

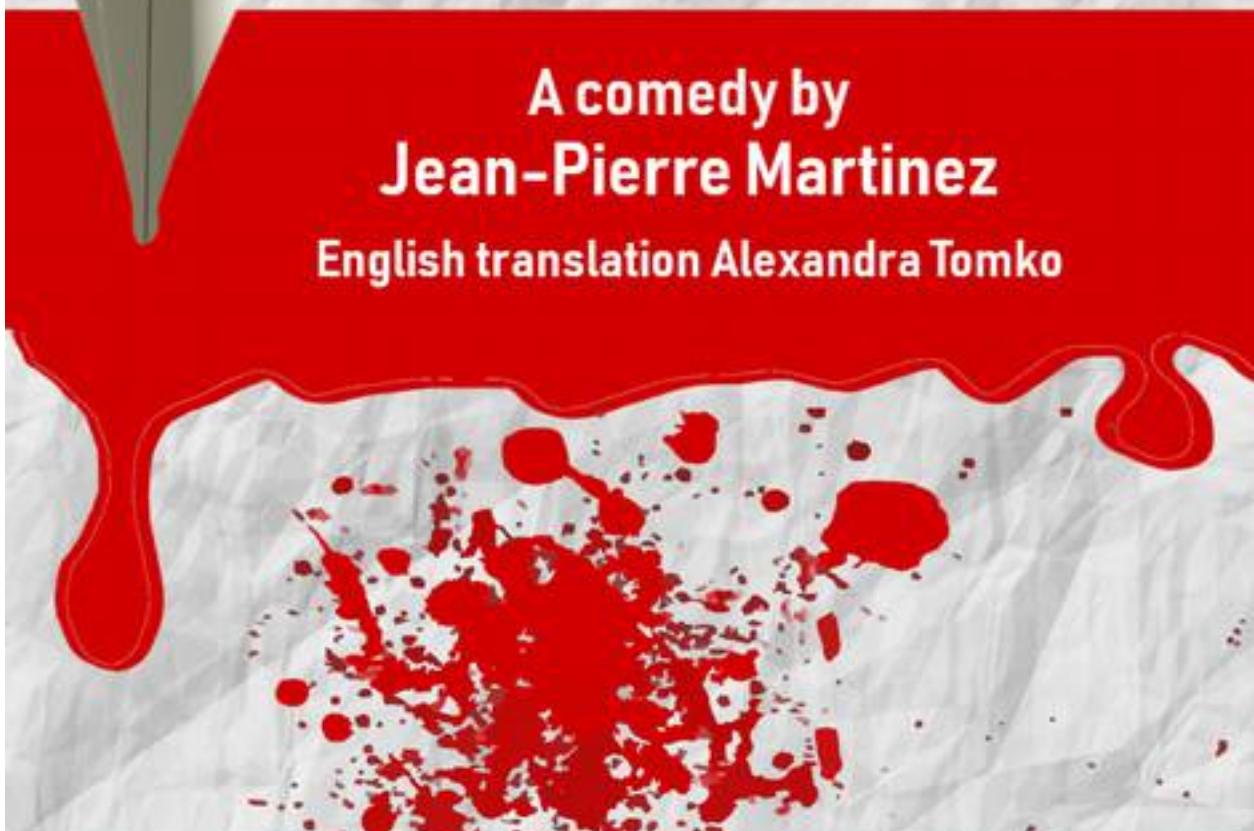


La Comédiathèque

CHEATERS

A comedy by
Jean-Pierre Martinez

English translation Alexandra Tomko



comediatheque.net

**This text is available to read for free.
However, an authorization is required from the author
prior to any public performance, whether by professional or amateur companies.
To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez
and ask an authorization to represent one of his works:
<https://comediatheque.net/>**

Cheaters

English translation by Alexandra Tomko

Since his first novel was published and won the Goncourt Prize, Alexander has enjoyed a reputation as a successful author, and is reaping the benefits. He is expected at the Ministry of Culture to be awarded with the insignia of Knight of Arts and Letters. Then, he receives a visit from a stranger who could jeopardize his success...

Characters

Alexander
Frances
Sacha

*Sacha's character can be performed by a man or woman.
Distribution: 1M/2F or 2M/1F*

In this version, Sacha will be considered a woman.

Scene 1

Alexander sits at his desk, writing his speech. A preppy Frances enters.

Frances – You're already dressed?

Alexander – I assume you aren't ready yet...

Frances – We have loads of time, haven't we? It's in two hours.

Alexander – Of course. And I could still turn it down...

Frances – Turning down the Nobel Prize in Literature could be pretty eminent. There have been precedents. Jean-Paul Sartre, Bob Dylan...

Alexander – I think Dylan accepted it, in the end.

Frances – But the Medal of Knight of Arts and Letters... I don't know of anyone who's turned it down.

Alexander – You're right, it would be ridiculous. I'll wait until they offer me a Nobel, then I'll see.

Frances – You've prepared a speech?

Alexander – Here it is. I was just learning it. Don't worry, it won't last long. I hate speeches...

Frances – I'll help you rehearse in the car...

Alexander – What would I do without you?

Frances – The same thing, I imagine.

Alexander – But it would be way less fun... (*Frances looks around the room.*) Did you lose something?

Frances – Have you seen my cell phone?

Alexander – No... You want me to call you?

Frances – I'll look for it first. I need to believe I can still find my phone on my own.

Alexander – By asking me if I've seen it...

Frances – I hope you start with thanking your wife, in your speech.

Alexander – I was going to thank people at the end, but if you prefer I start that way...

Frances – I'll bring a few copies of the Goncourt, just in case.

Alexander – Ah, the Goncourt... Sometimes I wonder if that wasn't a curse.

Frances – Why do you say that?

Alexander – I haven't written anything since.

Frances – You hadn't written much before either.

Alexander – Thanks for reminding me.

Frances – It'll come. You just need to find a subject.

Alexander – Yeah...

Frances – And there are some writers who've only written one masterpiece in their life. Alain-Fournier, for example. Other than *Le Grand Meaulnes*...

Alexander – Yes, but he died at the age of 27, a year after writing his bestseller. That explains why he didn't write another one...

Frances – Everyone knows that you need several years to get over a Goncourt.

Alexander – Some novelists never get over it. I wonder if I should have kept on teaching and self-publishing.

Frances – Come on... Can you picture yourself teaching literature in a suburban high school, to forty illiterates in jogging suits?

Alexander – Don't be so dramatic. I graduated with a doctorate in literature from the Sorbonne... I would've taught in a catholic school to twenty daddy's girls in Scottish skirts, willing to do anything to get good grades without having to open a book...

Frances – Alright... In that case, I understand your regrets. Remind me to put a parental code on the TV. I have a feeling that, when I'm not around, you watch some strange movies.

Alexander – As a novelist, most of my fans are closer to menopause than puberty.

She walks up to him and gestures to him tenderly.

Frances – Don't forget that I was your first fan.

Alexander – I remember very well.

They kiss. She frees herself from their embrace.

Frances – Come on, you have to finish your speech... But if you miss it that much, I'll pull out my kilt once in a while, promise.

Alexander – Speaking of which, before I forget, I just spoke to Maxence on the phone.

Frances – Ah right...

Alexander – He suggests we spend Christmas together in his cottage in Megève. We could use that time to organize a signing session. I heard there's a beautiful library in Megève that's very popular.

Frances – Really?

