

La Comédiathèque

THE HOUSE OF OUR DREAMS

Jean-Pierre
Martinez



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The House of Our Dreams

Countdown

Jean-Pierre Martinez

A couple has just bought the house of their dreams at a surprisingly low price.

What could have happened in this house that caused it to remain unsold for so long? The previous owners died there under circumstances as dramatic as they were mysterious... A philosophical countdown about the tragicomic fate of humanity in general, and of the couple in particular.

Flexible cast, from 2 to 10 actors

1M/1F

2M/2F

3M/3F

4M/4F

5M/5F

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ACT 5

They are sitting in a garden.

Him – This house is absolutely perfect.

Her – Yes. It really is paradise.

Him – And this garden...

Her – It's the Garden of Eden.

Pause.

Him – The Garden of Eden... is that paradise?

Her – What do you mean?

Him – Paradise is when you're dead, isn't it?

Her – The Garden of Eden is earthly paradise. Paradise lost. Just before Adam ate all the apples, Eve chopped down the apple tree for firewood, and their son smashed his brother's skull with the logs.

He looks at her, slightly surprised.

Him – I'll have to reread the Bible now that I have a bit of time.

Her – In any case, this is the house of our dreams.

Him – Yes. Exactly what we wanted.

Her – All the shops are nearby.

Him – Not to mention the schools.

Her – Shame we don't have kids.

Him – At least they won't end up killing each other.

Her – Well, if we ever sell it one day... to a couple with kids.

Him – And the house is so spotless.

Her – Everything has been redone from the basement to the attic.

Him – Kids would mess it all up.

Her – It's like new.

Him – Yes, completely renovated. And at that price, can you believe it?

Her – It's true, we didn't pay much for it.

Him – For a house like this.

Her – So beautiful, and so well-located.

Him – The paint is still fresh.

Her – It's so white... It's almost suspicious.

Him – Suspicious?

Her – Like someone wanted to erase all traces of...

Him – Of what?

Her – I don't know.

Him – All traces of life?

Her – All traces of blood...?

They exchange a worried glance.

Him (*reassuring himself*) – I really like this house.

Her – It feels so comfortable.

Him – I've always dreamed of having a house like this.

Her – And today, that dream has come true.

Silence. Renewed unease.

Him – Did you hear something?

Her – Yes...

Him – What was that?

Her – I don't know.

Him – Or maybe we imagined it.

Her – I'll go check.

She gets up, and returns a moment later.

Him – What was it?

Her – The letterbox.

Him – A letter?

Her – A flyer.

Him – You'd think putting a “No Junk Mail” sign on the door would work.

Her – It's for the “Neighbourhood Party.”

Him – The neighbours are having a party?

Her – The “Neighbourhood Party”! It's once a year, in spring. They set up tables in the street, everyone brings food and drinks...

Him – Oh, yes... The neighbourhood party... So, they leave a note to warn us they're going to make some noise.

Her – They leave a note to invite us!

Him – Invite us? Us? But we don't even know these neighbours!

Her – Now that we live here, they're our neighbours. We're supposed to get to know them.

Him – I see... The neighbourhood party... Do you think we should go?

Her – It's not mandatory... but maybe it's a good idea. What do you think?

Him – I don't know...

Her – If we want to start integrating into the area.

Him – It's true, we don't know anyone.

Her – We never even met the previous owners.

Him – Well, we hardly ever go out.

Her – No... Maybe we should...

Silence.

Him – Speaking of neighbours, you know what?

Her – What?

Him – I wonder if the neighbour is dead.

Her – What makes you say that?

Him – I don't know... (*Pause*) For one, the smell...

Her – The smell?

Him – Don't you smell anything?

Her – No.

Him – Even without a particularly keen sense of smell... There's definitely something rotten around here, I assure you.

Her – Really?

Him – And it's not from yesterday. It's getting stronger and stronger...

Her – But when you say something rotten... you mean a corpse?

Him – I don't know... I've never had the chance to sniff a corpse. Have you?

Her – No. Well, yes, but... not one that smelled this bad.

Him – Like the smell of a dead rat, if you prefer.

Her – Maybe it is a dead rat.

Him – Rats? In this area? I doubt it... It's quite a posh neighbourhood.

Her – A wild boar, then...? Or a deer... I once ate game that had gone off in a fancy restaurant. I imagine a corpse might have a similar taste.

Him – A rotten deer?

Her – I don't know... maybe the taste, but the smell...

Him – It seems to be coming from the house next door. Or the garden.

Her – How could a deer end up in the neighbour's garden?

Him – Especially a dead one. Even in a posh neighbourhood like ours, hunting isn't that common.

Her – Apart from the smell, what makes you think the neighbour might be dead?

Him – We never see her... The shutters are always closed...

Her – Maybe she's on holiday.

Him – For over three months?

Her – Why not?

Him – At her age, you go on a cruise for a week. Ten days, tops.

Her – How do you know how old the neighbour is? We've never even seen her. And how do you know it's a woman?

Him – I don't know. I just pictured an old lady. The house isn't in great shape. And women often outlive their husbands. So, I just deduced that...

