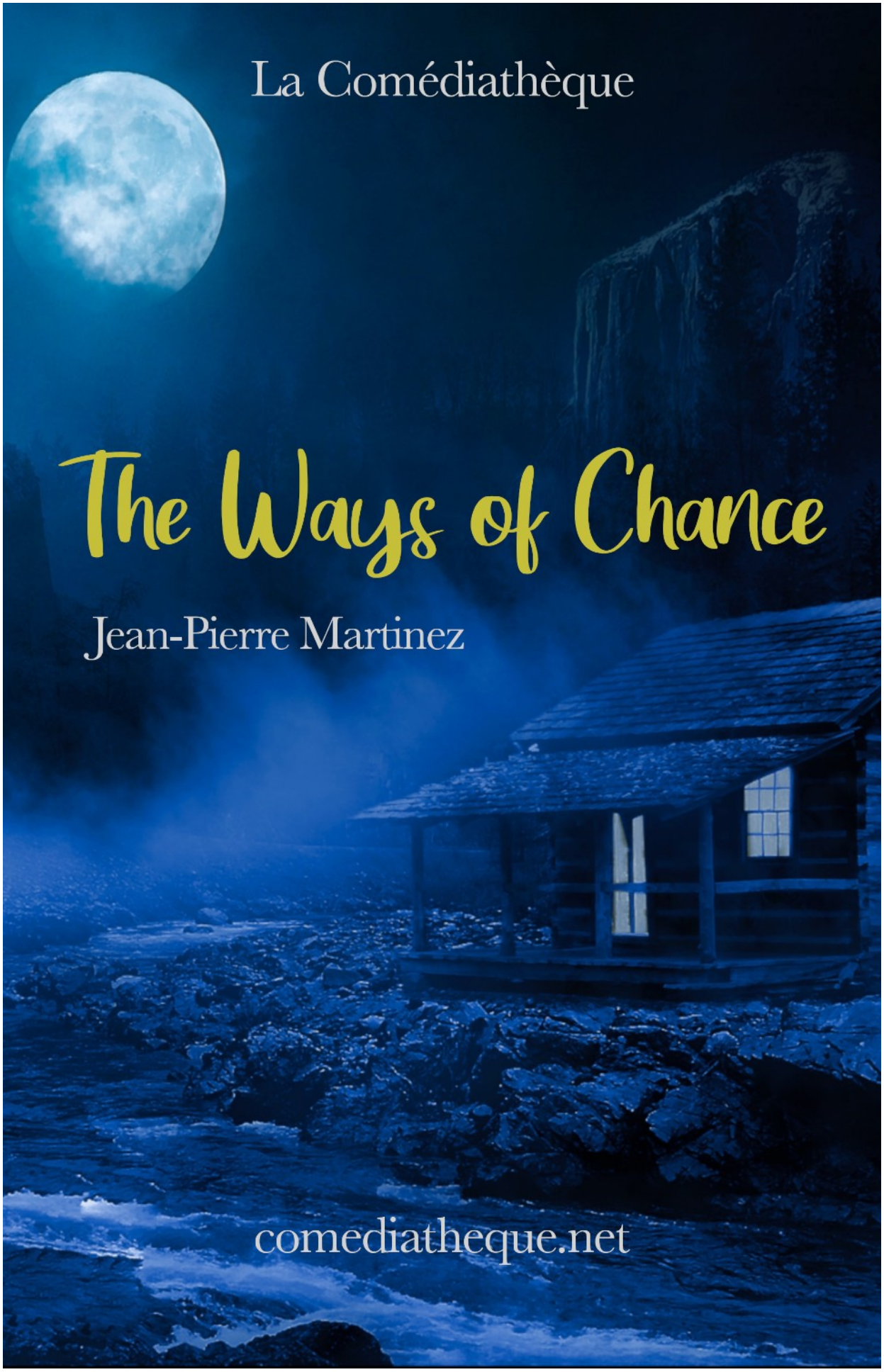

La Comédiathèque
The Ways of Chance
Jean-Pierre Martinez
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The Ways of Chance

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Translation by the author

At Chance's Café, Thelma and Louise, both stranded by car trouble, meet Richard and the ghost of Virginia. What begins as an unlikely encounter soon feels more like a reunion, and a reckoning. For chance doesn't always play fair…

Characters

Louise

Thelma

Richard

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A sparsely furnished roadside bar. A counter stands at the back, with three tables and one chair at each. Above the counter, a sign reads: Chance's Café. A woman enters. She clearly doesn't know the place and is surprised to find it empty. She takes a few steps, then clears her throat to announce her presence.

Louise *(timidly)* – Is anyone here? *(She takes a few more steps and repeats, louder.)* Is anyone here? Apparently not... Now I'm talking to myself… *(She hesitates, then sits at one of the tables, pulls out her phone, and checks the screen.)* Still no signal… *(Looking around.)* What kind of hole is this? *(She moves toward the counter.)* There has to be a phone in this place… *(She checks the counter but finds nothing and sighs.)* At the very least, I could have a coffee... This is crazy! Anyone could walk in here and make off with the cash... *(She spots a bottle and three glasses on the counter.)* Well, I could always have a little something to keep me going… *(She pours herself a glass, downs it in one go, almost choking.)* Wow… That's rather... rustic. *(Feeling braver, practically yelling.)* Is there anyone here? This can't be right. There must be a phone somewhere…

She steps behind the counter, rummaging through the shelves and accidentally knocking down a framed portrait. Bending down to pick it up, she disappears from the audience's view. A moment later, a second woman enters. Not seeing anyone, she does the same as the first, but with more energy.

Thelma *(shouting)* – Is there anyone here? *(Startled, Louise rises from behind the counter, clutching the portrait.)* Oh, hello! I thought the place was empty. A coffee, please.

Louise – Ah, no... You see…

Thelma – It's fine, tea will do… Do you have a phone? There's no signal here...

