

Twenty Thousand Euros

Youth theatre · 14-character play · 6 women, 4 men, 4 either · 45 min · Intermediate · Ages 11+

For the first time ever, the Youth Town Council of Vernay-sur-Lise has a real budget: twenty thousand euros, to be voted on over three sessions. In the school playground, the campaigns begin, polls are bought with sweets, and an older brother from the high school sets himself up as an adviser behind the scenes. Then somebody finally reads the document nobody reads, and the gift stops looking like a gift.

The council chamber of Vernay-sur-Lise town hall, lent to the young councillors three Saturdays in a row, and the school playground between sessions, in France, today.

Casting

CLARA (Female role, Teen) 14, president of the Youth Town Council, elected for a second year.

AMIRA (Female role, Teen) 15, council member, leading the campaign for the “Grand Festival”.

NORA (Female role, Teen) 14, council member, runs Amira’s campaign.

IRIS (Female role, Teen) 12, council member, has done the maths on trees and compost bins.

LINA (Female role, Teen) 11, in Year 7, the youngest on the council, lives in the hamlet of Les Granges.

PAULA (Female role, Teen) 13, writes the school paper single-handed.

HUGO (Male role, Teen) 14, council member, has wanted a skatepark since primary school.

FÉLIX (Male role, Teen) 13, council member, has backed Hugo from day one.

MATEO (Male role, Teen) 12, council member, watches debates from the French Parliament online.

OSCAR (Male role, Teen) 17, at the high school, Hugo’s older brother, too old for the council.

ROBIN (No gender marker, Teen) 13, council member, has abstained on every vote since September.

EDEN (No gender marker, Teen) 12, council member, takes the minutes of every session.

KIM (No gender marker, Teen) 14, council member, keeps the accounts and reads every document.

SASHA (No gender marker, Teen) 13, in Year 9, runs the Sasha Institute, a polling company in a shoebox.

ACT ONE: FIRST SESSION

SCENE 1

(The council chamber at the town hall. A big horseshoe-shaped table, microphones, a flag. On an easel, a giant cardboard cheque: "Twenty thousand euros". The council members are taking their seats. Paula sits at the back, a notebook on her knees.)

CLARA

Good morning, everyone. It's ten o'clock. I declare open the first budget session of the Youth Town Council of Vernay-sur-Lise.

(Nobody moves. Clara knocks three times on the table with her pen.)

CLARA

Open.

MATEO

Point of order.

CLARA

Mateo, we haven't even started.

MATEO

Exactly. Article four: "Council members shall remain seated." Hugo is sitting on the back of his chair.

HUGO

That's seated.

MATEO

That's perched.

CLARA

Hugo, please.

(Hugo slides down onto the seat.)

CLARA

Eden, are you taking this down?

EDEN

"Ten o'clock. Clara opens the session. Nobody moves. Mateo says Hugo is perched."

HUGO

You're not writing that down!

EDEN

"Hugo says: you're not writing that down."

CLARA

Thank you, Eden. Kim, you have the floor for the budget.

KIM

Thanks. Right. Twenty thousand euros. Once, this year. Not every year.

(Everyone looks at the cheque.)

AMIRA

It's beautiful.

KIM

It's cardboard.

FÉLIX

What?

KIM

It's a cheque for the photo. The mayor held it up for ten seconds for the newspaper, and then it got parked here. The real money is one line in the town hall's budget. We never touch it. We vote, and the town hall pays.

MATEO

So we're rich, but our pockets are empty.

KIM

Exactly. Like grown-ups.

CLARA

The rules, Kim.

KIM

Three sessions. Today, the projects. Next Saturday, the debate. The Saturday after, the vote. A project passes if it gets six votes out of eleven. Not five and a half. Six.

CLARA

I'd like to remind everyone that the president doesn't campaign. The president presides.

NORA

But the president votes?

CLARA

The president votes last.

NORA

Interesting.

CLARA

Let's hear the projects. Hugo.

(Hugo stands up. Félix stands up too, a second too late.)

HUGO

Thank you, Madam President.

CLARA

Clara will do.

HUGO

Thank you, Clara. Vernay-sur-Lise has a church, a roundabout and a bakery that's shut on Mondays. Vernay-sur-Lise does not have a skatepark. We are proposing a skatepark.

FÉLIX

One skatepark for all, and all for... one skatepark!

HUGO

Thanks, Félix.

FÉLIX

No problem. I learned it by heart.

(At the back, Paula raises her hand.)

PAULA

Question from the press. How much does a skatepark cost?

CLARA

Paula, the press doesn't have the floor.

PAULA

The press is taking it.

HUGO

The real question isn't the price. The real question is the dream.

PAULA

"Doesn't know the price."

HUGO

I didn't say that!

EDEN

"Hugo says: I didn't say that."

CLARA

Amira.

(Amira stands up. Nora hands out flyers all the way round the table.)

IRIS

They're already printed?

NORA

We plan ahead.