Her – I see...

Him – Observation, deduction...

Her – She must have gone on a very long trip. Or maybe she's staying with her children.

Him – For three months? Who would put up with their mother for three months?

Her – Well... Suppose the neighbour is dead... In her house... And you're the only one who's noticed?

Him – I've always had a very keen sense of smell...

Her – Surely her family would have missed her...

Him – Her family?

Her – Her children.

Him – And what if she didn't have any children?

Her – Everyone has children!

Him – We don't...

Her – Her husband, then.

Him – You just said she's probably a widow...

Pause.

Her – So what do we do? We should call the police...

Him – The police?

Her – We can't just leave her there like that, waiting for...

Him – For her to start decomposing?

Her – How long can a body remain like that before it starts to smell?

Him – I'm not sure it's a good idea for us to be the ones calling the police.

Her – Why not?

Him – They might suspect us.

Her – Suspect us? Of what?

Him – Of killing her!

Her – You think she was murdered?

Him – I have no idea... but it happens...

Her – And why would they suspect us?

Him – We've only been living here for three months, the neighbour dies just then, and we're the ones who call the police...

Her – You're right, it could cause trouble... But why would we have killed the neighbour?

Him – There are always good reasons to want to get rid of your neighbours, aren't there?

Her – What reasons?

Him – To buy the house, for example.

Her – Yes, well...

Him – Especially if we bought it as a life annuity.

Her – Don't tell me you bought the neighbour's house as a life annuity and then killed her.

Him – Of course not, what are you thinking!

Her – You're reassuring me...

Him – Then again, it might not be such a bad idea.

Her – Killing the neighbour?

Him – Buying the house.

Her – For what?

Him – To have no neighbours!

Her – You're starting to worry me again...

Him – No neighbours, no neighbourhood party.

Her – Yes, obviously...

Him – Anyway, if she is dead, the house will probably go up for sale.

Silence.

Her – I think I'm beginning to smell it, that smell...

Him – A rotten smell?

Her – Yes, I think so...

Pause.

Him – You're not just saying that to please me, are you?

Her – What?

Him – That you can smell a corpse.

The doorbell rings.

Him – What now? Are we expecting someone?

Her – No.

Him – I hope it's not another invitation.

Her – We don't know anyone... An invitation for what?

Him – The "Music Day"?

Her – That's true, it's coming up soon too.

Him – They could combine them.

Her – Music Day with the neighbours...

Him – I'll go check...

He exits. She sniffs the air, trying to catch a whiff of something.

Her – I wouldn't make a good sniffer dog. (*He returns*) What was it?

Him – The neighbour.

Her – The one who's dead?

Him – The other neighbour.

Her – What did she want?

Him – She wanted to know if, by any chance, the smell of a corpse was coming from our place.

Her – Did she say "corpse"?

Him – I think she meant a dead animal. Like a cat, maybe. Hers has been missing for a few weeks now.

Her – And what did you tell her?

Him – I told her I didn't smell anything...

Her – Good call.

Him – Best not to meddle in things that aren't our business.

Her – To live happily, live hidden...

Him – Are we happy?

Her – What do you think?

Silence.

Him – It's strange... She told me a funny story...

Her – Who?

Him – The neighbour!

Her – What story?

Him – I'm not sure you want to hear it now.

Her – You've said too much or not enough...

Him – Do you remember what the estate agent told us when we bought the house?

Her – What?

Him – That the house was for sale because the owners had died.

Her – Yes... That's probably why we never met them.

Him – What he forgot to mention was how they died...

Her – That's true. It's odd they both died at the same time.

Him – Yes...

Her – How did they die?

Him – She split his skull open with an axe...

Her – Oh, really... And where was that?

Him – Here, in the garden.

Her – No? And after that?

Him – Then she threw herself from the second floor into the courtyard.

Her – The courtyard? You mean the garden? Our garden...?

Silence.

Him – I never understood why this house was on the market for so long.

Her – And why it didn't find a buyer, even at such a low price.

Him – We did get a good deal, didn't we?

Her – Do you think so?

Him – I don't know...

Her – That's probably why they repainted everything.

Him – To cover up all the bloodstains...

Pause.

Her – Are you sure it's the house next door that smells like death?

Him – What do you mean?

Her – Maybe it's coming from here.

Him – No, that's not possible. When the police came and discovered the tragedy, they surely removed the bodies.

Her – Sometimes strange things happen in houses where such tragedies have occurred...

Him – It's true that the first time we visited the house, I did notice something.

Her – And you didn't tell me?

Him – The house was so cheap...

Her – Now I understand why.

Him – Yes, so do I...

Silence.

Her – Look, it seems like the neighbour's back from holiday...

Him – You think so?

Her – The shutters are open...

Him – Well, at least she's not dead.

Her – No... Not yet...

Him – So the smell isn't coming from her place.

Her – Or maybe it's the cat...

Him – Let's just say it's the cat.

Her – Yes, it's probably the cat.

Silence.

Him – So what do we do? Do we go or not?