Louise – Yes, I know… But you misunderstand. I'm not the landlady…

Thelma – OK... But you could still make me a coffee... or a tea?

Louise – I'm not the waitress either... I'm a customer, like you.

Thelma – Right... So... what are you doing behind the counter, then?

Louise – I was actually looking for a phone.

Thelma – And did you find one?

Louise – No...

Thelma – Right… So where's the landlady?

Louise – No idea…

Thelma – No idea?

Louise – How would I know?

Thelma – I don't know… You just told me you weren't the landlady. So you must know there's a landlady.

Louise – Not at all! I only meant that I don't run this place. For all I know, it could be a man.

Thelma – So you don't work here, then.

Louise – Exactly...

Thelma – I just figured, since I saw you behind the counter...

Louise – Look, we don't have to go on about this all night.

Thelma – I hope not… I'm completely deflated.

Louise – Same here…

Thelma – Two of my tyres, I mean. On that road out there—though calling it a road is generous. More like a country lane. And would you believe it? I have only one spare wheel.

Louise – You've broken down too?

Thelma – Well, yes… You can take all the precautions you like, but who carries two or three spare wheels in a car?

Louise – No, I mean, I've got flat tyres too.

Thelma – You had a flat tyre?

Louise – Three.

Thelma – Really? You too?

Louise – That's what I've been trying to tell you.

Thelma – Right... And have you called for help?

Louise – Well… Like you said… There's no signal! And I haven't found a landline...

Thelma – I see...

Louise – I don't know what we're going to do... It's lucky you got a puncture too...

Thelma – You think that's lucky?

Louise – Well… At least I'm not alone. And neither are you…

Thelma – Right… Let's keep calm… Someone's bound to turn up…

Louise – If you say so...

Thelma – This is a café, isn't it? And the door's open.

Louise – Yes… *(Looking at the sign.)* Chance's Café… Strange name... I don't know if that's a good omen...

Thelma – Do you know how to change a tyre?

Louise – Yes, well, sort of… I mean, I think so… I've never actually done it, but... It can't be that hard… Unfortunately, like you said… When you only have one spare and multiple punctures...

Thelma – This is crazy...

Louise – One of those days…

Thelma – Five punctures in five minutes? That's more than bad luck. And I don't believe in coincidence…

Louise – Are you saying...

Thelma – Someone must have put nails on the road, it's the only explanation... Or broken glass...

Louise – But… why?

Thelma – How should I know? Maybe a mechanic trying to drum up business...

Louise – Then it's odd he hasn't come to take our orders…

Thelma – Who?

Louise – The mechanic! And I haven't seen any garage around here. Have you?

Thelma – No… In fact, there's hardly anything around here...

Louise – Do you remember that film The Shining?

Thelma – Not particularly…

Louise – Shall I tell you about it?

Thelma – I'd rather you didn't…

Louise – Oh, come on! A young woman stops at an isolated motel in a storm. The owner turns out to be completely mad…

Thelma – That's Psycho.

Louise – What?

Thelma – The film. You're thinking of Psycho, not The Shining.

Louise – Oh, yes… Possibly…

Thelma – Either way, I'd rather not be in it.

Louise – I'm not much of a film expert, to be fair… Oh, I haven't introduced myself. *(She holds out her hand.)* Louise.

Thelma *(shaking her hand)* – Thelma.

Louise – Right... So, what now?

Thelma – I don't know… I guess we wait... What else can we do?

Thelma walks around the room and stops in front of a door (not necessarily visible). She tries to open it.

Thelma – There's a door, but it's locked…

Louise – We could walk to the next village…

Thelma – The nearest village… I have no idea how far it is... And with these heels…

Louise – Plus, it'll be dark soon…

Thelma looks around.

Thelma – This is strange. I've got this funny feeling.

Louise – You mean... a bad feeling?

Thelma – It's like I know this place.

Louise – Oh, really?

Thelma – Like I've been here before, if you prefer. A long time ago.

Louise – You mean... in a past life?

Thelma – Well, back when there was a landlady, anyway.

Louise – Or a landlord…

Thelma moves closer to the counter.

Thelma *(noticing the portrait)* – What's this photo?

Louise – A portrait... I think I broke the glass... The owner's going to kill me...

Thelma picks up the portrait and examines it.

Thelma – It's strange...

Louise – Don't tell me this portrait reminds you of something too, because this is starting to get spooky…

Thelma – I don't know... It's not just the photo... It's like... a sense of déjà vu. The feeling of being in this exact situation before...

Louise – What do you mean?

Thelma – Haven't you ever felt like that? Like you're acting in a film you've already seen. But you can't remember how it ends.

Louise – I hope it had a happy ending, this film of yours…

Thelma – I don't know...

Louise – Well, I'm going to pour myself another drink. *(She picks up the bottle and pours herself a glass.)* Want some?

Thelma – What is it?

Louise – No idea. We'll ask how much we owe when the owner shows up.

Thelma – Fair enough.

Louise pours her a glass. They clink glasses.

Louise – Let's not get too down over a puncture.

Thelma – You're right.

Louise – Even though, between the two of us, we've got five...

They down their drinks in one go.

Thelma *(grimacing)* – What is that stuff?

Louise – There's nothing on the bottle. Not even a label…

Thelma – The owner probably distills it in the cellar with an illegal still.

Louise – You think we could get into trouble?

Thelma – Don't you think we're already in enough trouble? Stranded in the middle of the night, in this shitty bar... I'm starting to wonder if I even want anyone to show up at this point...

Louise looks at her, unsettled. Richard enters, carrying a travel bag. As he opens and closes the door, thunder crashes and lightning flashes, filling the room.

Louise – We're saved! Here's the owner…

Thelma seems more reserved. The man moves cautiously towards the counter.

Richard – Good evening...

Thelma – We were starting to wonder if anyone was around.

Richard – Anyone?

Louise – You're not the owner?

Richard – No... I was just passing through, and…

Thelma – Don't tell me you got a flat too?

