

La Comédiathèque



A Cuckoo's Nest



Jean-Pierre Martinez

comediatheque.net

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

A Cuckoo's Nest

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Translation by the author

On the eve of Christmas, the unexpected return of a grandfather thought to be dead disrupts the routine of an ostensibly ordinary family. A zany and dark comedy about family ties. Go straight to hell... or draw a lucky card.

Characters

William
Judith
Fausto
Nina

© La Comédiathèque

Act 1

A living room opening onto a terrace. Some Christmas decorations but no Christmas tree. Judith, aged forty to fifty, sitting in an armchair, reading a newspaper with a headline about an eruption of an Icelandic volcano disrupting air traffic. William, her husband, same age, tending to a plant in a planter. He waters it, sprays it, trims it... Running out of imagination, he settles into another armchair. Silence. An old-fashioned cuckoo clock in the shape of a floor clock, located between them, cuckoos three times.

William – The cuckoo always cuckoos three times...

Judith – What time is it?

William – I don't know. Definitely not three o'clock, anyway.

Judith – We should get it repaired.

William – Or get rid of it. It's the only thing you inherited from your family.

Judith – Well, it's still too bulky...

A pause.

William – It's unbelievable, this weather, for December.

Judith – It's Indian summer.

William – A green Christmas makes a fat churchyard...

Judith – Well, luckily we didn't plan to go on vacation today. Did you read this? All the airports are blocked.

William – It's like going back to the time of caravels. Now, to get a plane to take off, you have to wait for the winds to be favourable.

Judith – All because of a volcano whose name we can't even pronounce.

William – Like the devil...

Judith – Sorry?

William – We can't pronounce the devil's name either! It just goes to show that there's something diabolical about this whole story.

Judith – Well, it's not the end of the world either.

William – I wonder if the millenarians are right. What if the apocalypse is really set for December 25th of this year?

Judith – Because a volcano erupted?

William – It started that way for the dinosaurs too!

Judith – One should never wake up a sleeping volcano...

William – And now, what do we do?

Judith – While waiting for the end of the world?

William – When the little bird has left its nest...

Judith – There's a nest? Where?

William – It's a metaphor! I'm talking about Nina, our daughter! When she's really gone and left us all alone in this house with one room too many.

Judith – She's not leaving forever. And she's only going to Paris. She'll come back.

William – Yes, in transit.

Judith – I'd prefer not to think about it. Not for now...

William – It's been over twenty years since our days have been filled with her. That our lives revolve around her. What did she eat? What will she eat? What did she do? What will she do? We'll have to get used to the idea that now, our only daughter knows how to eat and use the toilet by herself.

Judith – We'll have to find other landmarks, create new habits.

William – How did we manage before?

Judith – I don't know anymore.

William – We'll have to learn again.

Judith – But it will never be the same as before.

William – Then we'll have to reinvent it.

Judith notices the planter.

Judith – Are you doing some planting?

William – Just one or two cannabis plants, for our own use.

Judith – You're kidding!

William – We said we had to change our reference points, right? A little joint from time to time should at least help us let go of our old reference points. (*She looks at him puzzled.*) I'm joking, they're cherry tomatoes. I found them at the florist.

Judith – At the florist? That's very delicate of you, but you didn't have to. I hope you didn't spend too much on them...

William – Ten euros. I was actually going there to buy a Christmas tree. But apparently cherry tomatoes can have an incredible yield. More than a spruce tree, anyway. Have you seen the price of cherry tomatoes? It's almost as expensive as cannabis.

Judith – And it's legal too...

William – If I really end up getting laid off from the bank, I could always become a cherry tomato dealer.

Judith – Hmm...

William – Well, for now, I haven't harvested anything yet, but I bought it an hour ago.

Judith – Yes, and it's still December.

They both remain silent for a moment.

William – You know, I don't even know if I fear it or hope for it, this layoff.

Judith – It could be an opportunity to evolve...

William – Or the beginning of the end, like the dinosaurs. They couldn't evolve...

Judith – We have enough to fall back on. You would get a severance package. And besides, I'm working.

William – I know. That's what depresses me. Twenty years ago, we had nothing, and we weren't afraid of anything. Especially not the future. Today we have a house, two cars, life insurance for each of us... We have everything, and we're afraid of everything. Even volcanoes. We've become dinosaurs, I tell you...

A pause.

Judith – You would finally have time to write your novel. You've been talking about it for years. What was it called again?

William – "Memoirs of an Amnesiac."

Judith – That's a good title.

William – Unfortunately, it's already been taken since then.

Judith – You could call it "Memoirs of a Dinosaur"...

William – That's already taken too. All the good titles are already taken. Can you imagine? If only I was born a hundred years earlier, I could have titled my book "In Search of Lost Time" or "Journey to the End of the Night." With titles like that, of course, I would have been a hit.

Judith – It's enough to discourage you from writing...

William – In the meantime, I better not give up the idea of terrace farming. Just in case my severance package doesn't meet our expectations.

Judith – Does it worry you that much?