Her – Go where?

Him – To the neighbourhood party!

Her – I'm not sure it's a good idea.

Him – You're right.

Her – I can already see them looking at us sideways and whispering.

Him – “It's them.”

Her – “The ones who live in the house where that massacre happened.”

Him – Yes... Wondering when it will be our turn.

Her – Our turn?

Him – To tear each other apart.

Her – You think it could come to that?

Him – We're so bored.

Her – Do we have an axe?

Silence. He sniffs the air again.

Him – What if it was us...

Her – Us?

Him – Who smelled rotten.

They look at each other, perplexed.

Blackout.

ACT 4

He arrives first and looks around. She joins him.

Him – So, Inspector, what do you think?

Her – I think they're both dead.

Him – Yes... That's what I thought too, when I saw his head was separated from his body and had rolled more than two metres away...

Her – And her head had smashed on the courtyard tiles like an overripe watermelon.

Him – But what I meant was, what do you think about the case, Inspector...?

Her – I don't think anything, my dear. I observe and deduce, that's all. Like Sherlock Holmes or Inspector Columbo. A good detective doesn't think. They observe and draw conclusions from their observations.

He gives her a puzzled look and continues examining the scene.

Him – I wonder what could have happened here for a seemingly ordinary couple to end up slaughtering each other with such enthusiasm.

Her – What makes you think it was murder?

Him – She was still holding the axe that was used to decapitate him.

Her – Don't be fooled by appearances, they can be deceiving. Besides, you overlooked the fact that before decapitating her husband, she chopped down an apple tree in the garden. Probably with the same axe.

Him – That's true, I hadn't noticed that. And I'm not exactly an expert on trees.

Her – Neither am I.

Him – Then how do you know it was an apple tree?

Her – Because I saw apples hanging from the branches.

Him – I didn't notice that either...

Her – If I'd seen pears, I would have deduced it was a pear tree. Cherries, a cherry tree. Observation, deduction. Never forget that.

Him – I'll keep that in mind, Inspector.

Her – What do we know about this... seemingly ordinary couple, as you put it?

He checks a small notebook.

Him – He was a playwright... She was an actress...

Her – A well-known playwright?

Him – One of his plays had some success a few years ago.

Her – Oh, really? Which one?

Him – *A Dream House...*

Her – Never heard of it. The last time I went to the theatre was to see *Hamlet*.

Him – You didn't like it...

Her – Oh, I did. That's exactly why I decided to end on a high note. And her?

Him – Mainly supporting roles... And fewer and fewer, apparently.

Her – That could be a motive for suicide. But not a motive for murder. No criminal record?

Him – A minor plagiarism case. A shoplifting incident. Some family benefit fraud. Nothing major...

Her – Did they have children?

Him – No. That's why I mentioned the family benefit fraud.

Her – I see... You said shoplifting?

Him – Yes.

Her – Perfume? Makeup? Lingerie? Those are usually the items women steal from stores...

He checks the notebook again.

Him – An axe.

Her – An axe? Then it could have been premeditated...

Him – If that's the axe she used to decapitate her husband.

Her – Why steal an axe if she already had one?

Him – I don't know... Some women steal just for the thrill of it...

Her – An axe?

Him – True, an axe... that's rather unusual.

Her – A hatchet, maybe. That would be more ladylike... Or a bread knife. Perhaps a nail file.

Him – To chop down a tree?

Her – It's a small tree. You didn't notice that either?

Him – And as for... the plagiarism, Inspector, what do you make of that?

Her – You don't know what it means, do you?

Him – Let's say... I'm not entirely sure.

Her – Plagiarism is theft.

Him – Like stealing an axe from a hardware store?

Her – Yes. Except the hardware store is the mind of a writer, and it's his ideas that the plagiarist is stealing.

Him – I see... A bit like a vampire sucking the blood of his victims... Maybe she cracked his skull open to rummage through his brain and steal what was inside...

Her – Why would she have thrown herself out of the window afterwards?

Him – What could an actress possibly steal from a playwright?

Her – His lines, probably. It's a common flaw among actors. They end up believing they're the author of the script they're performing.

Him – Really?

Her – I once knew a tragedian who convinced himself he had written all of Shakespeare's plays.

Him – And is plagiarism serious, Inspector?

Her – We're all forgers, my dear. We just repeat the clichés we learned in school, twisting them slightly along the way. If we locked up everyone who wasn't truly the author of the nonsense they spout every day, there wouldn't be many people left at liberty, believe me.

Him – So, we haven't invented anything new.

Her – Life is a constant struggle against mediocrity, which involves plagiarising others before we plagiarise ourselves...

Him – That's so profound, what you're saying... I'm not sure I fully understand...

Her – True intelligence, my dear, is knowing when to keep your mouth shut. Few people can manage that. Even I sometimes catch myself making statements... that aren't mine. Pick up a piece of that watermelon and put it in a thermal bag. We'll send it to the lab for analysis.

Him – Yes, Inspector.

Her – And don't forget to wear gloves...

Him – So as not to contaminate the evidence.