Richard – How did you know?

Louise – How many?

Richard – How many...?

Louise – How many tyres?

Thelma – How many tyres did you puncture?

Richard – You're not going to believe this...

Louise – Four?

Richard – Four.

Thelma – Well... Respect...

Richard – So you both… had flats too.

Thelma – Yeah...

Richard – More than one, I take it, or you'd have changed it by now.

Louise – Three.

Thelma – Two.

Richard – This can't be... It's a trap!

Thelma – Yes, that's what we were thinking too…

Louise – At least now that you're here, we feel a bit safer.

Richard – Oh, really?

Louise – No, I mean... having a man around.

Thelma – Yes… Unless it's him.

Richard – Me?

Louise – Him, what?

Thelma – He's the one who put those nails on the road.

Louise – Are you a mechanic?

Richard – Me? Not at all! I told you, I had a puncture, just like you. Why would I put nails on the road to puncture my own four tyres?

Thelma – Fair enough...

Richard – Thanks for the vote of confidence. I'm really touched…

Thelma – Sorry, but there are so many nutcases roaming free…

Richard – It does have something of the motel in Psycho about it. But don't worry, I don't keep my mother stuffed upstairs. *(He pauses, thoughtful.)* Though…

Louise – Although what?

Richard – No, I don't know… Just a feeling…

Thelma – Ah! You too!

Louise – Do you two know each other?

Richard – No…

Thelma – Well, I don't think so…

Louise – You sounded as though you knew each other. You started speaking to him like an old friend.

Thelma – Did I?

Richard – I don't know…

Louise – Anyway, if you two are in on this together and it's some kind of prank to scare me, I don't find it funny at all.

Richard – Unfortunately, my car has four flat tyres. That's not a joke. And my mobile's got no signal. Is there a phone here?

Louise – We've already looked everywhere and found nothing.

Richard – Right... So what do we do now?

Thelma – We were kind of hoping you'd have the answer…

Richard – I don't know… So, there's no one else here?

Louise – No one… It's crazy...

Thelma – There's a door over there, but it's locked…

Richard – Oh, great… I mean, too bad...

A pause.

Thelma – You're not wearing high heels, are you?

Richard – No... Not today… Why?

Thelma – You could walk to the next village. To call a mechanic.

Richard – The next village...? Yes, I could…

Louise – But?

Richard – Let's just say… I'd rather not leave you two here on your own.

Louise – I must admit, that's reassuring. *(To Thelma.)* Isn't it?

Thelma – I'd be reassured if I knew we could get out of this hole as soon as possible. If no one's coming for help, we have no idea when this will end...

Richard – Or how…

Louise – Help? Until now, we were just talking about a tow truck. This is starting to get really creepy…

Thunder rumbles. Richard moves towards an imaginary window.

Richard – It's pouring down and pitch black out there.

Thelma – Not wanting to leave us alone… Just admit it, you're scared…

Richard – I don't fancy going out in a storm at night to find a village that could be miles away. I'd call that being sensible…

Thelma – Call it whatever you want.

Louise – Let's not start arguing! If we want to get out of here, we need to stick together!

Thelma – You're right, I'm sorry…

Louise – It could be worse… At least we're sheltered.

Thelma – Yes… But if we have to spend the night here, I wasn't prepared for that.

Louise – Neither was I. Even if I had a bag in the boot… With this rain…

Richard – And I don't think we should be expecting room service…

Thelma – At least you came with a bag. You're the prepared type…

Richard *(surveying the room)* – I don't get the impression the owners live here.

Louise – I saw a few ruined houses, but no lights.

Thelma – Yes, it's like an abandoned village.

Louise – Still, it's odd... an open bar just sitting here in the middle of nowhere, in a ghost town.

Richard – Especially a bar with no owner and no customers.

Louise – Well, we're here… but we could have done without it… Fancy a drink to perk you up?

Richard – Thanks, but I'd rather not drink alcohol.

Thelma – Wise decision. One of us should stay sober. You can be our designated driver.

Louise – Except you won't be driving either of us home, drunk or sober. All three of our cars are out of action.

Thelma – I feel like I'm shipwrecked on a deserted island.

Louise – Yes, castaways on the road…

Thelma – Well, deserted… Not exactly…

Louise – Would you rather be alone?

Thelma – No… But unless someone has a plan to get us out of here…

A pause.

Richard – What kind of car do you have?

Thelma – A small red hatchback. Why?

Richard – And you?

Louise – Same make and model. Mine's blue, though.

Richard *(to Thelma)* – And you've only got two flat tyres. If we put the two spare wheels on your car, one of us could drive to the nearest garage!

Thelma – That makes sense…

Richard – One wonders why you didn't think of it earlier… Right, give me your car keys. Where are you parked?

Thelma – Wait, not so fast… Just now, you didn't want to go out in the rain for fear of getting wet…

Richard – Yes, but now we have a chance not to spend the night here.

Louise – She's got a point. What's stopping you from taking off with both of our cars?

Richard – First off, because five out of your eight tyres are flat. And secondly, I'd have a hard time driving two cars at once…

Thelma – Yes, but once you get the tyre fixed! And you're supposedly going for a tow truck. What guarantee do we have that you'll come back for us?

Louise – Sorry, but... we don't really know you. You could be a thief who set this all up just to steal a car.

Richard – A tiny hatchback? Believe me, if I were a car thief, I'd find a simpler way to steal a more expensive car.

Thelma – Still, throwing nails on the road is like casting a net in the sea. You never know if you're going to catch a small fish or a big one... You get what I mean?

Exasperated, Richard pulls a set of keys from his pocket and holds them out to her.

Richard – Here, take my 4x4 keys…

Louise – But how do we know you've got a car to go with those keys? We haven't seen it. *(To Thelma.)* Have you?

Thelma – No...

Richard – You could just come with me! Change two tyres in the rain. Then drive for miles along mountain roads in the middle of the night with a stranger. All to find a closed garage, wake up the mechanic, and convince him to come out here and help us.

