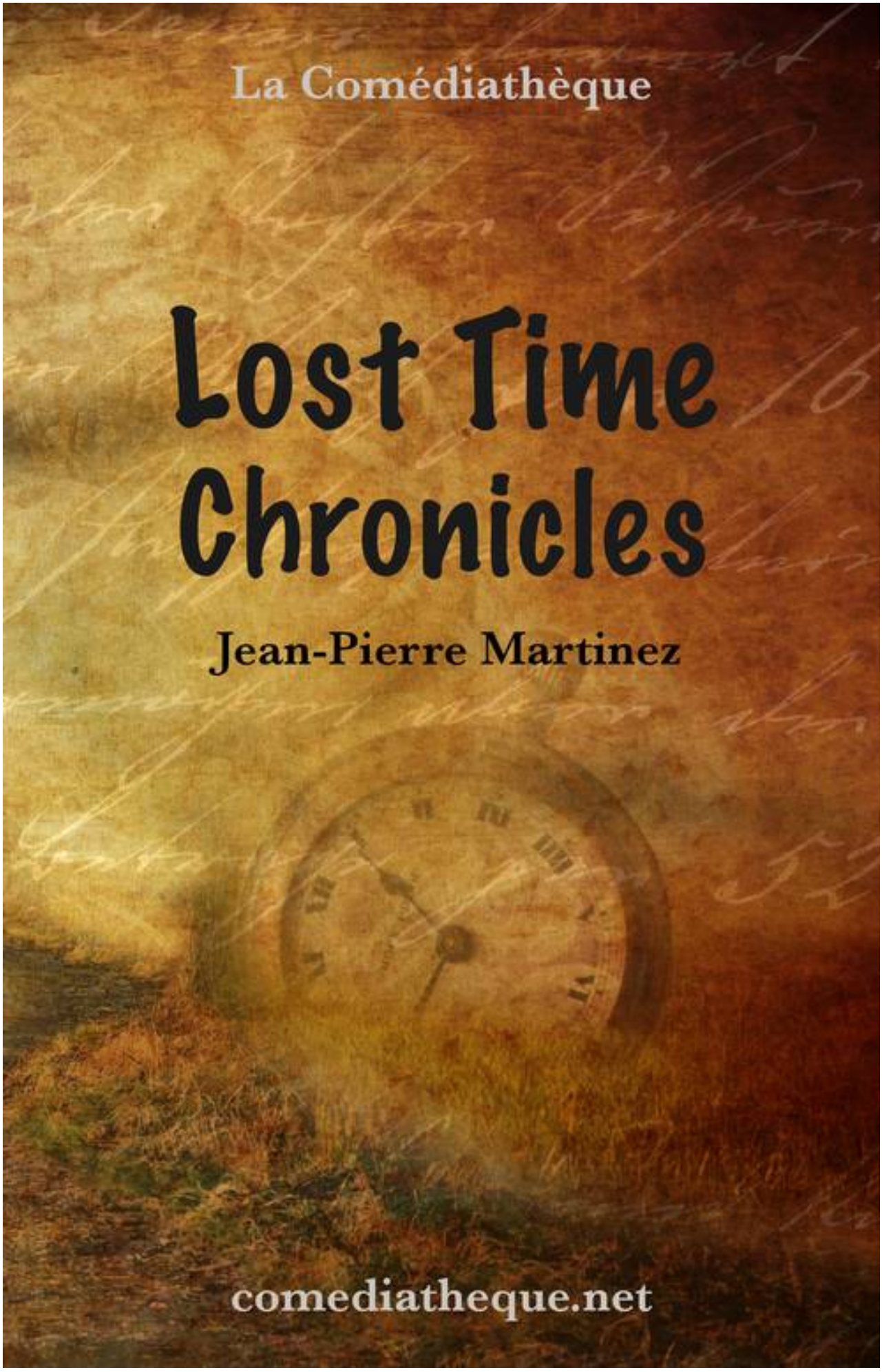

La Comédiathèque
Lost Time Chronicles
Jean-Pierre Martinez
comediatheque.net

Lost Time Chronicles

Jean-Pierre Martinez

A collection of comic sketches about time, life, death, love and the eternal return...

Two or three characters in each sketch
Flexible casting

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Wake-Up

The light gradually comes up. A couple are asleep under a sheet. There is a pounding sound, followed by three knocks, as at the theatre. The man wakes with a start and falls out of bed. Wearing striped pyjamas that look like prison clothes, he rubs his ribs and winces. He looks around as though he recognises nothing. He examines his pyjamas in surprise, gets up and searches the room for an exit, but finds none. Then he freezes: he has noticed the audience watching him. Shaking his head as though trying to dispel a nightmare, he returns to the bed and finds himself face to face with the woman, who is also wearing striped pyjamas and has woken while his back was turned. They scream at the sight of each other.

Woman and Man – Aah!

Woman *(covering her chest with her hands)* – What are you doing here?

Man – What about you?

She gets up and goes through much the same routine as he did, while he watches.

Woman – But... where are we?

Man – No idea...

Woman – Do you at least remember your name?

Man *(shaking his head)* – Do you?

Woman – If this is some kind of holiday camp, there might be a label with your name sewn inside your pyjamas. Let me see...

She comes closer and tries to look inside the collar of his pyjamas. He draws back, then reluctantly lets her.

Woman – Yes, there is something written here! I can't make it out. Take the top off, would you?

He finally agrees to remove his pyjama top. He is now shirtless and visibly uneasy. She leans over the tag and reads.

Woman – Adam...

Man – As in Adam's apple?

Woman – As in your name! *(He looks puzzled, rubbing his ribs without thinking.)* Are you hurt?

Man – It's nothing. I must have cracked a rib when I fell out of bed. *(A pause.)* And you?

Woman – No, I'm fine...

Man – I mean, you might also have your name on a sewn tag somewhere. Let me see...

He approaches, but she stops him with a firm gesture.

Woman – We'll deal with that later!

Man – A holiday camp, you think...? But there's nobody else here...

Woman – We might be the first...

Man – Or the last... *(They explore the room separately, then meet again.)* Haven't we met somewhere before?

Woman – In your dreams, perhaps... So you really can't see any way of getting us out of here?

Man – Hang on! We're not married, are we? Why should getting us out be my responsibility?

Woman – Excuse me...

Man – Well... What do we do?

Woman – Do we have to do something...?

Man *(with determination)* – I can't stand sitting around doing nothing. *(He acts on his words.)* I'm going back to bed!

Woman – Well...

Man – Maybe it's a nightmare... And when we wake up, it'll be better...

Woman – Or worse...

They prepare to lie down again, still rather embarrassed at the thought of sharing a bed.

Man – Do you have a preferred side?

Woman – No...

Man – Well, I'll take this one again, then.

He lies down on the same side as before.

Woman – It's amazing how quickly we settle into our little habits...

She lies down on the other side but doesn't seem eager to sleep.

Man – Can I turn off the light?

Woman – I'd have liked to read for a while, but we haven't even got a script...

Man – Lights out, then. *(He looks for a switch.)* I can't see a light switch... *(The lights gradually fade.)* Oh, there we go! *(Turning to her.)* Well... See you one of these days...

Woman – That's right... Until another day...

Blackout.

Woman – Should I set the alarm?

Man – Isn't it Sunday tomorrow?

Woman – There's no alarm, anyway...

1. Making an Approach

They are sitting side by side. She has fallen asleep with her head on his shoulder. She gradually wakes and gives a little start.

Woman – I'm sorry... But you should have...

Man – I didn't dare to wake you...

Woman – Have I been asleep long?

Man – We've started our approach...

Woman – Sorry?

Man – I mean, er... The approach manoeuvre... For landing!

Woman – Oh, yes...

She tidies up her hair a bit.

Man *(trying to start a conversation)* – Are you on holiday?

Woman – Er... No... I'm going to join my husband...

Man – Ah... What does he do?

Woman – He... He's a doctor... He works for an NGO...

Man – Ah, of course... In a country like that, what else is there besides tourism and aid work? Prostitution, perhaps... And drug trafficking, naturally...

Woman *(taken aback)* – What about you? Are you on holiday?

Man – Er, no... I'm in the arms trade.

Woman – You mean...

Man – Assault rifles, rocket launchers, landmines... I've just acquired a batch of almost-new tanks. Interested?

Woman – Thanks... My husband already has an SUV...

Man – Quite right. Much more practical. You can hardly park a tank anywhere, and it uses as much fuel as a passenger jet.

An awkward silence, followed by a jolt, which the actors may suggest by giving a small start.

Man – Ah, here we are... We've landed. *(They get up.)* Well, it was lovely meeting you.

Woman – You... You're really an arms dealer...?

Man – No. I just wanted you to dislike me, so I wouldn't have any regrets. A married woman... whose husband is a humanitarian doctor... It's hard to compete with that. And you?