Alexander – It's a strange thing. Uptown bourgeois don't open a book all year, but as soon as they're on vacation, they rush to the closest library to buy all the literary award-winners.

Frances – Those bourgeois, as you say, are your readers. Well, they're the ones who buy your books anyway...

Alexander – It must be the mountain air. And winter sports are so boring.

Frances – Especially when you don't ski, like you.

Alexander – I invited him over for dinner with Diane next week. Why not Wednesday?

Frances – Wednesday we're having dinner at my parents'.

Alexander – Ah right, sorry... Since usually, it's on Tuesdays...

Frances – Yes, but it's mom's birthday, have you forgotten already?

Alexander – Let's just say it slipped my mind... So, Thursday?

Frances – Thursday is Carla's exhibition opening at Galerie Claude Bernard!

Alexander – Sorry. I forgot that, too.

Frances – If you leave me someday, remember to replace me with a blowup doll and an electronic agenda.

Alexander – Maybe we should take a step back from social events, don't you think? We're turning into snobs...

Frances – You say that, but after a week, you'd be bored... I'm going to finish getting ready.

Frances exits. Alexander gets back to his speech.

Alexander – Madam Minister, a few years back, the Goncourt Academy prized my novel *Another Life* and saw in me a humble servant of the language of Molière. Today, you knight me. But I receive this badge of honor more as Don Quixote. Indeed, to live a writer's dream, and to make a living from writing, a young author must first tilt at windmills...

Frances returns.

Frances – Sorry to bother you, but... there's a woman at the gate. She says she's travelled from very far to have you autograph her book and that she's been waiting for this moment for a very long time.

Alexander – It's really not a good time... And who does she think she is, showing up like that, without warning? Where did she get our address? We're not in the phone book. In the Who's Who, maybe...

Frances – I don't know, but she insists. It'll only take five minutes. It's better to get it over with now, or she'll come back. What do you expect? It's the price of fame! After all, your fans pay the bills...

Alexander – Alright, I'll sign her book.

Frances – I told her you didn't have much time.

Alexander – Do you say Madam Minister or just Minister?

Frances – No idea...

Alexander – It was much simpler when women weren't ministers.

Frances – I'll let her in...

Frances exits.

Scene 2

Alexander sighs, sits down and works on his speech, crossing things out.

Alexander – Don Quixote... Maybe that's a bit much...

Sacha enters.

Sacha – I pictured someone younger...

Alexander – Sorry, I didn't see you come in.

Sacha – So, this is what the home of a successful author looks like...

Alexander – Sorry, another time, I would've offered you coffee and we would have chatted a while but I'm a bit short on time...

Sacha – Ah yes... The medal of Knight of Arts and Letters... You can't miss that...

Alexander – You know about that?

Sacha – Your wife told me... Anyway, I assumed she's your wife... Or your assistant... Maybe both...

Alexander – Alright... As you know, I don't have much time...

Sacha – Don't worry, I won't be long.

She sits and gets comfortable, contrary to her words. He's a bit confused.

Alexander (ironic) – Please, have a seat. You're here for an autograph, right?

Sacha – An autograph, yes... (*She picks up a copy of the Goncourt sitting on the desk and looks at the cover.*) *Another life*, the tragic destiny of a woman who chooses to disappear and change identity after a heartbreak. You could say this book changed my life.

Alexander – Thank you.

Sacha – I didn't say it changed it for the better...

Alexander – I'm sorry...

Sacha – For you as well.

Alexander – Me?

Sacha – This book changed your life as well. And in your case, for the better...

Alexander – That's true...

Sacha – A Goncourt, that's impressive...

Alexander – Indeed.

Sacha – You hadn't written anything meaningful prior. You haven't written anything since...

Alexander – It's so sensitive of you to remind me of that.

Sacha – However, you know how to sell yourself to the media. Articles, shows, conferences abroad... Bravo, such energy!

Alexander – Promoting is part of the job... Though it's not what I prefer.

Sacha – I'm sure you prefer writing. Unfortunately, you've only penned one bestseller.

Alexander – I did write two other novels before this one.

Sacha – Yes... But they didn't have as much momentum as this one, if I may. You could almost say they aren't from the same author.

Alexander – They were my early works. I've matured.

Sacha – Anyway, after this unexpected Goncourt, you found a way to grow your reputation. After all, with your wife's family, you don't lack connections in the press and political circles. Dad-in-law is an ambassador, I believe...

Alexander – You seem to have done your homework... I told you, I'm in a hurry. Did you bring a copy I can sign?

Sacha – Why? There are plenty here, aren't there?

Alexander – I see... Since you've traveled a long way to come here, I'll sign it and then, I have to ask you to leave. (*He grabs a copy from a pile.*) What's your name?

Sacha – Sacha.

Alexander – How do you spell it?

Sacha grabs a copy, signs it and hands it to Alexander.

Sacha – Like this.

Alexander takes the book, confused.

Alexander (*reading the signature*) – “To my biggest fan”... Usually, I'm the one who writes for my readers, and I'm the one who signs... Not the other way around...

Sacha – That, you do...

Alexander – Listen, Madam...

Sacha – Sacha.

Alexander – Listen, Sacha, you show up unexpectedly at my house. I have the courtesy of meeting with you even though I'm in a hurry. But if you're here to insult me... Who are you anyway?

Sacha – Your conscience, maybe. If you have one...

Alexander – What are you getting at?

Sacha – We both know very well that this is all a lie, isn't it?

Alexander – All what? What?

Sacha – You didn't write this novel. You found the manuscript on a train.

Alexander (*unsettled*) – Don't tell me that's why you... (*composing himself*) Yes, that is what's written in the book's foreword. But you know, from Cervantes to Boris Vian, many authors used this literary method. It's part of fiction. It's not reality.

Sacha – You and I both know that in this case, it's the complete truth. I even tip my hat off to you. To take a manuscript of which you're not the author, and to have the nerve to say so in the foreword while being convinced that it will pass as literary process...

Alexander – This is ridiculous! How can you say such a thing?

Sacha – Because I am the author of this manuscript.

Frances enters.

Frances – Darling, we have to go... If we don't want to keep the Minister waiting...

Alexander – Yes, yes, just a minute.

Sacha – Don't worry, Madam. I don't want to get in the way of your husband receiving this well-deserved award.

Frances exits.

Alexander – What are you talking about?

Sacha – The truth, and you know it better than anyone.

Alexander – If what you say is true, then why not come see me sooner?

Sacha – We'll call it... a set of circumstances.

Alexander – I don't have time for this charade, and I'm not in the mood. I'm asking you to leave now.

Sacha – If I leave, I'm going straight to the editor of the leading morning paper. You know? The one for which you sometimes work as a columnist. I'm sure they'll find my story very interesting.

He hesitates for a bit.

Alexander – Alright, I'm listening.

Sacha – After losing my manuscript, on which I worked for years, I had a meltdown.

Alexander – And you hadn't made any copies.

Sacha – It was a long time ago. I wrote the old-fashioned way. On paper. With a fountain pen. Actually, I was going to Paris to make photocopies and send them to publishers.

Alexander – Since you claim to be the author of this novel, you could have re-written it.

Sacha – You're an author, too. A bad author, but an author all the same.

Alexander – Thank you...

Sacha – You know very well that it's not that simple. When you've worked years on a book, after crossing out every paragraph for months and spending a week writing and re-writing a single sentence... You don't have enough energy to start from scratch after losing your manuscript. Not even knowing for sure that editors will even take the time to read a single line of it.