William – Why do you think I bought a food plant instead of a cannabis plant?

Judith – Because they don't sell cannabis plants at the florist?

We hear an unpleasant noise of a flute with many false notes.

William – What is this? It's horrible! How am I supposed to write a bestseller in these conditions?

Judith – The neighbour's daughter... Nina was also learning to play the flute when she was in primary school. Don't you remember?

William – That's true. It's unbelievable. Just yesterday, she was learning to blow into a flute, and today she's a lawyer.

Judith – And she blows smoke...

William – Very funny... Well, at least if we ever discover illegal plantations on our terrace, we can call her as soon as we're in custody. That's reassuring, right?

Judith (*looking suspiciously at the plant*) – Are you sure this is really a cherry tomato plant?

Nina arrives, pulling a rolling suitcase. She's a young woman in her twenties with a sporty look.

William – So, you're leaving? You're going to leave us here all alone, like two old fogies... We'll finally have some peace and quiet.

Nina – Me too.

William – We were just talking about you, actually. I was telling your mother that if we ever find a dead body buried in our garden, you can help us avoid trouble with the police.

Nina – You think so?

William – After all, we paid for your education!

Judith – Are you really not going to let us accompany you to Paris?

Nina – It's not necessary, Mom, I assure you. Josiane is picking me up by car.

William – Josiane? Who's Josiane?

Judith – Nina's colleague with whom she's going to share an apartment, you know.

William – No... I'm never told anything... And how old is this Josiane?

Nina – What does it matter? Are you a police officer?

William – Are people still allowed to name their daughters Josiane? Hasn't it been banned?

Judith – Rents are so expensive in Paris... Are you sure you didn't forget anything?

Nina – If I forgot something, I'll come back. I'm not going to the end of the world. Should I give you my keys? For the cleaning lady...

William – That's right, leave your keys at the reception when you leave. Did you take anything from the minibar?

Judith – I swear, you should write a book. If you put all the nonsense you say into writing, it could fill several volumes...

The phone rings inside the house.

William – I'll get it. I'd rather not witness your tearful goodbyes.

William leaves.

Nina – He looks completely depressed...

Judith smiles.

Judith – His darling daughter is leaving home. It's making him feel old, naturally...

Nina – I'm not leaving forever!

Judith (*on the verge of tears*) – Yes, that's what I told him... It's true, right?

Nina – Of course!

Nina hugs her mother to comfort her. It's a touching moment. Then they release each other. Nina hands her mother a piece of paper.

Nina – Here, I've written down the address and building code for you. You can come whenever you want!

Judith – Thanks... (*Judith puts the paper in a drawer and takes out a revolver.*) Oh, by the way... I found this under your bed while dusting. You really shouldn't leave it lying around...

Nina – Sorry, I didn't want Dad to see it. I'm supposed to never be without it, even at home.

Judith – You will give Josiane my regards...

Nina – Okay.

Judith – You'll have to tell your father at some point...

Nina – Tell him what?

Judith – That you passed the exam for the police academy, not the one for the judiciary! Why didn't you tell him?

Nina – I was afraid he'd be disappointed... It was his last chance to see me in a gown at least once in his life...

Nina approaches to take the revolver, but stops in front of the cherry tomato plants.

Nina – What's this?

Judith – Your father's plantings. Cherry tomatoes...

Nina (*not convinced*) – Oh, yeah...

William returns with a phone in hand. Judith quickly slides the revolver under the sofa. William hands the phone to Nina.

William (to Nina) – It's for you. Josiane...

Nina – Thanks... (*Nina walks away with the phone.*) Hello... Yes, Josiane...

William – She has a strange voice, doesn't she?

Judith – Who?

William – This Josiane!

Judith – What kind of voice?

William – I don't know... Not very feminine.

Judith – She's not a flight attendant, you know.

William – Yes, I figured that... The question is, what can you do in life when your name is Josiane? It's quite a handicap for finding a job. What does she do for a living?

Judith – She's... Nina's colleague, I told you. They're doing their internship together.

William – Their internship as lawyers? In which firm?

Judith – I can't remember... Pearson Specter Litt, I think...

William – Oh, yeah... That rings a bell vaguely.

A police siren is briefly heard from the street. Nina returns.

Nina – Josiane's waiting for me downstairs. I'll have to go...

Judith – You're still coming for Christmas dinner, right?

Nina – Of course! I told you. I'll bring the turkey.

William – You can even bring Josiane, if you want.

Nina – Oh, yeah? Well... why would I bring Josiane? We're not married or anything.

William – You can tell me anything, you know... I'm your father... I'll still love you...

Nina – Anything?

William – Almost anything.

Nina – Even if the turkey turned out to be a pig?

William doesn't seem to understand the reference.

Judith – Come on, go ahead, leave.

William – Yes, that's it, hurry up... We can't wait for you to be gone... We've been dreaming of having a guest room for so long... (*Nina embraces him to say goodbye.*) Now we just need to find some friends. But now that we don't have any children to take care of anymore, we'll have time to make some...

Nina is about to leave with her rolling suitcase.

