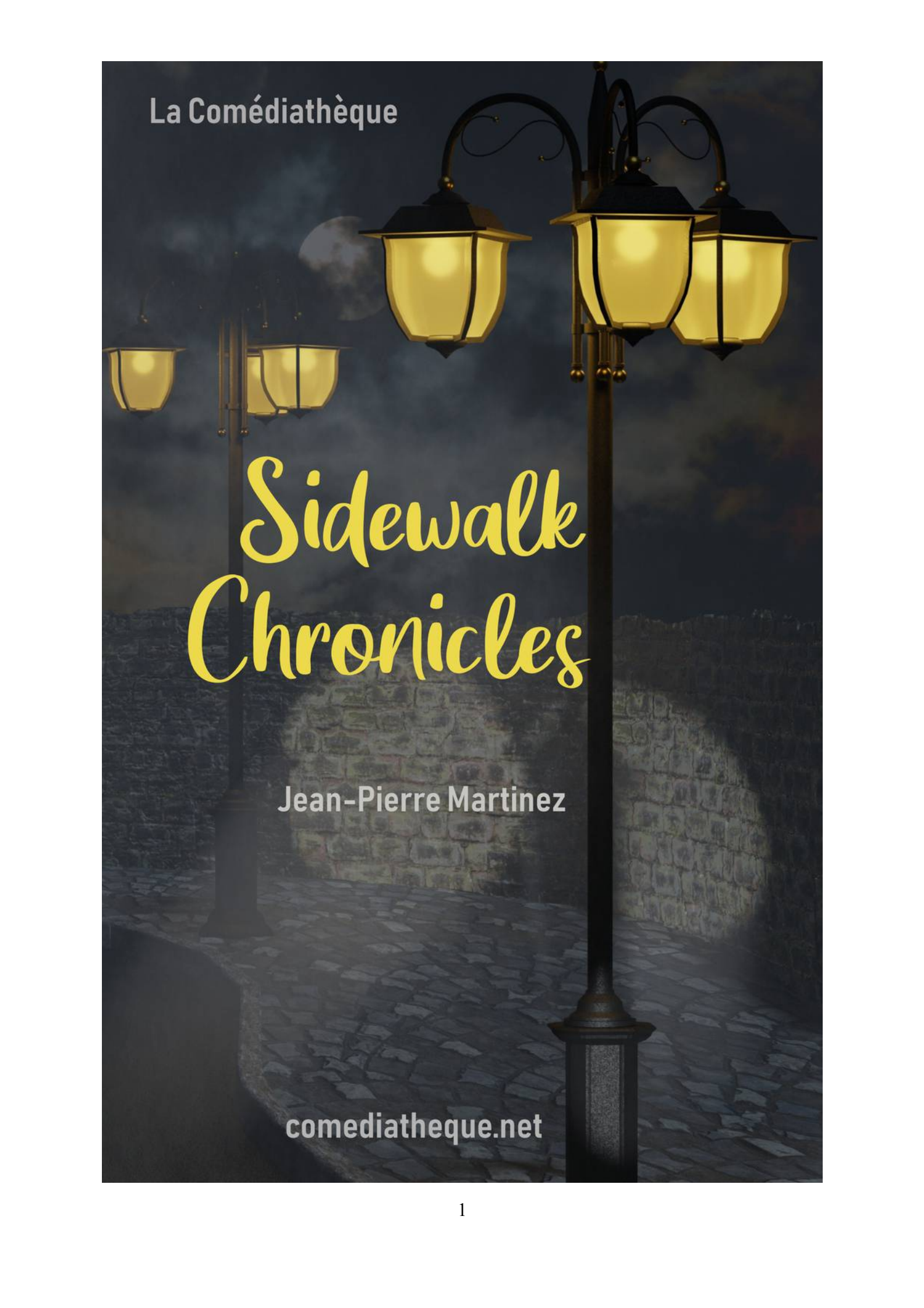


The background of the entire page is a photograph of a cobblestone sidewalk at night. Several ornate street lamps with multiple glowing yellow lanterns are positioned along the path. In the background, a stone wall is visible, and a full moon is partially obscured by clouds in the dark sky.

La Comédiathèque

Sidewalk Chronicles

Jean-Pierre Martinez

comediatheque.net

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Sidewalk Chronicles

On the sidewalk of a street, strange stories unfold...

25 characters:

Highly adaptable cast in terms of number and gender, each actor able to play multiple roles, and most roles can be portrayed as either male or female.

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1. At the End of the Street

A section of the street with a sidewalk, and possibly a bench. One character (man or woman) approaches from one side, while another character approaches from the opposite side.

One – Excuse me, do you know where this street leads?

Two – Where it leads? Oh no, I... I'm not exactly sure.

One – But you just came from there, didn't you?

Two – From where?

One – From this street!

Two – Oh no, I come from number 5, there. That's where I live... Anyway, it's right at the beginning of the street. In the other direction, I have no idea where this street goes.

One – Oh, that's annoying.

Two – Annoying?

One – I won't take this street without knowing where it leads.

Two – But where are you going?

One – I was told it's at the end of the street, but...

Two – At the end of the street? Which street?

One – I was told the one going downhill.

Two – The street going downhill? Then it must not be this one.

One – And why not?

Two – I would say this street goes uphill, don't you think?

One – Oh, really? You think so? I rather think it goes downhill.

Two – Or maybe you didn't take it in the right direction...

One – Oh no, for me, it goes downhill.

A third character arrives.

Two – Excuse me for bothering you... Do you think this street goes uphill or downhill?

Three – Is this for a survey?

Two – No...

Three – I'm warning you, I don't do politics.

Two – No, no, it's just this person who... They were told it's at the end of the street going downhill, and...

The third person looks at the street.

Three – I would say this street is rather flat, isn't it?

Two – A false flat, then...

One – Yes, but is it a false flat going uphill or downhill?

Three – Let's put a marble on the sidewalk, and we'll see if it goes uphill or downhill.

One – How could a marble go uphill?

Three – Not the marble! The street. We put the marble on the ground, and we'll see in which direction it starts rolling.

One – Yes, of course, we can do that...

They all seem to be waiting for something.

Two – Do you have a marble?

Three – No.

One – Then why did you talk about putting a marble on the ground?

Three – I just said it like that! I never said I had a marble. Do I look like someone who plays with marbles?

Two – We'd have to find a kid.

One – A kid with marbles.

They look around.

Three – Nowadays, kids playing with marbles...

Two – Yeah...

Three – It's true. It's a lost art. When I was a kid, we still played with marbles.

Two – It was a different time. It seems so far away. Now, if kids played with marbles, it would be through a smartphone app.

One – Well, that still doesn't tell me if it's the right street.

Three – The right street?

Two – They told him it's at the end of the street, but they didn't tell him the name of the street.

Three – Just at the end of the street?

One – I was told the street going downhill.

Three – Going downhill? But in which direction?

Two – That's what I told him...

Three – But where are you going exactly?

One – Nowhere! I'm looking for my car.

Three – Your car...

One – My husband told me he parked it on a street going downhill, but he didn't tell me which one...

Two – Was it a long time ago?

Three – Why? Do you think the slope of the street could have changed in the meantime?

Two – Why don't you just go down the street and see if your car is parked there?

Three – Go down... or up. That is the question.

Two – Did he tell you the exact number?

One – He just said at the end of the street. Right at the top.

Three (*skeptical*) – At the top? At the end of a street going downhill...

One – I'm a bit afraid of getting lost. I've been circling around for a good fifteen minutes already.

Three – It does seem to turn a bit, all the way at the end, doesn't it?

Two – Well, that would explain everything...

Three – What?

Two – What's the name of the street on the other side?

One – That street? The one going downhill too?

Three – I would say it goes uphill, but well...

Two – I'll go check...

He goes to check. The third person turns in the direction where the other one went.

