I wouldn't advise it.

His tone leaves no room for argument. He moves his jacket aside, deliberately revealing for the first time the pistol at his belt.

Fred – You're armed?

Alex – Are you threatening us?

Sam – Yes, I carry a weapon. Primarily for your protection.

Max – Of course. To protect us from ourselves. We've heard that one before.

Sam's phone rings again.

Sam – Excuse me. *(Into the phone.)* No, everything's fine... I have it under control, I assure you... Yes, of course... Certainly.

He exits.

Alex – I bet we're being filmed.

Fred – You mean a film? A hidden-camera show or something?

Alex – Security cameras! Didn't you see? The moment I threatened to leave, someone offered him reinforcements.

Silence.

Fred – An adviser to the President...

Max – Unbelievable.

Alex – If he's telling the truth, this is a matter of state security. We could be in the hands of some unofficial police unit operating completely outside the law.

Max – What's any of that got to do with us? We're not terrorists! Well, I'm not, anyway.

Fred – This is a nightmare. We'll wake up soon.

Alex – Some nightmares are better than waking up.

Max – What's that supposed to mean?

Alex – What does a condemned prisoner dream about on the night before an execution? Even if it's a nightmare, wouldn't they rather go on sleeping than wake up in a cell and hear the executioner sharpening the guillotine next door?

Fred – Thanks for cheering us up.

Alex – Sorry. I'm not naturally optimistic.

Max – We'd noticed.

Alex – But don't you think the world we live in is already a nightmare?

Fred – That's going a bit far.

Alex – Easy to say when you're relatively privileged, as we are. What if you lived in a war zone, somewhere like Gaza or Iraq?

Fred – Life certainly isn't easy for everyone.

Alex – Even here, you're better off in a wealthy neighbourhood than a deprived suburb, aren't you?

Max – And even if you don't live in a deprived area, just look at what's happening. Things aren't what they used to be.

Alex – It happened so gradually we barely noticed. But look back ten years...

Max – You're not wrong there. All the foreigners we've taken in. Political refugees, people escaping poverty, climate refugees... And then we're surprised when new diseases arrive here too.

Alex – Those aren't the diseases I'm talking about. I mean the creeping dictatorship that's being forced on us. In ten or twenty years, young people will never have known anything else. They'll think we're the mad ones.

Fred – Forgive me for asking, but... has anyone here done anything wrong?

Alex – Here we go.

Fred – We're being detained against our will. It looks like an arrest. There must be some reason for it.

Max – And you, naturally, are completely innocent.

Fred – Apart from a couple of speeding tickets years ago, yes. Maybe it's a mistake.

Max – Of course. A miscarriage of justice. In your case, naturally. But you want to know what the rest of us have done.

Fred – Or perhaps it's something to do with terrorism. Those investigations can be very murky. Sometimes the authorities bend the law.

Alex – This is straight out of Kafka! Arrested without a reason, and soon we'll have to work out for ourselves what we're supposed to be guilty of.

Fred – We'll find out soon enough, I suppose.

Sam returns.

Sam – Before I begin, I should warn you. What I'm about to say will be difficult to hear. Even harder to believe. But it's the truth.

Max – We've been here quite a while, and we'd really like to go home, so could you spare us the build-up?

Sam – I understand your impatience. So I'll come straight to the point. What I have to announce is... the end of the world.

The other three freeze.

Blackout.

ACT TWO

Alex, Fred and Max are stunned, torn between disbelief and fear. Sam remains impassive.

Max – The end of the world?

Alex – That's exactly what we were saying before you came in. You won't believe this either, but the world we loved disappeared a long time ago.

Max – Half the population is out of work, and people will accept anything for a miserable wage.

Alex – People die in hospitals because we're told there aren't enough beds. Instead of building more hospitals, they spend more on the police and the military.

Fred – All right, but that's hardly the end of the world. It's for our own good. And it's only temporary, isn't it?

Max – Temporary for more than ten years? I'd call that permanent.

Alex – The state of emergency has become normal. The curfew never ends. Civil liberties have been suspended one by one.

Max – You can't even get drunk with friends in a bar to forget your troubles.

Fred – Sam, is that what you mean by the end of the world?

Sam – No, I'm afraid not. I mean the total destruction of our planet.

Alex – Total destruction? You mean a nuclear war?

Sam – Not a nuclear war.

Fred – Then what? Pollution? Global warming? Rising sea levels?

Max – They've been talking about all that for years. It's not happening tomorrow, is it? Is that why you've dragged us here blindfolded?

Sam – I'm not talking about a gradual deterioration of life on Earth. I mean the end of life itself, in the very near future.

Silence.

Fred – Explain.

Sam – Every year, thousands of objects of various sizes collide with our planet. Most are small enough to burn up completely in the atmosphere. Larger ones may cause minor damage. But others are big enough to cause a major catastrophe.

Fred – Surely that would take an enormous asteroid hitting Earth?

Sam – Unfortunately, no. Once you're dealing with something a few hundred metres across, the end of life on Earth becomes a certainty rather than a possibility.