Louise – Put it that way...

Richard – You're both pretty suspicious, but... you're not exactly in a position to negotiate... So let's say, it's take it or leave it, alright?

Thelma takes the keys Richard hands her.

Thelma – OK… My car's parked right outside, in the car park.

Louise – Mine too.

The two women hand him their keys.

Richard – I'll come back for you as soon as I can. With a tow truck...

He exits, leaving his travel bag behind.

Louise – I think we can trust him, don't you?

Thelma – Do we really have a choice? *(She looks at the keyring.)* BMW... A dealer's car…

Louise – And he left his bag behind… *(She moves closer to the bag.)* I wonder what's in it.

Thelma – I don't know… Drugs?

Louise – You think?

Thelma – Why don't you take a look?

Louise hesitates, about to open the bag when Richard returns.

Richard – Sorry... I forgot this...

Thelma – You don't want to leave it here? Why take it with you?

Richard – Let's just say I'm the suspicious type too…

He exits again, taking the bag with him.

Louise – So now we just wait, then...

Thelma – Yes... And hope that bastard actually comes back for us.

Louise – We'll never know what's in that bag.

Thelma – He certainly seems attached to it…

Louise – Fancy another drink?

Thelma – Not sure that's wise… I don't know what it is, but it's strong…

Louise – I'm starting to feel lightheaded too. I hope that sadist hasn't drugged us...

Thelma – What?

Louise – If this is all set up... maybe he left that bottle on the counter with drugs in it. So he could take advantage of us later...

Thelma – Assault us both and then drive away in our battered little hatchbacks? He'd have to be the least ambitious criminal in the world.

Louise – Beggars can't be choosers...

Thelma – My aunt used to say that before serving dinner. I never quite dared ask what was on the menu…

Louise – No… But if we get stuck here for a week, I shudder to think what we'll end up eating.

A pause.

Louise – Anyone waiting for you?

Thelma – No, no one in particular. You?

Louise – Me neither... You realise? No one would even notice if we disappeared...

Thelma – Not for several days, at least.

Louise – I never come this way. I thought I'd take a shortcut. I don't even know where we are.

Thelma – And it's not like we can use our phones to track our corpses. There's no signal...

Louise – You're really comforting, aren't you?

Thelma – And what about him? What's he doing around here?

Louise – I don't know… And you?

Thelma – Me?

Louise – What are you doing here?

Thelma – Here? Honestly, I'm not really sure where we are either. I was on my way to a funeral, in some godforsaken village. My GPS died. Never found it. I was just trying to get back home…

Louise – Family?

Thelma – An old aunt, one I'd nearly forgotten about. The same one I mentioned earlier. I don't even know why I go to these funerals anymore.

Louise – When you get an invitation, you always feel a little obliged.

Thelma – Yes… And since she had no direct heirs, she left me a few thousand euros. Whatever she had in her savings. I guess I owed her that much. Though, after paying for that bloody funeral, I'm starting to wonder if I'm going to end up losing money…

Louise – And you won't even have been able to attend...

Thelma – I doubt anyone noticed I wasn't there. Especially if no one else turned up. She was a dreadful old woman. Everyone hated her.

Louise – Including you?

Thelma – During the summer holidays, my parents worked. I could've stayed with her—she lived in the countryside. But she always found an excuse to get out of it. So my parents sent me to summer camp every year, right up until I was fifteen. And you?

Louise *(thoughtfully)* – Summer camp?

Thelma – What brings you to this area?

Louise – Oh yes... You'll laugh, but I was going to a funeral too.

Thelma – Well, that's amusing, indeed. Don't tell me it was my aunt's funeral, that we're cousins, and now I'll have to share her savings with you…

Louise – No, it was my husband's funeral.

Thelma – Oh... I'm sorry... I didn't know...

Louise – No need. We'd been separated for over ten years. I only went out of duty, really. Well, it's a chapter closed.

Thelma – Yes...

Louise – I can't even hope to inherit anything from him. The divorce was only finalised recently, after years of proceedings.

Thelma – That's really unfortunate.

Louise – Yes... It would have helped, though. I'm sick of working every day, even Sundays and public holidays, for a pittance.

Thelma – And what do you do for work?

Louise – I'm a nursing assistant.

Thelma – That must be a rotten job.

Louise – No… And you?

Thelma – Assistant accountant. Not much more exciting, but at least it's less messy...

Louise – Are you married?

Thelma – Widowed... Three times.

Louise – Excuse me…?

Thelma – Married three times. Widowed three times. I clearly haven't had much luck with husbands.

Louise – Wow... That's unusual... I'm really sorry...

Thelma – Believe me, it's not easy finding someone for the fourth...

Louise – So, if I'm getting this right, you're not exactly swimming in happiness either...

Thelma – Some people just aren't meant for happiness...

Louise – Maybe you should see someone.

Thelma – I saw an analyst for five years. Cost me a fortune.

Louise – And...?

Thelma – After five years, I realised the only thing that felt lighter after each session was my bank account.

Louise – So you stopped…

Thelma – Yes... But first, I made sure I got my money back.

Louise – Excuse me?

Thelma – My analyst always insisted on cash, never a receipt. I knew exactly where the bastard kept his banknotes. On my last day, while he was on the phone to his next victim, I took the lot.

Louise – And he didn't report you?

Thelma – No… He probably wasn't exactly a saint himself…

Louise – That's the first time I've heard of someone robbing their own therapist...

Thelma – It's risk-free, I assure you. I wonder if, in the end, I even made a profit…

Richard *returns, soaked to the skin, carrying his travel bag. He puts it down near the counter.*

Louise – Well?

Richard – There was no spare wheel in the red car.

Thelma – No spare wheel?

Richard – None.

Louise – You didn't know?

Thelma – I bought it second-hand! I never thought to check.

Richard *(giving her a furious look)* – I'm soaked to the skin.

