La Comédiathèque

Memoirs of a Suitcase

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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Memoirs of a Suitcase

When life packs its bags...

A comedy in fifteen sketches

Jean-Pierre Martinez

A suitcase runs through fifteen absurd encounters: departures, reunions, dubious deals and unexpected endings. What we take with us — and what we leave behind — is not always what we think.

Cast
31 roles across 15 sketches.

Flexible casting, from 3 to 31 performers of any gender.

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1. No Audience

Two characters stand on either side of a suitcase. They seem to be waiting.

One – Do you think they'll come?

Two – Who?

One – People!

Two – People? You mean the audience...

One – The spectators, I mean!

Two – Oh, yes. The spectators...

One – We can't put on a show if there's no audience.

Two – No... Which is why we're not performing, of course.

One – So we agree we're not performing?

Two – Are you performing?

One – No...

Two – There you are. That's what I said. We can't perform when there's nobody here.

One – Okay... But why are we here, then?

Two – And who are we?

One – Nobody...

Two – Two characters in search of an audience.

A pause.

One – Why wouldn't they come?

Two – Oh, you know, the audience... They always seem to have a good excuse not to come to the theatre.

One – You're right. When it comes to excuses, their imagination knows no bounds.

Two – There's a transport strike...

One – It's a long holiday weekend...

Two – There's a football match on television...

One – There was just a terrorist attack...

Two – There could be a terrorist attack...

One – The weather's lovely. We'd rather go out for a walk...

Two – The weather's awful. We'd rather stay at home...

One – It's not recommended by the critics, so I won't go.

Two – It's recommended by the critics, so it must be boring.

One – It's too expensive. I'd rather go to the cinema.

Two – It's practically free, it must be awful.

One – I'd have loved to come, but I've got a wedding.

Two – A funeral.

One – A baptism.

Two – A first communion.

One – Religion has always done a lot of harm to the theatre.

Two – When it comes to finding a good alibi, they never lack ideas.

One – If only they had as many ideas about everything else...

A pause.

Two – We're not asking for much, after all.

One – We're not expecting to fill an enormous auditorium.

Two – Just a little venue like this.

One – Even if it’s only half full.

The second character suddenly notices the audience.

Two – And who are they?

One – Where?

Two – There, in the dark.

One – I can't see anything.

Two – Over there, way in the back.

One – Oh, you're right... I didn't see them come in...

Two – Yeah, me neither...

One – We're so out of practice.

Two – Can you believe it? They came anyway!

One – There aren't many of them, but they've come.

Two – They've braved strikes, storms and bad reviews...

One – We should give them a medal.

Two – Absolutely. They're heroes.

One – Yes... If only we had known...

A pause.

Two – And now, what do we do?

One – What do you mean, what do we do?

Two – Now that we've got spectators! We have to do something.

One – Well, I haven't prepared anything. Have you?

Two – Neither have I.

One – We didn't expect this.

Two – It's so sudden...

One – We'd given up hope...

Two – After all this time.

One – It's their fault too...

Two – They could have warned us.

One – You can't just turn up at the theatre without warning.

Two – It's simply not done.

A pause.

One – Perhaps some of them booked tickets.

Two – You think?

One – It's possible.

Two – Well, nobody tells us anything!

One – If we have nothing to show them, they'll be disappointed.

Two – It'll be another good excuse for them not to come next time.

One – We could, I don't know...

Two – We could sing something for them.

One – Can you sing?

Two – Yes... But I don't know a single song. Do you?

One – Yes, I know some.

Two – Well, go on, then.

One – I know plenty of songs... I just can’t sing.

A pause.

Two – I’m beginning to wonder whether we should have come at all...

One – You’re right... We should have made up an excuse not to come, like everyone else.

Two – Perhaps we'd better pack up and go.

The other looks around and notices the suitcase.

One – At least we've already got something to pack it in.

They begin to slip away quietly.

2. Pay by Instalments

One character is at home. The doorbell rings. The character goes to answer it.

One – Yes?

Two – Hello! Could you spare me five minutes?

The first returns with the second, who is carrying a suitcase.

One – Come in for a quick moment, but I'm pressed for time.

Two – Oh? What could be so urgent? On a Sunday... The Lord's Day...

One – Well... There's always stuff to do...

Two – Of course... But you won't regret opening your door to me.

One – You're not going to talk to me about the Bible, are you?

Two – Don't worry, I wasn't sent by God. Quite the opposite, in fact... Let me introduce myself. I'm the Devil.

One – You gave me a fright... I thought you were a Jehovah's Witness. They usually come in pairs, so I let my guard down...

Two – What I have to offer you is much more interesting... And I always work alone...

One – All right... But let me tell you straight away, I don't need anything.

Two – You never know... At least let me tell you what I can offer.

One – My favourite soap opera's about to start, and I've got to restart the TV box. The internet connection here is terrible.

Two – I promise not to take up too much of your time.

One – All right... I'm listening...

Two – I'd like to offer you a pact.

One – A pack, you mean?

Two – No, no. A pact.

One – What exactly does that involve?

The second character opens the suitcase and shows what is inside.

Two – Love, fame and beauty. All yours.

One – Oh, you know, at my age...

Two – That's an optional extra, but... if you'd like, I can throw in youth as well.

One – Eternal youth?

Two – Eternal? Let's not exaggerate... Is anything in this world eternal?

One – You're right... These days it's more a question of planned adolescence.

Two – Planned obsolescence, I think you mean.