Silence.

Alex – So?

Sam – Several years ago, scientists detected a huge asteroid heading straight towards Earth. They've refined their calculations as it approached. A collision is now inevitable.

Fred – How huge?

Sam – A thousand kilometres in diameter.

Silence.

Max – Can't we do something? Send up a nuclear missile and blow it to pieces?

Fred – Or use a laser to nudge it off course?

Sam – Perhaps in a science-fiction film. Or with a much smaller object, up to a kilometre across, though even that would be unprecedented. But we're talking about something monstrous, almost the size of a country. Nothing we have could change its course even slightly.

Silence.

Max – You're joking.

Sam – I wish I were. I have a family too. A wife. Children. I'm frightened of losing them. I'm frightened of dying, just like you.

Fred – But how can nobody have heard about it until today? Something like that can't be kept secret. Surely the news would have got out.

Alex – The news? Have you forgotten we gave up freedom of the press years ago? They've brought back censorship and even a Ministry of Information, as if we were living under an old dictatorship.

Sam – Precisely because of the inevitable consequences, governments around the world instructed their scientists to say nothing, to prevent panic.

Fred – And they all agreed?

Sam – Those who didn't were made to.

Max – You mean they were put in prison?

Alex – Or executed.

Sam – Most understood there was no point frightening everyone when nothing could be done.

Max – I seem to remember reading something about it years ago.

Sam – There were leaks. We made sure they were dismissed as fake news. Stories about asteroids crop up from time to time when the media run out of other things to report. Usually the odds are tiny or the danger is centuries away.

Fred – How much time have we got?

Sam – A month.

Silence.

Fred – And you're certain?

Sam – You can never be one hundred per cent sure. But the probability now stands at 99.99 per cent. That's as close as it gets.

A pause.

Alex – What if we don't believe you?

Sam – Why would we lie?

Alex – You've been lying for years. About that pandemic, for instance. You used it to establish a dictatorship, with the added benefit that half the population supports you.

Sam – We were democratically elected.

Alex – Exactly. Democracy. People are sheep. Promise to look after them and they'll follow any shepherd, obey any sheepdog. Keep the wolves away, make the journey feel safe, and they'll forget the road ends at the slaughterhouse.

Silence.

Sam – Let me make another confession, to show you I'm being sincere.

Max – This gets worse.

Sam – The pandemic was real, to begin with. But yes, we exaggerated its consequences a little to justify the gradual introduction of emergency powers.

Fred – But why?

Sam – Scientists had already warned us of the coming disaster. It gave us a way to prepare people gradually for far more drastic measures. Not to prevent the catastrophe; that was impossible. But at least to avoid the chaos that would have followed if we'd told everyone the truth.

Alex – So you admit you manipulated us.

Sam – Yes. But not for the reasons you thought.

Max – For our own good, as always.

Silence.

Fred – Suppose we believe you. Why tell us now?

Max – And why the three of us? Why pick us?

Alex – We're not scientists! We have no influence. We can't work miracles for you!

Sam – We're beyond looking for solutions. There aren't any.

Max – So why are we here, instead of enjoying our final month?

Sam – You were brought here because... *(His phone rings.)* Excuse me. *(Answering.)* Yes, Mr President...

He exits. The others fall silent for a moment.

Max – Do you believe any of this?

Alex – I don't know any more. Do you?

Fred – Why tell us a story like that if it wasn't true?

Max – Unless it's a game.

Fred – A game?

Max – It does feel like an escape room, doesn't it?

Fred – A what?

Alex – An escape room! You lock a group of people in a room, and they have to solve puzzles together to get out.

Max – Except the room we're locked in is Planet Earth, and apparently there's no exit.

Alex – I'd settle for getting out of this room first.

Silence. Fred finishes her drink and looks for somewhere to put the empty can.

Fred – I haven't seen a recycling bin.

Max – Who gives a damn about recycling cans if we're all going to die in a month?

Fred – Yes. Of course.

Max – We've spent years sorting our bloody rubbish to save the planet, and now they tell us the world's ending in a month! What was the point?

Fred – Is that really the question?

Max – Sorry, of course, you're the clever one. You're a teacher. So what's the question, then?

Alex – We'd all like to know. Apparently we're supposed to answer it.

Sam returns.

Sam – Sorry about that. Where were we?

Max – We were asking what the hell we're doing here!

Fred – What exactly do you expect us to do? If there's any way we can help, we're willing to cooperate.

Max – We haven't got anything against the police, I promise.

Alex – Speak for yourself.

Sam – Listen. We're all in the same boat. The boat isn't the Titanic; it's Planet Earth. We know it's going to hit an enormous iceberg in a month. We can't avoid it. There are no lifeboats, no passing ships coming to the rescue. Nobody will survive.

Alex – Then why tell the three of us a state secret you've kept from the entire world for ten years?

Max – Exactly. We didn't ask to know.

Alex – You've lied to us about everything for years. You could have kept lying about this.

Fred – It's time you explained why we're here.

