



The Comedians

after Graham Greene

by Christian Lanciai (2016)

The characters:

Harry Brown

William Smith

Mrs Smith

Jones

A purser

Doctor Magiot

Joseph

Martha

Concasseur

Other members of the Tontons Macoute

The action is in Haiti in the days of Papa Doc.

Scene 1. In the bar on board the *Medea*.

Brown You don't say?

Smith Yes, I do mean it.

Brown Candidate Smith for the presidency?

Smith Yes. William Smith.

Mrs He means what he says, I can assure you.

Brown I don't doubt it. It just seems so odd. An American presidential candidate on his way to Haiti of all places.

Smith It was only once upon a time.

Brown Which year was it?

Smith 1948.

Brown So you lost against Truman?

Mrs We still got more than ten thousand votes.

Brown At least something. Just once and never again?

Smith Once was enough for a lifetime.

Jones Some things only happen to you once.

Smith Sorry, your name, please?

Jones Jones. Major Jones.

Smith Some military past?

Jones A great past. In Burma.

Smith Before it became independent and broke out of the commonwealth to become a dictatorship.

Jones Correct.

Brown You must be joking. You can't be called Smith and Jones and be a US president candidate and a major??

Smith We aren't joking. In America you run for president for dead serious. Everyone has the right to try. It's a free country.

Jones Who are you yourself?

Brown I am sorry. I fell behind in the presentation. My name is actually Brown. I was born that way. It's nobody's fault.

Jones So we are Smith, Jones and Brown. Nothing wrong with that. Any title?

Brown No, I am just plain Brown. But I run a hotel in the godforsaken dump of Port-au-Prince.

Smith I presume that's where we are staying. What is the name of the place?

Brown Trianon. It's just above town.

Smith Yes, that's our place. Delighted to meet our hotel manager before we even got ashore. (*cordially shakes hands with Brown*)

Mrs We haven't booked any hotel, William.

Smith That's why we did it now. You should catch the right moment. Or else you will miss the train.

Brown That's right. You will be my guests of honour. You don't always have a presidential candidate for a guest. But what on earth brings you to Haiti?

Smith I have a personal letter of recommendation to the minister of social care.

Purser There is no social care. You should see the rats. Large as terriers...

Brown Don't worry. In my hotel you are safe, far away from the city rats and gunfires...

Mrs Are they firing guns in Port-au-Prince? Why are they firing?

Brown You don't hear it from our place. And usually they are more quiet.

Mrs Who are *they*?

Purser The Tontons Macoute, the president's hoodlums. They wear dark glasses and make their uninvited visits after dark.

Smith He is trying to frighten us, my dear. Nothing like that was included in the program we had from the tourist agency.

Mrs He can't guess that we are not easy to scare off.

Smith Perhaps we could have some protection from our major here, if need be. What war were you active in?

Jones You can take it easy. Just give me 50 soldiers to command, and we will purge the country like a heavy dose of laxatives.

Smith Were you in the command squads?

Jones Another branch of the same gang.

Mrs How exciting!

Jones Exciting like hell. – But how on earth did you come into possession of your hotel in Port-au-Prince of all dumps in the world?

Brown An inheritance from my mother. She was from Monte Carlo.

Mrs How exotic! Anything can happen there.

Brown So it did.

Mrs But how did she come from Monte Carlo to Haiti?

Jones A very relevant question. If you are at home in Monte Carlo you don't emigrate to Haiti.

Brown That was her secret. I lost contact with her. Then she got in touch with me from Haiti after many years and asked me to drop by. She had come into possession of a hotel. Obviously it hadn't been planned at all, but there she was with a hotel, so I went there. While I was there visiting her, she died. So I got in charge of the hotel. Times were different then. During those days I advanced my hotel to some star status. Then came Papa Doc and ruined everything. It is nowadays the most abominable dictatorship in the world. I left for trying to sell the hotel in New York but failed, so now I am on my way back again.

Jones What do you plan to do?

Brown The only thing I can do. Making the best of it. It couldn't get worse anyway.

Smith I guess that's why they sent us to Haiti. As a missionary of humanitarian aid they apparently thought we if anyone could do something about it. I doubt it, but I will try. And what about you, Jones, what brings you to Haiti?

Jones All kinds of things. I was born an adventurer.

Mrs That's the spirit!

Brown Let's drink to it. Be my guests! Welcome to my shabby hotel Trianon in Port-au-Prince, the best and only functioning hotel in town!

