La Comédiathèque

Hold On, Butterfly

Jean-Pierre Martinez



comediatheque.net

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Hold On, Butterfly!

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A butterfly may live for only a day. During those twenty-four hours, it flits from flower to flower, making the most of its existence and ensuring the next generation. If we live to be a hundred, we will have lived through some 36,000 butterfly lifetimes. What will we have made of each day?

A comedy in thirteen sketches

1. The Americas
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CAST
26 characters

Highly flexible casting in both number and gender. Performers may play several roles, and most roles can be played by actors of any gender.
For 2 to 26 performers (of any gender).

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1. The Americas

Two characters. One comes in while the other is fishing.

One – Any bites?

Two – I've caught one already. Look.

One – Wow, it's enormous.

Two – We'll grill it for lunch.

The first looks around while the other keeps watching the float.

One – Look at that butterfly. Isn't it beautiful? I've never seen one like it. Have you?

Two – No.

One – It'll be dead tomorrow.

Two – How do you know?

One – Butterflies only live for a few days. Sometimes just one. Some live so briefly they don't even have mouths to feed with.

Two – Well, I'm starving already...

One – What a beautiful day to live. And to die. What a beautiful butterfly...

Two – And what a beautiful fish.

One – At least lunch is taken care of.

Two – We'll have potatoes with it.

One – The sea is calm.

Two – I love potatoes.

One – The sun is shining.

Two – And they're quick to cook.

One – So we've got a good hour to spare...

Two – An hour? We've got our whole lives ahead of us!

One – We could go swimming.

Two – I'll catch one more for supper, and then we'll go, all right?

One – You're always afraid of running out. The fish aren't going anywhere!

Two – I'd rather make the most of it while they're biting.

One – All right.

Two – Any news?

One – No.

Two – Just an ordinary day, then.

One – Yes.

A pause. The first gazes towards the horizon while the other keeps an eye on the float.

Two – I think I've got one... Oh, no, just the wind...

One – Not a cloud in the sky. You can see right to the edge of the world.

Two – Yes.

One – Do you really think that's where the world ends?

Two – What?

One – Over there, beyond the horizon.

Two – I don't know... That's what everyone says. What else could it be?

One – I don't know... The beginning of another world...

Two – You think too much.

One – You're right.

Two – Look at that sunrise!

The other looks towards the horizon.

One – At least that'll never change... *(Still looking, their smile freezes.)* What's that ship out there?

Two – Where?

One – Over there, where the new day is beginning.

Two – I can't see anything. The sun's in my eyes.

One – Shade them with your hand.

Two – Oh, yes... Now I see it... It's very far away, isn't it?

One – Our fishermen never go that far.

Two – Looks like it's coming closer.

One – Yes... I can see it better now.

Two – It's really big...

One – Our fishing boats aren't that big.

Two – What do we do? Tell the chief?

One – Wait... There's another one.

Two – I think there are three.

One – A big one, a medium-sized one and a small one.

Two – The biggest has three masts.

One – Ours only have one.

Two – It's an enormous ship.

One – It's getting closer.

Two – We should sound the alarm.

One – Wait. I'm trying to make out what's painted on the hull.

Two – Yes... It looks like writing.

One – In a language we don't know.

Two – I'll copy it onto a slate and show the chief. Maybe he'll know what it means.

They draw something on a slate.

One – Let me see.

The other shows them the slate.

Two – It doesn't mean anything.

They show the slate to the audience. It reads: 'Santa Maria'.

One – We'd better tell the others.

Two – Yes, looks like we've got visitors... Must be a neighbouring tribe...

One – We'll give them a few potatoes and they'll go back home.

Two – And if they want to fish, the sea belongs to everyone... There's plenty of fish.

One – We can go swimming afterwards.

Two – The world isn't going to stop turning.

One – And according to our calendar, the end of the world is a long way off.

They leave. Blackout.

2. An Event

Two characters stand side by side facing the audience, looking rather self-consciously solemn.

One – Have you noticed something funny?

Two – What?

One – There's a butterfly sitting on the coffin.

Two – Oh, yes...

One – Must be attracted by the flowers.

