

# PARK BENCH

By Aurélie Harp & Elodie Monsenert

Adapted from French by Kay Bourguine.

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### **The Characters**

Robert Martini, a 40 yr. old man.

Rachel, a 40 yr. old woman.

### **The Setting**

The play is set in a small city park in an elegant neighbourhood. There are flowerbeds and two benches. One is empty and the other one is covered with a plastic sheet and various plastic bags and personal effects. The important accessories are described in each scene.

### **The Soundtrack**

« Bang bang » (which was sung by Nancy Sinatra).

### **The Time frame**

The play takes place in the summer over a period of about 10 days.

**ACT I**

**Scene 1**

(Summer morning, Park, 2 benches).

*A man in a slightly old-fashioned suit and tie is sitting on a bench. He has a briefcase at his feet. He is reading a newspaper and munching on cookies from a tupperware bowl on the bench beside him. He is drinking coffee from a thermos with a paper napkin placed on his lap. He raises his head and stares fixedly into space. He seems preoccupied and sad, broken-spirited. He sits that way for a minute, then checks the time and carefully folds his paper. He puts everything meticulously away in his briefcase and leaves. A bum is sleeping surrounded by his stuff on the other bench.*

*BLACKOUT*

**Scene 2**

(Summer morning, Park, 2 benches).

*The same man is sitting on the same bench with his briefcase at his feet. He is wearing black leather gloves and holding a gun. We can tell that he is about to commit suicide. He stares fixedly into space. On the other bench, the tramp has his back turned towards us. He is rummaging through his stuff. He starts to hum a song. It's a woman's voice. She's singing « Bang bang » by Nancy Sinatra. It's beautiful. The minute he hears the song, the man bursts into tears. Then he regains his composure and after a few seconds, takes off his gloves and goes back to his ritual in a mechanical way. He puts his gun away in his briefcase and takes out his tupperware, his thermos....*

*BLACKOUT*

**Scene 3**

(Summer morning, Park, 2 benches).

*The man is sitting on his bench performing his familiar routine. The woman is asleep on the other bench in the midst of bags and stuff covered with a plastic sheet. He watches her, then gets up. Intrigued, he approaches the bench suspiciously. He listens for a minute, then prepares to lift the sheet. She jumps up screaming, threatening him with a knife. She's ready to throw herself on him, using defenses she's learned on the street. He's terrified and looks around for help, but they're alone. She quickly realizes he's more frightened than she is and drops her guard.*

Her : What d'you want ?

Him : Nothing.

Her : So leave ! What're you deaf ? Get outta here !

Him : Ok.

He doesn't move. It's as if he's in shock.

Her : Go ahead, check me out all you want ! It's open house today !

Him : Excuse me ?

Her : I know what you're tryin' to do. No one cares about a tramp. Who's gonna complain !

Him : What are you talking about !

*Park Bench*

Her : Just try to get any closer you big fat pig. You'll see what happens to you!

Him : What are you crazy ! You've got to be kidding. Anyway, without wanting to offend you. You're not exactly what one would call a dreamgirl !

Her : Oh, 'cuz you think you're so dreamy !

Him : Look, I'm sorry. This is a terrible misunderstanding. It's true that I was watching you, but not at all for that ! You weren't moving and I couldn't hear you breathing, so I got worried. I thought you might be in a coma or even...well, that I needed to...

Her : Well, what if I do want to croak? It's none of your business ?

Him : Well yes, I mean, I don't know. It's true that I didn't think of that.

Her : I'd hate for you to start having to think. You might hurt yourself.

Him : I'm so sorry to have bothered you. I thought I was being helpful. I feel very embarrassed now.

Her : Where does this guy come from ? Did they just unfreeze you ?

Him : Excuse me ?

Her : Look, I'm breathing, everything's fine. You're not gonna make any difference today, so get lost !

*Park Bench*

*He continues to look at her without moving*

Her : Hey, are you deaf Mother Teresa ? I said, get moving !

Him : Yes, yes, I'm leaving.

*He goes back to his bench and she turns to her stuff. She begins to hum the song from the previous scene and starts combing her hair with a white comb. We sense that she takes care of herself to the best of her ability with the little she has. It's like a ritual. He is struck by the song once again. He watches her, hesitates, starts to leave and then finally comes back to her.*

Him : Excuse me, but could I please ask you for a very small favour ?

Her : What now ?

Him : I just wanted to know if...well...that song ?

Her : What song ?

Him : The one you're always singing !

Her : What do you mean always ? Wait a minute ! Are you following me or something ? Who are you ? Are you a cop ?

Him : Of course not. Not at all ! I just happened to be here yesterday at the same time, sitting on the same bench and heard you sing. It moved me, that's all !

