

La Comédiathèque

Now and then

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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Now and then

A sketch comedy by
Jean-Pierre Martinez

From prehistory to the end of the world, a few snapshots of our insignificant lives.

1. The Sacred Fire.....	3
2. Home Cinema.....	6
3. Grown Up.....	9
4. French Toast.....	10
5. The Door.....	12
6. Double Living.....	14
7. Here's Earth.....	17
8. Vehicule inspection.....	19
9. Waiting.....	22
10. The Painting.....	24
11. The Ghosts.....	27

Cast

22 characters. From 2 to 22 actors (men or women).

*Very flexible distribution in both number and gender, each actor may perform
several roles, and all roles can be played as either male or female.*

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1. The Sacred Fire

She enters, almost naked, with a leather satchel slung over her shoulder. He enters soon after, dressed the same way, and also carrying a bag. At first, they might look like holidaymakers on the beach. He seems to want to approach her, but hesitates. At last, he plucks up the courage.

Him – Excuse me, do you have a light, please?

Her – Yes, of course...

She rummages in her bag and eventually pulls out two large, flint-like stones. She starts striking them together, without success.

Her – Sorry, I'm not quite familiar with the new technology yet...

Him – That's alright, you know. I'm not very...

Without listening to him, she tries again, in vain. She grows irritated and begins banging the stones together harder and harder, almost hysterically.

Her – Bloody hell...!

Him – No, really, forget it! I can easily manage without...

She collects herself, stops banging the stones, and puts them back in her bag.

Her – I'm so sorry...

Him – No, please, don't apologise... You could have hurt yourself...

An awkward moment.

Her – And the fire, what was it for...?

He takes a small, fairly realistic stuffed animal out of his bag.

Him – To cook this.

Her – Ah, right...

Him – I know it's not very big, but... it's all I could find.

Her – I see... And so...

Him – They say it's easier to digest once it's cooked. Or so I've heard...

Her – Well, people say all sorts of things... Until now we've eaten meat raw, and no one's ever died.

Him – No one's ever died from that, anyway.

Her – So... you're a hunter-gatherer.

Him – Yes... Well... more on the gathering side, really.

Her – Yes, I... I can imagine.

Him – I'm sure one day we'll get there.

Her – Get where?

Him – We'll stop eating meat. You'll see, I'm right. Fruit and vegetables are much better for your health.

Her – Personally, I try to eat at least five a day.

Him – Anyway, they're easier to get hold of than meat.

Her – True...

They both laugh a little awkwardly.

Him – Well then, I... I'll leave you to it...

Her – Alright, yes... Sorry again about the fire.

They both seem reluctant to part. He's still holding the little creature by the tail. He makes another attempt.

Him – By the way, I was wondering... What are you doing at midday?

Her – Nothing special... I was... watching the clouds... just to pass the time.

Him – Ah yes, the clouds... No, it's just I thought... maybe we could have lunch together...

Her – Do you really think there'll be enough for two...?

He looks at the little creature, doubtful.

Him – Oh no, but... I've got some vegetables as well.

He pulls a small leek out of his bag and shows it to her.

Her – Ah yes... Brilliant... To go with the...

Him – Eating too much... isn't good for your health either.

Her – That's true... Well then... alright.

Him – I live just nearby, if you'd like...

Her – So... you're new in the neighbourhood? Since we've never crossed paths before...

Him – Yes... I found a little cave not far from here... It's not very bright, but the ceilings are wonderfully high.

Her – And very central, too.

Him – I've made a few drawings on the back wall, just to brighten it up a bit.

Her – Oh, you're an artist as well?

Him – Yes, well, a beginner... Would you like to see them?

Her – See what?

Him – My cave paintings!

Her – Oh yes! Why not? What do they show?

Him – Me, fighting with a lettuce.

They laugh again.

Her – And... what's your name?

Him – I don't know. I don't call myself very often. And you?

Her – Nor do I...