Sam – We want your opinion. How should we manage the final month before the world ends?

Alex – Oh, that's a good one. You've made every decision for us for more than a decade. And now we're all going to die, suddenly it's our job to organise humanity's last days? I suppose we'll have to pay for the funeral too?

Max – How long are you going to keep us locked up?

Fred – If we're going to die, we at least want to see the people we love and spend our remaining time with them.

Max – You're not planning to keep us here until the end of the world, surely?

Sam – Of course not. Given the circumstances, time is precious. You have one hour to decide.

Alex – Decide? Suddenly we get to make decisions?

Sam – Let's say your views will be taken into account — and they'll be decisive.

Max – But decide what, exactly?

Sam – Whether the public should be told the world is about to end.

Alex – And the three of us make that decision for everyone?

Sam – You were chosen at random to represent the voice of the people.

Fred – The voice of the people? All three of us?

Sam – You will make the arguments, but a much larger panel will listen and then vote.

Max – Where is this panel, then?

Sam gestures towards the audience.

Sam – Right in front of you.

They are stunned.

Fred – No...

Alex – So they're being held here against their will as well?

Sam – They were invited to what they thought was a performance. They won't be able to leave until we've reached a decision either.

Fred – And they're cut off from the outside world, just like us.

Sam – For the next hour, yes. The doors are locked and they were asked to switch off their phones. We're all here to decide what to do with the time we have left before the end.

A pause.

Fred – That's an enormous responsibility.

Sam – It is.

Alex – So one country is supposed to decide for the entire planet?

Sam – Similar gatherings are taking place around the world. The votes will be brought together, and the majority view will be taken into account.

Alex – What about you?

Sam – Me?

Alex – Will you take part in the debate?

Sam – I'm only here to collect your opinions.

Silence.

Fred – Could you repeat the question?

Alex – Let's get this over with.

Sam – Should we warn everyone and risk mass panic? Or keep them in ignorance and spare them unnecessary distress? That's the decision. We're here to hear the arguments on both sides.

Silence.

Alex – I believe in transparency. In every circumstance, whatever the consequences. People have a right to know.

Max – If there's only a month left, I'd rather spend it on holiday than at work.

Alex – One month. Let's call it our final month of paid leave.

Fred seems lost in thought. Sam turns to her.

Sam – What do you think?

Fred – I can't think. I'm scared, that's all. Do you mind if I take a tablet?

She takes a tablet from her bag and swallows it.

Sam – Would you like some water?

Blackout.

ACT THREE

Fred gradually composes herself. Alex and Max try to put on a brave face. Sam remains unshaken.

Sam – Being frightened is perfectly natural. I'm frightened too. Everyone who knows is frightened. But we have a decision to make, and we need to hear what you have to say.

A pause while Fred gathers her thoughts.

Fred – Keeping quiet... It's like not telling someone they're dying because you don't want to upset them. If I had an incurable illness and only a month to live, I think I'd want to know. I'd want to make the most of whatever time remained, take stock, settle my affairs, concentrate on what really matters.

Sam – Of course. That's the first argument that comes to mind, and it's a perfectly reasonable one.

Alex – I can hear a 'but' coming.

Sam – But you've just told us you're frightened. The thought of certain death on a fixed date terrifies you. Perhaps you'd have preferred not to know.

Fred – Perhaps.

Sam – And your example is one patient with a terminal illness. However that person reacts, the world is unlikely to be thrown into chaos. Here we're talking about every single person on Earth.

Alex – You said you were only here to collect our opinions, but you're already trying to influence us.

Sam – I won't vote. I'm here to moderate the debate, explore every aspect of the problem and make sure the decision is informed.

Fred – Go on, then.

Sam – Let's think. Suppose a terminally ill person decides they have nothing to lose, kills their boss, assaults a neighbour or robs a bank. It would still be an isolated crime.

Max – So?

Sam – Now imagine everyone on Earth thinking the same way. Nobody's afraid of prison. The only thing people fear is death, and nobody can prevent that. It'll be chaos.

Silence.

Fred – That is a risk. If you're going to die in a month, you might think you can do anything and get away with it.

Max – Exactly. Total anarchy.

Alex – But when someone learns they have only weeks to live, they don't usually rush next door to stick an ice pick into a neighbour they can't stand.

Max – Maybe because the patient is too weak. But a whole population of healthy people?

Sam – He's right, I'm afraid. The foundations of society could collapse overnight. Police, courts... We might find that nobody obeys any law at all.

Fred – There would still be morality. Religion, for some people.

Sam – Do you really believe good intentions would keep people law-abiding once the fear of punishment vanished in the face of certain collective death?

Alex – Even when we know we're going to die, there's still some humanity in us. We're even more afraid of losing our souls than of dying.

Max – Not everyone believes in God. Do you?

Alex – No. But it's not God we're all afraid of. It's the Devil. We're as frightened of burning in hell as we are of being the ones who stoke the flames. Most people want to be neither victims nor executioners.

