

La Comédiathèque



**Stories
to die for**

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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Stories to die for

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Translation by the author

Sketch comedy. Variable cast.

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The Curtain rises...

Two characters open the curtain slightly to observe the audience waiting for the start of the show.

One – Who is that old lady in the front row with her hearing aid?

Two – Well, she's the rightful heir...

One – The rightful heir...?

Two – The author's great-niece! We had to ask her permission to stage the play. And believe me, heirs are even more bothersome than living authors...

One – What's the point of staging plays by dead authors if we have to pay the heirs...

Two – Well, this one will be in the public domain in just ten years...

One – Let's hope she enjoys the show at least.

Two – That's not guaranteed. She attended the play's premiere in 1927. So naturally, she has some preconceptions...

One – Then why did she come?

Two – Probably to count the audience and make sure she's not being cheated out of her ten percent. We had no choice but to invite her to butter her up...

One – For now, her eyes are closed. Is she concentrating or sleeping?

Two – Or maybe she's dead...

One – Oh, no, she's snoring...

Two – Maybe we should wake her up. Let's cue the three knocks...

One – I'll ask them to knock a little louder...

Blackout. The three knocks are heard...

1. Condolences

A man is standing in front of a grave. Another man approaches.

Two – Excuse me, I'm looking for Polnareff's grave...

One – Is he dead?

Two – Sorry... I meant Gainsbourg, of course.

One – At the end of the pathway, on the left... You can't miss it... There are cigarette butts all around...

The second man is about to go there, then hesitates and looks at the tomb in front of which the first man is standing.

Two – Cemeteries are strange places when you think about it... Are the dead radioactive, that they bury them in confined spaces for centuries, like nuclear waste? I'm all for cremation, aren't you?

One – Pardon?

Two – Did you know her?

One – She was my mistress...

Two – Oh, I'm sorry.

One – There's really no need... She was a bitch...

Two – Come on, don't say that... So, that's why you only came now, after the ceremony. So you won't cross paths with the husband.

One – Yes...

Two – You didn't kill her, did you?

One – Oh, no...! She was run over by a tram... She was leaving my place to get my lighter that I had forgotten in my car... It happened when she was crossing the street again... They had just inaugurated the tram line the day before... She didn't remember...

Two – That's the problem with trams. Since they're electric, you can't hear them coming...

The first man takes out a cigarette and puts it in his mouth.

One – Do you have a light...? I ran out of a lighter...

Two – Of course.

One – Is it not prohibited here, though?

Two (*giving him a light*) – Cemeteries are the last place where smoking is still allowed. And if it were a non-smoking cemetery, they wouldn't have buried Gainsbourg there...

The first man eagerly lights his cigarette.

One – That's how her husband found out about our affair... She used to tell him that she was visiting her grandmother at the retirement home. Her grandmother never remembers anything, so it was convenient. But then the tram ran her over right in front of my place... Her husband must have suspected something...

Two – Of course... Finding out that you're a widower and a cuckold at the same time...

One – Since then, I've been on foot...

Two – Pardon?

One – He had his wife buried with my keys! Probably to get back at me...

Two – Your keys?

One – The keys to my car! I had given them to her... So she could fetch my lighter...

Two – Ah, yes, of course...

One – I went to the viewing of the body, and I saw the keys sticking out of her pocket... But there were so many people... I couldn't do anything... Now, I don't know how to get them back...

Two – But don't you have a spare key...?

One – Yes... My wife has it...

Two – Just tell her that you lost yours...

One – We're separated... This bitch just told her that I was cheating on her... So there's little chance that my ex-wife will give me the spare keys...

Two – I see...

One – It'll be dark soon... Do you have a shovel?

Two – Are you kidding?

One – You don't have a shovel... Do you have a car?

Two – Shall I give you a lift?

One – I'd appreciate it. Which way are you going?

Two – To Montmartre.

One – Funny, that's where my mistress used to live.

Two – I know... I'm her husband...

One – Oh, I see... I had my doubts when I saw the lighter...

The first man takes out the lighter from his pocket.

Two – Oh, yes, sorry... Here you go, of course... I didn't know it was yours... I was also surprised to find it in her hand when they brought her back to me. Since my wife doesn't smoke... Well, she didn't smoke...

The other man takes the lighter.

One – Thanks. (*Glancing at the lighter*) Not a scratch... It's a miracle...

Two – My wife, on the other hand...

One (*putting away the lighter*) – I value it a lot... She gave it to me as a gift...

Two – But about your keys... I'm really sorry... I swear I didn't know... I didn't think of checking her pockets...

One – I believe you... You seem like a good guy...

They are about to leave.

One – But I thought you were looking for Gainsbourg's grave? That's why I wasn't suspicious ... You were trying to trap me...?

Two – Not at all... During the ceremony, obviously, I didn't have much time to wander around... I thought I'd come back later to do a bit of sightseeing... Never mind, there'll be another time... (*Pause*) I've always wondered what they do with the dead when cemeteries are full...

One – We forget about them... Except for a few celebrities... That must be immortality. A perpetual concession...

They walk away.

One – It's true, it's a beautiful place...

Two – She insisted on being buried here...

One – It must be expensive, right? It's very trendy...

Two – Yes... It was her showbiz side...

They leave.

Two – You're right, she was really a bitch...

One – Come on, don't say that...

2. Dead line

A character is sitting facing another who is seated in front of a computer.

One (*checking the screen*) – So, according to all the information you provided, it would be on... December 27, 2041, in the evening.

Two – Ah...

One – Does that pose a problem for you? If I'm not mistaken, you'll be 76 years and 3 months old... It's a bit young, of course, but... Given your lifestyle and your rather unhealthy living conditions... Believe me... You couldn't hope for much better...

Two – Yes, of course, but... December 27th is right in the midst of the holiday season... It doesn't work for me. My wife and I run a chocolate shop. We make half of our annual turnover at that time... (*The other indicates that he can't do anything about it.*) And what if I quit smoking...?

One – Ah, now that changes things... Let's see... (*He types on his computer.*) Non-smoker... You still don't plan on moving...?

Two – It's next to the shop... and with the soaring real estate prices...

One – Alright... That would bring us to... February 29, 2044... It's a leap year... You gain almost three years.

Two – Is it really worth it...?

One – Ah, that's up to you to decide.

Two – And what if I also stop drinking aperitifs...?

One – Well, you have to live...

Two – You're right... We can't give up everything... (*Pause*) And my wife...?

One – Oh, that, you know, it doesn't really matter. It might even be good for your heart... and your prostate.

Two – No, I mean, my wife, um... When is she scheduled...?

One – Ah... Sorry... But... That's strictly confidential...

Two – But... Before or after me...?

One – Even if I knew, I wouldn't be able to tell you... Really...

Two – Mmmm... She doesn't smoke...

One – Oh, you know, sometimes that doesn't mean much. And you also have to take passive smoking into account...

Two – She makes me smoke on the balcony...

One – She could have an accident... Does she drive a lot of kilometers per year?

Two – She doesn't drive...

One – Pedestrians can also get run over while crossing the street, you know... And there are also accidents at home... A gas leak... A fall down the stairs...

Two – A hairdryer falling into the bathtub...

One – You seem so keen on your wife going before you. You want to spare her the pain of outliving you, is that it...?

Two – It's not that... It's for the family vault... Since my mother passed away, there's only one spot left...

One – And...?

Two – Well... I had a terrible relationship with my mother... I don't want to... You understand...? So if my wife goes first, it solves the problem... She takes the last spot, and I can go elsewhere... Without any fuss...

One – I understand...

Two – And what if I start doing a bit of sports...?

One – If it's not a dangerous sport... What were you thinking?

Two – I don't know... Petanque...

One – You can't imagine the number of skull fractures recorded each year among amateur boules players...

Two – Alright... Never mind... Let's go for December 27, 2041...

Him gets up to leave, then hesitates and turns back to his interlocutor one last time.

Two – By the way, I forgot to ask you... How am I going to die, exactly...? Lung cancer?

One (*caught off guard*) – Ah, yes, that's true, I'm sorry, I completely forgot to check... You did well to ask me...

He checks on his computer before looking up with an embarrassed expression.

One – I did warn you that your living conditions were unhealthy...

The other person's face shows some confusion.

One – The balcony... A collapse... In the end, I think you'd better quit smoking...

3. False Exit

A woman in mourning arrives. She takes out a handkerchief from her bag and wipes a tear. Her phone rings.

Woman 1 (*in a very emotional voice*) – Yes...? Oh, it's you... Yes, yes, I'm at the funeral home, right now. It's true that I hadn't seen him in years, but still. It's quite a shock. I wanted to see him one last time...

Stage left, a second woman arrives, also in mourning.