Him – Well then... Shall we go?

Her – You're right, we'd better hurry, because I think we're about to get a downpour.

Him – Really?

Her – Often, when there are lots of clouds in the sky, it rains afterwards. Haven't you noticed?

Him – No, but... now that you mention it. So you're more of a scientist, then?

Her – Yes, well... I try to observe the world around me. To listen to my body, too...

Him – Alright... And... have you made any other interesting discoveries?

Her – You'll see, I'll surprise you...

They exit.

2. Home Cinema

She is engrossed in reading the cinema listings. He arrives.

Her – How was your day?

Him – Not bad, but I'm exhausted. And you?

Her – The usual... But thank goodness it's Friday! What do you want to do tonight?

Him – I don't know. What do you feel like?

Her – We could go to the cinema.

Him – Yeah... What's on at the moment?

Her – There's a Korean film in the Latin Quarter. It's had great reviews. But I should warn you, it's two hours and forty minutes long.

Him – Great... In the original version, then.

Her – Obviously.

Him – North Korean or South Korean?

Her – Why, is one of those two languages easier for you than the other?

Him – No, but... if I had to choose, the Southern accent is always a bit more melodious.

Her – In any case, I don't think the North Koreans have enough film stock to make a two-hour-forty-minute movie.

Him – All the better...

Her – Otherwise, there's a Polish film a friend told me about. Apparently, it's very good.

Him – Polish? What's it about?

Her – A story about a virus that spreads across the whole world, forcing everyone to stay confined at home. With all the consequences that can have on a couple's life...

Him – I don't really like science fiction... And Polish science fiction...

Her – I see...

Him – And let's be honest... dragging ourselves out of the house to watch people on a big screen being bored at home. Poles, at that.

Her – Just say you don't like art house cinema, it would be quicker.

Him – That's not true. I really liked Kieslowski. He was Polish, wasn't he?

Her – Yes.

Him – The *Decalogue*, I remember it very well. We saw all twelve.

Her – Twelve, you think?

Him – We saw them all, didn't we?

Her – There are only ten.

Him – Are you sure?

Her – The *Decalogue*.

Him – Oh yes, maybe. Anyway, we saw them all.

Her – That was a long time ago... Back when we first met. We were still living with our parents, and we spent half the screening making out...

Him – You're right. That's probably where my passion for Polish cinema comes from.

Her – As for the rest, I'm not sure you remember much. Nor do I, actually, because reading subtitles while French kissing your neighbour... unless you're a contortionist...

Him – Anyway, I really enjoyed it.

Her – The film or...?

Him – Both.

Her – So, the cinema? Are we going or not?

Him – On a Friday, it's likely to be crowded, isn't it?

Her – Yes... That's the night when people who work go to the cinema.

Him – And now that we can kiss quietly at home in front of the telly, what's the point of going to the pictures?

He moves closer and puts his arms around her.

Her – Snogging at the cinema would make us feel younger. At least it would be a change...

Him – True, but if it means not seeing the film... and in twenty years you still hold it against me.

Her – Alright, you win. So, a night in with the telly.

Him – What's on?

She looks at a TV magazine.

Her – Well, that's funny...

Him – What?

Her – On Arte, they're repeating Kieslowski's *Decalogue* in full.

Him – Oh yeah... But since we've already seen them...

Her – I'd remind you we didn't exactly see them in ideal conditions.

Him – Yeah but... cinema on television, it doesn't really work, does it?

Her – Ah... too bad.

Him – Why?

Her – Those ten films by Kieslowski were originally made for Polish television. That's why they lasted less than an hour, and in the cinema they were shown two at a time.

Him – Two at a time? Ah, right... So that's why at the end of each screening, I never understood the connection with the beginning of the film. In fact, they were two different films...

Her – Exactly... And since usually, after groping me during the first half hour, you'd fall asleep before the second film even began...

Him – You must really have loved me.