Sam – Sometimes you don't have the luxury of refusing to choose. In the death camps, certain prisoners were offered work assisting their executioners. Most accepted, hoping to stay alive a few more weeks and perhaps survive.

Alex – Some did get out. At the cost of their souls. Imagine what it must have been like to go on living after that.

Max – But we're being told none of us has a chance of surviving.

Fred – Where there's life, there's hope. Even someone condemned to death hopes for a last-minute pardon, however certain it seems that none will come.

Max – You can always hope for a miracle.

Fred – We can't live without hope, even when the worst is almost certain. When hope dies, we're already dead. I'll hold on to a little of it until the very end.

A pause.

Max – Yes, well... If I really had only a month to live, and knew I'd never have to answer for what I did, there are one or two people I'd make pay. Starting with my brother-in-law.

Fred – I thought you weren't married.

Max – My brother-in-law! My sister's husband!

Fred – Don't get worked up. It was only a joke.

Alex – Besides, if somebody's going to die in a month anyway, is killing them really worth the trouble?

Max – It might be worth it for the pleasure.

Sam – There. You said it: pleasure.

Fred – Eros and Thanatos... Love and death.

Sam – Any psychoanalyst will tell you the fear of death and sexual desire are closely connected.

Max – Hang on. I was talking about killing my brother-in-law. I never said I wanted to sleep with him!

Alex – Eros and Thanatos? You're losing your minds. Next you'll tell us the end of the world will climax in one enormous collective orgasm.

Sam – I was thinking more of an explosion of violence against the vulnerable. Women, children... The certainty of death could unleash the very worst in people.

Alex – That's pure fantasy. You know your neighbours. Do you honestly think that if they knew they were going to die in a month, they'd rush round tomorrow to rape and murder you?

Fred – I don't know. My neighbours certainly wouldn't.

Max – But what about your neighbours' neighbours?

Fred – I see. And their neighbours' neighbours. The people on the wrong side of town, or across the border. Outsiders. Foreigners.

Max – Outsiders and foreigners. Often the same people.

Alex – I see.

Max – Even your own neighbour. Think of all the nasty little things they do behind your back. Putting their rubbish in your bin so they don't have to wheel theirs out. Or secretly watching you through the window when you're in the shower and you've forgotten to draw the curtains.

Alex – You sound as though you speak from experience.

Max – Oh, piss off.

Fred – Can we at least keep this civil?

Sam – Let's return to the question. We simply don't know. But social order rests largely on the threat of punishment: prison, or the shame of being condemned by your family, your neighbours, society itself. Remove that restraint and the worst could happen.

Fred – You're right. It would be the law of the jungle. The strongest would rule, and the weakest would suffer.

Alex – You'd still have the army, wouldn't you?

Sam – Soldiers are human too. They obey orders because they have to, and because they're paid. At best, out of duty and a desire to protect society. If society itself is doomed within weeks, do you really believe they'll keep risking their lives to preserve order?

Max – So you'd rather keep the truth hidden?

Sam – I don't know. The question is whether telling the truth would turn humanity's final month into a living hell.

Alex – We're not children! People have the right to know! Do you seriously propose keeping all humanity ignorant of its own extinction, simply to preserve order until the last second?

Sam – You're right. It's not only about public order. It's also an ethical question. That's why we need this debate.

Alex – Spare people the fear of the apocalypse and the chaos that might come first. Fine. But if everyone's going to die anyway, what difference does it ultimately make? I'd rather know.

Max – Anyway, surely there'll come a point when you can't hide it any more. When the asteroid gets close enough...

Sam – This ticking bomb is hurtling towards us, but although it's large enough to destroy us, it's nowhere near the size of a planet. According to the scientists, it won't be visible to the naked eye even twenty-four hours before impact.

Alex – In the name of protecting us from terrorism and epidemics, you've already turned society into something resembling a military state and treated the public like children. Make people afraid of everything and they'll accept anything. First you gagged them. Now you want to blindfold them so they won't have to look death in the face.

Sam – I don't claim to have the answer either. That's why we're here: to discuss it and make a decision. What do the others think?

Max – I don't know.

Fred – Neither do I any more. We're not children, I agree. But what about actual children? What do we tell them?

Max – That's another problem. Can you hide it from children if their parents know?

Fred – And at what age would you tell them?

Sam – You see? It isn't quite so simple.

Alex – Perhaps. But isn't concealing the truth also a decision made by the privileged few?

Max – What do you mean?

Alex – Apart from us and the people in this room, if we keep it secret, only a privileged few will know. Everyone else will carry on with their miserable lives as if nothing had happened. Meanwhile the elite will prepare for the final night, amusing themselves or praying, according to taste.

Sam – That's one way of looking at it.

Alex – You assume ordinary people will descend into chaos if they're told, while the elite will keep calm and quietly enjoy their last days. Why? Because they're supposedly more responsible?

Sam – I don't know.

Alex – Because the elite already has everything. That's why. They stand to lose it all if the news causes chaos. Ordinary people have nothing, so they have nothing to lose. What exactly are you frightened of? Trains running late? Workers refusing to turn up at the factory? Shops being looted? A stock-market crash? Is that what really matters to you? Keeping everything running smoothly until the final explosion?