Judith – Call me when you arrive, okay?

Nina – Don't worry.

Nina leaves. They remain sitting on the couch, silent.

William – And there you have it... It's done... We're old farts now.

Judith – You were already an old fart before this.

Silence.

William – Do you want to play Monopoly?

Judith – It's not very fun with just two players. But we can play at Christmas, like every year. With Josiane...

William – What are we going to do with her room?

Judith – It's an obsession! There's no rush...

William – We could leave it as is and turn it into a mausoleum? We could burn incense in there from time to time.

Judith – Do you want to go on a little trip? I still have plenty of vacation days to take. And in the funeral home, after the holiday season, it's rather slow...

William – Mmm...

Judith – Who knows why, people prefer to die between Christmas and New Year's.

William – What we need is a permanent vacation.

Judith – You're scaring me...

William – If I get laid off, you could stop working too.

Judith – I don't know if we can really afford it... We still have to pay for your mother's retirement home... Unless we win the lottery... And what would I do?

William – I don't know... You could finally do what you want! Haven't you ever wanted to do something else?

Judith – You know what I've been thinking about... I've been considering it for a while...

William – No.

Judith – Opening a bed and breakfast...

William – Why not! We already have a room that just became available...

Judith – Not here! In the countryside!

William (*horrified*) – In the countryside!

The doorbell rings.

Judith – See... I told you she would come back... She probably forgot something...

Judith goes to answer the door. William reaches out, grabs the newspaper, and opens it.

William (*reading*) – Prison break... The inmate escapes by pointing a fake gun at the guards... It's strange, why does this face look familiar...?

Judith returns.

Judith – It's not Nina...

William – Who is it?

Judith – An older man dressed strangely...

William – With a white beard and a red suit? That's what I thought. Who's this idiot who parked his sleigh right down there in a handicapped parking spot...

Judith – That idiot claims to be your father.

William – My father?

Judith – I thought he was dead!

William – Me too...

Judith – That's what you told me! He's not dead?

William – To me, he was dead... I haven't seen him in twenty years.

Judith – And what made you think he was dead?

William – One day, I found some bones, in my mother's garden while digging.

Judith – Your famous inclination for gardening...

William – I thought she had buried him there.

Judith – Oh yes, that's... that's also the first thing that would have come to my mind. And you didn't ask her?

William – Ask who?

Judith – Your mother!

William – At first, I didn't dare. It's not the kind of question you easily ask your mother. She just told me he had gone on a long journey...

Judith – And then? Didn't you wonder why he hadn't come back after twenty years?

William – I did, but... Since mom has been in that nursing home... You know she doesn't remember anything anymore. Even if the police beat her up, she wouldn't be able to tell them her own name...

Judith – Well, we can't just leave him at the door...

William – Why not?

Judith – He's still your father...

Judith leaves, leaving William bewildered.

William – But then, who were those bones in the garden?

Fade to black.

Act 2

Judith returns with a man of a certain age, of handsome appearance, wearing outdated and flashy clothes, with a gift package in hand.

Judith – It's really kind of you to come and visit us. But I don't even know your name...

Fausto – Fausto. My name is Fausto, dear Madam. But you can call me... Fausto.

William – I didn't remember his name was Fausto...

Awkward moment.

Judith – Well, William, aren't you going to say hello to your father?

William – Yes, yes, I... Dad? What wind blows you this way?

Fausto – Rather an adverse wind, to be honest.

William – Well, well... That's strange, but the opposite would have surprised me...

Fausto – I was supposed to take a plane at Charles de Gaulle Airport, but because of that volcanic cloud...

William (*to Judith*) – When I told you there was something diabolical about this volcano story... The bowels of the earth start spewing fire, and here's my father showing up after coming out of his grave...

Judith – So, you're in transit...

Fausto – I thought I would take the opportunity to visit my son... And finally meet my daughter-in-law... and my grandson.

Judith – It's a girl...

Fausto – Ah...

Judith – And you've come at a bad time...

William – She just left the house for good... It's really unlucky, if you had come just ten years earlier, you could have met her...

Judith senses the discomfort and tries to fill the silence.

Judith – But please, have a seat!

Fausto hands her the gift package.

Fausto – Here, I brought this for the little one.

Judith (*taking the gift*) – Ah, thank you! I'll give it to her as soon as I see her. Don't you have any luggage?

Fausto – I left them... at the airport's baggage storage.

Judith – Would you like something to drink?

Fausto – I wouldn't want to bother you...

Judith – Think nothing of it! What can I offer you... We rarely have aperitifs.

William – We don't receive many visitors... Since we have few friends and no close family.

Judith – Prune wine, perhaps? We brought it back from our vacation this summer in southwest France. We haven't had a chance to uncork it yet...

Fausto – Prune wine, perfect.

William – It's good for digestion.

Judith puts the gift package in a corner and leaves. Awkward silence.

Fausto – So, son, how are you doing?

William – Very well, thank you.

Fausto – Aren't you glad to see your old father again?

William – Yes, yes, but... You just erupt like that...