Two – One person's misfortune...

A pause.

One – I wonder what the hell I'm doing here.

Two – Me too.

One – We hadn't seen him for ages.

Two – When was the last time?

One – His wedding, wasn't it?

Two – And now we see him again at his funeral.

One – Well... ‘See him’ is one way of putting it.

Two – True...

One – Did you see him?

Two – Yes... I'd never seen a dead person before, so I thought I'd take the opportunity.

One – The opportunity?

Two – We weren't particularly close... I thought it would be less upsetting. For my first time...

One – What do you mean, your first time?

Two – Imagine you die tomorrow and I come to pay my last respects... Seeing your dead body would be a shock. I mean, we know each other. I'd have seen you alive the day before... So naturally...

One – Right...

Two – Whereas with him, we hadn't seen him for years...

One – Mmm...

Two – Have you ever seen a dead person?

One – No... *(A pause.)* So?

Two – It's strange... It's as if... all that's left is the packaging.

One – The packaging?

Two – The wrapping is still there, but... there's nothing inside. You know?

One – Yes...

Two – And his face... Like a mask with nobody behind it.

One – Yes, I get the general idea.

Two – Anyway, if I die first, don't feel obliged to pay your last respects to my remains. Because now... I really understand what that word means.

One – What word?

Two – Remains!

One – Ah, yes...

Two – Remains. What's left after everything else has gone. That's us when we're dead: just the packaging.

One – I wonder whether you can return the packaging for a refund.

Two – Seriously, don't bother coming to my funeral. I won't be there.

One – I'm still wondering why we came to his. If you hadn't told me... I move house at least once a year, so they probably didn't have my address.

Two – He's our cousin, isn't he?

One – A distant cousin, I think.

Two – What exactly does ‘distant cousin’ mean?

One – A cousin's son, perhaps... How did they find you?

Two – Facebook.

One – Right...

Two – First time I've ever been invited to a funeral on Facebook.

One – They didn't create an event, did they?

Two – I don't think so.

One – Look at this crowd... Was our distant cousin really that popular?

Two – He had nearly five thousand Facebook friends.

One – Really?

Two – Maybe they did create an event after all.

One – His friends probably thought it was a show. And it was free.

Two – Are you sure it isn't?

One – Isn't what?

Two – A show!

One – Who knows...

Two – Anyway, I must remember to take him off my list.

One – Your list?

Two – My Facebook friends list!

One – At least wait until the service is over...

Blackout.

3. Sunday

Two characters with nothing to do, looking thoroughly bored.

One – Did you see that?

Two – What?

One – Those two butterflies on the windowsill.

Two – Yes...

One – They're having sex.

Two – Right... So what?

One – Do you know how long a butterfly lives?

Two – No.

One – One day.

Two – Really?

One – A butterfly's whole purpose is to reproduce. Sex is all it thinks about. And it's got just one day to do it.

Two – Mmm...

A pause. They look increasingly bored.

One – What's the time?

Two – Six fifty-nine in the evening...

A pause.

One – How did we end up here?

Two – What do you mean, here?

One – At this very moment! Six fifty-nine. This exact instant. This... bloody awful Sunday afternoon we're spending together.

Two – Thanks.

One – It's not your fault. Well, not entirely... I mean, what's the point of any of this?

Two – Any of what?

One – We're bored senseless! Aren't you bored?

Two – Yes...

One – So I ask again: how did we end up here?

Two – You want to leave me, is that it?

One – That's not the point... Though perhaps we should think about it.

Two – Think about what?

One – The universe is fourteen billion years old. The Earth is about four billion. Life appeared roughly three billion years ago. Then came the dinosaurs, the extinction of the dinosaurs, humanity, the Stone Age, the Iron Age, the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, three world wars, the first man on the Moon... And all for what? Three billion years of evolution, only to arrive at this: the absolute void of a Sunday afternoon at six fifty-nine, in a Paris suburb. The black hole where every great hope of humanity disappears. On the Lord's Day, in this godforsaken suburb of Paris!

Two – Godforsaken? On the Lord's Day?

One – Exactly. Even God seems to have taken Sunday off.

