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# Happy dogs

## Tragicomic Monologue

Jean-Pierre  
Martinez



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# Happy Dogs

**Tragicomic monologue**

**Jean-Pierre Martinez**

A man who lost his identification papers due to a simple misunderstanding sets off on a journey to reclaim his identity, but eventually resigns himself to becoming someone else. This short first-person narrative is tragically humorous and can be staged as a theatrical monologue.

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It's freezing. You wouldn't leave a dog out in this weather. Yet there are already several dogs, standing outside the closed door of Happy Dogs. Mostly poodles. White ones, black ones. Well, other breeds too. I don't know much about dogs. I just know that the lapdogs are the bread and butter of grooming salons. Just like little old ladies are the main customers for women's hair salons. Besides, these poodles have about the same haircut as their owners. They even wear the same little coats. I don't have anything against small dogs, mind you. Or little old ladies, for that matter. But here I am, on the pavement, and I'm the only one without a coat. Like an idiot, I thought I wouldn't need one. Happy Dogs is just downstairs, and it opens at ten. I thought I'd just pop down and head back up. But it's quarter past ten, and the door is still closed. I could go back, sure. But now that I'm here... The boss will surely show up with the keys, giving us some silly excuse like, 'I missed my bus', 'My youngest has the flu', or 'My mum died last night'. My condolences, but in the meantime, I'm freezing my nuts off.

I know what you're thinking: why queue in sub-zero temperatures outside a closed grooming salon when you don't have a dog? Even at the hairdresser, I only go once a year. And if there was a queue that day, believe me, I'd put it off until the next year. So, if I'm here, it's not to chat up the old ladies. What do you take me for? No, I'm just here to pick up a package, plain and simple. Happy Dogs is my drop-off point. Nowadays, with city centres becoming ghost towns, small businesses have to do something to make ends meet. So, to hold on for a few more weeks before they go bankrupt and close up shop for good, they also become pickup points. A corner shop, a mini-mart, a florist... Now you can grab your parcels just downstairs from where you live. It could be anywhere. Any kind of shop. Well, maybe not a sex shop, a fish market, or a funeral home. But it's definitely more convenient than queuing at the post office. Provided the boss opens up on time, of course, because right now... At least at the post office, I'd be warm while queuing. And those poor pooches would be warm too.

A young lad with a hood pulled over his head strolls in, sweating despite the freezing cold and his casual pace. He slowly pulls out a bunch of keys from the pocket of his shapeless parka. As he clumsily tries to fit them into the lock, one by one, without bothering to take off his gloves, he tells us his alarm didn't go off. Listening to him, you'd think he was the victim here. I don't know if there's ever been a class-action lawsuit against alarm clock manufacturers that refuse to ring. He's probably around sixteen. Maybe eighteen. Or even twenty. I have a hard time with ages. To white people, all Black people look alike. To old folks, all young people are the same age. This guy is rather tall. A bit obese. I don't know if you can be a bit obese, because obese is already huge. Let's just say he's quite large, then. A cherubic face. I'm not exactly sure what "cherubic" really means, but I think it perfectly describes his chubby baby face, framed by fairly long and distinctly greasy hair. And then, screw it, if you'd rather slog through pages of descriptions with loads of obscure words that the author probably took the time to double-check in the dictionary, just go read Dickens again. Nobody opens dictionaries much these days. You just check on the internet. Between two spellings, you go with the one that gets the most hits, thinking it's probably the right one. Based on the very democratic principle that the majority can never be wrong against the minority. That when a mistake is this popular, it's

bound to be tomorrow's norm. And a fashion faux pas, when embraced by the elite, eventually becomes the new standard for elegance. That's how some people ended up wearing tasseled loafers. Without socks.

The overgrown teenager wears combat boots. He's dressed entirely in black, paramilitary style. He's got the whole no-life look, wandering through life as if it's a video game, eyes glued to the screen and finger on the trigger. Honestly, he looks pretty weird. I can easily picture him on an American campus with a machine gun, shooting at anything that moves, starting with the teachers who humiliated him, the classmates who bullied him for no reason, and the girls he harassed without any success. But can you imagine a mass shooting in a dog grooming salon? I can already see the headlines: 'Massacre at Happy Dogs: Six Victims, Including Three Pekingese, Two Great Danes, and an Afghan Hound. Their Owner, Race Unknown, Is in Critical Condition.' No, it wouldn't look professional. Even ISIS wouldn't claim responsibility. Yet, the Talking Heads' song plays in my head: 'Psycho Killer... Qu'est-ce que c'est?' I'd better run for it.