Her – You too... to let me drag you to the cinema five times in a row to see ten films in Polish. And do you still love me?

Him – Just as I did on the first day of the first film of the Ten Commandments.

Her – You remember which one that is, at least?

Him – What?

Her – The first commandment.

Him – No, I don't remember that either.

Her – Thou shalt have no other God but me.

Him – I promise, I'll have eyes for no one but you.

Her – Amen.

Him – May I kiss the bride now?

Her – At least wait until I switch on the telly...

3. Grown Up

Two children (can be played by adults).

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

Two – When I grow up, I want to be really tall.

One – Really tall? How tall?

Two – I don't know... like two metres eighty, you see?

One – Two metres eighty?

Two – Taller than my dad, anyway.

One – How tall is your dad?

Two – About two metres seventy.

One – Wow, that's tall... And your mum?

Two – A bit less, I think. Around two metres sixty, maybe. And your dad, how tall is he?

One – My dad? I don't know...

Two – About?

One – Around two metres fifty, I think.

Two – Oh yes... He's not very tall, then.

One – No... (*A pause*) Are you sure your dad's that tall?

Two – Sure... (*A pause*) Anyway... my mum always calls him a “big idiot.”

The other gives him a puzzled look.

One – And what does your mum call you?

Two – “Little idiot.”

A pause.

4. French Toast

They are both there, looking as if they don't know what to do.

Her – What if I made some French toast?

Him – Ah yes... why not? Good idea... But... do we have any stale bread?

Her – Stale bread? Oh no, I don't think so...

Him – Right...

Her – So what shall we do?

Him – Do you want me to go and buy some?

Her – Stale bread?

Him – Fresh bread.

Her – Do you think you can make French toast with fresh bread as well?

Him – Why not?

Her – I don't know... I've never tried.

Him – If it tastes good with stale bread, it ought to be even better with fresh bread, shouldn't it?

Her – You think so?

Him – Then again... French toast is really about not throwing bread away when it goes stale.

Her – That must be why it's called “lost bread,” I suppose... because it's made with bread that would otherwise have ended up in the bin.

Him – Exactly... To avoid wasting food, while so many people in the world are starving.

Her – I see your point... I'd rather lost sight of the moral dimension of French toast.

Him – In reality, we only make it to stuff ourselves, because we like it... but the excuse is not wasting food. French toast is really quite Jesuit, in fact.

Her – I just fancied eating some French toast.

Him – Catholics really do have a problem with bread.

Her – Do they?

Him – The bread of the Eucharist, that's the body of Christ, isn't it? A sort of French toast, in a way...

Her – I don't know... We could ask the neighbour.

Him – Is the neighbour Catholic?

Her – Ask her if she's got any stale bread!

Him – Ah yes...

Her – Yeah...

Him – Honestly, can you imagine asking the neighbour if she could give us her stale bread?

Her – No.

Him – If we had rabbits, maybe.

Her – Rabbits eat French toast?

Him – Rabbits eat stale bread!

Her – I didn't know that.

Him – In the countryside, people keep their stale bread to give to the rabbits. So nothing goes to waste. And then they eat the rabbit...

Her – So, in the countryside, they never make French toast?

Him – Those who don't have rabbits, maybe.

Her – I always thought French toast was a grandmother's thing.

Him – Grandmothers without rabbits, at any rate.

Her – So... shall we forget the French toast, then?

Him – Going out to buy fresh bread just to make French toast... that would be completely immoral.

Her – Yes... like giving fresh bread to rabbits.

Him – Or pearls before swine.

Her – I'll go to the bakery anyway. I'll buy two baguettes.

Him – Isn't that a bit much?

Her – That way, tomorrow we'll have stale bread!

Him – There you are, you see? There's always a solution in the end. Since you're going shopping, check if we've still got any eggs.

Her – Eggs...?

Him – For the French toast.

Her – Fresh eggs, you mean?

He looks at her, slightly worried.