A pause. They seem to calm down.

Two – Shall we put the television on?

One – And your grand solution is to watch some dreary Sunday afternoon programme?

The other presses the remote control.

Two – I don't think even that's possible.

One – Why not?

Two – The remote isn't working.

One – You're joking... Let me see.

Two – Must be the batteries.

One – Haven't we got any spares?

Two – Not that size.

One – Shall I go and buy some?

Two – On a Sunday afternoon?

A moment of utter despair.

One – How did we end up here?

Two – You're right. What a miserable Sunday.

One – Well, only another hour to get through.

Two – Why an hour?

One – It's seven o'clock now... Once Sunday afternoon television is over, the worst is behind us.

Two – You're right. In an hour we'll be saved.

One – Until next Sunday, anyway.

Blackout.

4. The Mole

An office. Two employees. What exactly they do is unclear, but they do it with painstaking routine. One opens the mail.

One – Oh, look. An anonymous letter...

Two – An anonymous letter?

One – I don't understand... Nothing like this has ever happened before.

Two – Are you sure it's anonymous?

One – There's no signature, and it's made up of letters cut out of a newspaper.

They show the letter.

Two – Good heavens... Just like in the films. What does it say?

One – 'There's a rat among you.'

Two *(looking around)* – A rat?

One – Not an actual rat.

Two – Oh?

One – A rat is somebody who secretly informs on other people.

Two – Informs on them for what?

The other takes another look at the letter.

One – That... there's a rat among us.

Two – Among us, or among you?

One – What difference does it make?

Two – 'Among us' means the person who wrote it is one of us.

One – You mean... you... or me?

Two – There's only the two of us, isn't there?

One – Why would either of us write this letter?

Two – I don't know. To report themselves, perhaps.

One – Report themselves?

Two – You're right. Sending an anonymous letter to denounce yourself...

One – Makes no sense.

Two – No...

One – Besides, it says ‘among you’.

Two – Then the rat who wrote it can't be the rat they're talking about. They must be reporting a different rat.

One – Without naming them?

Two – It is rather odd...

One – One rat informing on another rat.

Two – So you can even have rats among the rats.

One – Wait, there seems to be something else in the envelope.

Two – What is it?

One – A butterfly...

Two – Dead?

One – Of course it's dead! Inside an envelope... A dead, dried-up butterfly.

A pause. They exchange suspicious glances.

One – Are you the rat?

Two – Which one?

One – The one who wrote the letter!

Two – How did you work that out?

One – I took the office newspaper home to read yesterday, and there were letters cut out of it.

Two – You take the office newspaper home?

One – And you cut it to pieces!

Two – Fair point...

One – Anyway, it goes into the recycling the next day. What difference does it make?

Two – None...

One – But why, for heaven's sake?

Two – Why what?

One – This anonymous letter!

Two – I don't know... It's so boring in this office...

One – I suppose that's true...

Two – Anyway, there really is a rat among us.

One – Then why did you write ‘There's a rat among you’?

Two – So nobody would suspect me. There are only two of us.

One – And the butterfly?

Two – I promise I had nothing to do with that... I mean... it died of natural causes.

One – If you say so...

Two – A butterfly only lives a day or two, so... it's not hard to find one that's died of old age.

One – Personally, I've never seen a dead butterfly...

Two – And even if I had killed it... Murdering someone with a life expectancy of a day or two isn't much of a crime, is it?

One – You think so?

The other gives them a puzzled look. They return to their routine work.

Blackout.

5. Homophones

Two characters with absolutely nothing to do.

One – I'm bored.

Two – A board? You don't look like one.

One – No, I said bored. B-O-R-E-D.

Two – Oh, right...

One – They're homophones.

Two – Homophones?

One – Words that sound the same but mean different things.

Two – Right... So you're bored.

One – Yes. B-O-R-E-D.

Two – I got that.

One – What about you?

Two – What about me?

One – Aren't you bored?

Two – Oh, yes. Very. I'm extremely bored.

One – You mean...?

Two – B-O-R-E-D. Absolutely. You might even say I'm bored to death.

One – Right...

Two – That's hyperbole.