Three – I don't know where that street goes; I've never taken it. I always go to number 214 on Turnalot Street. Twice a week for over ten years.

The other one comes back.

Two – It's unbelievable; it's also Turnalot Street, number 214.

Three – That street is Turnalot Street?

Two – Well yes, just like this one.

One – How can a street go downhill in both directions?

Three – Well, if it's a street that goes in a circle...

Two – It can very well go downhill in both directions...

Three – That's why your husband told you the street going downhill...

Two – And at the end of a street going downhill in a circle, naturally, you're at the top of the street.

One – Oh yes, that makes sense...

Three – It's incredible... I've been going through this street from end to end for ten years to go to my psychoanalyst, taking a left at the exit of the station, and I realise today that it's just to the right when you come out.

One – Oh yes, that's truly going in circles.

Two – If I were you, I'd stop psychoanalysis...

One (*turning around*) – Oh well, look, there it is over there...

Three – What?

One – My car!

Two – Well, there you go.

Three – All's well that ends well.

One – Thank you very much for your help... Excuse me, I have to run, I'm already late...

Two – But of course.

The character walks away. The other two watch him go.

Three – It doesn't seem to go very smoothly, though...

Two – Yeah...

2. Career Plans

Two schoolgirls (potentially played by adults dressed as teenagers) arrive one after the other, clearly coming from school.

One – Did you get your report cards?

Two – Yes.

One – What's your average?

Two – Seventeen on twenty.

One – Oh, wow...

Two – And you?

One – Eight and a half.

Two – Oh, wow... That's exactly half.

One – Half of what?

Two – Eight and a half. Half of seventeen.

One – You think?

The other looks at her in amazement and gives up on answering. Silence.

One – What do you want to be when you grow up?

Two – I don't know... *(Pause)* I'm torn between becoming a physiotherapist and a streetwalker.

One – Oh, that's cool... *(Silence)* What exactly is a physiotherapist?

Two – Well... If someone has a cramp, for example, they call the physiotherapist, and she gives them a massage...

One – To get rid of the cramp...?

Two – Yeah...

One – Oh, I see... *(Pause)* So, it's a masseuse, right?

Two – Yeah... But now, it's called a physiotherapist.

One – That's cool...

Two – It comes from Greek: 'physis,' meaning nature, and 'therapeia,' which means healing. So a physiotherapist is someone who heals through natural means. Because you need to study, you know, to become a physiotherapist.

One – Study Greek?

Two – And latin, too. To know what the radius, the stratocumulus and the cunnilingus are...

One – Oh, that's cool... *(Pause)* And does a physiotherapist earn well?

Two – Nah... That's the problem... That's why I'm considering streetwalking.

One – Mmm... *(Pause)* Streetwalker is kind of like a delivery driver, right?

Two – That's right... It's a delivery driver, but one who delivers walking. That's why it's called a streetwalker.

One – Ah, I see... *(Pause)* And does it pay well?

Two – My older sister is a streetwalker, and my mom says she earns ten times more than she does.

One – What does your mom do?

Two – Nothing.

One – Nothing?

Two – Unemployment.

One – Oh, that sucks... And does your sister enjoy being a streetwalker?

Two – I don't know. My stepfather kicked her out right after she decided to become one.

One – Oh, that's not cool...

Two – Yeah, it sucks.

One – And what does your stepfather do?

Two – Nothing...

One – Unemployment?

Two – Deceased.

One – Oh, really? But deceased, uh? *(Seeing her interlocutor's silence)* Wow...

Two – And what about you? What do you want to do when you finish school, if you ever do...

One – I'm undecided...

Two – Between what and what?

One – I don't know.

Two – What do your parents do?

One – My dad is a Greek teacher.

Two – And your mom?

One – A Greek teacher.

Two – Great...

One – They want me to be a Latin teacher.

Two – A Latin teacher?

One – They say I'll never reach the level to be a Greek teacher.

Two – Cool...

One – There's no unemployment. It's in the civil service.

Two – And does a Greek teacher earn well?

One – I don't know...

Two – More than a streetwalker?

One – Maybe a bit less, actually.

Two – And you have to study...

One – There's an exam... Is there an exam to be a streetwalker?

Two – My sister started right after living school.

One – Oh yeah... That's cool...

They stay silent for a while.

One – Oh, damn...

Two – What?

One – Eight and a half... My parents are going to kill me, that's for sure...

Two – Just tell them that.

One – What?

Two – To your folks. When you get home, tell them you want to be a streetwalker. That way, they'll leave you alone.

One – You think?

Two – Well yeah...

One – Oh, okay...

Two – You don't even need a diploma.

One – Yeah, that's not a bad idea... (*She checks her watch.*) Well, I have to go, otherwise they really will kill me...

Two – Okay. Tell me all about it later.

One – What?

Two – About your folks! About your career plan. What they think...

One – Oh, okay... That's cool... Thanks for the advice anyway...

She walks away. The other one sighs.

Two – Man, she's really too clueless.

3. The Street Belongs to Everyone

A man dressed as a woman, resembling a prostitute, is waiting on the sidewalk. A nun approaches. She seems unpleasantly surprised to see the man.

Nun – What are you doing here?

Man – Can't you see?

Nun – Don't you think you stand out a bit in this nice setting?

Man – Are you the police?

Nun – Not exactly...

Man – The street belongs to everyone, right?

The man offers her money.

Nun – Well, take this tenner then, and get lost, alright?

The man looks at the money, surprised, but doesn't take it.

Man – Thank you, Sister, that's very generous of you. But I'm afraid I'll have to stay.

Nun – I'm just asking you to move to the end of the street!

Man – Yes, but sorry, that's not going to happen.

The nun thinks for a moment, annoyed, then decides.

Nun – Alright, how much for a... you know?

Man – Why? Interested?

The nun takes out two twenty-euro bills and hands them to him.

Nun – Here are two twenty-euro bills. You see, my car is just around the corner. Why don't you go check if I'm there? Just consider it part of your job...

Man – But I'm telling you, no.

Nun – And why not?

Man – Because I have a good reason not to move from here, that's why.

Nun – What reason?

Man – Do I ask you questions?

Nun – I don't mind if you do, as long as you clear off from here afterward.

Man – Fine. So why does it bother you so much that I'm here? It's not very Christian. I remind you that Jesus himself didn't stone the adulterous woman...

Nun – Yeah, well, when it comes to adulterous women, I'm more in favour of stoning, you know...

Man – Is that a threat?

Nun – Listen, I have nothing against you, alright? I'm keeping an eye on the house across the street, and I'd prefer to stay discreet, you understand? If there are two of us, it starts looking like a gathering...

Man – Number 13?

Nun – Yes, number 13, why?

Man – No, I'm asking you why. Why are you so interested in what's happening at number 13?

Nun – Let's just say... two people planned to meet there. Two people who are married, but not to each other, if you catch my drift.

Man – And heaven sent you to prevent this mortal sin... You're some kind of guardian angel, right?

Nun – I'd rather be a sort of cuckold...

Man – Ah, I see... You're the wife of...?

Nun – Can't hide anything from you.

The man is taken aback.

Man – Oh yes, of course, that changes everything...

Nun – So?

Man – Well, congratulations on your disguise. I would never have guessed that...

Nun – Thank you.

Man – What do you think of mine?

Nun – Don't tell me you too...

Man – Oh yes... I'm the betrayed husband.

Nun – No way?

Man – Yes...

Nun – It's unbelievable... Well, congrats to you too... I would never have guessed that...

Man – And now, what do we do?

Nun – It's true that our disguises are perfect, but...

Man – Yes, the least we can say is that our pairing is quite unlikely.

Nun – And quite noticeable.

Man – It's really unfortunate.

Nun – We're going to end up drawing attention, that's obvious.