Thelma – Or perhaps someone stole it. People do steal spare wheels, don't they?

Louise – But you've got a spare wheel yourself.

Richard – Yes, but I drive a four-wheel drive. And I seriously doubt its spare wheel would fit either of your bloody little cars.

Louise – Please, watch your language!

Thelma – Just because yours is bigger...

Richard – You, I suggest you keep quiet, or I might actually lose my temper.

Thelma – Alright, I didn't say a thing...

Louise – We're all a bit tense, it's understandable. But let's stay calm, alright? It's not that bad.

Richard – Speak for yourself...

Louise – Someone's bound to come along this road. They'll see our three cars, the flat tyres, and call the police.

Richard – The police…

Thelma – That doesn't exactly seem to thrill you... You don't want to deal with the police?

Richard – I don't plan on rotting here waiting for someone to show up, alright? Is that so hard to understand? *(He checks his phone.)* Still no signal...

Louise – So what do you suggest we do now?

Richard – Me? I'm not suggesting anything! As soon as the rain stops, I'm gone. You two can figure it out. That's my suggestion.

Thelma – Very gallant, thank you…

Richard – In the meantime, I'm having a drink to warm up.

He walks to the counter, pours himself a glass, and downs it in one go, coughing afterward.

Thelma – Yes, definitely more of a man's drink...

Silence. They each sit at a table.

Louise – I can't hear the storm anymore... *(She goes to look out the window.)* Looks like it's stopped raining...

Thelma – So you can finally leave us, and abandon us to our fate…

But Richard doesn't seem in a hurry to leave.

Louise – Have you changed your mind?

Richard – I can't walk... Not very far, anyway.

Louise – Why's that?

Thelma – Don't tell me you're wearing stilettos after all…

Richard – I've got flat feet…

Louise – Flat feet? I thought that was just what people claimed when they wanted to avoid military service.

Richard – Unfortunately, some of us really do have flat feet…

Thelma – So, looks like you're stuck with us. Unlucky for you... *(Pauses)* If only we had a deck of cards, we could play a game.

Louise – Want me to see if I can find one?

Thelma – No, I'm just messing with you... I'm not in the mood for cards. Are you?

Louise – Not really…

Louise starts pacing back and forth.

Richard – Could you stop moving around like that? It's making me nervous.

Louise – Sorry... *(She sits down at a table and suddenly looking unsettled.)* Why this table?

Thelma – Oh, so now we're doing philosophy… Why this table? Why this chair? Why is there something rather than nothing?

Richard – Where's the spare tyre gone…?

Thelma – And if my aunt had balls, she'd be my uncle.

Louise – No, I mean... There are three tables here. I don't know why I naturally sat at this one. I could've chosen any of them. Why this one, specifically?

Richard – Random chance, I guess… What's the big deal? Let's not waste the evening on it.

Louise – It's almost like it's my usual seat…

Thelma – Usual? Why? Do you come here often?

Louise glances at the bar's sign.

Louise – *Chance's Café*... I swear I've been here before... But how? I can't remember…

Thelma – What I'd like is to forget it as quickly as possible…

Louise – So, you've been here before?

Thelma – I don't know…

Louise – But earlier, you said you'd been here too…

Thelma – It's a roadside bar... We could've all passed through here years ago, on our way to a holiday with our parents…

Louise – Holidays… Wait, it's coming back to me now… Chance's Café! I came here during summer camp!

Thelma – Really?

Louise – You too?

Thelma – Yes, maybe...

Louise – You were the one who mentioned summer camp earlier… Because your aunt didn't want you to stay with her.

Thelma *(looking around)* – Yes, it vaguely rings a bell...

Louise – Of course! This was the place!

Thelma – The place for what?

Louise – It's here I lost my virginity!

Thelma seems shocked.

Thelma – No way... Now I remember. Me too!

Richard – Excuse me, am I interrupting?

Thelma – Summer camp! It was right over there, in the woods. We were so bored. This is where we'd meet up with friends.

Louise – So we could make out away from the chaperones.

Thelma – Or sometimes with them…

Louise – Yes... And more, if we hit it off. In the barn next door…

Thelma *(looking at the table)* – Unbelievable… Our carvings are still on this table...

Louise – No wonder I instinctively chose this one. Look! It's where he carved our names with a pocket knife… Louise and Richard!

Thelma – Richard?

Richard – Richard?

Louise – The counsellor! It was with him that… well, my first time... I must have been fifteen... He was five years older…

Thelma – He'd just got his camp leader's certificate.

Louise – So you too… You were at camp here?

Thelma – I didn't recognise the village. Back then, it was still a bit inhabited... I think it's no coincidence I picked this table either… Look… My name's on it too… along with...

Louise leans over to get a closer look.

Louise – Richard?

Thelma – Maybe it wasn't the same year…

Louise – It was the summer after my school exams… Everyone else had gone on a night hike to watch the fireworks. My best friend had been kept behind as a punishment. I pretended to be ill so I could stay with her. What was her name again?

Thelma – Thelma.

Louise – Of course! Thelma! That was you! I'd never have recognised you.

Thelma – Me neither… I suppose we've changed a bit. But... I didn't remember we were that close…

Louise – Friendship is like love, it's not always mutual...

Thelma – And Richard, the counsellor, we left him here to watch over us. Fat chance… He really took care of us...

Louise – He was excused from the walk… because of some problem.

Thelma – What was it again? Not an embarrassing illness, but something like that...

Louise – Flat feet…

Thelma – That's it!

The two women turn to look at the man.

Richard – Lots of people have flat feet. And I assure you I've never set foot here in my life…

Thelma – Just another coincidence, I guess... And I'm sure your name isn't really Richard either?

Richard – No… And I don't have a camp leader's certificate…

Louise – Then what's your name, then?

Richard – If you don't mind, I'd rather wait until we know each other a bit better before sharing that.