Her – Yes... And mostly so you don't get your hands dirty...

Him – And to keep the house clean.

Her – That would be a shame. It's so spotless here.

Him – Apparently, they repainted it every year.

Her – Probably after each crime.

Him – You think there were more?

Her – I told you, I don't think anything.

He exits. She looks around, then sniffs the air. She gets on all fours and sniffs the ground like a bloodhound. He returns, a little taken aback when he sees her.

Him – Are you on to something, Inspector?

She stands up.

Her – Trust my instincts, my dear, there's a smell of death in this house.

Him – There are two bodies right next to us. That's normal, isn't it?

Her – What I mean is, it smells rotten. Decaying flesh, if you like. But this couple died very recently.

Him – How do you know that?

Her – Her brain was still steaming when we arrived.

Him – It's true it's not very warm in here. But, if I may, Inspector, I think that smoke you saw was actually from a half-smoked cigarette. I found the stub in a corner of the courtyard.

Her – Well, even more reason. When the last cigarette is still smouldering, it means the condemned hasn't been dead for very long. (*She sniffs again.*) This case stinks, I'm telling you...

Him – And what conclusions do you draw from these observations, Inspector?

Her – There are at least three possible conclusions.

Him – I'm listening.

Her – Either the victims already smelled rotten while they were alive.

Him – Yes...

Her – Or that smell is coming from other, more decayed bodies that haven't been discovered yet. Bodies buried in the cellar, for example.

Him – How long can a man stay buried before he starts to rot?

Her – Well, if he wasn't already rotten before he died...

Him – So that's not yours either...

Her – No.

Him – Whose is it, boss?

Her – Shakespeare. In Hamlet. Assuming he really did write his own plays, of course.

Him – You think Shakespeare was a plagiarist too?

Her – Who knows...

Him – And what's your third hypothesis, Inspector?

Her – What if it's us who smell rotten...?

Him – I'd never have thought of that...

Her – That's why I'm the Inspector, and you're just a detective.

Him – Of course, Inspector.

Her – I've thought a lot about human nature. And I've come to certain conclusions, which I might write down in a book when I retire, to benefit future generations.

Him – Really? And what kind of book, Inspector? A detective novel?

Her – More like... a kind of Bible.

Him – I see... The show bible for a crime series?

Her – No, a Bible! A new New Testament, if you will.

Him – Ah, I see...

Him – Would you like to hear some of my reflections in advance?

Him – Why not...?

A brief pause, heightening the dramatic effect.

Her – Do you know how many human beings have lived and died on this earth before us, Detective?

Him – No.

Her – Around a hundred billion. For every living person on this planet, there are more than ten in cemeteries and elsewhere.

Him – Oh, that's a lot of people.

Her – And it's only going to get worse, believe me.

Him – Really?

Her – You'll see. As you grow older, you end up knowing more dead people than living ones.

Him – That's true...

Her – And one day, there will only be dead people left on this earth.

Him – The end of the world, you mean?

Her – The end of humanity, at least. At the rate we're going, it's probably not far off. The Earth will become nothing more than an empty house, haunted by all the dead who have lived in it since the dawn of humanity.

Him – What you're saying is beautiful, Inspector.

Her – Unfortunately, it's not mine.

Him – Whose is it, then?

Her – I suppose it belongs to the author of this play. Unless he's just another common plagiarist.

Him – And what about this double murder?

Her – We'll have to trace back the thread of these tragic events, from this latest murder to the first victim of this serial killer.

Him – You think we're dealing with a serial killer?

Her – Death! It's the one responsible for all these deaths! There's no such thing as a natural death, my dear. Every death is a homicide. It's Death who has murdered all these people.

Him – But when you say “trace back the events” , you mean...?

Her – The first murder! The first criminal case.

Him – Which case?

Her – Cain and Abel, of course.

Him – I've never heard of that case. Cain and... Abdel, you say?

Her – You've never read the Bible? “The eye was in the grave and stared at Cain”, does that ring a bell?

Him – No. A hidden camera in a grave?

Her – God was the first to invent CCTV, my dear. We police officers are merely his humble servants.

Silence.

Him – So you think the Earth could disappear one day?

Her – The Earth is like a house. You buy it from someone when you arrive, you sell it to someone else when you leave, hoping to make a little profit along the way. You think it's always been there, and that it always will be. But someone built it one day, and someone will eventually tear it down.

Him – I'm starting to smell it too.

Her – What?

Him – That smell of death.

Her – That smell, my dear, is the scent of life before you. The hundred billion humans who came before us. The Earth is a charnel house, a mass grave, a giant cemetery under the moon.

Him – I suppose that line's not yours either...

Her – Who knows... I do improvise sometimes. Have you seen *Night of the Living Dead*?

Him – The one with corpses rising from their graves, wandering through town, looking for fresh flesh to eat?

Her – A hundred billion, can you imagine? Not to mention the wild animals we're about to exterminate, and the domestic animals we raise in cages and slaughter on a large scale to eat after church, at a Sunday barbecue with friends.

Him – It's true, a barbecue is quite nice...