5. The Door

She is standing there with a coffee cup in her hand. He arrives, also holding a coffee cup. They exchange a faint smile as a greeting and sip their coffee in silence.

Her – Still as disgusting as ever, this coffee.

Him – Yes... But today, for me, it has a special taste.

Her – Oh really...?

Him – It's the last time I'll drink it.

Her – The last time...?

Him – It's my last day. Tonight, I'll be retired.

Her – You gave me a fright... I thought that once you'd finished your cup, you were going to jump out of the window to protest against the quality of the coffee in this lousy company. Mind you, that might have convinced them to replace the machine.

Him – Sorry, I'm afraid that machine will still be here tomorrow.

Her – I'll be condemned to drink this revolting dishwater again. And I won't even have the pleasure of your cheerful conversation.

Him – This is the first time we've met. Don't tell me it's your first day here.

Her – I work in the other part of the building, for your former competitors. They scrapped the coffee machine to save money...

Him – I see...

Her – Don't worry, it was exactly the same machine, and the coffee was just as undrinkable.

Him – Must be a monopoly. Like slot machines...

Her – Won't you miss getting up every morning at six, spending an hour commuting to get here, being bored stiff for eight hours doing a job that's completely pointless, and going home at night knowing it'll all start again the next day?

Him – It won't be easy. I'll try to get used to it... But tell me, I'm beginning to doubt my sanity. I've worked here for thirty years, and I'd never noticed there was a corridor at this spot.

Her – The corridor has always been there, but the access door was sealed off.

Him – Ah yes, that's right. There was a door... I thought it was a cupboard door.

Her – They reopened the door so that people working on the other side could come and have coffee here. Since we don't have a machine anymore...

Him – I see... So this corridor, it leads to...?

Her – To the cupboard where they set up my desk. Among other things... I'm a management controller. I audit the company next door.

Him – Right... So you work for...

Her – Your new boss. Well, until tonight. We bought out your company two months ago.

Him – So it's you I have to thank for this early retirement?

Her – I hope you don't hold it against me too much...

Him – Not at all... I should be thanking you, really.

Her – Please don't thank me... We didn't do it to ease your suffering, you know. It was just downsizing after a merger. We started by scrapping every other coffee machine. Then we did the same with the staff...

Him – I see... And you? What gets you out of bed in the morning?

Her – I don't know... It's true this coffee is absolutely disgusting, but I sometimes wonder if it isn't a bit addictive after all. Careful, tomorrow morning you might find yourself in withdrawal. Anyway... enjoy your retirement...

Him – Thank you...

He watches her leave.

6. Double Living

She is there. He comes in, looking worried.

Her – Are you alright? You look worried...

Him – Nothing serious, I promise... I was waiting to be sure before telling you but...

Her – You're scaring me, what is it?

Him – Have you ever noticed that our living room is much shorter than our kitchen?

Her – Sorry...?

Him – The kitchen's right on the other side, isn't it? Separated from our living room by a partition wall.

Her – Yes, maybe. So what?

Him – Logically, our living room should be the same length as the kitchen.

Her – And...?

Him – It's three and a half metres short.

Her – Three and a half metres?

Him – Three metres fifty-eight, exactly.

Her – Are you sure?

Him – Absolutely. I checked the measurements three times.

Her – It's an old house. Back then, walls weren't always straight.

Him – Three metres fifty-eight! We're not talking about a wall slightly crooked or a bit thicker than the others. Since the living room is six metres wide, that would mean a room of more than twenty-one square metres.

Her – A room?

Him – A room.

Her – You're frightening me. A walled-up room, you mean?

Him – Yes. You could put it like that.

Her – But come on, we've had this house for twenty years. Wouldn't we have noticed if a room was missing?

Him – The figures are there. I checked three times.

Her – That's mad.

Him – And to think that all these years I had my desk at the back of the garage, between the boiler and the freezer. Twenty-one square metres, can you imagine? We could have had a proper study!