Her : I'm warning you. If this is about that psycho, you'd better clear out real fast or you'll be eating with a straw.

*Park Bench*

Him : Would you please calm down ! What is the matter with you ? I don't even know who you're talking about. (Talking to himself). « That psycho ». They're all the same, females ! They always get the big guns out ! I just wanted to ask you to sing that song again !

Her : You want me to sing you a song ?!

Him : Yes, well, that particular song.

Her : You got to be kidding !

Him : No.

Her : Oh, come on, give me a break !

Him : Please, I really need it...

Her : I don't believe this. This isn't a country fair. What do you think I'm runnin' a booth or something ?!

Him : Please, I'm begging you. Just for a few minutes.

He takes out a 10 dollar bill and starts to give it to her.

Her : (*She takes her knife back out*) Go to hell ! I'm not a jukebox...and I'm not for sale, asshole !

Him : (*Soto voce as he leaves.*) Slut !

*BLACKOUT*

**Scene 4**

(Summer morning, Park, 2 benches).

*He has come to the park for breakfast as he does every day, but today, the bum is occupying his bench. He seems very irritated. He has no choice but to sit on the opposite bench. He tries to read his paper, but frequently raises his head to watch her sleep, as if he's waiting for her to wake up. Then he looks at the time and loses patience. He begins to make noise, unfolding and rustling his newspaper noisily and reading an article out loud while he walks around his bench.*

Him : The bombing yesterday, late in the afternoon, left 800 dead and more than 2000 missing ! What a shame....

Her : What's all this racket? You again? Oh, I don't believe it. Would you get off my case ?

Him : Good morning ! Did you sleep well ?

Her : Listen you. I'm not a morning person. So, just fold your paper and get outta here. I'm really fed up with this !

Him : I'm sorry, I thought you'd appreciate a little company.

Her : What I would appreciate is that you leave me the fuck alone !

Him : There we go. One tries to be kind and help out, give a bit of one's time to the needy...

Her : Looking at your mug, I don't know which one of us is the most needy !

*Park Bench*

Him : I'm sorry, but I believe you're being a bit picky. I don't think there are many people begging to spend time with you !

Her : GET OUTTA HERE ! I don't want you here! Don't you get it ?

Him : All right, but you're sitting on my bench !

Her : *(She gets up and walks around her bench.)* You know, I'm looking my hardest, but I don't see jackass written anywhere here ! So, this bench is as much mine, as it is yours. Get it?

Him : No, I'm sorry. I was coming here long before you were and I occupy this seat every morning from exactly 8 till 8 :30 a.m., except of course, on weekends and public holidays. So really, the one who feels the most uncomfortable should leave ! It's certainly not for me to « get out of here » as you say. So, I'll ask you one more time, to kindly return my bench !

Her : What is wrong with this guy ?!

Him : Give me back my bench !

Her : No !

Him : Excuse me ?

Her : No !

Him : Listen, I'm trying very hard to be polite. Please show a bit of public-spiritedness and give me back my bench !

Her : No !

*Park Bench*

Him : I don't understand why you're making such a big deal over a bench. On top of it, this one faces south, so you'll have a much better view from here, with lovely sunsets, which are very popular these days !

Her : No !

Him : But you're just like....Did my wife send you ? How much did she pay you ? I'll give you double ! How much do you want ?

Her : I said NO, so it's NO and NO means NO ! !

Him : But this is impossible ! You're just doing it to annoy me. It must be genetic !

Her : Well, I don't know, but you just said, It's the one who feels the most uncomfortable who should leave. So please, be my guest, feel free to go.

Him : That may be so, but I really don't believe that I'm the one who is being the most disturbing....

Her : Oh yes you are !

Him :All right then, since you're forcing my hand. The entire neighbourhood has signed a petition to protest against your nauseating presence in this lovely park. Apparently, the children are afraid of you ! There, look at that poor woman. She has to make a huge detour all the way around the park to bring her daughter to school. Aren't you ashamed of yourself !

Her : What is this shit ? The kids are afraid of me ? Here we go again. As soon as there's a spot on the wallpaper people freak out !

*Park Bench*

Him : (He takes the petition out of his pocket and goes to show her) Would you like to check it !

Her : You wanna know where I'd like to stuff your damn petition ?

Him : No thank you. I think I can guess.

Her : Well, no one's ever pulled that one on me !

Him : I would start gathering my trash together if I were you. The exterminators are probably on their way. They'll be here in a few hours at most.

Her : Now, listen here you jackass (we sense a bit of tension in his hand), first of all, you're not me ! And anyway, you can just forget about your bench. I'm on it and I'm staying put!

Him : ...I'd just like to add that you smell....

Her : What ?