Her – Imagine if one night they all came back to eat us – all those chickens, pigs, calves we've exterminated in our slaughterhouse?

Him – Oh yes, that's terrifying...

Her – Not to mention the vegetables!

Him – Vegetables? You mean like chips?

Her – Imagine! *Night of the Living Dead*, but with potatoes, carrots, and turnips rising up from the earth at night to come and eat us! Imagine, Detective!

Him – I'm trying, Inspector. I'm trying... So, what do we do about these two?

Her – What do you think of the house?

Him – It's not bad.

Her – Not bad?

Him – No, in fact, it's absolutely perfect.

Her – I've been looking for one in this area, actually. But with the miserable salary we get every month... Even though I earn three times more than you.

Him – No work needed. Close to all the shops. With a school not far away.

Her – Well, now the house will surely go up for sale.

Him – Now?

Her – Now that the owners are dead.

Him – Could you live in a house where such dramatic events took place?

Her – Couldn't you?

Him – I think I'd have nightmares...

Her – So you think the house will be sold for less?

Him – I think this house is unsellable...

Her – I think so too.

Him – Around here, it'll always be known as the house where the massacre happened. The house of the crime.

Her – Do you know that painting by Paul Cézanne, *The House of the Hanged Man*?

Him – Who?

Her – We don't even know if anyone ever hanged themselves in that house. But imagine the challenge for an estate agent. Who would want to buy the house of a hanged man? And yet, it became a famous painting. But for one house painted by Cézanne, how many others have been the scene of a hanging without anyone ever knowing?

Him – Well, you have to hang yourself somewhere.

Her – Somewhere else, but not in my house. That would lower its value.

Him – Right...

Her – What if we bought this house?

Him – We?

Her – For next to nothing. You and me. You must have some savings, right?

Him – We could definitely get it cheap. But you said it was unsellable.

Her – We buy it for almost nothing, wait for things to calm down, repaint it, and sell it for a big profit.

Him – And in the meantime, who would live in it?

Her – You and me!

Him – You and me?

Her – Don't you like me, Detective?

Him – Oh, yes, of course, it's just that...

Her – What?

Him – No, no, nothing... *(Pause)* And do you like me, Inspector?

She gives him a surprised look.

Her – I was joking, my dear.

Him – Of course, Inspector.

Her – You and I know each other too well already. We'd end up getting bored.

Him – We might even start there.

Her – Trust me, from my experience, it's often to escape boredom that many couples end up massacring each other at home.

Him – You think she cracked his skull and then threw herself out the window just to spice up their married life?

Her – Are you married, Detective?

Him – No.

Her – Then you can't understand.

Blackout.

ACT 3

He is sitting there, motionless. She enters, wearing a raincoat and holding an axe.

Him – You all right?

Her – Yes.

She takes off her raincoat.

Him – Did you have a good day?

Her – It was fine.

Him – Good. (*Silence, as she sharpens her axe with a stone*) Do you have something to tell me?

Her – What more could we say to each other... that we haven't already said? We'd just be repeating ourselves, wouldn't we?

Him – Fine... And... if I may ask... What are you doing with that axe?

Her – Ah... Now, that's a question you've never asked me before...

Him – Probably because it's the first time you've come home with an axe...

Her – Exactly... It's the first time. I decided to surprise you, old chap...

Him – It's also the first time you've called me “old chap”. And so?

Her – I'm going to chop down the tree at the end of the garden.

Him – With an axe?

Her – Yes! Not with a nail file.

Him – And what did that tree ever do to you?

Her – It's rotten.

Him – Rotten?

Her – Rotten from the inside. The slightest gust of wind, and it could fall on us.

Him – We're rarely underneath it.

Her – We might want to have a barbecue.

Him – We never have barbecues. And I don't even know where this tree is.

Her – I'm not surprised. You never leave the house. Not even to go into the garden.

Him – I didn't know we had an axe.

Her – We didn't.

Him – So you bought an axe...

Her – I didn't buy it, I stole it.

Him – That's pretty bulky... How do you steal an axe?

Her – You can't. The security guard caught me at the exit. In the end, I had to pay for it.

Him – We can afford to buy an axe, you know. Why didn't you want to pay for it?

Her – So there wouldn't be a receipt, obviously!

Him – And what's the point of buying an axe without a receipt?

Her – No receipt, no trace! If you were buying a gun to kill someone, you'd prefer not to have a receipt, wouldn't you?

Him – Yes, I suppose... Well, I'm trying to imagine. I've never bought a gun. And I've never killed anyone. Up until today...

Her – You're right. Buying a gun might raise suspicions. More than an axe, at least. Even with a receipt...

Him – So you do realise this is a serious act, if not downright criminal...

Her – Don't worry, I'm aware.

Him – I can understand someone chopping down a tree in a fit of rage. A plane tree, for example. Because it jumped in front of your car just as you were driving by, completely drunk. But calmly like this. With an axe you specifically got for the job... This is an execution! A premeditated murder. I'm warning you, I won't be an accomplice to such a crime.