Woman 1 – Excuse me, I have to hang up. My sister just arrived. I'll call you back later, alright? Thanks for calling...

The two women hug, without much warmth.

Woman 2 (*pointing to the courtyard*) – Good thing you warned me. I didn't receive an invitation. Is he in there?

Woman 1 – Yes.

Woman 2 – Have you seen him?

Woman 1 – Yes.

Woman 2 – It's been at least ten years... He must have changed, right?

Woman 1 – He's dead.

Woman 2 – Yes... I'm not really sure I want to face him, actually. I've never encountered a dead body. Maybe it's better to preserve the memory of him from our last meeting when he was full of life...

Woman 1 – Come on. Do it for him. I'm sure it would have been pleased to see you one last time.

Woman 2 – Alright.

She heads towards stage right without enthusiasm and disappears. Her sister wipes another tear. The other woman returns after a moment, looking a bit disturbed.

Woman 1 – Are you okay...?

Woman 2 – You told me the door was on the right, right?

Woman 1 – Yes, why?

Woman 2 – It's not him.

Woman 1 – You haven't seen him in ten years. He must have changed, inevitably.

Woman 2 – He didn't change sex, though... There's a woman in the casket.

Woman 1 – Are you sure...?

Woman 2 – A woman who looks nothing like him, you know... Didn't you notice?

Woman 1 – I was so upset this morning. I dropped my contact lenses in the sink. It must be the door on the left. There are two funeral rooms... I'll go check.

Woman 2 – I think it's better if I do it...

She leaves again and comes back after a moment.

Woman 1 – So...?

Woman 2 – It's not him either.

Woman 1 – Are you sure?

Woman 2 – Unless he hid from us his whole life that he was Black... Show me the funeral invitation... Maybe you got the address wrong. There are funeral homes everywhere...

Woman 1 – Oh, my God... It upset me so much to learn that he died. And now, we won't even be able to attend his funeral...

She takes the invitation out of her bag and hands it to her sister.

Woman 2 (*looking at the invitation*) – No, it's right here, I don't understand... (*Reading*) "Have the sadness to announce the passing of Mr..." That's not his name!

Woman 1 – This can't be! Let me see...

She takes the invitation and squints to read it.

Woman 1 – Damn it! It's the neighbours' name... It happens at least once a month that the mailman puts letters in the wrong box. I didn't pay attention.

Woman 2 – So, he's not dead...

Woman 1 – I'm really sorry... (*Awkward silence*) What are we going to do with the wreath?

Woman 2 – I don't think they'll take it back, you know...? Can you imagine if florists started refunding flowers after funerals... Let's just leave it to decorate your neighbour's deceased's grave.

Woman 1 – Especially since they didn't seem to care much about it. They didn't even show up...

Woman 2 – That's normal, you have the funeral invitation...

Woman 1 – Damn, that's right. How am I going to tell them...

Woman 2 – Oh, yes... You'll need all the tact you can muster...

Woman 1 – Well... The good news is he's not dead... I had almost made peace with it...

Woman 2 – So, that's done, right?

They walk away.

Woman 1 – Oh, my God...

Woman 2 – Are you going to visit him?

Woman 1 – Who?

Woman 2 – Well, him!

Woman 1 – Why would I go see him?

Woman 2 – I don't know. You were so determined to bid him a final farewell. Well, this way you can do it while he's still alive...

4. Interrogation

One character paces back and forth behind the second character, who is seated on a chair.

One – You're going to talk, believe me. I've broken down tougher ones than you, I guarantee.

Two (*with a weary look*) – I'm innocent, I tell you.

One – Yeah, sure. They all say that. Come on, let's start from scratch. Name, first name, age, profession...

Two – Pedro Sanchez, 33 years old, nurse...

One – And where were you on Wednesday night around midnight?

Two – In my bed. I was sleeping.

One – Alone?

Two – No, with my wife.

One – And of course, you're going to tell me she was sleeping too...

Two – Well, yes. At midnight. We both had work the next day.

One – You could at least be a bit more imaginative.

Two – I have nothing to say to you, I tell you.

One – Sure, yeah... Well, believe me, you're going to tell me anyway.

Two – What? That I have nothing to say to you? I just told you.

One – Don't play dumb with me! You're not sure to win.

Two – That's for sure...

He stands up to stretch his legs.

One – Sit down, Sanchez! (*The other chuckles.*) And be careful or I'll charge you with contempt as well.

The other sits back down, resigned.

Two – Can't we even have a little fun...

One – So? Where were you on Tuesday night?

Two – Didn't we say Wednesday?

One – Yeah, whatever, Tuesday, Wednesday, who gives a damn. Where were you?

Two – I don't remember.

One – What do you mean, you don't remember? You just told me you were in bed with your wife.

Two – No, that was on Wednesday, but on Tuesday, I don't remember.

One – Damn it, but you're going to talk, yes! (*He hits the table with his hand, then writhes in pain.*) Oh, shoot...

Two – Are you alright...?

One – Mind your own business!

Two – Does it hurt...?

One – A lot...

Two – Let me see.

One – What do you know about it?

Two – I'm a nurse... You made me repeat it at least ten times. (*The first one lets him and the other examines his hand.*) It's fine, nothing's broken.

One – Then why does it hurt like hell?

Two – You didn't have to hit so hard. It's crazy, you even broke the table. You know, you almost scared me. I thought you were really going to slap me.

One – I'm sorry, I got carried away.

Two – What a nonsense, these interrogation drills. We didn't sign up to get beaten up in custody, damn it.

One – Yeah, well, next time, you can be the cop. See if it's more fun than being the suspect...

Two – Can we take a little break? No need to be in a hurry.

One – Alright.

He takes out a pack of cigarettes and offers one to the other.

Two – Thanks, I quit last week. (*The other is about to light his cigarette.*) By the way, I don't want to be too nitpicky, but you know it's forbidden now...

One – What?

Two – Well, uh... We're in a public place, right?

One – Oh, damn it... No, but why did I choose this crappy job... So now, a cop can't even offer a cigarette to a suspect during an interrogation?

Two – They could sue you... You watch too much TV, you know...

The other reluctantly puts his pack of cigarettes away.

One – Alright, well, let's get back to it, then.

Two – Okay. Are you playing the suspect?

One – Okay.

He sits down on the chair, and the other starts pacing behind him for a while. The first one starts getting impatient.

One – Come on, get on with it. I'm starting to fall asleep here...

Two – Wait, damn it! I'm focusing...

He continues pacing, then starts.

Two – So, you asshole, where were you on Wednesday night at midnight? You're going to tell me eventually, so you might as well tell me now and save time.

One – Okay. I was robbing the convenience store down the street.

He laughs.

Two – Oh, come on, stop kidding!

One – You just told me we'd save time. You convinced me, and there you go. You're a damn good cop, buddy. (*Looking at his watch*) And besides, look at the time! We're not doing overtime, no way. Not for the pay we get...

Two – Oh, damn it, you're right, it's time to hit the road. And I can't be late today. My wife decided to drag me to the theater tonight.

One – No way...?

Two – I hope it's less boring than last time. I almost fell asleep...

They both put on their jackets and get ready to leave.

One – And last Wednesday at midnight, what were you doing? I almost want to know now. Come on, you can tell me...

Two – Well, I was in bed, believe it or not.

One – With your wife?

Two – No, with yours, idiot.

They leave, laughing.

One – Who knows...

5. The End

The first character stares fixedly towards the audience. The second one enters, seeming to be searching for his way.

Two – Excuse me. Do you know where Jim Morrison's grave is...?

One (*coming out of his meditation*) – No idea.

Two – The last time I came here was for the funeral, but I was so high. I don't remember anything... Did you know him?

One – Morrison?

Two – No... The... The guy they're burying, there... There are a lot of people. Was he someone important?

One – A philosopher... who also wrote plays.

Two – He was an enlightened thinker, a generous teacher, a loyal friend... Blah blah... He probably wrote nothing but incomprehensible stuff, messed around with his students, and owed money to everyone... Assholes die too, right? Often later than others, actually. But they end up croaking anyway. So where do we bury them, huh? Look at the epitaphs around you. To my dear husband... To our beloved father... To our beloved boss... And what about the guys who cheated on their wives, beat their children, and exploited their workers, where do we bury them? I don't know where this need to sanctify idiots after they die comes from.

One – Perhaps it's the gratitude of the living for finally being rid of them, I suppose...

Two – In any case, just for that, it would be worth attending your own funeral. Just to hear all those people who couldn't stand you say how wonderful you were...

The other looks at him, intrigued.

Two – Oh, bloody hell. The minute of silence now... They're really pulling out all the stops. (*Silence*) Writing plays by a philosopher must be boring, right?