Man – Too bad we couldn't coordinate.

Nun – Let's just act like we don't know each other.

Man – Alright... we can give it a try...

Nun – They shouldn't be arriving late anyway.

A moment passes during which they try to ignore each other.

Man – I'm just taking a few photos with my phone and then I'm out. It's for my lawyer.

Nun – I did think about hiring a detective for the photos, but it's so expensive.

Man – And so cliché.

Nun – If your photos turn out bad, I'll send you mine. You can leave me your email address.

Man – Here, take my card.

He hands her a card, which she takes.

Nun – Oh, you teach at the city high school?

Man – Yes, why?

Nun – I teach there too.

Man – That's at least one thing in common.

Nun – It's strange that we haven't run into each other before.

Man – Well, maybe we have. But I guess you don't go to work dressed like this either...

Nun – No, you're right...

A moment passes.

Man – Do you smoke?

Nun – No, thank you...

Man – Oh no, I don't smoke either. I just wanted to know if you were a smoker.

Nun – Oh really? And why is that?

Man – My wife is a smoker. It's absolutely unbearable.

Nun – Yes, I know what you mean... My husband smokes too.

Man – At least they have that in common. Maybe they met in a tobacco shop...

Nun – Who knows...

Man – Ah, here they come, I think.

Nun – I dare not look... They'll spot us for sure.

Man – All we can do now is act like in the movies.

Nun – In the movies?

He takes her in his arms and kisses her for a long time. They gradually release each other.

Man – There, they must have entered number 13.

Nun – Are you sure it was them?

Man – Not quite, actually... I didn't really look... You see, I had my mind elsewhere...

Nun – Yes, me too... Do you think they recognised us?

Man – Honestly, I doubt it. With our disguises...

Nun – Well, I think it's best if we leave.

Man – I'm wondering if I shouldn't entrust this matter to a private detective, though.

Nun – Yes, no matter what, it's a profession.

Man – But come to think of it, why not hire the same detective for both of our cases? After all, it'll be the same photos, right?

Nun – You're right, it would be silly to multiply expenses. We can share the costs...

Man – Please, I insist... It's on me.

Nun – You're a gentleman like they don't make anymore. And I don't even know your name...

Man – I think it's better not to linger around here too much... Would you like to have a drink somewhere?

Nun – I don't know if it's very reasonable, but...

Man – The hardest part will be finding a place where we could go unnoticed.

Nun – Indeed...

They exit.

4. Like Clockwork

One character arrives, pulling a dog on wheels attached to a leash. Another character arrives in turn, holding a pack of cigarettes (the text may be slightly adapted based on the gender of the two characters).

Two – So, you're back?

One – Oh, hello! Yes, yes, I got back this morning. And you?

Two – Last night.

One – Not too much traffic on the road?

Two – We left early, fortunately, because otherwise...

One – Yes... Vacation's over...

Two – Well, they say that, but in the end, we're not unhappy to be back home, right?

One – Mmm...

Two – We can't be on vacation all the time. Eventually, we'd get bored. (*He offers his pack of cigarettes to the other.*) Cigarette?

One – Thanks, I quit.

Two – Oh, really?

One – Back-to-school resolutions, you know... Now, I vape...

He takes out an electronic cigarette and starts vaping. The other puts away his pack of cigarettes.

Two – Well, I might as well give it a try too... (*He takes out a pillbox, swallows one, is about to put the box away, but changes his mind.*) Oh, sorry, do you want one? It's a little relaxant... Normally, it's prescription-only, but well, they're very mild...

One – Thanks, I quit medication too.

Two – Oh boy... We're not just talking about resolutions then... It's heavy, I must say. Did you meet God this summer, become a monk, and just came to pick up your things before going to seclude yourself in your monastery, is that it?

One – At least you haven't taken a vow of silence...

Two – Well, you're right. I might as well quit.

One – Quit... talking nonsense, you mean?

Two – Quit the meds!

One – Oh yes, of course... It's true, you don't look very well. For someone who's just returned from vacation...

The other takes it a bit hard.

Two – And your wife, how is she?

One – Honestly... I quit her too.

Two – Quit?

One – We were constantly bickering anyway... So instead, I took... something inflatable...

Two – Oh yes... Yes, that's... It's less complicated, for sure...

One – I inflate her every night. We watch a bit of TV, and then... And you?

Two – Me? Oh no, I... I'm still with my wife. The old-fashioned way, you know...

One – I see...

An awkward silence.

Two – And the dog, how's it doing?

One – The dog? Like clockwork.

Two – Oh yes, I hadn't noticed, actually... So, you've also quit the dog...

One – This one doesn't bark, and at least, I don't have to pick up after him.

Two – Obviously... But then why do you keep taking him out for a walk?

One – Habit, I guess... But you're right, I think I'll quit taking the dog out to pee too... It'll save me from some unpleasant encounters...

Another silence.

Two – I'd suggest grabbing a beer, but I have a feeling about what you're going to say...

One – I quit alcohol...

Two – There you go.

Some time.

Two – A coffee, maybe?

One – I quit caffeine.

Two – A decaf?

One – Alright... With a sweetener, then. And on the condition that you promise to keep quiet a bit.

Two – That's what I always tell my wife. Everything would be so much simpler if people stopped talking about nothing.

One – You're telling me...

Two – And with your... inflatable thing, you...

The other gives him an annoyed look.

Two – Okay, I won't say anything more.

They walk away.

One – Come on, dog.

Two – Is that its name?

One – Didn't you promise to tone it down a bit?

Two – Sorry...

One – I think I'm also quitting the neighbours...

5. The Right Price

A woman is on the street. A man approaches timidly.

One – Excuse me... You...?

Two – Yes... Yes...

One – And... How much is it?

Two – I... I don't know...

One – You don't know?

Two – Well, you see... To be honest, it's the first time...

One – The first time?

Two – No, of course, it's not the first time that... I mean, it's the first time for me... Well, I'm new to the job, you see... So obviously, I'm not familiar with the rates...

One – I see...

Two – How much would you give me, then?

One – I don't know... Around twenty-seven...

Two – Twenty-seven euros?

One – Uh... No... Twenty-seven years...

Two – Oh, okay!

One – Besides, I don't know the prices either...

Two – I thought so... Twenty-seven euros seemed quite specific... For someone unfamiliar with the prices... No, I meant... How much would you give me for...

One – Sorry, we misunderstood each other... I'm not used to this either... It's my first time too...

Two – The first time?

One – Not the first time... I mean, the first time that...

Two – Of course... Everyone has a first time, after all...

One – So, I don't know the current rates at all... That's why I was asking for the rates... for your services.

Two – In that case, it's not going to be easy... If neither of us knows the prices... I don't know, how much would you give me... So, this time, I'm not talking about my age, are we clear?

One – Of course... Sorry.

Two – Don't apologise. Actually, I'm thirty-two... I should thank you for your courtesy... So?

One – So what?

Two – How much?

One – Oh yes... Well, it's difficult to say just like that...

Two – Name a price. How much would you be willing to pay?

One – I don't know... A hundred and fifty...?

Two – A hundred and fifty?

One – I'm really sorry... Obviously, it's not enough...

Two – Are you kidding? But that's way too much!

One – You think so?

Two – I may not know the rates, but come on... a hundred and fifty euros is really throwing money out the window. And as I mentioned, I have no experience...

One – I'm not sure that, in that case, experience...

Two – Still... Or, you can pay me afterward.

One – Afterward?

Two – You can give me whatever you want. If you're satisfied. Like a satisfaction guarantee, sort of!

One – No, honestly, it would make me uncomfortable...

Two – Yes, but then, what do we do?

One – Sorry for asking, but... Why are you doing this?

Two – Why am I on the street?

One – You don't have to answer if you don't want to, obviously.

Two – It's because of a fortune teller.

One – A fortune teller?