Smith Looking forward to it!

Jones Cheers! (*They drink.*)

Scene 2. The hotel.

Magiot I regret the inconvenience, Brown. You shouldn't have come back.

Brown What else could I do? I couldn't sell the hotel in New York in spite of our irresistible tourist prospect from our days of progress. No one wants to buy a hotel in Port-au-Prince. It's like trying to sell a sick elephant.

Magiot Things will hardly be likely to improve down here.

Brown It surprises me that you are still here and alive.

Magiot Just you wait. I am needed as a doctor, I am respected, but sooner or later the hyenas will feel the scent of my corpses.

Brown It's my present corpse that worries me. We have had one suicide here too many before.

Magiot I remember. The poor Marcel. Your mother's last lover. Was it only because she died that he hanged himself?

Brown She gave him a third of the shares in the hotel. I bought them, and he was more than roundly paid for them.

Magiot You remember, that I advised you to sell all yours to him. That way you would conveniently have got rid of the hotel. Now it is too late.

Brown But this suicide is worse. No suicide is good for any hotel, but none could have been worse than this one. The cook and the cleaner have blown, and poor Joseph is scared stiff. I didn't even know him. Why did he come here?

Magiot It was probably his last possibility to feel safe anywhere. It is not easy to be a minister in this country.

Brown And poor Jones on board had a letter of recommendation for him. That's probably why he has been detained by the police.

Magiot He will not be likely to get off alive with such a crime. A letter of recommendation for a deposed minister can only have the same punishment as the minister.

Brown He anticipated. He is dead.

Magiot If Jones is lucky he will not have to happen to the same thing, but he needs a lot of luck.

Smith (outside) Is anybody home? This place seems empty.

Brown It's my guests from the boat. – Welcome, Mr and Mrs Smith! You will have the entire John Barrymore Suite for yourselves, the most perfect room of the hotel with the finest view!

Mrs Much obliged for that. Listen, there is someone sitting in the drained swimming pool.

Brown It's just a beggar. They sometimes find their way here in the night. It is cool here. We will presently fill it up with fresh water.

Smith You had better first wake up the beggar. He seems to be asleep.

Brown Yes, he is sleeping it off. They usually do. Joseph, show our guests to the John Barrymore Suite! They are our guests of honour from America.

Mrs Don't forget that my husband was a candidate for the presidency.

Brown Exactly. (*Joseph leaves with the guests.*)

Could you take care of the body?

Magiot Not without risking my life. I'll see what I can do. My son knows a few young men who are not afraid. Then you had better flush out the blood and turn on the water.

Brown If there is any water.

Magiot But why did he choose the swimming pool?

Brown He didn't feel welcome here. When neither the cook nor the cleaner managed to make him leave, they left instead. Joseph didn't succeed either. I gather he

found his place where he felt least in the way, and that was the best place to cut his veins.

Magiot Poor old minister of health!

Brown You said it.

Magiot Take it easy, Brown, and congratulations to your new guests.

Brown The first since I left. Jones should have come also, but he got stuck on the way.

Magiot If he finally arrives he will surely have some interesting things to tell.

Brown Let's hope so. (*They shake hands, and Magiot leaves.*)

Joseph, a double.

Joseph Welcome home, Sir!

Jones (knocking on the window) Tsst, Brown!

Brown You are alive! (*hurries up and lets him in through the window*) How did you make it? Obviously you have been both beaten and bandaged.

Jones I am used to it. It could have been worse, but I always seem to get away.

Brown What was the occasion? Smuggling?

Jones Not at all. Wrong letter of introduction. The general I thought I would be in good hands with was himself imprisoned. Obviously my letter of introduction with its heavy-weight reference was outdated. You can never trust militaries.

Brown But how did you get out? What happened?

Jones They wanted to know what business I had had with the scrapped general. I had never seen him of course. Then they thought they could improve reality by beating me up, and when they didn't succeed they sent for a doctor to fix me up, when it threatened to amount to a diplomatic incident, since I actually was a British citizen. The American embassy is expelled from Haiti, but we still have a *chargé d'affaires* left.

Brown He can't do much.

Jones That he exists is enough. What are you having?

Brown Rum, the best in Caribia on Haiti.

Jones It will do. (*Brown gives Joseph a hint, who mixes a grog for Jones.*)

Brown But how did you get out?