The first one looks slightly offended. The second one wonders if he made a mistake.

Two – Did you know this... playwright?

One – I also didn't want to miss my funeral... (*Extending his hand to the other to introduce himself*) Jean-Paul...

Two (*shaking his hand*) – Jim...

One – I wouldn't have recognized you. You had long hair back then, right...?

Two – And you, didn't you have a slight squint...?

One – In one eye, only. (*Amused*) But now, I'm just an essence...

Two (*taking out a cigarette*) – Come on, baby, light my fire.

The first one, who doesn't seem to understand the joke, lights the other's cigarette.

One – Sorry, I never listened to your records...

Two – I haven't read your books either... Existentialism, isn't it?

One – Yeah...

Two (*ironically*) – To be or not to be...

The other isn't sure if Jim is teasing him or not.

One – No, that's not mine, unfortunately... Are you sure Morrison is buried at Montparnasse Cemetery?

Two – No?

One – I would say it's more likely to be Père Lachaise...

Two – Oh, bloody hell, I don't remember anything. I must have been really high... I'll regret it for the rest of my life for missing my own funeral...

6. Swift Justice

Two chairs on each side of a table. A man in an orange jumpsuit enters. A female lawyer arrives, excitedly, with her phone to her ear. She greets the man and begins to settle down. She puts her briefcase on the table and takes out a folder.

Lawyer (*on the phone*) – Listen, twenty years isn't so bad. You know that with another judge and another lawyer, you could have gotten much more? Well, a bit more. And with time off for good behavior, in ten years, we might hope for parole. Ten years fly by, don't they? Anyway, excuse me, I have to go, I'm with a client here. Well, yes, I know you're really innocent, but well, what can you do? You can't win them all. I'll call you back, okay? Bye-bye... (*She puts away her phone.*) What a pain...

The lawyer finally turns to the man, who has remained standing.

Lawyer (*with a commercial smile*) – It's our turn, Mr... (*Checking the name in the folder*) Martinez.

Man – Sanchez...

Lawyer – Off to a great start... Please, have a seat, Mr. Sanchez, I insist. You know, these instruction files are full of typos. Not to mention the spelling mistakes... You'd think all these judges are illiterate. (*Sighing*) And then they wonder why there are so many miscarriages of justice... (*Smiling again*) But don't worry, we'll get you out of this, alright? So, what exactly are you accused of...? (*Leafing through the thick file*) Let's see... Oh my... It's similar to The Great Train Robbery case. A real soap opera. I was wondering why my briefcase was so heavy. But they don't realize, right? If I had to read all this... Anyway, let me summarize: basically, you chopped your wife in half with an axe, is that correct?

Man – No...

Lawyer – Bravo! That's exactly the answer I was expecting from you. You're innocent, even simpler. We plead not guilty and don't waste time with details. I feel we're going to do great work together, Mr. Ramirez. In fact, that's always the defense strategy I propose to my clients: deny everything outright. Even the obvious. Instill doubt in the jurors' minds, hoping for an acquittal on the benefit of the doubt. Well, it doesn't work every time, but believe me, it's much simpler than delving into the details. Mitigating circumstances, unhappy childhood, a moment of madness... All that is so complicated. And the result is very uncertain, you know. So here's what we'll do. You know the "yes or no" game?

Man – Yes...

Lawyer – Oh, bad point for you! I've already caught you... But I propose a variation. You answer "no" to all the questions we ask you, alright? Never yes. Always no. Be careful, are you ready?

Man (*on the defensive*) – Mmmm...

Lawyer – Did you have any reason to hold a grudge against your dear wife...?

Man – No...

Lawyer – Do you own an axe...?

Man – No...

Lawyer – Have you ever dressed as a woman? (*Her phone rings.*) Excuse me, I'll be right with you... Yes...? Oh, yes, darling! How are you? No, I have a hair appointment at 5 p.m., and I have a dozen clients to see before. Can you stop by the caterer on your way home for our little dinner with friends? I won't have time... Oh, I invited the judge with his wife, the prosecutor with his mistress... That's already three. No, three, the prosecutor's mistress is the judge's wife. Oh, just count it as six, okay? Thank you, you're sweet. Love you loads. Me too... Alright, see you tonight...

She puts away her mobile phone.

Lawyer – So, where were we, Mr. Hernandez?

Man – Sanchez...

Lawyer – Sorry, Hernandez, that's the name of my cleaning lady. Or Fernandez, I don't remember. Well, anyway, you didn't kill your wife, and that's it, okay? Trust me, this way we avoid a lot of complications... And by always answering no, whatever the question, we're sure never to contradict ourselves. Anything else you'd like to tell me, Mr. Gomez?

Man – Uh... Yes...

Lawyer – Ah, I caught you again. The correct answer was no. Well, I have to go now, Mr. Gonzalez. Duty calls. I still have a lot of innocent people like you to save today... See you tomorrow at the trial? And once again, don't worry. I'm convinced of your innocence, and I'll make sure to share this conviction with all the jury members. (*With a knowing look*) In fact, I'm hosting the judge for dinner tonight, and I'll try to slip a little word in your favour between the appetizer and the cheese. (*To herself*) Before the evening really starts to go awry, like last time... Alright, see you soon, Mr. Marquez...

The lawyer exits, just as excited as she was when she came in. The man remains there, perplexed. Then he turns around. On the back of his orange jumpsuit is written "Maintenance Service."

Man – Alright, Djamel, what are you doing with the ladder? We're not going to spend all day changing a light bulb, right?

7. A dog's life

Two characters (men or women), standing side by side on stage facing the audience, looking ahead at two imaginary graves. The first one glances over at the second.

One – Bravo! That's a well-flowered grave... It's really beautiful.

Two – Thank you... But it's a lot of work, you know. Well, when you see the result, you forget everything else...

One – That's for sure.

Two – And your roses, did you get them from the florist next door?

One – Oh no, I grow them myself. And mind you, without any fertilizers.

Two – Organic roses are the real deal. (*A pause*) And... how long did yours pass away, if I may ask?

One – It'll be exactly twenty years on December 31st.

Two – December 31st?

One – Yes indeed... New Year's Eve. You can imagine how much in the mood I was for celebration...

Two – A turkey bone that didn't go down well...?

One – No, he was hit by a car... A drunk driver who didn't even have a license.

Two – They should be the ones to go... Anyway, he died on the spot. He didn't suffer.

One – And yours?

Two – It's been exactly five years today. It's his birthday...

One – So it's still fresh... It leaves a void, doesn't it?

Two – You can say that again... I got another one, but no matter what people say, it's not the same. It doesn't replace...

One – That's for sure.

Two – And what about you, did you get another one?

One – No. I didn't even feel like it. I know it wouldn't have replaced...

Two – Well... Life goes on, despite everything. Do you have any children?

One – Three. But that doesn't replace either, you know?

Two – It's not the same. Especially when they grow up. And they leave you.

One – If they hadn't died prematurely, they would have never left us.

Two – Yes, but still... They live shorter lives than us, we know that. We should be prepared...

One – Despite everything, when it happens, it's a shock. How did you find yours?

Two – Through the internet.

One – Ah, yes... In my time, that didn't exist yet... I took the one from the neighbour. She didn't want him anymore.

Two – Some women are like that... They get one, and then they realize it's not what they had imagined... So, they prefer to abandon him... It's sad, but well. Luckily, you were there to take him in... I'm sure he was very happy with you, as long as he lived...

One – Do you have a photo?

Two – Look, there's one right there on his grave.

One – Oh yes, that's right, I hadn't noticed... My God, he was so handsome... With his big ears...

Two – And even if you had seen him a few years younger. With his coat all thick. And yours?

One (*pointing to the grave*) – Look...

Two – Oh, yes... All curly... He had a good face...

One – He was a sweetheart...

They sigh.

One – Well, we'll have to go. I think they're waiting for us to close.

Two – Do you come here often?

One – As often as possible. But it's quite far... And you?

Two – I live nearby, fortunately. I can come every day...

One – Then we'll surely see each other again.

Two – God willing.

They begin to leave.

One – And yours, what did he die from?

Two – Oh... A long illness, as they say when they don't know. Towards the end, he was in so much pain... I had to put him to sleep.

One – Come on, think that where they are now, they no longer suffer.

Two – Do you think there's a paradise for them too?

One – Who knows... There are cemeteries, after all...

8. Champagne

A woman is drinking a glass of champagne when there's a knock on the door.

Two (*off*) – It's the police!

The woman goes to open the door.

One – Come in, please. I was expecting you.

The second woman enters.

One – Are you alone?

Two – Well, my colleague had something to deal with. We're understaffed, you know...

One – Nothing serious, I hope?

Two – No... A dealer who got attacked by his pitbull.

