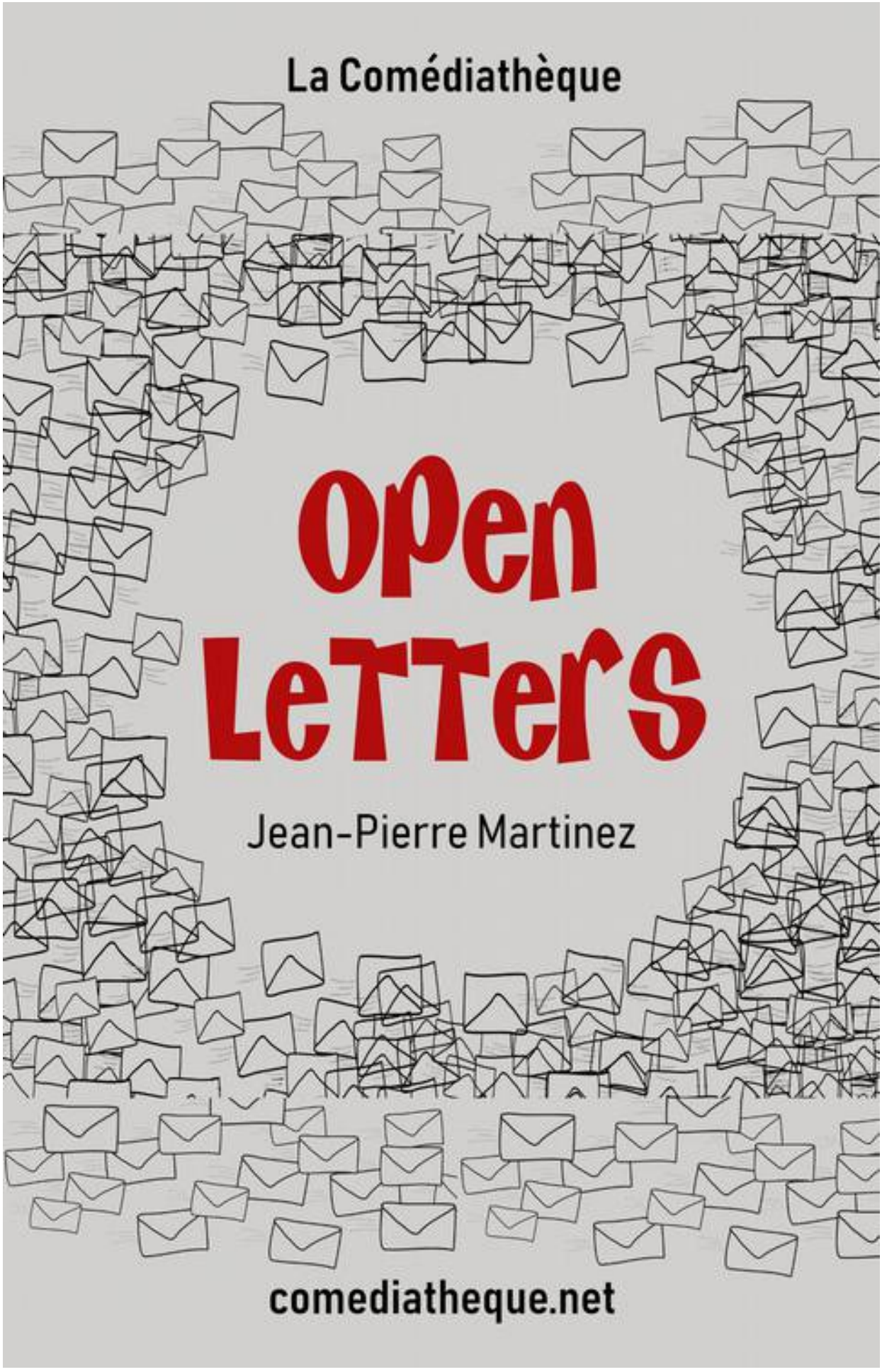

La Comédiathèque
Open Letters
Jean-Pierre Martinez
comediatheque.net

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Open letters

In the lobby of a building, between the mailboxes and the entry code panel,
strange characters cross paths without always understanding each other...

25 characters:
Highly adaptable distribution in terms of number and gender,
with each actor capable of playing multiple roles,
and most roles can be either male or female.

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1. Access Code

A woman enters the lobby, crosses it, and perplexed, stands in front of the door's entry code panel that leads to the stairs. A man arrives shortly after and heads towards the same door to input the code.

Woman – Excuse me... Can I enter with you? I don't have the code...

Man – Uh... Yes... Well... You mean you don't have the code?

Woman – Yes... That's what I just told you, right?

Man – I mean... In principle, you need to have the code to enter this building. That's the principle...

Woman – The principle?

Man – Those who have the code have the right to enter, others don't. What's the point of having a code otherwise?

Woman – Oh, I see...

Man – Well, yeah...

Woman – So, you won't let me in?

Man – Well, no...

Woman – Do you think I'm a thief or something?

Man – I don't know... If you lived in this building, why wouldn't you have the code?

Woman – Why? The code could have changed without me being notified.

Man – The code hasn't changed in twenty years.

Woman – I could have forgotten it!

Man – It's the kind of code you don't forget, believe me. Many elderly people live in this building, so we chose something easy to remember. Even someone in the terminal stage of Alzheimer's would forget their birthdate before forgetting the code to this building...

Woman – 007?

Man – So, you don't live in this building...

Woman – And do you remember your birthdate?

Man – Since you don't live here, who are you here to see?

Woman – But come on, that's none of your business! Are you with the police?

Man – No. But it's my building.

Woman – You own this building?

Man – I'm a co-owner. I look after the safety of the people who live here. And the integrity of their property.

Woman – I see... You're some kind of security guard, then.

Man – Just tell me what you're here for.

Woman – I'm here to murder someone, is that okay with you?

Man – On which floor?

Woman – Does it make a difference?

Man – Just checking that you're not lying.

Woman – The little old lady on the fifth.

Man – On the fifth, there's a gay couple and a single mother.

Woman – A single mother? What era are you living in? The late 19th century? Today, we say a single-parent family, mind you!