Her – Don't worry, you won't be involved in this massacre. (*Quieter*) Not as an accomplice, anyway...

Him – Why now?

Her – I told you, it's rotten, .

Him – Since when?

Her – I don't know... It happened gradually. When the worm's in the fruit, sometimes it attacks the tree too.

Him – I didn't even know we had a tree in the garden. What kind of tree is it?

Her – An apple tree.

Him – We have a fruit tree in the garden?

Her – It's already half-dead. It hasn't borne apples in ages.

Him – That's no reason to get rid of it like that.

Her – That tree has disappointed me greatly. I had such high hopes for it.

Him – You say it's half-dead. That means it's still half-alive.

Her – It's too late. I'd rather put it out of its misery.

Him – It might still produce a few apples.

Her – That's exactly what I hold against it.

Him – Sorry?

Her – All its life, that tree has only ever produced apples. And if it limped on for another ten or twenty years, it would still only produce apples.

Him – Apple trees produce apples. What did you expect?

Her – For it to surprise me.

Him – So, you'd rather chop it down.

Her – What's the point? That tree has become so predictable. And what's predictable is so depressing.

Him – And what are you going to do with the trunk?

Her – The trunk? The same as with the head, I suppose. I'll chop it into pieces, put it in plastic bags, and toss the chunks into the bin out front. A little each day, so the dustmen don't notice anything.

Him – Notice what?

Her – We're not supposed to throw branches in the bin. Even in small pieces.

Him – All the more reason not to chop down that apple tree.

Her – Enough talk. The sooner it's done...

She takes a step to leave. He stands up and faces her.

Him – And what if I don't agree?

Her – Oh, really? And what would you do?

Him – I could stop you.

Her – Stop me? You?

Him – Exactly. And you, if I tried to stop you, what would you do?

Her – I don't know... (*She raises the axe.*) I could smash your skull with this axe, for example. Just to see if there's really a brain inside.

Pause.

Him – So you still hold it against me for signing the script of this play in your place...

Her – That's called plagiarism, isn't it?

Him – It was for the best, I've told you a hundred times. I was already somewhat known as a writer. It reassured the producer.

Her – It reassured you more than anyone. Finally signing something worthwhile...

Him – The play was a flop.

Her – Some plays get a second chance. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had a poor reception at first.

Him – You think you're Shakespeare, now?

Her – Why not? By the way, some say that the great William is not the true author of Shakespeare's plays.

Him – *The House of Our Dreams*? Did you really think that would make you go down in history?

Her – That didn't stop you from signing the manuscript!

Him – And I wonder if you didn't take a bit of inspiration from Shakespeare to write that flop.

Her – Now you're calling me a plagiarist!

She moves towards him with the axe, menacingly. He cautiously steps back.

Him – Don't forget, there's a receipt. The store management probably reported it to the police. You're already marked for shoplifting.

Her – And you're marked for plagiarism. Because it's not the first time you've taken credit for a text that wasn't yours.

She raises her axe.

Him – The police will come. You'll never make this look like a crime of passion. You'll get life.

Her – Marrying you gave me a life sentence... (*She lowers the axe, seeming to relent.*) But you're right... it would be too risky. It's not worth it...

Him – Come on, put the axe down, you'll end up hurting someone.

Her – I wonder why we buried ourselves here...

Him – Yes, me too...

Her – I don't know why, but I've always felt something was wrong with this house.

Him – What?

Her – I don't know...

Him – Like a curse.

Her – What if we moved?

Him – With what money? Unfortunately, it's not with your masterpiece that we'll be paying off the mortgage. Nor with your acting fees, either.

She raises the axe again, menacingly.

Her – Is that a complaint?

Him – You wouldn't dare. It'd look too much like a bad farce.

Her – A woman chopping up her husband with an axe?

Him – More like a B-grade horror film, if you prefer.

Her – On the other hand...

Him – What?

Her – Some low-budget films sell really well...

Him – Like what?

Her – *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre.*

Him – This is just an axe, and it's just a woman killing her husband.

Her – When you don't have a big budget...

Him – Sorry, I don't buy it.

Her – Think about the first murder in the history of humanity.

Him – Cain and Abel?

Her – A guy strangling his brother with his bare hands. That's it. The investigation is just a CCTV camera set up by God in the criminal's grave. And the book is still a bestseller today.

Him – Yes, but that had never been done before. Nowadays, even when it comes to murder, it's hard to surprise anyone.

Her – You're right, it's really depressing. Makes me want to kill myself. Anyway, I'll start with the apple tree, it'll help me relax.

She picks up her axe and prepares to leave.

Him – I'll set the table... and think about a different script.

Her – Why don't you give me a hand instead?

Him – Doing what?

Her – Chopping down that bloody apple tree! If we don't want it falling on the neighbour's fence, you should push it from the other side while I cut the trunk.

Him – OK, but be careful. Accidents can happen so quickly...

Her – Especially when it's your first time using an axe...

They exit. A moment passes.

Voice off – Cut! That's not the script I wrote, damn it!

Blackout.

ACT 2

She is there. He enters.