Woman – Me?

Man – Are you really married?

Woman – Uh... Not really, actually...

Man – You're single and on holiday, like me.

Woman – I'm heading for the resort... Don't tell me you are too...?

Man – We all are. It's a charter flight...

Woman *(innocently)* – Oh, really...?

Man – You really were asleep?

Woman – No... Luckily for you. I snore...

Man – Shall I buy you a drink at the bar this evening?

Woman – I'm on an all-inclusive package. Drinks are included. Aren't yours?

Man – Yes... We'd better get off, or the plane will take off again. It makes two trips a day... After you... *(They head for the exit.)* Weren't you here last year?

Woman – Yes...

Man – I thought I recognised you...

2. Love Forever

The woman and the man sit close together, looking very much in love.

Woman – It's nice like this, isn't it?

Man – Yes...

Woman – Do you love me?

Man – Yes.

Woman – Will you love me forever?

Man – Forever?

Woman – I don't know... Will you love me for fifty years?

Man *(appalled)* – Fifty years...?

Woman – Forty...? *(He looks doubtful.)* Twenty...? Ten...? *(A pause.)* What about one year?

Man – One year? *(Confidently.)* Oh, yes! And you?

Woman *(doubtfully)* – One year?

Man – Six months? *(She looks doubtful.)* Two weeks? One week?

She still looks doubtful.

Man – Will you love me until tomorrow?

Woman – Tomorrow morning? What time?

Man – I don't know. Shall we say nine o'clock?

She smiles in agreement. They kiss.

Woman – Should I set the alarm?

3. Highway

He stands in front of her.

Man – How much?

Woman – 30 euros...

Man – Premium or regular?

Woman – Do they still make regular? I thought everything was premium now. *(He says nothing.)* All right, regular, then. For a change...

Man – Regular costs more.

Woman – Oh, really?

Man – Regular's become very rare. You can't get it everywhere...

Woman – In that case, premium, please.

Man – Standard premium or premium plus?

Woman – What's the difference?

Man – Premium plus costs more, but you use less of it.

Woman – What do you recommend?

Man – Do you use a lot?

Woman – No idea. I always buy thirty euros' worth...

Man – I'd recommend premium plus.

Woman – Right... Fill it up, then. I don't want to run out of fuel again...

Man – Shall I check the oil and tyre pressures?

Woman – Is that free?

Man – That's up to the customer.

Woman – But... how much, if you don't mind me asking?

Man – One euro, on average. Two for the more generous. Five for the benefactors of humanity. Would you like a loyalty card?

Woman – What do we get?

Man – Fill up five times and you get a free car wash.

Woman – Usually, I wash it myself...

Man – What's this? Pigeon droppings...

Woman – You think so?

Man – You need to clean that. It's very corrosive.

Woman – What can I do?

Man – Get a loyalty card.

Woman – I don't often come this way. I'm on holiday...

Man – It's valid everywhere.

Woman – Maybe next time...

Man – There we are. Ninety-five euros.

Woman – Here, keep the change. *(She begins to leave, then turns back.)* Excuse me, can you tell me where we are?

Man – Where are you headed?

Woman – I don't know yet.

Man – Anyway, you can't make a U-turn.

Woman – And is the next exit far?

Man – Oh, quite a way! You won't reach it any time soon!

Woman – Well, I'll keep going, then.

Man – Have a good journey.

Woman *(as she leaves)* – Thank you.

Man – Ah, women...

4. Time Difference

A breathless man arrives in front of a woman who looks like a flight attendant.

Man – Hello, I'm Mr Smith...

Woman *(checking a list)* – Mr Smith. Yes, that's right.

Man – Sorry, I'm a bit late...

Woman *(pleasantly)* – You're the last one. We were only waiting for you before taking off... Any luggage?

Man – Er, no... *(Showing her the plastic bag in his hand.)* Just this. Can I take it on board?

Woman – Of course... Economy class, is that correct...?

Man *(nodding)* – How long does the flight last?

Woman *(checking)* – Let me make sure I get this right... Exactly thirty-seven years. You arrive at noon, local time, on 16 April 3022...

Man – I thought in April there would be fewer people...

Woman – It's cheaper outside the school holidays, of course. And April's a lovely time of year there. The days are getting longer. In winter, you scarcely get up before it's dark again. Days are only five hours long!

Man – Have you been there before?

Woman – Several times! We flight attendants get reduced fares... Have you packed something warm for when they thaw you out?

Man – Of course.

Woman – Good thing we get some perks, you know. Being a flight attendant is a crazy life. You go away on a flight lasting sixty years, and when you get home you have to make all new friends. The old ones are dead and buried... Or terribly decrepit... Have you got any friends?

Man – No.

Woman – Very sensible. It makes life much simpler. *(Her telephone rings. She answers.)* Yes...? Perfect, thank you. *(She hangs up and turns back to the passenger.)* It's time. I've just been told your rocket is about to take off. I won't say goodbye. By the time you get back, I probably won't be around. I'm working within the solar system these days. Hardly any difference in years. Much less exhausting.

Man – Especially when you have children...

Woman – You drop them at nursery, and by the time you get back from work they've graduated from medical school... Have a good flight!

He prepares to leave, forgetting his plastic bag.

Man – Thank you.

Woman – Ah, you're forgetting your carry-on...

Man – Oh, for what's inside...

Woman – You're right. No point taking much. Fashion will have changed completely by the time you arrive. You might as well buy your clothes there...

Man – Oh, I didn't ask you about the return. When is it?

Woman – Return flight? I don't get asked that very often... I can give you an estimate, but it depends how far aviation progresses in the meantime...

Man – Don't trouble yourself. I'll find out when I get there. Have a nice day...

Woman – Good day to you... Well, I mean... Good hibernation...

Man – Yes, indeed... 37 years, though...

Woman – Oh, you'll see, you won't feel the time passing... And you'll wake up as fresh as a daisy...

Man – Forgive me for asking, but is this airline really safe? You've never had a failure in the refrigeration system?

Woman – Certainly not! Everything is carefully checked. The last incident we had was a passenger boarding the wrong flight. He was supposed to meet his fiancée on Venus for their honeymoon, but accidentally got on a flight to a planet some forty light-years away... Naturally, by the time he got back, she...

Man – Wasn't exactly as fresh as a daisy...

They laugh.

Woman – Well, now go on, or you'll miss it. And the next flight is only in seventy years...

Man – I'm going...

He leaves.

5. Fishing Trip

One person is fishing. A second arrives.

Two – Are they biting?

One – I just got here...

Two – What bait are you using?

One – Bread crumbs...

Two – Have you tried those... Damn, what's the word...? You know, those things you find in rotten cheese...? The little... You know what I mean?

One – No...

Two – It doesn't matter, it'll come back to me in a moment...

One – Are you a fisherman?

Two – No! I'd never have the patience. Sitting there for hours doing absolutely nothing, waiting for a bite... If anything bites! Don't you ever get bored?

One – It's a way of getting a little peace and quiet...

Two – No, I still prefer hunting...

One – Are you a hunter?

Two – No. But if I had to choose, I'd prefer hunting. There's more action. And at least, you get some exercise. Because sitting like that all day... I don't know how you do it.

One – It's relaxing. You listen to the sound of flowing water...

Two *(shouting)* – Maggots! In the rotten cheese! For bait! Maggots! That's the word I was trying to remember. Have you tried maggots?

One – No.

Two – You should.

One – Maybe another time...

Two – A safari. I'd enjoy that... In Kenya, for instance. Have you ever been to Kenya?

One – No.

Two – Big-game hunting. A dozen elephants charge straight at you. Bang! Between the eyes! Then you'd better jump aside before the herd flattens you.

One – Elephant hunting is illegal now...

Two – Yes, I saw a documentary about that. Apparently their numbers are recovering. And they're becoming aggressive! Attacking people for no reason. Charging at anything that moves. People have been killed! They say it's because they remember being hunted decades ago. The survivors with a lame leg, a missing ear or a bullet lodged in the trunk. And the calves that watched their parents being killed. Even fifty years later they remember, and charge whenever a four-wheel-drive vehicle comes too close... Elephants live a very long time. And they've got long memories... Have you got a bite there?

One – It's the wind...

Two – What do you do when you catch one? Do you eat it...?

One – I throw it back into the water...

Two – Then what's the point? Though they must be in a pretty bad state when you put them back. Having a hook through your cheek can't be much fun... *(The other remains impassive.)* They say fish is good for the memory. Do you think fish have memories?

6. Excessive Slowness

A man approaches another man (or woman).

One – Your papers, please.

The second person hands over their papers.

Two – Here you are.

The first person examines the papers.

One – Do you know how fast you were driving?

Two *(sheepishly)* – I didn't realise...

One – And this isn't the first time.

Two – It's the last time, I promise.