Alexander – So, you admit that it's not that easy to have a book published.

Sacha – When I was separated from my artwork, I was in shock for several months. Before falling into a deep depression. I even tried to kill myself...

Alexander – A failed attempt, I see...

Sacha – Unfortunately for you... Then, I decided to do what I wrote at the end of my novel: disappear. Voluntarily. But I didn't have any money. And I didn't know how to do anything else besides write. Instead of starting a new life, I wandered across France. Across the world. I became a vagabond. I could've gone on never noticing this plagiarism, since you were careful to change the title of my novel.

Alexander – So how did you find out?

Sacha – Completely by chance, while glancing through it at a library.

Alexander – You have no proof of this...

Sacha – I wouldn't have a hard time finding any. This manuscript was largely autobiographical. I sprinkled this novel with personal references that you didn't bother to disguise. Everything in there is true. It's my life. Your heroine is me...

Alexander – I see...

Sacha – Everyone has congratulated you on your ability to portray the character of this wounded woman, who is trying to invent another life, with such realism. To erase one's memory and start again from scratch, it seems simple. But the skeletons always end up out of the closet.

Alexander – I'm so sorry...

Sacha – Sorry?

Alexander – I had no way of finding the author. In fact, how could you lose a novel?

Sacha – I was mugged. Violently. My bag was stolen. I fought back. My whole life was in there. And all my dreams of redemption. They knocked me out. I almost died...

Alexander – And then?

Sacha – I woke up in a hospital bed. The thieves must've taken what they wanted and abandoned the manuscript in another train car or on a platform. It was of no value to them.

Alexander – Indeed.

Sacha – I imagine that's where you found it?

Alexander – Let's say I did.

Sacha – Or maybe it was an ambush, to rob me of my work. An ambush you orchestrated, perhaps?

Alexander – This is nonsense!

Sacha – It crossed my mind. But it was probably just petty theft. They must have been disappointed, I had just enough money for photocopies.

Alexander – How was I supposed to find you? Your name wasn't even on the manuscript.

Sacha – Fine, but you didn't have to pretend my work was your own, either.

Alexander – I waited two years before publishing this novel.

Sacha – Just the time you needed to claim to have written it... and to be sure that the author had not kept a copy.

Alexander – I thought it a shame to deprive the public of this novel. But I didn't know it would win the Goncourt.

Sacha – But you did everything you could to get it. You don't win the Goncourt by chance.

Alexander – Then it was too late. I was caught in a spiral. And you said so yourself. You decided to disappear!

Sacha – You didn't know that.

Alexander – Did you look for me back then?

Sacha – It doesn't matter, I found you now.

Alexander – Would you have come to see me if this novel hadn't won the Goncourt?

Sacha – Probably not.

Alexander – Without me, this manuscript would have never been published. As for winning a literary prize...

Sacha – So, I should be thanking you.

Alexander – What do we do now?

Sacha – I don't know. What do you think?

Alexander – What do you want exactly? That I give you back the life you could have had before you decided to change it? Your life is behind you.

Sacha – Thank you.

Alexander – It's just the way it is. Some people are lucky, some aren't. But destiny is not decided by a throw of the dice.

Sacha – So, I was born to have a crappy life, and you were born to be successful?

Alexander – What do you want? Revenge?

Sacha – I don't know what I want yet. I'll take some time to think about it.

Alexander – I am prepared to compensate you, of course. Provided we can find common ground.

Sacha – For now, I just ask for your hospitality.

Alexander – Are you joking?

Sacha – I just came back to France. I have nowhere to go. I need to settle down for a while to think about my future. You do have a guest room...

Frances reenters.

Frances – Is everything alright?

Alexander – Yes, yes, I'll explain...

Sacha – We were talking about literature.

Frances – Shall we go?

Sacha – I'll leave you. But I promise to come back and finish this exciting discussion...

Frances gives Alexander a worried look.

Blackout

Scene 3

Frances enters. The phone rings. She answers.

Frances – Yes mother... Yes, yes, we just got back... Yes, it went very well. The minister's speech was very moving. Thank daddy. It's thanks to him that she came. They went to college together, Oxford, that's right. Of course, I'll congratulate Alexander for you. He's parking the car. Listen, we'll tell you all about it on Wednesday, okay? Yes, I know you wanted to be there but never you mind. You'll come along next time. Next time? I don't know... Yes, for his Legion of Honor! (*She lets out a slightly forced laugh.*) Alright, bye for now.

Alexander enters as she hangs up.

Alexander – Who was that?

Frances – Mom.

Alexander – Ah, right...

Frances – Why? Were you expecting a call?

Alexander – No, no...

Frances – Can I see it?

Alexander – Who? I mean, what...?

Frances – Your medal!

Alexander – Shit, I think I forgot it in the car.

Frances – Well... You seem to really care. Aren't you happy?

Alexander – Yes, of course...

Frances – Don't take me for a fool, I can see that something's been bothering you.

Alexander – Nothing, I swear.

Frances – Since that woman came over.

Alexander – What are you talking about...

Frances – Who is she? Your mistress?

Alexander – Come on, Frances. Have you seen her?

Frances – Alright, she's not very sexy. But she's not ugly enough to make you run away. And I saw fear in your eyes earlier.

Alexander – Can we talk about this tomorrow? I'm not thinking very clearly right now. I think I overdid it with the champagne.

Frances – I only saw you drink one glass...

Alexander – Or maybe it was the caviar... I feel like it wasn't very fresh... I even wonder if it wasn't lump eggs. Do you think that in a ministry, they could serve lump eggs? That's pushing budgetary restrictions a bit far, don't you think?

Frances – I won't wait till tomorrow, Alexander. If you have something to tell me, do it now.

A beat, he hesitates.

Alexander – You're right. There's no point in stalling. Unfortunately, I have to face the consequences of my actions. It was bound to happen sooner or later...

Frances – I'm scared now. What is it?

Alexander – It's not easy...

Frances – Is she your lover?

Alexander – It would be easier if she were.

Frances – So she's not your mistress.

Alexander – Rather... a mistress of blackmail.

Frances – What could you possibly be blackmailed about? The only vaguely judicial case in your past is a police custody for defacing a grave.

Alexander – True.

Frances – They let you go when they realized that you were totally drunk, and that it was your own father's grave.

Alexander – I only peed on it. It was a stupid bet I made with myself.

Frances – So that's why she's blackmailing you.

Alexander – No, unfortunately not.

Frances – So what is it?

Silence.

Alexander – What if I told you that my whole life was built on a lie?

Frances – A lie...?

Alexander – Worse. A fraud. An intellectual fraud.

Frances – I'm listening...

Alexander – You said so earlier. I had written before, of course, but everyone agrees that this Goncourt is my life's work.

Frances – And...?

Alexander – And what if this book wasn't mine... (*She doesn't look surprised.*) You're not saying anything...

Frances – I'm thinking.

Alexander – You're thinking? I'm telling you that you married a plagiarist and you're thinking?

Silence.

Frances – I always thought you couldn't have written this book.

Alexander – Well, I can confirm that this book is not mine.

Frances – Yes, I know.

Alexander – That's all you have to say?

Frances – We decided to publish this book together. We promoted it together. It's kind of like our baby. The child we couldn't have together.

Alexander – Well, this baby isn't mine...

Frances – I know.

Alexander – How do you know? Only because you don't believe I could be the author of such a masterpiece?

Frances – I saw the manuscript. It wasn't your handwriting.

