

La Comédiathèque

NO SENSE

OFF LIMITS

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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No Sense Off Limits

A sketch comedy

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Absurdist humour.

Cast

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1. Here and the Hereafter

A character is waiting alone onstage, at a loss as to what to do.

On – Excuse me... Is anyone there?

After a moment, a voice answers from offstage.

Off – No...

On – Oh, right. I... Well...

The character waits a little longer.

On – I'm sorry to bother you, but... I've been waiting for quite a while now, and...

Off – Yes...

On – Well, I've rather lost track of time. I've been here since... Well, you know... And I was wondering whether...

Off – Yes...

On – Am I... in heaven... or hell?

Off – What do you think?

On – Purgatory?

Off – No.

On – Limbo?

Off (*surprised*) – Limbo?

The character looks bewildered.

On – Then where am I?

Off – Nowhere.

On – Nowhere?

Off – Nowhere.

On – But... for how long?

Off – Until it starts.

On – So it hasn't started yet?

Off – No.

On – Oh, right... (*Tries to take that in.*) But what hasn't started yet?

Off – Can I ask you a question as well?

On – Yes...

Off – What the hell are you doing here?

The character onstage looks dumbfounded.

On – Now that you mention it... I've completely forgotten...

Off – But who are you?

On – Honestly... I have absolutely no idea...

A pause.

Off – Then we can begin.

2. The Waiting Room

A woman is already there. A man enters.

Man (*with polite formality*) – Good evening.

Woman (*merely being polite*) – Good evening...

He paces around, examining the room, slightly awkward.

Man – What time is your appointment?

Woman – I'm a little early...

A pause.

Man – You haven't seen anyone?

Woman – No.

Man – Right...

A pause.

Man – This is my first appointment... What's she like?

Woman – She?

Man – It was a woman on the phone...

The woman looks doubtful but says nothing.

Woman – Perhaps there are two of them...

Man – So it's... your first time too.

She does not answer.

Man – Oh, well... Man or woman... The important thing is that they know what they're doing...

The woman gives him a slightly forced smile. Another awkward silence.

Man – I could let you go first, if that would help... You were here before me...

Woman (*coldly*) – I don't think that's a good idea.

Man – Sorry... I'll leave you alone... I'm just a little nervous...

The woman seems to feel guilty for being so abrupt.

Woman – I'm nervous too... I hate waiting...

Man – That's why you arrive early for your appointments...

The woman is not sure how to take this. He glances at a wall clock, which may be imaginary.

Man – It's the first time I've ever seen a clock in a waiting room...

He looks at his watch.

Man – They forgot to set it to the right time...

The woman barely pays attention to what he is saying.

Man – It's strange... putting a clock in a waiting room when it doesn't even tell the right time... Mind you, they're never on time either, so...

A pause.

Man – It must be part of the game...

Woman – What game?

Man – Making us wait like this... There's a reason they call us patients...

A pause.

Man (*uneasy*) – Didn't you hear something?

Woman – No...

He goes to the door through which he entered and tries the handle, but cannot open it.

Man – It won't open...

Woman (*very anxious*) – It won't open? You mean... it's locked?

Man – Now there's no turning back...

He goes to the door on the other side, which presumably leads to the consulting room, and tries the handle with no more success. He turns to the woman.

Man – This one won't open either...

The woman realises what is happening and begins to panic.

Woman – Why have they locked us in like this? I'm claustrophobic...

He would like to reassure her, but he too is becoming very worried.

The woman looks around in panic.

Woman – There aren't any windows... We're going to suffocate...

Man (*trying to remain calm*) – No, of course not... Besides, we have our mobile phones!

Woman – I don't have a mobile phone...

Man – But I do!

He takes out his phone and tries to make a call, but is soon disappointed.

Man – Damn, the battery's dead... (*Still trying to remain optimistic.*) But there must be a power socket somewhere...

They both start looking, first standing up and then on their hands and knees.

Woman – I can't see anything... Can you?

Man (*from behind the sofa*) – No... Wait, yes...

He stands up and holds something aloft.

Man – I've found a condom...

Woman – Do you really think now is the time?

Man – Sorry...

Woman – So what are we going to do?

Man – For now, all we can do is wait... Perhaps they'll come back...

They calm down for a moment, resigned to the situation.

Woman – Why did you come here?

He looks at her, slightly taken aback.

Woman – Sorry... Actually, I don't really know what I'm doing here either... But that's a good enough reason to come, isn't it? I mean, not knowing what you're doing here...

She looks as though she is about to faint.

Man – Lie down...

She is about to lie down, as if on a psychoanalyst's couch, but suddenly draws back.

Woman – Is it you?

Man – What do you mean, me?

Woman – So this whole thing has been staged to unsettle me?

Man – I was only suggesting that you lie down for a while and rest...

Woman – Sorry, I'm starting to lose it... (*She looks at the clock and seems to realise something.*) But wait... Didn't the clocks change last night?

Man – Yes...

Woman – I completely forgot to put my watch forward!

Man – So?

Woman – So I'm an hour late! And I thought I was early! That's why my psychoanalyst has already left! He must have locked the doors on his way out, thinking there was no one left...

Man – Your psychoanalyst...? Aren't we at the dentist's?

Woman – The dentist's is opposite...

Man – Really?

Woman – Yes, really!

He suddenly puts a hand to his cheek.

Man (*grimacing in pain*) – Ow...! It's starting again...

Woman – What is?

Man – My wisdom tooth! That's why I came!

Woman – At least you know why you're here...

Man – Yes, well... Going to a psychoanalyst to have a wisdom tooth taken out...

Woman – It must have been his name that confused you...

Man – His name...?

Woman – Dr Dennis... You can see how anyone could get confused...

He looks at her blankly.

Woman – Dennis... Dentist! It naturally makes you think of a dentist...

Man – I'd never thought of that... And the dentist?

Woman – That's me...

Man – Sorry...?

Woman – You can be a dentist and still need a psychoanalyst, you know... It's unusual, but... it can happen...

Man – Then perhaps you can do something for me...

Woman (*taken aback*) – The thing is... I'm not in my office... I don't have my instruments...

She seems to reconsider.

Woman – Let me see...

He opens his mouth and she examines it.

Woman – Oh, yes, it's very inflamed... And the tooth is already quite loose. Perhaps if I pull it a little...

Man – Ow!!! (*He closes his mouth.*) Are you sure you're a dentist?

Woman (*offended*) – You think I'm making all this up, don't you? So as far as you're concerned, anyone who sees a psychoanalyst must be completely mad...

Man – Not at all... It's just that... you hurt me, that's all...

Woman – Exactly... That's what I hear all day long. "You hurt me." As if I hurt them for the fun of it...

He holds his cheek.

Man – Why do they call them wisdom teeth, anyway?

Woman – Because they come through when we're supposed to know better, I suppose...

Man – Then why do wisdom teeth have to hurt like hell, to the point where we have to have them taken out?

Woman – Are you really a psychoanalyst...?

Man – A psychoanalyst can have toothache too, you know... Sorry to keep asking, but... are you sure this isn't a dentist's office?

Woman – So I'd be locked in my own waiting room, thinking I was at a psychoanalyst's office...? You really do think I'm mad!

Silence.

Man – Then again, one waiting room looks very much like another... And the wall clock hasn't been set to the right time... Just like your watch...

Woman (*firmly*) – The dentist's is on the right and the psychoanalyst's is on the left!

Man – All right, all right...

Trying to look composed, he walks around the room and stops in front of a reproduction of a painting, which may be imaginary.

Man – *The Scream*... A waiting-room classic... It works equally well for dentists and psychoanalysts...

Woman – Yes... I've got the same one in my waiting room... (*She looks at him, suddenly doubtful, searches her pocket and takes out a key.*) I'd better check anyway... I've got the key to my office in my pocket... (*She goes to the door and opens it without difficulty.*) Are you coming, Doctor...? Let's take care of that wisdom tooth...