Fausto – Barge in. We say barge in. Eruption is for volcanoes.

William – It's kind of you to come back and give me some English lessons... The last time I saw you, I had just passed my General Certificate of Secondary Education.

Fausto – And did you pass it?

William – Thank you for caring about my secondary education, but... where were you, by the way, these past twenty years?

Fausto – Not very far from here, actually. Just a few miles as the crow flies.

William – Ah, yes... That explains why you've never come to see me before. Well, after all, you're not a bird.

Fausto – Birds, too, sometimes get put in cages...

Judith returns with a tray containing a bottle of prune wine and three glasses.

Judith – Here you go... It'll refresh us...

Judith pours the drinks.

Fausto – Thank you.

Judith – Can you believe it? Having an aperitif with the window open in the middle of December!

Fausto – A green Christmas makes a fat churchyard...

Judith – Yes, that's what my husband used to say... So, you're William's father, then.

Fausto – Technically, yes...

Judith – I imagine you don't live in France...

Fausto – I don't really have a home port.

William – As long as you have your health...

Judith sips from her glass.

Judith – It's a bit warm, isn't it? I'll get some ice cubes, it'll be better...

Judith leaves again.

William – So they let you out? Not for good behaviour, I imagine?

Fausto – Not exactly...

William – You escaped?

Fausto – It's a bit more complicated than that.

William – I find it complicated enough as it is...

Fausto – Let's just say I benefited from a twist of fate.

William – Imagine that?

Fausto – I was about to leave the country, but because of that volcano...

William – So you remembered you had a son.

Fausto – In my situation... It's better if I don't stay in a hotel tonight. Naturally, I thought of you...

William – Naturally?

Fausto – You wouldn't turn in your own father to the police, would you?

William – It depends... Is there a reward?

Judith returns with an ice bucket.

Judith – And here are the ice cubes!

She uses tongs to put ice cubes in the glasses.

Fausto – Thank you for your hospitality...

Judith – By the way, do you know where you'll be staying tonight? If your plane can't take off until tomorrow...

William glares at him.

Fausto – I'll get by.

William – And we don't have much room to accommodate him...

Judith – There's Nina's room. You always wanted to have a guest room...

William – But... he's not a guest.

Judith – More prune wine, anyone?

At that moment, a phone ringing is heard, and Fausto takes out a large mobile phone from his pocket, indicating its outdatedness. Fausto extends the telescopic antenna and answers the call.

Fausto – Hello...? *(to the others)* Excuse me... Hello...

Fausto walks away towards the interior of the house.

William – Why on earth did you offer him Nina's room?

Judith – He's your father, isn't he?

William – I don't know this guy!

Judith – You're not sure it's him?

William – I haven't seen him in twenty years! But I don't recall him resembling that.

Judith – People change in twenty years, obviously. Are you starting to lose your memory, just like your mother?

William – Do you think he resemble me?

Judith – If you're not sure it's him, we can ask for his identification...

William – What I'd really like is to be able to search him.

Judith – For what?

William – To see if he's carrying a gun!

Judith – Ah, I see...

William – What could be in there...? I hear ticking, don't you?

Judith – Do you think your father would have come here to blow himself up with a bomb after twenty years of absence?

William – Then what is it?

Judith – It's the cuckoo clock!

William – The cuckoo... You mean my father? He also tends to lay his eggs in other birds' nests...

Fausto returns with a forced smile on his lips.

Fausto – It's a bit awkward, but I think I'll have to accept your kind invitation after all... A friend had offered to host me, but he just cancelled.

Judith – No problem. You're welcome here. Until the winds change...

Fausto – The winds...

Judith – The radioactive... I mean volcanic... cloud.

Fausto – Ah, yes, of course.

Judith – At least this one didn't try to convince us it stopped at the border...

Fausto – Clouds are like birds, they don't know borders.

William – Not even those of the Schengen area...

The doorbell rings. Fausto freezes.

Fausto – Are you expecting someone?

Judith – No... I'll go check...

Judith is leaving.

Fausto – Is there a way to exit through the terrace?

William – Yes, it leads to the garden.

Fausto – Ah...?

William – You can always try jumping. But we are on the third floor...

Fausto – Ah...

Judith enters with Nina.

William – Oh, it's you... Fausto was afraid it was the police...

Judith – Nina forgot... her mobile phone. They're so small now, you never know where you've put them... Yours, at least, you're unlikely to lose it! Fausto, this is Nina, my daughter... Nina, meet...

William (*interrupting*) – Fausto, a homeless guy we just picked up from the street... He had a sign around his neck that said "I'm hungry", so we invited him for an aperitif...

Judith is caught off guard by this lie, and Nina is obviously surprised.

Nina – Nice to meet you...

Judith – Fausto will be staying here tonight.

Nina – Well... Your guest room won't have stayed empty for long...

Judith – Would you like some prune wine with us?

Nina – Why not...

William – Are you sure it won't delay you? Josiane will worry...

Nina – I'm not five minutes away.