Man – Anyway, we don't say the little old lady on the fifth! So, you're lying!

Woman – Of course, I'm lying. If I had come to murder someone, do you really think I'd specify the floor to you?

Man – That still doesn't tell me what you're here for.

Woman – Initially, I didn't come to kill someone, that's true. But I must admit that after meeting you, it gives me the urge to commit murder...

Man – Fine, mock as much as you want. But as long as I don't know what you're here for, there's no way I'll let you in.

Woman – OK... I'm here to see someone, does that work for you?

Man – Oh yeah? And who's that?

Woman – The dentist.

Man – Do you have a toothache?

Woman – It's more complicated than that...

Man – Which dentist, first of all? There are at least three or four in the building.

Woman – I don't know his name. I mean, his real name.

Man – Convenient...

Woman – No, actually, it's not convenient. It's someone I met online. I only know his username.

Man – A username?

Woman – He invited me to his place, but he forgot to give me the code.

Man – He invites you to his place but doesn't give you the code...

Woman – He forgot, I tell you!

Man – Uh-huh... Why don't you just call him?

Woman – I don't have his number.

Man – Oh, he didn't give you his number either. Apparently, he values his privacy a lot... Are you really sure he invited you to come to his place? I mean, he didn't give you the code...

Woman – He gave me the address, said he lived on the third floor, and that he was a dentist. I think if he didn't want to see me...

Man – Dentist? On the third floor... So, it's the address of his office. Not his home.

Woman – So what?

Man – That explains why he forgot to give you the code.

Woman – And why is that?

Man – Because during the day, there's no code.

Woman – So, there is a dentist on the third floor.

Man – Yes.

Woman – So, you see, I'm not lying.

Man – At the same time, it's indicated on the sign.

Woman – What sign?

Man – The sign outside at the entrance of this building.

Woman – Okay... So, you still won't let me in?

Man – It depends... What's your username?

Woman – Excuse me?

Man – You said you only know this dentist by his username. I assume he only knows you by a code name too.

Woman – And why would I give you my code? That's very personal, isn't it? More personal than the access code to a building, at least...

Man – Let's say it's a two-way street.

Woman – Alex343.

Man – Alex343?

Woman – What? You don't like it either?

Man – No, no... Alex343, it's a very nice name. (*Changing tone*) For a very nice person... It makes me curious about the other 342 Alexs.

Woman – Are you hitting on me now? You've got some nerve.

Man – We started off on the wrong foot, but allow me to introduce myself – Domi459.

Woman – Domi459? So, it's you?

Man – I hope you're not too disappointed...

Woman – No, no, but... I didn't imagine you like this...

Man – Apologies for the code, but since there's none during the day...

Woman – Of course.

Man – And you never know who you're dealing with.

Woman – You're right. One can never be too cautious.

Man – Did you find it easily?

Woman – Yes, yes... Until I got to this door, at least...

He points to the door.

Man – But go ahead, please...

Woman – Uh...

Man – Oh yes, that's right... You don't have the code... Wait, let me go ahead of you... 111, easy to remember...

Woman – Yes, that's handy...

Man – By the way, I forgot to introduce myself... Since you only know me by my username...

Woman – Your name is on the sign at the entrance of the building.

Man – Oh, yes, that's true! And you, what's your real name?

Woman – If you don't mind, I'll wait to get to know you a little better before giving you the access code...

They exit.

2. Insult Letters

A woman arrives, opens a mailbox, and disappointedly finds it empty. A man arrives.

Man – No mail today?

Woman – A few years ago, I still received the occasional wedding invitation or so. But gradually, nothing. I feel like I'm the only survivor of my generation.

Man – If I die before you, I promise to send you a funeral invitation.

Woman – That's kind of you. I still go down every morning to check if I have any mail. It gives me a bit of exercise.

The man opens his mailbox overflowing with letters.

Man – I would give you some of mine, but they are mainly hate mail.

Woman – Hate mail? Oh yes... Your wife left you, right?

Man – I think she didn't handle the career change too well. But it's not her who's sending me all these letters, you know.

Woman – You're not a French teacher anymore?

Man – I resigned a few months ago. Now I work in a horse butchery.

Woman – That must be quite a change.

Man – It's messier.

Woman – Oh yes, quite a career change.

Man – Since I was a little kid, I always wanted to work with meat. Some dream of becoming firefighters; I dreamed of becoming a butcher.

Woman – There's room for everyone in this world, isn't there?

Man – Both my parents were philosophy professors. Needless to say, they weren't too thrilled about this plan. I think they would have preferred if I had told them I was gay and wanted to be an actor. So, I first studied literature to please them, married a Latin professor. But in the end, passion won out. I took evening classes, got my certification, incidentally got divorced, and here I am, finally a butcher!

Woman – Butchery is an honourable profession. But why horses?

Man – I think cows and calves would have reminded me too much of my old teaching job.

Woman – I understand... But all these hate letters? I imagine it's not the horses writing to complain...

Man – Oh, that? Actually, it has nothing to do with my new profession. These are my former students who keep writing to me. I stopped in June, and they don't know yet that I resigned.

Woman – And you read all of them?

Man – Do you think so! If only they were well-written. But the vocabulary is poor, the syntax is deplorable, and it's full of spelling mistakes. Here, let me open one at random...

He opens an envelope and reads.

Man – Screw your mother, you dumbass, I'll catch you, I'll kill you... I told you...

Woman – You know what? They didn't deserve you.

Man – I'll put these directly in recycling.

Woman – In that case, give them to me. It will keep me occupied.

Man – If you insist... (*He hands her the stack of letters which she takes.*) But I warned you...

Woman – If I find one that is more interesting than the others from a literary point of view, I'll set it aside for you.

Man – Perfect! And I'll set aside a little horse steak for lunch! It's excellent for your health, you'll see. Horse meat is much leaner than beef, and it's full of iron.

Woman – Iron? Not horseshoe iron, I hope.

Man – Ah, don't forget that a horseshoe brings good luck! Well then, have a good day! Meat doesn't wait!

Woman – Thank you, have a good day too!

He leaves. She looks at the stack of letters.

Woman – Let's see...

She also walks away, reading the first letter she has just opened.