He stares at her, bewildered.

3. That Doesn't Mean Anything

A man and a woman.

Man – I'm beginning to wonder whether my boss is trying to get rid of me.

Woman – Really?

Man – When I run into him in the corridors, he doesn't even say hello any more. We used to have lunch together at least once a week...

Woman – Oh, that doesn't mean anything. Maybe he's just very busy. Or perhaps he's on a diet.

Man – I don't know... He's started addressing me formally, using my surname. He always used to call me by my first name.

Woman – Oh, that doesn't mean anything. It could simply be a mark of respect, couldn't it? It shows that he takes you seriously.

Man – Even so... He's just taken a major project away from me and handed it to the new guy he's hired...

Woman – Oh, that doesn't mean anything. He doesn't want his employees to be overworked, and that's to his credit. He probably hired someone to take some of the pressure off you.

Man – Yeah... Well, I'm certainly not overworked now. In fact, for the past week, I haven't had a single project to work on. They've taken them all away from me, one by one.

Woman – Oh, that doesn't mean anything. Perhaps he wants you to be completely available for the next really important assignment he's planning to give you...

Man – I'm not so sure. I used to have a large office on the top floor, right next to his. Now they've moved me down to the basement, into a windowless room. And the boss has given my old office to the new guy...

Woman – Oh, that doesn't mean anything. At least you don't have him breathing down your neck all day. You have more freedom...

Man – Oh, yes, definitely. I can do anything I like. No one ever comes to see me. I spend all day playing games online. Well, not any more. They cut off my internet access yesterday...

Woman – Oh, that doesn't mean anything. Internet connections go down all the time. Everyone knows that.

Man – The worst thing is, I'm beginning to wonder whether he's sleeping with my wife.

Woman – Really...?

Man – I don't know... Yesterday, at around three in the afternoon, I saw her coming out of a small hotel with him... I suppose you'll tell me that doesn't mean anything...

Woman – Hmm... That might actually mean something...

4. The Bill

A woman is sitting alone at a restaurant table, staring into space. A waiter approaches briskly, without looking at her, already scribbling something on his order pad.

Waiter (*cheerfully, slightly overexcited*) – Did you enjoy the stuffed mussels? They're the chef's speciality...

Woman (*gloomily*) – I had the daily special. The rabbit...

Waiter (*unfazed*) – And what would madam like to finish with? A little dessert? A little coffee? The bill?

Woman (*looking at him intently*) – There's nothing more depressing than eating alone in a restaurant...

Waiter (*trying to maintain his composure, though slightly unsettled*) – A little liqueur?

Woman – Especially for a woman...

Waiter – Marie Brizard? Cointreau? Grand Marnier?

Woman – Eating in a fine restaurant is a bit like making love, you see?

Waiter (*flustered*) – Something sweet and ladylike, then...

Woman – Technically, whether you're alone or with someone else, it all ends in more or less the same way. And yet it's still better with two, isn't it?

Waiter – A herbal tea, perhaps?

Woman – You don't even have to talk, do you? Not in bed, and not at the table. A few banalities will do. I don't know... Pass me the butter...

Waiter – Evening Calm? Peaceful Night?

Woman (*with concern*) – Are you sure you don't want to sit down?

Waiter – The thing is...

Woman – It can't be easy for you either, can it?

Waiter – Well...

Woman – Not that I look down on your profession, of course. But serving all this food and then walking away, without even being able to taste it... Have you eaten, at least?

Waiter – Not yet...

Woman – Are you hungry?

Waiter – Well, I...

Woman (*offering him the bread basket*) – At least have a piece of bread.

Waiter – I don't know if...

Woman – Surely you're allowed a minute's break...

She stands up and firmly gestures for him to sit down. He obeys.

Waiter – It's true that... after the lunchtime rush, I always feel a little drained...

She sits down opposite him.

Woman (*smiling*) – There. Now there are two of us.

He begins chewing his plain bread.

Woman – Would you like some butter? It'll go down more easily...

Waiter – Thank you.

He takes the butter and begins spreading it on the bread.

Woman – Do you know what my grandmother used to say?

He clearly does not.

Woman – Hunger is the best sauce.

He seems struck by the profound philosophical truth of this remark.

Waiter – That's true...

Woman – When you're hungry, even a simple slice of bread...

Waiter (*sighing*) – It reminds me of my childhood... The slices of bread my mother used to give me after school... With salted butter... I was born in Brittany...

Woman (*warmly*) – Would you like a little salt on it?

She offers him the salt shaker. He hesitates, then takes it and sprinkles some salt on his bread. She watches him eat with a tender expression.

Woman – It's good, isn't it?

Waiter – To me, this is as good as caviar, you know...

Woman – That's what I had as a starter... Caviar... That's salty too... But the bill is even harder to swallow...

He smiles and continues chewing. She watches him for another moment, looking peaceful.

Woman – Talking to you has done me good.

She stands and gives him a grateful look.

Woman – Thank you. Really...

She puts on her coat.

Woman (*smiling*) – Next time, it's my treat.

Waiter – Thank you...

She leaves, giving him a little wave before she goes.

He remains seated, looking slightly lost, dreamily chewing his bread and butter. Another person enters, probably the owner. They look in bewilderment first at the waiter sitting at the table, then at the door through which the customer has just left.

5. Looking Is Free

A man enters a shop, where he is greeted by a sales assistant.

Woman – Would you like to see something?

Man – I'm just looking.

Woman – Looking is free.

Man – We'll see.

Woman – Let me see if I can find something for you...

She looks around, finds something and hands it to him.

Woman – Here, have a look.

Man – Isn't it a bit too eye-catching?

Woman – Look at me.

Man – Can you see me wearing that?

Woman – You need to see it on. Look at yourself.

Man – I just can't see myself in it.

Woman – Well, if that's how you see it. Would you like to see something else?

Man – I'll keep looking.

He looks at something else.

Man – I can't see the price.

Woman – Look at the tag.

Man – I can't see anything.

Woman – Don't look too closely at the price, trust me.

Man – I think I'll have another look at the first one.

Woman – Here you are. Have a look. See?

Man – Oh, yes. I can definitely see myself in this one.

He looks at her.

Man – Haven't we seen each other somewhere before?

Woman – I don't remember seeing you...

Man – Let me take a good look at you... What's your name?

Woman – That's not something you need to be looking into.

Man – We could see each other again.

Woman – Well, would you look at that!

Man – You see what I mean...

Woman – Have you actually looked at me? Have you seen yourself? Don't even look at me, all right?

Man – I see...

Woman – I'll leave you to keep looking.

Man – I think I've seen enough.

Woman – Peeping Tom!

Man – So... see you around?

Woman – That's it. Get out of my sight.

Man – Looking is free...

Woman – Then take a good look at me, because you won't be seeing me again any time soon.

Man – We'll see.

Woman – Come on, I've seen enough of you.

She pushes him towards the door.

Man – Now, look here...

He exits.

Woman – You really do have to see it to believe it.

6. Where's the Fire?

Two women are sitting outside a café, placing their order with an unseen waiter.

One – A decaf, please. With a sweetener, as usual...

Two – Actually, you know what? I'll have a cappuccino! I'll go back on my diet tomorrow...

The second woman spots two men out towards the audience and excitedly touches up her make-up. The first, looking gloomy, is lost in thought.

One – Do you believe in God?

Two (*suddenly animated*) – It depends on the day. But looking at those firefighters over there, I think I've just found my faith again...

One (*concerned*) – Is there a fire somewhere?

Two – Right in front of us... They've just sat down... Didn't you see them?

One (*squinting as she tries to see*) – No, I can't see anything...

Two (*trying to be discreet*) – There — the two dressed alike, with crew cuts and short-sleeved blue shirts. It must be their summer uniform...

One – How do you know they're firefighters?

Two – It's written all over them! On their polo shirts, can't you see? "Volunteer Firefighters"!

One – Oh, yes, perhaps... I need to get some new lentils.