Two – She read my earlobes, and... Yes, it was a fortune teller who read earlobes, apparently, it's very rare. That's why I tended to believe her...

One – And what did she see in your ear?

Two – Well... She said she saw love... and a sidewalk. Since then, somehow, everything unfolded like fate. Until... Destiny, probably.

One – She might have been a beginner fortune teller too... Or perhaps, you misinterpreted...

Two – You think?

One – I don't know... Reading earlobes is quite delicate, after all...

Two – And you?

One – Why did I end up... Well, let's say... I've had some romantic disappointments, and... I started wondering if...

Two – If it wasn't simpler like this.

One – Exactly. But I realise it's probably not a good idea.

Two – Oh no, don't tell me you're going to leave like that! You're my first customer, and I find you quite friendly...

One – Thank you, but... Now, it makes me a bit uncomfortable...

Two – Now?

One – Now that we've talked...

Two – Do you think I talk too much, is that it?

One – Not at all, quite the opposite! But precisely, now that we've gotten to know each other a bit...

Two – What if I don't charge you?

One – Are you joking... No, really, it would bother me...

Two – Just consider it a launch offer... A free trial...

One – Still, I'm not sure... Let me at least invite you to dinner first...

Two – If you insist...

One – Well... Let's go, then...

They leave.

Two – Now that I think about it, I believe you're right. She must have been a beginner too, that fortune teller. Anyway, she didn't charge me either...

6. The Man on the Street

One character is there, waiting. Another one arrives.

Two – Excuse me, are you the man on the street?

The other looks at him, obviously surprised.

One – Well, I'm the man on the sidewalk anyway...

Two – I'm an intern at a polling institute, and I've been asked to interview the man on the street. Could you spare a few minutes?

One – I'm waiting for the bus...

Two – Perfect, it's an omnibus survey.

One – Omnibus?

Two – Yes... It means it's a survey that combines unrelated questions. It's cheaper for the sponsors, you see?

One – No...

Two – Each one buys a ticket, if you prefer, and has the right to ask a question in this omnibus. It's cheaper than chartering a bus just for them.

One – I don't understand a word... Is it a survey about public transportation?

Two – Well, here's the first question... It's historically proven that Jesus Christ never went to church. Okay, somewhat agree, agree...?

One – Are you sure they're not pranking you at your polling institute?

Two – More like disagree, strongly disagree...?

One – Is this for a hidden camera show?

Two – I'll go with more like disagree...

One – This is completely ridiculous as a question.

Two – Yet, the person who commissioned it is very high up, believe me.

One – Who is it?

Two – Sorry, I'm bound by professional secrecy... So, here's the second question: Do you agree with the National Front's program, excluding national preference and leaving the euro?

One – Are you kidding me?

Two – Not at all!

One – How do you expect me to answer such questions?

Two – This one is a simple yes or no.

The other gives him an exasperated look.

Two – I'll put down don't know...

One – I suppose there's a third and final question...

Two – Well, there are a bit more than that, but...

One – Just say the omnibus broke down...

Two – So... Why is there something rather than nothing? It's an open-ended question... I can tell you, this one was commissioned by an individual out of their own pocket.

One – Maybe a philosophy professor.

Two – In fact, it's the wife of a man who runs a horse butcher shop in the suburbs.

One – Well, when you're married to a guy who runs a horse butcher shop, I understand why existential questions come up...

Two – And what's your answer?

One – How many characters do you have?

Two – Like for a tweet: 140 characters.

One – If only philosophers had stuck to that to answer these kinds of questions, philosophy would be much more popular in high school classes today...

Two – So...?

One – Why is there something rather than nothing? I don't know... Because if there was nothing, there wouldn't be horses either, so no slaughterers, no horse butchers, and no one behind the counter to ask this stupid question.

Two – Well, well...

One – What?

Two – That's exactly 140 characters...

One – Well, I have to leave. Here comes my bus...

Two – Can I ask for your name and a phone number? Sometimes they check to make sure we didn't make up the answers...

The other hands him his card.

One – Here's my card...

He leaves. The other stays and looks at the card.

Two (*reading*) – Mr. Streetwalker... (*Looking up*) What street is this, anyway?

7. The Right Number

A homeless person is there, begging. A man and a woman arrive. They carefully avoid him.

Her – There are many more homeless people in this neighbourhood now, aren't there?

Him – That's true, when we used to live here, there weren't so many people on the streets.

They stop and look at the façade of a building on the side of the street.

Him – Do you remember?

Her – Yes.

Him – It was on the sixth floor, wasn't it?

Her – The seventh.

Him – Oh yes, that's right.

Her – It feels so far away...

Him – We hardly had any furniture.

Her – We didn't have a dishwasher.

Him – We didn't even have high-speed internet.

Her – Bohemian life...

Him – We didn't have much, but we were happy.

Her – Are we really happier now?

Him – Money doesn't buy happiness, as they say.

Her – We were content with what we had, and we weren't any less happy.

Him – We were young. We loved each other.

Her – We're still young, aren't we? And we still love each other?

Him – That's true, it's only been six months.

Her – Six months! Feels like ten years to me.

Him – Same here. I've almost forgotten our life before. Are you sure this is the right number, at least?

Her – Oh yes, indeed. Number 13. Don't tell me you've forgotten that too. The complementary number!

They look at the façade for a moment in silence, with a blissful smile on their faces.

Him – 60 million, can you believe it?

Her – It changes life, for sure.

Him – Already, we're no longer forced to live on the seventh floor of a building.

Her – Well, I quite liked that apartment. It had a beautiful view of the Seine quays.

Him – Yes. But it wasn't very spacious.

Her – Three hundred square meters for the two of us was already quite good.

Him – Still. On the seventh floor.

Her – With an elevator...

Him – Remember when it broke down? For a week, the maid had to climb seven floors with our packs of mineral water.

Her – Poor thing...

Him – For sure, she's much happier now that we live in a one-story villa in Neuilly.

Her – The quays are central, but very noisy.

Him – That's why we chose that duplex on the top floor.

Her – Oh yes, that's true... It was a duplex...

Him – That's why I couldn't remember if it was the sixth or seventh.

Her – You're right. Actually, we had both floors.

A new emotional silence.

Him – Come on, let's go. We won't fall into nostalgia.

Her – And the driver is waiting for us.

Him – He's paid for that, isn't he?

Her – So, how many millions do we have now?

Him – We already had 10 from my family.

Her – Plus 20 from mine.

Him – With the 60 million from the lottery...

Her – That should be around 80, then.

Him – If I may, I'd say closer to 90...

Her – Me and numbers, you know... I've never been good at counting.

Him – You're not a money person. That's why I married you.

They leave, carefully avoiding the homeless person.

Her – Maybe we could give him something...

Him – Forget it. I only have big bills...

8. Second Chance

A homeless person arrives. He spots a coin on the ground and picks it up.

One – Two euros... It's my lucky day.

A second homeless person arrives.

Two – Hey...

One – Hey... I've never seen you on this street before.

Two – Yeah, I'm new. What's it to you?

One – Just surprised, that's all.

Two – The street belongs to everyone, right?

One – The street, maybe... But the sidewalk...

Two – And you? How long have you been squatting on this sidewalk?

One – Yeah. This is my place.

Two – You're a homebody, huh?

One – I have my routines, yeah. I know everyone around here.

Two – You know everyone. But no one knows you.

One – Well, at least, I don't know you.

Two – But I know you.

One – You know me?

Two – You really don't remember me?

One – No.

Two – It's true; I've changed a bit. You have too, by the way.

One – I'm not a fan of riddles.

Two – Picture me clean-shaven, in a suit and tie, behind a fake mahogany desk.

One – Sorry, it's hard for me.

Two – I was your financial advisor.

The other remains momentarily stunned.