AMIRA

A village doesn't live on benches and roundabouts. It lives on moments. I'm proposing the Grand Festival of Vernay. One Saturday in June, on the square. Stalls, lights, a stage. And on the stage, a real singer. A famous one. One your parents have never heard of.

NORA

"The Grand Festival. Finally, something happens in Vernay."

MATEO

Now that's a slogan.

NORA

Thank you.

MATEO

I'm not saying it's good. I'm saying it's a slogan.

HUGO

And how much does a famous singer cost?

AMIRA

The real question isn't the price, Hugo. It's the dream.

HUGO

That's my line!

AMIRA

It was lying on the floor. I picked it up.

PAULA

"Doesn't know the price either."

CLARA

Iris.

(Iris takes a thick bundle of stapled pages out of her bag.)

IRIS

I've done the maths. One tree, planted, with a stake to hold it up, is eighty euros. With twenty thousand euros, we can plant two hundred trees, and there's still enough left to put a compost bin in every street. A compost bin turns peelings into soil. In six months. Six months is nothing.

FÉLIX

Does it smell?

IRIS

A bit.

FÉLIX

How much is a bit?

IRIS

Depends on the peelings.

(Amira yawns. Nora elbows her.)

CLARA

Thank you, Iris, that's very thorough. Mateo.

MATEO

Free Wi-Fi in the forest.

(A pause.)

CLARA

In the forest.

MATEO

There's no signal in the forest. If you get lost, you can't even tell anyone.

IRIS

In the forest, you look at the forest.

MATEO

You can look at the forest and your phone. I've got two eyes.

CLARA

Noted. Lina?

(Lina stands up.)

LINA

Mine's a shelter. At the stop for the Wednesday shuttle bus, in Les Granges. When it rains, we wait outside. A shelter with a roof. That's all.

(A pause. Nobody reacts.)

CLARA

Noted.

EDEN

"Lina proposes a shelter. Nobody reacts."

LINA

You can't write that.

EDEN

It's what happened.

CLARA

Robin? A proposal?

ROBIN

I'm thinking about it.

CLARA

Since September?

ROBIN

It's a big subject.

CLARA

Fine. We'll vote on the agenda for the next session: the debate on these five projects. All those in favour?

(Ten hands go up.)

CLARA

Against? Abstentions?

(Robin raises a hand.)

EDEN

"Ten in favour. One abstention. As usual."

ROBIN

I don't vote for an agenda I haven't read properly.

KIM

It's two lines long.

ROBIN

I read them too fast.

CLARA

One last thing. Between sessions, there's no campaigning in the playground. No flyers, no promises, no pressure. We're a council, not a playground.

AMIRA

Obviously.

HUGO

Obviously.

NORA

Obviously.

MATEO

I request that the word "obviously" be entered in the minutes.

EDEN

Done. Three times.

CLARA

This session is closed.

(Clara knocks once. Everyone stands up at the same time. Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(The school playground, Monday, at break. On a picnic table, a shoebox with a slot cut into it and a sign: "Sasha Institute. One poll = one sweet." Sasha waits behind it. Nora comes over.)

NORA

Is this the institute?

SASHA

The Sasha Institute. Polls, studies, trends. One poll, one sweet.

NORA

I need a poll for Amira.

SASHA

On what?

NORA

On how everybody wants the festival.

SASHA

That's not a poll. That's a result.

(Nora puts a whole bag of sweets down on the table.)

NORA

I'm paying up front.

SASHA

A whole bag. Okay. So we write a question. "Would you rather have the festival or the skatepark?"

NORA

Too risky.

SASHA

"Would you rather have a big free festival with a famous singer, or a skatepark?"

NORA

Better. Keep going.

SASHA

"Would you rather have a big free festival with a famous singer, or compost bins that smell?"

NORA

Perfect.

SASHA

I already asked it this morning. Sixty-eight per cent for the festival.

NORA

Sixty-eight? Is that all?

SASHA

Some people like compost. Surprised me too.

(Lina comes over, a sweet in her hand.)

LINA

Can you put the shelter in your question?

SASHA

What shelter?

LINA

At the Les Granges stop.

SASHA

It doesn't fit in the question. The question's already long.

(Lina walks off with her sweet. Iris arrives, carrying a tomato plant in a yoghurt pot.)

IRIS

I heard everything. It's rigged.

SASHA

The technical term is "leading question".

IRIS

I want a poll too. An honest one.

SASHA

An honest one is two sweets.

IRIS

I haven't got any sweets. I've got radishes.

SASHA

The Institute does not accept vegetables.

(Paula arrives, notebook open.)

PAULA

Sasha, for the school paper. How many people do you ask?

SASHA

Enough.

PAULA

How many?

SASHA

My class.

PAULA

And the other classes?

SASHA

They're not in my class.

PAULA

"Polls one class. Calls it an institute."

SASHA

You're not writing that down.

PAULA

Everyone keeps telling me that this week.

(Amira crosses the playground, followed by Nora. She waves to pupils we can't see.)