One – A what?

Two – An exaggeration.

One – Right.

Two – Although in my case I'm not entirely sure it is an exaggeration.

One – I see...

Two – In fact, I wonder whether it isn't an understatement.

One – An understatement?

Two – Saying less than you mean, to suggest something more.

One – Fine. So, to sum up, we're bored. The rest is just rhetoric.

Two – Precisely.

One – We're bored out of our minds. End of story.

Two – Now that's a metaphor.

A pause.

One – Do you know how long butterflies live?

Two – No, and I couldn't give a flap.

One – Don't you mean ‘I couldn't give a damn’?

Two – I could put it more strongly, but I don't think you'd appreciate the imagery...

Blackout.

6. The Library

Two characters standing with their eyes fixed on their smartphones.

One – In Africa, when an old person dies, a library burns down.

Two – What...?

One – I'm looking for a quotation for my philosophy essay. What do you think? Pretty good, isn't it?

Two – Depends... What's the essay about?

One – Can we really say history begins with the invention of writing?

Two – What's that supposed to mean?

One – Haven't a clue... What about my quotation, then?

Two – What quotation?

One – When an old person dies, a library burns down.

Two – Sometimes it's the other way round.

One – The other way round?

Two – Last week someone set fire to the public library. Apparently it was some local teenagers. The caretaker was nearly burnt alive. He was just about to retire.

One – So?

Two – In that case it would be: 'When a library burns down, an old person dies.'

One – So I should forget that quotation...

Two – Or update it a bit.

One – Update it?

Two – How about: 'When a young person dies, a social-media account is deactivated.'

One – You think?

Two – How long have you got to write this essay?

One – About as long as a butterfly lives...

Two – Forget it. Do it tomorrow.

The other looks at them in bewilderment. Blackout.

7. Books

Two characters facing each other.

One – Good morning.

Two – Hello.

One – Have you been coming to this library long?

Two – About three years.

One – Ah... A relative newcomer, then.

Two – You could say that... And you?

One – Oh, me... About fifty years, I think.

Two – Goodness. That long?

One – Strange we've never met before.

Two – Yes...

One – We probably don't frequent the same shelves.

Two – That must be it.

One – I tend towards... the classics.

Two – Established repertoire. I see.

One – And you?

Two – More contemporary.

One – I see... Well, when I say 'I see'... Forgive me for asking, but as you're wearing that... You're wrapped in some sort of... I can't make out the...

Two – The title and the author's name.

One – Exactly.

Two – Hold On, Butterfly! by Jean-Pierre Martinez.

One – Hold On, Butterfly? And... what's that supposed to mean?

Two – You know contemporary theatre... All the good titles have been taken.

One – Naturally.

Two – But I suppose... it's an allusion to how short life is.

One – Vita brevis...

Two – A butterfly only lives for a day, so every minute counts.

One – Carpe diem... quam minimum credula postero.

Two – Quite...

One – Horace, of course.

Two – I thought so... And you?

One – Me?

Two – What's your title? Who wrote you?

One – The Misanthrope, by Molière.

Two – Yes, that's what I thought I could read on... your cover. To be honest, it put me off speaking to you at first.

One – I confess that solitude in my own private desert is beginning to weigh on me.

Two – The Misanthrope... A classic... And you're in remarkable condition for your age.

One – Original edition. Quarto format, vellum, leather binding, gilt edges. Built to last.

Two – The binding or the writing?

One – Both!

Two – I'm joking... But what exactly is vellum? I've never known.

One – Calfskin. From a stillborn calf.

Two – I see...

One – And you?

Two – Recycled paper.

One – Different times.

Two – More vegan, but it doesn't age as well.

One – The cover or the writing? Only joking...

Two – My cover did get a little torn. That's why they wrapped me in this hideous transparent plastic... Calfskin certainly has more style.

One – Never mind... Perhaps they'll reprint you one day. Molière was a contemporary playwright too, you know. Once upon a time...

Two – I wonder who'd borrow a play by Molière and a comedy by Jean-Pierre Martinez at the same time.

One – So we'll be spending a fortnight together...