The psycho finally finds the right key. The door opens, and all the dogs start barking in unison. Since I was first in line, I prepare to dash in just behind the gatekeeper, but a woman beats me to it, hoping to cut in front. I didn't see that one coming. She doesn't have a dog either. I block her way. 'Sorry, but I was here first, and I'm in a bit of a hurry...' She steps aside with an ironic smile. I probably don't look like someone with urgent business. 'Excuse me, I didn't know there was a queue.' So I go ahead of her into the shop, followed by a pack of furious dogs. It feels like I'm in a fox hunt, playing the role of the boar. I think one of those yappy dogs just nipped at my ankles. I choose to ignore it.

As soon as I step in, I'm hit with a vomit-inducing smell that seeps into the peeling wallpaper of this crummy dog grooming salon. The smell of dogs is worse than cigarette smoke. You can vacuum to get rid of the hair, scrub with disinfectant, and spray air freshener all you want, but it never completely goes away. Have you ever been in a car owned by someone with a German Shepherd? Even if the dog's been dead for three months, it still stinks. I mean, even if the body wasn't left in the trunk that whole time, and that German Shepherd enthusiast didn't smoke cigars on top of that. I hold my breath. But eventually, you have to breathe, and I know my time here will outlast my limited breath-holding capacity. All I want to do is collect my parcel, get out of this kennel, and head back to my little hideaway. But the pervert who could end my suffering isn't in any hurry. He's already disappeared into the back room, probably to turn off the alarm and turn on the coffee machine. I have time to look around. To avoid eye contact with the woman I just barged past, I check out the equipment on display, pretending I'm interested in the merchandise. Leather accessories, studded collars, chains, leads... If I didn't know I was at Happy Dogs, I'd think I was in a bondage shop. A zoophile version, considering the zoo-like smell.

The junior serial killer returns with a customer-service smile. 'Who's next?' I quickly flash the slip of paper with the order number I got by email. He takes it and glances at it distractedly. 'So, a parcel for...?' He looks up. 'Are there any other deliveries? That would save me a second trip.' Overjoyed, my rival also waves her claim slip, as if it were the winning number for the latest EuroMillions draw. She shoots me a revengeful smile. In the end, despite my rudeness, I won't even be first in line. 'Can I

see your IDs, please?' I hand mine over with some hesitation, a brief pause before letting go. He tugs a bit harder to pull it from me, with a sadistic grin. He's still wearing his gloves. To avoid leaving fingerprints? Either way, if I want my parcel, I have no choice. He takes both our cards, slips them into his pocket, and before heading back, he addresses the pack. 'The boss will be here soon. She'll take care of you.' The dogs bark even louder. I'm still not sure if it's because they're eager for grooming or because trying to avoid it altogether. Dogs can be hard to read.

The fat guy comes back with two packages of roughly the same size, stacked on top of each other. 'Wow, that's heavy! What's in there?' Like I'm going to tell you, jerk. We're not at customs, and you're not a cop. My rival, being more polite or maybe just wanting to get ahead of me, tells him they're books. The guy couldn't care less. I'm not even sure if he can read. He places the two boxes on the edge of the counter and whips out his electronic device for us to sign the receipt. As I struggle to scrawl a barely legible signature on the tiny screen, using a stylus the size of a cotton swab tied to the device with an overly short rubber band, I keep an eye on the two boxes as they teeter precariously. I check the screen to see how my signature turned out. I wouldn't even recognise it myself. I could have just drawn a cross. But apparently, nobody cares. They call it progress. A dull thud pulls my attention away from the screen. The two boxes have just toppled over. The chubby teen picks one up and shoves it into my arms without a word. I give him a hard look. 'I'll have you know that's fragile! I hope it's well-packed, because if it isn't...' He responds with a sarcastic tone: 'The important thing is that nobody got hurt.' He's got a point – if one of those rat-sized dogs had been hit by the box, it could've been their last grooming appointment.