3. Garbage

The stage is empty except for a large wheeled trash bin with a yellow lid. A woman arrives, pulling another similar bin with a green lid. Dressed elegantly and wearing high heels, she attempts to maintain a semblance of dignity in the degrading task of taking out the trash herself. Her phone rings, and she answers.

Woman 1 – Hello, yes? Oh, good evening, Jack! No, no, you're not bothering me. I was just organising some papers and getting ready to take a bath... Tonight at half-past seven? Oh yes, that's absolutely perfect! But are you sure that... Your last patient? Very well! In that case, maybe we'll have time to grab a drink afterward, just to get to know each other a bit? Oh yes, or dinner if you prefer... I know a very good Japanese place on the side of... Oh, you hate sushi... No, no, not at all... I also love pizzas... Perfect, then see you later... No, no, I have the address of your office... Oh, there's a code after 7 PM... Wait, let me grab something to write with... I'm in the bathroom, and I don't have anything on me... I mean, to write on...

She takes out a pencil but, realising she has no paper, opens the lid of the yellow trash bin. Finding it empty, she leaves the lid open and opens the lid of her own trash bin, from which she randomly takes a low-calorie cereal box.

Woman 1 – There, I'm listening... Oh, wow, indeed, it's complicated... (*Joking*) Couldn't you have chosen 111 or 007, like everyone else? Oh, it's your mother-in-law's date of death... Yes, you're right, for a burglar, obviously, it's more difficult to guess... But can you repeat that more slowly? Just a second, let me get a bit more comfortable...

She contorts herself to try to write with one hand on the cardboard while holding the phone with the other, before deciding to place the cardboard on the edge of the open yellow trash bin. The cardboard falls to the ground, and in trying to catch it, she drops her phone into the empty bin.

Woman 1 – Oh no, this can't be true... (*Towards the bottom of the bin*) Hello? Jack? Can you hear me? (*She leans toward the bottom of the trash bin to try to retrieve the phone*.) Hello? I can barely hear you...

She ends up tipping into the trash bin. Only her two legs stick out, which she waves while making muffled cries. A man arrives, holding a phone.

Man – Hello? Hello? Can you hear me?

His wife arrives behind him.

Woman 2 – Jack? What are you doing there?

Jacques immediately puts away his phone. Fearing being caught in this embarrassing position, the trash bin prisoner withdraws her legs and calms down.

Man – Well, I... I came to get the trash bin to bring it back up... The hairdresser couldn't fit you in, after all?

Woman 2 (*sternly*) – Yes. I'm coming out.

Man – Ah, very well...

Woman 2 – You haven't forgotten that tonight I'm going to my department head's farewell party?

Man – No, no, don't worry... I'll take the opportunity to catch up on my overdue accounting at the office.

The woman sees the cereal box on the floor.

Woman 2 – People are so dirty... (*Picking up the packaging to put it back in the trash bin*) And I have the feeling that the newcomers are the worst... By the way, have you met the new neighbour?

Man – What neighbour?

Woman 2 – Don't tell me you haven't noticed her... The one with the ample bosom...

Man – Ah, that one...

Woman 2 – You see, you do remember.

Man – It's true that she's quite a beautiful woman.

Woman 2 – I find her rather vulgar, but well...

Man – Vulgar?

Woman 2 – She's divorced, I think...

Man – She told you that?

Woman 2 – A woman who takes out the trash herself must be living alone... And as she's too old to still be single, I conclude that she's divorced... or a widow.

Man – She's not that old...

Woman 2 – She must be around my age.

Man – Oh, really? It doesn't show...

Woman 2 – When she takes out the trash in the morning in a robe before putting on makeup, it shows, believe me... But hey, it really seems like she made quite an impression on you...

Man – You're the one who brought it up. (*Pause*) And then she called the office today for a descaling...

Woman 2 – Descaling... When?

Man – Tonight.

Woman 2 – Ah, okay... It must have been an emergency.

Man – Maybe she has an important appointment...

Woman 2 – Right... Well... Just don't bring her home. Because I'm telling you, I'm capable of anything...

Man – Bring her home... What are you talking about...?

They start to move away.

Woman 2 – Well, aren't you bringing the bin back up?

Man – Yes, yes... (*He takes the wheeled bin by the handle and follows his wife.*) But when you say capable of anything... Not killing, right?

A phone rings from inside the trash bin.

4. Dead Letter

A character (man or woman) arrives to check their mail in their mailbox. They open the box, take out a few envelopes, and quickly examine them.

Tenant – Bill, taxes, contribution notice, bill…

Postman – Excuse me… Mr. Martin, does that ring a bell?

Tenant – Yes…

Postman – I don't see his name on the box. Which floor?

Tenant – Seventh. But he passed away last week.

Postman – Oh damn… So, basically… he moved.

Tenant – You could say that, yes.

Postman – No, because I have a registered letter for him…

Tenant – Ah, yeah… that's unfortunate.

Postman – So, what do I do?

Tenant – I don't know…

Postman – Did he leave an address?

Tenant – He's dead, I told you.

Postman – Oh yeah… But who is going to sign for my registered letter?

Tenant – That…

Postman – So, he won't come back…

Tenant – It's unlikely.

Postman – That's not convenient for me.

Tenant – There are always troubles, you know… But I'm not sure he died just to make your life difficult…

Postman – Mmm… Then, I don't know… Can't you sign for him?

Tenant – Why would I do that?

Postman – Among neighbours… we can do each other small favours… It would save me from coming back.

Tenant – Coming back? Why?

Postman – To deliver this registered letter!

Tenant – But I told you he's dead! Dead, you understand? And there's at least one advantage to being dead, it's that you become totally and permanently inaccessible to all kinds of registered letters!

Postman – I understand.

Tenant – You can always leave him a delivery notice!

Postman – You think?

Tenant – By the way, what's in that registered letter? Tax assessment? Eviction notice? Termination notice?

The postman glances at the envelope.

Postman – It's from the National Lottery.

Tenant – The National Lottery?

Postman – It can't be bad news.

Tenant – Do you really think that when you're dead, you can still tell the difference between good and bad news?

Postman – Of course… But still…

The tenant takes the registered letter from the postman's hand.