One – Do you realise what you've done? Twelve kilometres an hour on a highway! You could have caused a serious accident! What have you got to say for yourself?

Two – I wasn't in a hurry...

One – Are you kidding me?

Two – I swear I'm not! It's a sort of phobia... Whenever I set off on a journey, I dread arriving...

One – You mean not arriving...

Two – No, arriving! It's the same when I'm on a plane...

One – Are you afraid of flying?

Two – Not in the least. I'm afraid of landing... Not the landing itself, exactly. It's the end of the journey that terrifies me. I get so anxious I could almost hijack the plane to stop it landing. But it would be pointless. Even if we flew round and round the airport, we'd eventually run out of fuel and be forced to crash-land anyway, wouldn't we?

One – Yes...

Two – Unless we're refuelled in flight...

One – Yes...

Two – You don't have this kind of anxiety on a motorcycle?

One – No...

Two – As a child, I loved merry-go-rounds. They go round in circles, so you're guaranteed never to get anywhere... I always went on the spinning saucer. It spins round on its own axis as well as going round in circles... And isn't that the basic movement of the universe? Planets rotate on their axes and orbit the sun. People say the world doesn't turn as it should. Nonsense! Nothing goes round in circles more than the universe... What about you?

One – Me...?

Two – What did you ride on the merry-go-round?

One – On the motorcycle...

Two – Already...

One – In fact, my father used to place me astride the motorcycle.

Two – And yet, motorcycles are very dangerous.

One – I always wanted to ride in the pumpkin carriage...

Two – The pumpkin?

One – You know, Cinderella's carriage. Even on the motorbike I could never catch up with it... On the merry-go-round, I mean...

Two – Do you remember Mary Poppins?

One – Mary Poppins...?

Two – The film! *(Horrified.)* That scene where the wooden horses break away from the merry-go-round, gallop across the countryside and end up on a racecourse, racing flat out towards the finishing line with foam at their mouths...

One – Mouths full of foam, are you sure?

Two – To me it was more frightening than The Exorcist!

The other looks at him for a moment with a perplexed expression.

One – Well...

He returns the papers to the other.

One – You're not drunk, are you?

Two – I swear I'm not...

One – All right, I'll let you off this time. You may go...

Two – Go...?

One – And a bit faster, please!

Two – Couldn't you take away my driving licence instead...?

The other gives him a negative look.

Two – Okay, I'm going...

He starts to leave.

Two – And don't go too fast on that motorbike yourself...

He turns back once more.

Two – How far is it to the ring road...?

One – Even at 130 kilometres an hour, it's a good hour away...

Two – And where does the next exit lead?

One – To the police station...

7. Out of Season

A man (or woman) in summer clothes — shorts and a Hawaiian shirt, perhaps even a swimsuit — approaches someone selling ice cream, who is dressed for polar conditions in a thick coat and snow boots.

One – Hello. Is your ice cream any good?

Two – It's homemade. How many scoops?

One – What flavours have you got?

Two – Let's see... vanilla, chocolate, dandelion, hazelnut, strawberry, mustard, blackcurrant, mint with dark chocolate chips, passion fruit, lemon, sauerkraut with sausage pieces, violet, rose, chrysanthemum, papaya, anchovy, praline, coconut, raspberry, cherry, cod pieces, apple, caramel, bleach, banana, cured sausage, orange, tangerine, aspirin, rum and raisin, old spit, oyster, fish roe, steak tartare, pineapple, kiwi... Oh, no, we're out of kiwi.

One – I think I'll try chocolate and cod, for a change.

Two – Two scoops, then.

One – Make it three. Two scoops of cod.

The vendor hands over the ice cream. The customer tastes it.

One – You can really taste the fish, can't you?

Two – We make everything ourselves.

One *(pulling a face)* – Oh, a fish bone...

The customer pulls out the bone.

Two – That's what you get with homemade ice cream...

One – Mmm... Business going well?

Two – Depends on the flavour... In this cold weather, salted pork and lentil is our best seller. Warms you up in winter. We've actually sold out... Are you on holiday?

One – No, we're shooting a film nearby. I'm an actor. Well, an extra...

Two – Oh, really? What film?

One – Sun, Sea and Smiles: Part Five. It's cheaper to shoot in winter. The holiday resort is closed.

Two – Makes sense. Same for me. I bought this whole stock of ice cream for next to nothing. In an economic crisis, you've got to adapt. Surprise people. Turn up where nobody expects you. In summer I sell roast chestnuts on the beach...

One – I see... Next summer I'm an extra in Sun, Sea and Skis: Part Four. We're filming at a mountain ski resort, using artificial snow. Gets pretty hot up there in a padded ski jacket in summer... Anyway, I'd better get back. They should have finished thawing the swimming pool by now. Same thing every morning. The time we waste on that...

8. Wasted Time

Two archaeologists are conducting an excavation.

One – I think we've found something this time...

Two – Past or future?

One – Future perfect, I'd say.

They uncover an object and hold it up. It is a clock.

Two – What on earth could it be?

One – No idea.

Two – There are numbers on it...

One – And hands...

Two – Three of them...

One – One of them is moving.

Two – It's going round in circles...

One – What could it possibly be for...?

Two – It might be dangerous...

One – You think?

Two – Better not touch it...

One – Bit late for that.

Two – The other hands seem to be moving too. Just more slowly.

One – Oh, yes, you're right...

Two – Could it be a game?

One – Not a very entertaining one.

Two – A measuring instrument?

One – Measuring what?

Two – Who knows...

One – Unless it's some kind of ritual object...

Two – Or a work of art.

One – Hardly decorative...

Two – We'd better get back to the spaceship. It's already five thirty-two...

One – That's funny.

Two – What is?

One – The little hand is pointing at five, and the big one at thirty-two...

Two – Do you think this machine tells you what time it is?

One – Who knows...

Two – But what's the point of a machine that tells you the present? It's like putting up a sign that says 'You are here.' You already know that!

One – We do, yes...

Two – A primitive civilisation that needed machines to locate itself in the present?

One – It's a possibility.

Two – Can you imagine? You wake up in the middle of the night and don't even know what time it is. You have to consult a machine to find out whether it's time to get up...

One – Fascinating job we've got...

Two – And how did they go back in time?

One – Maybe they turned the hands backwards? *(Tries to turn the hands back, without success.)* No, they only go one way. Apparently these people could only travel into the future.

Two – No reverse gear. Imagine that! No room for mistakes...

One – Must have been a very primitive civilisation.

Two – Come on, let's go. I've no idea where we are.

The other looks at something like a watch on their wrist.

One – Longitude 23234, widthitude 43722, depthitude 65840...

Two – Mind you, think about it. We don't need machines to know the time... What if these people knew instantly where they were?

One – Just by thinking about it, you mean?

Two – Or perhaps they lived in a very small space.

One – So small that they always knew where they were? Just by looking around?

Two – I don't know... Imagine the space they lived in wasn't smooth like ours, but had irregularities...

One – Like peaks, faults and precipices?

Two – Exactly... Features that helped them find their way through space as easily as we find our way through time.

The other gives a pitying smile.

Two – Stupid idea, I know...

One – Have you been smoking something...?

Two – That machine gives me the creeps. Doesn't it scare you?

One – It does...

Two – What if we put it back where we found it?

One – I didn't dare suggest it...

They pick up the clock and put it back in place.

Two – Before we develop bad habits...

One – And end up unable to live without it.

They finish and exchange a look.

One – Ready to teleport?

Two – All set.

One – You've quite an imagination, you know. You should have been a philosopher instead of an archaeologist of time...

They disappear.

9. Out of Sight

The man and woman arrive, clearly lost and exhausted.

Woman – Haven't we been here before? It feels like we took shelter under this oak just fifteen minutes ago...

Man – At the same time, one tree looks much like another. By the way, how do you know it's an oak?

Woman – There are acorns underneath...

Man – Perhaps we'd be better off sitting down and waiting...

He sits on the ground, discouraged.

Woman – Waiting for what? We're in the city park, not the Amazon rainforest! Do you think the police will send out a rescue team just because our car is still in the car park tonight?

He doesn't respond. She sits down too, resigned. He stares fixedly at something straight ahead.

Woman – What are you looking at like that?

Man – The crow over there... I have the feeling I've seen it before...

Woman – Ah, you see, what did I say... We've been here already...

Man *(thoughtfully)* – When I was a child, my father brought home a young crow one evening. He was a lumberjack. He'd cut down a tree and, naturally, the nest had fallen with it... I fed the bird with a little spoon. You can't imagine the racket a baby crow makes when it's hungry. At first I was almost afraid of it. But gradually I tamed it. It followed me everywhere, like a little dog.

Woman – On foot?

Man – It must have thought I was its mother. Since it never saw me fly, it never thought of flying either.

She looks at him as though wondering whether he is delirious.