Louise – If you were the one who deflowered us both, I'd say we're already quite close…

Richard – I'm telling you, I'm not Richard, and I've never deflowered anyone… as far as I know… At least, not here… And certainly not you!

Louise – The bastard!

Thelma – We were fifteen, and he was twenty. That was dangerously close to taking advantage of minors.

Louise – He didn't rape me either, but… Well, he swore he loved me. That I was the only one. So you too...?

Thelma – Yes, he told me I was the only one too. That we were going to get married. I was young. I believed him.

Louise – Actually, I didn't care about that idiot. I just wanted to get it over with. To become a woman.

Thelma – Yes. It was the night of the fireworks. Everyone had gone to watch them.

Louise – No? Don't tell me you too...? So, both of us… it was the same night!

Thelma – Some fireworks. More of a damp squib…

Louise – Yes, that's true… And it was raining that night too...

Thelma – I mean my first time. With Richard. It wasn't just his feet that were flat… I still don't know how he managed to seduce two girls in a single evening.

Richard – And they say men are vulgar...

Thelma – But it really was raining that night.

Louise – Yes. I remember...

Thelma – So it was the same year... The same night...

Richard – It often rains on the night of the village fireworks around here.

Thelma – You seem to know the area quite well all of a sudden… Richard...

Louise approaches the bar and picks up the portrait

Louise – I knew this photo looked familiar… Virginia! In the end, it was for her that bastard left us both. Do you remember?

Thelma – She was the owner's daughter. So that's why this photo is here...

Louise – She was quite something... She'd be our age now.

Richard – If she was your age back then, that makes sense...

Louise – Yes, she was wilder than us, but she played the innocent little girl.

Thelma – That's how she fooled that idiot. Let's be honest, he wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed.

Louise – Not very bright, but definitely motivated.

Thelma – We used to call him Dicky...

Louise – Yes… Exactly, because of… Well, he hid it well too…

Thelma – I wonder if he got involved with her mother, too.

Louise – Her mother?

Thelma – The bar's owner.

Louise – Oh, I mean, that guy was an animal.

Thelma – Well, Virginia's mother wasn't exactly shy either.

Louise – True.

Thelma – According to all the boys at camp, all it took was a little cash.

Louise – Yes… They spent all their pocket money on her, but it was definitely more valuable than the biology lessons we got at school.

Thelma – And the practical work was included in the deal.

They laugh, glancing at Richard, who looks thoroughly displeased. Louise then grows serious.

Louise – There was a sordid incident that year, wasn't there?

Thelma – Sordid? You mean, aside from the fact that we both lost our virginity to a flat-footed creep on the same night?

Louise – No, I'm talking about when someone stole from the bar's cash register. You remember?

Thelma – Yes...

Louise – Well, since the three of us were the only ones there, Richard got blamed for it.

Thelma – Poor thing...

Louise – He swore he had nothing to do with it… but they fired him anyway.

Thelma – Yes...

Louise – I'm not exactly proud of it, but honestly, I was kind of relieved... it felt like a little revenge.

Richard – Revenge?

Louise – He ditched both of us, for that cow, Virginia.

Richard – I see…

Louise – I said I wasn't proud of it. But at the same time, it wasn't my fault he got fired, even if he didn't do it.

Thelma – It was me.

Louise – What?

Thelma – I was the one who took the money and made sure he got the blame…

Richard – What? *(The two women look at him, surprised by his sudden reaction, and he repeats, more quietly.)* I mean... what?

Thelma – I knew where the owner kept the key to the back office. It was too tempting.

Louise – Still...

Thelma – It was my way of getting back for losing my virginity... Dicky had given me his lighter, with his initials engraved on it. I left it by the till, in the locked office. I knew he'd get blamed. I wanted my revenge too.

Richard – That's monstrous!

Thelma – Why do you care? You're not Richard.

Richard – I just think it's completely irresponsible, that's all.

Louise *(to Thelma)* – Is this some kind of joke? Trying to trap him into admitting he's Dicky?

Thelma – Who knows…

Louise – Anyway, the money was never found.

Thelma – And my parents never sent me back to camp.

Louise – Mine neither…

Thelma – To be fair, two or three girls came back pregnant that year.

Louise – All thanks to Dicky…

Richard looks visibly disturbed.

Richard – I'm going outside to check if it's still raining… and to have a smoke.

He exits. The two women exchange a look.

Louise – Do you think it's him?

Thelma – The camp counsellor? I don't know... It'd be one hell of a coincidence for the three of us to end up here.

Louise – Then again… it is Chance's Café…

Thelma – All because of those flat tyres... What if it wasn't a coincidence?

Louise – What do you mean?

Thelma – The flat tyres, at least. Sometimes the police scatter things on the road to puncture tyres when they set up roadblocks…

Louise – Why would they set up a roadblock?

Thelma – How should I know...? Maybe they're chasing a terrorist. Or a gangster.

Louise – He doesn't exactly look like a terrorist. And we didn't see any police.

Thelma – Maybe they lifted the roadblock but forgot to remove the nails.

Louise – Hmm...

They pause for a moment.

Thelma – He left his bag.

Louise – Oh, right…

Thelma – Now's our chance.

Thelma moves towards the bag and opens it.

Louise – What's in it?

Thelma – You won't believe it…

Louise – What?

Thelma – Money.

Louise – Money?

Thelma – A lot of it.

Louise – No way… So, he really did steal from the bar's till back then?

Thelma – That was thirty years ago! There wasn't enough back then to fill a bag with cash, believe me.

Louise – You're right… So what is all this money?

Thelma – There are some plans here too… *(She takes out several sheets of paper.)* Plans for a casino.

Louise – A casino?

Thelma – The one he must have robbed, I suppose.

Louise – Oh, damn…

Thelma – I've never seen this much cash in one place. Not even at my therapist's...

Louise – So he really is a thief...

Thelma – At twenty, he was wrongly accused. Maybe he decided to make a career of it. For real, this time...