Two – Yes... Two weeks with The Misanthrope... *(Aside.)* Just my luck... *(Louder.)* I hope we're going somewhere by the sea, at least.

One – She also borrowed The Rough Guide to the Greek Islands. That'll be a change for me. I'm usually taken into classrooms and school playgrounds. Have you been to Greece?

Two – No, this is my first time out.

One – In three years?

Two – As you said, there's a first time for everything.

One – We can always ask the Rough Guide about Greece... Do you know him?

Two – Not at all.

One – He looks a bit rough, to be honest... Still, if we're going to spend two weeks together...

Two – How long have we been lying on this table?

One – I don't know... At least an hour.

Two – I wonder if they've forgotten us...

Blackout.

8. Crossed Wires

Two characters finishing a meal at a restaurant.

One – Not a bad restaurant after all, is it?

Two *(distracted)* – Yes...

A pause.

One – I wonder what comes next...

Two – Next? You mean after death? After life, I mean...

One – Er... No... I meant after the veal stew...

Two – The stew?

One – Yes... What comes next, for dessert?

Two – Oh, I see... Sorry, I misunderstood.

One – That's all right. It happens.

Two – Yes...

A pause.

One – So what do we do now?

Two – What do we do now?

One – Yes. Well, now... Afterwards.

Two – You mean take stock? Of our relationship? Perhaps it is time we had a serious talk, to decide whether...

One – Actually, I meant after lunch. What do we do now? Go to the cinema? Take a walk? Or head home?

Two – Oh, right... Now as in this afternoon.

One – Exactly. This afternoon, this evening...

Two – I thought you meant what we were going to do with the rest of our lives. Together, or...

One – I see...

Two – We really are at cross-purposes today.

One – Yes... Something not sitting right?

Two – No. If something was bothering me, I'd tell you. I promise.

One – I was talking about the meal.

Two – Sorry.

One – It's true that veal stew can be a bit...

Two – Yes. Especially when it's made with veal.

A pause.

One – Are you seeing anyone?

Two – Absolutely not! I've never been unfaithful to you, I swear!

One – I meant the waiter... So I can ask for the bill. I only paid for two hours' parking. I hope we don't get a ticket...

Two – Of course.

A pause.

One – Do you think we'll manage?

Two – To get the bill, you mean?

One – No. This time I mean the two of us.

Two – Us?

One – I get the feeling we haven't been understanding each other very well lately.

Two – But... Whatever makes you say that?

One – I don't know...

Two – Or we could have a little treat when we get home... I mean for dessert... Since the waiter isn't coming...

One – All right... Was that an invitation?

Two – Yes... Well... I think so.

One – Oh, there's the waiter! Waiter!

Two – Isn't that a woman?

One – Are you sure?

Two – No...

Blackout.

9. Poor Us

Two characters: one rich, the other poor.

One – Good morning.

Two – Er... Good morning.

One – You look surprised.

Two – No, it's just that...

One – First time a homeless person has said hello to you?

Two – First time I've replied, at any rate. People don't usually greet strangers in the street here. Especially homeless people.

One – Why's that?

Two – I don't know... People are suspicious.

One – Yet everyone around here is a billionaire, aren't they?

Two – Don't exaggerate... We've got a few multimillionaires too.

One – Poor things.

Two – Everyone is poor compared with somebody.

One – I'm poor compared with everybody.

Two – Precisely. Speaking of which...

One – What am I doing here in Monaco?

Two – I should warn you, being rich doesn't make people any more generous towards the poor.

One – Yes, I've noticed. A coffee costs five euros at the Yacht Club. I thought the handouts would be in proportion. Not a bit of it.

Two – The richer people are, the more afraid they are of poverty. They treat you like you've got the plague. They think it's contagious.

One – And yet you're rich yourself?

Two – Immensely rich.

One – And you said hello to me.

Two – But I haven't given you anything yet.

One – We've exchanged something. That's a start.

Two – Exchanged something?

One – A few words.

Two – A small business transaction, then.

One – Is something wrong?

Two – You could say that.

One – Can I help?

Two – I'm afraid not.

One – Not if it's a question of money, certainly.