Two – Lentils...?

One – Everything looks a bit blurry...

Two – I can see them perfectly clearly... And believe me, you don't know what you're missing...

One (*looking at the second woman*) – Even you look a bit blurry... And you're sitting right next to me... (*Concerned.*) Surely I'm not becoming long-sighted already...

Two – They're so tanned, did you see? But they look a little tired, don't they?

One – I've always wondered why they call them lentils...

Two – Perhaps they've just come back from an emergency... (*With emphasis.*) Dirty, exhausted warriors who have risked their lives in the flames, but with the satisfaction of a job well done...

One – They don't look much like lentils, when you think about it...

Two (*carried away, illustrating her words with gestures*) – I can just picture them, each gripping an enormous fire hose, battling a blaze all night long...

One – Perhaps it's because you have to leave them soaking overnight. Just like lentils...

The second woman looks at the first, wondering what she is talking about.

Two – Now I understand why our sons dream of becoming firefighters...

One – Or perhaps I forgot to put them in...

Two (*sighing*) – They can't even see us...

One – I'd better check...

The first woman touches one of her eyes with her finger.

Two – It's incredible... It's as though once we're married, we become less visible. And after one or two pregnancies, we become completely transparent...

One – No, I definitely have...

Two – And now they're leaving...

One – That can't be!

Two – They are, I swear. Look!

One (*horrified*) – I haven't put both of them in the same eye, have I?!

The second woman looks at the first in bewilderment. A fire-engine siren is heard.

One – What the hell is he doing with my cappuccino...? I need to get back to work...

Two – Relax. Where's the fire?

7. The Meter

A character is standing there, stooped over. The doorbell rings. They go to answer it, still stooped.

Two (*offstage*) – Hello! I’m here to read the meters.

One – Come in. I’ve been expecting you.

The second character appears, also stooped.

One – This way, follow me. Mind your head—the ceiling is very low.

Two – Don’t worry, I’m used to it.

Two follows One to one part of the stage.

One – Right, this is the water meter.

Two writes down the reading in a notebook.

Two – Very good...

One moves to another part of the stage, followed by Two.

One – This is the electricity meter...

Two writes down the reading.

Two – Perfect...

One moves to another part of the stage, followed by Two.

One – This must be the gas meter.

Two – Hmm...

Two writes down the reading.

Two – Ah, your consumption is down this month. Of course, we’ve had a very mild winter.

One – Well, global warming has to have some advantages...

One moves to one last part of the stage, followed by Two.

One – And here’s the oxygen meter...

Two – Very good...

Two examines the meter with a disapproving look.

Two – Ah, but this one’s a different matter. You’ve gone way over your allowance! (*Turning to One.*) What happened, Mr Lopez?

One – I don’t know... It’s true that I’ve been getting a little short of breath lately when I go for a run... On my treadmill...

Two – You'll have to stop exercising, Mr Lopez... It may be good for your health, but it's bad for your wallet...

One – Especially since the price of oxygen has gone up again this month...

Two – You don't have a leak, do you?

One – I don't think so...

Two writes down the reading.

Two – Perhaps you should lower the ceiling a little more... You'd waste less oxygen that way, believe me...

One – The thing is, with my back...

Two – Well, it's up to you...

Two takes out a card reader.

Two – So... Cheque or card?

One – The thing is... couldn't it wait a little? My pension, on the other hand, seems to keep going down...

Two – Yes, but Mr Lopez... You're putting me in an awkward position...

One – I could pay in two instalments...

Two – I'm afraid that isn't possible, Mr Lopez... You understand, if everyone did that...

One does not know what to say. Two is clearly uncomfortable.

Two – All right... We'll say I couldn't read the meters because you were out, and I'll come back next week. Agreed?

One – Agreed... But if you could come back in two weeks instead...

Two – Mr Lopez... Don't push your luck! Just imagine... If we had to cut off your oxygen, you know what that would mean...

One – I'd only have the gas left.

Two – Assuming you've paid the bill...

Despite everything, Two gives One a friendly pat on the back to lighten the mood before leaving.

Two – Come on, don't worry, Mr Lopez... I'll come back next month, all right? But this is the last time.

One – Thank you...

Two – And until then, no more exercise! And try not to breathe so often, for goodness' sake! I don't know... One breath out of two should be more than enough, shouldn't it? When you're struggling to make ends meet, you have to tighten your belt a little... Just pull it up around your lungs...

One responds with a resigned smile and is about to see Two to the door.

Two – No need to see me out. I know the way. And you might as well save your breath...

One stops, and they shake hands.

Two – Goodbye, Mr Lopez... And think about what I told you... Lowering the ceiling by thirty centimetres means ten per cent less oxygen consumption... Didn't you see our latest information campaign on television?

One – Thank you... (*Two leaves, and One remains alone.*) I think I'd better turn off the light as well...

8. Auto-Deprecation

Two characters are looking at something in front of them.

One – What make is it?

Two – A Mercedes.

One – Oh, right.

Two – Someone stole the star off it. At first, I kept having it replaced. Then I gave up. It gets stolen every time.

One – Stars even on cars... That's such a German idea.

Two – I wonder what the hell they do with them.

One – Who?

Two – With all those stars! What do they do, collect them?

One – Still, it's better if they steal the star and leave you the car. Mine didn't have a star. They stole the whole car last year. So I bought this one. Second-hand... (*A pause.*) Are you happy with yours?

Two – It's solid.

One – It isn't very pretty.

Two – It's German.

One – It's a good make.

Two – It's a Mercedes.

One – Yeah.

Two – You know what you're buying.

One – And you know what you've got.

Two – German quality. (*A pause.*) What make is yours?

One – I never found out.

Two – Sorry?

One – The man who sold it to me said it was a Renault. There was no badge on it, but the garage told me it wasn't a Renault.

Two – So what is it?

One – They don't know.

Two – Damn!

One – Apart from that, it runs fine. Just an oil change every now and then. Which is just as well, because when it comes to spare parts... If you don't know the make...

Two – Oh, right...

One – Yeah... It's a car of unknown parentage, really. They think it may have been made in a country in Eastern Europe. Or China. Israel, perhaps. By a manufacturer that has since disappeared. Or changed its name. Like Jews during the war, you see?

Two – But what do the registration papers say?

One – Renault.

Two – But it isn't one...

One – They had to give it a name. An official identity, so to speak. Have it adopted, you might say. Otherwise, everything's in order. It is a car, you know! I mean, it drives. It's just that no one knows the make.

Two – And how old is it?

One – They're not too sure about that either. About thirty years old, perhaps. Before the wall came down, anyway.

Two – Which wall?

One – That's just it—we don't know. The Berlin Wall, perhaps. Or the Great Wall of China. Who knows...?

Two – Did the Great Wall of China come down?

One – They'd have to carbon-date it. Carbon-14. Straight from the exhaust pipe.

Two – It doesn't have a catalytic converter...

One – Or seat belts, of course. But since it's officially considered a classic car, I'm allowed to drive it anyway. Apart from that, it's a good car.

Two – And what does it run on?

One – I use heating oil. But perhaps it would run on something else. I've never tried.

Two – Damn...

A pause.

One – Are you really sure yours is a Mercedes?

Two looks at One, a little worried.

One – No, I mean, since it doesn't have the star...

A pause.

One – You do have the papers for it, don't you?

9. In Unison

Two characters –male or female – cross paths.

One – Good morning.

Two – Good evening.

Each seems puzzled by the other's behaviour.

One – Good morvening.

Two – Good evenorning.

One – Can I help you?

Two – Do you need any information?

One – They don't understand a thing.

Two – They don't seem very bright.

One – Can you hear me?

Two – What are they saying?

One – Do you speak English?

Two – Parlez-vous anglais?

One – ¿Adónde vas?

Two – Quo vadis?

One – They're probably not from around here.

Two – They can't be from this area.

One – Maybe it's a regional language.