Jones I am used to it. Old routines are still sticking. Some money under the table and a note for a sergeant. Now I can start afresh. It's just to get going.

Brown With what?

Jones You'll see.

Smith (comes back down) I thought I heard our friend Jones' voice down here. Welcome back to reality.

Jones Thanks. It was just a temporary trip.

Smith You seem to have got some scars in the battle.

Jones It will pass. Some resistance only raises the fighting spirit.

Smith That's the spirit. I tried to put in a word for you in my capacity as a candidate for the presidency.

Brown That's probably what made it.

Jones Unfortunately I have to disappoint you, Brown. I can't stay in your fine hotel.

Smith Pity, for it's a fine place with a swimming pool and all.

Brown I am sure there are better places.

Jones I have to stay closer to town since new exciting business demands my presence there.

Brown Without doubt.

Mrs (comes down) The beggar seems to be out of the pool.

Brown Yes, they usually never stay long.

Mrs I hope he got something to eat before he left.

Brown I am sure he had.

Smith But who is this? (*A new lady appears.*)

Brown Martha!

Martha I heard you had come back. Angel has got the mumps.

Brown How sad.

Jones Who is Angel?

Brown Her son. This is Martha Pineda, the wife of the consul general of Argentine here in Port-au-Prince. The Latin American states still have their embassies in Haiti and enjoy high status.

Mrs How dreadful for your son!

Martha Yes, he suffers horribly. You suddenly seem to have your hotel filled up with guests, Harry.

Brown That's overstating it. Jones does not stay here yet, and the Smiths are the only guests. William Smith is a former presidential candidate.

Martha How exciting!

Smith Not any more.

Brown Nowadays he seems to work full time for the spreading of the wholesomeness of vegetarianism.

Mrs It is our mission in the world.

Martha How exciting!

Mrs Yes, it is really most exciting.

Martha I can't stay longer. I have to get home to my sick son. I didn't know you had the hotel full of guests.

Jones Don't let us stop you.

Mrs We were just retiring. Come, William.

Jones See you, Brown. I am off.

Brown Good luck with your business.

Jones They always succeed to begin with. (*leaves*)

Martha I thought you would never be back.

Brown Doctor Magiot warned me. He was here a moment ago.

Martha But you came back. You dared.

Brown I had no choice. I could not sell the hotel in America.

Martha You should have sold it to Marcel while he was still alive.

Brown Yes, doctor Magiot said the same thing. Even for a bargain price it would have been good business.

Martha What sort of business is that Jones heading for?

Brown No one knows. Since he appears to have come into good standing with the militaries, I suspect some fishy weapon business.

Martha Perhaps he has been doing that before.

Brown At least something in that line.

Martha Will you stay on now?

Brown That is the question. It will depend on circumstances. When I came home there was a corpse waiting for me in the swimming-pool.

Martha Was that the beggar the American lady thought she discovered?

Brown It was the former minister of health Philipot.

Martha Whom no one knows what happened to him? Who is supposed to be busy with some project in the north or have disappeared in the south?

Brown The very man. Doctor Magiot helped me clean it up afterwards. It's no good having corpses in the swimming-pool when you have your first guests for months and they even are Americans, especially not if it is a question of suicide in which the victim cut up his own veins.

Martha What had he done?

Brown He appears to have called Doc Duvalier incompetent as a doctor.

Martha Then he will never be buried.

Brown No, if even his corpse will ever be located.

Martha Still I am glad you came back. Just don't tell me it was for my sake.

Brown It was for your sake. Has your husband ever seen us through?

Martha He doesn't care. He has stopped to care about anything. He just wants to get away from here, but it will be difficult to find a consulate after Haiti.

Brown He is not alone. All those embassies that were expelled have reasons enough to consider themselves lucky.

Martha I have longed for you.

Brown It is mutual. We have several vacancies. Do you have time? Do you dare?

Martha We have managed it before in short time and with narrow margins.

Brown Then we have our moment now. Come! (*brings her out. Joseph cleans up after the drinks.*)

Scene 3. A local place of doubtful nature, like a voodoo night club.

Jones How nice to see you here in such a place!

Smith My wife fancied taking a closer look at the local life, even if she already saw enough.

Jones What do you mean? Have you been disappointed?

Smith Indeed. They are not exactly any idealists here, and my wife and I are accomplished idealists. There is no fertile ground here for pure vegetarianism. We will probably soon return with our mission unfulfilled.