One – Love, fame and beauty... Sounds like it'll cost me an arm and a leg.

Two – Not at all, dear customer. That's where my offer is positively diabolical.

One – How much are we talking about?

Two – It won't cost you an arm, I can promise that... Just your soul.

One – Oh, really?

Two – Don't worry. You can pay in monthly instalments.

One – I'll need some time to think this over.

Two – Selling your soul to the Devil is quite common these days.

One – If you say so...

Two – And what would you do with it anyway?

One – What?

Two – Your soul!

One – I suppose I haven't been using it much lately...

Two – So why not trade it for something useful?

One – On the other hand... You never know... I might still need it.

Two – Well, since you're hesitating, let me tell you about our special offer. But hurry: it's only available for twenty-four hours...

One – What's the special offer?

The second character takes a catalogue out of the suitcase.

Two – As a welcome gift, I'll throw in a high-speed television subscription with 563 channels, absolutely free... for three months.

One – I see...

Two – That way you won't miss your favourite soap opera because of a bad internet connection.

One – And for the rest, I can pay in instalments?

Two – We'll take a little bit every month. You won't even notice.

One – Can I take a look at the contract?

The second character takes a contract out of the suitcase and hands it to the first.

Two – It's all there in writing... In rather small print, mind you, and it's fairly technical.

One – So I see... And I can't find my glasses...

Two – You trust me, don't you? Just sign at the bottom of the pact...

One – Fine...

Two – And don't forget to initial every page...

One – I hope it won't take long. My soap opera's about to start...

Two – Don't worry. With your new box, you can watch it whenever you like! Over and over. For eternity. And absolutely free. For three months...

One – All right... Where do I sign?

3. On the Grass

One character is there. Another arrives carrying a suitcase.

One – Where are you going with that suitcase?

Two – Nowhere... I just bought it. It was on sale.

One – Going away, are you?

Two – No.

One – Then why did you buy a suitcase?

Two – I told you. It was on sale.

One – Right... *(A pause.)* You're getting worse.

Two – A suitcase always comes in handy, doesn't it?

One – What for? If you're not going anywhere.

Two – Where would I go?

One – I don't know... You're the one who bought a suitcase. Are you stupid or something?

Two – Can't we just talk?

One – About what?

Two – If you had a suitcase, where would you go?

One – If I had a suitcase?

Two – Do you have a suitcase?

One – What the hell am I supposed to do with a suitcase?

Two – You could go somewhere...

One – Where?

Two – I don't know...

One – Anyway, I don't have a suitcase.

Two – Want me to lend you mine?

One – What for?

Two – In case you feel like going somewhere.

The other stares in disbelief.

One – Where is this going, exactly?

Two – No idea. But at least we've already got the suitcase.

One – Aren't we fine here?

Two – Yeah, it's all right... But we don't know what it's like anywhere else.

One – Elsewhere?

Two – Maybe it's better.

One – Elsewhere might be better?

Two – Well, yes! Why not? We've never been there. We've never even left this place.

One – Yeah, well... You know what they say...

Two – What?

One – The grass is always greener on the other side.

Two – There's hardly any grass on this side.

The other looks around.

One – Yeah, that's right.

Two – We could go where there's grass.

One – In the countryside, you mean?

Two – Where there's grass.

One – Why?

Two – To lie down in it. I can't remember the last time I lay in the grass.

One – They sell grass here, but it's not for lying on.

Two – That would be too expensive.

One – There's a patch of grass outside the town hall.

Two – Yeah... But there are lots of dog droppings.

One – Yeah... And we're not even allowed to roll around in it.

Two – Roll around in what?

One – In the lawn!

Two – Roll around in the lawn?

One – Does that even make sense? 'Roll around in the lawn'?

Two – See? We can't do it, and apparently we can't even say it. Shall we go?

One – Where?

Two – To the countryside!

One – The countryside... Where does the countryside start anyway?

Two – Wherever the suburban trains stop, I suppose.

One – Why not? We'll go right to the end of the line and see if that's the countryside.

Two – And what do we pack in the suitcase?

One – What do you want to put in it? We're only taking the train...

Two – True. If we find something interesting there, we can always put it in the suitcase.

One – Which line shall we take?

Two – I don't know. The one heading south, perhaps...

One – The southbound line, then.

Two – To the end of the line.

One – Well... We'd better be off, then.

Two – I'd say we'd better pack our bags.

They leave.

4. Not Exactly the Bahamas

One character is there. Another arrives with a suitcase.

One – So, this is it? You're really leaving?

Two – That's right...

One – You really can't stay a little longer?

Two – I'd love to, but I honestly can't...

One – What a shame... Such a short visit. You'll come back and see us, won't you?

Two – Of course...

One – You enjoyed yourself, at least?

Two – Absolutely! Very much...

One – Good, good... It's not exactly the Bahamas, but still...

Two – No.

One – What do you mean, no?

Two – I mean... no, it's not the Bahamas.

One – You don't think this place is the Bahamas?

Two – Well... no, because we're nowhere near the Bahamas...

One – No, quite... We certainly aren't! Do you like it here?

Two – Very much, yes.

One – And have you ever been to the Bahamas?

Two – Yes... I went last year.

One – Really? Whatever took you there?

Two – People keep going on about the Bahamas.

One – Do they?

Two – 'It's not the Bahamas' this, 'it's not the Bahamas' that. I wanted to see for myself.

One – See what?

Two – Whether the Bahamas really were the Bahamas, as everyone keeps saying.