Eager to leave, I head toward the exit. The guy calls me back with a chuckle, 'Your card!' Right, I'd forgotten. What did he need my ID for, anyway? To check my identity? In case I had sent myself a time bomb set to explode right now in this kennel...? I take my card, shove it in my pocket, and walk out without looking at anyone, clutching the box to my chest. Finally, I'm out on the street. Saved. I take a deep breath of fresh air. I'd rather breathe in fine particles than that dog smell...

I head straight back to my apartment. Fifth floor, no lift. This box is damned heavy. I drop it in the hallway as soon as I get in. I should get to work, but I don't have the energy to open my package right now. First, I'll take a nice hot bath to warm up. And change clothes. I still feel like I smell like dog. I sink into the scalding water. Now I smell like wet dog. The hot dog. I should have stopped downstairs for a coffee; it might have woken me up a bit. But I'm already too wound up. I end up falling asleep in the lukewarm water. And I have a strange dream. I'm a novelist. Or at least, I will be once I write my first novel. If you want to bake cakes or unclog toilets, you go to school and get a vocational qualification as a pastry chef or a plumber. And then you bake cakes or pump crap. It's simple. There's no vocational qualification for novelists. To become an author, you have to write a book. Becoming an author is about going from blank pages to yellow pages. From living in obscurity to a high-profile career. Until you've written something, you're just an ordinary mythomaniac, possibly guilty of creating unauthorized alternative truths. And until you've sold a book, you're just a prostitute working for free because there's no one to sell your charms to. Right now, I'm just a nobody trying to make a name for myself. And I don't even have the first

idea for my first novel...

I wake up in cold water. How long did I sleep? I could have drowned. The police would probably conclude it was suicide. Dying by accident after falling asleep in the bath isn't exactly glamorous. He died as he lived: stupidly. Would it be better for people to think it was a stupid accident or a final act of freedom? But why am I talking like it actually happened? I'm not dead, am I? Well, I might be if I stay in this freezing water for another five minutes. And to think I got in to warm up. I get out of the water, dry off with a towel, and get dressed. I'm hungry. The fridge is so empty that I'm wondering why I even keep it plugged in. What time is it? My watch has stopped. The battery's dead. Funny thing about batteries – they can last for up to five years, apparently. Five years. It's like elections. Long enough to forget the promises that weren't kept. But not long enough to forget the feeling of betrayal. When a battery dies, I always wonder: when did I last change it? Where was I? What was I doing? Who was I with? Was I more alive then? Happier? How many more watch or pacemaker batteries do I have before I reach the last one? I don't have the energy to go to the corner shop to get a new battery. I should probably just get a new watch. When you change the battery, the watch usually isn't waterproof anymore. I don't scuba dive, but if I have to take off my watch every time I take a bath... I order a pizza. It's probably not breakfast time anymore, anyway. I should get back to work. I don't feel like it. Maybe once I eat, I'll feel differently.

I turn on the TV while I wait. Oh great... The elections, just what I needed. The centrist primary. Seven dwarves arguing over who gets to kiss Snow White. The only way they'd stand a chance is if they all stacked on top of each other. Makes you want to head back to the bath after swallowing a bottle of sleeping pills. I turn off the TV. The box is still in the hallway. I get ready to open it, but there's a knock at the door. It's the pizza. Well, it didn't come by itself. In the hallway stands a guy with a helmet on his head and a pizza box in his hands. I don't have any cash. 'Can I write you a cheque?' He asks me for ID because he needs to jot down the number. Seriously, it's not my day. Everyone doubts my identity, even the pizza delivery guy. Soon, the shop assistant at the corner store will ask for my papers before consenting to serve me an espresso.

The Daft Punk guy looks at my ID card with a suspicious expression. Then at my face. Then back at my photo. Is there a problem? He hands the card back and leaves in a hurry. It feels odd having someone with a full-face helmet ask you to prove your identity right at your doorstep. I thought he wasn't going to let me back into my own home. I thought he wasn't going to let me back into my own home. I get what a Mexican might feel like when stopped by a motorcycle cop with fake papers on Route 66. Okay, Route 66 might not be the usual route for a Mexican, but I never claimed to be a geography expert. Route 66 is just the first one I thought of. What? What's wrong with my face? I glance absentmindedly at the card he just handed back to me and take a step back. Instead of my photo, there's the image of a middle-aged woman..