Tenant – Let me see… Oh yes, the National Lottery, indeed.

Postman – Do you know if he played the lottery?

Tenant – I don't know… I knew him very little… We crossed paths occasionally… He had a dog…

Postman – And what happened to him?

Tenant – He died, I told you.

Postman – The dog died too?

Tenant – No, not the dog, him!

Postman – And what happened to the dog?

Tenant – The dog? I don't know…

Postman – It's sad, a dog that ends up all alone in life like that… I don't understand all these people who take an animal and then abandon it. Taking care of an animal is a responsibility. People don't realise…

Tenant – Do you think he won the jackpot?

Postman – If that's the case, he shouldn't wait too long to show up. Because there's a deadline. If you don't pick up your check before, you lose everything, and the amount is put back into play.

Tenant – It would be a shame indeed.

Postman – So, what do we do?

Tenant – We?

Postman – As you say, it would be a shame…

Tenant – Okay. I'll sign.

Postman – It'll save me from coming back.

The tenant signs the receipt handed to him by the postman, eagerly opens the envelope, and reads.

Postman – So?

Tenant – It's a settlement of all accounts…

Postman – It's not a check?

Tenant – He worked for the National Lottery. It's just a notice of the end of his contract.

Postman – So, in addition, he lost his job… That's really unfortunate. Because finding a job these days isn't easy.

Tenant – Especially when you're dead.

Postman – And with the crisis, on top of that.

Tenant – I know what it's like; I'm unemployed too.

Postman – Oh yes, that's unfortunate… And obviously, it's never people like you who win the lottery, huh? Those who really need it.

Tenant – No.

Postman – I read an article in the newspaper yesterday – 'He wins 60 million in the lottery and continues to live exactly as before…' I'll tell you, some people don't deserve to win!

Tenant – That's clear.

Postman – Well, it's not all that, but I have to continue my rounds.

He's about to leave. The tenant brandishes the letter.

Tenant – What do I do with this?

Postman – That's up to you… As long as you've signed the receipt.

The postman is about to leave.

Postman – But if I were you, I'd write to them.

Tenant – To whom?

Postman – To the National Lottery! Since a position has just become available…

The postman leaves. The tenant looks at the registered letter again, perplexed.

5. Diabolical

A character (man or woman) enters carrying a visibly heavy box. Another character arrives in turn.

One – One, that looks heavy… Are you moving?

Two – Does it show that much?

They put the box on another box that is already there.

One – I'd offer to help, but with my back…

Two – Thanks anyway…

He sits on the boxes to catch his breath. The other takes out a pack of cigarettes.

One – Want one?

Two – Thanks, I'm already on the brink of apoplexy…

The other puts away his pack.

One – You're right, I should quit too… I'll take a licorice instead.

He takes out a box of licorice.

One – Want one?

The other signals no.

Two – Thanks, no. I'm already very thirsty.

One – I've tried everything, even acupuncture, but I can't quit completely.

Two – Mm-hmm…

One – It's strange; I've never seen you in the building… and we're getting acquainted on the day you're moving…

Two – Do you think we got acquainted?

The other just looks at him with a smile, still chewing his licorice.

One – So, where are you going with your boxes?

Two – I'm moving to the 19th.

One – The 19th district?

Two – Uh, yes… Not the 19th century.

One – It will be a change for you.

Two – Yes… Well, the 19th probably isn't that different from the 20th.

One – But we won't have the chance to see each other again…

Two – I would tell you that I'll miss you, but since we had never crossed paths until now. Have you been living in this building for a long time?

One – Oh, no, but I don't live here.

Two – Oh, yes… That probably explains why we didn't run into each other more often…

One – I have my office on the third floor.

Two – I see. The dentist.

One – Uh, no… Mine is just across. The exorcist.

Two – The exorcist…?

One – Obviously, it's not written on the door.

Two – Of course.

One – I mainly consult in the evening. Or even at night, it's more discreet.

Two – That's probably why we never met…

One – People who come to see me don't always want to be recognised…

Two – I'm not sure I'd like to run into your patients in the stairwell after nightfall…

One – You don't believe in exorcism.

Two – Does it show that much?

One – I don't blame you, but you're wrong.

Two – Maybe, yes… And does it work?

One – Look around you… And especially above… Don't you think the market is immense?

Two – Maybe, yes… But with all that, you still haven't managed to quit smoking?

One – I haven't found the magic formula that would free me from the demonic powers of nicotine.

Two – Marlboro, leave this body!

A moment.

One – And why are you moving, if I may ask?

Two – Well… To be closer to my work, first.

One – By moving from the 19th to the 20th?

Two – And also… How should I say? Because I felt a diabolical presence in the apartment I occupy on the top floor of this building.

One – Really? You should have told me sooner…

Two – Unfortunately, I didn't know you yet.

One – And by diabolical presence, what do you mean exactly?

Two – I mainly mean… my wife.

One – I see… I have many cases like yours…

Two – Well, enough of this, but I have to get back to it. Since you don't want to help me…

One – I could still try to exorcise your spouse.

Two – You could do that?

One – Which floor is it?

Two – Eighth.

One – You brought down these boxes from the eighth floor, with no elevator?

Two – And I still have a lot more to bring down…

One – Oh, yes… Eighth without an elevator… That's truly diabolical...

Two – Yes…

One – Sorry, but I think, there… I can't do anything for you…

He walks away, and the other stays there with his boxes, a bit destabilised He decides to leave when another character (played by the one who just left) wearing a carnival mask arrives. He pretends to look for something, like a name on a mailbox or a professional sign.

Three – Excuse me, the exorcist, which floor is it?

Two – Third. Across from the dentist.

Three – Obviously, there's no sign downstairs.

Two – Nor on the door.

Three – Thanks…

He leaves. The other stays there, sitting on his box.

Two – I think it was time for me to move…

6. Parcel Bomb

A postman (man or woman) arrives with a package and encounters a tenant who also arrives.

Postman – Oh, I had a package for you, by the way.

Tenant – Thank you.

The postman hands her the package.

Postman – A little signature...

Tenant – Of course...

Overloaded, the tenant hands the package back to the postman to sign the receipt he offers.