AMIRA

Year 8s! The concert's for you too. Promise. Year 7s, front row. Promise. Year 10s, we're saving you the best seats. Promise.

NORA

You've just promised the front row to everybody.

AMIRA

It'll be a big front row.

(Hugo and Félix arrive from the other side. Félix is carrying a placard.)

FÉLIX

A skatepark for all! All for... for...

HUGO

One skatepark.

FÉLIX

All for one skatepark!

AMIRA

Hugo. Clara said: no campaigning in the playground.

HUGO

And what are you doing?

AMIRA

Saying hello.

HUGO

With flyers?

AMIRA

With flyers, it's more polite.

(Robin crosses the playground, hands in pockets. Everyone turns towards Robin.)

AMIRA

Robin! Here, a festival badge. It glows in the dark.

ROBIN

Who would the singer be?

AMIRA

It's a surprise. You'll love it.

HUGO

Robin. A croissant. Still warm.

ROBIN

Where would the skatepark go?

HUGO

Wherever it's needed. Everywhere.

IRIS

Robin. A tomato plant. By July, it'll be as tall as you.

ROBIN

And your trees, when would we actually see them?

IRIS

Soon. Well, in ten years. But soon.

(Robin takes the badge, the croissant and the yoghurt pot.)

ROBIN

Thanks. Thanks. Thanks.

AMIRA

So?

ROBIN

I'm thinking about it.

(Robin leaves, eating the croissant. A pause.)

HUGO

My croissant's gone. That's a start.

IRIS

My tomato's gone too.

AMIRA

So's my badge.

NORA

Sasha. A poll. What does Robin want?

SASHA

That one, even for three bags of sweets, the Institute can't promise anything.

SCENE 3

(Behind the gym. Oscar, a skateboard under his arm, headphones round his neck. Hugo and Félix stand in front of him.)

OSCAR

Right. You've got a problem.

HUGO

We've got four projects against us.

OSCAR

No. You've got a numbers problem. Word is, you don't know the price.

HUGO

Who told you that?

OSCAR

The school paper. It's up on the wall in the main hall. Your photo's blurry.

FÉLIX

I'm the one who gave it to her.

OSCAR

Rule number one: never give a price. Give a dream.

HUGO

That's what I said!

OSCAR

Yeah, but when I say it, I say it with experience. Rule number two: promise everything. Rule number three: find the missing vote.

HUGO

Robin.

OSCAR

Robin.

FÉLIX

Oscar, why are you helping us? You're at the high school.

OSCAR

Because I am a citizen of Vernay-sur-Lise. And because me and my mates have been skating in the chemist's car park for five years, and the chemist throws buckets of water at us.

HUGO

You want the skatepark for yourself.

OSCAR

I want the skatepark for the youth. I am the youth. Until June.

FÉLIX

Hugo... I need to tell you something.

HUGO

What?

FÉLIX

I can't skate.

(A pause.)

HUGO

You've got a skateboard.

FÉLIX

I've got one. I don't stand on it. I carry it.

OSCAR

That's perfect. A good spokesperson never knows how to do the thing they're talking about.

(Robin walks past at the back, yoghurt pot in hand. Oscar blocks Robin's way.)

OSCAR

Robin. We haven't met. Oscar, Hugo's brother. Want me to teach you how to ollie?

ROBIN

Can I ask you a question?

OSCAR

Go for it.

ROBIN

The skatepark, who would it actually be for?

OSCAR

For the youth.

ROBIN

But who?

OSCAR

An ollie is when you jump with the board stuck to your feet, no hands.
It changes your life.

(Robin leaves without answering. Oscar turns to Hugo.)

OSCAR

This is going to be harder than I thought.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(Wednesday afternoon. A small office in the town hall, lent to the youth council. Clara is sorting papers into piles. Kim is reading a very thick stapled document. Eden is copying out the minutes neatly.)

CLARA

They campaigned in the playground. All of them. That same Monday.

EDEN

I've noted it.

CLARA

You weren't in the playground.

EDEN

Paula sent me her article. I'm copying it out.

CLARA

Flyers, badges, and a croissant. A croissant, Kim! They're buying votes with pastries.

KIM

A croissant is one euro twenty. For one vote out of eleven, that's cheap.

CLARA

And what's that?

KIM

The minutes of the last town council meeting. The real one, the grown-ups' one. The one where they voted for our twenty thousand euros.

Forty-eight pages.

CLARA

Nobody reads that.

KIM

That's why I'm reading it.

EDEN

Are there any funny bits?

KIM

Page twelve, they spend forty minutes on the colour of the new bins.

EDEN

What did they pick?

KIM

They postponed it.

(Clara's phone buzzes. She answers.)

CLARA

Hello? Yes, hello. Yes, it's Clara. Very well, thank you. Five projects, yes. Visible? Yes, of course. Very visible. For the paper, yes, of course. Goodbye.

(Clara hangs up.)

KIM

Who was that?

CLARA

The town hall's youth department. They wanted to know if our project would be "visible".

EDEN

Visible how?