Him – I had a strange dream... Well, more of a nightmare.

Her – What was it?

Him – I dreamt that you were leaving me...

She seems embarrassed.

Her – Do you know your lines?

Him – Don't you?

Her – Yes, yes, well... I think so.

Him – Shall we rehearse one last time?

Her – OK...

Him – They say the author of the play is a psychopath. If we change a single word of his script, he might kill us.

Her – And since he's also the director.

Him – That's the problem with contemporary theatre...

Her – Shall we go?

Him – I'll go out and make my entrance again.

Her – Me too...

They both exit. He returns after a moment and sits down. She enters, wearing a raincoat and holding an axe.

Him – You all right?

Her – Yes.

She takes off her raincoat.

Him – Did you have a good day?

Her – It was fine.

Him – Good. (*Silence, as she sharpens her axe with a stone*) Do you have something to say to me?

Her – What more could we say to each other... that we haven't already said? We'd just be repeating ourselves, wouldn't we?

Him – Fine... And... if I may ask... What are you doing with that axe?

Her – Ah... Now, that's a question you've never asked me before...

Him – Probably because it's the first time you've come home with an axe...

Her – Exactly... It's the first time... I decided to surprise you, old chap...

Him – It's also the first time you've called me “old chap”. And so?

Her – I'm going to chop down the tree at the end of the garden.

Him – With an axe?

Her – Yes! Not with a bread knife.

He pauses, disturbed.

Him – Not with a bread knife?

Her – Isn't that what I'm supposed to say?

Him – Yes. Yes, yes. But that line... It's pretty silly, isn't it?

Her – Yes, well...

Him – What if we asked the author to change it? We could say... “Not with a nail file”—that would be funnier, wouldn't it?

Her – Do you think so...?

Him – It looks that way, yes.

Her – You said it yourself, the author hates it when we change a single word of his script. And I think he's in a foul mood today... And since there's an axe on set...

Him – You're right, we need those acting credits... Now's not the time to get fired. Shall we go again?

Her – OK.

He focuses for a moment and resumes.

Him – You all right?

Her – Yes.

Her – I wanted to tell you something.

Him (*surprised*) – Yeah...

Her – It's not easy.

Him – What?

Her – I'm leaving you.

Him – That's not in the script, is it?

Her – No, not that.

Him – We agreed we wouldn't change the script.

Her – I've just been offered a role. The role of my life...

Him – Who?

Her – The author. Well, the director.

Him – What do you mean, a role?

Her – He just asked for my hand.

Him – Your hand?

Her – Yes, well, my hand... and the rest. He asked me to be his wife, if you prefer.

Him – He's got some nerve, that one... And what did you say?

Her – Yes.

Him – So it's as simple as that... He asks for your hand, and you say yes?

Her – You never asked for my hand.

Him – A guy you barely know?

Her – I know him a bit better than that...

Him – Oh, I see... (*Pause*) You want to get married, is that it?

Her – I'm sorry. It's over between us.

Him – I don't understand...

Her – There's nothing to understand.

Him – You're leaving me... just as we've moved into a new house?

Her – I'm leaving you the house.

Him – You mean you're leaving me to keep paying the mortgage on my own...

Her – You didn't want children. This house was already too big for just the two of us.

Him – I could have changed my mind. Do you want a child?

Her – It's too late.

Him – Why?

Her – I'm already pregnant... That's why I couldn't wait any longer to tell you.

Him – That you're pregnant?

Her – That I'm leaving you!

Him – What if it were mine?

Her – It's not.

Him – How can you be so sure?

Her – We haven't made love for six months.

Him – That long? Are you sure?

Her – Long enough for me to be sure this baby isn't yours.

Silence, as he absorbs the blow.

Him – Very well...

Her – I'm really sorry...

Him – OK...

Her – Are you going to be all right? I mean... for shooting this scene?

Him – I'll be fine... We're professionals, aren't we? The show must go on...

Her – I think he's waiting for us...

Him – Don't worry... We'll shoot this film.

Her – I'm glad you're taking it this way.

Him – And count on me to stick to the script, word for word...

Voice off – If everyone's ready, let's roll. Quiet on the set.

Silence.

Blackout.

ACT 1

He is there. She enters.

Him – So, is he gone?

Her – He'll be back in an hour, giving us some time to think it over.

Him – And for us to decide whether to make an offer... or not.

They look around the room.

Her – So, what do you think?

Him – I'm gobsmacked.

Her – You too...

Him – It's true, it's absolutely perfect.

Her – There's even a garden.

Him – A garden or a courtyard?

Her – A courtyard big enough for a tree.

Him – Oh, really?

Her – I've looked everywhere, and I can't see anything wrong with it.

Him – Compared to everything else we've seen so far...

Her – Often more expensive...

Him – Much more expensive.

Her – There must be a mistake with the price; it's impossible.

Him – They must have forgotten a zero at the end.

Her – Or maybe they're in a real hurry to sell.

Him – Who are the owners?

Her – The estate agent told me they're dead.

Him – Then they're not in a hurry.