Luckily, the guy still gave me the pizza and returned my ID card. What else would he do with it, anyway? I mean, the pizza. Sell it reheated to another customer? It's already pretty bad when it comes out of the oven the first time. Judging by the smell, it's quite burnt. If he put it back in the oven, it would be for cremation. He probably

thought I was some kind of weirdo. Or a transgender person. That's probably why he gave me the pizza. Afraid of being sued for discrimination by the LGBT community. He might have thought it was a testing operation. Or maybe he was just in a hurry to leave this madhouse. It really is a crazy story. Who is this woman? Why do I have her ID, and where's mine? Well, it's not hard to figure out. The only place I went today was Happy Dogs. That idiot must have given me someone else's card. And whoever they are, they must have taken mine. Who knows if he did it on purpose, that little creep. And I was already suspicious. But seriously, how could I have known he'd hand me someone else's ID? Well, it might be a real one, but it's not mine. So what's the point? I need to get back there before they close.

I charge down the stairs, furious. In the end, it's lucky the pizza delivery guy asked for my ID, otherwise... Normally, you don't spend your time checking to see if your ID photo has changed. We're the ones who change over the years, not the photo. If you don't recognise yourself after a while, it's because we've turned grey, not because the photo has yellowed. But in this case, I've had a complete gender change. I might not have noticed until months later, like when trying to board a train or plane. No, it's utterly irresponsible to pull stunts like this!

I swing open the door to Happy Dogs like I'm entering a saloon, ready to draw my weapon. 'Where's that jerk?' The little lady behind the counter doesn't seem to understand right away what I'm talking about. I explain. She pretends to sympathise, without actually apologising. The crazy guy isn't here. He's a trainee. He only works in the morning. She looks at the ID card. It's not a regular customer. So she doesn't know her. Just someone who came to pick up a parcel, like me, and might never come back. An occasional visitor, not a member of the canine club with a loyalty card. No. They don't have her contact information. And they have no way to reach her. But maybe she'll come back once she realises the mix-up. Sure... In six months or a year. If she hasn't died in the meantime.

The shopkeeper looks at me with a feigned apologetic expression and a hint of suspicion. 'Are you sure it's a mistake?' I feel like strangling her. I'm holding a woman's ID card right in front of her, and she's asking if I'm sure it's a mistake. I snatch the card from her hands. No way am I leaving it with her, hoping that this woman comes back to return mine. At least this way, I have some leverage. Because, obviously, she's in the same mess as me. She doesn't have her identity either. I mean, she doesn't have her ID card. I leave my number with the poodle groomer, just in case, and suggest she choose her trainees more carefully. She mumbles something that I'd rather interpret as a commitment to do just that. I leave, not feeling any calmer. Looks like I'll have to investigate this myself.

I take advantage of the opportunity to buy a battery at the corner shop. It's still cheaper than getting a new watch. The second hand starts ticking again. I have a coffee at the café next door. A middle-aged woman is leaning on the counter right next to me. Her profile seems familiar, but I can't remember her name. Could she be the woman who walked off with my identity? How would I know? I've been avoiding making eye contact. I can't just ask her if she's got my ID in her bag instead of hers. It could be her. Or any woman in this city. I glance at the ID card. A name. An address. Thankfully, she lives in the neighbourhood. At least, according to the address on the

card. She might have moved. The card's already quite old. Almost expired. The coffee is lukewarm. I hate it when they serve lukewarm coffee. Or maybe I just took too long to drink it. My mind was elsewhere. This whole thing is starting to obsess me.

The woman who was beside me is already heading for the door. Too late to ask her if she's got my ID instead of hers. She turns around one last time, like she's waving to her audience before exiting the stage. Suddenly, her name comes back to me—she's an actress we've seen on TV for years. Though she's been appearing less and less lately. Actresses of a certain age are easier to recognize from a distance than up close. Especially without makeup. Reality doesn't like close-ups. The truth is easier to perceive from afar. But who is this woman? Not this fading actress—the woman who stole my identity. The waiter shoots me an ironic look. What if he's in on it too? I'm starting to lose my mind. I wonder if I might have a slight fever. I decide to leave without finishing this horrid coffee.