Two – Sounds like a local dialect.

One – Do you have a problem?

Two – Are you sure you're all right?

One – Yes, they definitely have a serious problem.

Two – No, they're clearly not well.

One – Are you looking for something?

Two – Have you lost someone?

One – Or perhaps they have a speech impediment.

Two – Maybe I should write them a note.

One – Do you have a pencil?

Two – Do you have a piece of paper?

One – They look as if they're about to faint.

Two – Maybe I should call a doctor.

One – Shall I call an ambulance?

Two – I'd better call the fire brigade.

One – They look completely lost.

Two – Maybe they're a little disturbed.

One – Yes, you have to feel sorry for them.

Two – Poor thing... I wouldn't want to be in their shoes.

One – Would you like me to drive you somewhere? I've got a car.

Two – Luckily they're on foot. They're in no state to drive.

One – Well, there's no point insisting.

Two – Maybe I'd better leave them alone.

One – Are you sure you'll be all right?

Two – Will you be able to manage on your own?

One – What can I do about it?

Two – I'd like to do something, but what?

One – Well then... Goodbye.

Two – Right, er... Bye-bye.

One – That's right... Buy one.

Two – All right... Buy two.

They still hesitate to leave, each a little worried about the other.

Two – One?

One – Two?

Two – One.

One – Two.

They leave in opposite directions, marching in step.

Two – One.

One – Two.

Two – One.

One – Two...

They circle the stage, meet again and exit together, still marching in step.

10. The Newspaper

Two characters are sitting on a bench.

One – Have you read the paper this morning?

Two – No. What's happening?

One – I don't know. I cancelled my subscription.

Two – There's usually one lying around on a bench.

One – Or in a bin.

Two – Even yesterday's paper.

One – We're in no hurry.

Two – We don't need the latest news.

One – We're retired.

Two – We just want to know what's going on.

One – If something happened, we wouldn't know about it.

Two – Thank goodness for TV.

A pause.

One – Did you watch TV last night?

Two – My aerial fell off the roof in the last storm.

One – Mine's still on the roof. It's the TV that's broken.

Two – Maybe they're on strike.

One – The TV? How would we know? We can't watch it.

Two – The newspaper! Maybe they're on strike.

One – There always used to be one lying around on a bench.

Two – That's why I cancelled my subscription.

One – You too?

Two – But if everyone's done the same as us...

One – That'll be the death of the press.

Two – There won't be any papers left lying on benches.

One – Then we won't know what's going on at all.

Two – In the Middle Ages, there were no newspapers.

One – And people weren't any worse off.

Two – They couldn't read.

One – Besides, who knows if everything they print in the papers is true?

Two – They exaggerate sometimes, that's for sure.

One – When they write about America, for instance.

Two – America?

One – Have you ever been to America?

Two – No.

One – Then how can we be sure America really exists?

They reflect on this idea for a moment.

Two – What if Christopher Columbus never found anything?

One – What if Christopher Columbus never existed?

Two – What if there was nothing on the other side of the sea?

One – What if there was no sea? (*The other looks at One, a little surprised.*) Have you ever seen the sea?

Two – Oh yes, I have. Well, on TV. Back when I still had an aerial.

One – Let's say the sea exists. But how do we know what's on the other side?

Two – What if the Earth really were flat?

One – How can we know what's really happening in the world?

Two – Or even in this country.

One – Or even in this town.

Two – Or even in this park.

One – Or even here.

The other looks at One, a little puzzled.

Two – Here, we'd know, wouldn't we?

One – Exactly. We don't need a newspaper to tell us that.

Two – And as for what happens elsewhere, frankly...

One – How could we really know?

Two – How could we ever be sure?

One – Not from a newspaper, anyway.

A pause. Something at Two's feet catches their eye. Two picks up a crumpled page of newspaper and unfolds it.

One – What is it?

Two – A page from a newspaper.

One – Which section?

Two – The local news.

One – And?

Two gives One an astonished look.

Two – It's about us.

One – That doesn't mean we really exist.

Two turns back to the newspaper.

Two – It says we're dead.

One – Dead?

Two – Me, from falling off the roof while trying to fix my aerial. You, electrocuted while tinkering with your TV.

One – Dead...

Two – It's in the paper.

One – Then again...

Two – How do we know it's true?

11. The Visit

Two characters enter, looking worried. They remain silent for a moment.

One – So? How did he seem to you?

Two – To be honest, I was expecting worse...

One – Yes.

Another silence.

One – Worse?

Two – I don't know... He's clearly very weak, but still... At least he spoke to us...

One – Yes...

A pause.

One – What exactly did he say?

Two – I'm not sure I understood him properly... Something like... Oh... Uh... Ay...

One – Yes... That's what I heard too...

Two – He seems to have a bit of trouble with consonants...

One – Yes.

Two – Still, he seemed pleased to see us.

A pause.

One – It's hard seeing him like that...

Two – We were very close to him...

One – I was very fond of him.

Two – I think he was very fond of us too.

One – We were very close.

Silence.

One – Do you really think he recognises us?

Two – Of course he does!

One – When we arrived, he turned his head away...

Two – Probably just a reflex... I'm not sure he's in control of all his movements, you know...

One – It felt as if he was trying to tell us something...

Two – Maybe he wanted to thank us for visiting...

One – Hmm...

Two places a comforting hand on One's shoulder.

Two – We'd better go. We'll come back and see him...

One – Yes...

They begin to leave.

One – I think I may have finally understood what he was trying to say earlier...

Two – Did he say something?

One – You know: Oh... Uh... Ay...

Two – Oh, that... So?

One – Oh... uh... ay... Add a couple of consonants... It sounds very much like... “Go away.”

Two – Do you think so...?

One – It sounds like it...

Two – Hmm... Anyway, he did seem pleased to see us...

One – Yes...

Two – Come on. We'll come back and see him...

12. Time Off

Two characters.

One – So, what was it like over there?

Two – Oh yes, it was... But it was such a long way away!

One – Far?

Two – Honestly, I had no idea it was that far.

One – But was it nice?

Two – Oh yes, it was... But it was so small!

One – Was there a sea?

Two – Oh yes, the sea! Tiny, though.

One – But there was a beach, at least?

Two – A beach, yes. But it was packed...

One – On the beach?

Two – On the beach, in the sea, everywhere... It's so small.

One – And was the weather good?

Two – The weather was... magnificent. But the wind!

One – The wind...?

Two – It could blow the horns off a snail.

One – Are there many of those over there?

Two – Snails? Not a single one! Probably because of the wind...

One – And is the food good there?

Two – Very good! Well, better than you'd expect...

One – And what do they eat?

Two – A bit of everything.

One – Not snails, anyway.

Two – No, you certainly don't go there for the snails.

One – Right...

Two – Sea snails, perhaps...

One – Hmm...

Two – If you can find any...

One – Yes...

Two – But the sea is so tiny...

One – Hmm...

Two – And the water isn't very salty.

One – Oh, really...?

Two – I'm not sure sea snails would be very happy there.

One – Probably not...

Two – Frogs, maybe...

One – Frogs?

Two – I mean... sea frogs. If there were such a thing...

One – Is there much to do there?

Two – Oh, you can see the whole place in no time... It's so small... No, you go there to rest. As for anything else...

One – So, did you come back feeling rested?

Two – Completely exhausted. The jet lag. There's almost a twenty-four-hour time difference.

One – That's quite a difference...

Two – Honestly, though, it was very nice. Very nice. I'd happily go back...

One – Well, you know, that makes me want to take a trip there too.

Two – On the other hand, is it really worth going so far? To such a small country.

One – You have to go somewhere.

Two – No, next year I was thinking of doing Liechtenstein.

One – That's small too.

Two – Yes... But it's closer.

One – But there's no sea...

Two – Really?

One – Or maybe a very small one... and not very salty.

They remain motionless for a moment, in silence.

Two – Do you know what I was thinking?

One – No.

Two – The Earth turns...