Jones But I like it well here. For me it is paradise. I have risen in society and had a suite of my own in Club Creole, the most extreme place in town, where only guests of honour may stay and without paying. The service includes everything and even all the girls of the night club. In a short time I will have made my fortune.

Smith I would be very careful if I were you.

Jones Be careful about what?

Smith About having anything to do with the government. They are all gangsters. They live on sucking out the country by blackmail, oppressive violence and parasitism. We were invited as guests out to the new capital Duvalierville, a planned equivalent to Brasilia. It's a ghost town, a monstrous ghost town of naked skeletons of sterile monster buildings where nothing works. We only saw one living human being there. He was a cripple and a beggar, and when I gave him money our driver killed him. My wife witnessed a funeral. It was the deceased health minister, and his procession was followed by his widow and children. They were stopped, soldiers rampaged the funeral car and disappeared with the coffin.

Jones Naturally it's a rogue state, but you have to give them a chance. Or else they will never improve.

Smith That's what my wife always believed until she came here. If you are planning to make business with them I would think twice and pull out quick if there was any chance.

Jones I think that is the problem. There is no chance. I am contracted and must fulfil the deal.

Smith I am sorry for your sake. Fortunately we never got that far. The new minister of health backed out instantly when the only true path to good health vegetarianism was mentioned. There is no hope for such a government.

Jones Brown will be disappointed. You were his ace of trumps as guests of honour. An American presidential candidate does not always come to Haiti.

Smith After we have left, his hotel will probably be empty. I hope he will not get any trouble with the intolerable police bullies.

Jones I will do what I can to protect him.

Smith You should rather think of your own safety. If you get mixed up with that company you are more at risk than in the hands of gorillas.

Jones Thanks for the warning, but I usually get out all right.

Smith Whatever you do, don't try to cheat them.

Jones Why not? If they are such crooks as you claim they will not last long in power anyway. Dictators only exist to be deposed, and I have alternative business at hand.

Smith May I ask what kind of?

Jones Honest business. Weapons for the rebels.

Smith And you are negotiating with the Tontons Macoute at the same time?

Jones The one does not exclude the other.

Smith It surprises me that you have survived this long.

Jones If you have survived at all you could always survive some more.

Smith As long as it works.

Jones Life never ends.

Smith All I can do is to wish you luck.

Jones To you as well, even if you have decided to give up.

Smith We never give up the good cause. The problem is that here in Haiti there are only bad causes.

Jones I think it was worse in Congo.

Smith Did you make business there?

Jones In Stanleyville and Leopoldville, but at least I got away alive.

Smith But the business did not succeed?

Jones Not directly.

Smith (*rises and leaves, gives Jones a friendly press on his shoulder for a farewell.*)

Scene 4. The hotel.

(A gang of Tontons Macoute have occupied some armchairs in the salon and seem to have seized the entire hotel, all in black glasses, their only uniform, several with their guns drawn.)

Brown (*comes down in a dressing-gown and slippers*) May I know the reason for this intrusion so early in the morning?

Concasseur Sit down! (*points at him with his gun*)

Brown What are you looking for? We have no fugitives here. Your men are making noise enough to wake up the dead. And I have guests who are better off sleeping.

Concasseur Shut up! What do you know about colonel Jones?

Brown Very little.

Concasseur Philipot was here.

Brown Was he? Which one of them?

Concasseur Both! Both the scuttled health minister and his nephew!

Brown I had no idea.

Concasseur Before the nephew came here he was up with colonel Jones. What was his business with colonel Jones?

Brown How could I know?

Concasseur You know everything!

Brown No, I know nothing. Ask colonel Jones about what you want to know. He is after all a friend of yours nowadays.

Concasseur We don't trust him. We don't trust white men. We only use them.

Brown What a pity then that I am of no use.

Concasseur If you are of no use to this country and do not cooperate, you still know what is happening. Where is Joseph?

Brown I don't know.

Concasseur Why isn't he here?

Brown I don't know.

Concasseur You were with him tonight. You attended the same voodoo rites together with young Philipot.

Brown Yes, I drove there with Joseph but returned alone.

Concasseur Why?

Brown I was disgusted with the show.

Concasseur You had a meeting with the rebels.

Brown Never in my life. What do you really want? What is the reason for your intrusion?

Concasseur A police station was attacked tonight at four o'clock. A man was killed.