Him : Yes, well, when you open your mouth, there's a smell of...putrefaction. Yes, that's what it is. It fills the air. Look, even the leaves are turning yellow. You are defiling the area and it is my duty as a responsible citizen to help protect the environment.

Her : Oh yeah ? Well you know something. You don't even have to open your mouth. It's easy to see that you're full of shit and probably haven't been drained and cleaned since nursery school !

Him : There's no need for vulgarity !

*Park Bench*

Her : That's no way to speak to a lady !

Him : I'm just trying to help. You won't be able to say that I didn't warn you.

Her : Ok, now you are really pissing me off. So before I remove the little bit of manhood you have left, you're gonna stop talkin' to me and pretend I don't exist !

*Pause.*

Him : You mean like peaceful coexistence ?

Her : Yeah, that's it !

Him : All right, but I.....

Her : Shut up !

*BLACKOUT*

**Scene 5**

*(Summer morning, Park 2 benches).*

*He's sitting on the other bench. The tramp is still occupying his bench. He isn't reading his paper or eating breakfast as he usually does. He seems a bit tense and frequently looks over at the other bench where she's asleep. He takes a large roll of brown tape out of his briefcase and walks over to her bench, being very careful not to make any noise. Then he wraps the tape around the bench until she is completely tied up. He notices a small box next to her and without thinking picks it up and puts it in his pocket. He finishes the job by putting a large piece of tape over her mouth. She wakes up with a start. She tries to move, but she can't and her screams are muffled by the tape. She wrestles with all of her strength but she is*

*Park Bench*

*trapped. He goes back to his bench, sits down and gloats over his victory.*

Him : Why are you screaming ? This is what you wanted isn't it ?! Cohabitation...in silence ! You should be happy !

She tries to free herself and screams as loud as she can.

Him : At last, a bit of peace and quiet! If you stopped grunting like a wild pig, you might be able to appreciate the silence...Listen ! Can you hear the birds singing ? That's a great tit or a Parus Major. Listen to her song « teechu-teechu-teechu », she's chirruping. Oh it's so lovely ! « Teechu-teechu-teechu » What a joy to hear !

*She's beginning to tire.*

Him : Anyway, I don't know why I'm wasting my time trying to enrich your mind. It's like casting pearls before swine. Nothing but cheap wine for you !

*He takes a plastic bag filled with breadcrumbs for the birds out of his briefcase and starts throwing them at her.*

Him : Cheep, cheep, cheep....

There's bread everywhere. It's on her, on the bench and she struggles madly.

Him : I'm so sorry. I'm talking and talking. Did you want to say something ?

Her : *Moiun huionen !*

Him : I can't understand what you're saying. Please articulate !

Her : Muoinhoiun moiun !

Him : I told you to articulate !....Oh you know, you can scream all you want. Normal people don't react to each other under normal circumstances, so as you yourself say..When it's a bum...who cares ! On the contrary, people will be delighted to no longer have to witness failure and our nation's shame. And at least you'll no longer make women feel compelled to have their uterus removed when they look at you.

*Pause.*

Him : You know, it's your fault that we find ourselves in this situation. You didn't give me a choice. If you hadn't been so unpleasant from the beginning, we might even have become friends ! But your lack of courtesy towards me went too far. And I can not, can no longer, accept such lack of gratitude and scorn. « Men are born and remain free and equal in rights », article no.1 of the declaration of the rights of man. I too am a citizen and I've payed my debts. For twenty years I've been hearing the same refrain and haven't said anything. I've just put up with it !! I want to be respected ! That isn't difficult to understand is it !!! RESPECT !!! I want my space ! (*Then as he calms down*) Is that clear ?

*She nods. He takes his black leather gloves out of his pocket and starts to put them on. As he takes the second one out, he feels the box he had taken.*

Him : Oh, what's this ? I think you lost something ! (He shows her the box and opens it). Oh, how touching,

photographs !...Nice dog, a black and fire-red Coonhound ! Very rare ! Did you know they were exported to the US in the XVIIth century for racoon hunting ?

Her : Mouinhouin moiun, Moiunoiun moiun, Moiunhoiun moiun (she gets more and more worked up, until finally she's exhausted).

Him : And this is you ? I never would have recognized you. Wow, you used to look pretty good ! (He looks at her) You certainly have aged a bit! And this is your...

*All of a sudden she starts to sing the song. She sings the melody louder and louder. First he stares at her dumbfounded, then he is mesmerized again. Something strange happens inside him.*

Him : (He comes back to reality) I don't know what came over me...I'm so sorry...(He removes the tape from her mouth, and unwraps the rest of it. He gives the box back to her.)....I'm sorry....

*She runs away. He stays on his bench, distraught.*

*BLACKOUT - END OF ACT I*