One – Yes.

Two – If we could stay still for long enough...

One – Yes.

Two – I mean absolutely still...

One – Hmm...

Two – Suspended above the ground, I mean, holding on to something...

One – Yes.

Two – With our feet off the ground.

One – And then?

Two – Then twelve hours later, we'd be in China.

The other looks at Two, astonished.

One – And twenty-four hours later, we'd be back here.

Two – We'd have gone all the way around the world.

They take a moment to consider all the implications of this discovery.

Two – But we'd still have to find something to hold on to...

One – Yeah...

13. Out to Pasture

They are sitting side by side. He is chewing on what looks like a piece of gum. She turns to him.

Woman – Are you all right?

Man – Fine. Why?

Woman – I don't know... You look as if you're chewing something over...

Man – Oh, yes... It's hay... *(She looks at him in surprise. He gets up.)* I think I'll go for a walk in the park, for a change.

Woman – All right... If you're going past the butcher's, could you get two pork chops? I'll fry them tonight and serve them with rice.

Man – No.

Woman – Sorry?

Man – Oh, that's right, I haven't told you, have I? I've become a herbivore.

She takes this in.

Woman – Then just get one pork chop... You can always have the rice.

Man – The rice?

Woman – If you've decided to become a vegetarian...

Man – No, I didn't say vegetarian. I said herbivore.

A pause.

Woman – Fine... Then get some lettuce instead...

Man – No need. I'll graze on a patch of grass in the park.

Woman – The grass...

Man – I've always felt very close to cows... There comes a time in life when you feel the need to act according to your beliefs. Do you understand?

Woman – I'm trying...

Man – Well, cows... I could just as easily have said sheep, giraffes or gazelles...

Woman – Oh, right...

Man – Herbivores, basically... Don't you want to come with me?

Woman – Where?

Man – To the park!

Woman – Are you trying to put me out to pasture?

Man – Do you have anything more urgent to do?

Woman – No.

Man – It rained a lot last week. I walked past the park earlier and the grass looks magnificent. You'll see. Let's make the most of it before people trample all over it. With weather this nice, the place will be packed this afternoon. Trust me, we'd better go now.

Woman – All right, I'll get my coat.

He puts on a fluffy, sheepskin-style coat.

Man – Isn't this a bit too conspicuous?

Woman – Moooo... no. *(She puts on a cowhide-style coat.)* And me? Do I look all right?

Man – Baaaa... yes.

They exit.

Woman – Maybe I shouldn't have worn a skirt... Will we have to get down on all fours?

14. Playwrights These Days

Two characters stand with their arms hanging limply at their sides.

One – You see, by now we should be putting on a show.

Two – And here we stand, with no idea where to go.

One – We don't know where to stand or what to do.

Two – Didn't he leave us a few words? Not even a clue?

One – It wouldn't bring him back, but we'd know what to say.

Two – We'd know what to do, what to feel, how to play.

One – He's left us like this, staring into empty space.

Two – Why did he do it? Was he afraid opening night would be a disgrace?

One – And his friends? Not a thought for anyone in the audience.

Two – Look at them all sitting out there, waiting in silence.

One – They're waiting for our lines, but what can we say?

Two – Nothing. We don't have anything to say.

One – Because we don't have the play.

One – Because he never wrote a line.

Two – Because yesterday, he ran out of time.

One – From indigestion.

The other character stares in surprise.

Two – Indigestion?

One – I only said it because it rhymed with your question.

Two – Was the play supposed to be in verse?

One – I don't know. None of this rhymes or makes any sense...

Two – We're not playwrights or actors, or anything of the kind.

Two – We don't know what to tell you. We only came to say goodbye.

One – Two characters in mourning, and a few orphaned rhymes.

A pause.

One – At this point, we should be taking a bow and receiving an ovation.

Two – Or boos and insults, without the slightest compassion.

One – But at least then we would know.

Two – Whether it was a good play or a terrible show.

One – A smash hit or a total disaster.

Two – But now we'll never know the answer.

One – Honestly, it's very sad, I have to say.

Two – Playwrights really are a joke these days.

15. George

He is sitting on a chair. She enters wearing a police inspector's trench coat that is much too big for her.

Woman – Is there anyone here called George?

Surprised, he looks around. Then he looks out at the audience.

Man – I don't know... Probably...

Woman (*suspiciously*) – Probably?

Man – Not me, anyway. Well, I don't think so...

A pause. She seems uncertain.

Woman – And what do you want with George?

Man – Er... Shouldn't I be asking you that?

Woman – Oh...? Why?

Man – Because you're the one looking for George.

Woman – Yes.

Man – Then I should be the one asking, "And what do you want with George?" Otherwise it doesn't make any sense...

Woman – You're right... The writer must have been drunk again when he wrote this...

Man – He must have skipped a line.

Woman – Or got the characters mixed up.

Man – And they don't even have names.

Woman – And this trench coat is much too big for me.

She takes off the trench coat and hands it to him. Underneath, she is wearing clothes similar to his. He gets up and puts on the trench coat. It fits him perfectly. She sits down in his place.

Woman – And what do you want with George?

Man (*referring to the trench coat*) – Ah, yes. That's more like it...

Woman – You haven't answered my question.

Man – I'm the one asking the questions here, all right?

Woman – All right... (*He seems to have run out of questions.*) Well?

Man – Well what?

Woman – George...

Man – George... Hmm... Could he be the one, by any chance?

Woman – Who?

Man – The writer!

Woman – The writer? George? No, I don't think so...

Man – Why not?

Woman – Well... because... he's an anonymous writer. Early twentieth.

Man – There aren't many anonymous writers from the early twentieth century, are there?

Woman – Why not?

Man – Anonymous writers belong in the Middle Ages. Nowadays, we have ways of tracking writers down. DNA evidence and all that. The literary offenders database. An anonymous writer from the twentieth century doesn't make any sense...

Woman – The twentieth... The 20th arrondissement of Paris! Right at the beginning, near Nation. An anonymous writer from the beginning of the 20th arrondissement.

Man – Oh, right...

Woman – Exactly.

Man – That makes more sense.

Woman – Why?

Man – Famous writers usually live in the 6th or 7th arrondissement. You need money for that. In the 19th and 20th, of course, there are only anonymous ones. What does this writer look like?

Woman – George?

Man – George, if you like.

Woman – Why do you want to know what he looks like?

Man – In case I see him.

Woman – So you want me to give you a physical description?

Man – So I can recognise him...

Woman – All right. Have you got something to write with?

He takes a notebook and pencil from one of the trench coat pockets.

Man – I'm listening...

Woman – George calls himself George. But obviously, that's a false name. A pseudonym, if you prefer.

Man – I see... A code name.

Woman – No one knows George's real name. In fact, the only thing we know about George is that his name isn't George. And as for his appearance...

Man (*scribbling in the notebook*) – Very good. Thank you for that valuable information...

Woman – Did you actually write that down?

Man – I've done something even better... (*He hands her the notebook.*) Look...

Woman – A composite sketch? (*She looks at the drawing.*) But... why have you drawn a dog?

Man – I... I can only draw dogs... But you have to admit the resemblance is striking, isn't it?

Woman – Yes... It's the spitting image of him...

Man – And it's not just any dog... It's a police dog. A dog is man's best friend. Believe me, a dog will never let you down.

Woman – Have you finished?

Man – Finished what?

Woman – Your investigation!

Man – For now, yes. But I must ask you to remain available to the police. I still have to question a few other characters...

Woman – Which characters?

Man – Garamond, Helvetica, Times New Roman... Plenty of types to choose from...

A pause.

Woman – And what exactly is this George wanted for?

Man – I'm sorry, but even if I knew, I couldn't tell you.

Woman – I see...

Man – Lucky you.

Woman – So can I go now?

Man – Where?

Woman – I don't know... Somewhere...

Man – All right... Let's just say I'll follow you.

They prepare to leave.

Woman – Are you really sure he exists?