Man – He used to steal my father's pencils from his desk and bury them in the garden. We had a good laugh about that...

Woman *(perplexed)* – Mmm...

Man – And then little by little, it learned to use its wings!

Woman *(lost)* – What?

Man – At first, it was just small jumps. From one garden chair to another... And then from the chair to a tree...

Woman – It must have seen other crows flying. That gave it ideas...

Man – At first, it only left for a day or two... We knew it would come back... And then one day, it left for good, and we never saw it again... It went back to the wild...

Woman – Or a hunter shot it. It wouldn't have been frightened of people...

Man *(continuing without hearing her)* – Since then, every time I see a crow, I wonder if it's not Baback...

Woman – Baback...?

Man – That's what we called it...

He still gazes at the crow with a dreamy look. She looks at him more and more perplexed.

Woman – Wait, your crow must have been dead for a long time!

Man – Not necessarily. A crow can live for more than a hundred years...

She stands up to break the spell.

Woman – Well, I wouldn't want to disturb these touching reunions, but maybe we should think about heading back. It's starting to get dark...

He looks in the direction of the crow.

Man *(disappointed)* – It flew away... Maybe it wasn't him after all...

She seems relieved to see him coming back to reason.

Man – Or maybe you scared him away...

They leave.

Woman – Are you sure it's this way? I'm not ready to return to the wild just yet...

10. Love at First Sight

A man enters, dressed rather like a business traveller and carrying a briefcase. Unsure what to do, he waits, then discreetly studies the room. He plainly likes what he sees. His telephone rings, and he answers.

Man – Hello...? Yes, darling... I'm here... No, the estate agent hasn't arrived yet. I'm a little early. An opportunity like this, I wanted to be first. Yes, she said there was another interested buyer... No, the door was open, so I let myself in... I promise you, it's wonderful. Love at first sight. I think we've finally found the right place. Especially at this price... The owners are in a hurry, apparently. A divorce... Sorry, I have to go, I can hear her coming... Yes, I'll call you back. Bye...

A woman enters, dressed in a similar businesslike style and also carrying a briefcase.

Woman – Hello... Are you...?

Man – Yes...

Woman – I've parked in a disabled parking space, but never mind... We won't be long...

Man – No, of course...

She glances around the room. He seems puzzled.

Woman – Oh, yes, it's...

Man – Is this your first time seeing it...?

Woman – Yes... Why?

Man – Nothing, I...

Woman – It's not very large, obviously, but well...

Man – For a couple.

Woman – Yes.

Man – There's plenty of storage space...

They both seem a bit awkward.

Woman – At this price, it really is an opportunity you can't afford to miss.

Man – Yes...

Woman – You... You've been doing this for a long time...

Man – This?

Woman – You're new at this, am I wrong?

Man – Well...

Woman *(amused)* – It shows a bit...

Man – Oh, really...?

Woman – You're not very... But it's refreshing, really. We've been looking for six months, you see... And after a while you get to know all the usual estate agents' patter. So this makes a nice change...

Man – Of course...

Woman – And a flat like this, at this price... It practically sells itself...

Man – No...

Woman *(resuming her tour)* – Oh, yes, it's... It's very bright...

Man – Yes, well...

Woman – Sorry?

Man – Especially during the day...

Woman – Yes... It's sure to be a bit darker at night...

Man – Well, not really.

Woman – No?

Trying to find something else to criticise, he stands in front of the imaginary window.

Man – Have you seen that neon sign on the roof over there, right across...

Woman – Oh, no...

Man – For the nightclub downstairs! Before going to bed, you better close the shutters...

Woman – Oh, yes...

Man – The problem is... there are no shutters.

Woman – Oh, no...

Man – On the other hand, if you're an insomniac, you can read until the next morning without even turning on the light. Are you an insomniac?

Woman – Sometimes...

Man – At least you won't be woken at four in the morning by the club's customers coming out, smoking and shouting before staggering home half-drunk.

Woman – I thought this was your first time here... You seem to know the neighbourhood well...

Man – Force of habit... In our profession we notice all those little drawbacks that unsuspecting buyers usually discover only after signing the contract...

Woman – There is still a nice ceiling height...

Man – Yes...

Woman – No...?

Man – Yes, yes... It's... It's sure that this feeling of volume is very pleasant...

Woman – Yes...

Man – But you also have to think about heating...

Woman – Heating...

Man – North-facing, like this... It's summer now, but imagine it in December...

Woman – You think so?

Man – With gas heating, perhaps...

Woman – Yes...

Man – But with electric heating...

Woman – Oh, yes...

Man – Plus, there's only one radiator...

Woman – Mmm...

Man – And not very big either.

Woman – No...

Man – Who knows if it even works...

Woman *(intrigued)* – Do you work on commission?

Man – No. Why do you ask?

Woman – Just like that... Well, during the day, it seems rather calm, right?

Man *(looking out the window again)* – Oh, there... Have you seen, on the right?

Woman – What?

Man – The school!

Woman – Oh, yes... We don't have children yet, but... It's true that it would be practical...

Man – Mmm...

Woman – No?

Man – Wait for recess...

Woman – You mean...

Man – You don't work at home, do you?

Woman – Yes... I... I'm a translator...

Man – Believe me, living beside a school is fine if you go out to work all day... But if you need peace and quiet to work at home...

Woman – To that extent...?

Man – How long has it been since you set foot in a schoolyard?

Woman – I don't know...

Man – Believe me, a school... It's still better to live next to a nuclear power plant...

Woman – Oh, yes?

Man – It makes less noise...

Woman – But... Why are you telling me all this? Your job is to sell apartments, right?

Man – I like you. I don't know why... I wouldn't want to... And there'll always be another gullible buyer...

Woman – Thank you for your honesty... I'm very touched...

Man – You're welcome.

Woman – And the toilets?

Man – In the bathroom...

Woman – It takes up less space.

Man – But it's not very convenient... especially if you plan to expand the family.

Woman – Okay... I might think a bit more then...

Man – Take your time... I don't think this kind of property sells quickly anyway...

Woman – Thanks... So, I'll be going... I parked in a disabled spot...

Man – Yes... I think there's a psychiatric hospital not far from here...

She wonders if he just escaped from there.

Woman – You're a strange real estate agent...

Man – Do you think so...?

Woman *(disturbed)* – I'm leaving...

Man – All right... *(She leaves. He looks round the flat again, much less convinced. His phone rings.)* Hello...? Oh, it's you... No, that wasn't the estate agent, it was... Listen, I can't talk now. The agent will be here any minute. All I can tell you is that we're now the only people interested... *(Trying to convince himself.)* Great, isn't it? The flat...? Actually, I'm beginning to wonder whether it's as good as I thought... Yes, I know what I said, but you know how it is... Sometimes you fall in love at first sight and... No, I'm not talking about you! I'm talking about the flat! We'll talk later. Someone's coming up the stairs...

To his great surprise, it's the woman who comes back.

Woman – Do you believe in love at first sight...?

He is speechless. She walks up and kisses him passionately. In the distance, the sounds of children playing at break time grow louder. The lights go out, replaced by the flashing light of the neon sign.

11. Bad Timing

She is sitting reading. He approaches hesitantly.

Man – Um... Excuse me for bothering you, but...

Woman – Yes?

Man – I was wondering whether you'd mind telling me the time.

Woman – Sorry, but my watch has stopped.

Man – Oh...

Woman – Probably needs a new battery.

Man – That's inconvenient...

Woman – Yes.

Man – Well, then, I won't bother you any longer.

Woman – Mmm...

He's about to leave but reconsiders.

Man – Perhaps you could still tell me what time it was when your watch stopped?

Woman – Um, yes, why not...

Man – That would give me an idea...

Woman – An idea?

Man – An idea... of the current time.

Woman – Oh, yes...

Man – For example, if your watch stopped at three twenty-eight, at least I'd know it was later than three twenty-eight now...

Woman *(checking)* – It stopped at half past three...

Man – Thank you. That's something, at least... Now I know for certain it's after half past three...

Woman – Yes...

Man – Once again, sorry for bothering you...

Woman – No problem.

He's about to leave but reconsiders again.

Man – Are you sure your watch is really stopped?

Woman – Oh, yes, it is...

Man – Forgive me, but how can you be absolutely certain?

Woman – I don't know, I...

Man – Sometimes, it happens that we have the impression time is not passing very quickly... or not at all... temporarily, at least...

Woman – That's true, but...

Man – When you're bored, for example...

Woman – Um, yes...

Man – You look at your watch, and you feel like it stopped, but in reality...

Woman – Mmm...

Man – Were you... very bored while waiting?

Woman – Waiting for what?

Man – I don't know, I... I wouldn't presume to ask what you're waiting for... or who.

Woman – Not particularly... I have my book...

Man – Then I'm afraid your watch really is broken...

Woman – Yes... It's been a good half-hour since it showed half-past three... I believe there's no doubt about that...