CLARA

Visible in a photo, I suppose.

KIM

Compost bins don't look like much in a photo.

CLARA

Neither does Wi-Fi.

EDEN

You can see a shelter.

CLARA

A shelter's small.

(The door opens. Lina comes in, soaking wet, hood up.)

LINA

Hello. Can I dry off in here? The shuttle was twenty minutes late. At Les Granges, there's no roof.

CLARA

We'll talk about it on Saturday.

LINA

Last Saturday, you said: "Noted."

(Kim hands Lina a packet of tissues.)

KIM

Do you take the shuttle every Wednesday?

LINA

Every single one. It's the only day I get to go into town.

EDEN

Can I put "soaking wet" in the minutes?

LINA

What's the point?

EDEN

None. But it'll be written down.

(Lina sits in a corner and dries her hair.)

LINA

How many pages are left, Kim?

KIM

Thirty-six.

LINA

Can I wait here? It's still raining.

(Kim turns a page. Blackout.)

ACT TWO: SECOND SESSION

SCENE 1

(The council chamber, the following Saturday. Robin is wearing the festival badge, and the tomato plant sits on the table at Robin's place. At the back, Paula. Next to her, Oscar, in sunglasses. Sasha waits by the easel, the shoebox under one arm.)

CLARA

Second session. The debate. A reminder: we speak one at a time, we raise our hands, and we don't eat during the session. Robin.

(Robin puts down a half-eaten pain au chocolat.)

ROBIN

Somebody gave it to me at the door.

HUGO

That was Oscar.

CLARA

Who's that at the back, in sunglasses?

OSCAR

The public.

HUGO

It's my brother.

CLARA

The session is open to the public. The public keeps quiet.

OSCAR

The public keeps quiet.

CLARA

Amira, you asked to speak first.

AMIRA

Thank you, Clara. I'm not going to make a speech. I'll let the numbers do the talking. Nora.

NORA

According to a poll by the Sasha Institute, sixty-eight per cent of pupils at the school want the Grand Festival.

HUGO

That's not true!

NORA

There's a sign. It says "Institute" on it.

IRIS

I'd like to hear the question.

NORA

Who cares about the question? It's the answer that counts.

IRIS

Then I'll say it. "Would you rather have a big free festival with a famous singer, or compost bins that smell?" I was behind the basketball hoop. I wrote it all down.

(Murmurs around the table.)

MATEO

Point of order! You can't quote a poll without saying how many people were asked. I saw it on TV.

CLARA

Sasha, please. How many people?

SASHA

The Institute does not reveal its sources.

CLARA

How many?

SASHA

Twenty-five.

IRIS

Out of four hundred pupils.

SASHA

Twenty-five is a highly representative sample.

IRIS

Representative of what?

SASHA

Of my class.

PAULA

Question from the press. Who paid for the poll?

SASHA

That's protected by client confidentiality.

NORA

It was a donation!

(A pause.)

AMIRA

Okay. Even if it's twenty-five, that's still seventeen people who want a concert.

IRIS

Seventeen out of four hundred. Four per cent.

CLARA

Kim. The real numbers.

KIM

I rang round. A skatepark, the smallest one, in concrete: a hundred and eighty thousand euros.

(Silence. Hugo slowly sits back down.)

OSCAR

That's negotiable.

CLARA

The public!

KIM

A famous singer, the one Amira wants, with the stage and the lights: forty thousand euros. Just to turn up.

AMIRA

Forty thousand? For one hour?

KIM

Fifty minutes. With the encore.

MATEO

And the Wi-Fi in the forest?

KIM

You'd need a mast. The forest is protected. You're not allowed to put up a mast in it.

IRIS

You're allowed to plant trees in it.

KIM

Yes. Trees fit in the budget.

IRIS

Thank you.

KIM

But it takes ten years before anyone can see them.

CLARA

And in a photo, they don't look like anything.

IRIS

Sorry?

CLARA

Nothing. I was thinking out loud.

MATEO

I call for a recess!

CLARA

What for?

MATEO

In Parliament, when nobody knows what to do anymore, somebody calls for a recess. They all go out into the corridor. And when they come back, they know.

CLARA

Five minutes.

(Clara knocks once. People stand, form little groups. Hugo and Amira end up by the easel. Oscar wanders over. Nora and Félix follow.)

AMIRA

You'll never get your skatepark.

HUGO

You'll never get your singer.

OSCAR

But between the two of you, you've got four votes.

AMIRA

So?

OSCAR

A skate ramp. Just one, a big one, in the car park of the village hall. Ten thousand. And a concert to open it. Ten thousand.

AMIRA

What singer do you get for ten thousand?

OSCAR

A band. A local band, on the way up.

HUGO

It's your band.

OSCAR

It's a band on the way up.

NORA

The FestiSkate.

AMIRA

What?

NORA

That's the name. The FestiSkate. I can see it on the flyers already.

FÉLIX

One FestiSkate for all, and all for one... one...

HUGO

Leave it, Félix.

