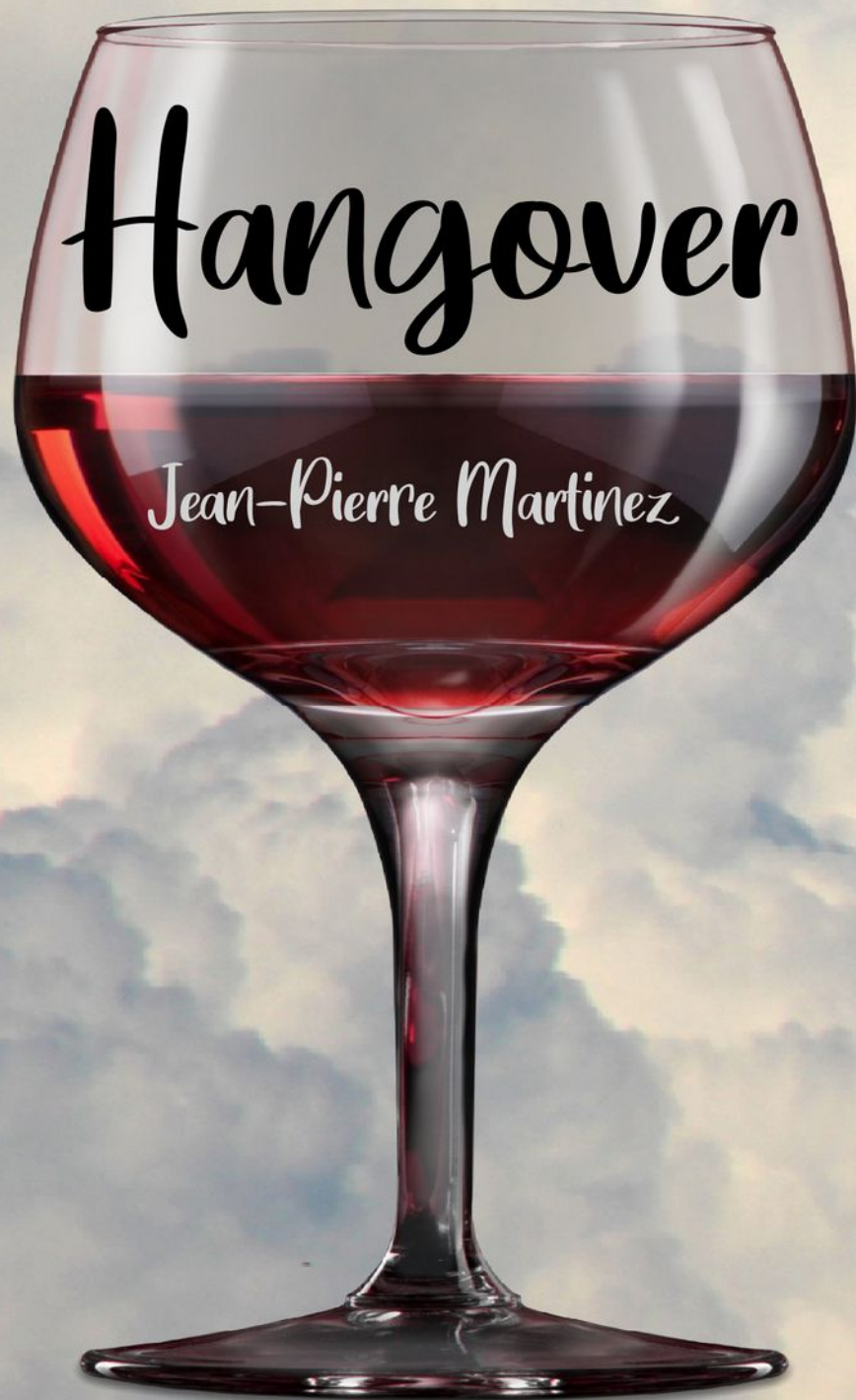


La Comédiathèque



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Hangover

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Peter and Karen have invited a couple they met at a restaurant, with whom they vaguely get along, for drinks. But since then, they've all had time to sober up, and they realise they don't have much in common to share. It looks like it might be a long evening. Unless...

Characters

Peter

Karen

Charles

Victoria

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A white trash couple occupies the cramped living room of a gloomy flat. A manky sofa and a coffee table cluttered with dirty dishes.

Peter – They're not coming.

Karen appears to be listening.

Karen – I never realised you could hear the subway from here. Did you cop that?

Peter – I'm telling you, they're not coming!

Karen – Maybe it wasn't so noisy back in the day... When it wasn't so run-down...

Peter – Did you at least give them our address?

Karen – Or maybe my ears are getting sharper with age... Usually, it's the other way around...

Peter (*louder*) – Did you give them the address?

Karen – Oh, come on, no need to yell, I'm not deaf, you know!

Peter – The subway...

Karen – Yes, I did give them our address. On the tablecloth...

Peter – On the tablecloth?

Karen – A scrap of the paper tablecloth! Things are tight for us too... Do you reckon we can still afford to go to restaurants with fancy tablecloths?

Peter – Or maybe they lost the address... Perhaps that bit of tablecloth was left in a pocket and went through the washer. That happens all the time...

Karen – Oh, really? And how would you know? How often do you use the washer?

Peter – A scrap of tablecloth can easily get lost.

Karen listens again.

Karen – There's another subway... Maybe they're on it...

Peter – We should get business cards...

Karen – Business cards?

Peter – Nowadays, online, you can get a hundred business cards for just a few euros.

Karen – What the hell are we going to do with a hundred business cards?

Peter – It's still better than a scrap of paper tablecloth...

Karen – And who would you even give those hundred business cards to?

Peter – I don't know... To the people we meet...

Karen – To the people we meet? We never meet anyone!

Peter – Well, we do, here's proof.

Karen – Honestly, for us, one business card every decade would be more than plenty...

Peter – Yeah, I get it, but you can't order business cards one by one. It's at least a hundred.

Karen – Well... You said it yourself, they're not coming...

Peter – If we'd handed them a business card instead of a greasy bit of paper tablecloth, maybe they'd have come...

Karen – They'd have come? Just because we gave them a business card?