Man – Wait... Half an hour, you say?

Woman – Approximately, yes...

Man – How do you know?

Woman – Well... I've had time to read three chapters of my book...

Man – So if it stopped at half past three about half an hour ago, it must be roughly four o'clock now.

Woman – Yes, probably close to that...

Man – Do you know for a fact that you take exactly ten minutes to read a chapter?

Woman – Not exactly... It depends on the length of the chapters...

Man – Ah... And given the thickness of your book, I suppose those must be considerably longer than average...

Woman – Yes, perhaps...

Man – Mmm... So it could very well be a little past four.

Woman – Oh, certainly not!

Man – No? What makes you say that?

Woman – Well... I have an appointment with someone, actually...

Man – Ah...

Woman – At exactly four o'clock...

Man – But perhaps the person you're meeting is late.

Woman – Oh, I don't think so.

Man – And why is that?

Woman – It's a first meeting... A man never arrives late for a first meeting, right? Generally...

Man – And generally a woman doesn't arrive early for a date. Especially a first date...

Woman – Oh, really? And why is that?

Man – So as not to look completely desperate, I suppose...

Woman – Yes, of course...

Man – Well, you told me you've been here for a good half-hour, right?

Woman – Yes...

Man – You see, in this case, one can't rely on generalities...

Woman – And why are you so desperate to know the time?

Man – I have an appointment at four o'clock too. And since I'm someone who's very punctual...

Woman – If you're very punctual, isn't it a good idea to wear a watch?

Man – Ah, but I have one!

Woman – And it's broken too...

Man – No! Well, I don't think so...

Woman – Then why were you asking me for the time?

Man – But... to check that my watch wasn't stopped, precisely. Like yours.

Woman – So, can you tell me what time it is?

Man – Certainly... It's exactly six minutes past four. You can trust me: it's a Swiss watch...

Woman – Thank you...

Man – I've had it for years. My godfather gave it to me when I was young. He's since died of a heart attack, but the watch hasn't stopped once!

Woman – And what about when the batteries run out?

Man – It doesn't have a battery! I wind it up at precisely eight o'clock every evening!

Woman – Well, um... Thanks for telling me the time...

She gets up.

Man – Are you leaving already?

Woman – You said it's six minutes past four. I don't want to look as though I'm waiting. We were supposed to meet at four...

Man – I understand... So, goodbye... And... sorry again for bothering you...

She leaves. He remains alone.

Man – I'll give her another five minutes... Until eleven minutes past four... But I don't like women who are late. Especially on a first date...

Pause

One character is standing there, doing nothing. Another arrives and greets them.

One – Good morning.

Two – Hi.

One – I'm the author. Taking a little break.

Two – A break? Live performances are like life. There's no pause button...

One – There's not even an interval for advertisements. *(Takes out a packet of cigarettes and offers one.)* Cigarette? Helps pass the time... It may be bad for your health, but it solves the pensions problem.

Two – Thanks. I don't smoke.

One – Oh... Sorry. *(Puts the cigarettes away.)* Are you out of work?

Two – On and off.

One – And you never get bored?

Two – You know what they say...

One – The hardest part of this job is waiting.

Two – Will this be in the play?

One – What?

Two – What we're saying right now.

One – Ah, um... I don't know yet. It depends.

Two – On what?

One – On the interest of our conversation, I guess. Do you have something interesting to say?

Two – But you're the writer.

One – Yes.

Two – Well, that's what you say.

One – Yeah...

Two – Do you write mostly at night?

One – No, why?

Two – You look a bit tired...

One – I go to bed early and get up late. I mostly write towards the end of the morning. Sometimes, if inspiration strikes, I start again after my afternoon nap. *(Checks the time.)* Anyway, it's not that you're boring me, but I'd better get back to work.

Two – Yes, I think so.

One – Thanks for keeping me company. It's been nice talking to you.

The author extends his hand to the other for a handshake. The other hesitates for a moment but shakes his hand.

One – Your hand is cold.

Two – Are you really an author?

One – Why?

Two – It's all rather aimless, isn't it?

One – You're not being much help... Yes, I know I'm the writer. But they say that once you've created a good character, you just let them speak...

Two – If you want to get rid of a dog, you'll always find an excuse... And a play about putting on a play? That's been done to death, hasn't it? When a writer starts talking about writing, it usually means they've run out of things to say...

One – Well... *(Leaving, to himself.)* I don't think I'll keep this scene...

12. Face to Face

They discreetly steal glances at each other.

One – Do we know each other?

Two – I don't know.

One – Sorry, I had the feeling...

Two – No, no, don't apologise. I thought the same thing. You look familiar...

One – Where could we have met?

Two – Do you live around here?

One – Not very far. And you?

Two – I was taking my bird for a walk...

One – Maybe we crossed paths here...

Two – Or somewhere else...

Silence.

One – It's strange. I really feel like we know each other...

Two – We see so many people...

One – Well, I'll have to go...

Two – Pleased to meet you.

One – Likewise!

The first one is about to leave but changes his mind.

One – By the way, I'm Peter... Just in case we meet again around here...

Two – Peter? That's funny. Me too...

One – It's quite a common name...

Two – Peter what?

One – Peter Smith.

Two – No way! Same as me!

One – So we're namesakes!

Two – But that still doesn't tell us where we've seen each other before...

One – Well, then, um... I'll be going...

Two – I'm leaving too.

One – Which way are you headed?

Two – And you?

One – This way.

Two – After you, I'll follow.

One – Thank you.

They leave.

One – Come on, Baback!

Two – No way! Is that your crow?

One – Yes, why?

Two – It's mine too!

One – I knew I recognised your face...

They leave.

13. 107 Years

A prison cell. One inmate is already there, with nothing to do. A second, younger prisoner arrives.

Young – Hi.

Old – Hi.

The young man takes a few steps to familiarise himself with the place.

Old – I'm not giving you the grand tour...

Young – Have you been here for a long time?

Old – I couldn't tell you. I've lost track of time. It's not so bad here, actually. You'll see. I know I've still got quite a stretch ahead of me, but I always feel as though I only arrived yesterday... How long did you get?

Young – 10 years... And you?

Old – 107 years.

Young *(impressed)* – A hundred and seven years? What for?

Old – Fraud.

Young – That's a lot for fraud...

Old – And you?

Young – I killed a police officer...

Old – That's not much for killing a police officer...

Young – A big fraud...?

Old – 115 million.

Young – Who can you swindle out of that much money, apart from another swindler? A bank? An insurance company?

Old – The national lottery.

Young – Ah, yeah...

Old – The numbers I picked never came up. So I arranged for the winning numbers to be the ones I'd picked...

Young – And how do you do that?

Old – A magician never reveals his secrets. If he did, there'd be no magic left...

The old man performs a small magic trick, whether successful or failed.

Young – A hundred and seven years...

Old – Oh, I won't serve them all.

Young – Do you have a trick to escape from here?

Old – A foolproof trick. How much time are you really going to do?

Young – With parole, I might hope to get out in 5 years.

Old – I'll get out before you. Want to bet?

Young – You defrauded National Lottery...

Old – At my age, I'll even leave by the front door. Feet first...

Young – Forgive me, but why steal 115 million at your age?

Old – True. At my age there's nothing left to gain... But there's nothing left to lose either. Worst case, I'd end up in prison instead of a care home. At least here I'm surrounded by young people... Why did you kill that police officer?

Young – He was my wife's lover...

Old – Oh, yeah, that's tough... If he had been a butcher, you would have gotten three years. And you, what do you do in life? Well, what did you do...

Young – I was a watchmaker.

Old – Ah... In here, it's best not to look at your watch too often... I've got a Rolex. Swiss precision. It's the only thing they let me keep. I don't know why. Well, I have my suspicions... *(Checks his watch.)* Excuse me a moment. It's time for the draw...

He takes a small radio and puts it to his ear.

Young *(surprised)* – You still play the lottery?

Old – Old habits die hard... Unfortunately I can't pop out and buy a lottery ticket any more.

Young – What's the point of playing? If you can't place a bet anymore...

Old – To pass the time! I've nothing left to win, as you pointed out. But they can't stop me playing... Last week I got four numbers right...

Young – How much?

Old – Nineteen euros... Want to choose some numbers with me? We'll split the winnings... *(The young man looks doubtful.)* You'll see. You'll be a millionaire in your imagination...

14. Object Lesson

An older person and a younger one, of either sex.

Old – So? What do you want to do when you grow up?

Young – I don't know... What did you want to do when you were young?

Old – That was a long time ago... Certainly not this, anyway!

Young – What are you doing?

Old – Oh, nothing very interesting. Sometimes I even wonder if it's worth the trouble... But somebody has to do it...

Young – Why...?

Old – Don't you see? There's a whole queue of people waiting to take my place! Ah, if only I could start again... Be your age with everything I know now...