Alexander – Why didn't you say anything?

Frances – We couldn't have lived with this lie together.

Alexander – So you chose that we live this lie separately...

Frances – It worked very well till now, don't you think? And it could have kept on working.

Alexander – Unfortunately, this woman showed up. Now, nothing will be the same again.

Frances – That depends.

Alexander – Really? On what?

Frances – We can always find an arrangement.

Alexander – Yes... We will also have to find a little arrangement with our conscience.

Frances – Didn't we do that a long time ago?

Alexander – What else do you know? Other than this baby isn't mine...

Frances – I don't know who the father is, if that's your question. But ever since this woman came to visit, I think I know who the mother is.

A beat.

Alexander – How could you let me do this?

Frances – Simply out of love. A little out of ambition too, I'll admit. You wanted so much to live this life. A writer's life. You lived it...

Alexander – But I'm just a fraud. And our life is a lie. You knew. You should have stopped me.

Frances – Don't reverse the roles.

Alexander – You're right. I'm the scumbag. Are you going to leave me?

Frances – If I were going to leave you, I would have done it back then. We don't have a choice anymore. We're in the same boat.

Alexander – And this boat is sinking.

Frances – Don't rush. And above all, don't panic. What you need to do is think. What are you planning to do?

Alexander – I don't know... Suicide would probably be the best option. At least it would be romantic...

Frances – Don't be stupid. You're not brave enough to kill yourself.

Alexander – Well, you seem to have a very high opinion of me. I wonder how you managed to stay married to me all these years. To continue to love me...

Frances – I love us as a couple. Our complicity. We are partners, Alexander. I won't let you down. And I won't let this woman destroy us.

Alexander – In this instance, I'm the one who destroyed her life.

Frances – On the other hand, this manuscript was published because you already had a bit of a reputation.

Alexander – And especially thanks to my in-laws' connections...

Frances – This woman would probably never have been successful, even if she did write a masterpiece.

Alexander – Yes, that's what I started telling her... But I don't think it worked...

Frances – Without this combination of circumstances, you wouldn't have become so famous, but she probably would have remained anonymous. Everyone knows that you don't get the Goncourt by sending a manuscript by mail to Gallimard. There's the whole weight of social status. You need connections.

Alexander – You're right, genius is not enough, otherwise Van Gogh would have become a billionaire. His paintings ended up being sold, but only after his death. And that only made speculators rich.

Frances – Of course. It's not fair, but that's the way it is. Money attracts money, and success attracts success. It's the art market that makes the price of an artist. Not the talent. Otherwise, we wouldn't exhibit all this garbage in contemporary art museums. And it's exactly the same for literature.

Alexander – I was afraid that my wife would disown me after admitting this unforgivable moral fault. I'm almost disappointed.

Frances – Don't lecture me!

Alexander – We are monsters, Frances. I should confess right away...

Frances – Absolutely not. May I remind you that I too have everything to lose in this scandal! Starting with my honor!

Alexander – Your honor?

Frances – My reputation, if you prefer. Not to mention that of my parents'... I gave up everything to manage your career! Can you imagine the scandal if the press were to find out? Mom would never get over it... Her heart is already so weak.

Alexander – Yes, but we can't go back to the way things were. This bitch won't let it go.

Frances – Is she blackmailing you?

Alexander – Not for now. She only asked if she could stay here.

Frances – Stay?

Alexander – Temporarily, I guess. She says she doesn't know where to go...

Frances – What did you say?

Alexander – Well, I didn't really have a choice. (*The doorbell rings.*) That must be her...

They exchange worried looks.

Frances – I'll get the door.

Blackout

Scene 4

The room is empty. Sacha enters, in a nighty or pajamas, having just woken up. She exits and reenters with a cup of coffee. She sits at the desk and poses. Alexander enters. He is unhappily surprised to see her there, in his seat.

Alexander – Don't mind me... Make yourself at home.

Sacha – If you bought this house with your Goncourt, it's kind of my house too...

Alexander – It's a family home. My in-laws gave it to us.

Sacha – I always dreamed of having a desk like this... This fountain pen, is it a Montblanc?

Alexander – I think you overestimate what a Goncourt offers, other than fame.

Sacha – Really?

Alexander – Don't think that a simple literary award would be enough to get you into the upper class. The entry ticket is much higher than that, believe me.

Sacha – And therefore definitely beyond my means.

Alexander – Success is not only about talent.

Sacha – Proof being that, as a successful author, you are totally devoid of it.

Alexander – This job requires a lot of effort, patience, skill... A lot of compromises too. You have to deal with a lot of bullshit.

Sacha – I'm sure that you're very skilled at that.

Alexander – Writing is art, of course. But that's not the hardest part. It's not the most tedious, anyway. In a way, I envy you.

Sacha – Take my place! I'll take yours...

Alexander – It's not that simple.

Sacha – Really?

Alexander – Why don't we make a deal?

Sacha – You keep the honors and give me the money?

Alexander – I was thinking of sharing rights, which would remain confidential, of course.

Sacha – Of course.

Alexander – How about fifty-fifty?

Sacha – All these years, you reaped the benefits of my work. Not to mention the glory. How do you intend to repair this injustice?

Alexander – You can have a lump sum for the past, obviously. Plus, a percentage on future fees. What do you think about that?

Sacha – Maybe...

Alexander – I built a reputation, day after day. Year after year. While you were gone. Willingly. To do your little solo world tour...

Sacha – In short, it's almost dishonest of me to come and ask something of you now.

Alexander – I wouldn't go that far. But you too could benefit from what I've built. Rather than destroying it all now.

Sacha – What's in it for me?

Alexander – Money! While remaining in the shadows, of course.

Sacha – Oh, please!

Alexander – My publisher is urging me to write a new novel. We could collaborate. I'm offering you a win-win deal. Your talent, my fame. And we split the rights.

Sacha – After having stolen my work, you want me to become your ghostwriter? You have to admit that you have some nerve.

Alexander – Think about it. A plagiarism trial would take years. I would have the best lawyer. And the outcome would be very uncertain. We would both lose a lot of time. And as I understand it, you've already lost a lot of time.

Sacha – Your cynicism amazes me, but I am not impervious to your arguments.

Alexander – I'll let you think it over.

Alexander exits.

Scene 5

Sacha stands up and walks around the desk. Frances enters.

Frances – Are you alright? Do you have everything you need?

Sacha – Actually, I'm a little hungry. Do you have anything I could dip in my coffee?

Frances (ironic) – Would you like me to go get you some croissants?

Sacha – Oh no, don't go out of your way. If the maid has the day off...

Frances – I think there are biscuits in the kitchen cupboard.

Sacha – Biscuits? That sounds good. I'll go see later...

Frances – I hate them but my husband can't get enough.

Sacha – When you have nothing else on hand to dip your cookie in.

Frances – Are you planning to stay long?

Sacha – I don't know yet. It'll depend...

Frances – On what?

Sacha – First, your husband. We have some business to tend to. He offered to hire me as a ghostwriter. He didn't tell you about it?

Frances – Don't take me for a fool. My husband doesn't have any secrets from me. He told me everything.

Sacha – I'm sorry for you. I feel for you, really.

Frances – Really?

Sacha – You thought you were married to a great novelist. You learn that you're only the wife of a lousy plagiarist...

Frances – What do you want?

Sacha – You should have married me...

Frances – Don't tell me that's what you want...? If it is, know that I'm willing to do anything for the man I love. I don't promise you marriage, of course, but if you like mature women...