The first thing I notice when I get home is the pizza box. Might as well have something to eat, even though by now the pizza must be cold too. And therefore even less appealing. The universe's destiny, from its birth to its death, is a long and slow degradation from heat to cold. Until that absolute cold and total stillness that is the death of all things. I open the box. I had ordered a vegetarian. It turns out to be a tuna pizza. With an apparent extra helping of tuna. I hate tuna. I can't digest it. This really isn't my day. I do my best to scrape off most of the toppings and start eating. As I chew on this tasteless pizza, about as tender as the cardboard it came in, I glance at the illustration on the box. A pizza maker in green and red, wearing a chef's hat, sliding his pizza into an old-fashioned oven with a long wooden peel. When you eat with the devil, you need a long spoon. He probably left it in the oven too long. I feel like I'm eating charcoal. Below the ironic “Bon appétit” is handwritten the name of the lucky recipient, along with their address. I startle again. It's my address, but not my name. It's the name of the woman whose ID I have! This is unacceptable! Is this some sort of conspiracy? What's this intrusion into my life? I can already tell this tuna is going to sit heavily in my stomach. I scraped off most of it, but there were still crumbs left. I'd better go lie down.

I wake up sweating. It's nighttime. What time is it? My watch has stopped again. Turns out it wasn't the battery after all. I should have just bought a new watch. Too late now. If I buy one now, they'll sell it with a battery, and I'll end up with an extra one I don't need. “It only wears out if you use it” like they say in the ad. No, it'll just wear out along with the other one, but for no reason. Like a heart beating on its own for a pointless life because an impostor has walked away with the rest of the body. Like a lonely heart that was all set for a transplant, only to be told that the recipient found something better elsewhere. I really need to find this woman. I check the address on a map—it's just a few streets away. I try to find her phone number in the phone book, but she's not listed. Who even uses phone books these days? Anyway, I'll head over to the address tomorrow and see what happens.

It's not an apartment, nor a house. It's more like a kind of shop with nothing for sale. Or maybe it's a store with the display window on the wrong side, facing the back office. Inside, I see two desks, some computers, and a few filing cabinets. A few decorative items too, some uniquely designed furniture pieces, quirky lamps, and



knick-knacks. It's unclear if these handcrafted items, unlike the Ikea-style office furniture, are actually for sale, or what they might cost. Strange business. I don't see anyone inside, but the lights are on. So, it must be open. I wait on the pavement for a bit, hoping someone shows up. Maybe the owner. Or some customers. But it's definitely quieter than Happy Dogs, that's for sure. I'm not feeling too comfortable, given the cold reception I got from the manager of this odd shop the first time we met. On the other hand, I'm not here to ask her for a favour. She'll probably want her ID card back, too—assuming she's realized it's missing by now.

A door opens in the office, and a woman appears. She's not so bad, actually. From afar. I couldn't pin down her age. Works for me. My thing is women you can't pin an age on. At the lower end, when you can estimate their age, you're not far from being accused of child abduction. At the other extreme, start being able to guess their age again, you're close to becoming a gigolo. The perfect woman, to me, has no age. Young ones are alright for a while, but they lack conversation. Especially humour. And patience, for sure. They don't know how to appreciate a good wine. They drink grape juice. Or Coke with vodka, then puke everywhere. As for older women, I don't really know. I prefer not to. I'll find out soon enough. For now, my preference is women of indeterminate age, where going out to a restaurant isn't just a formality but part of the foreplay. Because we should be prepared for the day when all that's left is the restaurant. If our stomachs can still handle it. At worst, we'll still have the pleasure of conversation, with a nice cup of herbal tea.

I push open the shop door and step inside. She's seated at her computer, not looking up right away, maybe to show that they don't pounce on customers as soon as they walk in. They're above that. They don't sell vacuum cleaners. In fact, there's nothing for sale. I move forward tentatively, pretending to glance around the decor, desperately searching for something with a price tag. She finally deigns to look at me, seems a bit surprised, and gets up. 'Can I help you?' Unlike the actress I saw at the café, she's better up close than from afar. But I still don't recognize her. I'd be tempted to invite her over for a little tête-à-tête. But the first time I saw her at Happy Dogs, I was in a terrible mood. I almost barked at her. Don't worry, that's just to keep the metaphor going. I'm not about to pull one of those "new novel" tricks where you find out at the end that the narrator is actually a dog.