Peter – Because then this bloody piece of paper tablecloth wouldn't have ended up in the wash! That's why! A business card is less likely to get lost. It's made of cardboard! And even if it does go through the wash, with a bit of luck, it might still be somewhat legible.

Karen – You're right, let's get some waterproof business cards, machine washable. Check if you can find those online.

Peter – Well, they're not coming anyway...

Karen – Hey, it's only nine. Mind you.

Peter – We said half past eight.

Karen – "Half past eight to nine", he said! I remember it very well, because you asked him "half past eight or nine o'clock"?

Peter – And what did he answer?

Karen – I think he just brushed it off...

Peter – Anyway, it's nine now. We're past the deadline and they're still not here.

Karen – Deadline... Lucky we didn't plan dinner on top of it...

Peter – Oh, so now it's my bad for inviting them?

Karen – You didn't even invite them?

Peter – I just mentioned it'd be cool to catch up sometime over drinks... Didn't say when! You were the one who jumped on setting a date...

Karen – So you didn't want them to show up?

Peter – Well, yes, but . . .

Karen – Then why did you invite them for drinks? If you invite them, you have to set a date! We'd have looked like fools otherwise!

Peter – I was just being polite.

Karen – Polite? Petey, you're starting to freak me out... Everything okay?

Peter – Since we seemed to hit it off a little... I didn't think they'd actually take us up on it...

Karen – Well, it's just as well, you see, they're not here anyway... Honestly, these folks aren't really our kind of thing... I don't know what made you think bringing them over was a good idea...

Peter – Really? And what exactly is our kind of thing?

Karen – You know, the kind of folks who don't even bother with business cards because there's nothing to jot down! That's our vibe. But what about you? What would you even put on your business card?

Peter – Well, maybe they meant to call to cancel... That's what people usually do, right? Or maybe they've misplaced our number too... You did give it to them, right?

Karen – Of course, chill out. I scribbled it down on that makeshift tablecloth. You know, the one they accidentally tossed in the wash with their dirty laundry.

The doorbell rings.

Karen – Huh... maybe their washing machine wasn't working.

Peter remains frozen.

Peter – Shit, here they come, I guess...

Karen – See, that's the gamble you take when you invite folks over. Maybe we shouldn't invite anyone at all.

Peter – Well, go and see! Maybe it's a mistake...

Karen gives Peter a fuming look and goes to open the door.

Karen – Hello Charles!

Charles (*off stage*) – Good evening Karen ! You seem surprised to see us!

Victoria (*off stage*) – Didn't we agree on Thursday around nine o'clock?

Karen (*off stage*) – Yes, indeed... We said around half past eight to nine. But since it's now two past nine, Peter assumed you weren't coming...

Charles (*off stage*) – Ah, ah, ah! That's quite amusing!

Karen (*off stage*) – Please, come in... Peter! It's not a mistake! It's Charles! With his wife...

Charles and Victoria, appearing more affluent than their hosts, enter and exchange handshakes.

Peter – Hey there, welcome... Hello Victoria... It's Victoria, isn't it?

Charles – Indeed, that's her... She might have had a makeover since we last met, but yes, she's still Victoria, my wife.

Peter – No, I meant, it is Victoria... Your first name is Victoria...

Victoria – Yes, it is, it's Victoria. My husband's just teasing you...

Charles (*lightly tapping his wife's shoulder*) – Don't worry about it, Victoria. Everything's fine.

Victoria – I've only had my hair styled.

Karen – Oh, indeed! It suits you much better, doesn't it, Peter?

Peter – What?

Karen prefers to go on talking.

Karen – Just so you know, it's going to be casual... We haven't prepared anything special...

Victoria – Right, we did say it was just for drinks, didn't we? So, let's go and have the aperitif, as long as we have beverages!

Charles – Actually, we brought along a bottle of sparkling wine!

Peter – Well, good timing, we've grenadine syrup, right, Karen? We can pour a little into the sparkling wine, to make it taste sweeter.

Karen – Grenadine syrup... in the sparkling wine?

Peter – And why not?

Karen – I don't know...

Victoria – My husband's just joking. It's not sparkling wine, of course. It's genuine champagne.

Charles – We get it from a small producer in France.

Victoria – If you like it, we can share the address with you.

Karen – Champagne! Oh wow... we can't mix your grenadine syrup from Lidl with real French champagne...

Peter – Hey, it's not from Lidl, it's from Aldi!

Karen – That's just not fair! We invite you over for drinks, and you're the ones who bring the booze. Please, have a seat. Peter, can you grab the crackers and the peanuts?

Peter – Have we got crackers and peanuts?

Karen – Of course, we have crackers and peanuts! I have to stash them away, or he gobbles them up while glued to the football on TV, and then there's nothing left when we have guests... Hey, Petey, hustle!

Peter – Don't know where they are, I told you! Since YOU stashed them away...

Karen – Ugh, same old story... You can never count on them for anything... Well, I'll grab them. Excuse me, I'll be right back. Make yourselves comfy. Just relax and make yourselves at home.

Karen exits.

Peter – I hope they're not too close to expiring... We hardly ever have any visitors.

Charles – Ha, ha, ha! This Pete is quite a character! At least with you, one never gets bored! Isn't that right, Victoria?

Peter, who wasn't joking, seems somewhat surprised by their amusement. An awkward silence follows as the two guests glance around the rather modest room.

Victoria – So, do you find this place comfortable?

Peter – It's alright. It's small but at least... it's not too big for the two of us.

Victoria – Exactly...

Charles – Do you and Karen have any kids, Peter?

Peter – No... We could have, but... No, it didn't happen...

Victoria – It's never too late, you know.

Peter – Oh no, not now... And like I said, we don't have the space... Where would we put them?

Charles – Yes, of course...

Karen comes back with a tray of crackers and peanuts.

Karen – And here are the snacks... Well then, you haven't popped the champagne, yet?

Peter – You didn't bring the grenadine syrup?

Karen – Peter! Not with real champagne...

Victoria – But of course! If it pleases him... Besides, I'm going to have some myself. Come on then, to keep Peter company.

Peter – You see? Madame's joining in too. I'll go fetch the grenadine syrup.

Peter gets up and exits.

Charles – And it's not as if it were... a top-notch champagne.