Sacha bursts out laughing.

Sacha – You've got some nerve as well!

Frances – I'll take that as a compliment.

Sacha walks up to Frances and touches her cheek.

Sacha – And are you attracted to me? (*Frances seems troubled for a moment, but then recovers.*) After all, I'm the genius, and you married him for his genius!

Frances – Not only.

Sacha – And I could write other novels...

Frances – Then why haven't you?

Sacha – I haven't said my last word.

Frances – According to Alexander, it is your story that you have told in this first novel. Perhaps you have nothing else to tell.

Sacha – When you're a novelist, you always use elements of your own life, don't you?

Frances – Yes... That's why, as time goes by, we have less and less interesting things to say. I'm not sure if taking you on as ghostwriter would be such a good deal...

Sacha – I could always tell your story. It seems fascinating.

Frances – A crook's life is more exciting than that of most honest people. Especially when they have a victim mentality like you...

Sacha – In short, you're the real artist here.

Frances – As far as your literary fruitfulness is concerned, in any case, you seem to have long since reached the age of menopause.

Sacha – Your husband is infertile. He hasn't even been able to give you a child.

Frances – Don't get involved in our love story, you wouldn't understand.

Alexander enters and hears the end of the conversation.

Alexander – Were you talking about me?

Frances – I'll leave you alone...

Frances exits.

Scene 6

Alexander – Don't push it, I'm warning you.

Sacha – Or what?

Alexander – I know you don't think highly of me, but don't underestimate me.

Sacha – I'm trying... I have to say it's not easy... I'll try, I promise.

Alexander – I made you an offer.

Sacha – And I'm thinking about it, honest... (*A beat*) Do you still have it?

Alexander – What?

Sacha – The manuscript!

Alexander – No...

Sacha – You destroyed it, right? To erase all proof of your crime?

Alexander – Why? Would you want it back?

Sacha – You can understand that, for me, this manuscript has sentimental value.

Alexander – You can understand that if I still had it in my possession, I wouldn't give it to you without compensation.

Sacha – So, you no longer have it.

Alexander – Let's say that I... misplaced it.

Sacha – It's so stupid that I want to believe you.

Alexander – And do I have to believe you?

Sacha – About what?

Alexander – What if you were bluffing?

Sacha – Then, I've already won. You immediately showed me your hand.

Alexander – But I could refuse to pay.

Sacha – You played, you lost. Gambling debts are sacred. And you know what happens to people who refuse to pay them.

Alexander – We don't know anything about you.

Sacha – I told you. This novel is autobiographical.

Alexander – That was several years ago. You're no longer this character from the novel. And I'm not really the person who put my name on it anymore.

Sacha – I know you. You won't take that risk.

Alexander – What risk?

Sacha – You will pay. For peace of mind. The only policy you have the courage to answer to is your insurance policy. The assurance of a quiet little life, with a little medal now and then to reward the good grades you got by cheating.

Alexander – So you do want money.

Sacha – That would make you feel better, wouldn't it?

Alexander – What else could you want?

Sacha – Do you know how it feels to be robbed of your work? To see your own text, written in your own blood, signed by someone else's hand?

Alexander – No...

Sacha – It must be what a woman must feel when her child is taken away from her at birth and given to a stranger.

Alexander – I didn't want that. This manuscript is like a child I found. How do I know you didn't abandon it?

Sacha – Voluntarily, you mean?

Alexander – A message in a bottle, in a way. Hoping that someone would find it... Your savior... And that he would promote it for you...

Sacha – If I understand you correctly, you almost deserve another medal for responding to my S.O.S.

Alexander – I didn't steal this manuscript from you.

Sacha – True. I don't think you would have had the guts for a violent robbery. Your specialty is more theft by opportunism, isn't it?

Alexander – You're right, I'm a coward. But I'm not a criminal. I've paid for sex, but I've never raped anyone.

Sacha – Still, I'm going to get dressed...

Sacha exits.

Scene 7

Frances comes back in.

Alexander – I can't stand to see her here every day, in the middle of our living room. Sprawled out on our couch. When she's not sitting at my desk...

Frances – Yes, but in a way, it's best to have her around.

Alexander – You think?

Frances – At least we know that she's not at the local bistro, completely drunk, telling the barman about her misfortunes. Not to mention the risk of her selling her story to a tabloid or a TV station, obviously.

Silence.

Alexander – You told me you saw the manuscript.

Frances – Yes.

A beat.

Alexander – Do you know where it is?

Frances – What?

Alexander – The manuscript! One day, it was in my locked desk drawer. And the next, it was gone.

Frances – Was the drawer damaged?

Alexander – No, and you're the only one who knows where I keep the key.

Silence.

Frances – Alright, I took it.

Alexander – I kind of figured...

Frances – So we both knew, actually.

Alexander – I can understand why you decided not to say anything, knowing that I was not the real author of this novel, but why did you take this manuscript?

Frances – Life insurance, I guess...

Alexander – Insurance? For what?

Frances – In case you want to leave me for a younger woman, if success went to your head.

Alexander – So, do you still have it?

Frances – Yes...

Alexander – I'm getting to know you all over again, Frances.

Frances – You took me for a fool, didn't you?

Alexander – I thought I was pulling the strings in this sinister comedy. In the end, I was just a puppet.

Frances – But you're the one in the spotlight, darling...

Alexander – And I'm the one who might end up in the shadows.

Frances – You'd kill yourself for a good word, that's your problem.

Alexander – So for a whole novel, imagine what I am capable of...

Silence.

Frances – We could get rid of it...

Alexander – The manuscript?

Frances – Its author.

Alexander – You're crazy!

Frances – If she were to disappear, nobody would be concerned... She organized her own disappearance. She's already a missing person!

Alexander – You're joking, right?

Frances – Of course, I'm joking... So, what do you suggest we do?

Alexander – Negotiate. We don't have a choice. But I'm not so sure money is all she's after.

Frances – She'll accept it. You can buy anything with money. It's all about how much...

Alexander – How much can we spare?

Frances – How much do you think your reputation is worth?

Alexander – Thank you for not saying my honor...

Blackout

Scene 8

Sacha is lying on the sofa, dozing. She looks dead. Frances enters, a knife in her hand. She approaches Sacha, hesitates.

Sacha – It's not that easy to kill someone, you know. Especially with a knife.

Frances – I just wanted to cut myself a slice of sausage. Would you like some?

Sacha (*siting up*) – Thank you. I'm a vegetarian.

Frances – I should've known.

Sacha – Really? Why's that?

Frances – I don't know... This tendency to systematically side with the victims, perhaps. With those who are destined for the slaughterhouse. Are you religious?

Sacha – I believe in reincarnation. What goes around comes around. And in the end, we will have played all the roles.

Frances – I see... And next time, the first ones will be the last... That's what I was saying. Replace reincarnation by resurrection, and this conception of the world is really quite catholic.

Sacha – Even here on earth, we are our own executioners, don't you think? We are victims of our own demons.

Frances – Since it all comes around, you will end up plagiarizing yourself...

Sacha – Maybe... Your husband and I may be two sides of the same coin. The medal of Knight of Arts and Letters.

Frances – I will always prefer the knight to the scholar... I will kill you.

Sacha – And by murdering me, you will murder yourself.

Frances – You really believe you're Jesus Christ.

Sacha – You're the one with a cross around your neck...

Frances – It's a standard-bearer.