Tenant – Excuse me, I'll return this for a second.

The tenant signs the receipt and smiles.

Tenant – I hope it's not a parcel bomb...

The postman responds in the same joking tone.

Postman – It does sound like there's a ticking inside.

They laugh.

Tenant – You see so many things nowadays! (*Suddenly stops laughing*) Is it true?

The postman, taking her seriously, puts his ear against the package.

Postman – Well... Yes, it sounds like it.

The tenant suddenly looks worried. She, too, puts her ear to the package.

Tenant – But yes... I hear it too... Do you think it could...

The postman also changes his tone.

Postman – Do you know anyone who would have a reason to hold a grudge against you to this extent?

Tenant – I don't know... Apart from my mother-in-law... But we all have enemies, don't we?

Postman – Still.

The tenant hesitates.

Tenant – So, I'm not sure I want to take it now...

Postman – What should I do with it then?

Tenant – Just take it back to the Post Office.

Postman – I haven't finished my round yet... What if it blows up on me along the way? And now, you've signed the receipt...

He hands the package to the other, who refuses to take it.

Tenant – What if we call the police?

Postman – The police?

Tenant – Like when you find a suspicious package in a train station or on a train.

Postman – You mean... a bomb disposal unit?

Tenant – They will know what to do...

Postman – And if the bomb explodes before they arrive?

Tenant – I don't know... Let's just throw the package into the street...

Postman – And if passersby get hurt? Children, perhaps... It's school closing time... We can't do that!

Tenant – You're right... There's nothing left but to prepare ourselves to die with dignity, with the only consolation that our sacrifice will have saved a few innocent lives...

Postman – Our sacrifice? What exactly are you proposing?

Tenant – We need to act, and fast!

She takes the package from the postman, throws it to the ground, and stomps on it violently.

Postman – Are you out of your mind?

Tenant – It didn't explode...

Postman – No...

They both bend down to examine the package.

Postman – Oh, yes... It was indeed a clock... But I don't see any bomb...

Tenant – No, it's strange...

Postman – But I think about it, who's the sender?

Tenant – The sender?

Postman – In principle, it's written on the receipt!

Tenant – Oh yes...

The postman looks at the receipt.

Postman – It's from Switzerland... That's curious...

Tenant – Yes, it's probably the country in the world with the fewest terrorists...

Postman – Mrs. Manson... Do you know her?

Tenant – She's my mother-in-law.

The postman searches through the remains of the package.

Postman – Look... There's a letter of claim...

He hands the sheet to the other, who reads it.

Tenant – Happy birthday, my darling... It's for her son's birthday.

Postman – Her son?

Tenant – My husband!

Postman – A clock... That's a strange gift for a birthday, isn't it?

Tenant – My stepfather is a watchmaker.

Postman – And it didn't raise any suspicions when you heard the ticking... I mean?

They both contemplate the battered remains of the package.

Postman – Your husband will be pleased... How old is he, by the way?

Tenant – It still smells a bit like gunpowder, doesn't it?

Postman – I would say more like chocolate...

Tenant – Ah, yes, look, there were also chocolates with it. (*She takes the battered box and hands it to the postman*.) Do you want one?

Postman – What if they were poisoned?

They exchange a perplexed look.

7. Wrong address

One (man or woman) arrives, opens their mailbox, and unsurprisingly but with a certain sadness, finds it empty. Another character (man or woman) arrives, also opens their mailbox, and after a moment of surprise, pulls out a stack of letters.

One – Looks like you've got mail today...

Two – Yes, I don't understand… Usually, aside from junk mail… Let me see...

Their face darkens.

One – No bad news, I hope...

Two – No news at all… It's the mail for my neighbours on this floor… The mailman got it wrong again...

One – Ah...

Two – I'll put it back in their mailbox.

One – Yes...

Two – So, nothing for you either...

One – No, no mail today...

The other is about to put the mail into another mailbox but drops the stack on the ground.

Two – Darn!

One – Wait, I'll help you.

The two characters bend down to pick up the envelopes and take the opportunity to examine them.

Two – Well, I didn't know he subscribed to Diving Magazine...

One – True, we're quite far from the sea...

Two – He must do scuba diving in the pool.

One – Or in his bathtub...

Two – There's also a letter with the Fire Brigade letterhead.

One – Maybe he's a volunteer firefighter.

Two – Or maybe it's an invitation to the annual ball...

Laughter. Embarrassment.

Two – Isn't this a bit intrusive, what we're doing?

One – Yes, a bit… What else?

The two characters start examining the envelopes.

One – A postcard.

Two – Where is it from?

One – The Balearic Islands. Ibiza.

Two – What does it say?

One – Still...

Two – That doesn't count; it's a postcard! Even the postman could have read it...

One – "A little hello from the Ibiza, where we're spending a week on vacation. The landscapes are beautiful, and the weather is lovely. See you very soon. Kisses. Peter and Jack."

Two – That's so ordinary...

One – People don't know how to write anymore.

Two – But still.

One – What?

Two – It's signed Peter and Jack.

One – Dive buddies, perhaps?

Two – Or firefighter friends...

The two characters immerse themselves again in examining the mail.

Two – Oh, a letter with the address written in pink ink...

One – Oh yes...

Two – I wonder who that could be...

One – Is he married?

Two – Separated, I think.

One – Isn't there a recipient's address on the back?

The other turns the letter.

Two – Donald...

One – Why would a Donald write to him in pink ink?

Two – That would explain why his wife left him.

One – How can we find out?

Two – I have my suspicions...

They open the envelope.

One – No way?

Two – Sorry, I couldn't resist. An impulse, as the serial killers say.

One – Well, now, might as well read it.

Two – "Hello Alan. Excuse me for writing to you with a pink pen, but it's all I had on hand. Especially since it's to tell you some very sad news. Aunt Mary passed away yesterday…"

One – A death announcement in pink ink… How could we have guessed?

Two – This mail is so disappointing. I wonder if it's worth continuing.

One – You're right. This guy is so ordinary.

Two – Completely transparent.

One – It's so simple; I wouldn't recognise him if I passed him in the stairwell.

Two – Let's put all this back in his mailbox.