One – Oh, I see.

Two – Even you said just now that this place isn't the Bahamas.

One – Well, it's a fact.

Two – Yes... But you made it sound as though the Bahamas must be better than here.

One – It's just an expression.

Two – Even so...

One – Well? What did you find?

Two – Find what?

One – What are the Bahamas like?

Two – Well... Honestly?

One – Honestly.

Two – Not as good as here.

One – There you are! Just what I was saying. The Bahamas aren't here.

Two – You said the opposite...

One – The opposite?

Two – That here isn't the Bahamas.

One – Same thing, isn't it? Here isn't the Bahamas, and the Bahamas aren't here.

Two – You're right.

One – Here is here, and the Bahamas are the Bahamas.

Two – Exactly.

One – You mustn't compare apples and oranges.

Two – Except apples aren't the same as oranges.

One – Obviously. Apples are apples, and oranges are oranges.

Two – So here is the apple, and the Bahamas are the orange.

A pause.

One – Perhaps you'd better get going, don't you think?

Two – You're right. I'll miss my flight otherwise.

One – Where did you say you were from?

Two – Slovakia.

One – Ah, yes... Now that really isn't the Bahamas.

Two – No...

One – Well, have a good trip!

Two – Thank you!

5. Excess Baggage

One character is there. Another enters.

One – Good morning, I would like to buy a suitcase, please.

Two – Certainly, sir... Where will you be taking it?

One – For a specific destination? What does it matter?

Two – Ah, but it makes all the difference!

One – A suitcase is a suitcase, isn't it?

Two – Not at all, sir! There are all sorts of suitcases. One for a holiday is quite different from one for moving out after a separation... or for leaving your country to go into exile.

One – Into exile?

Two – Quite... And there are different kinds of exile. Tax exile, for example, has very little in common with economic or political exile.

One – Right... Let's say it's for a holiday, then.

Two – Leisure trip or business trip?

One – Leisure.

Two – Travelling alone or with someone?

One – But really, that's none of your business!

Two – Forgive me, but if it's for two people, that makes quite a difference to the size. Especially if you're sharing with a woman... In that case I'd recommend a trunk.

One – It's just my stuff in this suitcase. My wife left me. We recently got divorced...

Two – I'm very sorry your wife packed her bags and left you...

One – Thanks...

Two – How long is your trip?

One – Just one week.

Two – The destination?

One – I feel like I'm already at customs...

Two – A trip to a tropical country calls for a far more robust, easy-to-clean suitcase than a trip to Switzerland.

One – Switzerland?

Two – Are you going to Switzerland?

One – I never said that!

Two – Well, if you're carrying a lot of cash, you'll need something more secure than if you're just packing socks and underwear.

One – That's ridiculous! Who says I'm going to Switzerland to hide my savings?

Two – Just a guess...

One – I'm going to an island for my daughter's wedding, if you must know.

Two – Civil or religious ceremony?

One – Religious.

Two – Which religion?

One – Seriously, what does that have to do with the suitcase?

Two – Nothing. This time, it was just curiosity. My apologies.

One – Fine...

Two – So: an island, one week, travelling alone, honeymoon... I mean, travelling to a wedding... Are you going by plane or by boat?

One – Does it make a difference for the suitcase?

Two – For an elegant cruise I wouldn't recommend the same style as for a simple flight. Unless you're flying business class, of course.

One – I'm flying. Economy class.

Two – Cabin baggage or checked luggage?

One – Checked. Is that all?

Two – That's all for now... and I think I have just the thing you need.

The second character leaves.

One – I thought we'd never get there...

The other returns with a completely ordinary suitcase.

One – You asked all those questions just to offer me this suitcase?

Two – We do our best to meet our customers' individual needs.

One – What's so special about it? What makes it particularly suitable for travelling to an island for my daughter's wedding?

Two – Nothing. For such an ordinary trip, an ordinary suitcase will do.

One – But why this particular one?

Two – Because it's the only model we have left.

One – The only one? You must be joking! Then why ask me all those questions?

Two – I wanted to make sure you weren't a special kind of customer... But apparently you're not.

One – Special? You mean someone taking a cruise on the Titanic and needing an unsinkable suitcase?

Two – Look, are you taking the suitcase or not? I haven't got all day.

One – You're lucky I haven't got time to try another shop. I'll take it.

Two – Very well. Cheque or cash?

One – Cheque.

Two – Which bank?

6. Keeping Cool

Two characters sit side by side. The second has a suitcase on their lap.

One – Have you been here before?

Two – Yes, but it was a long time ago. And you?

One – No, it's my first time. What did you see?

Two – Oh, I don't remember very well... It was with... What's his name again... He's a very famous actor...

One – Oh, yes...

Two – I think he passed away.

One – Oh, he died?

Two – I think so.

One – What a shame. What did he die of?

Two – Oh, you know... He wasn't young. And he was very ill...

One – That's sad for his family, all the same. Did he have a family?

Two – Yes, I imagine so. Like everyone else.

One – Well... And so, he... he was very famous...

Two – Oh, very famous... You saw him a lot in films. Then mostly on television. Eventually it was mainly theatre. And towards the end you never saw him at all.

One – Not at all?

Two – He'd rather faded into obscurity, as they say.

One – It happens, unfortunately.

Two – Yes, everyone had forgotten him. Even me, as you can see.

One – Such is life.

Two – Yes...

One – At our age, you can't tell whether famous people are being forgotten or we're just losing our memories...

A pause.

Two – What does 'flight mode' mean?