One – Is he dead?

Two – The pitbull? Just kidding, don't worry... But the dog did bite off his arm. And he wouldn't let go. We had to sedate him...

One – The dealer? I'm kidding...

They both laugh.

Two – Anyway, he's downstairs in the police van... I hope he won't wake up too soon...

A pause.

Two – So... where is it?

One (*nodding towards a room*) – Over there, in the bedroom.

Two – Well, I'll go take a look, if you don't mind...?

The policewoman disappears for a moment from the opposite side she entered.

Two – Ah, yes...

She immediately returns.

Two – And... if I may ask, how did you do it? I mean, looking at you like this... But you don't have to answer, of course.

One – With an electric knife. Battery-operated...

Two (*impressed*) – And you were planning to... carry the body parts. Put them in a garbage bag, perhaps?

One – I wouldn't have called you...

Two – Fair enough.

One – A glass of champagne?

Two – Well, why not!

She pours her a glass.

One – Thank you. Cheers then.

They drink in silence.

One – Aren't you going to handcuff me?

Two – You only had one husband?

One – Yes.

Two – Then you won't be doing it again anytime soon.

They exchange smiles.

Two – It's quite chilled... Sorry, but... how come only two pieces? Were the batteries running low...?

One – My husband couldn't choose between me and his mistress. I opted for a fair share.

Two – Men, they're all the same...

One – Are you married?

Two – Widowed.

One – I'm sorry...

Two – No, it's okay...

One – Don't tell me you too...

Two – Oh no... I could never have joined the police... They are a bit less strict on recruitment now, but well, having a criminal record is never a good thing... No, my husband died stupidly. From a virus...

One (*sympathetic*) – I see... COVID, maybe...

Two – Not even that! Just a silly flu, I'm telling you... One day, he came home with a slight fever. I made him a hot toddy and put him to bed. The next day, he was dead.

One (*jokingly*) – If I catch a cold, I won't come to you for treatment...

They laugh heartily.

One – More champagne?

Two – You understand why I'm not putting handcuffs on you...

She refills her glass with a smile.

Two – And do you know her?

One – Who?

Two – His mistress!

One – Not personally. I just know she works in the police.

Two – No way! A colleague! Oh, you know, there are bitches everywhere. Even in the police force...

One – Can I ask you something?

Two – Go ahead...

One – Do you believe in coincidences?

Two – You know, in my line of work...

One – Then believe me, it's not by coincidence that you're here.

Two – Alexander?

One – That's my husband.

Two – He told me he was widowed too!

One – Shows that anyone can be mistaken.

Two – My goodness... I didn't even recognize him, to be honest. But you've done a good job with him... So, you must be angry with me, right?

One – He lied to you too...

Two – What a jerk... So, what do we do now?

One – As I said, we'll share. Do you prefer the upper... or the lower pieces?

Two – Well, it's not that simple... I have to write a report. I'll be hard to pass this off as a domestic accident...

One – A suicide?

Two – A guy committing hara-kiri with a battery-powered knife...?

One – In that case, we need to get rid of the body. Any ideas?

Two – The pitbull?

One – Those are still some pretty big pieces...

Two – It's a big pitbull.

One – I'll go buy more batteries...

9. Ominous Eulogy

One character stands in contemplation in front of an open casket, next to which stands a vase on a pedestal. Another character arrives.

Two – Hello... (*Hesitant*) Do you recognize me? Dominique.

One – Oh, yes, of course... It's been such a long time...

Two – As soon as I heard, I came.

One – Yes, me too...

Two – I had never seen him since middle school. I'm not sure I would have recognized him. He has changed...

One – He's dead...

Two – He was an unforgettable teacher.

One – Clearly. Thirty years later, we still remember him.

Two – There are teachers like that, who leave a lasting impression on you.

One – That's for sure...

Two – I'm not sure if, without him, I'd still remember all my German declensions by heart.

One – He was an excellent educator...

Two – Mmm... Perhaps a bit severe....

One – Yeah... Mr. Furer...

Two – We used to call him Adolf.

One – It wasn't mean...

Two – Kids can be cruel sometimes. It was all in good fun.

One – Indeed, we didn't laugh much with him...

Two – Do you remember when he broke your finger with his ruler because he caught you picking your nose?

One – Oh, I remember... Look, I still have the mark. And you, when he hung you on the coat rack for the whole hour because you mixed up the dative and the genitive?

Two – I still have a red mark around my neck...

One – As you said, there are teachers who leave a lasting impression on you.

Two – Seeing him lying there like that, with his little mustache... Thirty years later...

One – Yeah... I wouldn't have missed this for anything... I live in Madrid now... And you?

Two – In Los Angeles.

One – Your German declensions can't be of much use to you either... Anyway, that's all in the past now.

Two – Yes. It was a different time...

One – Let's not badmouth him now that he's not here to defend himself.

Two – You're right... May his soul rest in peace.

A solemn silence.

One – His eyes weren't closed earlier, were they?

Two – I don't know. Yes, perhaps... It think so...

One – I have the feeling he's looking at us...

Two – With the same angry stare as before...

One – What if he wasn't really dead...

Taking the vase, the other character strikes the corpse on the head.

Two – There. Now we're sure he's dead.

One – Could we get into trouble for this?

Two – We couldn't risk him being cremated alive.

One – You're right. It's the last favour we could do for him...

Two – He wasn't too fond of Jews, was he?

They prepare to leave.

One – By the way, have you seen any other classmates from middle school?

10. Consultation

A man enters a doctor's office. The doctor is sitting at his desk, busy filling out a form.

Doctor – Please, have a seat...

Patient – Thank you.

Doctor – So... What brings you here?

Patient – Well... I don't know how to put it... I think I caught Death...

Doctor – Oh, you know, these days, it's all we hear about... There's a virus going around... Believe me, it's non-stop... So? Runny nose... A tickle in the throat... A bit of fatigue...

Patient – No, no, I'm perfectly fine, Doctor... I'm not sick... What I mean is... I really caught Death.

The doctor seems a bit thrown off..

Doctor – Yes... (*Trying to regain composure*) Well, we'll still prescribe you a preventive treatment, just in case... (*He takes out a prescription and starts writing it like a robot.*) So... A little cocktail of vitamins to boost your immune system, which might be a bit sluggish due to the cold... A throat syrup, one tablespoon in the morning, at noon, and in the evening... Paracetamol only if you have headaches... (*He hands the prescription to the patient.*) There you go, with all that, you shouldn't be bothered too much this winter... (*But the patient doesn't take the prescription.*)

Patient – I knew it wouldn't be easy...

Doctor (*surprised*) – It's a completely standard treatment, you know. I prescribe it at least thirty times a day currently...

Patient – Doctor, I've caught Death, and she's locked in the Ford Fiesta parked in my garage.

Doctor (*snapping out of it*) – Tell me about it...

Patient – Well... Last night, I decided to end my life...

Doctor – Mmm...

Patient – Firearms are not my thing. And gas can be dangerous for the neighbours. You have to think about those who are left behind, after all...

Doctor – Certainly...

Patient – So I went to my garage. I sealed the door with wet towels, just like I often saw in Wednesday evening TV movies. And then I started my Ford Fiesta. With great difficulty, by the way. It smokes like a tractor, and it makes just about as much noise.

It's the catalytic converter. I should change it, but anyway... In this case, it was actually an advantage. So I sat in the driver's seat. I turned on the radio. And I let the engine run. I was starting to doze off peacefully for what was supposed to be my final sleep when I saw her in the rearview mirror, sitting behind me...

Doctor – Who?

Patient – Death!

Doctor – Ah, yes, of course...

Patient – I shouldn't have been so surprised. I was doing everything I needed to find her. But you know what amazed me?

Doctor – No...

Patient – She looked exactly as I had imagined her, exactly like the image we have of her, you know!

Doctor – What do you mean?

Patient – The long black cape, the scythe, the complete get-up! It's crazy. You think, oh, it's just an image, and then... Because no one has ever seen Death. Maybe she exists, okay. But it's like God. Maybe we'll meet him up there someday, but no one has come back with photos to show us exactly what he looks like. So we can imagine that even if he exists, he's certainly not a venerable old man with long hair and a white beard, vaguely resembling Santa Claus or Karl Marx...

Doctor – No, obviously...

Patient – Well, that's what freaked me out all of a sudden. To see her like that. Exactly as I had imagined her...

Doctor – Yes, that... Must have been a shock...

Patient – In any case, believe me, it woke me up! I don't know what came over me, but I turned off the engine and got out of the car like a madman, slamming the door behind me. And there, luckily, I had the right reflex...

Doctor – Oh, yeah...?