Man – Who?

Woman – George!

Man – Of course!

Woman – Still, we don't know much about him.

Man – We know his name isn't George...

Woman – Yes.

Man – It's a start.

They exit.

16. J.C.

All references to left and right are from the audience's point of view.

J is already there, doing nothing, with a vacant expression. C enters from the left, looking puzzled.

C – Can somebody tell me what's going on here...?

As if coming out of a trance, J looks at C with a mixture of surprise and indifference.

J – Is something going on?

C – What's going on?

J – What could possibly be going on?

C – I don't know... That's why I'm asking.

J – You came in, and...

C – I felt as though I was interrupting something...

J – And what could you possibly have interrupted?

C – Nothing.

J – Well, that's something.

C – What is?

J – Turning up like that... out of nowhere... and interrupting me... when I wasn't doing anything.

C – Are you suggesting I'm the one who did something?

J – Didn't you?

A pause.

C – So, what do we do now?

J – I don't know. We wait and see what happens.

C – What?

J – For something to happen...

C – Something?

J – Or someone...

C – Someone...? And where could they come from?

J – I can never get this straight... (*Hesitating.*) From the right or the left...?

C – It's simple. Look. (*C turns their back to the audience and points first to the left, then to the right.*) Let's call this side Jerusalem, and the other side Calvary. J.C.

J – J.C...?

C – Jerusalem, Calvary... J.C.... Jesus Christ!

J – Oh, right...

A pause during which nothing happens.

J – You're right... Maybe we'd better split up...

J exits to the right. C remains motionless, wearing the same vacant expression J had at the beginning of the scene. After a moment, J bursts in from the left.

J (*theatrically*) – Can somebody tell me me what's going on here...?

As if coming out of a trance, C looks at J in surprise. Then C seems to remember something.

C – You're going to laugh, but I was waiting for you...

J – Like the Messiah.

C – But not from that side...

17. The Suitcase

A character arrives carrying a suitcase and approaches a table with another character behind it.

One – Good morning. Is this the lost property office?

Two – Yes.

One – I got lost on the way.

Two – So you're here to hand something in?

One – No, more to collect something.

Two – What have you lost?

One – Let's see... *(Takes out a piece of paper and reads.)* I lost my virginity when I was very young. I lost all my illusions at about the same time. I lost my faith and eight kilos. I lost my temper and quite a lot of money. I lost my job and my appetite. I lost track of time before I lost my mind. I lost my dignity and my grip. I lost my bearings and a lot of sleep. I lost my zest for life, along with my last shred of hope. And very recently, I lost my memory.

Two – Ah, yes.

One – I even lost my wife the day before yesterday.

Two – But when you say "lost"...?

One – A short, slightly plump blonde with a red ribbon around her wrist. No one's handed her in here by any chance, have they?

Two – A red ribbon?

One – So I could recognise her. I do the same with suitcases when I fly. But I managed to lose her anyway.

Two – You lost a suitcase? Because we've got plenty of those here, you know. What was in it?

One – What suitcase?

Two – The one you lost.

One – I didn't lose a suitcase. Quite the opposite. *(Indicating the suitcase.)* I found this one.

Two – What's inside it?

One – Nothing. At least, I don't think so. I couldn't get it open. I thought I'd fill it with everything you were going to give back to me.

Two – Ah, but if this suitcase isn't yours... Are you sure it isn't? There's a red ribbon around the handle.

One – Oh, yes. So there is...

Two – Are you sure you're not married to a suitcase?

One – Oh, yes!

Two – Mind you, you wouldn't believe how many suitcases we have here with red ribbons around the handles.

One – And what about my wife?

Two – Sorry, but even if someone found her, I don't think this is where they'd hand her in. Was she all in one piece?

One – Why do you ask?

Two – I don't know... In several pieces, a short woman, even a slightly plump one, could fit into one or two suitcases. The problem is, we have a lot of suitcases here. And most of the time, we don't even bother opening them to see what's inside.

One – Really?

Two – Especially when they're locked.

One – Oh, right.

Two – So no, I can't say with absolute certainty that we haven't got one or two women here divided among three or four standard-sized suitcases, or one or two large trunks.

One – I see.

Two – I'm only trying to say that if your wife is here, she's probably in several pieces.

One – And the rest?

Two – The rest? (*A pause.*) Oh, yes. But... no. I'm afraid that won't be possible.

One – Why not?

Two – Because we're short-staffed, that's why!

One – Oh...

Two – If it were up to me, of course... But I'm the only one here, handling both drop-offs and collections. And now that they've cut half the civil service jobs...

One – Yes?

Two – Well... one day we hand things back, and the next day we take them in.

One – And today you're taking them in.

Two – That's right. Just your luck. But come back tomorrow and my colleague will help you.

One – All right...

Two – Are you sure you don't want to leave your suitcase with me? That I can deal with...

One – All right... Here you are... I'll collect it tomorrow...

Two – This one or another one... What difference does it make...? It's empty anyway...

One – Right, I'll come back tomorrow...

Two – Try not to get lost this time... At least now you know where to find us...

One hands the suitcase to Two, who takes it with visible effort.

Two – Well, for an empty suitcase, it weighs as much as a dead body.

One leaves. Two examines the suitcase.

Two – Locked... (*Puts the suitcase in a corner.*) Who knows what's in there this time...

Blackout.

18. Low Cost

A row of seats or a bench. A woman enters slowly, carrying a bag. She glances around indifferently, simply to put off the moment of sitting down. Eventually, she puts down her bag, sits and waits, staring straight ahead with a vacant expression. A man enters at a brisker pace. He checks his watch and paces up and down. After a moment, he notices the woman and turns to her.

Man – Excuse me, but are you...?

Woman (*surprised*) – Yes...

Man – I thought so...

Woman – Oh, right...

Man – But I wouldn't want to...

Woman – No, of course...

Man – Do you mind if I...?

Woman – Mm-hm...

He sits.

Man – So you're here for...?

Woman – Aren't you?

Man – Yes, yes. Me too...

Woman – Perfect.

Man – Sorry about...

Woman – Not at all.

Silence. They wait, each on their own.

Woman – Do you have the time, please?

Man – Depends... At our point of departure or at our destination?

Woman – Sorry. That was a stupid question.

Man – Yes...

Silence. He stands up again, looking worried.

Man – This is Terminal 2, isn't it?

Woman – Yes... At least, I hope so.

Man – Since we're the only ones here, I was beginning to wonder if...

Woman – What else could it be...?

Man – Terminal 1?

Woman – Terminal 1 no longer exists.

Man (*incredulous*) – There's only Terminal 2 now?

Woman – Yes.

He takes this in.

Man – No, because if this were Terminal 1 and, as you say, it were no longer in use, that would explain why...

Woman – This is Terminal 2.

Man – It's just that there's only you and me...

Woman – Maybe we're the first.

Man – Hmm...

Silence. He sits down again.

Man – Are you leaving?

Woman – Sorry?

Man – No, I mean... Are you leaving or coming back? Are you from here and going there, or are you going home?

Woman – Oh, that... Well... I'm going... I'm coming... I'm not really from anywhere... Let's just say I'm in transit.

Man – Me too... (*A little agitated.*) There aren't any toilets in this area, are there?

Woman – Normally, we're not supposed to be here for long... What about you?

Man – Me?

Woman – Are you going home?

Man – Home? Oh no, I... Actually, I'm a bit like you.

An awkward silence.

Woman – Sorry, I'm not really in the mood to talk.

Man – No, I'm sorry... I'll leave you in peace...

Woman – No, no, you're not bothering me... It's just... Do you think the flight will still leave if there are only two of us?

Man – I hope so... I don't know... Do you think it's like the theatre? If there aren't enough people in the audience, they cancel the performance?