Karen – Oh, definitely not. Nowadays, you can find champagne in supermarkets for the price of a bottle of cider.

Charles – Let's hope this one doesn't have the same taste...

Karen – I wasn't saying that about yours, of course. Which comes straight from France.

Charles – Do you think French champagne from supermarkets doesn't come directly from France? Just kidding....

Peter (*off stage*) – Karen! I can't find the grenadine syrup!

Karen (*sighing*) – I swear... he's going to drive me crazy... Be right back...

Karen leaves. Victoria's polite smile instantly freezes.

Victoria – My goodness, Charles, what are we even doing here?

Charles – Come on now, don't overreact... It's true they're a bit... quirky, but hey, they're nice folks, aren't they?

Victoria – Quirky? But they're genuine degenerates!

Charles – Listen, darling, we can't only socialise with people who are like us! Like our colleagues from work or your mom.

Victoria – What about my mom? What's wrong with my mom?

Charles – Nothing... but you have to broaden your horizons, you know? You're always telling the kids that they should respect different people..

Victoria – But Charles... I'm talking about disabled people!

Charles – Well, at least we can get a good laugh at the expense of the commoners... Come on, relax a little! I'm sure tomorrow we'll only remember the funny moments of this unforgettable evening...

Victoria – Tomorrow? If we haven't died of an infectious disease by then. Just look at this dump! I hesitated to even sit on the sofa. I was afraid I'd get stuck to it because it was so greasy. Not to mention the dirty dishes lying on the table. Look, there's mould growing on this plate!

Charles – Ah, indeed...

Victoria – Imagine if they insist on keeping us for dinner!

Charles – You're right, it sucks...

Victoria – Yes, it really sucks. Yes, it sucks like hell!

Charles – Why are you talking like that?

Victoria – I don't know... maybe I've already been contaminated...

Charles – We should have checked that we're up to date with all our vaccinations before coming...

Victoria – I told you that I wasn't really sure about this invitation! Well, it's too late now.

Victoria – Listen Charles, it's the psychologist in me talking. This guy isn't clear, you know what I mean?

Charles – How can you say so?

Victoria – His handshake was limp!

Charles – Limp? You mean clammy?

Victoria – Limp! When he shook my hand earlier. I felt it...

Charles – Ah, got it. Good thing you have a degree in psychology... I didn't pick up on any of that.

Victoria – And then you don't have to act all superior about your supposed open-mindedness and tolerance towards the commoners. I'm sure the only reason you came here was to borrow his jigsaw!

Charles – His jigsaw?

Victoria – To finish putting up those shelves in the bathroom! I remember it crystal clear. When we left this restaurant and I asked you why you agreed to this invite, you told me word for word: 'and this guy seems like the type who'd have a jigsaw!'

Charles – Well... Let's calm down. We'll stay a while longer not to be rude, and then we'll go...

Victoria – What about sneaking out while they're in the kitchen instead?

Charles – Listen, sweetheart, we can't do that... It would be rude.

Victoria – THEY don't even have our address.

Charles – You're right, let's beat it.

They get up to leave, but Peter comes back with a bottle, followed by Karen.

Peter – And here's the grenadine syrup!

Karen hands Charles the champagne bottle.

Karen – There you go, the honour is all yours!

Charles takes the bottle.

Karen – Hey, can you grab the champagne glasses?

Peter – The champagne glasses... I have no clue where they are! Honestly, I didn't even know we had champagne glasses... It's plain and simple, I don't even know what a champagne glass looks like!

Karen leaves with a sigh. Charles is about to uncork the bottle but stops in his tracks.

Charles – I'll wait a bit longer then... I wouldn't want this precious liquid to end up on the carpet...

Victoria – In the subway, the bottle may have been shaken a little.

Peter – I'll take care of the grenadine syrup...

Karen comes back with four glasses, setting them on the coffee table.

Karen – Here are the champagne glasses...

Peter – Who wants syrup in their champagne?

Victoria – I'll join you...

Peter pours a bit of grenadine syrup into two champagne glasses. Charles pops the cork.

Charles – There we go!

Charles fills the glasses.

Karen – Ah, it's bubbling nicely...

Charles – Indeed.

Peter – That's how you know it's authentic champagne.

Karen – Have some crackers.

They help themselves.

Victoria – Thanks...

Charles – So then, here's to you!

Peter – Right, cheers!

They clink glasses and take a sip.

Victoria – I think it could be chilled a little more, don't you?

Karen – It's really good just like it is.

Peter – You should try it with grenadine ...

They drink again to fill the silence.

Victoria – It's funny to be at your place like this...

Charles – Yes, it's very nice of you to invite us.

Victoria – True, we hardly know each other...

Charles – I have to admit, we shared some good laughs at that restaurant.

Karen – Yeah, we did. Can't quite remember why, in fact...

Victoria – I must say, neither can I....

Charles – Well, we did indulge in quite a few drinks, didn't we?

Karen – Did we ever?

Victoria – I was completely tipsy, for sure.

Karen – Need a refill?

Victoria – With pleasure!

Karen fills the glasses again.

Karen (to Charles) – Still no grenadine?

Charles – No really, thanks... Just straight.

Victoria – This weather's weird, isn't it!

Karen – Yeah, totally...

Victoria – Yes... It's like fall weather.

Charles – You know, it's already October.

Victoria – Indeed. The beginning of the school year was over a month ago.

Charles – All Saint's Day will be upon us soon.

Victoria – It's unbelievable how time flies.

Karen – Yeah... (*Silence*) You alright, Petey? You dozing off?

Peter – No, why?

Karen – You're not saying much...

Peter – What do you want me to say?

Karen – I don't know, when we got guests, we make conversation.

Charles – Maybe Peter is waiting to have something interesting to say...

Karen – Then you won't hear the sound of his voice for a long time.

Peter – What's that supposed to mean? You think what you've been chatting about is fascinating? Do you find what she's saying fascinating? Huh?

Victoria – I mean...

Peter – Whether to pour syrup in the sparkling wine or not! You reckon Monsieur and Madame came here for a wine tasting session? (*Turns back to the other two*) Did you come here for a wine tasting session?

Charles – No, well...

Peter – See? They didn't come here for a wine tasting, they came for drinks.