Brown Before that I was in bed. Why was there only one man killed? Did the others run away?

Concasseur Yes. I will deal with them later. But why hasn't Joseph come home? Someone recognized Philipot at the séance. He hasn't come home either. When did you last see him? Where?

Brown At the séance. We didn't talk.

Concasseur But you seem to know him and well like you knew his uncle the scrapped health minister. He came here before he disappeared and was found as a corpse, didn't he?

Brown I didn't even attend his funeral.

Concasseur His funeral was cancelled. That's maybe why you didn't go there.

Brown No, I even warned my guests against going there, but they went there anyway and witnessed a downright orgy of plundering a corpse.

Concasseur There was no corpse in the coffin. It was a deception. We confiscated stolen bricks.

Brown So your minister of social health Philipot maybe then isn't quite dead after all?

Concasseur What do you know about it?

Brown As I said: nothing.

Concasseur You are lying. You know everything and therefore don't want to speak. You know where both Philipot and colonel Jones are. Hit him, Marlou. (*A policeman is just about to strike Brown when Mrs Smith appears in a nightgown.*)

Mrs How distasteful, how utterly distasteful! How dare you come tramping into a private home just to smash the furniture, wake up the guests and abuse the owner? Shame on you! Anyone can see that you are negroes, but even in America they are not all barbarians. What is your authority, and where is your warrant, if you are policemen? Show us your legitimation and orders!

Concasseur (to Brown) Who is she? An old film star?

Brown The wife of the presidential candidate, who is staying here.

Concasseur What presidential candidate?

Brown He was in the elections 1948 opposing Truman.

Concasseur We would prefer not to get him down as well. You will pass this time, Brown, but we will be back. *Salut!* Come on, boys! We won't find anything here anyway except mad ladies and old ghosts. (*leaves with his gang*)

Mrs What a mob of gangsters! The whole country is just a mob of black gangsters.

Brown It will pass, even if it will take time.

Mrs We have had enough. We fly out as soon as we can.

Brown Already? So soon?

Mrs We already stayed far too long. We should have realized that in a dictatorship everything is hopeless from the start.

Brown It could have been even worse.

Mrs Some optimist! No, thank you. As far as I have been able to assess the situation correctly, it actually could not have been even worse.

Smith (coming down in a nightgown) Did you get rid of the trouble-makers, darling?

Mrs At least for the moment. I just told Mr Brown that we intend to leave the country as fast as possible.

Smith If you are wise you will wage on the same only possible solution.

Brown You forget that I am bound to my hotel and my responsibility.

Smith For what? For this failure of a self-destructive and mad country of hell?

Brown No, for my hotel, my personnel and my friends here. Maybe even for major Jones.

Smith If you don't leave the country voluntarily you will be forced to. That's my positive conviction.

Brown We shall see. I am sorry your morning was disturbed. It will not happen again, if I can avoid it.

Smith It will happen again, you can be sure. And next time my wife will not be here to defend you. – Gertrude, go back up to bed and sleep on. The danger is over now.

Mrs No, William. The danger is never over. (*goes back upstairs*)

Smith Have you seen Jones?

Brown No.

Smith I am worried about him. We can leave the country without difficulties, but he will have difficulties.

Brown Why? He seems to always have managed.

Smith Do you really think he is a major? He seems to have made those gangsters believe he is a colonel.

Brown I doubt that he has had any military past at all. He seems the contrary to a soldier in everything and definitely impossible as such.

Smith My opinion exactly. But he has not seen through the gangsters. I have. He thinks he can fool them.

Brown He is welcome to fool them as much as he likes. They don't deserve any better.

Smith But it is risky. They are worse than animals.

Brown I know. I know them.

Smith I can't tell how disappointed I am with this country and its people. I came here with only good will to do good, and all I find is an innate hopeless animal stubborn wickedness, which either wallows in its own misfortune, like all the mutilated beggars here, or enjoys worsening it for others, like the almighty father of the country, the lifetime crowned world benefactor Papa Doc, who is like a grotesque distortion of a dictator. I knew that Hitler and Stalin were the worst in history, but Papa Doc Duvalier is like a misshapen freak of an offshoot of theirs, as if he was planted in the world just to prove the monstrosity of all dictatorship. It can't survive since it lives only by abuse as long as it lives. If Haiti has taught me anything, it's the absolute necessity to fight and extirpate all dictatorships by any means.