AMIRA

That makes four. We need two more.

(Mateo walks past them. Nora catches him by the sleeve.)

NORA

Mateo. Free Wi-Fi at the skate ramp.

MATEO

In the forest?

NORA

Next to the forest. You can see it from the car park.

MATEO

Then my vote is yours. I give it and I don't take it back. It's a matter of honour.

AMIRA

Five. We need one more.

(The whole group turns towards Robin. Robin is watering the tomato plant

from a bottle of water.)

CLARA

The session resumes!

(Clara knocks once. Everyone goes back to their seats.)

AMIRA

Clara, we have a new project. A joint project. The FestiSkate.

EDEN

"During the recess, Hugo and Amira, who hated each other, merged."

HUGO

We didn't hate each other.

AMIRA

A bit.

CLARA

The vote will take place next Saturday. Robin, a question?

ROBIN

Yes. The FestiSkate, how long does it last?

AMIRA

A whole day!

KIM

One day. For twenty thousand euros.

AMIRA

One unforgettable day.

ROBIN

I'm still thinking about it.

OSCAR

The public feels this is taking a while.

CLARA

The public can leave.

(Oscar leaves.)

LINA

What about the shelter?

(A pause. Nobody reacts.)

CLARA

This session is closed.

SCENE 2

(After the session. The room is empty except for Kim, Eden and Lina, who are stacking chairs. The cheque is still on its easel.)

EDEN

Five votes for the FestiSkate. It needs six.

LINA

Is Robin going to vote?

EDEN

Since September, Robin has voted thirty-two times. Thirty-two abstentions. I wrote every one down.

LINA

Is that a record?

EDEN

No idea. Nobody else has ever tried.

(Kim has stopped stacking. Kim is reading the thick stapled document, standing up, a chair in one hand.)

EDEN

Kim? You've stopped stacking.

KIM

I've finished. Page forty-seven.

EDEN

And?

KIM

Item fourteen. "Withdrawal of the Wednesday youth shuttle, from January. Saving: twenty thousand euros." Passed.

(Lina puts her chair down.)

KIM

Item fifteen. "Creation of a budget for the Youth Town Council. Amount: twenty thousand euros." Passed. Applause.

EDEN

It actually says "applause"?

KIM

In brackets.

LINA

The Wednesday shuttle. The one from Les Granges?

KIM

There's only one.

LINA

That's my bus.

(A pause.)

LINA

In January, how do I get here? Mum works on Wednesdays. Dad too. It's twelve kilometres to here.

EDEN

Nobody warned you?

LINA

We got a letter. Mum read it, said a word I can't repeat in a town hall, and binned it without explaining anything.

KIM

They took the money from the bus, and they gave it to us. With a cardboard cheque and a photo.

LINA

But why?

KIM

A bus that's been running for ten years doesn't make a good photo. A giant cheque with kids standing round it does.

EDEN

"Visible."

KIM

Exactly.

EDEN

It could be a coincidence. Grown-ups love round numbers.

KIM

Item fourteen, item fifteen. Same evening. Six minutes apart. The time's written in the margin.

EDEN

Shall I write that down?

KIM

No!

EDEN

Sorry. My hand writes on its own.

LINA

Do the others know?

KIM

Nobody reads these pages. Not even the people who voted for them, if you ask me.

(The door opens. Paula comes in and searches under the chairs.)

PAULA

I forgot my pen. The blue one, the one that... Why the faces?

KIM

No reason.

PAULA

Three people stacking chairs without a word. There's always a reason.

(Paula looks at the document in Kim's hands.)

PAULA

What's that?

KIM

A public document.

PAULA

Then I'm allowed to read it.

(A pause. Kim hands the document to Paula. Paula reads, turns the page, flips back.)

PAULA

Item fourteen. Item fifteen.

LINA

That's my bus.

PAULA

That's my front page.

KIM

Paula, wait. The council doesn't know yet. All eleven of us need to find out together, in session, before the whole school does.

PAULA

The next session is a week away. My paper comes out on Monday.

KIM

A week is nothing.

PAULA

A week, for a newspaper, is a century.

EDEN

And what if we ask you nicely to wait?

PAULA

The press doesn't wait. A press that waits is called a press release.

LINA

And what about me? Does anybody ask me?

(Paula and Kim turn towards Lina.)

LINA

It's my bus. I want everyone to know. Monday's fine.

(A pause. Paula photographs the page with her phone.)

PAULA

Thanks, Lina. Can I quote you?

LINA

Put: "Lina, 7B, Les Granges." With the B.

(Paula leaves. Kim looks at the cheque.)

KIM

Monday's going to be loud.

EDEN

So what do I write?

KIM

Nothing. For once.

(Eden closes the notebook. Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(Monday, the playground. Taped to a post, a sheet of paper: the front page of the school paper. Hugo, Félix, Amira, Nora, Mateo and Iris stand in front of it. Further off, pupils we can't see are whistling and jeering.)