Karen – Then go ahead, if you've got something interesting to say to our guests!

Peter – Well, why not? (*A moment*) Right now, nothing's coming to mind, but hey... We're not in a rush, are we? Are you guys in a rush?

Charles – No..No rush...

Peter – See, they're not in a hurry! Let's enjoy our drinks... It's you who's pressuring us here!

Charles and Victoria exchange a puzzled look.

Victoria – Anyway... What do you do for a living? I mean, last time, we barely had a chance to really chat...

Peter doesn't answer. Nor does Karen. They sulk and give each other sly looks while sipping their champagne, forgetting the presence of their guests. Peter seems to be thinking about what he is going to say.

Peter – There wasn't too much traffic on the road?

Karen rolls her eyes heavenward with a sigh, underscoring the banality of his remark, and Peter shoots her an incendiary glance.

Victoria – We came by subway.

Charles – We live three stops away from here.

Victoria – By the way, from your place, you can hear the subway pretty well.

Karen – Ah, see?

Charles – The subway? No, I don't hear a thing...

Peter – My wife hears voices, like Joan of Arc. But for her, it's trains..

Charles – Mine too, apparently...

Victoria – Please!

Charles – I was kidding. It must be tinnitus...

Victoria – Tinnitus... Come on, Charles... How would I hear the same sound as Karen, at the same time, if it were tinnitus?

Peter – What?

Charles – When we hear noises that don't exist...

Karen – Noises that don't exist! Call us crazy, too! It's not our fault if you both are deaf as posts. Right Lisbeth?

Victoria – Um... me, it's actually Victoria.

Peter – It's true that Victoria and Lisbeth are a bit similar... Especially when you're as deaf as a doornail.

Karen – So, these ladies and gentlemen wanted to know what you do that's interesting in life.

Peter – You mean as a profession?

Karen – Well, yes, as a profession!

Peter – Currently, I work for the Sanitation Department.

Charles – Sanitation?

Karen – My husband is a garbage collector.

Peter – I think they understood that, right?

Victoria – There is no such thing as a bad job... What would we do if there was nobody to pick up our trash?

Karen – Exactly... Well, your trash, my husband is the one who picks it up...

Peter – You wouldn't believe the stuff folks chuck in their trash bins. Once, we even stumbled upon a baby...

Victoria – A baby?

Peter – Oh no, but alive, you know? Happened on bulk trash pickup day...

Karen – We thought about keeping it, but the paperwork was overwhelming.

Victoria – Yes... It was simpler in Moses' time.

Peter – Moses...?

Victoria – You know who I mean. The baby whose parents left him in a basket to float down the Nile... it was the Pharaoh's daughter who found him...

Peter – And then ?

Victoria – No, nothing, it's... it was in a basket, not in a dumpster, but it's a similar story...

Karen – Never heard of that... but you see so many things now. Was that a long time ago?

Charles and Victoria exchange a worried glance.

Charles – And what about you, dear madam? What do you do for a living?

Peter – Karen? She does nothing.

Karen – I'm on sick leave.

Peter – For five years.

Karen – Is it my fault that I'm depressed?

Peter – It's not mine either...

Karen – Well, that's debatable...

Charles – And... before you got sick, what did you do?

Karen – I was part of the prison staff.

Peter – My wife was a prison guard. Screw if you prefer.

Victoria – Oh yes, indeed, that... It must be very depressing.

Karen – It was also where I met my husband.

Charles (*to Peter*) – Before being a garbage collector, were you also a screw? I mean... a prison guard.

Karen – Oh, no... Peter was a resident...

Charles – A resident...

Victoria – You mean that... Oh, I see...

Karen – We met at the prison. We weren't on the same side of the bars, but later we found common ground.

Peter – Yes... Now I am serving my sentence at home.

Charles – I see... You're wearing an electronic bracelet.

Peter – No... Just a gold-plated wedding ring.

Charles – Okay... Good old Peter!

Silence.

Karen – You are not asking my husband why he was in prison?

Victoria – Well...

Charles – We wouldn't want to be indiscreet.

Peter – It was a misunderstanding.

Karen – My husband was the victim of a miscarriage of justice.

Charles – So he was released after a new trial...

Karen – Rather following a reduced sentence, in fact. Apparently, it was only his lawyer whom Peter managed to convince of his innocence...

Peter – He was a court-appointed lawyer.

Peter takes a cracker. Karen shoots him a disapproving look.

Karen – Grab a cracker while there are still around... And you, what do you do?

Charles – Well I... but please, Victoria, the floor is yours.

Victoria – I take care of disabled children.

Peter – You mean children who is not normal?

Karen – Not 'is not normal', Peter... We say children that are not normal.

Victoria – Actually, I prefer if we say children with disabilities.

Karen – Oh yeah, got it. And what exactly is wrong with them? Like a missing arm or leg?

Charles – More like a missing screw...

Victoria shoots him a stern look.

Victoria – These are children with mental disabilities. Mainly autistic.

Peter looks puzzled, evidently unfamiliar with the term.

Peter – Ah yes, autistic...

Victoria – Individuals who have difficulty establishing communication with others.

Karen – In that case, you should occupy yourself with my husband then... And you Charles? Do you also work with imbeciles?

Charles – Uh no... I... I am a physical education teacher in a secondary school... Even if sometimes, I feel like I'm working with motor-disabled people...

Victoria – Charles, please...

Charles – My wife hates jokes about this subject.

Karen – Sports teacher! Oh yes, now that you mention it... You can really see the pecs under your tight t-shirt...

Peter – And they say I'm the vulgar one!

Karen – What? Even if we can't touch, we're allowed to admire beautiful things, aren't we?

The guests are embarrassed.

Victoria – Well, perhaps we won't disturb you any longer...Right, Charles? Remember, my parents are expecting us for dinner.

Charles – Your parents? Oh yes, your parents...

Karen – Are you already bored with us?

Victoria – Oh no, not at all...It's just that...

Karen – You see, Peter? If you had a bit more conversation, we'd probably have a few more friends. And it isn't with your business cards that...

Charles – Business cards?

Peter – You have business cards?

Charles – Uh... Yes, well... It's mostly Victoria, with her job...