One – Scum! And you come to taunt me on my street again? I'll strangle you, you piece of garbage!

He tries to grab the other's throat, but the other dodges.

Two – Easy! We can talk, after all. And I have a proposition for you.

One – A proposition? If I ended up like this, it's precisely because of the rotten investments you advised me, you bastard!

Two – This time it's different, I assure you. It's absolutely risk-free.

One – Risk-free? Of course, it's risk-free! What else could I possibly have to lose? You left me with only the shirt on my back!

Two – You said it yourself, you have nothing to lose, and neither do I. So, yes or no, do you want a chance to make a comeback?

One – No!

Two – Alright then. Too bad for you. I'll try to find another partner. I'm leaving because I don't have time to waste. It's a unique opportunity that I have to seize in the next hour.

He starts to leave.

One – Okay, go on...

Two – Are you sure?

One – I'm listening...

Two – Well, I had just one 50-euro bill left.

One – Is that all you have left of what you stole from me?

Two – I decided to go all-in. I went to see a fortune teller earlier, and she gave me the five numbers for the next lottery.

One – Is this a joke?

Two – I assure you, she was very confident.

One – Fine. So, you're going to become a millionaire? Good for you. And how does that concern me? Do you plan to repay me with your big win?

Two – Not exactly.

One – It's strange, but I suspected as much.

Two – So, I gave her the 50 euros I had left to get this insider information... and I don't even have two euros left to buy a lottery ticket.

One – And?

Two – I only have an hour left!

One – So what?

Two – Well, I was wondering if... if you'd be interested in investing in this venture. You put in the two euros. And we split the profits. Two-thirds for me, one-third for you.

One – Basically, you want me to give you the two euros I just found on the ground... to buy a lottery ticket because a fortune teller just gave you the winning numbers.

Two – So, you do have two euros to invest in this venture! You won't regret it, trust me.

One – But you really take me for a fool! With these two euros, I can buy a baguette and a litre of red wine!

Two – But I'm offering you a chance to make a fortune!

One – You're the one who ruined me!

Two – You disappoint me. Even in the highly unlikely event that this fortune teller got it wrong, I'm offering you the chance to win 60 million! And you're talking about a baguette and a litre of wine? Let me tell you something: You're not worthy of being my partner in this venture. Alright, I'm leaving...

He's about to go.

One – Okay. Fifty-fifty. It's still me taking the financial risk. As usual...

Two – Okay, but you drive a hard bargain.

He extends his hand, and the other gives him the two euros.

Two – You won't regret it, trust me. Wait for me here; I'll be back. Tonight, we'll be rich!

One – Before I met you, I already was.

The other leaves.

Two – Why do I have this unpleasant feeling of being conned again?

9. On the Street

A man is there, dressed like a child. A woman arrives, also dressed like a child.

Two – Well, what's going on with you? You don't seem okay.

One – No...

Two – Where are your kids?

One – My kids just abandoned me.

Two – Right here on the street like this? That's monstrous! How can anyone do that to an adult? Were they your natural children?

One – No, I was adopted. They took me in from the Adult Protective Society just about a year ago...

Two – The Adult Protective Society?

One – The Society for the Protection of Adults.

Two – There you go! Kids these days have completely lost a sense of responsibility. They choose a companion parent on a whim without thinking about all the responsibilities it involves: feeding, clothing, walking them... And when they've had enough, they abandon them on the sidewalk. An adult is not an object, after all! It's not a toy!

One – Would you adopt me then?

Two – My dear, I would gladly, but I'm already the domestic adult for a family of five siblings. So if I came home with a companion, I'm not sure they'd be okay with it.

One – Too bad. You seemed nice. And your kids, do they treat you well at least?

Two – It's okay... Once, they forgot me at a gas station when they left for vacation, but they didn't do it on purpose. I was so scared... I thought they'd abandoned me too! But no, they came back to get me an hour later...

One – An hour?

Two – The next exit was over fifty kilometres away... So what are you going to do now?

One – I don't know...

Two – Are you tattooed at least?

One – Yes... They tattooed their mobile number on my left shoulder...

Two – That's still a sign of trust.

One – You think so?

Two – It means, at least at the beginning, they didn't intend to abandon you... Although, on the left shoulder, it must not be easy for you to read that number.

One – Fortunately, I know the number by heart...

Two – Have you tried calling them?

One – I get a voicemail. They might have changed their number.

Two – Are you sure they did it on purpose?

One – We were on the street. I was walking ahead. At some point, I turned around, and they were gone.

Two – Ah yes, kids often do that when they want to get rid of their adults... Well, unfortunately, I'll have to abandon you too.

One – Abandon me?

Two – Well, I mean... My kids are in that toy store there. It's forbidden for adults. But they won't be long coming out...

The other's phone rings.

One – Hello? Ah, it's you! No, no, I thought... Well, I thought I lost you... Oh, you're in that store too? Yes, yes, I'm right outside with another adult. No, no, I'm waiting for you. Take your time... (*He puts away his phone.*) That was them...

Two – Well, you see, there was no need to be afraid... Kids, after all, don't just abandon us like that.

One – You're right... I jumped to conclusions too quickly... I'm a bit emotional. Do you live in the neighbourhood?

Two – Yes, yes... Just at the end of the street...

One – We can see each other from time to time then...

He seems to notice something.

One – This time, I absolutely have to leave you. I see them coming out of the store, and they hate waiting... (*Towards the wings*) Yes, yes, I'm coming! So, did you find something you like?

He exits. The other stays there, thoughtful.

Two – What a dog's life...

10. The Protest for Nobody

Two characters are there with signs on which nothing is written yet. A third character arrives.

Three – Excuse me, is this the starting point for the protest?

One – Yes, yes, this is it.

Three – Alright...

Two – We start from here and go to... Where exactly are we going?

One – Well, I think this time it's... Listen, I'm not exactly sure, actually. But we'll see, right?

Two – After all, we just need to follow the others.

Three – Ah, okay...

One – Are you joining the protest with us?

Three – Yes, well... I hope I didn't pick the wrong protest.

Two – Is there another protest today?

Three – Ah, I thought you knew. There's a counter-protest.

One – A counter-protest? Did you know there's a counter-protest?

Two – No... Oh, this could get tricky then... If the counter-protest route intersects with ours.

One – You think we might cross paths?

Two – Where are they going?

Three – I don't know.

One – Like us, we don't know where we're going anyway...

Two – Yeah, true.

A moment of silence.

One – What did you write on your sign?

Two – I haven't written anything yet. I'm out of ideas...

They think.

Three – Maybe I could help you?

One – Why not?

All three think.

Three – Sorry to ask, but I want to make sure I'm not mistaken... What are you protesting for exactly?

Two – For what? You mean against what?

Three – Oh, I don't know, I... I thought it was the others who were protesting against...

One – The others?

Three – The counter-protest...

Two – Oh no, the counter-protest, they're for.

Three – For?

One – You don't seem to have much experience with protests, huh?

Three – Uh... No, I have to admit this is my first protest.

One – Well then, let us explain. We're the protest, and we're against.

Three – Against? Against what?

Two – It depends, of course. But we're generally against.

Three – I see...

One – The others, the counter-protest, they're against the fact that we're against.

Three – I think I understand this time... I mean, generally... But this time, what specifically are you protesting against?

One – Against what? I can't remember what we're protesting against today...

Two – I don't know... I haven't written anything on my sign yet... I was waiting to know what the slogan was.

Three – The slogan? I thought you were against slogans, precisely. I mean, against the established order.

The two exchange a glance.

One – You're a clever one, aren't you? Are you trying to confuse us?

Two – You're not a cop, are you?

Three – A cop?

One – An undercover cop, infiltrating us!

Two – Are you here to demoralise us?

Three – Oh no, not at all. I'm not with the police. I mean, I have nothing against the police. But I have nothing for them either.