They put the mail back into the recipient's mailbox and check their watches.

Two – Oh my... Already! I'm going to miss my soap opera.

One – Ah, you watch it too?

Two – Thankfully, there's TV to change our minds a bit...

They exit.

8. Invitation

A woman walks by, pulling a wheeled trash bin from which male and/or female feet protrude. Another woman arrives to collect her mail and greets the first.

One – Good morning!

Two – Ah, good morning! How are you?

The other notices the feet sticking out of the trash bin.

One – Is it bulky item collection today? I thought it was next week?

Two – It was an emergency…

One – Spring cleaning, then?

Two – Yes, you could say that.

She puts the feet back into the trash bin so they're not visible.

One – I should get around to it too when I have the time. We accumulate so much stuff over the years.

Two – Could you hold the door for me?

One – Of course, stay right there.

She steps offstage to hold a door that may not necessarily be visible.

Two – That's kind of you!

One – No problem, please. Have a good day!

Two – Thank you! You too.

The other woman leaves with her trash bin.

Another woman arrives to collect her mail.

One – Ah, good morning! Very pleased to meet you. I'm your next-door neighbour. I saw you from afar while you were moving in...

Three – You're right, it's better to keep a distance in those cases. Just kidding...

One – I'm delighted that... Well, I just wanted to say... Welcome to the building!

Three – Thank you, that's very kind of you.

One – Among neighbours...

Three – Yes...

One – You'll see, people in the building are very nice. And especially, if you need anything...

Three – Thank you.

One – I must be going now... I'm picking up my daughter from her violin lesson. Do you have children?

Three – Yes... Well, no. I mean... Now, I'm rid of them, fortunately.

One – Rid of them...?

Three – Yes... I put them in the freezer, to have some peace and quiet.

One – Ah, yes...

Three – I'm kidding.

One – Of course.

Three – They're grown up now. They no longer live at home.

One – It does create a void when they leave. Towards the end, you can't wait for them to clear out. And then, in the end... It creates a void.

Three – But your daughter still lives with you, right? I mean, if you're picking her up from her violin lesson...

One – Yes... But I can imagine. It must have created a void for you, right?

Three – When my last one left, I first considered adopting a dog from the shelter, and then, in the end, my mother-in-law came to live with us.

One – A dog needs to be taken out three times a day to do its business. It's quite inconvenient.

Three – You're right. A mother-in-law is much more practical.

One – Yes...

Three – There are diapers...

One – Yes...

Three – I'm kidding...

One – Of course... Well, I'll leave you now... Otherwise, my daughter will be waiting for me...

Three – I'm sorry I haven't been more talkative. But I'm a bit overwhelmed at the moment. With this move...

One – I understand.

Three – Anyway, we'll surely have the opportunity to meet again since we're next-door neighbours.

One – But I was thinking... Why don't you come for drinks tonight?

Three – Uh... Yes, why not?

One – Around 7:30?

Three – Fine. (*She checks her watch*.) Now, I must leave. Otherwise, my first patient will be waiting. So, see you tonight!

One – Perfect!

The other leaves. Another character arrives.

One – You know what? I just ran into our new next-door neighbour. I invited her for drinks tonight.

Four – You invited her?

One – Well, yes, why?

Four – I ran into her husband this morning, and you know what?

One – What?

Four – He's a tax inspector.

One – Tax inspector... You mean tax audits and all that...

Four – Yes.

One – At the same time, we have nothing to hide, right?

Four – You say that... And what about the shelves in my office that I had installed off the books by the guy on the fifth floor?

One – They're not coming to inspect the house...

Four – It's second nature to those people!

One – You think?

Four – And even so. Imagine, we'll have to be careful about everything we say.

One – What could we say? Apart from your shelves?

Four – Imagine we have a falling out with them.

One – Why would we fall out with them? We don't know them?

Four – Exactly! We don't know what might offend them. We don't know their religious or political opinions.

One – It's kind of the point when you invite people to get to know them.

Four – Yes, but he, if we say something he doesn't like, he has the means to subject us to a tax audit. And believe me, those people, when they search, they find...

One – Oh my God, you're right... Why did I invite her? Maybe we could cancel?

Four – They'll find it suspicious! That would be even worse. Or they'll think we don't like them...

One – You're right... So, what do we do?

Four – What a mess you've gotten us into again...

One – And her, I don't even know what she does. I completely forgot to ask... Anyway, she seems a bit disturbed...

Four – She's a psychoanalyst...

One – No way? But how do you know that? Did her husband tell you?

Four – I saw her put up her sign in front of the building this morning.

One – Psychoanalyst? So that's why she asked me so many questions...

Four – What kind of questions?

One – Well... About violin lessons, for example.

Four – Violin lessons?

One – Do you think that has a special meaning for a psychoanalyst, violin lessons?

Four – Well, it does for a tax inspector. Especially if you pay for them under the table...

One – But it's awful...

Four – I mean, can you imagine the torture of this aperitif? Between a tax inspector and a psychoanalyst!

One – You're right, we'll have to be careful about everything we say...

Four – We'll try to say as little as possible.

One – Yes...

Four – But it won't be easy.

One – No, for sure... When you invite people for drinks to get to know them...

Awkward pause.

Four – Are the bulk item collections today?

One – Next week... By the way, I also ran into the neighbour from the fifth floor who was taking out her trash, and you know what?

Four – Don't tell me you invited her for drinks too?

One – No, but I thought I saw human remains sticking out of the trash.

Four – Don't you think we have more urgent problems to deal with?

One – You're right... What if we put something in their drink? Like sleeping pills, you know. Just to shorten the evening...

Four – You think?

They exit.

9. Love Letter

The postman arrives and looks for a name on a mailbox but can't find it. A tenant appears.

Postman – Excuse me, Miss Taylor, do you know her?

Tenant – Taylor? No… Well, yes… That was my maiden name. But nobody calls me that anymore… And I've been married for twenty years.

Postman – Nevertheless, this is the correct address.

Tenant – Let me see...

The postman hands her the envelope.

Tenant – It's strange; it looks like a collectible stamp... But look, the postmark is from March 21, 1985... Nearly thirty years ago!