Woman – That happened to me once, you know. At the theatre, I mean. I still have very bad memories of it. I thought it was very inconsiderate. Downright rude, in fact. The way they throw it in your face at the last minute: “Where’s the rest of the flock? You don’t seriously expect us to perform for a few stray sheep, do you? Fine, you made the effort to come. Nobody forced you. Too bad for you. But we’re stars! We only perform to packed houses. So come back when there’s a queue outside...” The arrogance! When they can’t even attract more than two people at a time! And punishing us instead of taking it out on all the people who didn’t come. If anything, they should congratulate us. Thank us. “Thank you for being the only people who made the effort to come. It’s quality that matters, not quantity. And to thank you for the quality of your presence, tonight we’re going to put twice as much into it as usual. We’ll perform just for you. You’ll see: it’ll be an intimate experience of extraordinary intensity. An experience you’ll remember for the rest of your life...” What would it have cost them to perform? Even for one person! Even to an empty theatre! An hour or two of their time? Instead, they left me standing there and went across the road for a few beers, complaining about how hard life is for performers...

Man – Well... for someone who isn’t in the mood to talk...

Woman – Sorry, but I find it sad... To them, a cancelled performance just meant lost earnings. To me, it was a missed connection... A moment that never happened and never will. Do you understand?

Man – Yes, but here they have to pay for the jet fuel... Just think about it. An actor needs what? A litre or two a day. But a plane must burn around a thousand litres per hundred kilometres. So if there are only two of us on board... Even if we buy some duty-free goods from the cabin crew during the flight, it still won’t be worth their while...

Woman – Hmm...

Man – What if they’re on strike?

Woman – They’d have told us, wouldn’t they?

Man – Maybe it’s an unannounced strike. A communist plot!

Woman – Then why would we be the only ones who haven’t heard about it?

A pause.

Man – Do you think a communist who wins the lottery stays a communist?

Woman – There’s nothing to do but wait...

Man (*pursuing the thought*) – If I won the lottery, I think I’d start believing in God, at least. (*A pause.*) Do you know when I’d have liked to live?

Woman – No.

Man – In prehistoric times.

Woman – Oh, right...

Man – Aren’t you going to ask me why?

Woman – All right, tell me.

Man – Because everything was much simpler!

Woman – You think?

Man – To begin with, there were no planes. So no low-cost airlines. There were no cars either. Not even bicycles, because the wheel hadn't been invented yet. If people wanted to go somewhere, they walked. Much better for the environment.

Woman – On foot? Can you imagine? It would have taken them a month to walk from Paris to Nice!

Man – Why would a Neanderthal have wanted to go to Nice? Nice didn't exist!

Woman – The French Riviera did, didn't it? Those people might also have wanted to retire somewhere pleasant and fashionable, or take the occasional holiday by the sea. Considering the lives they must have led...

Man – But there was no retirement, and there were no holidays! Because the idea of work didn't exist. There was no social security either, so no social security deficit. No state and no religion, so no prisons and no guilt.

Woman – I see... The law of the jungle, then...

Man – Exactly! I'd have liked to live back when human beings were simply animals among other animals. A little more intelligent, perhaps... Intelligence isn't always an advantage, you know...

She looks around, a little uneasy.

Woman – I'm beginning to think you may be right...

Man – It took us only four million years to evolve from apes. Barely a second in the history of the universe. There's still time to go back the way we came...

Woman (*not understanding*) – To go where?

Man – Back to the wild!

Woman – I was talking about our plane! I'm beginning to think I should have taken the train...

Man – Some trains don't leave on time either. And some derail...

Woman – Do you believe in destiny?

Man – Depends what you mean by it...

Woman – The idea that everything has already been written.

Man – By whom?

Woman – By no one! The idea that we don't really have a choice. Only the illusion of choice. The idea that wherever we end up was determined in advance, right from the start, by a series of switches along the track, whatever we do. And all we can do is sit tight and wait...

Man – No one has to take the train. We're living proof...

Woman – Planes are guided by air traffic controllers too...

Man – Apparently, they're on strike... What if we just left?

Woman – We're already in the boarding area.

Man – So?

Woman – See that sign over there?

Man (*reading*) – No Exit... That's crazy!

Woman – We've already been through security. We can't turn back now...

Man – And apparently we're not taking off any time soon either. But when are we supposed to pee?

Woman – I remember, a long time ago...

Man (*interrupting her*) – Oh no!

Woman – What do you mean, "no"?

Man – You're not going to start telling me your life story. Memories weigh you down, you know! And there's a weight limit. Maybe you're the reason we can't take off...

Woman – Me?

Man – Excess baggage!

Woman – I've only got one small bag...

Man – It's a low-cost airline. Maybe they've replaced the planes with airships.

Woman – Hot-air balloons?

Man – How do you get a zeppelin off the ground?

Woman – I don't know...

Man – You drop ballast!

Woman – You want to throw me overboard?

Man – The sandbags! You throw the sandbags overboard. Or empty them...

Woman – But... there isn't any sand in my bag!

Man – Are you sure?

She opens her bag, reaches inside and, to her surprise, pulls out a handful of sand, which she lets run through her fingers.

Man – There you are...

Woman – Do you think that'll be enough?

Man – I haven't got any luggage...

Woman – All right...

She empties the sand onto the floor.

Man – Perfect.

A pause.

Woman – We still haven't taken off...

Man – But you must feel lighter, don't you?

Woman – I don't know.

Man – What were we talking about?

Woman – I can't remember... Can you?

Man – I've never had a memory.

Woman – Then why do I have this vague sense of déjà vu...?

Man – Do you think we were meant to meet?

Woman – If everything's written in advance, fate must have switched you onto my track.

Man – Or maybe you're the one who's gone off the rails.

Woman – Will you be my husband?

Man (*looking around*) – Do I really have a choice?

Woman – It had to end this way.

Man – It was written.

Silence.

Man – Looks like it's going to be a nice day.

Woman – Yes. They're forecasting thunderstorms.

A pause.

Woman – I'm starting to need the toilet too.

Man – It must have been fate that brought us together.

They hold hands.

Man – A little company...

Woman – At no extra cost.

They smile like people in an advertisement.

Man – Terminal 2.

Woman – Low-cost airline.

19. The Road

Two characters stand by the side of a road. The first holds out their thumb to hitch a lift.

One – It's quiet.

Two – Yes.

One – Not much traffic.

Two – No.

One – My arm's starting to cramp. (*Lowers their thumb.*) Where does this road go?

Two – Which way?

One – I don't know. That way.

Two – Isn't there a sign?

One – I can't see one.

Two – What about the other way?

One – No sign there either. (*A pause.*) Stupid, isn't it?

Two – What is?

One – Standing here by the side of the road without knowing where it goes.

Two – I don't know about the road, but we're going nowhere.

One – Right... Not much traffic. (*A pause.*) What if we switched sides?

Two – What for?

One – To go that way?

Two – Do you want to go that way?

One – Why not? There aren't any cars going this way.

Two – There aren't any going that way either.

One – We could stand on opposite sides.

Two – What for?

One – It would double our chances.

Two – Our chances of what?

One – Of not being stuck here. You don't want to stay here by the side of the road, do you?

Two – No.

One – All right... Which one of us crosses?

Two – You. It was your idea...

One – All right.

Two – Be careful crossing.

One crosses to the other side of the road. A long silence.

Two – Well?

One – It's quiet on this side too.

Two – What if a car comes?

One – And stops, you mean?

Two – And stops.

One – On which side?

Two – I don't know. One side or the other.

One – Then we get in.

Two – Both of us?

One – What do you think?

Two – I don't know.

One – If we stay on separate sides, it'll double our chances.

Two – Our chances of what?

One – Of a car stopping.

Two – But then we won't be going in the same direction.

One – There aren't any cars anyway...

Two – I liked it better before.

One – Liked what better?

Two – Being together.

One – Together?

Two – On the same side. We could talk.

One – What about?

Two – Anything. Just to pass the time while we wait for a car to stop.

One – Then come over here.

Two crosses and joins One. Silence. A car is heard approaching.