One – What?

Two – The usher told us earlier to switch our phones off completely. 'Even in flight mode,' she said.

One – Oh yes, that's right.

Two – What does that mean?

One – No idea... I never fly. Do you?

Two – Me neither. Besides, I don't have a mobile phone.

One – Me neither.

Two – That way, we won't risk forgetting to turn it off.

A pause.

One – Did you bring your suitcase with you?

Two – I never part with it. Since...

One – Since what?

Two – I left it on a train once. The bomb squad came. I got there just in time. They were about to blow it up!

One – No?

Two – The fright I got... Imagine if I left it at home, and the police film-buff unit turned up with their sniffer dogs at my front door, and then the bomb squad broke the door down to blow it up!

One – You're right. Best keep it with you... *(A pause.)* It does smell a bit strange, though, that suitcase...

Two – You think so?

One – Shouldn't it have started by now?

Two – Yes, you're right...

One – They asked us to turn off our mobile phones a while ago.

Two – Or perhaps it has already begun.

One – How can it have started? Nothing's happening.

Two – You know, with modern theatre...

One – Do you think this is modern theatre?

Two – I don't know... The local council paid for it...

One – That's why I came too. I didn't realise it would be experimental theatre.

Two – Do you think there'll be an interval?

One – Do they still have intervals?

Two – I don't know... Depends how long the play is, I suppose.

One – Do you think it's long enough to need an interval?

Two – It didn't say anything in the programme.

One – It's been going on quite a while, hasn't it?

Two – We've certainly been waiting for it to start for a long time.

One – You don't suppose we both fell asleep?

Two – At the same time? Surely not.

One – Perhaps it's already the interval...

Two – Or maybe the whole thing is already finished.

One – It can't be over when it hasn't even begun!

Two – With modern theatre, you never know...

One – So, what's the plan?

Two – Let's wait a little longer... It would be a shame to leave now...

One – You're right.

A pause.

Two – If only the ushers sold ice creams.

One – Isn't that at the cinema?

Two – Oh, I'm not sure...

One – Neither am I.

Two – I'm not even sure they sell ice creams in cinemas any more.

One – So imagine the chances in a theatre...

Two – It's a pity. I'm sure more people would come to the theatre if they sold ice creams.

One – That's quite possible...

Two – Let's wait a little longer...

One – And then, if it still doesn't start, we can go grab some ice cream.

Two – Why not? We should have gone straight there...

One – Think how much ice cream we could buy for the price of a ticket.

Two – Well, the council paid for our tickets.

One – Yes... The council... They should have given us ice creams instead...

Two – Right, that's enough.

They both stand up.

One – Come on, let's get out of here.

Two – Let's go and have a couple of ice creams.

One – A couple?

Two – Two scoops!

One – Oh yes... And don't forget your suitcase...

Two – You're right... Otherwise they'll send for the bomb squad.

They leave.

7. Second Chance

The first character stands at the edge of the stage, holding a suitcase and leaning forward to look down. The second arrives in a hurry.

Two – You're not going to jump on me, are you?

One – Uh... No... Not if I can avoid it...

Two – Sorry, I meant... You're not about to jump, are you?

One – Oh... Uh... No... Not if I can help it...

Two – That's a shame... I mean, that's good!

An awkward silence.

One – Do I really look that desperate?

Two – I don't know... And me?

One – Yes, a bit... You seem to have come from...

Two – I just left my dentist's office.

One – And it didn't go well.

Two – Sort of... He stood me up.

One – You're dating your dentist?

Two – No, I mean... he cancelled my appointment.

One – I see... And why was that?

Two – He had a toothache.

One – Oh, really? Well, I've always wondered where dentists go when they have a toothache.

Two – And hairdressers, where do they get their hair done?

One – You know what they say... The shoemaker's children go barefoot.

Two – As a result, I always have a toothache... What about you?

One – No, my teeth are fine... In fact, they're about the only part of me that is.

Two – So, that's why you were thinking about...

One – Thinking about...?

Two – You know... jumping.

One – I hadn't got that far... I was just checking whether it was high enough for me to be reasonably sure of dying. I wouldn't want to end up merely injured...

Two – Imagine being depressed, trying to end it all, and ending up paralysed.

One – That's even more depressing.

Two – Exactly.

One – That's why I preferred to check.

Two – You were looking for a suitable spot, then.

One – Exactly.

Two – And?

One – What?

Two – Is it high enough?

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

Two – I don't have much experience of this...

The second character comes closer and looks down.

One – Watch your step, though...

Two – You're right. What a stupid accident that would be.

One – So?

Two – It's not that high... Maybe if you took a headfirst dive...

One – And it's grass.

Two – Pity it's not concrete.

One – Grass is quite soft. Especially after heavy rain.

Two – We haven't had much luck with the weather lately.

One – No, it's really depressing.

Two – Whatever you do, you'd better get it right. You won't get a second chance.

One – Excuse me?

Two – When you shoot yourself, if you miss with the first shot, you can always make up for it with the second. Just press the trigger again. But when you jump into the void...

One – That's true.

Two – Picture climbing back up the stairs with a broken leg and a fractured skull just to jump again.

One – No way...

Two – They say you can't die of embarrassment, but there must be limits...

One – Right, I'd rather go out with some dignity.

Two – Well, I'd better go. Sorry, but my tooth is really hurting.

One – Thanks for the advice, though.

Two – Don't mention it. Do you know if there's a late-night pharmacy nearby? For my toothache...