The postman examines the envelope.

Postman – Oh yes, indeed... That's incredible.

Tenant – What could it be?

Postman – Why don't you open it since it's addressed to you?

Tenant – Do you think so?

Postman – Miss Taylor, is it still you?

Tenant – Yes... Well, it used to be...

She opens the envelope and scans its contents.

Postman – So?

Tenant – It's a letter from my ex-boyfriend... My first love.

Postman – What does it say? If it's not too indiscreet, of course.

Tenant – He apologises for not being able to make it to our last date; he broke his leg. He's stuck in the hospital.

Postman – These things happen; I know what I'm talking about.

Tenant – And to think I believed he stood me up...

Postman – True, at that time, there was no internet. There weren't even mobile phones. What else does he say?

Tenant – He says he loves me... Can you imagine? If only I had known...

Postman – It's incredible! This letter took 30 years to reach you...

Tenant – Yes... And I don't congratulate you!

Postman – Excuse me?

Tenant – If this letter had reached me on time, my life could have been very different!

Postman – Yes, of course, but...

Tenant – I really wonder what he has become...

Postman – What was his name?

Tenant – It's written on the back of the envelope, isn't it?

The postman checks.

Postman – No? That's not true!

Tenant – What?

Postman – But I'm the one who sent you this letter! I had completely forgotten!

Tenant – You? Are you sure?

Postman – Absolutely! It's my name, and it's the address of my parents. Where I lived at that time...

Tenant – I wouldn't have recognised you at all...

Postman – It's been thirty years... I haven't forgotten your first name, of course, but your last name...

Tenant – So, you became a postman.

Postman – Yes... I was so depressed that you never replied to my letter... Thinking back, I believe that's why I became a postman. To have the joy of bringing others the answers I never received.

Tenant – And your leg, is it better?

Postman – Yes, thank you... But please, call me Mike...

Tenant – Well, I'm in a bit of a hurry now. My husband is waiting for me outside with the car.

Postman – Of course...

He watches her leave, almost running.

Postman – Miss Taylor...

10. Squatter

A man arrives, hesitates for a moment, and sits down on the floor in front of the mailboxes. He starts to doze off. Another tenant arrives and spots him.

Tenant – Come on, wake up, my friend. I understand you might be tired, but you can't stay here, right?

The man wakes up.

Man – And why not?

Tenant – Well... because this is a building lobby, not a shelter. Don't you know where to go?

Man – No... Right now, I'm homeless.

Tenant – Well, all the more reason, my friend! If you're homeless, why on earth would you want to settle here?

Man – You're right...

The man gets up.

Tenant – Thanks for your understanding. But you know what? Deep down, I envy you.

Man – Really?

Tenant – Sometimes, I too would like to be homeless. Not having to go home every night. Not having the same person waiting for me at home.

Man – In that case, could you perhaps let me stay at your place for a night? It would give you a bit of distraction...

Tenant – At my place?

Man – It's so cold outside.

Tenant – Yes, I know; I had to wear my thermal shirt this morning... And despite that, I froze in the office all day.

Man – If I spend the night outside, I'm not sure I'll wake up tomorrow morning.

Tenant – Are you sure you're not being a bit dramatic?

Man – Do you really want to have my death on your conscience?

The tenant hesitates, then takes out a banknote from her pocket.

Tenant – Well, it's your lucky day. Take this and go sleep at a hotel.

Man – Ten euros? How do you expect me to find a hotel room at that price?

Tenant – Okay, here's thirty, and you get out of here, okay? I'm sure you can find a budget hotel or something. You wouldn't want to sleep in a palace either, would you?

Man – It'll do. Thanks, Your Grace.

Tenant – And if you can't find a hotel that will take you in, at least you can buy some cheap wine to keep warm.

Man – You're saving my life. God will repay you...

A woman arrives.

Woman – What are you doing here?

Man – I didn't have the entry code, and I lost your mobile number. Since I knew you'd be arriving soon... But this lady kindly offered me to wait at her place.

Woman – Thank you, that's very kind of you.

The woman is taken aback but doesn't show it.

Tenant – Not at all. Among neighbours, it's only natural.

Woman – It's true, with this cold... Let me introduce you to my brother. He's staying with me for a few days before heading back to Bucharest for a film shoot. He's an actor...

Tenant – Nice to meet you, then.

Man – Performers have always had a bad reputation. In the Middle Ages, they were considered thieves, and they were even refused burial in cemeteries with good Christians.

Woman – Fortunately, we're not in the Middle Ages anymore... I shouldn't say this in front of him, but he's an excellent actor. You'll see; he'll have a great career...

Tenant – I don't doubt it...

Man – Don't bother this lady with that; she's probably eager to get home to her husband.

Tenant – Well then, I'll leave you.

Man – Thanks again.

Tenant – Not at all.

Man – Really nice, isn't she?

Woman – Yes, there's a good atmosphere in this building, it seems.

They exit.

11. Give and Take

The first person arrives. The second follows and, seeing that the other looks a bit unwell, approaches with concern.

One – Are you okay?

Two – I just buried my father.

One – Buried?

Two – Yes, well... I didn't do it myself. I hired specialists. Seems like there's no other way. It's not cheap, by the way.

One – Oh, I see...

Two – Anyway, I've just come from the funeral.

One – I'm truly sorry. Please accept my condolences...

Two – You can keep your condolences. I hated my father.

One – We always have a good reason to hate our fathers.

Two – You know what I find really unbearable at funerals?

One – What?

Two – All those people who aren't even part of the family, whom we've often never seen in our lives before the ceremony, and who, in front of the coffin, start sobbing louder than the deceased's own children. As if to make them feel guilty for not showing more demonstrative grief.

One – You're right... There should be a precedence order. A permissible decibel level based on each person's proximity to the deceased.

Two – If the direct heirs don't feel the need to cry in front of the deceased's coffin, then the others should refrain from doing so, right?

One – Yet, it seems that your father's death didn't leave you entirely indifferent...

Two – Indeed... His passing is tough for me.

One – Despite your differences, you hadn't completely severed ties with him...

Two – No... The last time I saw him was in the judge's office...

One – In the judge's office?