William – I'll serve the drinks. *(To Judith)* Why don't you show our friend his room in the meantime? *(To Fausto)* It's the family suite, very quiet.

Fausto – All right...

Judith – Will you follow me?

Judith leaves with Fausto.

Fausto – Miss...

William pours a glass for Nina. Nina casts an intrigued glance at her father, who seems uncomfortable.

William – Aren't you drinking your aperitif?

Nina – Who is this guy?

William – I told you, a homeless guy. He didn't know where to sleep tonight, so since we had a spare room...

Nina – Charity isn't really your thing, is it...?

William – It's Christmas, after all!

Nina – You always say you don't care about Christmas.

William – Well, precisely, I've decided to give meaning back to this holiday that has become over time nothing more than an indecent celebration of consumer society. Did you know that in the past, at Christmas, they would set an extra seat for any stranger who might come knocking at the door?

Nina – Like Santa Claus...

William – It was called the "seat of the poor." It was said to be meant for the souls of deceased family members, who were invited to the feast.

Nina *(skeptical)* – Mm-hmm...

William – Look, in fact, here's proof that he's a good guy, he brought a gift for you...

Nina looks at the package.

Nina – For me? Does he know me?

William – Seems like he's heard of you.

Nina opens the package and takes out a revolver, holding it in her hand.

Nina – A revolver... All right... Thank him for me...

William – When you were little, you always played cops and robbers... Remember? None of your friends wanted to play with you...

Nina – Mm-hmm...

To regain her composure, Nina looks at the newspaper.

William – One day, you even locked the house cleaner in a basement closet because you accused her of stealing your candies. We didn't find her until the next morning...

Nina's attention suddenly seems drawn to an article.

Nina – A homeless man... His photo is in the newspaper! Haven't you seen it?

William – No...

Nina – He escaped from prison this morning! I knew his face looked familiar... I must have seen the wanted notice at the office...

William – Does he have a lawyer already?

Nina – This guy is dangerous, I'm telling you!

Fausto comes back with Judith. Nina instinctively points the gun at Fausto, who reacts by stepping back.

Fausto – I'm sorry, if I had known, I would have brought a doll...

William – Oh, yes, that would have been much more appropriate for a girl. Especially a girl her age.

Fausto – Don't worry, it's fake.

Nina – Remarkably well-made...

William takes the toy from Nina's hand and examines it.

William – A prison guard would probably be fooled if someone waved this in front of his face... (*William plays with the revolver, spinning it clumsily around his finger like a cowboy, but the revolver slips from his hand and flies behind the couch.*) Sorry, I'm not very skilled...

William bends down and accidentally picks up the real revolver previously hidden there by Judith.

Judith – Oh, my God...

William (*to Nina*) – But you seem to know a lot about guns, don't you?

Nina – Well, in my line of work...

William – My daughter is a lawyer.

Fausto – Ah, very good... A lawyer in the family can always be useful...

Judith (*to Nina*) – I wonder if this wouldn't be the right moment for your coming out...

William – I knew it!

Nina – It's not at all what you think, I assure you. But please, put down the gun without making any sudden moves...

As a joke, William aims the revolver, which he believes to be fake, at his father.

William – I've always dreamed of doing this... I'll have to talk to my therapist about it.

Nina – No!

William accidentally pulls the trigger and is surprised by the sound of the gunshot himself.

William – The shot went off on its own... The trigger is really sensitive. And what realism! I even felt the recoil, wow. I don't know how they manage to do that.

His father remains motionless for a moment, then collapses.

Judith – Oh my God, you just killed your father.

William – Yeah, that's what I was saying... I've always dreamed of doing that...

Nina – His father?

Judith – Your grandfather...

Nina – I thought grandpa was dead!

Judith – Well, now he is...

Nina – I think I'll tell Josiane not to wait for me...

Fade to black.

Act 3

Judith and Nina are dismayed by Fausto's body lying on the floor. William seems surprised.

William – But it's a fake! Can't you see he's pretending to make us laugh? Right, dad?

Nina – It's my service weapon.

William – Your service weapon?

Nina – I'm a cop, dad, not a lawyer...

William – Cop?

Judith picks up the toy gun.

Judith – The fake one is this one.

William – Oops... I think my therapist would call that a Freudian slip.

Nina – For a Freudian slip, it's quite successful...

Judith – Oh my God, what are we going to do!

William – We could bury him in the garden.

Judith – Is that a family tradition?

Nina – But we can't do that! It's not legal!

Judith – Listen, sweetheart, I don't think it's the time to be rigid about the rules.

Nina – Rigid?

William – It's involuntary manslaughter...

Judith – And you said it yourself – it's your service weapon! I told you not to leave it lying around...

William – He's on the run, no one would notice his disappearance.

Judith – It looks like he's still moving...

William – It would be more humane to finish him off before burying him, right?

Nina examines Fausto, opening his shirt.

Nina – The bullet ricocheted off his medal. He's just knocked out from the impact...

William – A medal?

Nina – Made of steel, apparently.

William – He must have engraved it in his cell to pass the time.

Nina – With the Pope's effigy...