Karen – To hand out to idiots when she happens to meet them outside of work.

Peter – You will leave us yours when you leave.

Karen – Do you have kids?

Victoria – Uh... Yes... A boy and a girl... They're at my mother's, actually...

Karen – But why did you come, exactly?

Charles – Why?

Victoria – Because you invited us, didn't you?

Charles – Remember, we said for drinks around nine o'clock.

Peter – Firstly, we said eight-thirty to nine.

Victoria – So you see, you did invite us, didn't you, Peter?

Karen – They came to poke fun at you, my Petey. That's why they came.

Victoria – But no, not at all!

Charles – And whether it's eight-thirty or nine o'clock, what difference does it make, eh?

Peter – Oh, but it makes all the difference! It means you hesitated to come until the last minute.

Karen – And on top of that, they already want to leave... That's not very polite...

Peter – So by arriving at nine o'clock, you thought to yourselves: we'll be bored for half an hour less. Is that what went through your little heads?

Karen – But of course, Peter! We're not good enough for them to arrive on time when we invite them.

Victoria – Well, we did arrive on time, since we said between eight-thirty and nine o'clock!

Peter – You arrived at two past nine!

Charles gets up.

Charles – Alright, that's enough now. We come to your place for drinks, we bring a bottle of champagne, and all you have to offer is some stale crackers, and on top of that we get yelled at!

Peter – Okay, you're bringing a bottle of champagne, but why are you bringing a bottle of champagne, huh?

Charles – Why?

Peter – To shame us! That's why!

Victoria – To shame you?

Karen – Totally! To humiliate us! They think, champagne, they mustn't drink it every day in their hovel, those proles. Let's bring them a bottle, that'll be a change from whisky.

Peter – But definitely not Dom Pérignon, huh? A little cheap champagne on sale at Leader Price will do. Anyway, they won't know the difference, they never drink champagne.

Karen – Well, guess what! We have drunk champagne before. And on top of that, it was a good one!

Peter – Like at your sister Nicole's wedding last year, for instance. Wasn't that Dom Pérignon?

Karen – No, Veuve Clicquot, I think.

Peter – Exactly! Veuve Clito. And we could clearly see that the champagne you brought us wasn't worth a shot of cider.

Victoria – You really are out of your mind.

Charles – You had already started the drinks before we arrived, that's it.

Karen – Did you hear that, Petey? Mister is calling us alcoholics now. And you're not saying anything?

Peter – Well, that's not very nice, Charles... Those aren't things you say to friends...

Karen – So the crackers aren't good enough for you either?

Peter – Did you find them stale, those crackers?

Karen – I found them quite good, those crackers. They was regular crackers.

Peter – They WERE regular crackers, Karen. They were regular crackers. You forget that Mister is a professor.

Karen – Professor, my ass... A sports teacher! Do you really need a degree for that, or is it enough to put on shorts and puff out your chest like in a beauty pageant?

Charles – Alright, come on, Victoria. Let's go. We're not going to stand here and be insulted...

Karen – Fine, go have dinner with your mother-in-law, since apparently she's waiting for you! But well, you could have come up with a better excuse...

Peter – Sure... No one is so eager to have some chow at their mother-in-law's.

Karen – Next time, at least agree beforehand...

Victoria – I had a bad feeling about this invitation, I told you...

They are getting ready to leave.

Peter – Where are you off to? You already want to leave us? That's not very polite...

Charles – We told you, we're expected for dinner.

Peter – There is still a bit of bubbly left. We shouldn't let it go to waste.

Karen – And then we'll let you taste our whisky. We get it from a small producer in the suburbs.

Victoria – We've had enough to drink. We're leaving, we're telling you.

Peter intervenes.

Peter – At my place, I'm the one who decides when we leave.

Charles – Oh really? And do you plan to hold us back by force?

Peter – Why not?

Charles – Be reasonable, old chap. I don't think you stand a chance. And you can barely stand up...

Peter – Maybe so, but I have more convincing arguments.

Peter pulls out a gun. Charles and Victoria stare at the gun, paralysed.

Charles – I think we've gotten off on the wrong foot. Let's all calm down and have one last drink together before we part as good friends, okay?

Peter – Well there you go... So you don't leave us with a bad impression.

Karen – And so you won't hesitate to come back to ours for drinks. We may be modest folks, but we know how to entertain as well.

Peter – And we have our pride. Get the whisky and the ice, Karen.

Karen – Oh, I think I forgot to put ice in the freezer.

Karen takes out the bottle and glasses.

Peter – It doesn't matter, we'll drink it at room temperature.

Karen – Lisbeth, it doesn't bother you drinking hooch at room temperature, does it?

Victoria – No, no, not at all, please.

Charles – Nor do I, it will do very well, I assure you.

Karen – Usually, we drink it straight, it's simpler.

Victoria – As you wish...

Peter – Come on, we can speak informally now that we're buddies, right?

Charles – Alright. If you wish. Well, if you want. No problem.

Peter opens the bottle, ready to serve the drink.

Peter – There you have it! That's a proper drinks!

They clink their glasses.

Karen – Well, cheers.

Peter – To friendship, Charlie! Mind if I call you Charlie?

Charles – Of course.

Peter – Not because Charles, it's not to say but...

Charles – My friends call me Charlie.

Peter – Well, there you go! I guessed right then.

Karen – My husband is quite the mind reader.

Victoria – I can see that...

Peter – I'm Petey. And you, sweetie, do you have a nickname?

Victoria – Um...No, not really...

Karen – Come on, don't be so shy...

Victoria – When I was little, my parents used to call me Pumpkin.

Karen – Pumpkin? Isn't that the nickname for Lisbeth?

Victoria – Er, no, but actually my name is...

Karen – We'll call you Lisbeth. When you're named Lisbeth, you don't need a nickname. Help yourselves to some snacks.

Peter – They're crackers, Karen. So, what do you think of my hooch?

Charles – Oh, yes, it's...it's very good...

Victoria – Yes, you can definitely taste the peat!

Karen – The peat...

Peter – No, just kidding, don't force yourself.

Karen – Who cares about the taste of whisky anyway.

Peter – As long as it's got about 45 degrees in the shade, the count is good. Grab some crackers, Lisbeth!