MATEO

"Twenty thousand euros: the little kids' bus money. The Youth Town Council is getting ready to spend the money that kept the Wednesday shuttle running on a concert and a skate ramp."

AMIRA

"Getting ready to spend"! We haven't spent anything!

NORA

All we did was come up with a name and print some flyers.

HUGO

Who talked to Paula?

IRIS

Everybody talks to Paula. Paula listens everywhere.

(A ball of paper flies in from the wings and hits Hugo.)

HUGO

Oi!

FÉLIX

It's the Year 8s. They're shouting "Give the bus back".

AMIRA

On Friday they were saying hi to me. I promised them the front row.

NORA

They still want the front row. On the bus.

FÉLIX

The bus from Les Granges comes at ten past one. It doesn't change anything, but it comes at ten past one.

HUGO

How do you know that?

FÉLIX

It's on the sign at the stop. I read signs.

(Sasha arrives, the shoebox under one arm.)

SASHA

New poll. Free of charge, because this is serious. Trust in the youth council: twelve per cent.

AMIRA

Twelve! In your class?

SASHA

In my class. And the twelve per cent are the ones who didn't understand the question.

HUGO

But we're not the ones who got rid of the bus! It's the town hall! It's the grown-ups!

(Oscar arrives, skateboard under his arm.)

OSCAR

In politics, little brother, what matters isn't who did it. It's who's in the photo.

HUGO

And who's in the photo?

OSCAR

You lot. With the cheque.

IRIS

Then we give the cheque back.

NORA

You can't give back a cardboard cheque. That doesn't mean anything.

IRIS

Then we give the money back. We vote for the twenty thousand euros to go back to the shuttle.

MATEO

Are we allowed to?

IRIS

It's our budget. We're the ones voting.

AMIRA

And my concert? I promised a concert to four hundred people.

IRIS

They don't want your concert anymore. They want the bus.

AMIRA

On Mondays, people want a bus. On Saturdays, they want a concert.

(Robin arrives, reading the paper on a phone.)

ROBIN

Is it true, this thing about the bus?

FÉLIX

You read the school paper?

ROBIN

I read everything. When you're thinking, you read.

AMIRA

Robin. With the FestiSkate, we've got five votes. With you, that's six.

ROBIN

With me, six. Without me, five. I can count.

(Clara runs in, phone in hand, followed by Kim, Eden, Lina and Paula.)

CLARA

Nobody talks to the press. Nobody. From now on, our answer is: "No comment."

PAULA

I'm standing right here, Clara.

CLARA

No comment.

HUGO

Paula, why are you going after us? The town hall got rid of the bus. Not us.

PAULA

The mayor doesn't read the school paper. You do. You write a paper for the people who read it.

IRIS

And "the little kids' bus"? That's not written anywhere in the minutes.

PAULA

Nobody stops at a post to read "item fourteen". "The little kids' bus", everyone stops. Look: there were six of you standing in front of it.

LINA

Just now, crossing the playground, a Year 8 boy yelled at me: "Give the

bus back!" It's my bus. Who am I supposed to give it back to?

KIM

Clara, we have to discuss item fourteen in session. All of us together.

CLARA

Or we could act like we never read it.

LINA

I read it.

CLARA

You didn't have to read it!

LINA

It's a public document.

CLARA

Public doesn't mean you have to read it!

(Clara's phone rings. Everyone goes quiet. Clara answers.)

CLARA

Hello? Yes, hello. Yes, I've seen it. No, it wasn't us. Well, yes, it was us, but we didn't... Yes. Saturday. The mayor will be there. With the photographer. Of course. A new project. Thought up by young people. Visible. Yes. I'll tell them.

(Clara hangs up.)

KIM

Well?

CLARA

On Saturday, the mayor is coming to watch the vote. With the photographer from the newspaper. The real newspaper.

PAULA

Excuse me? The "real" newspaper?

CLARA

And they're reminding us of the budget rules. Article two. The twenty thousand euros must fund "a new project, thought up by young people".

IRIS

And the shuttle?

CLARA

The shuttle isn't a new project. It's been running for ten years. We're

not allowed to give it the money.

(A pause.)

LINA

So we've got twenty thousand euros, and we're not allowed to put it back where they took it from.

KIM

That's it.

MATEO

That's really clever. I'm almost impressed.

EDEN

"Monday, ten past ten. The council learns that it cannot give back what it was given."

(The bell rings. Nobody moves. Blackout.)

ACT THREE: THIRD SESSION

SCENE 1

(Saturday, half past nine. The council chamber. On the table, croissants nobody is eating. At the end of the table, a chair with a card on it: "Madam Mayor". The whole council is there, except Robin. At the back, Paula and Sasha.)

CLARA

The mayor gets here at ten. We have thirty minutes. Thirty minutes to find a project that's new, thought up by young people, visible, and that doesn't get us booed by the whole school on Monday.

AMIRA

We've got the FestiSkate. It's new, we thought it up, and you can see it.

IRIS

And on Monday, we get booed.

AMIRA

Monday's a long way off.