Two – Shit. It's coming on the other side.

One – If you hadn't crossed...

Two – You’d have been left here on your own, and I’d have gone that way.

One – Right...

Two – Maybe the cars only go one way.

One – Which way?

Two – Maybe it’s a one-way road. Maybe traffic isn’t allowed this way.

One – You think?

Two – We’ve never seen a car come this way.

One – So what do we do? Go back to the other side?

Silence.

Two – It’s not so bad here.

One – If it weren’t for the road.

Two – Not much traffic.

One – No... It’s quiet.

Blackout.

20. To Tell the Truth

A man and a woman sit at a restaurant table, finishing their meal.

Woman – What a feast!

Man – Yes, wasn't it?

Woman – Well, we can allow ourselves a little indulgence once in a while on a special occasion.

Man – Here's to our wedding anniversary!

They raise their glasses, clink them together and drink.

Woman – Thirty years. Can you believe it?

Man – It feels like yesterday.

Woman – If you could do it all over again, would you still marry me?

Man – With my eyes closed!

Woman – What about with them open?

Man – Doesn't love make you blind?

Woman – What are you trying to say?

Man – To tell the truth, I haven't a clue.

Woman – I'm feeling a little light-headed...

Man – Would you like some dessert?

Woman – I'm not sure that would be very sensible...

The waitress arrives.

Waitress – So? Did you enjoy your meal?

Man – It was perfect! Wasn't it, darling?

Woman – Absolutely delicious. Really...

Man – A good restaurant like this is just what the neighbourhood needed.

Waitress – Thank you.

Woman – What made you choose this neighbourhood, if you don't mind me asking?

Waitress – There's no great secret to the restaurant business. You choose a neighbourhood where people are old enough for eating to be the only pleasure they have left in life—but not so old that they don't have enough teeth left to chew.

Man – I see...

Waitress – And, of course, they have to be rich enough to treat themselves to an overpriced restaurant once in a while.

Woman – Of course... (*An awkward pause.*) Still, the food really was very good. Wasn't it, darling?

Man – Excellent.

Waitress – Oh, we don't do anything complicated. We just defrost the ready-made meals we buy for next to nothing from a wholesaler.

Woman – Really?

Waitress – Why bother doing anything else? People can't tell the difference anyway. Could you?

Man – No, I suppose not...

Waitress – See? Truth be told, we don't even have a kitchen.

Man – Really? But that door over there, next to the toilets...

Woman – It says "Kitchen", doesn't it?

Waitress – That's just part of the décor. It's a fake door fixed to the wall. It doesn't even open. All we have is a cupboard behind the bar and a microwave to defrost everything.

Man – I see...

Waitress – Didn't fifty different dishes on the menu make you suspicious?

Man – There was a lot of choice, but...

Waitress – And five minutes after you ordered, we served you an authentic Marseille bouillabaisse as if it had been simmering all day in a kitchen down by the Old Port.

Woman – You certainly can't fault the speed of service. Can you, darling?

Man – Still, the bouillabaisse was very good.

Waitress – If you enjoyed it, that's all that matters. How about a little dessert to help it go down?

Man – Why not?

Woman – Yes, please...

Man – We really are being greedy.

Waitress – Well, judging by the pair of you, I didn't think malnutrition was what had brought you here.

Man – No...

Waitress – If you can even call this a restaurant...

Woman – Right...

Waitress – May I make a suggestion for dessert?

Woman – Of course.

Waitress – In that case, I recommend the tiramisu.

Woman – Your speciality, I suppose.

Waitress – No! But we've had a batch sitting in the freezer for at least six months, and its use-by date is tomorrow. If I don't get rid of the rest tonight, we'll have to donate it to the local food bank. We do have very strict health inspectors, after all.

Man – That's reassuring...

Waitress – Come on, do your good deed for the day! You don't want this genuine Italian tiramisu ending up at the food bank and giving someone who really is starving food poisoning instead of you, do you?

Woman – All right. Tiramisu it is.

Man – Same for me.

Waitress – Besides, a little food poisoning now and then does wonders for the waistline. You'll see...

Woman – It'll remind us of our honeymoon in Italy...

Waitress – Did you have food poisoning on your honeymoon?

Man – Er, no. I meant the tiramisu.

Waitress – Sorry?

Woman – Tiramisu. Italy...

Waitress – Oh, right! I said it was Italian tiramisu; I never said it came from Italy. Ours is made in Romania. Still, at least we know where it comes from. You can't always say that, believe me... *(She scribbles the order on her pad.)* Right, two tiramisus. Coming right up!

The waitress leaves. An awkward silence. The man and woman exchange polite smiles.

Man – I'm not sure ordering dessert was very sensible.

Woman – You're right. We really are being greedy...

Blackout.

21. The Wrong Sense of Humour

One enters, apparently looking for something. Two joins them and watches for a moment, clearly wondering what they are doing.

Two – Have you lost something?

One notices them.

One – Well... yes, actually. I've lost my sense of humour.

Two – No kidding?

One – You couldn't help me, could you?

Two – Help you?

One – Find my sense of humour.

Two – I'd like to, but I don't even know what I'm looking for.

One – You don't know what a sense of humour is?

Two – I don't have one.

One – Really? Are you sure?

Two – Absolutely. Everyone I know agrees on that.

One – Oh... That's not funny. No sense of humour whatsoever?

Two – So even if I wanted to, I can't see how I could help you find yours.

One – Of course.

Two – This isn't some kind of joke, is it?

One – What?

Two – What you just said—about losing your sense of humour.

One – Oh, no. Not at all...

Two – Because if it was a joke, I'm afraid you couldn't count on me to get it.

One – I see.

Two – That wouldn't necessarily mean your joke wasn't funny, of course. I never laugh at jokes...

One – That's not much help...

A pause.

Two – So humour has a sense, then?

One – Sorry?

Two – You said you’d lost your sense of humour. That means humour must have a sense.

One – In a sense.

Two – Even absurd humour?

One – No, you’re right. That doesn’t make any sense.

Two – Obviously. The absurd has no sense at all—not even a sense of humour.

One – That’s not quite what I meant. In fact, I meant exactly the opposite. What I mean is that absurd humour makes no sense. That’s exactly why it’s funny.

Two – You think so?

One – That’s what I thought before I lost my sense of humour. But now, I must admit, I’m not so sure.

Two – It’s all a bit complicated, isn’t it?

One – That’s probably why I can’t find my way.

Two – And do you think there can be a right sense of humour and a wrong one?

One – No. Why?

Two – You say you’ve lost your sense of humour. So humour must have several senses, and you no longer know which is the right one.

One – The right what?

Two – The right sense!

One – I see. But I’m afraid you’re taking the word “sense” in the wrong sense again.

Two – So there is a wrong sense of humour after all?

One – When we talk about a sense of humour, we don’t use the word “sense” in the sense of...

Two – Don’t tell me the word “sense” has more than one sense too!

One – A sense of humour is the ability to find funny things funny. That doesn’t mean humour itself has to make sense, let alone that there are right and wrong senses of humour.

Two – If I understand you correctly... a sense of humour makes no sense.

One – I’d go even further: humour is precisely what makes no sense.

Two – That sounds perfectly sensible.

One – See what I mean?

Two – What?

One – I’ve lost my sense of humour.

Two – Are you certain?

One – Believe me, when you start trying to make sense of humour, that's when you know you've completely lost it.

Two – That makes sense.

One – Take Bergson. He wrote a whole book about laughter—*Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Believe me, he was no comedian. And I've never heard of anyone laughing out loud while reading it.

Two looks at One for a moment, perplexed.

Two – I'll help you look anyway...

Blackout.

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 websites :

<https://jeanpierremartinez.net/>

<https://comediatheque.net/>

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the French Society of Authors (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the [contact form on his websites](#).

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 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
Horizons
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
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

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
Such a Lovely Village
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

Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Don't panic !
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
For real and for fun
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lost time Chronicles
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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