Judith – Oh my God, it's a miracle!

William – A couple more of those, and the Pope can be beatified. But I didn't know my father was so religious...

Judith – Italians, you know, even the mafiosos...

William – I didn't know he was Italian either.

Fausto regains consciousness.

Fausto – What happened?

Judith – Just a little fainting spell, grandpa... It must be the emotion... These family reunions, of course, must be shaking you up a bit...

Nina – But he still escaped from prison.

Judith – We can't just turn him in to the police.

Nina – I am the police!

Fausto – I thought she was a lawyer?

William – Me too... Funny, just yesterday, it would have bothered me, but now I'm almost relieved.

Nina – Oh yeah?

William – It's going to considerably simplify these family reunions.

Judith – What are we going to do with him...

Nina – Armed robbery, concealing stolen goods, and now escape... We never found the loot from his last heist...

William – Well, well...

Judith – But he's still your grandfather, after all.

William – We don't choose our family... *(To Fausto)* Well, why don't you tell me why you came here, exactly?

A pause.

Fausto – I stopped by to see your mother before coming here.

William – And then?

Fausto – She didn't remember me anymore. I think she's losing her mind.

William – I forgot about you too. And yet, I am still in my right mind. Forgetting someone you haven't seen in twenty years is normal, you know...

Fausto – The problem is that... I wish she remembered one particular thing.

William – Tell me about it...

Fausto – She's the one who hid the loot from my last heist.

William – And she doesn't remember where she hid it, is that it?

Fausto – Do you have any idea?

William – Me?

Fausto – She could have told you.

William – Even when she had her wits about her, my mother wasn't much of a talker. She didn't even tell me that my father was in prison and not buried in the garden...

Nina – In the garden?

The cuckoo clock chimes three times.

Judith – And now, she's a bit like this old cuckoo clock. The record is skipping.

Nina – No, but I can't believe it... We're talking about the proceeds of an armed robbery here!

Judith – How much?

Fausto – Twelve million.

Judith – Twelve million!

William – Oh, yes, indeed...

Judith – It allows for making plans.

Fausto – We could share it.

Judith – A donation, so to speak...

William – As a final settlement.

Judith – And where did this money come from?

Fausto – Société Générale.

Nina – We're talking about a heist, right? Not a cash withdrawal...

Judith (to William) – You could consider it as a severance pay?

Nina – We still need to find the money...

William – That's not going to be easy. When we put mom in that specialized institution, we had to sell her house to pay part of the bill... I can't imagine us asking the new owners if we can dig holes in their garden...

Judith – By the way, if it wasn't your father, then whose bones were in the garden?

Nina – Bones? What bones?

Fausto – The gardener stumbled upon the loot while trying to plant bamboo. Right after, he fell from a cherry tree.

William – A domestic accident, in a way.

Nina – That's really unlucky.

Fausto – Since he was working under the table and had no family, your mother preferred to take care of his funeral herself. She buried him at the foot of the cherry tree, in the strictest privacy...

William – It's so sad not to be able to rely on a loving family, even on the day of your funeral...

Judith – That's so true... I work at a funeral home, and believe me, sometimes it would be more fun to be buried in your own garden.

William – Especially for a gardener.

Fausto – Right after that, your mother decided to hide the cash somewhere else, but I don't know where...

Judith – Where could that old loony have hidden the dough...

Fausto (*to Nina*) – Do you have any idea where your grandmother could have hidden this money?

Nina – No... But even if I did, I wouldn't tell you!

Judith – Let's think for a moment. What could she have done with this wealth...?

William – Maybe she opened a secret bank account in Switzerland?

Nina – Can you imagine grandma opening a Swiss bank account?

William – And then we would still have to know the bank and the account number...

Judith – She could have hidden it here.

William – She did spend a few months with us before Judith insisted on putting her in a nursing home...

Judith – Me?

William – Yeah...

Judith – That takes the cake! You were the one who said you couldn't stand her anymore!

Fausto – Let's search the house...

William – It's not that big... If there was money hidden here, I think we would have noticed by now.

Judith – Unless someone found it and decided to keep it for themselves... or herself.

Nina – Are you saying that about me?

Judith – No, I was thinking... of the house cleaner, for example. Remember when you were little, she used to steal your candies...

Fausto – Maybe she took it with her to her nursing home.

William – When she left the house, she only wanted to take that old cuckoo clock that annoys us all day long.

Judith – Not to mention at night...

William – Of course, the nursing home didn't want it. So your grandmother passed it on to us.

Nina – Maybe to make sure that every hour, you would have a fond thought of her...

William – If it were up to me, we would have donated that old thing to the Red Cross a long time ago.

Nina – That's all you have left of your family! Well, I mean, besides your parents...

The cuckoo clock chimes three times again.

Fausto (*looking at his watch*) – What time is it?

William – When the nurses came to take mom away, it was three o'clock. And since she's been gone, the cuckoo clock always rings three times. Probably to make us feel guilty.

Judith – Damn, the cuckoo!

Nina – What?

Judith – What if she hid the cash in there?