Two – Okay, fair enough. But what are you doing here, then?

Three – Well, I'll tell you... I want to get more involved...

One – Alright. In that case, you're welcome.

Three – Thank you... But I would still like to know what I'm protesting for.

One – We always decide at the last minute, so we don't risk being co-opted.

Three – And the counter-protest?

One – Apparently, today, they have a bit of a head start on us...

Two – So? Are you with us or against us?

Three – I think I need to think a bit more... I might have gotten carried away too quickly... In the end, I wonder if I'm really ready to commit... Excuse me?

He leaves.

One – Some people, I swear...

Two – When you lack political maturity...

One – Are you sure he wasn't a cop?

Two – Who knows...

One – Still, it's strange.

Two – What?

One – There are only two of us.

Two – True, you're right.

One – Are you sure the protest is today?

Two – I don't know anymore. That guy completely confused me.

One – Since we don't have any slogans.

Two – Maybe there was a counter-order.

One – I suggest we come back tomorrow, shall we?

Two – You're right. Anyway, apparently, the base wasn't ready for a protest of this magnitude.

One – You know what they say: don't be right too soon.

Two – I hope we don't run into the counter-protest, though. We'd look ridiculous...

One – We'd look like two fools, yes.

Two – Do you think so?

They exit.

11. Out with the Broom

Two street sweepers are at work. They're sweeping. One of them picks something up from the ground.

One – It's amazing what you can find in the gutters.

Two – What is it?

One – An ear.

Two – What?

One – An ear, I'm telling you!

Two – An ear? No way! Let me see... Oh yeah, it's an ear, indeed.

He starts looking on the ground.

One – What are you looking for?

Two – I'm checking if the second one is there.

One – Why would there be a second one?

Two – I don't know... Ears come in pairs, don't they?

One – Ears come in pairs... Ridiculous...

They remain perplexed for a moment, leaning on the handles of their brooms.

Two – What are we going to do with this ear?

One – What do you suggest we do?

Two – I don't know. Maybe we should try to find its owner.

One – What do you think they'll do with it?

Two – It seems to me that if I lost an ear and someone found it, I'd like them to return it to me.

One – What do you mean if you lost an ear? You don't lose your ears like you lose your keys! How do you lose an ear without noticing?

Two – That's true... How could this person have lost an ear?

One – It could also be a woman.

Two – A woman? Why a woman?

One – Why not a woman? Women have ears too, right? Otherwise, where would they hang their earrings?

Two – But this ear doesn't have an earring.

One – Maybe it was a woman who didn't wear earrings...

Two – That's terrible...

One – What?

Two – Knowing that somewhere, a woman is walking down the street with only one ear.

One – The woman with the cut-off ear...

Just then, a woman arrives.

Three – I can read palm lines. Would you like me to read yours?

One – We're looking for someone who reads earlobes. Can you do that?

Three – Let me see...

He hands her the ear.

One – Here, I'm lending you a listening ear.

Two – We mostly want to know to whom this ear belongs.

The fortune teller seems to concentrate.

Three – I see... a broom.

Two – Do you think this ear could have belonged to a witch?

One – A broom... Of course, we're street sweepers, so she sees brooms! If we were fishmongers, she'd smell fish. And if we were sailors, she'd hear the sea...

Three – For now, I mostly sense bad vibes...

Two – We found this ear while sweeping up dead leaves in the gutter.

One – Autumn is the peak season for street sweepers... Dead ears pile up...

Two – What else do you see?

Three – I see... (*Waving the ear, as if in a trance*) I don't see anything, but I hear.

Two – And what do you hear?

Three – I hear a voice... coming from very far away.

Two – And what is this voice saying?

Three – I hear... numbers!

One – Numbers?

Two – It must be a coded message.

Three – Five digits... And a sixth one...

Two – The supplementary number!

Three – Yes... Yes, that's it... It looks like the combination for the next lottery draw!

One – The lottery?

Two – And what are these numbers?

She abruptly hands him the ear back, as if the spell has been broken.

Three – To find out, you must pay in advance.

One – Right... And what proves it's the right combination?

Three – Nothing. You're not obligated to believe. It's up to you...

Two – Still, can you imagine? What if it's the right number?

One – Are you serious?

Two – What do we have to lose?

One – I think madam will tell us that...

Three – Fifty euros.

One – Fifty euros?

Three – Take it or leave it.

One – And what if it's true, why don't you play the winning combination yourself?

Three – You found the ear, not me. It would go against my professional ethics.

Two – It's only 25 euros each...

One – How about 40, okay?

Three – Okay.

They each give her a twenty euro note. She takes out a paper from her pocket and hands it to them.

Three – Here are the winning numbers.

Two – But... they were already written on this paper before you heard that voice!

Three (emphatically) – Destiny is always written in advance.

She leaves.

Two – I don't know why, but I believe her...

One – And what are these numbers?

The other is about to tell him but refrains.

Two – Come over here instead... (*Glancing at the audience*) Walls have ears...
They step back a bit.

One – So?

Two – 13.

One – Classic.

Two – 5 bis.

One – Let's just say 5.

Two – And 214.

One – 214?

Two – Let's say 2, 1, and 4.

One – Yeah, but that's only 5 numbers.

Two – Oh yeah, that's right...

One – She didn't give us the supplementary number, the sneak.

Two – We should have given her the fifty euros she asked for.

One – Yeah, it's going to be my fault now.

Two – And what about this ear? It doesn't look very clean...

One – Obviously, we found it in the gutter...

Two – Yeah... (*Addressing the audience*) Did anyone lose an ear? A dirty ear... Well, I'll leave it here, prominently displayed. If the person who lost it wants to retrieve it...

One – So, are we making that lottery ticket, yes or no?

Two – Let's do it... I don't know why, but I have a feeling it's our lucky day...

They exit.

12. Pascal's Wager

One character arrives, disoriented. He glances at the map in his hand and then notices something on the ground. Intrigued, he picks it up: it's a banknote. He examines it curiously. Another character arrives. The first character addresses the second.

One – Excuse me, you wouldn't happen to...?

Two (*interrupting*) – Sorry, I don't have any change.

One – Oh no, I'm not begging... On the contrary... I wanted to ask if you happened to lose a banknote?

The other, surprised, stops and softens a bit.

Two – A banknote? It depends... How much is it?

The first character glances at the banknote.

One – Five hundred.

Two – Oh, really... Wait, let me check... (*He pretends to search his pockets.*) I... Well, maybe... A five-hundred-euro banknote, you said?

The other examines the banknote.

One – Yes, five hundred... Oh no, wait...

Two – It's not a five-hundred banknote?

One – Well, it is, but it's a five-hundred-franc banknote!

Two – Francs? You mean... the old francs?

One – Oh no, the new ones... Well... The francs from before, you know... The old francs don't exist anymore, right?

Two – The new francs don't exist anymore either... Let me see...

The other hands him the banknote.

Two – Oh yes, five hundred francs. A Pascal, as they used to say back then... It's been a while since I've seen one... When they were in circulation, I didn't see them often either...

One – Pascal... Wasn't he a philosopher?

Two – I think he was a mathematician...

One – Ah yes! Pascal's Wager!

Two – Five hundred francs...

One – How much is that in euros?

Two – About a hundred euros, right? Something like that...

One – So, it's not yours... Do you think we can still exchange them?

Two – At the Bank of France, you mean? Oh, I don't think so... (*He hands back the banknote.*) I'm not even sure the Bank of France still exists.

One – You think?

Two – Nowadays, with Europe...

One – Still, the Bank of France...

A third character arrives, seemingly looking for something. The other two look at him, intrigued.

One – Are you looking for something?

Three – Yes, I think I lost a hundred euros, you know...

Two – A hundred euros?

One – And you're not sure? It seems to me that if I lost a hundred euros...