One – Yes, I think... I'll come with you... Maybe I'll try medication instead...

Two – Good idea... The advantage of pills is that if you get it wrong...

One – You can always have another go...

They exit together.

8. Seventh Heaven

One character is there. Another enters carrying a suitcase.

Two – Hello. I'm here for... Well, you know...

The other doesn't seem to know.

One – Oh, yes, assisted dying! No, it's just that... You'll laugh, but we also take sperm donations. *(The other does not laugh.)* Sorry, I should have guessed from your expression that you weren't here for...

Two – No...

One – Also, for sperm donation, people usually don't bring a suitcase.

Two – No.

The first character hands the second a form.

One – Here. You need to fill in this form. Let me check I haven't mixed it up with the other one... No, this is the right one... Name, address, telephone...

Two – Phone?

One – Well, you don't have to give us one... It's not as though we'll be ringing you afterwards... Anyway... Social security number, someone to contact in the event of non-death...

Two – In the event of non-death? Are you sure?

One – It's a hundred per cent reliable in principle, but... nobody's perfect. Have you brought a cheque and a photo ID?

Two – Here... *(The second character hands over the documents.)* It's not a very recent photograph, but...

The other looks at the photo.

One – Ah yes, indeed... But how old were you?

Two – Six months.

One – Well, they didn't specify a recent photograph. Were you referred by someone?

Two – Excuse me?

One – If you were referred by someone who's already used our services, half the fee goes to their family. Didn't you know?

Two – No.

One – What a shame. You could have done the same for your family. Don't you know anyone else who might be thinking of ending it all?

Two – I don't know...

One – It's a bit late for that now. Maybe next time... I mean... There's just a little test to do...

The first character hands over another form.

Two – Don't tell me you need an above-average IQ to qualify for assisted dying?

One – Not at all. Everyone has the right to end their days. Even idiots. We just need to make sure you're fully aware of what you're doing.

Two – Right...

One – Just tick the right boxes. It's really not difficult. We haven't failed anyone yet.

The second character studies the test and starts ticking the answers.

Two – Oh, I see... What's one plus one? What colour is a white horse? Is there life after death?

One – You can have one lifeline.

Two – In that case, I'll come back and give you the answer to the last question later.

One – Just so you know, we don't offer any after-sales service!

The second character hands back the completed test.

Two – Is that all for the formalities?

One – Almost... Have you written a letter explaining your lack of motivation?

Two – No...

One – Just joking, don't worry.

Two – So, what's next?

One – Everything's in order. I'll announce your arrival...

Two – Announce me? You mean... up there?

One – Yes, if you like... It's on the seventh...

Two – Seventh heaven?

One – Seventh floor! The department in charge of...

Two – Oh, sorry.

The first character picks up the telephone.

One – Yes, Chris, your appointment's arrived... All right, I'll ask them to wait... *(The first character puts down the phone.)* We're running a bit late. Winter's our busiest season, and the weather this year... It's so depressing...

Two – I've got all the time in the world...

One – Not me, I'm afraid... I've got a lot to do... But first I'm going to the coffee machine. I didn't get my morning coffee; my alarm didn't go off. Shall I bring you one?

Two – One what?

One – A coffee!

Two – Sure, why not...

One – Don't worry. If you're no longer here when I get back, I'll drink it to your health... I mean, I'll drink it myself.

Two – Thanks for everything.

One – You're very welcome.

Two – No, no, I mean it. You're the last person I'll see before I go. So at least I won't have anything to regret.

One – Thank you. And... don't forget your suitcase.

9. Goodbye... or Nothing

Two characters face the audience, without looking at one another. The first has a suitcase.

One – Well... All good things must come to an end.

Two – Yes... Sooner or later, we all have to part.

One – So I'd better be going...

Two – Right.

One – Well then... goodbye.

Two – Yes.

One – Although, when I say goodbye...

Two – Yes, there's not much chance we'll see each other again.

One – And if we do...

Two – Perhaps farewell would be better.

One – Quite... Farewell.

Two – There we are...

One – Although... goodbye...

Two – What?

One – Do you believe in God?

Two – In what?

One – God!

Two – Oh! Er... Not really.

One – Then perhaps even “goodbye” isn’t the right word. It comes from “God be with you”.

Two – No...

One – So what should we say if we don't believe in God?

Two – I don't know...

One – What do you believe in?

Two – I don't know... Nothing.

One – Then perhaps we should say... 'nothingbye'.

Two – Nothingbye?

One – Instead of goodbye, we could say nothingbye.

Two – Yes, I suppose we could...

One – But in that case, is there any point saying anything at all?

Two – True...

A pause.

One – Well then, I'll go. Without saying anything.

Two – What's the point, anyway?

The first character starts to leave, then hesitates.

One – Can we at least give each other a kiss?

Two – If you like...

They kiss. The first character leaves with the suitcase.

Two – Nothingbye...

10. Unattended Baggage

A suitcase stands onstage. One character enters, glances at it and waits. A second character arrives and greets the first.

Two – Hello...

One – Hello.

The second character also starts waiting.

Two – Have you been waiting long?

One – About ten minutes.

Two – Don't tell me they're on strike again.

One – I don't think so.

Two – Or perhaps it's a 'passenger incident', as they call it...

One – Perhaps.

Two – An incident... What they really mean is an accident. Well, a suicide... Someone jumping under a...

One – Oh, I see...