Her – Or a child's bedroom...

Him – Yes...

Her – But how is that possible...? Why would anyone wall up a room?

Him – I don't know...

Her – It's a bit creepy, isn't it?

Him – What is?

Her – Knowing that for twenty years we've spent every evening in this living room, without realising that right next door, there was another one the same size, completely empty...

Him – Well, empty... we don't know that.

Her – What?

Him – It might not be empty.

Her – Not empty? You mean... the previous owners might have hidden something in there?

Him – Why not? Otherwise, why wall up a room?

Her – What on earth could be so important to hide that you'd wall up an entire room in your house?

Him – A treasure?

Her – That would be too good to be true...

Him – A corpse...

Her – A corpse?

Him – Why not...

Her – Twenty square metres just to hide a corpse?

Him – There might have been several...

Her – Or maybe... maybe the person wasn't dead when they walled them in...?

Him – Him or her...

Her – Or both.

Him – And what if the former owners are still there...?

Deathly silence.

Her – I don't think I can go on living in this house, knowing that just behind this wall, there might be one or more corpses...

Him – It's only a theory.

Her – Yes, but I need to be sure.

Him – You're right, we have to know.

Her – And right away. I can't spend another night in this house without knowing what's in that room.

Him – Me neither...

Her – So what do we do?

Him – I'll take care of it...

He leaves. She casts an anxious glance towards the wall, corresponding to the fourth wall. He returns with a sledgehammer.

Her – Are you sure?

Him – We have to know for sure.

Blackout. The sound of sledgehammer blows. The lights come back. They stare towards the audience as if through a gaping hole.

Her – What on earth is that?

Him – A living room in perfect condition, almost identical to ours.

Her – Not a speck of dust.

Him – Incredible...

Her – Do you think someone still lives here?

Him – I don't know... At the same time... it looks very much like the neighbours' living room.

She looks more closely.

Her – It *is* the neighbours' living room!

Him – I don't understand... I must have made a mistake in my calculations.

Her – Oh really...? Well, you'll have to explain that to them when they get back...

7. Here's Earth

She and he are standing facing the audience, and don't seem to see each other.

Her – Hello, Mars?

Him – Ah, hello Earth!

Her – You recognised my voice? It's been a while since we last spoke...

Him – Not that long, you're exaggerating...

Her – Wait, it was exactly...

Him – About 110,000 years ago. At the start of your last ice age. I called to see how you were doing.

Her – That's right. Time flies so quickly.

Him – So, are you feeling better, warming up a little?

Her – Yes, yes, I'm fine, don't worry. It was just a slight chill.

Him – Good, good...

Her – That said, I think I've picked up something nasty recently.

Him – Again! Oh damn... you really catch everything that's going round, don't you. And how long has this been going on?

Her – Oh, not very long. About 10,000 years.

Him – What sort of illness is it?

Her – Humanity. Apparently it's a new virus. No vaccine yet.

Him – And is it serious?

Her – We don't really know yet how it might develop.

Him – Ah, you've got no luck... But are you alright?

Her – For now, yes. I've just had a slight fever for the last hundred years or so...

Him – Global warming... You shouldn't let it drag on, you know. It could get worse...

Her – You're right, if it doesn't improve in the next five or ten thousand years, I'll have to get treatment.

Him – Yeah... but be careful of the side effects. Sometimes the cure's worse than the illness. Do you remember when you caught that thing...

Her – The dinosaurs.

Him – That's it. They gave you a shock treatment and...

Her – Oh yes, that meteorite. Talk about a suppository. I almost didn't make it through that one.

Him – Still, afterwards you were completely cured.

Her – Yes, but it took me quite a while to recover... So, how are things with you?

Him – Oh, me, you know... Same old, same old... It's not about to get any better now.

Her – Don't say that...

Him – At my age.

Her – We're the same age!

Him – What can you do, that's how it is.