Patient – I still had the key to my Ford Fiesta in my hand. I immediately pressed it to lock the doors. Not much works in this car anymore, but that still does. It was one of the first models to be equipped with it at the time. I even hesitated to take that option, I'm not into gadgets, but you know how it is. It was the only model immediately available at the garage. It was either that or wait for the ordered one for months...

Doctor – Yes, I know how it is... I just got a new Mercedes, and I had to take the cigarette lighter, even though I quit smoking five years ago... And believe me, just the cigarette lighter option, on a car like that... It's almost the price of a second-hand Ford Fiesta... Yes, well, what happened next?

Patient – Then, I was saved! She was trapped in there, in the car. Right in front of me, I tell you. I could see her very distinctly pressing her black burqa-like thing against the window trying to get out. But no! She was trapped! Can you imagine? In my Ford Fiesta!

Doctor – Alright... So, you really don't want the syrup...?

Patient – Don't you understand what I'm telling you? I caught Death!

Doctor – Yes, yes... I... I can refer you to a colleague if you want...? Wait, I must have his address here, in my directory...

He searches but doesn't find it, then picks up his phone.

Doctor – Yes, Christel. Can you give me Dr. Müller's phone number? At the psychiatric center, yes... (*He scribbles something on a piece of paper.*) Thanks... (*He hangs up and hands the piece of paper to the patient.*) There you go, you can see him on my behalf, and explain what's happening to you, okay? I'm sure he'll be very interested...

Patient (*taking the paper*) – Thanks... And what about my Ford Fiesta, what do I do?

Doctor – What do you mean...?

Patient – Well, I'm going to need it now... I mean, now that I've decided not to commit suicide with carbon monoxide... What do I do? If I open the door, Death will take the opportunity to escape. And the Grim Reaper will start reaping again, right away.

Doctor – Ah, yes, of course...

Patient – It's a responsibility, anyway... Moreover, did you see? Yesterday, on the news: no announcements of the death of retired celebrities. No earthquakes in underdeveloped countries. No school bus accidents... Obviously, because Death is locked in my car...

Doctor (*uncertain if he's joking or not*) – On the other hand, if Death stays in there too long, you realize the implications. It would be a disaster for the media, NGOs, funeral homes, the pension system...

Patient (*annoyed*) – I feel like you're not taking me seriously...

Doctor – Please don't take offense; I absolutely don't question the truth of what you just told me. But are you absolutely sure it wasn't someone else on the back seat? Maybe your wife, for instance...

Patient – My wife doesn't wear a burqa! And by the way, we got divorced last year. It hit me hard, actually. It's one of the reasons that pushed me to the brink of suicide...

Doctor – Well, you see! As you mentioned, you were already quite intoxicated... Lack of oxygen can cause hallucinations... Look at the chocking game... When you're

about to die, you might have remembered your wife, all the good times you've spent together, and she appeared to you like that...

Patient – With a burqa and a scythe...?

The doctor seems puzzled. The patient reflects.

Patient – It's true that for the burqa... It was more like a black scarf tied around her neck... And for the scythe, I'm not completely sure... It could have been a broomstick as well... But witches also have broomsticks and wear black scarves!

Doctor – Hmm...

Patient – And how do you explain that this morning, when I went back to my garage after a good night's sleep, she was still there, behind the rear window of my Ford Fiesta? She even tried to tell me something...

Doctor – Oh, really?

Patient – Since I couldn't hear anything, she scribbled something on a piece of paper in a cabalistic language that vaguely looked like Portuguese and pressed it against the windshield.

Doctor – Portuguese?

Patient – That surprised me a bit too...

Doctor – And what was written on that paper?

Patient – Well, I have no idea... I don't understand Portuguese... I should ask my cleaning lady. She's Portuguese, as it happens... But it's strange, she didn't come this morning as usual... No, I assure you, Doctor. I caught Death...

Doctor – Mmm... I'll still prescribe a mild sedative for the time being... It will help you relax...

Patient – Do you think so...?

The doctor nods, and starts scribbling something on a prescription.

11. Unknown Double

A character stands facing the audience, looking at a tomb. Another approaches.

Two – Excuse me, is this the tomb of the unknown author?

One – Oh no, this one is the tomb of the unknown soldier.

Two – Are you sure?

One – Sometimes it's hard to tell... Since there's nothing marked on it... (*Takes out a paper*) They gave me a map at the entrance, but well... (*Puts on his glasses*) Let me see. W28... Yes, that's it. The unknown soldier. Between the unacknowledged genius and the anonymous alcoholic. The unknown author is just behind: X29...

Two – I wonder if it was such a good idea to put them all in the same cemetery...

One – Yes, that's right. The secret agent is X27. (*Silent moment, each in front of their grave*) Was this one related to you?

Two – This one or another one. Who knows! I was born of an unknown father...

One – Oh, I see... (*He looks at his map again*) The unknown father... No, really, I don't understand any of this. They could have at least put an alphabetical index. And this double-entry table with numbers and letters is just ridiculous... It's like a battleship game! A5, miss... C10, hit... B12, sunk...

Two – And you?

One – The unknown soldier? He was my father...

Two – Really? And... did you follow in his footsteps?

One – What can I do? The military career is a longstanding tradition in our family. We are soldiers from father to son. In fact, I already have my reserved place in the family vault.

Two – Oh, so there are vaults as well?

One – You didn't know? Yes, yes, of course! My whole family is buried there. A long line of very discreet military people. You know: the Silent Army...

Two – The Silent Navy...?

One – The Silent Army!

Two – Ah, yes... I understood Silent Navy. I thought you were in the navy. Because of the battleship game...

One – So, you are in search of paternity?

Two – Yes.

One – And what would you ask your father if you could meet him one day? Here or in another world?

Two – His identification papers...?

One – Yes...

Two – And you?

One – Permission to search him. To check if he's not carrying any weapons...

Two – It's not easy every day, you know, to be unaware of your origins.

One – That's what I always tell my men at the barracks. When you don't know where you come from, you can't know where you're going. To wage war, you need a good plan first. And know how to read it. Why do you think that for centuries, women were refused in the army? Because they're incapable of reading a plan! They already have trouble with a road map or even a shopping list, so you can imagine. A battle plan... And you? What do you do in life?

Two – Theatre.

One – Oh, yes, the... The theatre.

Two – Actor.

One – Yes.

Two – Are you familiar with it?

One – No. The performing arts, as they say? I'm the Silent Army, you're the performing arts... Labels still help us find our way a bit, don't they? And... are you a famous actor?

Two – No... I am an unknown actor.

One – Alright. Well... Nice to not have made your acquaintance...

Two – I won't say goodbye...

One – Neither will I.

The first glances at one last tomb.

One – Look, that one isn't even on my map...

Two – Let me see... (*Reading*) It's the tomb of... the unknown man.

One – The unknown man...?

Two – Probably a homeless person...

One – Even homeless people have the right to a final resting place...

The first one leaves. The second one remains alone.

One – Well... Where was I...?

12. Dying of laughter

A police officer observes a coroner examining a corpse.

Police Officer – How long ago did the death occur, Doctor?

Coroner – The body is still warm. I would say two or three hours.

Police Officer – It was a cleaning lady who found the body, slumped in his chair.

Coroner – Mmm...

Police Officer – Do you know what caused his death?

Coroner – The tests will confirm it, but I believe I'm not mistaken, Officer, when I say that this man died from laughter...

Police Officer – That's quite unusual, indeed.

Coroner – A deep laughter. A throaty laughter. The zygomatic muscles gave way. I don't need to draw you a picture.

Police Officer – Do you know what could have triggered this fatal burst of laughter?

Coroner – You said he was found in his armchair. It was at his home, in front of the TV...?

Police Officer – No.

Coroner – At the movies?

Police Officer – At the theater.

Coroner – Even more surprising. Usually, when we find a spectator slumped in his seat after a performance, it's because he's dozing off...

Police Officer – Are you sure this man is not simply asleep? Very deeply...

Coroner – Confuse a deep coma with clinical death? Come on, Officer, you don't take me for a rookie. How about you tell me what kind of play the victim was attending...

Police Officer – My men are questioning the theater director and going through Time Out to confirm his statements... But we have already issued a search warrant against the presumed playwright for involuntary manslaughter.

Coroner – Involuntary?

Police Officer – According to the theater director, the author believed he had written a tragedy... That's what he'll claim, anyway. But you know, I'm not a rookie either. I know how to get a suspect to talk...

Coroner – You're right, Officer. We can't let such individuals roam free. If we can't go to the theater without fearing to die of laughter...

Police Officer – It seems he's still shaking with a few spasms. Are you absolutely sure he's dead?

Coroner – It's just the nerves. Trust me, Officer. This man is as dead as can be.

Police Officer – Do you think he saw himself die?