Honestly, if it weren't for the address, I wouldn't be sure she's the woman I saw at Happy Dogs. She doesn't really look like the photo on the ID card, but then again... Women often change their appearance. All it takes is a trip to the hairdresser. And maybe it's an old photo. Or, like me, maybe someone gave her someone else's card a long time ago, and she never noticed. And it's this same card that got passed on to me by mistake. It's like taking a ten-pound note from my pocket and trying to find its original owner based solely on the print pattern. A banknote is dirty. It goes from hand to hand, even across borders. An ID card is supposed to be unique to each of us. You only show it to authorised professionals – cops, customs officers, doctors... You should never part with it. Much less swap it with someone else's, especially if they're not even the same gender as you. This is all getting more and more confusing in my head. For a moment, I can't even remember why I'm here. Sure, she's not bad-looking, but... enough to throw me off this much? Or maybe I'm a lot lonelier than I thought.

I start to stammer out an explanation. 'Do you ever go to Happy Dogs? Have you been there recently?' She looks more and more perplexed. If she thinks this is just a pretext to start a conversation, she's probably thinking it's the weirdest pickup line she's ever heard. I'm not sure she'll give me credit for creativity. But I must look so pathetic that she feels sorry for me. She might think I'm homeless. An undocumented immigrant. Or a harmless lunatic who escaped from a psychiatric ward, looking for a bit of comfort and human warmth in her shop. 'Would you like a coffee?' She takes my silence as a yes and pours me a cup. 'Thanks.' 'Sugar?' 'No, thanks.' I said that just to be polite. But I hate coffee without sugar. I drink it anyway, trying not to make a face. At least it's hot. I explain that I've lost my ID card. I'm not sure if I should tell her I have hers. Maybe she found it? 'Found it? Where?' 'I don't know... In your bag, maybe?' From her reaction, I sense I'll need to elaborate a bit.

But the door she came through opens again, and another woman appears. Apparently, this back office has an even further back office. And maybe it just keeps going, like Russian dolls. The shop, I mean. Speaking of dolls, they're not bad, either. A blonde and a brunette. I'm not sure if they fit into each other too. The first one, the blonde, explains my situation with a hint of compassion: 'The gentleman has lost his papers.' 'That's odd,' says the brunette. 'Oh, really?' She explains that she's a visual artist. She takes photos of anonymous people and makes up their stories. I look at the photos. One of these missing persons looks a bit like me. And all of these photos have a strangely familiar vibe.

The brunette stares at me intently. She's interested in the photographic traces of people she doesn't know—photos recovered from garbage dumps. Or flea markets. I hate flea markets. There's one every autumn in my neighbourhood. Nothing looks more like a garbage dump than a flea market. Except maybe the prices. People from all the surrounding towns rent stalls at exorbitant rates and bring their junk to sell. Their old chipped plates, their youngest kid's outgrown underwear, their ancient computer... The worst part is, it actually sells. Sometimes at prices that rival new items. It's quite picturesque. And very depressing. There's a funfair, too. Funfairs are quite curious. Completely out of time. Even when I was a child, they were already outdated. And they haven't changed since. Same old rides. Same old candy floss. Same awful background music, with tracks so obscure that the royalties office couldn't even find the copyright holders. Round and round! Classicism is what never goes out of style. Funfairs are the opposite: something that was never in fashion and will stay perpetually outdated. And yet people keep taking their kids there, as if it were some kind of initiation rite. So that's life: an open-air rubbish tip where even the junk is for sale. And the only thing they'll offer you for entertainment is one ride on the carousel, once a year.

I didn't really catch the beginning of what she was saying—I was too caught up thinking about this rubbish tip idea. She's explaining her artistic approach. She scavenges through society's trash, looking for traces of individuals who have been discarded, then tries to imagine the original. To bring these ghosts back to life. I latch onto that to show that I've been listening, in case she asks me a question I can't answer. 'I'm the opposite—I'm still here, but I've lost my traces. At least, I don't have an ID card with my photo on it to prove I exist.' I'm starting to understand the feeling

of all those refugees who arrive in Europe and, to avoid being sent back, throw away their ID cards. I'd really like to find my ID and go home. They smile at me. I don't know why these two women are being so kind and so open about their lives. It feels nice here, almost like heaven. I feel guilty for being rude to one of them over something as trivial as the queue order. Now I'm too hesitant to get back to the reason I came.