Victoria – Thank you.

Victoria forces herself to swallow another cracker.

Peter – So, what shall we do now? How about a little poker?

Karen – Strip poker? Seriously, Peter, you don't propose strip poker to guests on their first visit... Haven't you glanced at the etiquette manual?

Peter – Strip poker... I said a little poker! Seems like you're going deaf, old girl. Or maybe you're hearing voices! Is it because you're dying to check out Charlie's buttocks?

Karen – There was a subway passing just at that time...

Peter – Yeah, like with Joan of Arc. There was some crackling on the line, that's why she ended up on the barbecue... Did you hear the subway, huh?

Victoria – No...

Peter – The subway's only in your head, Karen! And I think it's about to go off the rails.

Charles – Oh, I think I heard something this time.

Karen – See? I'm not imagining things!

Peter – Well, I think we'll skip the poker. No takers..

Peter brandishes his gun.

Peter – Fancy a game of Russian roulette? It's been a while since I've played...

Charles – Personally, I'd still prefer poker... Don't you, Victoria...

Victoria – Yes, a little poker, why not? I'm not too familiar with the rules, but I can learn...

Karen – Don't worry, Peter is joking...

Peter – We're not drunk enough yet to play Russian roulette. Maybe later in the evening, if we're feeling up for it...

Victoria – How about a game of Scrabble?

Charles gives her a disapproving and concerned look.

Charles – I'm not sure if our friends...

Karen – What's that again? Is it like Jeopardy or something?

Peter – Isn't that a pain in the ass?

Charles – Well, let's forget about Scrabble then. I'm already forced to play it with my mother-in-law every Friday.

Victoria (*with a pinched expression*) – II didn't realize it bothered you that much...

Charles – Well, now you know.

Karen – Come on, lovebirds, no need to argue! We don't have any games anyway...

Peter – Didn't we have a Monopoly?

Karen – What do you think, Lisbeth?

Peter – I quite like Monopoly now and then. We made one when I was in the slammer with a piece of cardboard and some shirt buttons.

Victoria (*with a nervous laugh*) – I suppose you often landed in jail on the board?

Dead silence. Charles shot another disapproving glance at Victoria. Peter bursts out laughing.

Peter – Ah, ah, ah! That's a good one! Oh, Lisbeth, you crack me up!

Karen – You're quite a funny one, aren't you?

Peter – Nah, it was a special kind of Monopoly. Instead of "Go directly to jail", we had "Go directly to the brothel." Much more motivating, I tell you.

Karen – I was the one who confiscated the game from them. So, we still have it at home.

Charles – Do you?...

Peter – Would you like to see it?

Charles – Yes, why not? Right, Lisbeth? I mean Victoria...

Peter – Well, in the meantime, let's have another drink.

He serves them again, nudging the revolver on the table slightly, under the anxious gaze of his guests.

Victoria – I'm not sure if this is very wise... And besides, my mother will be waiting for us...

Charles – If that's the only thing...

Victoria shoots him an irritated look.

Charles – Now that we are friends, can I ask you something, Peter?

Peter – Yes of course, we're mates.

Charles – Alright, then what landed you in... the slammer? I mean... What was that judicial error about?

Peter – A judicial error?

Karen – Which one? Because you know, my husband's life is just one big string of judicial errors. Even his birth, I wonder if it wasn't a mix-up...

Peter – It's simple, in prison, they called me the innocent.

Karen – I'm not sure it was just that, but well...

Peter – Oh yeah... It's like fate has decided to have it in for me.

Karen – His first stint in prison was for armed robbery.

Peter – Since it was the bank right downstairs from me, the cashier thought he recognized me. Of course, I told them, he sees me pass by every morning to go to the pub next door for drinks.

Charles – And this robbery, was it... with this revolver?

Peter brandishes his weapon.

Peter – This one? Ah no, this one is made of soap.

Victoria – Made of soap?

Peter – The real one is stashed in the kitchen drawer. It's a good imitation, right?

Charles – Oh yes...

Peter – I made that one too when I was in the slammer, for a getaway.

Charles – You were quite handy with your hands, evidently.

Karen – I confiscated it before he could get into trouble. With time off for good behaviour, he had only a few years left to serve...

Peter – The last years always seem the longest. It's like with marriage.

Victoria – So, this is a fake gun...

Peter picks up the revolver.

Peter – A real masterpiece... Took me months... Shame I never got to use it...

Charles and Victoria remain taken aback for a while.

Victoria – Well... perhaps we should be going now...

Charles – I think I could do with another pick-me-up before we go...

Charles, already quite tipsy, grabs the bottle of whisky and pours himself another glass.

Victoria – Looks like you're drinking it neat now too.

Karen – There's still some champagne left, we can't let it go to waste.

Charles – You're right, Kaz, that would be a shame.

Charles pours the remaining champagne into his whisky.

Victoria – You mix whisky with your champagne?

Charles (*taking a sip*) – It's a bit unusual, but not bad. Would you like to try?

Peter – There's no more champagne left...

Charles – Ah, well then, bottoms up!

He empties his glass in one gulp.

Victoria (*trying to calm him down*) – Don't you think you've had enough already?

Charles – It's fine... A little excess now and then can't hurt.

Victoria – And then my mother will be waiting for us...

Charles – Oh, come on, your mother won't be waiting for us! You think they're dumb enough not to have figured it out by now? Your mother's on Friday. And at your mother-in-law's, it's not half past eight to nine, it's precisely seven ten!

Peter and Karen exchange a perplexed look.

Karen – Looks like there's going to be some action...

Victoria – Well, I'm leaving anyway.

Charles grabs the gun and points it at Victoria.

Charles – You're not going anywhere, Lisbeth!

Victoria – But Charles! It's a soap gun...

Charles – Yeah, well anyway...

A moment of awkward silence.

Karen – Hey, Peter, are you sure this one isn't real? I mean, I get that it's a masterpiece, but still...

Peter – You think so?

Peter takes the revolver from Charles' trembling hands and examines it.

Peter – Oh yeah, look at that... It's so well-made... Even I managed to be fooled...

Karen – But since it's the real one, Petey! It's normal that it's well-made!

Peter – You're right...

Victoria is paralysed with fear.