Coroner – Why? Do you think his testimony could have advanced your investigation? Just kidding... You know, in my line of work, with all that we see... It's better to lighten the mood... Last week, I autopsied a guy who died of boredom...

Police Officer – At the theater as well? We might be dealing with a serial killer who changes his modus operandi each time to throw us off the track...

Coroner – It's true that nowadays, it's more common to die of boredom at the theater than to die from laughter. No, it was simply during a dinner at his mother-in-law's...

Police Officer – I see... Do you think the autopsy will reveal other interesting elements?

Coroner – The examination of the stomach contents shows that before this tragedy, the victim had eaten in a Chinese restaurant. Spring rolls, to be precise...

Police Officer – Spring rolls?

Coroner – I am absolutely certain about this point. And then ginger chicken with Cantonese rice.

Police Officer – No dessert?

Coroner – None. But you know, it's not very surprising. Desserts in Chinese restaurants...

Police Officer – Do you think it could have any connection to the death?

Coroner – None at all.

Police Officer – Okay...

The Police Officer is about to leave.

Police Officer – Dying of laughter... And to think that I have to break the news to his family...

Coroner – I understand. You don't have an easy job either... Why don't you come to dinner at my place one of these evenings...? You need to decompress from time to time..

Police Officer – Alright... I'll talk to my wife about it. (*Puzzled*) I swear, it looks like he's still convulsed with laughter...

Coroner – It's just the nerves, I tell you...

13. Outside

They are sitting. He is reading, and she is knitting. Or the other way around.

Her – It feels good to have a little peace and quiet.

Him – Yes.

Her – With all the commotion out there.

Him – Yes.

Her – We're so much better off at home.

Him – Yes.

Her – I can't even remember when it was...

Him – When what?

Her – The last time I went out!

Him – Oh, yes. Outside...

Her – And you?

Him – Me?

Her – When was it?

Him – The last time you went outside?

Her – The last time you went outside!

Him – Oh, me! Outside... I don't know... It must have been... To take the dog out...

Her – The dog? He's dead.

Him – No?

Her – That was years ago.

Him – Oh, yes... I was thinking... This dog doesn't pee very often...

Her – So?

Him – So what?

Her – When was the last time you went outside? Do you remember?

Him – Oh, me! Outside... I don't know... It must have been... To take out the trash...

Her – The trash?

Him – Why not the trash?

Her – We have a trash chute.

Him – Oh, yes... I was thinking so... This trash doesn't fill up very quickly. And where is the dog buried?

Her – In the garden.

Him – I had to go outside to bury the dog. The garden is outside, right?

Her – Well, no...

Him – Ah...

Her – You know what?

Him – What?

Her – It might sound strange, but... I'm not sure if I've ever really been outside... The dog used to pee on the lawn. Before we buried him underneath...

Him – Mmmm... Me neither... At least, I don't remember. I would remember, wouldn't I?

Her – Probably.

Him – Then again, what could we possibly do outside?

Her – We're so peaceful here. (*Doorbell rings*) What's that?

Him – The doorbell...

Her – I wonder what it could be...

Him – I'll go check...

He leaves and comes back a moment later.

Her – So?

Him – It was the postman.

Her – Ah... What did he say?

Him – Nothing. He was already gone. But he left a letter.

Her – Postmen often do that. I don't like letters. I'm always afraid it's bad news. Is it bad news?

Him (*looking at the letter*) – It's an announcement.

Her – About...?

Him – About a death.

Her – Ah... Whose?

Him – Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

Her – Both of them?

Him – Apparently.

Her – Did we know them?

Him – It sounds familiar. (*He takes out his wallet and pulls out an ID card*) You'll laugh, but Mr. Smith is me.

Her – So I'm Mrs. Smith?

Him – Probably.

Her – Are we married?

Him – In any case, we're dead.

Her – We should write to them and let them know it's a mistake.

Him – Yes.

Her – But for that, we'd have to go outside.

Him – I don't know if I'll have the courage.

Her – We're so comfortable at home.

Him – Do you think it's a mistake...?

She shrugs, indicating that she doesn't know.

14. Announcement

A woman is on stage, looking bored.. Potentially, in the background, "Für Elise" is playing. The doorbell rings twice. She goes to open the door. A postman enters.

Denise – I knew it was you.

Postman – The postman always rings twice!

Denise – I don't open the door to just anyone, you know. With all that's going on nowadays...

Postman – I have a little letter for you, Denise. (*With all the things happening nowadays...*) There you go! The letter for Denise...

Denise (*taking the letter*) – For once, it's not a bill... A glass of wine, as usual?
She places a bottle and a glass in front of him.

Denise – Help yourself. You know the place.

While he serves himself, she glances at the address and becomes upset.

Denise – It's my mother's handwriting...

Postman – Well, if she's writing to you... It means she's not dead, right?
Denise opens the letter anxiously and reads it.

Denise – Oh, my God...!

Postman – Is she dead?

Denise – It's more serious than that...

Postman – More serious?

Denise – She forbids me from attending her funeral!

Postman – But... she's not dead, then?

Denise – I guess she wants to tell me beforehand...

Postman – Ah yes, I see. That way, she won't be the one writing the obituary. That would be unusual.

Denise (*distracted*) – Unusual?

Postman (*laughing and already a little tipsy*) – Can you imagine? My funeral will take place at the village cemetery, sharp at ten o'clock. No flowers, no wreaths. And please don't come either.

Denise gives him a fiery look.

Denise – Do you find that funny?

Postman (*recovering*) – But... are you on bad terms with your mother, then?

Denise – Why do you think she forbids me from attending her funeral?

Postman – I don't know... Maybe she wants to spare you the chore... Funerals, in general...

Denise – No, it's the last thing she found to upset me... When I was a child, she would forbid me from everything... Don't do this... Don't do that... Don't put your fingers in your nose... Don't say bad words... Don't put the cat in the washing machine... I wasn't allowed to do anything...

Postman – Ah, I see...

Denise – So, at eighteen, I left home... I haven't seen her since...

Postman – Home...?

Denise – My mother!

Postman – Well, that's not very cheerful... Here, I'll poor myself another... So what are you going to do?

Denise – I swore I wouldn't go to her funeral anyway.

Postman – So everything ends well. I mean... In the end, you're not going, and at the same time, you're respecting her last wishes...

Denise – Are you kidding? My mother forbids me from attending her funeral, and I would obey her? Can you imagine? Even in death, she'd still be giving me orders?

Postman – So, are you going to go?

Denise – I don't know... On the other hand, isn't that what she had in mind...

Postman – What...?

Denise – She knows that the best way to get me to attend her funeral is to forbid me from going...

Postman – Ah, yes, obviously.

Denise – What would you do in my shoes?

Postman – Well, let's see... I get along quite well with my mother... Especially since she 's dead..... But yours is still alive. You have time to think about it...

Denise – Yes...

Postman – How old is your mother?

Denise – 48 years old.

Postman – Well then... You have your whole life to think about it...

Denise – Yes... Actually, I wonder if that's what she had in mind...

Postman – Well, I better get going. I have other letters to deliver. I hope they're bills, it's less complicated...

Denise – One last one for the road?

Postman – Okay, but the last one then...

15. Travelling

A woman is seated at a desk. A man enters. He flips through some brochures. The phone rings.

Her – Travelling Agency, how can I help you? Oh, Mrs. Seventy-eight twenty-four, just the person I was thinking about. How are you? Perfect... And how's Mr. Seventy-eight twenty-four...? Oh, very well... For your wedding anniversary...? Well, why not ask him for the moon! Oh yes, a second honeymoon, that sounds quite appropriate. Come to the agency, and I'll give you the brochure... Perfect, Mrs. Seventy-eight... Very well, Mrs. Seventy... Yes, Mrs. Seven... Well, I must let you go now, I have other people waiting. Me too, Mrs. Seventy-eight twenty-four... Can I help you, Sir?

Him – I'm still not entirely sure...

Her – I understand. There are so many possible destinations. It's not easy to make a choice, is it?

Him – I used to love traveling... in the past.

Her – I can still try to advise you... Were you thinking of a space trip? Time journey? Both?

Him – You might think I'm foolish, but... I have never traveled through time before.

Her – Really? Prehistory is quite trendy these days, you know. Especially the Jurassic period. Safaris have been crazy lately. It's a killer! Everyone wants to come back with their Tyrannosaurus head to hang over the fireplace. Between you and me, even if a meteorite hadn't caused the extinction of dinosaurs at the end of the Cretaceous, I believe today's tourists would have managed to wipe them out.

Him – I prefer something a bit more peaceful.

Her – I understand. I feel the same way. Crowds on vacation... The only advantage with the Jurassic period is that it's not very regulated.