Silence.

Sam – I've heard your arguments, and they're all worth considering. But we must decide. So tell me, each of you: given the choice, would you rather know or not know?

Fred – I wish I could answer. But I genuinely don't know.

Max – Too late for us, anyway. You never gave us the choice.

Fred – I think... I think I'd rather not have known.

Alex – Unless this is all more bullshit designed to bring us further into line.

Sam – In exactly one month you'll know whether I lied. Until then, if it helps, think of it as a thought experiment. The issues we're debating are the same.

Fred – I don't think they are. We'd answer differently if the question were purely theoretical.

Alex – Would we?

Fred – If it's only theoretical, it's easy to imagine an ideal world where most people remain good citizens right to the end. But if this really happened... Would you stake your life on the goodness of human nature? Or the supposed kindness of that abstraction you call 'the people'?

Max – She's right. Do you honestly believe ordinary people, as you call them, are fundamentally better than the privileged people exploiting us and the bastards governing us?

Alex – I don't know.

Fred – We're all much alike, especially in our worst qualities. Some are lucky enough to be born on the wealthy side of town, that's all. The others dream of taking their place, not of abolishing the divide.

A pause.

Fred – It's strange, really. We all know we'll die one day. In twenty years or in a month. But as long as we don't know the date, we live as though we were immortal. We certainly don't feel the urgency.

Alex – That's how those in power get away with so much. If people lived as though they had only a few weeks left, they wouldn't put up with everything that's done to them.

Fred – Society does everything it can to conceal death, to make it abstract. Most of us die without ever having seen a dead body. Death isn't just a taboo. It's a state secret.

Max – And whenever they threaten us with death, it's to control our lives. As if death were something you could avoid in the end!

Sam – That's all in the past. Let's not get lost in a purely philosophical discussion. We're here to decide: yes or no. No halfway option.

Max – Nobody trained us for a decision like this. We're not experts.

Sam – Nobody has trained for an unprecedented situation that can never happen again. Because in a month we'll all be dead.

A pause.

Fred – How awful... And I've left my cat at home all alone. At least the poor thing doesn't suspect anything.

Max – Don't be so sure. They say animals have a sixth sense for disasters like this.

Fred – You're right. Before the last tsunami, for example, apparently...

Sam – Time is running out. Does anyone have anything else to add?

Fred – No.

Max – Neither do I.

Alex – I've said all I have to say.

Sam – Very well. We'll vote by a show of hands.

Alex – And you?

Sam – I won't vote. There are three of you, so there must be a majority. No abstentions.

Max – Fine. Let's get it over with.

Sam – One last thing. If secrecy wins, you'll all be bound by that decision. You mustn't tell anyone, not even your loved ones, whatever your personal view.

Alex – And if we do talk?

Sam – This is no joke. Let me be absolutely clear: we know where to find you, and we can silence you for good.

Alex – So much for your idea of democracy and free speech.

Sam – There's no time to debate that. Who votes for telling the truth?

A moment's hesitation. Alex raises her hand.

Sam – One vote. Who votes for secrecy?

Alex – I'd call it lying. Government-approved lying.

Fred and Max raise their hands.

Sam – Secrecy wins, two votes to one.

Alex – Can we get out of here now?

Sam – Not yet. There's still the audience's vote. They've heard your arguments. Now it's their turn.

Alex – The audience?

Sam – The audience, yes. The citizens' panel. Ladies and gentlemen: all those who believe the truth must be told, whatever the cost, please raise your hands.

Some members of the audience raise their hands.

Sam – And those in favour of keeping it secret?

Another section of the audience raises their hands.

Sam – A majority in favour of telling the truth. *(Or keeping it secret, depending on the vote.)*

Alex – There. Are we free to go? If 'free' still means anything.

Sam – Someone will be along shortly to take you home.

Max – The sooner the better.

Sam's phone rings.

Sam – Excuse me.

He steps out to answer.

Fred – So that's it? Just like that?

Max – Looks like it.

Fred – We knew we'd all die one day. We just never imagined we'd all go at the same time.

Alex – Or that we'd be given the date weeks in advance.

Max – One month's notice before the whole place goes bankrupt.

Fred – From now on, each day that passes will be worth a year of our lives.

A pause.

Max – How exactly did you work that out?

Alex – Never mind. She means that every minute counts now.

Max – So where would you want to spend your last day? In bed with someone? On a beach? In a church?

Alex – Last day or not, shouldn't we ask ourselves that every morning? What do I want to do with my life today?

Max – Most people wake up wondering how they'll pay the mortgage until they retire. If they ever get to retire. Because I...

Sam returns.

Sam – I'm sorry. I've received new orders.

Max – New orders?

Sam – The President believes it's too dangerous to let you go before the decision has been made worldwide.

Alex – Dangerous? Why?

Sam – We're afraid there could be a leak, and the rumour might spread beyond our control.

Max – If the world's really ending, people are bound to notice sooner or later, aren't they?