Sacha – Yes. It bears status. You only fight to keep your privileges.

Frances – I do not turn the other cheek. My religion is glorious. It is the religion of the crusades. I don't wallow in the role of victim like you do.

Sacha – Do you prefer siding with the executioners?

Frances – I prefer the winning side. Don't you?

Sacha – I don't want to have to choose. "I am a Man, and nothing human is alien to me."

Frances – Are you also a philosopher?

Sacha – It's by Terence. A Latin author who lived nearly two centuries before Christ.

Frances – Do you know others?

Sacha – “I am the wound and the knife. I am the bellows and the cheek. I am the limbs and the wheel. And the victim and the executioner!”

Frances (*ironic*) – It's beautiful...

Sacha – It's Baudelaire.

Frances – Have you read *Flowers of Evil*?

Sacha – What about you? Have you truly read them, or do you simply know the few necessary quotes to dazzle society?

Frances – In any case, I have no empathy for those who refuse to get blood on their hands when it comes to hunting, but who turn up when it's time for the kill.

Sacha – Beware of clichés about vegans. Hitler was also a vegetarian.

Frances – It is true that you seem to know what you're talking about.

Sacha – About Hitler?

Frances – About crime. You said it's not easy to kill someone with a knife.

Sacha – The hardest part is getting rid of the body afterwards.

Frances – So, you speak from experience...

Sacha – While you were lining your pockets with my royalties, I went through a difficult period...

Frances – I'm very sorry about that...

Sacha – Unlike the adage, beggars can be choosers. In fact, you must choose what is worth begging for. But you are better than that, of course. In your world, you decide what the choices are.

Frances (*ironic*) – I understand you had a difficult childhood... Would you like to talk about it?

Sacha – It's strange how everyone wants me to tell them the story of my life. But in fact, it's already described in detail in my novel.

Frances – We made this novel a success. Without us, you would have had to self-publish. And now, even you would have forgotten about it.

Sacha – Perhaps...

Frances – And honestly, look at yourself...

Sacha – What?

Frances – Do you hear yourself? “What” In our world, as you say, we say “Excuse me”.

Sacha – No kidding.

Frances – You don't have the class of a writer. You'd look terrible on TV. Why not leave it to the professionals? We would all be winners.

Sacha – You're proposing that we share the work, right? Your husband lacks style when he writes, I lack style when I speak. So, I write his books, and he speaks for me?

Frances – Why not? It's sort of Cyrano's story, right? You know Cyrano?

Sacha – You truly make me sick. How could you live with this all these years? Live off of it.

Frances – Everybody plagiarizes everybody, in the field of literature, you know. Since the beginning of time. If it were a crime, we'd know about it.

Sacha – It is a crime. Not to mention a sin, of course. But you have no morals.

Frances – What do you want? It's time to decide. Money?

Sacha – You have nothing else to offer me anyway. In the end, you're right. I'm not docile enough to do whatever circus act I'm asked to perform to be accepted into your shitty world.

Frances – That sounds reasonable. How much?

Sacha – A million.

Frances – The Goncourt winner receives a check for ten euros.

Sacha – But that's without counting the byproducts... Hundreds of thousands of copies sold. TV appearances. All-expenses paid conferences...

Frances – This Goncourt did not sell so well.

Sacha – I think I detect a shade of accusation in your voice... In short, the novel I wrote was only worthy of being signed by your illustrious husband, right?

Frances – You can understand that it will take us some time to raise the money.

Sacha – I'm not in a hurry. I'll give you 24 hours.

Frances – And we'll need guarantees. To make sure you'll leave us alone for good.

Sacha – What guarantees?

Frances – A handwritten letter from you, waiving all rights to the novel in exchange for this amount. You will also agree to waive any and all lawsuits.

Sacha – Alright.

Frances – I've prepared a template for you to copy.

Sacha – It's my turn to copy this time...

Frances – Excuse me?

Sacha – A few years ago, your husband copied an entire book he didn't write.

Frances – A million, that's it. Then, you disappear from our lives.

Sacha – You can count on me. Disappearing is my specialty. But it'll be a lot easier with a million. Give me the paper.

Frances – Here.

Sacha – Alright. I'll be in my room doing my homework... I'll be back as soon as I'm done. Will I be allowed to watch TV afterwards?

Sacha exits.

Scene 9

Alexander enters.

Alexander – I just spoke to my agent. I've been asked to adapt my novel for the theater...

Frances – Isn't that what you've always dreamed of?

Alexander – Did I really just say my novel?

Frances – It might not be your novel, but it's our Goncourt.

Alexander – You're right. This is our success.

Frances – Yes.

Alexander – I even rewrote a few passages. At first, it wasn't that good...

Frances – And it was full of spelling mistakes.

Alexander – Did you speak with her?

Frances – Yes.

Alexander – And what does she want?

Frances – A million. In full settlement of accounts.

Alexander – That's expensive... Do we have it?

Frances – Yes. On our life insurance. We don't have kids anyway.

Alexander – So for the theatrical adaptation, I say yes?

Frances – It would be better to make them wait a little. I would like to check one more detail...

Alexander – Alright. I'll call them back.

He exits. Frances also exits and comes back with the manuscript.

Blackout

Scene 10

Sacha looks through the Prix Goncourt. Frances enters.

Sacha – It's amazing how much smarter a novel looks in print than in manuscript.

Frances – And when the book is wrapped in the red cover of a literary award...

Sacha – You were right to change the title, mine wasn't very good.

Frances – What was it again?

Sacha – *Memoir of an amnesiac.* Are you trying to trick me?

Frances – Do you have the letter I asked for?

Sacha – Here it is.

Sacha hands her the letter.

Frances – Okay...

Frances examines the letter.

Sacha – Is something wrong?

Frances – I'm rather relieved, actually... I had doubts, but now I'm sure. Your handwriting... It's not the same handwriting as the manuscript.

Sacha – I thought it was misplaced?

Frances – I have it in a safe place.

Sacha – And what conclusion do you draw from this handwriting analysis, Inspector?

Frances – You too are a fraud. You did not write this novel.

Sacha – If you say so...

Frances – I knew it. The real author would never have been satisfied with financial compensation.

Sacha – It's true, I'm not who you think I am.

Frances – So, who are you?

Sacha – It doesn't matter who I am... I met this novel's author in prison.

Frances – Is she still there?

Sacha – I don't know. She was sick. Maybe she's dead. Maybe not. She told me her life story. Her novel. She told me about losing her manuscript.

Frances – Did she send you?

Sacha – No. I work for myself.

Frances – So you don't know what's become of her...

Sacha – She was transferred, we lost touch. A few years later, I found the Goncourt in the prison library. I read it. I remembered this story, and I understood.

Frances – Why wait so long?

Sacha – I was released last week. I came straight here.

Frances – So the real author doesn't know anything.

Sacha – That doesn't make any difference. I want money in exchange for my silence.

Frances – The fact that you are a simple blackmailer changes everything. You're not an artist that we robbed. You're not even an author. And your ten-line letter is full of spelling mistakes.

Sacha – Your husband is not a real author either. All three of us are thieves. I just want my share of the loot.

Frances – Yes, but now you have no proof...

Sacha – Think again. Now I have the original manuscript. And it's not in your husband's handwriting.

Frances – The manuscript?

Sacha – You really take me for a fool. I saw you coming with your handwritten letter. You're smarter than your husband but much less than me.

Frances – How did you get your hands on this manuscript?