Him – Oh, really...?

Her – During that time, Earth was devoid of human presence, and nearly all creatures had vanished from that slice of the cosmic pool table during the early Tertiary period. Except for a handful of rats which happen to be our distant relatives. As a result, the influence of tourism on the current state of affairs was quite minimal. So in the Jurassic, freedom reigns supreme; you can pursue your desires without much consequence. And let me assure you, individuals fully exploit this opportunity.

Him – And the time customs officers, don't they do anything?

Her – Do you think...? You don't even need a time passport for the Jurassic period!

Him – I must admit I have a slight preference for old-fashioned trips, though. I mean, trips in the geographical sense. You might find this silly again, but I have never been to the United States of Asia.

Her – Listen, I don't want to be a downer, but you know, with globalization now, it's pretty much the same everywhere...

Him – To that extent...?

Her – Traveling around the planet, except for businessmen... Or maybe a little cruise in the solar system... But well... There isn't much to do other than taking photos from the portholes. You hardly leave the spacecraft. Oh, of course, it's very comfortable, I won't deny that. Swimming pool, restaurant, casino, duty-free shop... But it's mostly for older people... In fact, I just proposed a moon cruise to one of our best clients for her 5000th wedding anniversary.

Him – I see. What would you recommend, then?

Her – Personally, I'm a big fan of the 2000s... It's not too far... There are very few tourists... Of course, you need to follow a few simple rules. The time customs officers are on top of things, it's still quite strict. But it's not as restrictive as you might think. It's a bit like the Jurassic period, after all...

Him – I'm not sure I follow...

Her – For the opposite reasons, of course. Since it's quite close to us in time, you just need to adopt the fashion of that era, which was quite elegant, especially for ladies, and give up for a while everything that progress has brought us. You'll blend in easily with the population! No, really, the 2000s are quite fun.

Him – Really? That's curious, I hadn't thought of it that way. But why not, indeed...

Her – Well, not to settle there permanently, of course. But for a week or two, it's quite exotic. Without being too tiring, actually. And, believe me, the food in the 2000s was really good. For those lucky enough to have something on their plates, of course. No, because I don't know if you've ever tasted brontosaurus steak, but... You have to like game meat to start with, right? No, a Cretaceous barbecue might be very quaint, but for me, it's not worth a Big Mac Combo in one of those early traditional fast-food places... I assure you, in the 2000s, it had a different taste than the freeze-dried hamburgers they make us eat today...

Him – It's tempting, that's true... I hadn't thought of that... But...

Her – Yes...?

Him – I was perhaps also considering a more... permanent journey.

Her – I see. What we call here the last journey.

Him – Exactly.

Her – Why not... If you've thought it through...

Him – I've been thinking about it for some time now.

Her – Well, I'm sure in that case, you need to be certain. Because it's a one-way ticket...

Him – I don't want to come back, I assure you.

Her – I'll need a medical certificate, right?

Him – I brought it with me, just in case...

Her – When would you like to leave?

Him – Well... Right now, if possible. Once you've decided, why wait, right?

Her – Very well, let me check... (*She types on her computer*) Yes, this morning, that's not a problem. Can I see the medical certificate? You'll have to leave your passport with me as well. You won't need it anymore anyway...

He hands her the documents, which she examines one by one.

Her – Perfect. Everything seems to be in order, Mr... Smith. I see you haven't switched to digital yet either. I should scold you...

Him – Now, it's no longer worth it, is it.

Her – You're right... Do you have any luggage? I'm joking... Just to lighten the mood a bit... Because it's an important decision, Mr. Smith...

Him – I am fully aware of that.

Her – Now, it's true that this journey is a dream... and probably still holds many mysteries. A journey that has been increasingly requested, I must admit. Since we obtained authorization to offer these kinds of services. What can you do? People have been everywhere. They've experienced everything.

Him – At least with this journey, you don't come back.

Her – Are you starting to feel a bit cramped with us?

Him – Let's just say... I feel a bit weary, especially.

Her – I understand... Immortality has its perks, of course. But it's true that one can get tired of it...

Him – Especially when it lasts too long.

Her – Very well... So... all that's left for me to do is to wish you a safe journey, Mr. Smith...

She takes a pistol out of a drawer and points it at him. Two muffled shots are heard.

Her – I shouldn't, but that sound always makes me laugh. I don't know why...

16. Double Life

A notary's office. A woman arrives, dressed in mourning attire. She hesitates, then sits down. After a while, she leans towards the desk to look at the documents on it, then hesitates. Curiosity gets the better of her, and she leans over again, extending a hesitant hand to grab an envelope. Another woman, also dressed in mourning attire, enters. She seems surprised to see the other woman, who hasn't noticed her arrival. The new arrival coughs to signal her presence, and the other woman startles.

Woman 1 – You scared me...

Woman 2 – I'm really sorry. But I didn't know that... (*Extending her hand and introducing herself*) I'm Mary...

Woman 1 – You know my name?

Woman 2 (*surprised*) – Uh... No, Mary, that's me. The widow of the deceased.

Woman 1 – What?

Woman 2 – You're also named Mary?

Woman 1 – But I'm the widow!

Woman 2 – Excuse me?

Woman 1 – Who does she think she is, this hussy?

Woman 2 – Say that again, you bimbo?

They're about to jump at each other's throats when the notary arrives with a cup of coffee in hand.

Notary – Would you like some coffee?

The two women regain a more dignified composure.

Woman 1 – No, thank you, I'm fine.

Woman 2 – We're already upset enough as it is.

Notary – Please, have a seat... (*Both women sit down.*) First of all, allow me to offer my condolences.

The first woman sheds a tear. The notary hands her a box of tissues, and she takes one.

Woman 1 – Thank you.

The other woman rolls her eyes with an exasperated expression.

Notary – Very well, now that we are all here, I believe we can proceed with the reading of the will.

Woman 1 – All here?

Notary – Unless we are waiting for a third Mary...

Woman 2 – Excuse me, but I think there's a little misunderstanding...

Notary – I'll come to that right away, dear Madam, don't worry... (*He picks up the envelope on his desk and clears his throat.*) I'll get straight to the point. As your joint presence in this office may have already hinted to you, Mr. Smith, before his death, had a double life.

Woman 1 – A double life?

Woman 2 – I assure you, we had no hint of that at all until now...

Notary – In any case, following his sudden disappearance in circumstances as murky as they are painful, Mr. Smith leaves behind two widows and two orphans... both named Jack.

Woman 1 – Your son is also named Jack?

Notary – It's true that for a man leading a double life, choosing two women with the same name and baptizing all his children Jack can avoid quite a few mistakes...

Woman 2 (*devastated*) – That's clear...

Notary – So, it appears that the estate of your common husband was mainly composed of a house in Newcastle upon Tyne and another in Newcastle under Lyme. It was during one of his many journeys between these two towns that Mr. Smith would have been carried away with his car by a flooded river during a violent storm.

The two women exchange a hostile glance.

Notary – Without further ado, I will read you the deceased's last wishes. (*He opens the envelope*) First and foremost, regarding his funeral, Mr. Smith expressed a wish to be cremated. At least for this, you have nothing to worry about. Mr. Smith was apparently a very organized man, and he has made all the necessary arrangements. I'll provide you with the details...

In a clumsy motion, the notary spills his coffee onto the will.

Notary – Oh, damn... (*He takes a tissue and wips the spilled coffee on the will.*) Sorry... I'll fix this right away, don't worry, and I'll continue reading the will... Hopefully, this rag is still somewhat readable... (*He glances at the document.*) Well, then, in essence... Let me summarize for you... Mr. Smith bequeaths his house in Newcastle to...

Woman 1 – Newcastle upon Tyne or Newcastle under Lyme?

Notary – I must admit that with the coffee stain, I can't read exactly what's written after Newcastle... In any case, Mr. Smith bequeaths this house to his wife Mary and his son Jack.

Woman 2 – Which Mary?

Woman 1 – Which Jack?

Notary – I assure you, he didn't specify...

Woman 2 – This is unbelievable!

Woman 1 – But then, how do you expect us to...

The notary's phone rings, and he answers.

Notary – Excuse me for a moment... Yes? No? Oh yes? Oh no! Okay... Okay... Okay... Thank you... (*He hangs up.*) So, I have good news and bad news.

Woman 2 – I must admit, I'm quite curious to know what the good news might be...

Notary – Your husband did not die by drowning in the Lyme River, as we initially believed...

The two women exchange looks of dismay.

Notary – According to the latest developments in the investigation, Mr. Smith may have climbed back to the riverbank after being accidentally swept into the river by a gust of wind while walking his dog named Toby. A dog that apparently, he never parted with.

Woman 1 – Our dog is also named Toby!