Sam – Even if we decide to tell them, they'll need to be psychologically prepared for news of this magnitude.

Alex – How on earth do you prepare someone psychologically for the end of the world? I'd love to see that.

Fred – So we're condemned to stay here until the consultation is over?

Max – And how long will all that nonsense take?

Sam – About a week.

Max – A week!

Fred – You can't be serious.

Sam – I'm sorry. Those are my instructions.

Alex steps forward.

Alex – And what if we insist on leaving?

Sam draws his pistol and points it at her.

Sam – Stay exactly where you are.

Alex – You won't shoot.

Sam – In the old world, perhaps I wouldn't have. But believe me, I can now.

Max – What are you going to do? Kill all of us? *(Indicating the audience.)* Them too?

Sam – I'm waiting for further instructions. For now, you'll stay here quietly. Try to relax. There are snacks and peanuts in the fridge. We'll bring you a meal later.

He exits.

Alex – I told you we couldn't trust them.

Fred – There are other people involved besides us.

Max – So now you're defending them?

Fred – No. But I agree we shouldn't rush into anything. We have to avoid unrest.

Alex – Unrest? We're talking about a giant asteroid hitting Earth with millions of times the force of the Hiroshima bomb, and you're worried about a bit of unrest?

Fred – You know perfectly well what I mean. Do you want our final month on Earth to be hell? Especially for the vulnerable? Children, for instance.

Alex is visibly affected by this argument.

Alex – Fine. So what do you suggest? We stand here and let them shoot us like animals going to the slaughterhouse?

Fred – I don't know.

Max – He's the one with the gun, for now.

Alex – So what do we do?

A pause.

Max – How about starting with a drink?

Sam returns.

Sam – There's news.

Alex – What now?

Sam – I warn you, this will be difficult to believe too. Even I'm struggling to take it in.

Max – Let's hear it.

Sam – We've just received a signal from an extraterrestrial civilisation.

They are all stunned.

Blackout.

ACT FOUR

Alex, Fred and Max try to recover from the shock. Sam remains impassive.

Alex – A message from aliens? Are you joking?

Sam – I know it sounds incredible. But lately, nothing surprises me any more.

Alex – You don't say.

Sam – We know life on Earth will end one day. We simply don't know when. Yet we treat the idea as science fiction.

Fred – And we know it's extremely unlikely that we're the only life in the universe. Yet we treat extraterrestrials as science fiction too.

Max – How did they get in touch? Send you a carrier pigeon?

Sam – Since the 1960s, a research programme called SETI — based in the United States — has been listening for possible signals from outer space.

Fred – So the idea can't be completely ridiculous.

Sam – It was their researchers who picked up the signal.

Alex – They've been listening for over fifty years without hearing a thing. And now, exactly one month before the end of the world...

Sam – Precisely. Because disaster is so close, they've decided to contact us.

Max – Why? To say goodbye?

Sam – They're offering to save some of us, so our species can survive, even if it has to leave the planet where it began.

Alex – Save humanity? You have to wonder whether it's worth saving.

Fred – And how do they plan to rescue these lucky few?

Sam – They propose collecting them in a spacecraft.

Alex – Wonderful. Noah's Ark in outer space. I've heard everything now.

Sam – They can take only a few thousand teenagers.

Alex – Teenagers?

Sam – Older people might no longer be able to have children, while very young children could struggle to survive the journey. Teenagers would adapt more easily to their new home.

Fred – Another planet, then.

Alex – Well, if Earth is destroyed...

Max – Fine. But what's that got to do with us? Sadly, none of us has been a teenager for quite some time.

Sam – We have to choose which secondary school will be saved.

Fred – A school?

Max – Why a school?

Sam – The students will already be together in one place. It'll make collecting them easier.

Alex – Good luck to those who get picked. But why involve us?

Sam – We have the responsibility of choosing the school that will be saved. For this country, at least.

Fred – Just this country?

Sam – One school from every country. Presumably that will provide a sufficiently diverse group.

Alex – Draw a name out of a hat.

Sam – That's one possibility.

Fred – Is there another?

Sam – We could select the country's best school.

Fred – The best?

Sam – The one with the highest examination results, for example.

Alex – Oh, I see. One of those expensive private schools your children probably attend.

Sam – And what school do your children attend?

Alex – I don't have children, and you know that perfectly well. None of us here has children. Is that why you selected us?

Sam – Not the only reason.

A pause.

Fred – Excellence or a lottery?

Sam – Exactly. Another decision has to be made.

Fred – It's inhuman to ask us that. How can we decide which of these young people get to live?

Sam – We have to. Otherwise the entire human race will disappear.

Alex – Personally, I wouldn't be entirely opposed to that outcome.

Sam – We haven't a moment to lose. They need the name of the school by tomorrow. After that it may be too late.

Alex – We know what 'excellence' means. Social privilege. It's no coincidence that the top schools are in the richest neighbourhoods.