Brown This happens to be worse by being a black dictatorship.

Smith I was never a racist before I came here, but I am sorry to say that I have been obliged to admit to myself that from now on I am a definite racist. You are right. The fact that it's a black dictatorship makes matters worse. I have small hopes for all the new African states that now are turning independent and thereby reverting to their old tribal wars. As long as the colonial powers ruled them there was some order with them, but now one after the other will decline into utterly corrupt dictatorships. I have no

hope for the black Africa, especially not after the Congo crisis. All whites who went there to try to bring some order into the chaos returned home confirmed racists. Africa has two world oceans around it besides the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, but they never came upon the idea to try to navigate. Only Phoenicians, Europeans and people of the east did that.

Brown Do you regard yourself as a European although you are American?

Smith All Americans come from Europe except the blacks, who come from Africa by unnatural transplantation. Europe managed without that sort of thing.

Brown I regret that you will be leaving us.

Smith I regret that you have to remain. But it's your own choice.

Brown I always had a kind of morbid interest in primitive drama and human excitement. I would like to see the end of the drama here.

Smith I hope you will survive it.

Brown I have Jones here for an instructor in how to survive.

Smith Do you think he will survive?

Brown He has survived so far.

Smith He puts his trust in fortune and has nothing else to trust.

Brown Then at least he is an optimist. That could lead at any length.

Smith Yes, it will last until it for natural reasons changes into pessimistic realism. I am sorry, Brown, but what are we constructive positivists really doing in this world of global destruction? Do we have anything else to do here but to offer pearls to swine, who only make them vanish in their dirt? Unfortunately I have to despair about all humanity. We had a chance of a new beginning after the Second World War, it looked fairly bright during the 50s as if we really had managed to pull ourselves together, and then Kennedy was shot, the Vietnam war was boosted ruining the good reputation and admired status of America in the world, even the apostle of peace Dag Hammershield was liquidated, and now the Chinese are launching a cultural revolution by which all things old are to be destroyed, all culture, tradition, religion and history, by the regular Chinese power madness hysteria, which was introduced and established already when the first emperor more than 2000 years ago ordered all books to be burned to make history start with him.

Jones (knocking on the window) Tsst!

Smith Here is your friend Jones now. I expect he is in trouble. Take care of him. We are packing and leaving. (*leaves*)

Brown (lets Jones in) What has happened now?

Jones They have found me out. They are after me. I have to hide.

Brown It's not possible here. But you are a British citizen. Our *chargé d'affaires* must be able to give you protection.

Jones The British embassy is surrounded and under surveillance. I am wanted. Still I didn't manage to cheat them of a single gourdes.

Brown But you lived well at their expense, and that's bad enough for you to never be able to get rid of them.

Jones Why didn't Smith want to see me?

Brown They are leaving. They have had enough of this country.

Jones No wonder.

Brown The only possible safe place for you I could imagine would be the Argentine embassy. I know the ambassador well. His wife is a good friend of mine. But we have to smuggle you over there. Could you dress up as a woman?

Jones I have been in it before. What about the *Medea* then, the boat we arrived with?

Brown You have to have an exit permit to get on board. You'll never get that.

Jones No, I am afraid so. Then we have to try your emergency exit.

Brown Quiet! I hear someone coming.

Jones That must be someone very discreet.

Brown (*rises as he recognizes the guest*) You are always welcome, doctor Magiot.

Magiot I heard your friend Jones had fallen out of grace and that he is here. I am afraid we share the same danger of life.

Brown But you are only a doctor and indispensable as there are so few left.

Magiot I have also been in touch with Philipot. It's a crime that for the time being immediately leads to execution.

Jones He is just an ordinary youth.

Magiot No, major Jones, he is the nephew of the former social minister, who recently cut his veins in Mr Brown's swimming-pool.

Jones Was that what he was doing? How awkward for you, Brown.

Brown It couldn't have been more awkward. What is your message, doctor? We were just about smuggling major Jones over to the Argentine embassy.

Magiot It would be wisest for him to then stay there as long as possible and not leave it until doctor Duvalier has been overthrown.

Jones You think you can oust him?

Magiot Anyone could oust him any time. It's inevitable. He is like that and is asking for it by every violation he commits, and he commits them constantly all the time, since that's what he lives on. His greatest fear is to lose the initiative of evil.

Brown What about you then, doctor?

Magiot I have to care for my patients. Haven't you been visited by the Tontons Macoute?