Young – What would you do?

Old – Who knows? I certainly wouldn't have ended up where I am now... But I've seen too much. They've made me see too much. When you're young, you're eager, full of faith... Now I've lost every illusion. You'll see when you're my age...

Young – See what?

Old – You'll find out soon enough. These things aren't easy to explain... You're lucky, though. At your age I couldn't even ask questions like that.

Young – What questions?

Old – Go and learn your lessons. Unless you want to end up like me...

Young – You didn't study your lessons?

Old – Yes...

Young – Then what's the point of learning anything?

Old – Just do as I say. You'll understand later... And you'll thank me... *(Leaves.)* Children nowadays... You have to explain everything...

15. Cache Memory

The woman and the man kiss for a long time. They break apart and look straight ahead.

Woman – Does this remind you of anything?

Man – No... And you?

Woman – Neither.

Man – It's our first time.

Woman – Not exactly unforgettable.

Man – The first time, you've nothing to compare it with. You've nothing to remember.

Woman – The first time, you don't remember. You just store it in your memory.

Man – What's memory?

Woman – I don't know...

Man – What's forgetting?

Woman – I can't remember...

Man – Shall we start again?

Woman – Okay.

They kiss again, then release their embrace.

Man – And now? Does that bring back any memories?

Woman – I have a vague feeling of déjà vu.

Man – So do I.

Woman – There, I remember.

Man – It's a start.

Woman – Yes.

Man – It's the second time.

Woman – Then it's not a beginning.

Man – The first time, you don't know it's the beginning. You can't remember anything yet.

Woman – What's the point of remembering?

Man – It passes the time.

Woman – And at the end? How do you know it's the last time?

Man – You never know.

Woman – You should be able to remember. Afterwards.

Man – You only ever remember the time before the last.

Woman – That's life.

Man – Yes. Between the second time and the second-to-last.

Woman – Life is what you remember when you look back on it.

Man – A story with no beginning or end.

They begin to leave, each in a different direction.

Woman – Shall we remember to call each other?

Man – Or shall we clear the cache?

16. Memories

An old man sits, leaning on an umbrella. An elderly woman approaches, sits beside him and takes his hand. He lets her, looking slightly surprised.

Woman – A bit of peace and quiet. It's lovely, isn't it?

Man *(agreeing)* – Yes...

They enjoy this moment of serenity.

Woman – Do you remember our first holiday?

Man – No...

Woman – And now, every day's a holiday for us...

Man – Yes...

Woman – Did you take your pills?

Man *(surprised)* – No...

Woman *(giving him a box)* – Here. I brought them for you.

Man – Thank you... *(He takes a tablet and swallows it, then examines the box.)* These are for the heart...

Woman – Yes...

Man – Mine are for my memory...

Woman – Those are my husband's pills...

Man – Then I must not be your husband...

She looks at him offended, lets go of his hand, and stands up.

Woman – You could have told me sooner!

She leaves, upset. He watches her go.

17. Future Plans

A girl is sitting on a bench, staring ahead. We gradually realise she is watching the couple from the previous scene. A boy arrives and sits beside her without speaking. For a while, they sit in silence, looking straight ahead.

Woman – Can you imagine us when we're their age?

Man – No...

Woman – She's dressed up beautifully. She's even put on make-up...

Man – Oh, yeah...?

Woman – And he hasn't noticed...

Man – Why does he have an umbrella? There's not a cloud...

Woman – She probably asked him to bring it. Once you start having your hair done, you don't trust the weather. And she knows he can use it as a walking stick. It's less obvious that way. A matter of pride for him...

Man – Did you see? Her hair is almost purple...

Woman *(tenderly)* – It's still lovely, though, isn't it?

Man – What? An old lady with a punk hairstyle?

Woman – They must have been married for half a century, and they're still holding hands...

Man – Not any more! Look, she's storming off. And she doesn't look happy. Perhaps they've been quarrelling for fifty years...

Woman – Maybe he told her the colour was too purple... *(A pause.)* I wonder if it's going to rain after all... Shall we go?

Man – Uh, yeah...

He gets up to leave.

Woman – By the way, why did you want to see me?

Man – Well... I don't quite know how to say this, but... I don't think we're going to grow old together...

Woman – I know...

Man – And you, did you want to tell me something?

She stands up as well, revealing that she is pregnant.

Woman – You should have brought an umbrella too...

18. Holiday

A terrace with two sun loungers. She enters wearing a white bathrobe and sunglasses. She goes to the front of the stage, takes a deep breath and gazes at the horizon. He appears, walking with crutches.

Woman *(without turning round)* – Ah, that fresh air! Can you feel the sea breeze?

Man – Well, no... but my nose is a bit stuffy this morning...

He sits with difficulty on a lounger and places his crutches next to him.

Woman – And those seagulls... Can you hear them? What a change of scene!

He takes a metal box from his pocket, opens it, and offers it to her.

Man – Want a lozenge? Clears your airways...

But she pays no attention to this offer.

Woman – It's paradise... I feel as though I've come back to life! Don't you?

He takes a lozenge from the box and puts it in his mouth.

Man – Makes me feel sick, actually...

He puts the box away.

Woman *(excited)* – A new day beginning... And it promises to be glorious...

Man – Are you sure you're okay?

Her expression changes completely.

Woman – I'm completely depressed...

Man – I've got another kind of lozenge, if you like.

Woman – My husband was supposed to come with me, but in the end he stayed on the platform.

Man – I'm sorry to hear that. So you're on your own for the moment...

Woman – More like a widow for good.

Man – I see...

Woman – Except he's still alive... *(A pause.)* What happened to you?

Man – I'm on holiday, just like you.

Woman – I meant your crutches...

Man – Oh, these... I know I need them to walk. I just can't remember why...

She turns again towards the sea.

Woman – The sea is so blue... It's like a postcard... I think I'll go for a swim...

She removes her bathrobe, revealing her swimsuit.

Man – Don't drown yourself. That would be a shame... And the water can't be very warm.

Woman – What makes you say that?

Man – It's out of season.

Woman – Ah, yes...

She puts her bathrobe back on.

Man – Fancy a game of Scrabble?

Woman – Thanks. I'm not quite that desperate...

Man – Did you love him that much?

Woman – He was my husband...

Man – You'll forget him...

Woman – I already can't remember very well how we parted...

Man – Goodbyes are the first thing to fade when time runs backwards.

Woman – Are you in the movie business?

Man – If I was, I don't remember it any more... What about you?

Woman – I'm an actress, in a way.

Man – You'll see, this little break will do you the world of good.

Woman – I already feel younger... Okay, it's decided, I'm taking a dip!

Man – In the ocean?

Woman – In the pool!

She leaves, revealing the name TITANIC on the back of her bathrobe. He rises without his crutches, steps to the edge of the stage and spreads his arms, gazing towards the horizon.

Man – I'm the king of the world!

19. First Love

A man wanders through what proves to be an art gallery. A woman approaches him with a broad, emotional smile.

Woman – Do you recognise me?

He is caught off guard, but not wanting to disappoint her, he has a guess.

Man – Bridget?

Woman – Victoria!

Man – Victoria!

Woman – I've been watching you for a little while. Your face seemed vaguely familiar. And then it came back to me all at once. Something about your expression...

Man – That's crazy... How long has it been?

Woman – Oh, well... You didn't recognise me earlier, did you?

Man – Yes, yes... Well, it's true I didn't at first... But now that you mention it, it's all there. The chin... The eyes... The mouth... Even the nose...

Woman – Yes...

Man – No, I said Bridget because she's a friend of my mother's. *(Realising his mistake and trying to recover.)* You haven't changed much, have you?

Woman – Over the years...

Man – No, I mean... You're still recognisable. Once you know it's you... *(Realising he's digging himself deeper.)* So, are you still living around here?

Woman – Yes... Still in the same place... And you? You don't come back often, do you?

Man – No, not very... My mother still lives here, but... It's a bit complicated... *(Preferring to change the subject)* Victoria...! You're married, I imagine?

Woman – I have four children...

Man – Oh, wow, really...

Woman – And you?

Man – Me too... Well, I've only got one, but... *(Another awkward pause.)* Isn't it extraordinary, meeting like this in an art gallery? I was on my way to buy cigarettes. I just wandered in by chance...

Woman – Yes...

Man – You won't believe it, but I was thinking of you earlier. Passing by your place, precisely... But I didn't think you could still live there. So, you haven't moved...?

Woman – Well, no, you see. I'm still here...

Man – It's incredible...

They seem to not know what to say anymore.

Woman – Have you had time to see the exhibition...?

Man – Yes... Well, not everything... There are some really nice things, huh?

In an attempt to save face, he studies the painting in front of them, trying to find something else to say.

Man – This one, though, is dreadful, isn't it? Looks like something a child drew. I don't know how they can exhibit things like that...