Louise – What do we do? Call the police?

Thelma – I remind you, we have no way of contacting anyone... or we wouldn't be stuck here.

Louise – Oh, right...

Thelma – You should go see what he's up to…

Louise – Why me?

Thelma – Find out if he's planning something dodgy.

Louise – Dodgy? Why me?

Thelma – He hates me. Try to keep him busy for a while.

Louise – Why?

Thelma – Just do it, for heaven's sake! For the sake of our friendship… Remember, I was your best friend.

Louise – You're not planning to steal his money, are you?

Thelma – What do you take me for?

Louise – Someone who once robbed her therapist.

Thelma – Well, yes, this money's stolen too...

Louise – Is stealing stolen money still theft?

Thelma – Unfortunately, in legal terms, I think that's called handling stolen goods.

Louise – I'm going.

She exits. Thelma moves to the bar, takes out some tablets from her bag, crushes them, and pours the powder into a glass. She nearly gets caught when the others return, but doesn't flinch.

Thelma – Is it still raining?

Richard – No…

Thelma – We definitely got off on the wrong foot, didn't we? I'm really sorry.

Richard – Alright... Let's just drop it…

Thelma – Come on, let's have a drink, all together... To our reunion...

Louise – It's crazy, isn't it? You, here, with your two exes... All we're missing is the bar owner…

Thelma – And her daughter.

Louise – You're not pretending you've broken down just to get us into bed again, are you?

Thelma – Just to rekindle the spark for two long-lost virgins, thirty years later…

The supposed Richard doesn't seem amused. Thelma pours three glasses and hands one to Louise and one to Richard.

Richard – So it really was you who took that money?

Thelma – I'll tell you… but only if you admit you're Richard.

Richard hesitates.

Richard – OK… It's me.

Louise – What a coincidence! At this point, I think we can even call it fate. It's a little spooky, don't you think?

They hear fireworks, and see the glow of colourful reflections.

Richard *(worried)* – What's that?

Thelma – Isn't that the village fireworks display?

Louise – Another coincidence...

Thelma – A real fireworks display... like a sort of commemoration.

Richard – Your turn to talk now, Thelma... It's like poker. I've shown my hand, now you show yours.

Thelma – Alright… Yes, it was me who took the cash from Chance's Café.

Louise – I knew it… I suspected it, even back then…

Thelma – There wasn't much, actually. A disappointment, like my first time with Richard. But I told you, it was mostly about revenge…

Richard – You bitch!

Louise – That's all in the past, isn't it?

Richard – Because of you, I got kicked out of that camp. And I never worked as a counsellor again.

Thelma – Once you're labelled as a sexual delinquent...

Richard – If my life went off the rails, it's because of you, you cow.

Thelma – Oh, we all have our little problems…

Richard – I'm going to strangle you...

He stumbles toward her, beginning to feel the effects of the sedative.

Louise – Oh my God! He's having a seizure! Must be the emotion…

Richard *(leaning on a table)* – I don't know what's happening to me... I feel dizzy... This cow poisoned me…

Thelma – He's just drowsy. It's the sleeping pills.

Louise – Sleeping pills?

Thelma – The ones I slipped into his drink.

Louise – Why would you do that?

Richard collapses into a chair, then falls asleep, his head on the table.

Thelma – He was about to strangle me!

Louise – This is a nightmare… This can't be happening… It's the kind of thing you'd only dream up.

Thelma – Well, I don't plan on sleeping here.

She moves behind the bar, bends down, and reveals a key.

Louise – What's that?

Thelma – The key to the back room. It's still hidden in the same spot.

Louise – You knew where the owner hid the key…

Thelma – Yes.

Louise – So you really did steal that money.

Thelma – Of course!

Thelma *unlocks the door and goes into the back room.*

Louise – Oh my God... What are we going to find behind that door? Skeletons from the past…

Thelma *returns.*

Thelma – You don't know how right you are…

Louise – What…?

Thelma – I've got good news and bad news.

Louise – Bad news?

Thelma – There's a woman in there. Hanging on the telephone.

Louise – Well, she'll have to hang up sometime. She must be exhausted, like us.

Thelma – Oh, she is. Dead tired, I'd say.

Louise – What do you mean?

Thelma – I mean she's hanging. Literally.

Louise – No… You're joking…

Thelma – You can go and see for yourself, but I warn you, it's not a pretty sight. She's hanged herself with the telephone cord.

Louise – Oh no… That's awful… Tell me this is a nightmare… That I'm going to wake up…

Thelma – I'd never seen a hanged person before, but it's truly horrifying.

Louise – We must call the police!

Thelma – No signal, remember? And to use the landline we'd have to get her down first.

Louise – Oh, that's right…

Thelma – And besides, this whole situation is getting a bit complicated to explain to the police, don't you think?

Louise – You think?

Thelma – Let me try to summarise. By sheer chance, after a series of flat tyres, I run into the counsellor who took my virginity thirty years ago, along with the girl he also deflowered the same night. Back then, the counsellor was wrongly accused of a theft I committed out of revenge for his fling with the owner's daughter, a notorious tramp. And now, this bastard's just robbed a casino, but we're all stuck here because he has flat feet... Should I keep going?

Louise – You're right… I'm starting to get lost myself…

Thelma – And I've simplified it.

Louise – But who is she? The woman in there?

Thelma – I'm not sure, but I'd say… Virginia.

Louise – Virginia? The bar owner's daughter?

Thelma – Even all blue, she looks a lot like the girl in the photo.

Louise – Oh my God. But what is she doing here?

Thelma – Maybe she took over the bar after her mother.

Louise – No, I mean… what's she doing here, hanging?

Thelma – How would I know?

Louise – Maybe she hung herself after you stole the bar's cash...

Thelma – What?

Louise – Maybe it led to the bar going bankrupt. Or her mother dying.

Thelma – But that was thirty years ago!