Brown Mrs Smith saved me. She interfered like the goddess Nemesis herself just as they were going to dispose of me.

Magiot For knowing Philipot?

Brown For knowing Jones.

Magiot You must have insulted them outrageously, major Jones. Did you succeed in selling them non-existent weapons?

Jones I never got that far, but I was close to succeeding.

Magiot That's the only thing anyone is making money on in this country, selling weapons to the dictatorship. To then cheat them with false weapons is the surest way to get the same ticket as former social minister Philipot. Still that's what most weapon dealers are doing and getting away with it. That is why the regime is so hysterically desperate.

Jones Pity I didn't reach that club of success.

Smith (coming down, dressed) Are you still here, Jones? How nice to see you one more time.

Jones I thought you didn't want to see me any more.

Smith On the contrary. We had a disturbing scene here this morning, my wife had already decided for us to leave the country, but the abominable manners of that policeman gave her a deeper disgust of all dictatorial oppression than she ever thought herself capable of. We started packing immediately.

Magiot I hope the fact that both the dictatorship and the Tontons Macoute are black don't add to your possible racist prejudice.

Smith We had enough of that already in America, but my wife will have to speak for herself. Here she is now.

Mrs I heard that major Jones is back for a visit. I was hoping to at least be able to bid you a decent kind of farewell.

Smith The question is if anything could be decent in this country.

Magiot Madame, your country regards the regime of this country as a bulwark against communism and therefore protects its dictator. I am not ashamed to admit that I am what you call a communist and stand in touch with the mountain guerrilla and its leader the young Philipot. At the same time I work as a doctor and refuse to abandon my patients although I know the regime is after me. I expect to be murdered by the Tontons Macoute any time like all other decent people in this country. Thus I try to lead a decent life against all odds.

Mrs You are a hero.

Magiot Thank you, Madame, but I am just an honest doctor.

Brown We must get Jones out of here before the Tontons Macoute come for another visit.

Mrs Could we be of any assistance?

Jones Thank you, Mrs Smith, but I have a lady of my own to help me.

Brown We intend to smuggle him across by dressing him up as a woman.

Mrs How original! Good luck!

Smith We had better go up and continue packing, darling.

Mrs Wait a moment. I want to finish reasoning with the gentlemen first. We aren't in such a hurry.

Jones Where do you intend to fly? Home to Wisconsin?

Smith We thought of staying a while in Santo Domingo and have a look around.

Jones Earlier Ciudad Trujillo until a few years ago.

Brown Did you know that dictator also?

Jones He was a regular Sunday school against the black regime here. Trujillo loved girls at least.

Brown We know nothing about Papa Doc's love life.

Magiot He probably hasn't any.

Mrs I have heard that he practices voodoo instead.

Brown Yes, they say he collects corpses in his cellar. The former minister of health is probably there, if he isn't busy as a zombie.

Magiot They usually cut off their heads first for security.

Mrs How could such a man at all become a politician and then a perfect dictator?

Smith He started as a doctor, dear.

Mrs That's no excuse.

Brown Do you intend to try to start some vegetarian colony or cell in Santo Domingo?

Smith We intend to look around for possibilities.

Mrs The conditions are probably better there than here.

Magiot Was it because you were vegetarians that you lost the elections in 1948?

Mrs Not only. Those who are right and know they are right always sail against the wind and never reach all the way, but they still know they are right.

Magiot What is right? The law or the conscience?

Mrs The conscience is always right of course. The law is always being manipulated as it invites manipulation by blind formalism and variable interpretations. Anyone can use the law to get what he wants. The more laws, the more criminality and injustice. The law is a blind robot which is easy to tamper with to make it go against all reason and self-evidence to overrun the conscience and thereby turn into an inhuman monster of automatism. That's Orwell's 1984 in a nutshell: an inhuman robot system as the highest authority. It's the slavery of the modern times of hell.

Magiot Is that what you turn against?

Mrs If you know what is right it is not wrong to do so.

Magiot Vegetarianism?

Mrs You could always start with that. It's a good initial position.

Brown Shall we start attire you in your skirts, Jones?

Jones We might just as well. We have to get started sometime.

Smith The sooner, the better. What about getting packed, Gertrude?

Mrs There is very little left.

Magiot I hope to see you all in Haiti again under better circumstances.

Smith We would be delighted, if Brown's hotel will still be standing. The position is splendid. The only disturbance of the paradise was the politics.