FÉLIX

Monday's in two days.

PAULA

For your information, the photographer from the "real" paper arrives at ten. The school press has been here since nine.

EDEN

"The school press has been here since nine."

PAULA

Thank you.

MATEO

Point of order.

CLARA

Mateo, not now.

MATEO

Yes, now. Last night I watched three hours of debates in Parliament.

HUGO

Why?

MATEO

To calm down. And I worked something out. When they can't do something, they don't give up. They change its name.

NORA

Meaning?

MATEO

A tax that won't get through becomes a "contribution". A closure becomes a "restructuring". The thing doesn't change. The name changes. And it gets through.

(A pause. Everyone looks at Mateo.)

KIM

The shuttle isn't a new project.

MATEO

Not yet.

IRIS

You mean we take the old bus and say it's a new bus?

MATEO

I mean we take the old bus and make it our project. Our bus. With our name on it.

NORA

Then it needs a name.

(Nora gets up and walks round the table.)

NORA

The bus on Wednesdays. Bus. Wednesday. Bus-day. Bus-nes-day... The Busnesday.

(A pause.)

LINA

The Busnesday.

HUGO

That's terrible.

FÉLIX

It's good.

HUGO

It's terrible, but it's good.

NORA

"The Busnesday. It comes your way too."

MATEO

Now that's a slogan. And this time, it's good.

KIM

Hang on. I'm counting. The shuttle costs twenty thousand euros a year. The driver, the fuel, the insurance. Twenty thousand exactly, for one year. There's nothing left. No concert, no ramp, no Wi-Fi.

AMIRA

Nothing at all?

KIM

Zero euros.

HUGO

So what about skating?

LINA

Montclar has a skatepark. A big one, in concrete. We go past it on the way to the swimming pool in summer.

KIM

Montclar is six kilometres further. It fits in the budget if we drop the

stop outside the town hall.

CLARA

Why that one?

KIM

Nobody gets on there. Ever.

HUGO

A hundred-and-eighty-thousand-euro skatepark. Already built. Already paid for. By somebody else.

FÉLIX

Best skatepark you'll ever have.

IRIS

And a full bus means thirty fewer parents' cars on the road, every Wednesday. So actually, it's green.

NORA

Everything's green if you say it right.

CLARA

And what if the town hall says it isn't new?

KIM

They'll have to say it in front of the photographer.

(A pause. Clara looks at the mayor's empty chair.)

CLARA

I'm the president. I put to the vote whatever I want. We present both.

AMIRA

And me? I promised a concert to four hundred people.

NORA

Amira...

AMIRA

Four hundred, Nora. I shook their hands. Every single one.

NORA

You promised every one of them the front row. It was never going to work.

AMIRA

It was working really well until Monday.

NORA

I write your slogans, Amira. Not your promises. When we vote, I'm voting for the Busnesday.

(A pause. Amira sits back down, far from Nora. Sasha steps forward, holding the shoebox.)

SASHA

May I? I've done a poll. A real one, this time. Every year group. Just one question: "Do you take the Wednesday shuttle?" Not one sweet received. I even handed out my own.

CLARA

And?

SASHA

Forty-two. Forty-two pupils at this school take the shuttle. And two of them are in this room.

(Everyone looks at each other. Lina raises her hand. A pause. Félix raises his hand.)

HUGO

You?

FÉLIX

Les Granges, the stop after. Every Wednesday.

LINA

You're the hoodie at the back! You always get off before me, and you pretend to be asleep.

FÉLIX

It's the little kids' bus. I didn't want anyone to know.

HUGO

You can't skate, you take the little kids' bus... What else are you hiding?

FÉLIX

I hate croissants.

(Oscar comes in, a guitar case on his back.)

OSCAR

Morning, council. Quick practical point: the band's been rehearsing all week. We've got a song about skating, a song about youth, and a song about the mayor, to butter her up.

HUGO

Oscar. We might not be doing the FestiSkate.

OSCAR

Sorry?

HUGO

I don't know yet what I'm voting for. But you don't get to decide. You're seventeen. You don't vote here.

OSCAR

I'm advising you.

HUGO

You're advising yourself. It's not the same.

(A pause. Oscar leans the guitar against the wall.)

OSCAR

Where did you learn that?

HUGO

Behind the gym.

(Robin comes in, carrying a big bag.)

ROBIN

Sorry. The bakery was packed. Everyone wanted to buy me something.

CLARA

Robin. Do you know how you're voting?

ROBIN

I'm thinking about it.

CLARA

There are three minutes left.

ROBIN

Then I'll think fast.

(The clock strikes ten. Everyone looks at the door. Nobody comes in.)

KIM

She's late.

CLARA

The rules say we start on time.

(Clara picks up her pen.)

CLARA

So we start.

SCENE 2

(Clara is standing. The whole council is in place, Hugo on his seat. At the back, in the public seats, Paula, Sasha and Oscar. At the end of the table, the mayor's chair is empty.)