Her – Sometimes all it takes is a little shower of asteroids over a few million years, full of water and mineral salts, and off you go again for another turn around the sun.

Him – You're right, you have to stay positive.

Her – Well, sorry, I'll have to slip away. But be careful with this new virus, they say it's highly contagious.

Him – Do you think it could reach me?

Her – Anyway, they say the Moon is already contaminated. Take care.

Him – You too. And don't wait another eternity before calling me again.

Her – I promise.

Him – Right then, I'll give you a kiss. From a distance...

Silence marks the end of the conversation, then she coughs and sneezes.

Her – What a nasty bug, this humanity. I'll have to get treatment if I don't want it to get worse. I wouldn't want to end up in the same state as poor old Mars...

8. Vehicule inspection

She is wiping her hands with a rag covered in grease. He arrives.

Him – Hello, I've come to collect the car my wife left with you an hour ago for the vehicle inspection.

Her – What's her name?

Him – Clara. Clara Santos.

Her – And the car?

Him – I... I haven't given it a nickname yet, but... it's a Ford Fiesta. Is it ready?

Her – Ah yes, Mrs Miller's Ford Fiesta, I know exactly which one...

Him – And... is it ready?

Her – Ready...? That depends...

Him – Depends... depends on what?

Her – Depends what you mean by ready.

Him – Well... I don't know. Did you carry out the inspection?

Her – Yes. I checked the vehicle.

Him – And... is everything alright?

A pause.

Her – Can I speak frankly?

Him – Er... yes.

Her – It's a car that isn't doing very well.

Him – What's wrong with it? It's the clutch, isn't it? I could feel it slipping a little when starting off...

Her – Yes, the clutch too. But that's not what worries me.

Him – I think I should be the one worrying, don't you? So what exactly is the problem?

Her – It's hard to say... It's more of a general condition, you see?

Him – No. Could you be a bit more precise?

Her – It's a second-hand car, isn't it?

Him – Yes, that's right.

Her – And the previous owner was elderly.

Him – Yes, how do you know that?

Her – A car that's nearly ten years old, but in excellent condition and with very few miles on the clock... You can tell it spent most of its time tucked away in a warm garage. Never travelled far. Hardly driven, but lovingly cared for... until it was entrusted to you.

Him – How do you know it was a woman?

Her – The clutch, precisely. Older ladies tend to ride the clutch a lot, that's just how it is. Not their fault. That's why the clutch is a bit worn.

Him – Now it's me that's starting to wear out... Could just tell me exactly what repairs are needed?

Her – I'm afraid it's not that simple... Is she dead?

Him – I thought that was for you to tell me. Is it really that serious?

Her – No, I was talking about the old lady you bought this poor car from. Has she passed away?

Him – How would I know! I don't even know who she was. The garage where I bought the car told me the previous owner was an elderly lady who hardly drove it.

Her – In my opinion, she's dead.

Him – My car?

Her – That old lady.

Him – This is absurd. What kind of conversation is this? I'm asking if I can take my car, and you're talking to me about its previous owner!

Her – Because the two problems are closely connected.

Him – Oh really?

Her – Quite clearly, this car has never recovered from the loss of its previous owner.

Him – We don't even know if she's dead!

Her – She's dead, believe me.

Him – My car?

Her – From what I can see, this is a car that sleeps in the street, am I wrong?

Him – I don't have a garage. Is that a problem?

Her – You could at least give it a wash from time to time. Leaving a car in such a state just isn't right.

Him – This is for a hidden camera show, isn't it? Where's the camera?

Her – This is no joke, sir. Cars also deserve a bit of attention. Respect. Even affection.

Him – Alright, enough's enough... Can I or can't I take my car now?

Her – Here, this is the inspection certificate.

Him – Thank you...

Her – And here are the keys...

Him – Very good.

Her – But let me tell you, you don't deserve this car.

Him – It's my wife's car!

He is about to leave, furious.

Her – And don't forget to change the clutch!