Jones It is always like that. So it was in Burma, and so it was in the Congo. Political powers forced their independence, which turned them into dictatorships going under in violence and chaos. During the colonial times there was at least order and justice.

Magiot So Haiti should have remained under the French?

Jones Of course. They were well off under Alexander Dumas' father.

Magiot It would be difficult to return to that order of things.

Jones But you must admit it was better than the order of today.

Magiot There is no order of today, only voodoo and terror.

Jones Still I like it here. I would like to help you redeem the country.

Mrs That's a true vegetarian.

Jones That's not what I meant. The salvation of Caribia is in my opinion rather in the rum business.

Brown That's the voice of a realist.

Martha (enters, to Brown) I heard about Jones' problems. He is welcome to stay with us.

Brown Your future is ensured, Jones.

Magiot As I said, I hope he stays there as long as possible for his own sake.

Martha You will never be short of company.

Jones There is always a way forward and a way out of all difficulties. That's what I always said. You'll always manage if you only have the will.

Smith I think so too.

Magiot Your husband could not get into diplomatic difficulties with the government for housing a person non grata?

Martha He will take that risk.

Brown If there is a problem we will have to smuggle Jones across the border. You know Philipot, doctor Magiot.

Magiot He will be sure to help you, and he would enjoy learning something from major Jones about guerilla warfare.

Jones I will be glad to take on proselytes. Just give me a handful volunteers, and we will purge the country like a dose of laxatives.

Brown We had better smuggle you out right away. Martha will help. You will act as her lady companion.

Jones Some pleasure!

Smith And we will have to continue preparing for our journey. Come, Gertrude. We leave a good company but in good company.

Mrs Hold out, boys! One day we will overcome!

Jones Absolutely.

Brown Come, Martha and Jones. Happy journey, Mr Presidential Candidate with wife. Take care, Magiot.

Magiot That accounts for all of us. (*All the others leave.*) I doubt that anyone will ever come back to this hotel. At home perhaps the Tontons Macoute are waiting for me to shoot me down for "resistance against police". That's their normal procedure. Here you could actually hide, like the former health minister, but now there is no one left here who would try to get rid of you. I will stay here for the time being, and then we'll see. There is still rum galore here, and the kitchen is well provided. It's just to make the best of it, be content, hold out and hibernate. The only matter that could get me out of here would be a patient, and then I would have to accept it, even if both the patient and I will be shot in the bargain. Only a patient I could still consider myself worth dying for in this world

(makes himself comfortable with large grog. Curtain.)

Comment

I never tried to dramatise Graham Greene before although he always was one of my favourite authors – at fifteen I read everything of him. After the publication of “The Comedians” there was a film made on it with Richard Burton, Alec Guinness, Elizabeth Taylor, Peter Ustinov and James Earl Jones, and Graham Greene wrote the script himself. He chose to make great changes in his novel. For example, it contains a long interesting flashback of Brown’s life (chapter 3 in the first part) which is entirely missing in the film. The consul is given a much larger part in the film than in the book, where he only occurs in glimpses, and the conclusion in Santo Domingo (chapter 4 in part 3) is also missing in the film. For the rest, the film sticks faithfully to the book and succeeds in accentuating the most important scenes to dramatic and efficient highlights, especially the voodoo séance. Graham Greene must have been satisfied with the film, which got through what he wanted it to get through with. The only matter that the film lacks, which is offered by the book, is the complete portrait of Jones. Alec Guinness is perfect in the role, no one could have made it better, but still the books gives even more.

I have chosen to conclude my dramatization before the thriller finale begins with the flight across the mountains with guerrilla adventures and sudden grim death, but a play can’t present such matters. I choose to leave Graham Greene’s comedians while they are still alive and in good health and before anyone of them has turned in in one or other way. There are many deaths in the book, and the suicide in the swimming-pool is just the beginning. Graham Greene accomplished a masterpiece of a comedy with a dark tragic background, and I chose to stick to the comedy refusing to accept the end of it no matter how dark and tragic the background.

A curiosity: Artur Lundkvist of the Swedish Academy once commanded the plague flag to be hoisted when a play by Graham Greene was being presented at the leading theatre of Stockholm. He did not like Graham Greene and made sure he would never get the Nobel prize. I wonder what Artur Lundkvist would have thought about my dramatization of “The Comedians”. Could they have displeased him?

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