Victoria – Never would I have thought that one day you would point a weapon at me. Your wife!

Charles – I thought it was made of soap...

Karen – That's true, Charlie, you could have killed her.

Peter – When you're not used to it... Weapons can be dangerous...

Karen takes the revolver from Peter's hands.

Karen – One shot, and it's gone. Especially with such an antique. There isn't even a safety catch!

Peter – Come on, let's all sit back down and have another drink, okay?

Peter fills the glasses again.

Karen – I think we've finished all the crackers.

Peter – With all these drinks, I'm starting to have the munchies, aren't you?

Charles – Yeah...

Peter – Will you be staying for dinner with us? Since it's not the day you're visiting the in-laws after all...

Victoria seems to be pretty drunk herself.

Victoria – I must have been mistaken... It's not Friday?

Charles – No, but we wouldn't want to overstay our welcome.

Karen – And besides, we have nothing in the fridge anyway. Just stale bread...

Victoria – Do you have any milk and sugar?

Karen – Yes, perhaps...

Victoria – I can make you some French toast!

Peter – French toast?

Victoria – We used to make it often when I was a scout... It's very quick, you'll see. It only takes five minutes! And then we won't waste anything. (*To Karen*) Could you show me the kitchen?

Karen exits with Victoria.

Peter – Ah women... At least we'll have peace for five minutes...

Charles – Yeah...

A moment.

Peter – I hear the subway too, you know.

Charles – Really?

Peter – I'm just pulling her leg.

Charles – Oh, I see...

Peter – You know what your problem is, Charlie?

Charles – No.

Peter – Your mother-in-law.

Charles – That's not entirely wrong. Your wife is right, Peter, you're quite the psychologist...

Peter – If you want, I can help you get rid of her.

Charles – Excuse me?

Peter – Aren't you fed up with Scrabble nights every Friday?

Charles – Well, yes but...

Peter – Come on, Charlie! A real man doesn't play Scrabble. He plays poker! Scrabble is for the ladies! You're a sports teacher, aren't you?

Charles – Yes, well...

Peter – Of course, there'll be some expenses...

Charles – Wait, are you serious, Petey?

Peter grabs the revolver from the table.

Peter – This one, trust me, it's not made of soap. But when I use it, the shit will hit the fan.

Charles – Really?

Peter – This weapon may be an antique, but it's brought joy to many before...

Charles – Joy?

Peter – The heist at the bank, it was my first gig... But I quickly realized that hold-ups weren't my thing.

Charles – Oh, I see.

Peter – Way too risky. Especially at my age.

Charles – Reflexes aren't what they used to be, that's for sure...

Peter – Yeah, and especially ten years in the slammer now, given the state of my liver, it could quickly become a life sentence.

Charles – So you've decided to settle down?

Peter – Nah, but I've opted for something more laid-back.

Charles – That's good to hear.

Peter – I went freelance, with my wife. She knew her way around weapons too. Met her in prison. Told you that, didn't I?

Charles – Yes...

Peter – Garbage collector, that's just a cover. My real job now is to rid the folks who employ me of people who might want to cause them trouble.

Charles – I see...Bodyguard...

Peter – I don't really like that term, but usually, they call it a hitman.

Charles – Oh! Really?

Peter – Me, I prefer bounty hunter. Like Joss Randall. You know what I mean? 'Wanted, Dead or Alive', you know it?

Charles – Uh... Yes...

Peter – Steve McQueen, he's my idol. I had a poster of him with his sawn-off Winchester on my closet door in prison. You see what I mean? With the Winchester holster strapped to the thigh with a little leather cord, like a garter.

Charles – A garter?

Peter – The others used to make fun of me, because for them, it was more pin-up posters in garters that they had on their closet doors, you see?

Charles – Excuse me Petey, but... Hitman... We are quite far from... 'Wanted, Dead or Alive', right?

Peter – If you think about it, it's kinda the same thing, isn't it? Okay, it's not exactly legal, but I'm also clearing society of all sorts of troublemakers. I'm some sort of vigilante, you know. It's just that... It's private justice, you know.

Charles – Oh yeah, I suppose, when you put it like that...

Peter – So what do you say, Charlie?

Charles – I don't know... Is it expensive?

Peter – I'll give you a friend's rate...

Charles – Clearly, it's tempting, but...

Victoria arrives and brandishes a frying pan.

Victoria – And here is the French toast!

Peter – If you want, I'll give you a deal for both.

Karen arrives with plates.

Karen – Looks like you're getting along after all.

Victoria – What were you two conspiring about with those secretive looks?

Peter – Stay out of it, Lisbeth, we were talking business...

Karen serves the toast.

Victoria – Don't worry, there's enough for everyone. You had quite a stock of stale bread in your kitchen...

Karen – I believe it was already there when we moved into this flat.

Charles – Not too much for me, thanks...

Peter – The previous tenant must have been raising rabbits in cages.

Karen – Wouldn't surprise me. A colleague from the prison let me have this palace when he retired. Maybe having cages at home reassured him. With more docile tenants.

Peter starts eating.

Peter – Oh yes. It's really good. A true gourmet! Maybe we'll keep her a little longer, huh, Charlie?

They all laugh together.

Karen – It's still funny, isn't it?

Charles – What, Karen?

Karen – Honestly, I didn't think you would come. And that at this hour, after drinks, we would all be here together eating stale bread.

Victoria – Oh no? And why?

Charles – Stop it, we can tell them now. It's true that we hesitated a lot to come. It was even you who didn't want to go... You were saying that Peter and Karen, it wasn't our kind of thing.

Peter – Not our kind, exactly! That's what my wife was telling me too.

Victoria – We had just exchanged a few words, at that restaurant. That's not enough to know people. So, to be friends like that...

Peter – Shows that first impressions are often right.

Karen – Do you often go to that pizzeria?

Charles – It was the first time. It's true that this place is quite typical, isn't it?

Victoria – My husband thought it looked a bit like the pizzerias we see in mafia movies, so we went in out of curiosity. And you, do you go there often ?

Peter – That's where I handle my business.

Victoria – Your business? I thought you were a garbage collector.

Peter – Yes...I dispose of garbage...But I've privatized part of my activities.