Three – Well, you see... I went to the ATM, that much I know... I withdrew a hundred euros, as usual... But I can't find them... Maybe they fell out of my pocket... You haven't found them, by any chance?

One – A hundred euros? No...

Three – Or maybe I forgot to take them...

Two – What do you mean, forgot?

Three – Before, it was my credit card that I forgot in the ATM. I would take the money and forget the card... Now, I make sure to take my card back... But sometimes, I forget to take the banknotes...

One – In that case, the machine would swallow them, right?

Three – Yes... Unless someone took them before...

Two – Or the wind carried them away.

One – It's true, it's windy today.

Two – The wind carries away the dead leaves...

The first character shows the banknote he found.

One – Banknotes too...

Three – Did you find my hundred euros?

One – This is what I just picked up from the ground.

He hands him the five-hundred-franc banknote.

Three – A five-hundred franc banknote...

Two – It can't be yours.

Three – It's still curious, you know...

One – What?

Three – Five hundred francs... that's roughly a hundred euros, isn't it?

Two – But come on... how could your hundred euro banknote turn into a five-hundred franc banknote?

Three – Yeah... especially since mine were two fifty-euro banknotes.

One – How do you know that? You're not even sure you didn't forget them in the ATM.

Three – You're right... But hundred euro banknotes are quite rare, aren't they?

Two – Nowadays, less rare than five-hundred franc banknotes.

One – By what miracle could two fifty-euro banknotes turn into a five-hundred franc banknote?

Two – Personally, I don't believe in miracles... And turning two fifty-euro banknotes into an even non-exchangeable five-hundred franc banknote, that's quite a miracle...

Three – Especially since, in reality, a hundred euros is 655 francs and 96 centimes... rounding it a bit... So, I'm losing more than 155 francs in this operation...

One – Oh yes, we're far from the multiplication of loaves, that's for sure...

They remain perplexed for a moment.

Two – Or maybe, it's from the ATM...

Three – What do you mean?

Two – You say you didn't check the banknotes. You're not even sure you took them.

Three – So what?

Two – Maybe the ATM gave you a five-hundred franc banknote instead of two fifty-euro banknotes.

Three – You think? But that's theft!

Two – Maybe it's malfunctioning.

One – But if you didn't take the banknotes, the ATM swallowed them.

Three – Who knows... Some ATMs might not swallow...

Two – Especially when you try to make them swallow banknotes that are no longer valid.

Three – But you say the ATM gave me this five-hundred franc banknote! So the bank gives me an expired banknote, and then the ATM refuses to swallow it?

Two – It's true that it's a bit hard to swallow...

One – Maybe it swallowed it and then spat it out.

Three – In any case, I have the unpleasant feeling that, in this story, I got screwed.

Two – It's a bit the feeling we all have when leaving our bank, isn't it?

Three – An ATM suddenly handing out francs... It doesn't make sense, does it?

One – I don't know... Do you see any other explanation?

Another perplexed silence.

One – They wouldn't have gone back to the franc without telling us, would they?

Two – It's true, it's been a while since I listened to the news...

Three – Still... Going back to the franc... We may be a bit absent-minded... but we're not talking about missing the switch to daylight saving time here...

Two – I do have another hypothesis, but it's a bit creepy...

One – Go on...

Two – What if we took a leap into the past...

Three – A leap?

One – You mean... like in a science fiction movie? We were projected backward in time... before the euro era.

Three – Are you joking? And really, time travel... If it's just to go back to the franc era... What a movie...

Two – I didn't say it was a good movie... It might just be a bad nightmare...

One – It's simple, let's just look at the money we have in our pockets...

Three – I have nothing... I was going to the ATM, actually...

Two – I left without my wallet... I just took out the trash...

One – I have some change in my pocket...

He searches his pocket and takes out a coin.

One – Ah, here it is... A one euro coin...

Three – Phew...

Two – Let me see? (*He examines it.*) It's a ten franc coin...

One – No?

The third examines the coin in turn.

Three – Oh yes, really... It looks a lot like a one euro coin... but it's indeed a ten franc coin.

Two – I think something really unusual is happening here...

One – Let's not panic... Maybe they gave me this ten franc coin by mistake at the bakery... It happens...

Two – Still... It's starting to look like a set of presumptions, as they say in detective series...

A fourth character arrives.

Four – Excuse me for bothering you; I know this will sound strange, but you haven't found a five-hundred franc banknote, by any chance?

The three others look at him suspiciously.

One – Allow me to ask you a question... What year is it?

Four – But... we're still in 2024, I think... Until December 31, at least...

Two – So, in 2024, you're walking around with a five-hundred franc banknote? Do you realise that?

One – It's true, we were worried sick!

Three – For a moment, we thought we had taken a big leap backward. Like in that movie... Back to the Past...

Four – Isn't it Back to the Future, the movie?

Two – Yes, well, that's not the issue.

Four – I'm sorry; I... I didn't mean to...

Two – No, but it's a crazy world, nonetheless...

One – Here's your five-hundred franc banknote!

Three – But what are you going to do with that?

Four – Well... I was actually going to a numismatist...

Three – A numismatist?

Four – For coins and collectible banknotes, you see...

One – I see...

Four – I found this banknote at home, in a book that belonged to my grandfather.

Two – The kind of grandfather who uses banknotes as bookmarks...

One – Well, it's less messy than oily sardines.

Four – So, I checked online to see what it's worth today.

Two – How much?

Four – A hundred euros! Can you believe it? Back when it was still exchangeable, it was worth only seventy-six...

Three – Oh yes, that's... Your grandpa was quite clever, in the end.

One – Yes, that's what we call a bet on the future... With this Pascal, your grandfather made you win about twenty-four euros.

Four – How much is twenty-four euros in francs?

Three – Approximately 157 francs and 43 centimes...

Four – Wow... Well... Thanks, anyway... Luckily, there are still honest people like you...

The remaining three watch the fourth person leave.

Three – That still doesn't tell me where my hundred euros went in all this...

The other two look at him.

13. A Good Sweep

Magda is sweeping the floor. Edward arrives in a three-piece suit.

Edward – Oh, Magda... Just the person I was looking for...

Magda stops sweeping.

Magda – Sir?

Edward – How long have you been sweeping for us, Magda?

Magda – I don't know, Sir. I don't keep track. Are you unsatisfied with my work?

Edward – Quite the contrary, I wanted to congratulate you. Are you familiar with our bank's motto?

Magda – We sweep it all under the carpet?

Edward – That's right! Excellent, Magda! And thanks to you, the carpets of the Union Credit are always spotless. And you could say bank's carpets are a reflection of the bank's reputation. If the carpets aren't spotless, clients might start to think that...

Magda – The banker might be dirty as well...

Edward – Exactly! You get it, Magda.

Magda – May I get back to work, Sir?

Edward – Not just quite yet, Magda...

Magda – Alright...

Edward clears his throat.

Edward – As you know, Magda... my dear Magda... I would even say, my very dear Magda... we are living in trying times.

Magda – Are we, Sir?

Edward – We are in a financial crisis, Magda! Even if you don't read the financial press every day you must have heard about it? Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot, you're Russian, aren't you, Magda?

Magda – Polish, Sir...

Edward – That's even better! I mean, worse... Poland is in an even more catastrophic financial situation. Don't tell me you hadn't heard?

Magda – No, Sir...

Edward – Anyway, we're in a recession, and the financial sector is the first affected by the global loss of values...

Magda – Values...

Edward – I'm talking about stock and bond values, of course, but believe me, Magda, it's a very small step from economic depression to plain old depression. When the stock market is slow, so is morale. And when morale is low, moral crisis comes knocking.

Magda – Yes, Sir...

Edward – Take yourself for example, Magda, don't tell me you're not a little depressed?

Magda – I'm doing fine, Sir, thank you for asking...