Two – They don't want to upset people. Instead of saying someone was cut in two, they call it a passenger incident. Nobody dares call things by their proper names any more... A blind person is 'visually impaired', someone sleeping rough is 'experiencing homelessness', and a drunk is 'alcohol-dependent'... In the old days...

One – I'm not going far. I'll walk.

The first character starts to leave.

Two – Excuse me!

One – Yes?

Two – You're forgetting your suitcase.

One – My suitcase? Oh, no. That isn't mine.

Two – It isn't yours?

One – No. I thought it was yours.

Two – Certainly not. In fact, it was here when I arrived.

One – That's true... I thought you'd just stepped away for a moment. To go... So it isn't yours.

Two – No... And you're quite sure it isn't yours?

One – Of course I'm sure! Why would I say it wasn't mine if it was?

Two – Who knows? People leave suitcases lying around everywhere. For no apparent reason. Have you ever taken a train from a major city station?

One – No...

Two – Half the time the departure's delayed because someone has left a suitcase in a carriage and everyone has to wait for the bomb squad.

One – Left it? Or forgotten it?

Two – Who can tell?

One – You don't abandon a suitcase the way you abandon a dog.

Two – Then there's the cinema unit to wait for...

One – The cinema unit?

Two – The bomb disposal experts! With their sniffer dogs.

One – Oh, you mean the canine unit. I've never seen dogs working in a cinema.

Two – Except guide dogs, perhaps.

One – What's a blind person doing in a cinema?

Two – True... Although they do have audio description now.

One – And I've never seen film buffs sniffing for explosives, either. But I think we're getting sidetracked...

Two – So what should we do?

One – What do you expect us to do?

Two – We can't just leave and abandon this suitcase.

One – But it isn't ours! We can hardly be accused of abandoning it...

Two – Now we know it's an unattended bag, we have a responsibility.

One – A responsibility?

Two – We're talking about an abandoned suitcase!

One – I've got better things to do... Besides, you're the one who noticed it was abandoned.

Two – But you saw it first! And you were about to walk away and abandon it!

One – I keep telling you, it's not my suitcase! You can't abandon a suitcase that's already been abandoned! You just leave it where it is.

Two – So if you found an abandoned child, you'd leave them there because they weren't yours?

One – A suitcase isn't a child!

Two – Maybe not. It's much more dangerous.

One – Dangerous?

Two – If it's packed with explosives and the owner deliberately left it here.

One – Statistically speaking, very few unattended bags on trains actually contain explosives.

Two – True... But it can happen.

One – So you think we should call the police?

Two – I think it's our duty.

A third character arrives and notices the suitcase.

Three – Ah! My suitcase! I knew I must have left it here before getting on the...

The third character picks up the suitcase and starts to leave.

One – Well, at least we've done our duty.

Two – Yes...

One – I think I'll walk.

Two – Yes, me too.

They leave in opposite directions.

11. The Spitting Image of His Son

One character is there. Another enters and starts staring at the first, discreetly at first and then quite openly.

One – Do we know each other?

Two (offering a hand) – Anthony!

One – Anthony? But my name isn't Anthony...

Two – Anthony! I'm Anthony! We were in a drama class together.

One – A drama class?

Two – Don't you do theatre?

One – Well, I used to... But that was ages ago. And not for very long.

Two – At the community centre.

One – Yes...

Two – The local amateur drama group.

One – Yes, that's right...

Two – We rehearsed a scene from Molière together. 'The little cat has died.'

One – The little cat has died?

Two – I played the cat.

One – Seriously?

Two – No, I'm joking. I played Agnès.

One – Agnès?

Two – The teacher was a bit eccentric...

One – Probably why I didn't stay very long. I don't remember acting in that scene.

Two – Of course you did! The School for Wives!

One – Well, it clearly made an impression on you.

Two – You do remember me, don't you?

One – Oh yes, yes, of course... But... well...

Two – None of us are getting any younger...

One – You haven't changed.

Two – Me? No, I'm fine... But you, though...

One – Me?

Two – I almost didn't recognise you.

One – It was a few years ago.

Two – Even so. It's incredible.

One – What is?

Two – How much you've aged.

One – Thank you...

Two – Of course, everyone changes a bit over time. Even I've matured a little. But you...

One – Me?

Two – Bloody hell... You really have aged!

One – Right... Well, I hope you'll get over it.

Two – Yes, yes, sorry... It's just so strange seeing you like this.

One – I can imagine.

Two – And you really don't think I've changed?

One – Sorry, but... are you absolutely sure we did drama together?

Two – Positive. I've got a great memory for faces. Otherwise I could never have recognised you. You've aged so much...

One – At the community centre, you say?

Two – That's right... The little cat has died...

One – Ah... It's coming back to me now.

Two – What is?

One – I tried the class because my son had signed up.

Two – Your son?

One – Fred. You probably did that scene with him.

Two – But aren't you Fred?

One – Fred's my son. He's your age. I only went to the class for two weeks, long enough to discover drama wasn't really for me. And being in a drama class with your own son... So I left.

Two – I must have joined just then. I was on the waiting list... And when a place became available...

One – Exactly. You did that scene with Fred, my son. I know we look alike, but still...

Two – I thought it was strange. How could anyone age so much in five years? So how old are you, anyway?

One – I could be your father...

Two – Well... To be fair, you don't look it...

12. The Great Leap

The first character, who may be ill or elderly, stands at the edge of the stage as if preparing to jump. They have a suitcase. The second character, who may be a priest or a nurse, holds their hand and gently urges them forwards.