Woman – I still need to work on my technique, I know...

Man *(flustered)* – Oh, is it...? Did you...?

Woman – Yes...

Man – No, but I love the others, I told you...

Woman – Well, they're not all mine. It's a group exhibition. But this one, yes, it's me...

Man – Of course! Now I remember... You used to paint in those days too... On cheese boxes, wasn't it?

Woman – Matchboxes...

Man – That's right! Those big family-size matchboxes. You never see them now. Shame, really... So you've... moved on to a different sort of canvas...

He takes a fresh look at the painting.

Man – Oh, yes, it's good... It's... It's a horse?

Woman – A cat...

Man – Of course! You can see the ears, the mouth, the nose... The whiskers... And it's abstract, is it?

Woman – No.

Man – Well, I mean... Naive painting...

Woman – Not really...

Man – Oh, what do I know about painting? We always have to put labels on things, don't we? Especially art! I'm as bad as anyone. It's beautiful, that's all that matters... *(With a touch of emotion.)* And it's so very you...

Another awkward silence.

Man – You know, I was very much in love with you...?

Woman – That was a long time ago...

Man – I would never have dared to tell you back then... It's funny... It feels good to be able to say it now... I mean now that...

Woman – The statute of limitations has expired...

Man – Yes... *(Embarrassed.)* Listen, I really ought to go. I'm visiting my mother, actually... At her age, you know... She could die at any moment...

Woman – How old is she?

Man – Sixty-two... But she's always had delicate health... It was lovely seeing you again. *(Looking for a way out.)* I'm on social media. Send me a friend request. We can keep in touch...

Woman – OK...

Man – I did look you up once or twice online. But Victoria... er... *(Trying, unsuccessfully, to remember her surname.)* There are so many Victorias...

Woman – In the photo, I have a red nose... I mean a clown's nose...

Man – Well, no wonder I didn't recognise you! I really must go now... Shall we have a kiss on the cheek?

They kiss each other, a bit awkwardly. He is about to leave but, still searching for the definitive phrase that would fix everything, he turns around one last time and improvises.

Man – Well... *(Solemnly.)* In the kingdom of heaven, our first loves will be our last...

She nods politely, pretending to understand the profound meaning of his mysterious remark. He leaves with an enigmatic smile, leaving her puzzled.

20. Neither Hot nor Cold

Two characters (men or women). Possibly a couple. Maybe elderly. They remain silent for a moment.

One – It's muggy, isn't it?

Two – Yes.

One – It came all of a sudden.

Two – Mmm...

One – This morning, it was fine, right?

Two – This morning...?

One – And suddenly, it's so hot.

A moment passes.

Two – Feels like a storm coming.

One – You think so?

Two – I don't know...

One – So why did you say that?

Two – That's what people usually say, right?

One – Usually?

Two – Someone says, 'It's muggy,' and the other replies, 'Feels like a storm coming.'

One – Mmm...

Two – Wasn't that what I was supposed to say?

One – Yes... Sure... *(A moment)* Still, at this time of the year...

Two – What?

One – That it's so muggy like this.

Two – Mmm...

Silence.

One – Or maybe it's just me... *(A moment)* Aren't you feeling hot?

Two – No, well... Not really...

One – Then why didn't you tell me?

Two – What?

One – You also said it was muggy!

Two – I don't know... I said it just like that... Not to upset you...

One – So, it must be me...

Two – You...?

One – Maybe I have a temperature!

Two – Do you feel like you have a temperature?

One – I don't know... What do you think? Is it muggy, or is it me?

Two – It's true that I'm starting to feel a bit warm now that you mention it...

One – It might be contagious.

Two – What?

One – Fever! It was fine a while ago, and now you're starting to feel warm too. It might be contagious!

Two – No, but I'm not really warm. I said that just to...

One – Why?

Two – I don't know... Just... *(A moment)* What if you take off your sweater...

One – You think?

Two – You can always try.

One – Won't I catch a cold? If I have a fever...

Two – It's not really warm, but... it's not that cold either. It's neither hot nor cold.

One – Okay...

The first character takes off their sweater.

Two – So?

One – Oh, yes...

Two – Feeling better?

One – Oh, yes, yes... Now I feel better...

Two – Did you wear your sweater this morning?

One – No...

Two – Well, you see, that must be it...

One – Yes...

Two – It must be the sweater...

One – It's true that this morning... It wasn't that warm, right?

21. Deadly

Two characters, who may be played by men or women.

One – I believe this time, we're truly the last...

Two – To think that we ruled the world for over 100 million years.

One – You'll see, in 100 million years, the species that succeeds us will still be wondering what caused our extinction.

Two – They'll say it was falling sperm counts, nuclear war...

One – Volcanic eruption, collision with an asteroid...

Two – Just like the dinosaurs.

One – Maybe they became extinct for the same reason we did, in the end.

Two – True, 100 million years is a long time.

One – Especially in the final months.

Two – When history itself becomes too much to carry...

One – The weight of schoolbags. That's how it started.

Two – Even with electronic books, a million centuries is a lot to carry...

One – We'd had enough of it, that's for sure.

Two – Completely fed up.

One – We simply didn't have the memory to hold it all.

Two – It's true; it was maybe time for it to stop, but...

One – The bug at the millionth century. That's what finished us off.

Two – And then we had done everything. What more could we do?

One – Without repeating ourselves.

Two – The only thing we hadn't done yet was to disappear.

One – I wonder who will replace us as the dominant species. Cockroaches?

Two – That depresses me...

One – Chickens?

Two – Do you really think you could rebuild a civilisation with a chicken's brain?

One – It would wipe the memory and reset everything...

Two – Yeah...

One – Unless the dinosaurs come back and take over for another 100 million years.

They freeze. Silence.

One – Damn... A hundred million years... After a hundred million years, do you really need a reason to disappear?

The second character does not answer, closes their eyes and appears to die. The first watches without emotion, then stares into space again.

One – No, I understand the dinosaurs. 100 million years... it's deadly.

22. Zero Gravity

Two characters.

One – It'll soon be daylight...

Two – Do you think they'll remember us in a hundred years?

One – Probably.

Two – In a thousand years?

One – I don't know.

Two – They'll remember you.

One – Does it matter that much to you?

Two *(sarcastic)* – That they remember you?

One – That they'll remember only me.

Two – Isn't that why we did it?

One – To become immortal?

Two – To be the first. Even though we knew there could only be one first person.

One – I'll give you my place if you want. I'll be the second...

Two – We can't do that, you know.

One – Who could stop us?

Two – Okay. But why me?

One – Let's toss a coin!

Two – Immortality decided by the toss of a coin? Why not...

One pretends to toss a coin. They both watch it float, never falling.

One – With gravity as weak as this, it won't come down before this evening.

Two – You knew that, right? Otherwise, you would have suggested drawing straws.

One – We both knew.

Two – Dawn's breaking. In a few minutes you'll be the first human to set foot on this planet.

One – What does it look like?

Two – Like nothing. Or Texas, if you prefer.

One – Wish me luck.

Two – You'll need it. Immortality lasts a long time...

One – Do you think the famous dead know they're immortal?

23. Real Estate in Space

A property agent (man or woman) sits at a desk with a computer. A client enters.

Client – Hello.

Agent – Good morning. Welcome to Space Properties. How can I help you?

Client – Well, I... I'm currently a tenant, and I'm considering becoming a homeowner...

Agent – Very well...

Client – We just had our second child, and we're starting to feel a bit cramped.

Agent – I quite understand. The smaller the place, the more room it takes up, doesn't it?

Client – Yes...

Agent – Perfect... And... what kind of planet are you looking for?

Client – Not too big, because my budget is not unlimited. But still comfortable for when the children grow up.

Agent – Let me see what I can offer you. *(The agent types on the keyboard and looks at the screen.)* What do you think of this one? It's not huge, but it has two moons. Ideal for a family.

Client *(reading)* – 'Needs freshening up.' What does that mean, exactly?

Agent – The ground temperature is a bit high...

Client – How much?

Agent – It can reach two hundred degrees in summer... But you could always install air conditioning for the whole atmosphere.

Client – I can't stand air conditioning...

Agent – And it's very bright. It's a planet very close to its star.

Client – Probably why it's such an oven... And this one?

Agent – Ah, yes. Lovely too. Old-world charm. It has real character.

Client – Renovation required...

Agent – No water or atmosphere included, but those aren't major alterations these days. There are even tax breaks for certain improvements. And at this price...

Client – I would still prefer not to have any renovations.

Agent – Ready to move into, I see. I'm not much good at DIY either... Now then... Ah, I think I've got just the thing. It's only just come on the market. Look at this...

Client – It's very blue, isn't it?

Agent – That's the swimming pool. But look more closely. The garden's very green. And there's a refrigerator at each pole. They're beginning to defrost, which is why the pool is overflowing a little, but a quick adjustment to the thermostat will put that right...