CLARA

It's ten o'clock. I declare open the third session of the Youth Town Council. Two projects are being put to the vote: the FestiSkate and the Busnesday.

EDEN

"Two projects. One empty chair."

CLARA

Amira, for the FestiSkate.

(Amira stands up.)

AMIRA

I'm not going to lie. I made promises. A concert, a ramp, the front row. When you make a promise, you keep it. Otherwise, what's the point of promising? Grown-ups make promises and don't keep them. We said we'd be different. So I'm standing by it. The FestiSkate. For the four hundred. Even if they don't want it anymore. Because I want people to still be able to believe me.

(Amira sits back down. A pause.)

CLARA

Kim, for the Busnesday.

KIM

Twenty thousand euros. One bus, one driver, thirty-six Wednesdays. A stop at Les Granges. A stop at Montclar, right outside the skatepark. Forty-two pupils on board, not counting the ones who are too embarrassed to say. And a name on the side, in huge letters, for the whole town to watch go by. Visible, as they say.

CLARA

Any questions?

(Robin raises a hand. Silence. Everyone turns towards Robin.)

EDEN

Robin is asking to speak. That's a first.

(Robin empties the bag onto the table: the badge, the yoghurt pot with the tomato plant, a paper bag from the bakery, a flyer.)

ROBIN

In two weeks, I've been given a badge, a croissant, a tomato, a pain au chocolat and an ollie lesson. Everyone talked to me. Nobody asked me what I wanted to know. And I only wanted to know one thing. Lina. What's your bus for?

(A pause. Lina stands up.)

LINA

On Wednesdays, it comes at ten past one. I get on at Les Granges. Félix gets on at the next stop and pretends to be asleep. We go down into town. I go to the library and take out three books, that's the maximum. Then the swimming pool. Then I meet Jade outside the bakery. At five, we go back up. It's the only day of the week I see anybody apart from my gran and the cows. That's it. That's what it's for.

(Lina sits back down.)

ROBIN

Thank you.

CLARA

We move to the vote. Show of hands. Eden counts. Who votes for the FestiSkate?

(Amira raises her hand. Hugo raises his hand. Mateo raises his hand.)

EDEN

Three.

CLARA

Hugo?

HUGO

I'm not voting for Oscar. I'm voting for me. I've been waiting for this skatepark since primary school. I'm not letting it go in a week.

CLARA

Mateo? The Busnesday was your idea.

MATEO

The idea is mine. But my vote, I gave away last Saturday. I don't take it back. It's a matter of honour.

NORA

You gave it away for Wi-Fi.

MATEO

It's not the price that matters. It's the principle.

CLARA

Who votes for the Busnesday?

(Lina, Iris, Kim, Félix and Nora raise their hands. Hugo stares at Félix's raised hand.)

HUGO

Félix?

FÉLIX

I'm voting for me. Like you, just now.

HUGO

It's not the same.

FÉLIX

It is. You're waiting for a skatepark. I take the bus.

(A pause. Hugo doesn't answer.)

EDEN

Five.

CLARA

It needs six votes. Robin?

(A pause. Everyone looks at Robin. Robin raises a hand.)

ROBIN

For.

(Silence. Then Félix starts clapping. Then Lina. Then everyone, even Amira.)

EDEN

"Robin votes." I'm underlining that twice.

CLARA

Eden?

EDEN

I vote with the majority. It makes the minutes simpler. For.

CLARA

The president votes last. The president votes for. Eight votes for the Busnesday. The Busnesday is adopted.

(A knock at the door. Through the gap, a flash.)

OSCAR

It's the mayor. With the photographer.

AMIRA

Clara, wait. Can I change my vote?

CLARA

Why?

AMIRA

So it's unanimous. It looks better in the photo.

KIM

You just said you keep your promises.

AMIRA

I do keep them. There'll be a concert. On the bus. On launch day. With Oscar's band.

OSCAR

On the bus?

AMIRA

The front row will be the seat behind the driver.

HUGO

I'm changing too. Montclar is a real skatepark. And it's already paid for.

MATEO

If everyone's changing, I'm changing. My honour goes where the group goes.

EDEN

"Eleven votes out of eleven. Four minutes ago, the project had five."

CLARA

Unanimous.

(Another knock.)

CLARA

Nora. The marker.

(Mateo turns the giant cheque over. On the back, Nora writes in big letters: "BUSNESDAY". Everyone lines up around the cheque, written side facing the audience. Oscar slips in at the end of the row.)

HUGO

Oscar. You don't vote, you don't pose.

(Oscar steps out of the row and goes to stand at the back, next to Paula. The door swings wide open. A white light.)

PAULA

Question from the press. Madam Mayor, what about next year? Who pays for the shuttle then?

(A pause. No answer. A flash.)

LINA

And the shelter, at Les Granges?

(A pause. Nobody reacts. A flash.)

LINA

Clara, next year, will you be at the high school?

CLARA

Yes.

LINA

Then next year, I'm running for president.

(This time, everyone turns towards Lina. One last flash. Blackout.)

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