He exits.

9. Waiting

She is there. He arrives.

Him – Excuse me, are you part of...

Her – No.

Him – Alright, so you too, you...

Her – Yes.

Him – And have you been waiting long?

Her – Long?

Him – Only because I died over an hour ago and... I'm still waiting.

Her – What exactly are you waiting for?

Him – I don't know... For someone to take care of me.

Her – To take care of you?

Him – I went to A&E because I wasn't feeling well... I waited five hours before anyone paid attention to me. I wonder why they call it “emergency”. If they'd taken me straight away... That's probably why I ended up here, actually...

Her – Probably.

Him – I feel like I spent my whole life waiting. They say you spend a third of your life asleep, I think I spent at least a third of mine waiting. Waiting for the bus, waiting for my wife, waiting for the right time, waiting for the moment, waiting for someone to see me, waiting at the doctor's, at the dentist's, at the hairdresser's, waiting for holidays, waiting for retirement...

Her – If you don't like waiting, this won't help.

Him – You mean this will drag on?

Her – Eternity.

Him – Eternity? You mean... forever?

Her – When you're dead, it's forever, isn't it?

Him – So we'll be waiting like this until...

Her – My advice is to stop waiting altogether... and erase from your vocabulary every word connected with time. Like yesterday, today, tomorrow... Or “since when” and “until when”. Or “for how long”... And above all, above all, forget the word “emergency”.

Him – I see what you mean, but... surely something will happen one day or another, won't it?

Her – No.

Him – Well... so what do we do?

Her – Nothing. We do nothing. What else could we do? We're dead!

Him – I don't know... So nothing is going to happen, and there's really nothing we can do?

Her – There is. There's one single thing you can do here.

Him – Oh really? What's that?

Her – Play dead.

He looks at her, puzzled.

Him – Right...

Her – What did you expect? Eternal life?

Him – I was hoping at least to escape eternal death... So this is the afterlife? There's nothing after?

Her – We don't know. When we've lost all sense of time... When we've forgotten everything... until we no longer even know who we were, then perhaps we'll be recycled. Our decomposing souls will become the compost from which new seeds may one day grow again. But for now... I mean forever, as far as we're concerned... we have to let go of ourselves.

Him – Alright... (*A pause*) So there is still a faint hope of getting out of this?

She gives him a puzzled look.

10. The Painting

He is there. She arrives carrying a painting, a portrait of a young woman, more of a daub than a masterpiece, but in a gilded frame.

Him – What on earth is that monstrosity?

Her – It used to hang above my great-grandmother's bed, in her nursing home. Every time I visited her, she'd say that after she passed away, this painting would be mine...

Him – Very generous of her. Especially since apart from this daub, she didn't leave anything else to anyone...

Her – My mum went there yesterday to clear out the room. She gave me the painting.

Him – It's a portrait... Who is it?

Her – My great-great-grandmother, I think...

Him – She was rather pretty... when she was young. You look a bit like her.

Her – Do you think so?

Him – And what are you going to do with it?

Her – I don't know... I can't just throw it away...

Him – No, of course not... But hanging it in the living room...

Her – We could hang it above our bed...

Him – You're joking?

Her – Obviously...

Him – How old was your great-grandmother, exactly?

Her – She was born in 1910, in Auvers-sur-Oise.

Him – In Auvers? Incredible! You realise? Twenty years earlier, she could have crossed paths with Van Gogh.

Her – She always used to say her mother knew him well.

Him – No...? Van Gogh?

Her – Yeah.

Him – But when you say *knew him well*...

Her – I don't know.

Him – For all we know, you could be Van Gogh's great-great-granddaughter...

Her – Who knows...

Him – And since he has no other known descendants, you'd be heir to his fortune.

Her – His fortune?

Him – Well, you're right... The people who bought his paintings are filthy rich today, but he died in poverty. And this painting...?

Her – My great-grandmother told me she got it from her own mother...