Her – The heirs might be.

Him – He said it's been on the market for several years.

Her – How can it be in such good condition?

Him – Looks like it's just been cleaned.

Her – I don't get it.

Him – Do you think there's a catch?

Her – I've looked, but I can't see one.

Him – The neighbourhood seems very quiet too. And very posh.

Her – The charm of the old with all the modern comforts.

Him – Completely renovated.

Her – No work needed.

Him – We're starting to sound like the estate agent.

Her – It's crazy... It feels like no one has ever lived in this house.

Him – All these pristine white walls...

Her – It's so clean... It's almost creepy.

Him – Yes... It's odd...

Her – What?

Him – No, nothing, it's silly.

Her – Go on... We're about to commit to a mortgage for half a century. We might spend the rest of our lives in this house... If you have something to say, now's the time.

Him – I don't know... I have a strange feeling.

Her – A feeling?

Him – Don't you smell something?

Her – No... I don't smell anything...

Him – Like a smell of...

Her – A smell of what?

Him – I don't know. A smell... of bodies.

Her – You mean body odour... like in a crowded bus at rush hour?

Him – Yes, something like that... Except the passengers have already left.

Her – Maybe it's the estate agent... He didn't seem very clean.

Him – For it to still smell all over the house, even though he left a quarter of an hour ago?

Her – Or maybe it's us...

Him – Us?

Her – We've been running around all morning. Even with a good deodorant...

Him – No, I'm telling you... It's not that kind of smell.

Her – I don't smell anything... Are you sure?

Him – I think so...

Her – What kind of smell?

Him – I don't know... Like... the smell of all those who came before us.

Her – Who came before us? In this house?

Him – Owners come and go, but the houses remain.

Her – Leaving their scent behind?

Him – I'd be curious to know how many people have owned this house before us.

Her – The real estate attorney could tell us, right?

Him – You think so?

Her – Or we could go to the land registry. Trace it back to the first owner. The one who built this house. The one who lived in it first.

Him – When it was still untouched. Free of any memories...

Her – When it was just a plot of land.

Him – A planning permission.

Her – A construction project.

Him – A blueprint.

Her – Just an idea.

Him – A desire.

Her – When this house was just a dream of a house.

Him – In the end, if you go back far enough, there's no reality but dreams.

Her – We'll have to try explaining that to our banker.

Him – You're right. Because to borrow that kind of money...

Her – Especially when you're an artist... So, what do we do?

Him – I think we need to decide because at this price, it won't stay on the market for long.

Her – It's true it's not expensive for such a beautiful house, but can we really afford it?

Him – With a fifty-year mortgage, it'll bring down the monthly payments.

Her – We'll still have to cut back on going out to afford the instalments.

Him – Or find some additional sources of income.

Her – Got any ideas?

Him – The house is big. We could rent out a room to passing tourists, business travellers, illegitimate couples...

Her – Sure... Why not open a brothel upstairs and an illegal gambling den in the basement?

Him – Or we could rent it out for film shoots.

Her – Film shoots?

Him – Yes, film shoots.

Her – Oh, really?

Him – I have a friend who does that. Apparently, you can rent it out for a lot if the house is interesting and matches exactly what the director is looking for.

Her – What kind of films could we shoot in this house?

Him – I don't know... Porn films?

Her – Imagine if our friends recognised the house.

Him – If they recognised the house, that means they're watching porn... They're not likely to mention it to us...

Her – Yes, of course.

Him – You'd prefer horror films?

Her – There are other types of films, aren't there? Romantic comedies...

Him – When you think of everything that could have happened in this house since it was built...

Her – Yes... It must have been the setting for all sorts of scenes from married life.

Him – Films of all kinds...

Her – Hopefully not horror films.

Him – Probably mostly domestic dramas, I'd say.

Her – We'll try not to add too much to that...

Him – An empty house, between a move-out and a move-in, is like an empty stage in a theatre. Or a film set between two shoots.

Her – The actors have just left, taking their set with them.

Him – Others will arrive, bringing their own props and their own story.

Her – Those who arrive know nothing about the play that just ended.

Him – And they don't know much yet about the play they're about to perform.

Her – Tragedy or comedy? Or tragicomedy...

Him – Between two performances, all that remains is an empty stage. But in the air lingers the scent of all those who have graced it.

Her – That smell of life, and death... that's the smell of theatre.

A pause.

Him – So, shall we take it?

Her – It's the house of our dreams, isn't it?

Him – Yes.

Her – I've got an idea.

Him – An idea for a house?

Her – An idea for a play...

Him – A play? And what would it be called?

Her – *The House of Our Dreams...*

Him – If the play's a hit, maybe it'll help us pay off the house.

They hold hands and look around happily, then ahead of them.

Blackout.

The End.

About the author

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

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

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Comedies for 2

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
Preliminaries
Running on empty
The Costa Mucho Castaways
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
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap
backward for Mankind

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
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
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
Quarantine
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
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
Offside
Open Hearts
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Enough is Enough
For real and for fun
Him and Her
Lost time Chronicles
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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