Two – I've got cancer. Terminal cancer. I haven't got long. I could die tomorrow. Or the day after.

One – I'm so sorry.

Two – You sound sincere.

One – Haven't you got any family?

Two – I was an only child. My parents are dead. Some very distant cousins have appeared from time to time, but I quickly realised their interest wasn't purely genealogical.

One – No friends?

Two – Friends... In my position... When you're a billionaire, the human race falls into three categories: competitors, employees and customers.

One – So you're on your own, like me. Poverty isn't much help when it comes to making friends either.

Two – Opposites meet... Perhaps we were destined to find each other.

One – What will you do with your fortune, if you've no family and no friends?

Two – I could leave it all to you.

One – Your loneliness as well?

Two – You'd still be lonely, but you'd have plenty of company.

One – Unfortunately, I wouldn't enjoy it for long.

Two – Why not?

One – I've got cancer too.

Two – I'm terribly sorry.

One – You sound sincere.

Two – I am.

One – So what do we do?

Two – We're just butterflies, both of us. We've only got a few days to live.

One – And we can't even reproduce.

Two – At least let me buy you a coffee.

One – It'll be the most expensive coffee of my life.

They leave.

Blackout.

10. Door to Door

Two characters. The first, wearing a bow tie, rings the other's doorbell. The second opens the door.

One – Good morning. We're Jehovah's Witnesses.

Two – Is this a joke?

One – No. Why?

Two – There's only one of you!

One – Oh, yes... My colleague's off sick.

Two – Really.

One – There's a flu epidemic going around.

Two – No doubt a trial sent to test us by God.

One – I see you're already receptive to...

Two – I was joking. Religion's not really my thing, so I won't waste your time...

One – Just a minute!

Two – What now?

One – I also install the new smart electricity meters.

Two – In a bow tie? Is this some sort of hidden-camera prank?

One – Not at all! Since privatisation, everything's been outsourced. So they offered the job to us, Jehovah's Witnesses. We're always knocking on people's doors anyway, and not everyone lets us in.

Two – And smart meters are an easier sell than God?

One – I don't know... It's my first day. You're my first customer.

Two – Just my luck...

One – Well?

Two – Well what?

One – The smart meter?

Two – It's just... with all the stories you hear...

One – So you don't believe in God, and you're not afraid of divine punishment for your lack of faith, but you believe all that nonsense about smart meters emitting evil forces? When there's no scientific evidence for any of it...

The other hesitates for a moment.

Two – All right, you've won. Install the bloody meter and get out.

One – It'll take about an hour...

Two – Just one thing... Are you really a Jehovah's Witness?

Blackout.

11. No Future

Two characters staring straight ahead.

One – I've often wondered what I'd do if I only had one day left to live.

Two – One day?

One – Or an hour. Or fifteen minutes.

Two – What would you do?

One – Nothing.

Two – Really...

One – Aren't you going to ask why?

Two – Why what?

One – Why I'd do nothing!

Two – Why would you do nothing?

One – Because I don't think you can do anything unless you can imagine at least some kind of future.

Two – Right...

One – I don't think you can do something when you know for certain it's the last time you'll ever do it.

Two – You think so?

One – What about you?

Two – Me?

One – What would you do?

Two – If I had fifteen minutes left?

One – Yes.

Two – I don't know... I'd have sex.

One – Sex?

Two – Yes.

One – In fifteen minutes?

Two – I mean a quick fuck, not planning a future together, having children and starting a family.

One – Right... Making love knowing it's the last time.

Two – Every time I have sex I wonder whether it'll be the last. In fact, I can't even remember when it was.

One – What?

Two – The last time!

One – And who would you sleep with?

Two – That's where it gets complicated.

One – Right.

Two – Not you, anyway...

Blackout.

12. Message in a Bottle

Two characters, who remain silent for a moment.

One – Remember that space probe we launched about fifty years ago, to travel beyond the school system...?

Two – Solar system. Beyond the solar system.

One – That's it... With a message for extraterrestrials?

Two – What about it?

One – I've always wondered whether it was a good idea.

Two – Really?

One – Imagine somebody finds it.

Two – Somebody?