Victoria – Well, I'd like to start my own business too, but I'm hesitating a bit.

Karen – With your nut cases, you mean?

Victoria – As a psychologist, yes. What legal status did you choose? Self-employed?

Peter – Yes, you could call it that.

Victoria – And your wife? Does she help you out a bit?

Karen – We work together.

Charles – No kidding?

Peter – We take turns cleaning, and when necessary, I finish with the jigsaw...

Charles – I told you this guy looked like he had a jigsaw.

Victoria – Working as a couple is ideal... when you get along...

Peter is about to light a cigarette.

Karen – Not here, you know.

Peter – Okay... You smoke, Charlie?

Charles – No, thank you... In my line of work...

Peter – Come with me to the balcony anyway, we can continue talking business.

Charles – I'm not sure if...

Victoria – But go ahead!

Charles – Well, alright...

They exit.

Victoria – You shouldn't stay with him.

Karen – What?

Victoria – I'm a psychologist, and believe me, this guy is a psychopath.

Karen – You mean he's dangerous?

Victoria – He just got out of prison and he has a revolver!

Karen – Oh that...

Victoria – He doesn't mistreat you, does he?

Karen – Well, he doesn't really help with household chores. And once, I even caught him peeing in the kitchen sink when the dishes weren't done.

Victoria – Oh my God...And you never thought about divorce?

Karen – No...But it's true that I often think about killing him.

Victoria – Oh really...Well, that's a good start. But what could possibly keep you attached to a guy like that?

Karen – Habit, I guess. And the fear of not finding someone like him, even worse.

Victoria – Even worse? Do you think that's possible?

Karen – I was a prison warden. It's possible, believe me. It's simple, It's simple, I chose the best of the bunch.

Victoria – At the same time... it was a prison. It's like if I told you, I chose my husband from a psychiatric hospital, and I picked the least crazy one.

Karen – What can you do, it's life. They say most married people meet their spouses at work. And you? Are you happy with your husband?

Awkward silence.

Victoria – Can I confide in you, Karen?

Karen – Of course! We're friends, aren't we?

Victoria – It must be because I've had a bit to drink, and I find you really sympathetic, because I haven't told anyone about this yet.

Karen – About what, Lisbeth?

Victoria – I've met someone.

Karen – But someone...

Victoria – Yes.

Karen – Ah, I see...

Victoria – I didn't think it could happen to me again, but there it is. It happened.

Karen – And who is it?

Victoria – You don't know him.

Karen – Yes, I can imagine. I mean, what kind of guy?

Victoria – He's a childhood friend... The son of my mother's neighbours... We even flirted a bit under the tent when we were scouts... Then he had a long stay in a sanatorium... Anyway, I ran into him again a month ago when I went to see my mother, and immediately... It was as if we had never been apart...

Karen – And what about Charlie then?

Victoria – I don't know... I feel so ashamed... I think I still love Charles, of course, but at the same time... Moses gets along so well with my mother...

Karen – Moses?

Victoria – His name is Moses. I confess I even thought about killing him.

Karen – But why? You've only just found him again?

Victoria – Charles, my husband!

Karen – Ah yes...

Victoria – It's silly, obviously.

Karen – Not so much.

Victoria – Do you think so?

Karen – Your husband, he's the squirrel type, right? I bet he's got you on a life insurance policy. Am I wrong?

Victoria – No.

Karen – So if something happened to Charles, you'd be a widow.

Victoria – Well, yes, naturally.

Karen – And even a widow in financial comfort.

Victoria – But why would anything happen to Charles? He's as fit as a fiddle. He's a sports teacher!

Karen – Just leave it to the professionals.

Victoria – Professionals...?

Karen – I can take care of it, if you want.

Victoria – But what exactly do you do for a living?

Karen – I make contracts.

Victoria – Contracts? Temporary contracts, you mean?

Karen – No, no, contracts. On someone's head.

Victoria – Life insurance contracts?

Karen – More like death insurance contracts...

Peter and Charles return.

Peter – You'll see, you won't regret it...

Charles – I hope so...

Peter – So ladies, having a nice chat?

Karen – We're talking business too.

Peter – Oh yeah?

Karen – I sense a stir, Petey. I think business is picking up..

Victoria – Well, we should probably leave you now. Right, Charles?

Karen – You don't want to have dinner with us?

Peter – You could have put the dirty dishes in the sink, at least... What will our friends think of us?

Karen – When I put them in the kitchen sink, you pee in them! Really, you don't want to stay?

Charles – We wouldn't want to impose on your hospitality.

Peter – Well, then it will be for another time.

Karen – Still, think about what I told you, Lisbeth.

Victoria – Alright...Here's my card. If you want to call me...

Charles (*to Peter*) – Here's mine.

Peter – You see, they have business cards!

Karen – Well then... Safe travels back.

Charles – Thank you for everything. Come on, Lisbeth?

Victoria – Um... My name is Victoria, actually!

Charles – Next time, we will do this at our place...

Karen – And this time, we'll bring the ammo.

Victoria (*aside to Charles*) – Aren't you going to ask him about the jigsaw?

Charles – For your mother?

Victoria – For the bathroom shelves!

Charles – Ah yes... But I think I'll wait until we're a little more intimate...

They shake hands.

Karen – Well, have a safe trip back.

Peter – Yeah, until we meet again...

Victoria (*aside to Charles*) – You can see that his hand is limp...

Charles and Victoria leave.

Karen – Well, they came after all.

Peter – Yeah, and we got along quite well, didn't we?

Karen – But I don't think our friendship will last very long...

Peter – With the job we do, it's not easy to keep friends.

Karen – Still, we should invite people over more often.

Peter – Yes.

A pause.

Karen – You were right. I think we should get business cards made.

Peter – Cheers to that...

They empty their glasses.

Karen – Did you hear it this time, right?

Peter – What?

Karen – The subway!

Peter – 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.

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

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Comedies for 2

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
Preliminaries
Running on empty
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Joker
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

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

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
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
Quarantine
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Smell of Money

Comedies for 5 to 6

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

Comedies for 7 or more

Backstage Comedy
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
Neighbours'Day
Open Hearts
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Him and Her
Lost time Chronicles
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stories to die for

Monologues

Like a fish in the air

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