Edward – Don't take this the wrong way, Magda, but your appearance, the way you're standing there, with your broom... You don't exactly scream *joie de vivre*!

Magda – I might be a little tired at the moment... Endlessly sweeping things under the carpet...

Edward – Never mind, my point is, Magda, that our bank is, of course, also affected by all those financial troubles... and we need to cut costs. You understand that, don't you?

Magda – Yes, Sir...

Edward – With nothing but your wellbeing in mind, the Union Credit has had to take a series of drastic, yet painful, measures in order to maintain your position. A position whose continued existence was, I am now free to reveal, gravely threatened.

Magda – Thank you, Sir...

Edward – I therefore have the pleasure to let you know that you are still employed.

Magda – I'm working off the books, Sir...

Edward – Regardless, you'll still be able to continue sweeping our floors for the foreseeable future. And who knows? Maybe one day I'll let you sweep under the carpet in the Director's office.

Magda – I live in hope, Sir...

Edward – Obviously, the Union Credit expects you to meet us halfway in our efforts to maintain the number of jobs in this country. As you know, unemployment leads to the loss of spending power, no spending power leads to a loss of consumer confidence, and without consumer confidence there's no jobs... and the vicious circle of stagflation is closed. Are you following me?

Magda – I'm trying, Sir...

Edward – I realise this is going way over your head, of course, my poor Magda, but you can trust me... Here, I'll make it simple for you... In exchange for you keeping your job, the Union Credit is also giving you a salary reduction of thirty per cent. I think you'll find this offer more than fair.

Magda – Thirty per cent?

Edward – It's a little less than a third.

Magda – A third less?

Edward – Well yes, not a third more, obviously. In these trying times even cleaning jobs are few and far between, Magda. Soon you'll need a Master's Degree just to apply for a job sweeping floors, even off the books! And then you'll be competing against those who benefit from nepotism or a quick chat on the casting couch... Do you have a Master's Degree, Magda?

Magda – No, Sir...

Edward – I imagine you don't have anyone you can rely on for some good old nepotism?

Magda – No, Sir...

Edward – As for the casting couch, my dear Magda, no offence but the odds aren't in your favour... But what can you do...? People can't help the way they look... It's the great lottery of life... Even the Union Credit can't change that... Some people are born in Switzerland with double-barrelled names and attractive physiques, while others... Anyway, you'll agree that our offer is very generous... What do you think?

Magda – What do I think, Sir?

Edward – Yes Magda... It isn't necessary that you have an opinion on this matter, but I will still listen to you nonetheless. We are still a democracy, if nothing else...

Magda actually seems to be thinking about it.

Magda – What do I think...

Edward – You must be thinking something...

Magda – What I think...? (*Magda raises her broom to strike Edward*). I'll show you what I think, Sir!

Edward – Magda? Have you lost your mind?

Magda chases Edward with her broom backstage into the wings.

Edward – Magda, please, calm down! This is just a first offer! The bank is also a big supporter of labour relations...

We hear Edward's cries coming from the wings.

Edward – Ow... Ouch... Twenty per cent?

Magda – I'll give you twenty per cent more of this!

Edward – Ten per cent?

Magda – Ten per cent raise?

Edward – Well, I mean...

They both come back on stage. Magda is keeping Edward in check with her broom, ready to strike again.

Edward – Very well Magda... Knowing how and when to end a negotiation is a skill and I can see your counter offer is not negotiable... We have a deal... The Union Credit agrees to your request for a ten per cent raise...

Magda – Very well, Sir.

Edward – Having said that, I like your tough negotiating style... At the bank we like to leverage our employees' strengths... And you, Magda, have quite a strong personality...

Magda – Thank you, Sir...

Edward – Would you be interested in a training session, paid for by the bank of course, to allow you to join our repo team? Like I said, we're in a financial crisis and there's more and more clients defaulting on their payments...

She shoots him a dark glance. He retreats cautiously.

Edward – Let's not talk about it anymore, Magda. I'll let you get back to work...

Magda – Thank you, Sir.

14. A Shadow of the Street

A character (man or woman) is there. Another one arrives. Not noticing the first one, he thinks he is alone.

Transparent – Hello, I am the man you don't see.

Inaudible – But... who's calling me?

Transparent – I assure you, you're not hearing voices, like Joan of Arc. But I was just telling you that... I hope you're not deaf, at least?

Inaudible – No, no, I hear you very well. But where are you?

Transparent (*to the audience*) – It's the tragedy of my life, I am completely transparent.

Inaudible – And can you hear me?

Transparent (*to the audience*) – I can see him moving his lips very well, but I can't hear at all what he's saying to me...

Inaudible – It's the story of my life, I'm not mute, but no one hears me. Not even the deaf.

Transparent – How to know if he understood my question, I can't hear his answer.

Inaudible – I can't see him, and I can't get myself heard. It's not going to be easy to have a continuous conversation...

A third character arrives.

Odourless (*addressing the one he sees*) – Are you talking to yourself?

Inaudible – It's not even worth answering him...

Transparent – No, not at all, I was talking to this gentleman you see there.

Odourless – It's curious, I see you here, and I hear you over there!

Transparent – Oh no, but you won't hear him. He's the inaudible man.

Odourless (*a bit lost*) – Oh yes... And you?

Transparent – I am the invisible man.

Odourless – I see... Like in the movies, you mean?

Transparent – Yes... Except that I am really transparent. And for an actor, believe me, it's not necessarily an advantage.

Odourless – That's amazing... I can distinguish him perfectly, but I can't hear what he's saying, while you...

Transparent – Me, at least... even invisible, I remain perfectly understandable.

Odourless – Thank God, me too.

Transparent – So I think we'll get along well.

Odourless – Yet generally, people say they can't stand me.

Transparent sniffs the air in his direction.

Inaudible – It's true though. It's when people absolutely feel nothing that you notice it.

Odourless – What were you saying?

Transparent – Nothing. But I thought that being odourless is still less bothersome than being invisible, like me, or inaudible, like this poor man.

Odourless sniffs in his direction, evidently uncomfortable.

Odourless – No smell... In some cases, it can even be an advantage for others, believe me.

Inaudible (also uncomfortable) – Oh yes, him you don't see, but you can definitely feel his presence, that's for sure...

Transparent – It's strange...

Odourless – What then?

Transparent – We are only three, right?

Inaudible – It seems so, right?

Transparent – And yet... I feel a presence, don't you?

Odourless – Apart from you, I don't feel anything...

Inaudible – A spiritual presence, you mean?

Silence.

Transparent – Unless it's him...

Inaudible – Him?

Odourless – The one who, in addition to being invisible, inaudible, and odourless..

Inaudible – ...is also untouchable and completely tasteless.

Odourless – God? Well, it doesn't make sense...

Inaudible – In any case, it makes no sense to any of the five we know.

Transparent – Unless he's broadcasting on another frequency...

Odourless – Oh yes... If God exists, we can say he's extremely discreet...

A pause.

Transparent – I even wonder if at such a level of discretion, we can still talk about existence.

Inaudible – Yeah...

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.

For those who prefer reading or working from books, printed versions of his plays can be purchased from Amazon for a price similar to that of photocopying this document.

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

A brief moment of eternity
A Cuckoo's nest
A Hell of a Night
A simple business dinner
All's well that starts badly
An innocent little murder
Back in the spotlight
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Cheaters
Check to the Kings
Crash Zone
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but stable
Eurostar
Four stars
Fragile, handle with care
Friday the 13th
Heads or Tails
Him and Her
In lieu of flowers
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Just like a Christmas movie
Last chance encounter
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
One marriage out of two
Preliminaries
Quarantine
Running on Empty
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Ideal Son-in-Law
The Jackpot
The Joker
The perfect Son-in-Law
The Performance is not cancelled
The Smell of Money
The Window across the courtyard
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!

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