One – Aliens!

Two – Not very likely...

One – Maybe not. But if we sent it, there must be some tiny chance, right? People do sometimes find messages in bottles.

Two – Yes... And?

One – Would you throw a bottle into the sea with your name, address and credit-card number inside?

Two – Why would I throw a bottle into the sea?

One – Exactly! That's the question: why?

Two – Well? Why?

One – Because we're naive enough to think aliens will be friendly! That they'll generously share all the immense powers of their more advanced civilisation with us, expecting nothing in return.

Two – Why wouldn't they?

One – I don't know... When Europeans reached America, was that how we treated the Indigenous people? Yes or no?

Two – No...

One – First we slaughtered them with weapons they'd never seen, forced the survivors to convert, gave them diseases and unlimited whisky. Then we rounded up the few who were left and shut them away on reservations.

Two – When you put it like that...

One – Now imagine those aliens find our message and send us a reply.

Two – What could they possibly say?

One – Imagine their reply is: ‘We're coming.’

Two – Oh... That's terrifying.

One – It was bloody stupid to give them our address and invite them to pop round for a drink whenever they had nothing better to do.

Two – Can't we do something to take it back?

One – Nothing.

Two – And we can't move house either.

One – Not yet.

Two – You're right... We're in serious trouble.

One – Still, with a bit of luck, they'll never find the message.

Two – Or perhaps they don't exist.

One – In the meantime we'd better keep a low profile.

Two – Definitely.

One – The secret to happiness is staying out of sight.

Two – I'll turn the light off...

One – Good night.

Two – Sweet dreams. *(A pause.)* You didn't say ‘butterfly’.

One – No... This time I really couldn't find a way to work it in.

Blackout.

13. Hold On, Butterfly!

Two characters staring straight ahead.

One – It went by so quickly.

Two – Yes.

One – Did you see that butterfly?

Two – Yes.

One – Going from flower to flower. Such a hurry.

Two – You think?

One – It's only got one day to live.

Two – And so many flowers to discover.

One – If we live to be a hundred, we'll have lived as long as thirty-six thousand butterflies.

Two – Thirty-six thousand five hundred, to be precise.

One – Oh, yes.

Two – Three hundred and sixty-five days times a hundred.

One – Not counting leap years.

A pause.

Two – How many flowers have you sampled lately?

One – None. You?

Two – Me neither.

One – We think we've got all the time in the world. Then, day after day, we forget to do the things that matter most to us.

Two – Like sampling the flowers in the neighbour's garden.

One – We've got a garden of our own.

Two – You're getting on my last petal.

One – That's a start.

Two – And that's my final word.

One – Is it midnight already?

Two – One minute to midnight.

One – I didn't notice the time passing.

Two – Tomorrow will be another day.

One – But we won't be here.

Two – That's life. All good things must come to an end.

One – Hold on, butterfly! We've still got one minute!

Two – True... For a butterfly, that's a whole month of life.

One – What shall we do with all that time?

They look at each other and smile.

Blackout.

The End

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez first took to the stage as a drummer in several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then worked as a television screenwriter before returning to the stage as a playwright. He has written around a hundred scripts for television and 123 plays, some of which have become classics (*Friday the 13th, Strip Poker*). His plays have been performed in more than 100 countries and translated into around 50 languages.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his websites :

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

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 Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (SACD).

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

Jean-Pierre Martinez recently returned to music, writing original songs inspired by his poems and plays.

With **Jean-Pierre Martinez Music**, he extends that creative universe through original songs: short stories in musical form, humorous or melancholy, in which each song sometimes becomes a miniature theatrical scene.

https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

Comedies for 2

A Thwarted Vocation
EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cards on the Table
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Horizons
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap backward for Mankind
The Ways of Chance

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Hangover
Happy Hour
How to get rid of your best friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more

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

Collection of sketches

Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Blackouts
Don't panic!
Dramedies
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
Every Colour under the Sun
For real and for fun
Funny Stories
Him and Her
Hold on, Butterfly
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
Memoirs of a Suitcase
No Sense Off Limits
Now and then
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Open Letters
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded

free of charge from his websites:

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