Two – I was about to win the lawsuit I had filed against my father... Now that he's dead, of course, it's going to be much more difficult...

One – Ah, I see...

Two – I'm afraid the case will be closed without resolution.

One – That's worrying. But... why the lawsuit, if I may ask?

Two – It would take a bit long to explain, but basically... I reproach my father, after bringing me into this world, for leaving me completely defenceless in the face of the world's misery...

One – And why not make the same reproach to your mother as well?

Two – I was born of an unknown mother.

One – Of an unknown mother? Well... I didn't even know that was physically possible. In my time... But it's true that nowadays, with new technologies...

Two – I was born in unknown lands, from an undocumented surrogate mother, paid in cash, who preferred to remain anonymous.

One – So, you blamed your father for depriving you of a mother's affection...

Two – Oh no, not at all!

One – Then why sue him for bringing you into this world? You don't seem to have any particular malformations...

Two – Goodness, no.

One – I'd even say you're rather well-made...

Two – Thank you.

One – So, why?

Two – Have you seen the world we live in?

One – Yes, that's true... With all these wars everywhere on the planet. Terrorism. Famine. Climate change...

Two – Not to mention the wealth tax and prostate cancer.

One – You hold your father accountable for bringing you into this valley of tears that is our modern world...

Two – Actually, it's a bit more complicated than that...

One – You're starting to intrigue me.

Two – Before dying, my father bequeathed a large part of his fortune to a foundation that fights world hunger.

One – Ah, yes, that's... That's good.

Two – Yes, but my share of the inheritance is reduced as a result.

One – Of course... But... it's still very generous of him.

Two – Not at all! He did it on purpose to annoy me!

One – What do you mean, to annoy you? World hunger, everyone is against it, right? Don't tell me you're in favour...

Two – I'm telling you he did it solely to disinherit me.

One – Yes, I understand, but... Still... It will benefit people who really need that money.

Two – Exactly! That's why I'm suing him.

One – Pardon?

Two – If he had left his fortune to his plumber or his tax inspector, his intention to harm me would have been clear. But this way, it's particularly cunning, isn't it?

One – Cunning?

Two – By disinheriting me in favour of fighting world hunger, he gives himself the moral high ground, you see! And if I oppose it, I come off as selfish. A daddy's boy who wants to keep eating caviar with his father's inheritance, rather than joyfully renouncing it so that the disinherited can have a bit of rice on their plates.

One – When they have a plate...

Two – Oh no, I won't let it happen!

One – Of course... I mean... I understand... But it might not be easy.

Two – Tell me about it...

One – As you were saying, in front of the judges, you'll have the bad role...

Two – There you go... But I remain confident... I have a good lawyer...

One – And what will you do if you still win the case?

Two – What do you expect me to do? I'll immediately donate that money to the same foundation.

One – Pardon?

Two – I have no choice! If I keep all that cash for myself, I'll be seen as a jerk. That's what you'd think, wouldn't you?

One – Well, yes, obviously...

Two – There you go! When I told you my father was a great pervert, do you understand now?

One – Uh... Yes... I'm trying... But... are you sure it's not a bit complicated, all of this?

Two – And why is that?

One – If this money is ultimately going to that foundation...

Two – Ah yes, but it's not the same at all! This time, I'll be the one giving.

One – You'll be giving... your father's money.

Two – If I inherit it first, it'll be my money! And I will have proven that he did all this not out of generosity but simply to annoy me. And I'll be the benefactor of humanity!

One – Of course... Well... If it can make you feel better too...

Two – Yes... But there's still one thing that bothers me.

One – The death of your father...

Two – No, the fact that even if I win this case, he'll never know...

One – It's always much more difficult to get revenge on people who are already dead.

Two – Yes... And it's much less gratifying...

12. Delivery Notice

The postman slips letters into each mailbox. A tenant arrives.

Tenant – Can't you read?

Postman – Of course! And you?

Tenant – No Junk Mail, it says there on my box!

Postman – Ah, but this isn't junk mail! I am your new postman.

Tenant – Oh, really? And what's this then?

Postman – It's an initiative we've just launched at Post Office. You know, now with the internet, we have to diversify our tasks...

Tenant – So what?

Postman – For those who no longer receive letters, we've decided to distribute royalty-free letters.

Tenant – Royalty-free?

The postman shows what he has in his bag.

Postman – 'Letters from My Windmill,' 'Persian Letters,' 'Letters from Madame de Sévigné'...

Tenant – Why?

Postman – To re-enchant the world! And re-enchant The Post Office! Traditional mail has disappeared, fine. It saves paper. And so, it avoids cutting down trees. But people don't read anymore! And that's terrible, isn't it?

Tenant – Yes, of course.

Postman – Literature is the memory of the world! Wanting to save the forests is perfect. But we must also preserve what constitutes our true wealth! Our cultural heritage – books! Do you know how many letters there are in our alphabet?

Tenant – Approximately 26, right?

Postman – Can you imagine?

Tenant – What?

Postman – With just 26 letters, by combining them, man can express everything.

Tenant – Yes...

Postman – And yet, when I say 26... Do you know which language in the world has the fewest letters?

Tenant – Well, no...

Postman – Rotokas. A language spoken in the Solomon Islands. Its alphabet has only 12 characters.

Tenant – Really?

Postman – A dozen letters to express all of humanity's thoughts.

Tenant – Yes, that's... Do you have mail for me?

Postman – Ten numbers to understand the mechanics of the universe.

Tenant – Can I have my mail?

Postman – And seven notes to compose all the music in the world.

Tenant – So, no mail...

Postman – And what will remain of all this in a few billion years? When the sun, in its grand finale, has reduced us all to ashes?

Tenant – I don't know...

Postman – A few hieroglyphs engraved on stones that haven't melted yet. Some concise remarks like in the early days of writing. Truly, I tell you – the first stammerings of humanity will also be its final breath.

Tenant – Yes...

Postman – When The Post Office is gone, the epitaphs of our ancestors will survive us for a moment. Like a delivery notice. But remember one thing. (*With emphasis*) Only the memory of the music of the spheres will survive us forever.

Tenant – I didn't understand anything...

The End.

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/

https://comediatheque.net/

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