Sacha – I wrote this letter knowing that you would go directly to compare the handwriting with that of the manuscript. It was a way for me to know if you were hiding it at home, and where. I kept an eye on your whereabouts, and I found it.

Frances – You're bluffing again.

Sacha – Go check in the basement if it's still there.

Frances – I don't believe you.

Sacha – I told you I just got out of prison. I know how to find where people hide their most valuable possessions...

Frances – You bitch.

Sacha hands her a piece of paper.

Sacha – I've prepared a bank account number for you. I want this money in my account by the end of the week.

Frances – Don't worry. You'll have it...

Frances exits.

Scene 11

Alexander enters.

Alexander – You're still here?

Sacha – Of course, I'll be rich soon. I'll be able to live as upper class, too. I saw that there was a nice house for sale right across the street from yours.

Alexander – Don't push your luck.

Sacha – Of course, there's also another solution... Much simpler, in a way. And much cheaper for you.

Alexander – What is it?

She advances towards him, seductive.

Sacha – Marry me! And one day, I'll be your beneficiary.

Alexander – You're forgetting my wife. I don't think she'll be on board. And I'm not either...

Sacha kisses Alexander on the mouth. Surprised, he doesn't push her away.

Sacha – Let it happen... (*She becomes even more enterprising.*) You'll see, I'll surprise you...

Alexander – You already have... But you're not my type.

Sacha – Yet you signed my novel. For someone who doesn't like my type...

Alexander – I meant your style... Quite ambiguous by the way...

Sacha – Well... You could learn to like it...

Frances enters and surprises them in each other's arms. Sacha bursts out laughing.

Sacha – Don't worry, he's yours... For the moment. I'm going to take a walk in the garden, it's really too stuffy here. But tomorrow, I want my money.

Sacha exits.

Alexander – I'm sorry, I don't know what came over me.

Frances – I thought I heard you say that she snatched that kiss from you by surprise. So, you didn't mind?

Alexander – Stop it, what are you talking about?

Frances – It is true that she's younger than me. And she is definitely novel.

Alexander – I'm not even sure if she's really a woman... You have nothing to fear, don't worry.

Frances – That may be so. But be wary. I would kill to keep you.

Blackout

Scene 12

Frances is sitting at the desk. Sacha enters.

Sacha – Do you have my money?

Frances – Here.

She hands her a cheque. Sacha takes it and reviews it.

Sacha – Ten euros... Is this a joke?

Frances – That's what the laureate of the Goncourt award receives.

Sacha – Don't play this game with me. May I remind you I just got out of prison...

Frances – You shouldn't have tried to seduce my husband.

Sacha – What are you going to do? Kill me? Even for crimes of passion, you know, the sentence is much higher than for simple plagiarism. Believe me, I know.

Frances hands her a piece of paper.

Frances – Here's your money. Half a million euros. This is a transfer notice to the account you gave me. You will get the rest when you give the manuscript back to me.

Sacha – You'll get it. But I'll wait until the money is in my account first.

Sacha takes the transfer notice that Frances hands her.

Frances – And what guarantee do I have that you won't come and blackmail us again?

Sacha – You made me sign a written pledge.

Frances – Oh, you know, that sort of paper...

Sacha – Actually, there's no guarantee that I won't come back when I run out of money. How long does it take to spend a million? I'm not used to it, you know.

Frances – I can't bear to live the rest of my life with this sword of Damocles hanging over my head.

Sacha – Sure, you will. You have guts. More than your husband. You're the one who wears the pants, right? Even if he's the one who wears the medals...

Frances – I'm fine with that.

Sacha – In the end, you're the one who should have signed this book. But he's the one who'll continue to strut around in Parisian salons and on TV.

Frances – I prefer to pull the strings. I don't like to be in the spotlight.

Sacha – Too bad... The light suits you...

Frances – Are you really into women?

Sacha – In prison, you know, you don't have much choice. Eventually, you get a taste for it...

Sacha gets closer to Frances, who dodges without pushing her away.

Frances – We have a sauna. If you're interested...

Sacha – Why not?

Frances – It's in the shed at the back of the garden. I'll come and drop off some towels for you.

Sacha – Thank you... If you want to join me...

Frances – I'll be there in fifteen minutes.

Sacha – I'll be waiting. We can continue this charming conversation.

Frances – I have no doubt that it will be heated...

Frances exits.

Blackout

Scene 13

Frances enters, on her cell.

Frances – Yes, that's exactly it... I would like you to cancel this transfer. Very well, I'll send you a confirmation by e-mail. Thank you very much. Have a nice day...

Frances puts away her laptop and sips a cup of coffee. Alexander enters, preoccupied.

Frances – What's going on? You seem worried. What's wrong?

Alexander – I just came up from the garden. I wanted to get in the sauna, like every morning, after my cardio-training...

Frances – And...?

Alexander – You won't believe it, but this horrible woman was already there.

Frances – Really?

Alexander – There, in the sauna, completely naked.

Frances – No?

Alexander – And completely dead.

Frances – Really?

Alexander – You don't seem surprised...

Frances – I don't know... She must have died of a heart attack. It happens sometimes, you know. The sauna is not recommended for people with weak hearts.

Alexander – Yes, maybe... Especially since she looked like she'd been there all night.

Frances – How strange.

Alexander – Her face was scarlet, and she lay in a pool of sweat.

Frances – How horrible! It is, however, written on the door of the sauna that you should not exceed half an hour.

Alexander – Yeah... I don't know what came over her and why she stayed so long in the sauna...

Frances – Go figure...

Alexander – The door was blocked from the outside with a metal bar.

Frances – No!

Alexander – What have you done, Frances?

Frances – I did what you should have done yourself a long time ago if you had any balls.

Alexander – But why?

Frances – We would never be done with her! She would have blackmailed us all our lives. Even though, in truth, I just found out that she's not the author of this novel...

Alexander – She isn't? Then, who is?

Frances – Another woman, it seems. She met her in prison.

Alexander – I always knew that girl didn't have the class of a writer. But then why did you kill her? If she wasn't the writer!

Frances – I was worried you might leave me. That you would run off with her.

Alexander – What are you talking about? Can you picture me with that...?

Frances – I'm kidding. But even if she's not the author, she knows everything. She would have blackmailed us all the same.

Alexander – This is a nightmare... I have to turn myself in to the police.

Frances – Just words, as usual. You're just procrastinating and waiting for me to tell you what to do.

Alexander – So what do we do?

Frances – We could try to make it look like an accident, but it's risky...

Alexander – If we are asked about our relationship with this woman, and what she was doing in our sauna...

Frances – We have to get rid of the body.

Alexander – Alright... If you think that's best... And then, what?

Frances – Then? Nothing. We'll go back to normal.

Alexander – Normal?

Frances – Enough talk. I'll finish my coffee and we'll get to work.

Alexander – But... It must've been an agonizing death.

Frances – She asked for it.

Alexander – And before, you joined her naked in the sauna.

Frances – I had to make her trust me.

Alexander – So now, you know if it's a man or a woman.

Frances – Yes.

Alexander – So?

Frances – Now what does it matter? Corpses are unisex.

Alexander – Does a dying woman remain feminine?

Frances – That's funny. Did you make that up?

Alexander – Still not, unfortunately... It's a song by Brigitte Fontaine.

Frances – You'll soon find out... Let's go...

Blackout

Scene 14

Frances and Alexander enter, carrying the inert body of Sacha. He holds her by the feet and she by the shoulders. They put her on the sofa without any care.