Woman 2 – It's the same one...

Notary – In terms of dogs, at least, your husband wasn't polygamous...

Woman 1 – So that bastard is still alive?

Notary – That's where the bad news comes in... He managed to get back in his car and continue driving. However, the vehicle was later thrown into the Tyne River by a new gust of wind when he reached Newcastle. The police just fished out his Fiesta from the river a few minutes ago.

Woman 2 – The Tyne River, then.

Woman 1 – Of course, the Tyne River! In Newcastle upon Tyne! You need to connect the dots here, she's missing a few bulbs upstairs!

The other woman gives her a murderous look.

Notary – Mr. Smith really had no luck. It's obvious he would have been better off not taking his car that day.

Woman 1 – It was my Jack's birthday...

Woman 2 – Mine too...

Notary – Perhaps it's the law of averages. I'm talking about this double drowning, of course...

Woman 2 – It seems that when you lead a double life, you are also destined to die twice.

Notary – Even though, according to the famous maxim of Heraclitus, one never drowns twice in the same river. (*A pause*) I'm just kidding...

Woman 1 – So what was the good news then?

Embarrassed silence.

Notary – The good news is that we found the dog Toby, and he's alive and well. We can still consider shared custody...

Woman 2 – And is that all there is in the will?

Awkward silence.

Notary – Well... Uh, sorry... Wait a minute... Here's something else... This is the music your husband chose to accompany his cremation.

He presses a remote control, and the first lyrics of the song "Light My Fire" start playing. Plus a few barks.

17. Tunnel

Two men (or two women), standing side by side, looking straight ahead.

One – Well, here we are, it's the end.

Two – Looks like it...

One – Do you think there's something after?

Two – Who knows...

One – Honestly, I don't really believe it.

Two – We'll find out...

One – We weren't doing so bad here. It wasn't paradise, but... it wasn't hell either.

Two – As they say. We know what we're losing, we don't know what we'll find.

One – I think I see something now.

Two – Me too...

One – Looks like a tunnel.

Two – With a blinding light at the end.

One – So far, it matches what we were told...

Two – I'm not sure if that's a good sign.

One – It's quite narrow. We're never going to fit through together...

Two – You go first, I've got your back.

One – Brave, but not reckless...

Two – Anyway, we can't stay here, so...

One – Yes, I think we'll be kicked out soon...

Two – Alright, here I go...

One – Tell me what you see?

Two – Wait, I'm stuck... There, I can see the exit!

One – So?

Two – You'll never believe it...

One – What?

Two – It looks like a hospital room...

One – So, we might not be really dead then?

Two – It's worse than that...

One – What do you mean, worse?

Two – It's not really a hospital...

One – Then what is it?

Two – There's some idiot staring at me as I come out. With a stupid smile... Damn it, we're in a maternity ward!

One – Oh no... Not again...

Two – It makes me want to cry...

Sound of a crying baby.

End of Series

Two women (or two men) are seated on either side of a table, each with a manuscript in hand.

One (*with a distressed look*) – It's a good thing we didn't bring the author here, right? Because there's still quite a bit of work to do.

Two (*with a knowing look*) – Oh dear...

One – His first play was really good, though. Very funny. I don't understand...

Two – The second one is always harder to write. It's a known fact...

One – Mmm...

The first one starts flipping through the manuscript and reads silently with a grim expression. The second one also reads diagonally, while glancing at the first one from below, trying to turn the pages simultaneously.

One (*noticing the other's lack of amusement*) – We're already on page three, and we haven't laughed once.

Two nods with a remorseful expression.

Two (*with a commercial smile*) – Would you like some coffee?

The other doesn't bother responding, continuing to read and turn the pages. Suddenly, she stops at a line and bursts into laughter.

One – Well, this is actually quite funny...

She continues to laugh as the second one watches, not sure which page the first one is on and attempting to verify by peering at the opposite text.

One (*seeing that the other isn't laughing*) – You don't find this funny?

The other finally locates the mentioned line.

Two – Oh, I do... (*Forcing a laugh, with a delayed response*) It's really excellent. Here, we find the same vein as his first play...

The first one regains her composure and resumes turning the pages as she reads.

Two (*gaining confidence*) – Oh, and this one is not bad either...

She genuinely laughs in a demonstrative manner, unable to stop herself. Until she notices the other staring at her with a dismayed expression.

One – You find that funny?

Two – Well, not really. It's true that it's not very subtle, but...

One – Ah, because you were starting to worry me a little... Personally, I can't stand this kind of humour.

Two – It's undeniable that it's quite heavy; he used to do better, for sure...

The two women continue to turn the pages in sync with their reading. Spontaneously, they both stop at the same page and start laughing deeply, their laughter growing in intensity. They laugh together with tears in their eyes for a while. The first one gradually calms down, followed by the second one.

One – I have to admit that this is really funny... (*She resumes her serious expression.*) Well, it's funny to us because... (*With a concerned look*) But will it really make the audience laugh?

Two – Not sure...

One – Exactly!

Two – Perhaps a bit too quirky.

One – We need something irreverent but a bit more...

Two – Mainstream.

One – Mmm...

The first one seems to ponder, and the other observes cautiously, hesitating to intervene.

One – I had an idea...

Two – Yes...

One – Wouldn't it be funnier for people if the main character were Brazilian?

Two (*taken aback*) – Brazilian...

One – You know how people from Brazil are, right?

Two – Um... Yes, quite well. My spouse is from Rio...

One – That nonchalance, that animalistic quality... (*Laughing*) That accent, it's hysterical... The Brazilian accent, isn't it? That's something that could make the general public laugh. It's a crisis; people want to have a good laugh, for heaven's sake!

Two – To have a nice evening and not overthink things.

One – I say, a Brazilian or nothing. You'll discuss it with the author, won't you?

Two – No problem, I'll take care of it.

One – We already paid him an advance anyway. He can swallow this too, right?

Two – Still not interested in coffee?

One – I really think we've got something here.

Two – It completely changes the play's perspective.

One – I'm sure we'll be a hit. Sometimes, it only takes a little. But you need to find it...

Two – It's a profession, as they say.

One – Do you remember his first play?

Two – The one where he talks about his father's death.

One – If I hadn't insisted on setting it in the Stone Age...

Two – And making the hero Scottish.

One – Ah, yes, I had forgotten about that... It's true, the Scottish accent...

Two – It always has a guaranteed effect...

One – Well, I don't think we'll do better than this...

She finally closes the bound document and checks her watch.

Two – Oh my... I need to run, too. I have a meeting with a troublemaker I can't seem to shake off... Oh, and what did he call it, by the way?

She looks at the title on the cover.

One (*reading incredulously*) – "Chronicles of a Laborious Life"...

Two – I was sure you wouldn't like it, but I preferred not to say anything to avoid influencing you. I agree, it's a terrible title...

One – "Chronicles of a Laborious Life"... And why not "Laborious Chronicles", while we're at it?

Two – Oh yes, that's... That's shorter.

One – I was joking...

Two – Of course.

One – No, we need something catchier.

Two – A title that makes people want to come see the play.

The first one seems to think.

One – Why not "Strip Poker"? That's a catchy title. It makes you want to see the play. Well, it depends on the cast, of course...

Two – Oh yes, that's... It's catchy...

One – But...?

Two – It's the title you already gave to his first play...

One – What play?

Two – The one where he talks about his father's death.

One – Ah...

She thinks again.

One – "Strip Poker 2"...?

The other struggles to fake enthusiasm.

One – No... It should be something more... Maybe a name? Since the hero is Brazilian... Carlos, for example?

Two – Why not...?

One – It's the name of an actor I had the misfortune of sleeping with after promising to make him a star... If I give him the lead role... It would be a way to get rid of him. He's a bad influence, to top it off...

Two – Ah...

One – Now, Carlos... I have to admit, it's truly a ridiculous name... What's your husband's name?

Two – Carlos.

One – Ah... Well, "Chronicles of a Laborious Life" isn't so bad after all, right?

Two – You get used to it.

One – When you've repeated it a dozen times. "Chronicles of a Laborious Life"... Alright, it's settled. This time, you can't say I didn't respect the author's wishes.

Two – You could even say his last wishes.

One – Oh really? Why's that?

Two – Oh, you're not aware? The author committed suicide last night.

One – No...?

Two – I believe he never really got over his father's death.

One – So this is his final play...

Two – Most likely...

One – I think we'll be a hit. A deceased author always sells much better than one who's struggling.

Two – The misfortune of some...

They start to leave.

One – I hope the heirs won't be too difficult to deal with...?

Two – An old aunt, I think.

One – Did you know that hair keeps growing after death? Were you aware of that?

One – No...

Fade to black

The End

About the author

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

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

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

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

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