They all turn to the cuckoo clock.

William – It's worth checking...

While Judith searches inside the clock, Fausto looks at Nina.

Fausto – Do you enjoy being in the police?

William and Judith continue their search.

William – I can't find anything, how about you?

Judith – No... Oh, wait...!

She takes out a garbage bag and opens it, under the watchful gaze of the other three.

Judith – A bag full of banknotes...

William – That's probably what was jamming the mechanism at three o'clock.

Nina – How much is it again?

Fausto – Around 12 million francs.

William – Francs? (*William examines the banknotes*) Oh, bloody hell, it's francs!

Fausto – Well yes... It was twenty years ago...

General astonishment.

William – What are we going to do with francs?

Judith takes out her smartphone and types.

Judith – Francs can no longer be exchanged for euros since February 17, 2012.

William (*to Fausto*) – Well, that's that... I had a feeling.

Judith looks at the bottom of the bag.

Judith – Wait a minute... There are also four gold bars at the bottom of the bag...

Fausto examines the contents of the bag.

Fausto – Four gold bars? There were eight! What happened to the others?

Fausto gives them a suspicious look.

Nina – Sure, go ahead and call us thieves, old man...

Fausto – What did she do with the rest?

William – She probably spent it.

Judith – While we're struggling to pay for her nursing home...

William – How much does four gold bars make in euros?

Nina – It depends on the price of gold, but it must be a significant amount...

William – If we forget about the banknotes that can no longer be exchanged, it probably won't be worth much.

Judith – What do we do?

William – Do we split it?

Nina – But it's stolen money!

Judith – It's the bank's money, they're the thieves!

Fausto – Now, it's true that divided into four... One bar each... We wouldn't get very far with that... Especially me...

Judith – We could invest it all in a countryside bed and breakfast and take care of it together! The family would finally be reunited!

No enthusiasm from the other three.

Fausto – Or we could gamble it all on poker, and may the best man win...

William – Poker? Come on! He must have spent the last twenty years of his life playing cards with his fellow inmates. Might as well play Scrabble with an academician!

Nina – In that case, a game of chance.

Fausto – Russian roulette?

William – Granddad is joking...

Judith – Let's just play this like Monopoly!

Surprise from the other three.

Fade out.

Act 4

They started a fierce game of Monopoly, in a casino-like atmosphere.

Nina – It's the first time I play Monopoly with real bills...

Nina rolls the dice.

Judith – You're right... Francs that can't even be exchanged for euros anymore...

Nina – Five. Chance. *(She draws a card)* You won the second beauty prize. 500 francs...

William rolls the dice.

William – Seven. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven... Paradise, I'm buying it!

Fausto rolls the dice.

Fausto – Three. One, two, three... Community Chest. You're released from jail. This card may be kept until needed or sold. I'll keep it...

Judith rolls the dice.

Judith – Eight. Belleville. It's mine. I'm putting up a hostel and three guest rooms...

Nina rolls the dice.

Nina – Two. One, two. Go to jail... That's what's going to happen to all of us eventually, mark my words...

William rolls the dice. A police siren can be heard in the distance.

William – Four. One, two, three, four... Chance. Société Générale offers you 3,000 francs for your settlement.

Judith – Francs...

William – It's the bank where I work that gave this Monopoly to Nina when she opened her first account...

Fausto rolls the dice.

Fausto – Eleven. Pigalle! I'm buying it! I'll put up two brothels and three bordellos!

Fausto is about to help himself directly from the bank. Nina reacts immediately by pointing her gun at him.

Nina – Hands off the loot, old man! I'm in charge of the bank! *(Fausto points his gun back at Nina.)* I've got the real one, I advise you to drop it...

Fausto gives in and lowers his weapon.

Fausto – It hurts me that my own granddaughter suspects me of dishonesty.

There's a knock on the door. They all freeze.

Judith – Who could it be at this hour?

Nina – Didn't you hear the police siren?

William – I think the game is over...

Nina – Not so fast... We don't just stop a game of Monopoly like that... I'll go see...
(*Nina gets up.*) Dad, watch the bank!

William – Don't worry, I'm used to it.

They wait for a moment, looking at each other suspiciously.

Judith – Want some more prune wine?

Nina returns.

William – So?

Nina – It was my colleagues... Checking if, by any chance, the fugitive had taken refuge at his son's...

Fausto – And then?

Nina – I showed them my police ID...

Fausto (*relieved*) – The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.... Now you're really part of the family.

Nina – The game goes on...

Judith rolls the dice.

Judith – Twelve. Champs-Élysées...

William – It's my turn! With a hotel, 150,000 francs.

Judith – There you go... I'm broke... (*to William*) But after all, married under a community property regime, right?

Nina rolls the dice.

Nina – Seven. Pay a fine of 100 francs or draw a chance card. I'll draw a chance card." (*She draws a card and pales*) "Go to Rue de la Paix..."

William – It's mine too! With a hotel, 200,000!

Nina – I'm broke too...

William (*to Fausto*) – It's just between you and me now... (*William rolls the dice.*) Prison, just visiting...