Him – But where did it come from? Who painted it?

Her – I don't know.

Him – Isn't it signed?

Her – No... Or maybe the signature's faded.

Him – You're thinking what I'm thinking?

Her – Yes... But no, it's not possible...

Him – If your ancestor really knew him... Nobody wanted his paintings back then. And he was penniless. I'm sure he could have given one away for a hot meal. And for a tumble, all the more so...

Her – Don't hold back ! Just call my great-great-grandmother a tart!

Him – I didn't mean that... just a little gift.

Her – No, and anyway, as you said, look, it's a daub!

Him – Honestly, I've seen some paintings in museums... If we didn't know they were signed by great masters... What do we really know about art?

Her – You're right... We should have it appraised...

Him – Just imagine. A Van Gogh. Even if it's not his best, it would be worth millions.

Her – Let's not get carried away...

Him – True... After all, maybe it's better to leave the doubt hanging. To keep dreaming a little longer, rather than breaking the spell straight away.

Her – Not to mention, an appraisal probably isn't cheap. Just to be told it's the work... of a Sunday painter.

Him – But now I'm almost tempted to hang it above our bed.

Her – Why's that?

Him – I don't know... Thinking that Van Gogh might have painted it to bed your great-great-grandmother. And now it's worth millions. That would make it the most expensive shag in history, wouldn't it?

He picks up the painting to look at it.

Her – I'm not sure that idea excites me much.

Him – This painting weighs a ton, doesn't it?

Her – True, I noticed that too.

Him – In the end, I don't think it's a good idea to hang it above the bed. If it fell on us...

Her – Why is it so heavy, anyway?

Him – It's not the canvas, it must be the frame...

Her – Frames are usually made of wood...

Him – If it's wood, it's awfully heavy.

Her – Or maybe it's cast iron.

Him – A cast-iron frame? It doesn't look like cast iron.

Her – Perhaps it's paint.

He scratches the frame with his fingernail.

Him – Doesn't look like it...

Her – You're thinking what I'm thinking?

Him – Yes... I only know one metal that's truly golden.

Her – If it's gold, it's the equivalent of at least a bar.

Him – In the end, this painting might actually be worth something.

Her – Anyway, we can dream...

11. The Ghosts

He is looking through a telescope pointed towards the audience. The character may be a child, or an adult playing a child. She is his mother or his teacher.

Her – Do you see that star I've aimed the telescope at?

Him – Yes.

Her – Planets revolve around that star.

Him – Yes, I can see them.

Her – One of those planets is habitable... and inhabited.

Him – I can see it.

Her – Its inhabitants are called humans.

Him – I can see them.

Her – And they managed to make their planet uninhabitable.

Him – So what?

Her – So they all died.

Him – But I can still see them.

Her – Because that planet is millions of light years away from ours. In reality, they've already been dead a long time.

Him – So the ones I see are only ghosts.

Her – Yes. The last one died 100,000 years ago.

Him – That's funny.

Her – Yes.

Him – But then how do you know they're dead? Since the image of their end hasn't reached us yet...

Her – Quantum teleportation is instantaneous. It isn't bound by the rules of space and time. We sent a probe there a month ago. No trace of life on the surface.

Him – A mass suicide... But why would they do that?

Her – We don't know.

Him – We don't know?

Her – No. And yet we've made all kinds of extraordinary scientific discoveries. But that's something we still haven't managed to understand. It's one of the mysteries of the universe that remains unsolved.

Him – The ghosts of a vanished humanity, on an Earth they turned into a desert... I'll keep watching them a little longer, to try and understand...

The End.

About the author

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

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

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Comedies for 2

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
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Grown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman,
one giant leap backward for
Mankind
The Way 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
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
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police
Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more

At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police
Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana
Abbey
Music does not always soothe
the savage beasts
Neighbours'Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not
cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Backstage Bits
Blackouts
Don't panic!
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
For real and for fun
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lost time Chronicles
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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