Fred – On the other hand, if humanity must survive, perhaps we shouldn't pick teenagers with a vocabulary of two hundred words, who spell everything phonetically and have never written anything longer than a text message.

Alex – You, of all people? And you're a teacher? Well done.

Fred – You're right. It's awful. *(A pause.)* On the other hand, we have to be realistic.

Sam – I'm afraid there's no time for more discussion. Let's vote. Who favours academic excellence?

Fred hesitates, then raises her hand.

Sam – Who favours a random draw?

Alex and Max raise their hands.

Sam – Now let's hear the audience. First, those in favour of choosing the country's highest-performing school, please raise your hands. And those in favour of choosing at random? Very well. Excellence wins. *(Or chance, depending on the vote.)* Thank you for your contribution. *(His phone rings. He answers as he walks towards the exit.)* Yes... I'm listening.

He exits. Silence.

Alex – Surely everybody can see it's a hoax now?

The other two look uncertain.

Max *(to the audience)* – What do you think? Is any of this true?

He may improvise briefly in response to one or more audience members.

Fred – I don't know what to believe any more.

Max – Well, it could be true, couldn't it?

Fred – As he said, plenty of things seem like science fiction until they actually happen.

Max – Like the worldwide pandemic. And everything that followed. If you'd been told about all that beforehand, would you have believed it?

Alex – Probably not.

Fred – I don't know why, but I have a feeling it's true.

Alex – These people have been lying to us for ten years! In fact, they've always lied to us.

Fred – It's so outrageous it might just be true.

Max – What have we got to lose by playing along?

Alex – So you agree it's a game?

Fred – The real question is whether we have the option not to play. You saw him. They're willing to kill us.

Sam returns.

Sam – The situation has changed.

Alex – Considering where we started, I hope it's improved.

Sam – It appears so. Though nothing is certain yet.

Fred – Well?

Sam – Against all expectations, the danger has lessened slightly.

Max – You told us the end of the world was absolutely certain. How can the danger have lessened?

Sam – The asteroid collided with another celestial object and broke into several pieces. Unfortunately, an enormous fragment is still heading straight for Earth.

Fred – How huge?

Sam – About a hundred metres across.

Max – That's better, isn't it?

Sam – Yes, but still large enough to cause a global catastrophe. Unless this fragment breaks apart as well. More importantly...

Fred – What?

Sam – The collision has greatly increased the fragment's speed. It's hurtling towards us at almost the speed of light.

Max – How long until it hits?

Sam – According to the new calculations, about a week.

Alex – And you call that an improvement?

Sam – The Southern Hemisphere would take the direct impact, but the rest of the world would suffer terribly. Earthquakes, gigantic tsunamis...

Max – But the end of the world isn't certain any more? We might actually survive?

Sam – Some people could survive in underground shelters or on mountaintops.

Alex – Then we've got only a week to prepare. If nobody is warned, far more people will die.

Fred – What do you want from us?

Sam – We must reconsider our decision in light of this new information.

Fred – I don't know what to think.

Sam – If we announce it now, there'll be panic. People across the Southern Hemisphere will rush north, while those in the north will scramble for the mountains.

Alex – I suppose people like you all have a mountain chalet somewhere. In Switzerland, perhaps.

Fred – Those who can't reach the mountains will fight to get onto hilltops or the upper floors of tall buildings.

Max – Assuming those buildings aren't swept away too.

Alex – But if we say nothing, only a privileged few with inside information will take precautions and have any chance of surviving.

Sam – True. But we can't save everybody.

Fred – Are we voting again? About what?

Sam – There's no point rushing now. Things are changing by the hour. By the minute, even. *(His phone rings. He answers.)* Yes... All right... Call me as soon as you know more. *(Putting away his phone.)* The scientists have revised their calculations again. There's now only a one-in-ten chance that the fragment will hit Earth.

Max – All that for this...

Alex – What about the little green men?

Fred – And the school we were going to move to another galaxy?

Sam – I haven't heard any more about that.

Fred – Maybe it was the aliens who shattered the asteroid to save us.

Sam – That's possible. *(His phone rings again. He answers.)* Sam speaking... Yes... Fine... I'll see to it.

He puts his phone away, visibly shaken. The others wait anxiously for him to speak.

Max – Well?

Sam – I've just been told that all danger has passed. What's left of the asteroid will travel far beyond the Moon's orbit. There'll be no impact on Earth. Nobody will ever know how close we came.

Silence, a mixture of relief and disbelief.

Fred – So it's over?

Sam – It seems so.

Alex gives a slow, soundless, ironic round of applause.

Alex – The show's over.

Max – So we can go back to our miserable little lives? Just like before? I'm almost disappointed.

Fred – Strange, isn't it? I've never felt so alive as I have today.

Max – What was that you said earlier? Eros and Thanatos? Next she'll tell us she had an orgasm.

Fred – I'd say I've got everything I need waiting at home, but unfortunately it's only my cat.

Max – Well, we could always do something about that. I'm single too.

Alex – Whether you're free to leave is another matter.

They turn towards Sam, who remains silent.

Fred – Sam?