Alexander – I didn't think she'd be this heavy... Yet, with all the water she already left her body...

Frances – You know the expression “It's dead weight”.

Alexander – Yeah, so?

Frances – It proves that a dead person always weighs more than a living one.

Alexander – As long as it doesn't weigh on our conscience...

Frances – Did you pull out the car?

Alexander – It's down there.

Frances – Perfect.

Alexander – How are we going to get rid of this body?

Frances – We'll take it to our country house in Brittany. We'll chop it up, cremate the remains in the wood stove, and scatter the ashes from the cliff top.

Alexander – You're scaring me, Frances. It sounds like you've been doing this your whole life...

Frances – Do what I say, and everything will be fine.

Alexander – I've always trusted you blindly, but I don't know why, now I have a bad feeling.

Frances – Do you have a better solution?

Alexander – No...

Frances – So let's not waste any time.

Alexander – Okay... And cremation will be easier after a night in the sauna. Her water broke...

Frances – Do you really think this is a good time for wordplays?

Alexander – You're right. I think we have a more pressing matter at hand...

Frances – We could roll her up in a carpet.

Alexander – Why?

Frances – I don't know. They always do that in movies.

Alexander – Okay...

They are about to roll her up in a carpet.

Frances – I think this carpet's too small.

Alexander – Let's just take her like this.

Frances – This time, I'll carry the feet, it'll be lighter for me.

Alexander – Alright...

They pick the body up again and exit.

Blackout

Scene 15

Alexander and Frances enter, looking happy.

Alexander – It did us good, this weekend in Brittany, don't you think? We look healthier.

Frances – Yes... A walk on the oceanside. Breathing in the fresh air. Rediscovering the taste of authentic things.

Frances – Every time I go back there, I feel like I'm back to my roots.

Alexander – In Brittany? But, as far back as you could trace your family tree, your family never left Paris.

Frances – Roots are where you feel at home, and where you can afford to buy a country house.

Alexander – It's strange, I feel like that this ordeal has brought us even closer.

Frances – Me too.

Alexander – And now that we have nothing to hide, I feel more relaxed, don't you?

Frances – Nothing to hide? You mean between us?

Alexander – Of course... Are we still having dinner at your parents on Tuesday?

Frances – Yes, as usual.

Alexander – Very well. I'll be glad to see them.

Frances – That's true. We haven't seen them in a long time.

Alexander – Two weeks, actually.

Frances – Yes, that's what I meant.

Alexander (*picking up a newspaper*) – So, what's up in the world?

Alexander unfolds the paper, and starts looking through it.

Frances – It's the beginning of literary season.

Alexander – Unfortunately, we are not likely to win a prize. We have nothing to publish...

Frances – For now...

Frances pulls out a manuscript and starts reading. They read for a moment each in their corner. Then Alexander notices the manuscript.

Alexander – That damn manuscript again?

Frances – No, this is a different one.

Alexander – A different one?

Frances – I found it in the guest room, under a floorboard...

Alexander – So she planted it there... It's a miracle... I had already found her Bible on a train, and now that she's dead, she also leaves us her New Testament...

Frances – Both manuscripts are in the same handwriting.

Alexander – So, she is the author after all?

Frances – Possibly...

Alexander – This woman was truly diabolical.

Frances – Yes... We did well to get rid of her.

Alexander – If we told this story to someone, they wouldn't believe us.

Frances – That's why we won't tell anyone.

Alexander – Except for our readers maybe. It's true, it would make a good novel, right?

Frances – It already has.

Alexander – What do you mean?

Frances – It's the subject of this second novel.

Alexander – I'm definitely out of luck. All the good ideas have already been used by others. What do I have left but plagiarism? (*A moment*) And is this manuscript any good?

Frances – Even better than the first...

Alexander – My agent is always nagging me to publish something else.

Frances – Why not sign this one? I assure you, it's very worthy of you.

Alexander – Since she's dead, after all. Let's say we're her heirs...

Frances – You always know how to find the right words, honey. That's probably what makes you a successful author. Yes, we're entitled to that. That's the way it is. We're one of the entitled people. And that's not going to change.

Alexander – I wonder how she ended up in prison...

Frances – To think that when she came to us, she had no proof. I had the manuscript. If you hadn't confessed everything...

Alexander – That's true. I let myself be tricked. I shouldn't have. But she took me by surprise. I promise you that next time...

Frances – Next time?

Alexander – Now, I expect the doorbell to ring at any moment, and another one of my thousands of readers to come and accuse me of having found this book on a train.

Frances – As stated in the foreword of your book.

Alexander – We can't very well kill them all.

Frances – There would be no one left to buy your books.

Alexander – What's the title of my new novel?

Frances – Plagiarism.

Alexander – It may need to be changed before I submit the manuscript to my publisher.

Frances – Our dear Maxence... By the way, did you confirm, for Megève, at Christmas?

Alexander – Yes, yes... It's fine. Everything is also organized for the signing session.

Frances – Perfect. The mountain air will be a nice change. Because, between you and I, Brittany was...

The phone rings.

Alexander – Do you think it's another blackmailer?

Frances – We'll know soon enough... Pick up!

He picks up the phone.

Alexander – Hello? Yes... Yes, this is he... Okay... Alright... Yes, of course, I'm honored... Thank you for letting me know... (*He hangs up.*) It was someone from the ministry. I will be awarded the Legion of Honor... for my life's work.

Frances – Really?

Alexander – You don't even seem surprised.

Frances – You can thank dad. He had a word with the Prime Minister.

Alexander – I'll have to write another speech.

Frances – That's the price of fame.

Alexander – Well... As long as they don't ask me to write more books...

Music at low volume getting progressively louder. Sacha comes back, sits at the desk and starts making changes to the manuscript.

Frances – After all... Life is a lie.

Alexander – Do you love me?

Frances – What do you want me to say?

Alexander – Yes?

Frances – Then, yes. How about you?

Alexander – Yes, I do... (*A beat*) I love myself too.

Frances – That's funny...

Alexander – It's by Sacha... (*She looks surprised.*) Sacha Guitry.

Frances – You're right, from now on, it's best to plagiarize dead authors... That way, I won't have to kill them.

They smile at each other, while Sacha keeps writing.

The end.

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez was first a drummer for several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then began a career writing television scripts before turning to theater and writing plays. He has written close to a hundred scripts for television and almost as many plays, some of which have already become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). He is one of the most produced contemporary playwrights in France and in other francophone countries. Several of his plays are also available in Spanish and English, and are regularly produced in the United States and Latin America.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is offering free downloads of the texts of all his plays on his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>) however, any public production of his plays are subject to authorisation by the SACD. For those who only want to read the play or want work from a traditional book format, printed editions of his plays can be ordered from [The Book Edition website](#) or [Amazon website](#) for a cost similar to that of photocopying this script.

The following plays are available in English:

An Innocent Little Murder

Casket for two

Crisis and Punishment

Critical but Stable

Friday the 13th

Him and Her

Quarantine

Running on Empty

Strip Poker

The Worst Village in England

All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays are available to download for free from his website: <https://comediatheque.net/>

This text is protected under copyright laws.
Criminal copyright infringement will be investigated
and may result in a maximum penalty of up to 3 years in prison
and a EUR 300.000 fine.

Paris – September 2021
© La Comédiathèque - ISBN 978-2-37705-583-8
<https://comediatheque.net/>
Play available for free download