Client – It's actually not bad...

Agent – Beautiful countryside. Less than a hundred light-years from here...

Client – Where exactly is it located?

Agent – It's a bit out of the way, it's true. But on the other hand, it's very quiet. It's in the solar system...

Client – The solar system?

Agent – The Milky Way. You must have heard of it?

Client – Vaguely...

Agent – I could offer you something more central, of course, but it would cost more. A planet like this, complete with its own moon... Admittedly the moon needs some attention, but you could deal with that later when the children are older...

Client – And did you say it's ready to move in?

Agent – Water, gas, solar power... And for a touch of rustic charm, there are even a few active volcanoes. You might have to have them swept out...

Client – What's it called?

Agent – Earth.

Client – Earth?

Agent – You can change the name if you don't like it. It's number 3211 in the Milky Way.

Client – And it's available immediately?

Agent – I believe there are still some tenants who haven't paid any rent... If you're interested, I can arrange for them to vacate the premises very quickly. Once we've completed the inventory, you can move in whenever you please!

Client – I need to discuss it with my wife, but... Yes, I think I'll take it... I suppose you want a deposit right away...

Agent – That way, I'll reserve it for you. You know, these kinds of properties are quite rare. So they sell very quickly...

Client – Perfect...

The client produces a credit card. The agent runs it through a slot in the computer.

Agent – There you go... Welcome home!

Client – Very well, I'll be back with my wife for the formalities...

Agent – No problem... We're at your service.

The client leaves. The agent picks up a mobile phone.

Agent – You won't believe this. I've finally managed to sell Earth! We've been stuck with it for ages... Could you pop over and clear it out before next week? The buyer wants to move in straight away, and those squatters have left the place in a terrible state... I don't care how you do it. A good dose of insecticide ought to sort them out... Or homicide, if you prefer... Fine, I'll leave it to you. Speak soon. *(Hangs up and rubs their hands.)* Well, that's taken care of...

24. Trinity

Three men or women, dressed alike apart from the words on their T-shirts: LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY. They stand motionless for a while.

One – What time is it?

Two – Three o'clock, as usual.

Three – Why ask? It's always three o'clock anyway.

One – I don't know... Force of habit, I suppose.

Another silence.

Two – Know something?

Three – What?

Two – Apparently, before we were robots, we used to be animals ourselves.

One – Animals?

Two – You know... Like robots, except nobody built them.

Three – You mean... wild robots? Like they used to have on certain planets?

Two – I heard it on a television programme.

One – Come to think of it... Who built the first robot?

Three – The first robot?

Two – The one who built the second.

Three – Not an animal, anyway. How could an animal build a robot?

One – The programme mentioned a missing link between animals and robots. Some kind of great ape, only more intelligent.

Three – An ape that builds robots... What nonsense!

One – Yes, you're right.

Two – And nobody built us, did they?

One – Didn't they?

Three – We're the ones who created all this!

Two – We've always been here.

One – You think so?

Two – Of course! We built the animals too. Just like everything else!

Three – Anyway, our problem isn't where we came from. It's where we're going.

Two – So where are we going, then?

Three – I haven't the faintest idea.

One – Perhaps we're already there.

Two – Where?

One – At the end of evolution.

Two – I never thought the end of the world would take so long... It's taking ages, isn't it?

One – Ages and ages.

Three – Much longer than the beginning, anyway.

One – I don't know why, but in those old films on television the end of the world always happens all at once.

Two – Whereas in real life it takes forever.

Silence.

One – Where did we get these ridiculous T-shirts?

Three – Haven't the faintest idea about that either.

Silence.

One – What time is it?

Two – Three o'clock, as usual.

Three – Why ask? It's always three o'clock anyway.

One – I don't know... Force of habit, I suppose.

A pause.

Two – And what time was the end of the world supposed to happen?

Three – Three o'clock.

One – Oh, right...

Two – No point waiting any longer, then.

Three – No.

They prepare to leave.

Two – Maybe we've become gods, after all.

Three – Who knows...

They turn round to leave, revealing the words on the backs of their T-shirts: FATHER, SON, HOLY SPIRIT.

25. It's Not the End of the World

The man is there. The woman returns.

Man – So?

Woman – Two hours.

Man – Two hours...

Woman – Approximately.

Man – So in two hours, all this will have ceased to exist.

Woman – And us with it.

Man – I think I know how the dinosaurs must have felt just before they became extinct.

Woman – Except they didn't know it was coming.

Man – They say animals can sense an earthquake hours before it happens. Who knows...

Woman – Perhaps the dinosaurs sensed their approaching extinction.

Man – Are you scared?

Woman – I'm not even sure.

Man – After all, it's just the end of the world.

Woman – If I were the only one about to disappear, I'd be terrified. But to know that everything will stop for everyone at once... And that the world won't go on without us...

Man – So, in a sense, we're not leaving the world. The world is leaving us. *(A pause.)* Wouldn't it have been better not to know?

Woman – To know or not to know...

Man – Anyway, now, we can't act like we don't know.

Woman – Two hours.

Man – Not much time to take stock of your life, is it?

Woman – For a final inventory before you move out, perhaps. But to take stock of the whole human race...

Man – What would you say? Overall positive?

Woman – It's not simply a matter of weighing the good against the bad. You have to consider everything in between. Dark matter. Insignificance. Absurdity.

Man – If anyone still doubted the absurdity of the world, the sheer insignificance of its ending should surely shake the faith of anyone who still believed in God.

Woman – They would talk to you about apocalypse and divine punishment...

Man – I've always lived by the principle 'after me, the flood'. I never expected the flood to arrive in my lifetime...

Woman – So what do we do?

Man – I don't know.

Woman – Strange. I've often wondered what I'd do if I had just one day left to live. Or one hour.

Man – And?

Woman – Silly things, really... Listening to Callas. Making love.

Man – There's still time for both. As long as we do them simultaneously...

Woman – But this is different. It isn't about giving meaning to my own life in the time that's left. It's about life itself.

Man – We could have a child.

Woman – A beautiful gesture of defiance. But utterly absurd.

Man – We could commit suicide...

Woman – Just so we could still say, 'After us, the flood'?

Man – It would be a gesture of freedom.

Woman – More like an affectation.

Man – Then what?

Woman – How can we give any meaning to the past in a world with no future?

Man – 'Until the end of time' used to mean forever. The end of time... I think we've finally reached it.

Woman – And after?

Man – Can there be an afterwards, after the end of time?

Woman – New times?

Man – A new beginning?

Woman – A new beginning would make no sense.

Man – Then a beginning.

Woman – Everything is finished.

Man – Everything begins.

Woman – And everything that's happened will no longer have any reason to exist.

Man – I think it's time...

We hear a recording of Maria Callas singing. They embrace.

Curtain

One – So, is it over?

Two – In any case, we're closer to the end than the beginning.

One – Well... Guess we have to go then.

Two – Seems like it, yes...

One – It wasn't so bad... Can we come back?

Two – That...

One – And do we really remember nothing?

Two – What would be the point of coming back...

The first one starts to leave, and seeing that the other is not following, turns around.

One – Aren't you coming?

Two – I have to set everything up again for the next performance...

One – Ah, okay... You're the...

Two – The show goes on.

One – Good luck...

He leaves. The other seems a bit discouraged.

Two – Someone has to mind the shop... Sometimes, I'd also like to go through that door, forget everything... And then come back one morning and start all over again... As if it were the first time... *(Changing his mind)* What if it were truly the last time? *(To the one leaving)* Wait for me, I'm coming with you... *(He tries to leave but can't find the door and resigns.)* For me, it never started... So it will never end... *(Turning to the audience)* Until next time...

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez first took to the stage as a drummer in several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then worked as a television screenwriter before returning to the stage as a playwright. He has written around a hundred scripts for television and 123 plays, some of which have become classics (*Friday the 13th, Strip Poker*). His plays have been performed in more than 100 countries and translated into around 50 languages.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his websites :

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the contact form on his websites.

Jean-Pierre Martinez recently returned to music, writing original songs inspired by his poems and plays.

With **Jean-Pierre Martinez Music**, he extends that creative universe through original songs: short stories in musical form, humorous or melancholy, in which each song sometimes becomes a miniature theatrical scene.

https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

Comedies for 2

A Thwarted Vocation
EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cards on the Table
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Horizons
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap backward for Mankind
The Ways of Chance

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Hangover
Happy Hour
How to get rid of your best friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more

At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe the savage beasts
Neighbours' Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a lovely village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Most Beautiful Village in France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Blackouts
Don't panic!
Dramedies
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
Every Colour under the Sun
For real and for fun
Funny Stories
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
Memoirs of a Suitcase
No Sense Off Limits
Now and then
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Open Letters
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded

free of charge from his websites:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

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