Alex – You are going to tell everyone about the catastrophe they've just escaped, aren't you?

Sam – The decision has been made at the highest level. The public will not be informed.

Fred – If you keep this secret and people find out, they'll be furious. They'll demand answers.

Alex – Now that the world isn't ending tomorrow, there's no danger of mass panic. Why keep people in the dark?

Max – Do we have to vote again?

Sam – There will be no vote. Nobody will be told. And nothing that has happened here ever existed.

Alex – Fine. Do whatever you like. We'll say whatever we like.

Sam – I've received instructions about that too. I'm truly sorry. This is a matter of state secrecy. We can't risk letting you speak.

Alex – Really? How exactly do you plan to stop us? Kill us?

Fred – You can't do that! You're a policeman, aren't you? You're supposed to uphold the law!

Alex – They make the laws now. You still think the police are here to protect ordinary people?

Max – Why bother killing us? Nobody would believe a word of this anyway.

Fred – You could simply tell us it was all a game. We'd never mention it again.

Max – An escape room. And we've finally escaped.

Sam – I'm sorry. None of you will be leaving this room.

He reaches for his pistol with the exaggerated flourish of a cowboy in a duel, but fumbles it and drops it in front of him. Alex snatches it up and points it at Sam. Alternatively, the exchange can be played as a slow-motion slapstick sequence, with Sam drawing and Alex lunging for the gun.

Alex – Not so clever now, are you?

Sam – What are you going to do? Kill me?

Alex – Don't tempt me.

Fred – Please, don't.

Max – Why not? The bastard was about to kill all three of us!

Sam – You won't shoot.

Alex – Won't I?

Sam – Go ahead. Pull the trigger.

Alex – What have I got to lose? You said yourself none of this ever happened.

Alex hesitates.

Sam – Killing someone isn't so easy, you know. Even when you know you'll get away with it. Thousands of years of moral teaching, ever since Cain murdered his brother Abel, can't be erased in an hour.

Alex – I told you, I don't believe in God.

Fred – Please put the gun down.

Max – So he can shoot us instead? No way! Go on, shoot! If we've got a chance of getting out alive, we should take it.

Alex hesitates again, then lowers the gun.

Alex – All right. I won't shoot. Not yet. But I'm keeping the gun. And if you try to take it back, believe me, I'll use it.

Sam – It doesn't matter. You could fire it and you still wouldn't kill me.

Alex – Really?

Sam – Unless I decided to play dead, of course.

Max – What are you, immortal?

Fred – Perhaps he's wearing a bulletproof vest.

Sam – The gun isn't loaded.

Alex – Another lie.

Sam – It's true. I'm lying.

A pause.

Fred – That's a rather difficult statement to interpret.

Max – What?

Fred – He said, 'It's true. I'm lying.' If that's true, he isn't lying.

Alex – And if he is lying, it isn't true.

Max – You've lost me.

Sam – In any case, it's not a real gun.

Alex – You're joking.

Sam – It's a stage prop.

Max – A prop?

A pause.

Alex – So now you're telling us we're in a theatre?

Max – He's come out with everything else. Why not?

Fred – But that's impossible. Theatres have been closed for years because of the pandemic.

Sam – Almost all of them, yes. But some have kept going underground, without the health authorities or police knowing.

Alex – So... we've been performing a play?

Sam – The play is over. You'll take your bows — to applause, I hope — go backstage to your dressing rooms, and then go home. Nobody's going to die. Not today, anyway. The show's finished.

Fred – So you're not a policeman?

Max – Who are you, then?

Sam – I'm the director.

Alex – So everything was fake?

Sam – No. It was false, and it was true. It was theatre.

Max – But we're not actors!

Sam – You were selected to take part in an improvised performance. All these people are the audience.

Fred – So you're the one breaking the law. Live theatre is strictly forbidden.

Sam – I'm part of a secret organisation trying to bring back what used to be known as live theatre.

Alex – Where are we, then?

Sam – We're at... *(Sam gives the name of the theatre in which the play is being performed.)*

A pause.

Fred – The theatre... It's been so long since any of us went to one.

Max – We've forgotten what it was even for.

Sam – Nothing. Or perhaps to make people think.

Max – Thinking about what?

Sam – The meaning of life, for example.

Fred – I think I'll see life differently after all this.

Sam – Whether we die in a month or thirty years, whether we die alone or all together, does it really change anything?

Fred – The question is what we choose to do with the rest of our lives.

Max – The question? And what's the right answer?

Sam – In theatre, there are no right answers. Only good questions.

Alex – Whatever happens, we must never stop living for fear that we might die.

Fred – And when the curtain falls and we leave the stage, to cheers or jeers, let's at least know that we've played the part of our lives to the full.

All four face the audience and take their bows.

Sam – Ladies and gentlemen, the performance you've just witnessed was, of course, completely illegal. When you leave, even if you enjoyed it, please don't tell a soul. Thank you for your discretion.

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:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

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Avignon – May 2023
© La Comédiathèque – ISBN 978-2-37705-936-2
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