Fausto rolls the dice.

Fausto – Go directly to Gare de Lyon. That's exactly what I plan to do when I get out of here. It will be less policed than the airports...

William rolls the dice.

William – Free parking...

Fausto rolls the dice.

Fausto – Nine... Rue de la Paix.

William – That's mine! 200,000 francs!

Fausto – I'm going bankrupt...

Judith – In the end, the bank always wins...

Fausto quickly reaches for Nina's revolver and points it at the others.

Fausto – Sorry, but I really don't have a choice... (*The other three raise their hands.*)
This is a hold-up. Don't make any sudden moves and everything will be fine. Show me the dough!

Fade to black

Act 5

On either side of the cuckoo clock, William and Judith, sitting in their armchairs, pass a joint between them. On the coffee table, there are two glasses and a bottle. The cuckoo clock chimes three times.

William – The cuckoo always rings three times...

Judith – Mmm...

William – I thought it was fixed by now.

Judith – It is.

William – What time is it?

Judith – Three o'clock.

William – Ah, I see...

Silence.

William – I don't know if he'll get very far with his gold bars.

Judith – Maybe as far as the Italian border.

William – I hope he'll at least send us a postcard...

Judith – Mmmm.

William – And how are your parents doing? It's been a while since we last saw them... They're not dead, are they?

Judith – No, no.

William – How old are they now?

Judith – I don't remember... They're so old... I'm starting to wonder if I'll die of old age before them...

William – We're not lucky, that's for sure...

Judith – Why do you say that?

William – We could have hoped for a little help from fate...

Judith – Come on, don't be so pessimistic... We need to see the glass half full... (*She grabs the bottle and fills the two glasses.*) We've never won the lottery, but we've never had any serious illnesses either.

William – Mmm... Never been audited by the tax authorities...

Judith – We've never been selected to serve as jurors in a criminal court either.

William – You're right. We weren't born under a lucky star, but not under an unlucky one either.

Judith – We must have been born under a starless sky.

William – Nobody must have noticed that we were born.

Judith – And when we're no longer here, nobody will notice either.

William – We're like stowaways on this ghost ship called Earth...

They continue to drink and smoke in silence.

Judith – If things stay like this, we'll be able to have dinner on the terrace.

William – Is Nina coming to celebrate New Year's Eve with us?

Judith – Of course.

William – Is she still bringing the turkey?

Judith – Yes. But I think she gave up on making pig.

William – That's good.

Judith – Too bad your father couldn't stay, we could have had a family evening.

William – He arrived like Santa Claus, but he's the one leaving with the gifts.

Judith – It's okay, we'll have a quiet little New Year's Eve.

William – I'll never be able to play Monopoly again in my life.

Judith – You're right. After a game like that, all the others can only be disappointing... (*Silence*) What if we still open those guest rooms?

William – I just found out that my job at the bank has been eliminated... We can no longer rely on my inheritance... And we still have my mother to take care of... So, I'm willing not to just look at the half-empty bottle, but still...

Judith – I found the half-full bottle.

William – Sorry?

Judith – I found out what your mother did with the other half of the loot.

William – What?

Judith – The cuckoo clock.

William – The cuckoo clock?

Judith – The counterweights are solid gold... And with the financial crisis, the price of yellow metal has quadrupled in recent years...

William – Are you kidding?

Judith – When your mother was still in her right mind, she must have melted half of her gold bars to make counterweights, just in case the police found the rest.

William – Gold is still a safe investment. Along with family, of course...

Judith – So?

William – What?

Judith – Those guest rooms?

William – Why not. In the countryside, I'll get so bored, I'll be forced to write my book...

Silence.

Judith – Are you really sure that guy was your father?

William – Well, he certainly knew my mother well... But I don't know why, I always thought I was the gardener's son...

Judith – Your mother was sleeping with the gardener?

William – It would explain the mysterious domestic accident he had...

Judith – Not to mention your inclination towards agriculture.

William – And if the gardener is my father, at least I know where to find him. In the garden.

Judith – Yes... But not in ours...

Silence.

Judith – Do you still have some of your cherry tomato plant seeds?

William – No. We smoked them all.

Judith – When we're in the countryside, you'll have to plant more.

The cuckoo clock starts to sing continuously, emitting completely new sounds.

Fade to black.

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 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.

Amateur and professional theater groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>). However, public productions are subject to SACD filing.

For those who prefer reading or working from books, printed versions of his plays can be purchased from Amazon for a price similar to that of photocopying this document.

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

A simple business dinner

An innocent little murder

Casket for two

Cheaters

Crisis and Punishment

Critical but stable

Four stars

Friday the 13th

Him and Her

Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall

New Year's Eve at the Morgue

Quarantine

Running on Empty

Strip Poker

The Ideal Son-in-Law

The Window across the courtyard

The Worst Village in England

Welcome aboard!

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.

Avignon – April 2023
© La Comédiathèque – ISBN 978-2-37705-919-5
<https://comediatheque.net/>
Play available for free download