Two – So, ready to take the plunge?

One – Yes, well...

Two – If you're not ready yet, just say so.

One – No, no. I'm ready, but...

Two – Because if you're not... There's still time. We're not in a rush.

One – How much time?

Two – How much? I don't know... A good five minutes.

One – Five minutes?

Two – We've got time, but... not all the time in the world.

One – Put yourself in my place.

Two – I'd rather not, actually. But you'll see, you won't feel a thing. And afterwards you'll feel much better...

One – I'll see?

Two – Sorry?

One – You said 'you'll see'.

Two – Ah, yes... Well, no, that's true, you probably won't see anything either...

One – Then why say 'you'll see'?

Two – It's just an expression! It's not easy to describe... or explain...

One – The truth is, you haven't a clue.

Two – No...

The first character is still reluctant to jump.

One – Do you think there's something at the bottom? *(The other looks doubtful.)* Do you think there even is a bottom?

Two – You think there might not be?

One – Now you're the one asking questions? I thought you were here to reassure me... To explain everything.

Two – Yes, but... You have a point. Actually, I don't know any more than you do. In a way, you'll find out before I do...

One – But I won't be able to climb back up and tell you.

Two – I'm not sure I want to know ahead of time...

One – A bottomless pit...

Two – Is that possible?

One – According to Newton's law of universal gravitation, the entire universe is forever falling in on itself. Existence is a continuous fall. A perpetual collapse. We spend our whole lives falling. I fall, therefore I am...

Two – Being born is a leap into the unknown.

One – A leap into the void, certainly...

Two – They say cats have nine lives. And they always land on their feet.

One – What's that got to do with anything?

Two – Nothing... But when you've got to go...

One – Would you jump in my place?

Two – One day I'll have to take the plunge myself. But... I'm in no hurry.

One – Philosophy in general, and religion in particular, shouldn't be an obscurantist alternative to science, but a way of getting ahead of it through intuitions that can then be tested or disproved. Believers should be pioneers. Not the people who turn out the lights as they leave.

Two – True... Are you ready now?

One – Besides, in ancient Greece there was originally no dividing line between science and philosophy. Philosophers were mathematicians too. Or the other way round.

Two – Really? I didn't know that...

One – 'Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here.' That's what was written over the entrance to the Academy.

Two – The Academy of Fine Arts?

One – The school founded by Plato!

Two – Oh, of course...

One – It was only afterwards that everything fell apart.

Two – Gravity, presumably. Are you going to jump on your own, or would you rather I pushed you?

One – I'm going, I'm going... I feel as though I'm about to go skydiving.

Two – Yes... Except you haven't got a parachute...

One – Or bungee jumping.

Two – Except there's no bungee cord.

One – Or stepping off a stool with a noose around my neck.

Two – Except there's no rope either. You're just going to jump and hit the bottom.

One – In that case I'd rather there weren't a bottom. Why do I have to jump, anyway?

Two – Remember when you were little and got to the top of a playground slide after climbing the last step?

One – What about it?

Two – Once you're at the top, you have to go down. To make room for the people pushing up behind you.

One – Right... Do you think there's a staircase back up?

Two – Ah, my friend... That's where science ends... and faith begins.

The second character pushes the first off the edge of the stage, representing the edge of the abyss.

13. Puncture Cover

One character is there. Another enters carrying a suitcase.

Two – Hello. I booked a hire vehicle online...

The second character hands over a document, which the first examines briefly.

One – Very good... May I see your driving licence?

The other hands over a licence.

Two – Here you are...

One – This is a boat licence.

Two – Oh, sorry.

The second takes back the boat licence and hands over a driving licence.

One – Right... So you'd like to hire... a hearse. Is that correct?

Two – Yes, that's right.

One – Very well... And for how long?

Two – One day should be enough.

One – To accompany a loved one to their final resting place, I presume?

Two – Yes, in a manner of speaking...

One – In a manner of speaking?

Two – Actually, it's for me.

One – I see... And where will you be driving from...?

Two – From my house to the cemetery. Since I've chosen a flat-pack coffin, I thought that hiring a hearse and driving it myself...

One – Of course...

Two – I did consider getting a taxi, but then...

One – Right. So I take it you won't need the unlimited mileage option?

Two – I don't think so.

One – I see you haven't taken out our Peace of Mind Breakdown Cover either...

Two – I... no... What's that?

One – Well... If the vehicle breaks down, we take care of everything. And if necessary, we'll provide a courtesy vehicle free of charge. Or rather... a courtesy hearse.

Two – I... I don't know... It's only five kilometres. The risk must be fairly small...

One – Ah, but breakdowns can happen anywhere... And you could have an accident.

Two – An accident? While driving myself to my own funeral?

One – That really would be unfortunate, I admit...

Two – Unless it was a fatal accident, of course.

One – Or you could simply get a puncture...

Two – A puncture?

One – The cover isn't compulsory, but it would be safer.

Two – Don't tell me the spare wheel is an optional extra too!

One – No, of course not... At least, I don't think so... Well, it's up to you...

Two – I think I'll take my chances.

One – In that case, here are the keys.

The second character takes the keys.

Two – Very good.

One – All that remains is to wish you a pleasant journey.

Two – Thank you.

One – And... drive carefully.

The other leaves with the suitcase.

14. Like a Prison Door

Two characters. The second is closing a suitcase.

One – So, today's the big day?

Two – Yes... The hour of freedom has finally come.

One – Forty years...

Two – Practically a life sentence.