Louise – Who knows? The butterfly effect… One thing leads to another. She never saw Richard again. Instead of getting away, she had to run the bar and offer private evening lessons to the boys from summer camp to make ends meet… Perhaps that's what drove her to it.

Thelma – Hmm…

Louise – It's horrifying!

Thelma – It's fate. Nothing we can do about it.

Louise – We need to find a way to alert the police.

Thelma – If we call the police, Richard will get arrested. And this time, for a crime he actually committed.

Louise – True…

Thelma – The best thing we can do is get out of here.

Louise – But how?

Thelma – That's the good news. I found something else in that cupboard…

Louise – What?

Thelma *goes into the back room and returns carrying a spare wheel.*

Thelma – A spare wheel!

Louise – No way?

Thelma – And believe me, this is a real wheel of fortune!

Louise – How do you mean?

Thelma – We take the cash, and we're out of here…

Louise – We can't do that…

Thelma – Remember, that guy is a predator. He took advantage of us thirty years ago.

Louise – Yes, well…

Thelma – He cheated on both of us with that cow, Virginia. You wanted revenge, didn't you?

Louise – Yes, of course, but…

Thelma – That tramp hung herself, and he'll end up in jail for a crime he actually committed. Meanwhile, we'll be sipping cocktails somewhere in the tropics. Life hasn't been kind to us. This is our revenge.

Louise – You think?

Thelma – Do you really want to spend the rest of your life as a nursing assistant? Trust me, it's like my analyst: he won't report the theft.

Louise – I don't know… it doesn't feel very moral...

Thelma – If fate brought the three of us together tonight at Chance's Café, it can't be for nothing, right?

Louise – I don't know why, but I trust you. And I've got something to confess too.

Thelma – Oh really?

Louise – I admired you a lot back then.

Thelma – Admired, as in…?

Louise – You were everything I wasn't. You dared to do everything…

Thelma – Well, as you can see, things haven't exactly worked out for me.

Louise – Honestly, the only reason I slept with Richard was to be like you. To feel closer to you.

Thelma – Oh, I see…

Louise – Our time has come, Thelma, I can feel it! We're picking up right where we left off thirty years ago.

She moves closer, and Thelma instinctively steps back.

Thelma – There's also a phone in there, but I think we'd better keep a low profile…

Louise – After Richard was kicked out of camp, maybe she stayed near the phone all those years, waiting for a call from him that never came.

Thelma – Seriously? You should write romance novels.

Louise – And out of despair, she eventually hanged herself with the phone cord…

Thelma – Yeah… Must be that…

Louise – All because of the miscarriage of justice Richard suffered… because of us…

Thelma – Miscarriage of justice… Let's not get carried away. There wasn't even a trial.

Louise – Are you sure it's Virginia?

Thelma – I don't know… She looks a lot like her mother… Especially now…

Louise – Now that she's hanging from the phone?

Thelma – Now that she's thirty years older! Don't think she's still the young girl who drove all the camp counsellors crazy. And as for us—have you looked at us lately? We haven't exactly stayed young either. If we want any chance of finding a gigolo, we're going to have to flash the cash...

Louise – We can't just leave them both here like this…

Thelma – You're right. We're not monsters, after all… *(She takes a bundle of banknotes from the bag and places it on the table beside the sleeping Richard.)* A tip for the staff, as they say at the casino.

Louise – There's one thing I don't understand…

Thelma – What?

Louise – How could she hang herself and close the door behind her, leaving the key in its place?

Thelma – Do you want us to call the police and let them solve the mystery?

Louise – You're right, it's really none of our business…

Thelma – But if you ask me, that girl didn't hang herself alone…

Louise – And the nails? Who put those down?

Thelma – They must be in it together.

Louise – Of course… Dicky and Virginia…

Thelma – Maybe he staged it as a suicide to keep all the cash for himself.

Louise – And she knew he'd come this way after the heist. So, she put down the nails to make sure he'd stop here instead of running off with the cash…?

Thelma – Or maybe… it's fate.

Louise – Fate?

Thelma – Hansel scattered pebbles to find his way home. Perhaps fate scattered nails to bring us back together…

Louise – At *Chance's Café*…

Thelma – I think we were meant to meet here.

Louise – It's destiny.

Thelma – Virginia… Now I remember. Chance was her family name, hers and her mother's.

Louise – Of course… *Chance's Café*…

Thelma – Goes to show, chance doesn't always work in your favour.

Louise – Do you think we're responsible?

Thelma – Responsible for what?

Louise – For her suicide!

Thelma – I don't know, and frankly, I don't care. Let's just get out of here.

Louise – Which car are we taking? Yours or mine?

Thelma – Mine only needs two tyres replaced.

Louise – Yes... but mine's practically new.

Thelma takes a coin from her pocket, flips it, catches it, and covers it with her other hand.

Thelma – Heads, yours. Tails, mine.

She reveals the coin.

Louise – Let's go.

Thelma – Grab the spare tyre!

Louise – Oh, right, sorry…

They exit, one carrying the bag and the other the spare tyre. Darkness. Lights up. Richard wakes, alone. He sees the wad of cash on the table. Realising the bag is gone, he mutters.

Richard – Those bitches… *(A pause.)* They won't get far. I tampered with Thelma's brakes. It's a steep descent from here, with a ravine alongside the road… *(He gets up and takes a few unsteady steps.)* I wonder which car they'll put those wheels of fortune on…

We hear the sound of screeching tyres, then a crash.

Richard – There's some justice in the world, after all… *(A pause.)* Doesn't help me get away, though… *(He goes to the counter and looks at the portrait.)* Virginia… Funny how much she looks like her mother now…

A phone rings from the back room. He looks toward the door.

Richard – The door! It's open…

He walks toward the door, stopping at the threshold. The phone continues to ring.

Richard – Should I answer it?

He steps into the back room. The phone stops ringing.

Richard – Hello?

The sound of a police car siren wails, its flashing lights filling the scene.

Blackout.

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/

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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 ...
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

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