One – It's inhuman. Whatever the crime, no one deserves that.

Two – And I'm innocent, what's more.

One – We all say that...

Two – How much time have you got left?

One – Twenty-five years, seven months and three days.

Two – Have you remembered the leap years?

One – I hate leap years...

Two – I'm beginning to appreciate them a little more.

One – So what will you do with your freedom?

Two – I don't know. I'm not used to it any more...

One – You're not going to do anything stupid, are you?

Two – Like what?

One – Something that would land you back here.

Two – No, don't worry.

One – You won't forget us, will you?

Two – Of course not.

One – I'm not expecting you to come back and visit.

Two – You're right. It would be too painful for both of us.

One – I'll miss you.

Two – And I'll miss you... Though I'd rather we'd met somewhere else.

One – What time exactly are you being released?

Two – Five o'clock.

One – Is someone coming to collect you, or...?

Two – No one's collecting me. I'll take my things and get on the underground. On my own. Like a grown-up.

One – Well, as long as you've got your health...

Two – Yes...

One – Forty years, and it all fits into that battered old suitcase. Can you believe it?

Two – Yes... I arrived with a small suitcase. And I'm leaving with the same one.

One – Sure you haven't forgotten anything?

Two – I'll leave you the coffee machine...

One – That's kind of you.

Two – From now on, I'll have my coffee in the café round the corner.

One – Lucky you...

Two – Unfortunately, I'll probably be drinking it alone. After all this time, I don't know anyone any more.

One – Are you sure the café hasn't closed down?

Two – You think it might have?

One – They're all closing, one after another.

Two – When I was a kid, that café was our youth club. We all met around the table football. The owner didn't have any qualifications in youth work, but if you got cheeky, he knew how to give you a good slap.

One – If we hadn't got into so much trouble when we were young, we wouldn't have ended up here...

Two – True. We could have become bankers or lawyers.

One – Anyway, too late now... The die is cast.

Two – And no more bets.

One – The governor didn't ask to see you?

Two – What for? To throw me a leaving party?

One – You're right. Just get out without saying goodbye.

Two – I'd certainly rather not see him again.

One – Come on, I think the time has come.

Two – When you've got to go, you've got to go.

They embrace, overcome with emotion.

One – Well then... Enjoy your retirement, old friend!

Two – I'll try...

The second character leaves with the suitcase. The first remains.

One – Damn it... Another twenty-five years to go.

15. The Show Is Over

Two characters enter. The second carries a suitcase and puts it down.

One – What sort of farce is this?

Two – Come on... Don't turn it into a tragedy...

One – You must be joking, my friend! It is a tragedy!

Two – I'd call it a full-blown melodrama.

One – In any case, it's like being trapped in a bad play.

Two – Yes. It started out like a bedroom farce.

One – And after a few misunderstandings...

Two – It turned into a horror show.

One – Could I have a word with you aside?

Two – I promise not to shout it from the stage.

One – If this goes on, the whole thing will come crashing down around us.

Two – An entirely plausible scenario, unfortunately.

One – Have you seen the crime scene?

Two – Looks very staged to me.

One – Stop putting on a show.

Two – The suspect's acting, that's obvious.

One – He certainly gave us quite a performance...

Two – Yes... A proper scene from Act Two.

One – What an actor!

Two – A real character, that's for sure.

One – As for the victim, she looked every inch the leading lady.

Two – An innocent ingénue, I'd say.

One – She certainly thought she was a star.

Two – Well, her death has finally put her in the spotlight.

One – Yes... Although the drama apparently unfolded behind closed doors.

Two – No audience, so no witnesses.

One – A complete blackout.

Two – She always dreamed of treading the boards...

One – Now she'll be carried out between four of them.

Two – Still, you must be pleased. You've always wanted to be in the limelight. And this extraordinary case...

One – We'd better rehearse a little before making our statement to the press.

Two – For once, try not to be so theatrical.

One – You're usually the one who overacts.

Two – You're a comedian, you are.

One – And you play the hypocrite to perfection.

Two – Isn't this what you wanted? Your name up in lights?

One – Don't worry, you can have the leading role.

Two – Oh no, I couldn't. I know how much you like being centre stage.

One – What was the killer's name again? I've gone completely blank.

Two – Don't expect me to prompt you.

One – Of course not... You've always wanted to steal the show.

Two – Shall we take a break? I could do with an interval, couldn't you?

One – Anyway, we're getting close to the final act.

Two – Unless there's an unexpected twist.

One – I think it's time for us to exit the stage.

Two – Yes, the curtain's about to fall.

One – And I'm afraid this will be another flop.

Two – Let's at least make a good exit.

One – You weren't expecting an encore, were you?

Two – Shall we leave stage left or stage right?

One – A dramatic dilemma...

Two – Let's try the stage door. Less conspicuous.

One – I hate making a spectacle of myself too.

As they leave, the second character glances at a woman in the audience.

Two – Well, now that's quite a balcony!

The other looks too.

One – I'd say we're playing to a full house.

Two – Perhaps we'll be a smash hit after all.

One – Not bad for amateurs. We could pass for professionals.

Two – Don't get carried away with your performance.

One – And you can stop clowning around.

Two – What a circus...

One – Sure you don't want one last turn in the ring?

Two – No, you're right. We wouldn't want to bore our audience...

One – Let's concentrate on the essentials. And don't forget the prop...

Two – Because the prop is the very essence of theatre.

The second character picks up the suitcase.

Two – È finita la commedia.

They leave.

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/

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