Out of politeness, I ask the blonde what she does. After all, she's the one I came to see. Or at least I think so. She tells me she's a fortune teller. At first, I think she's joking. But she has enough of a sense of humour not to be offended. I tell you, women of a certain age have a lot of humour. Still, her profession cools me down a bit. An affair with a fortune teller could get predictable fast. Living with a woman you can't hide anything from, who knows your future. Though, she didn't even notice she left with my ID card. That's reassuring. But still, a fortune teller? That's a bit like a witch, isn't it? Even though this one is quite charming. I'd be too afraid that, during the night, she'd stick needles into a doll that looks like me to make me pay for my misdeeds, even the ones I haven't committed yet. She asks me what I do for a living. To challenge her, and because I'm not quite sure what to say, I suggest she guess.

She kindly offers to read my palm. For free, I suppose. I'm not too keen on it. If something terrible is going to happen to me, I'd rather it be a surprise. But I let her do it. She takes my hand. Was this just an excuse? Her palm is warm and soft. She doesn't say anything. I feel a bit awkward. She seems uneasy, but maybe for different reasons. 'Bad news?' 'No, but I don't see any lines on your hand.' 'And is that a bad sign?' She tries to downplay it. 'Well, if you're a novelist, I don't predict much of a future for you.' 'Oh, and why's that?' 'I told you: I don't see any lines on your hand!' Her sense of humour is a bit questionable. But she doesn't seem to be joking. If I don't have lines on my palm, I just hope I still have some fingerprints...

She lets go of my hand, almost reluctantly. An awkward silence. They both look at me with a somewhat indulgent expression. If it's better to be envied than pitied, I think I'm on the wrong track. Then again, women tend to like lost dogs without collars. If I had to choose a partner, I wouldn't know which one to pick. Or maybe both. Okay, that's a bit cliché, but what's the point of being the narrator in a novel if you can't fantasise a little? Have you ever had a dream where you realize you're dreaming? And then you think, 'Great, I can do whatever I want! No consequences.' The worst that can happen is you wake up. Damn. What if they're together? I mean, as a couple. I don't know if that should make me more excited or completely discourage me. Probably both. I think it's time to get to the point before this really goes off the rails. I quickly explain the possible card mix-up. Maybe to get rid of me, the blonde agrees to check.

While Mary Poppins rummages through her handbag, a few posters on the wall catch my eye. They're about a pretty radical vegan movement. About recognising animals as people. About fighting against animal exploitation. About the torture inflicted on these poor defenceless creatures we claim to be our friends. And about the various legal and not-so-legal actions taken to ensure their rights are respected. I gather this office is also the headquarters of an activist organisation. Its legal front. The brunette notices my surprise. 'Are you into animal rights?' 'Not really. Well... I mean, yes,

but... I have to admit I've never thought about it much until now.' To be fair, I don't usually eat my friends. And anyway, I don't have any. So, at least the blonde and the brunette share the same convictions. Even if they don't share the same bed. 'If you'd like to join us, you're welcome.' It takes me a moment to realize she's only inviting me to join their vegan movement, which might have some armed resistance. Suddenly, I feel less enthusiastic. I say I'll think about it... I'm now keen to wrap things up.

The blonde has her ID card. So, the one I have in my hand isn't hers. I have to admit, the photo didn't really look like her. But then again, photos can be deceiving. On my ID card, I looked more like a terrorist on a wanted poster. A premonitory sign? So, the fortune teller wasn't wrong. She didn't lose her papers. I just hope she's not also right about her predictions of my total lack of a future... But then, why does the address match? There's a building above. It's the same address. The entrance is just a bit further down the street. Eight floors. Three apartments per floor. That's twenty-four possibilities. Thanks, I can do math. I thank them anyway, and leave after vaguely promising to come back to buy something. But what?

I check the mailboxes. I don't see the name I'm looking for. But she might have moved since she got her ID card, which is already a few years old. I'm starting to wonder if I'm the one who's a bit lost. You wouldn't mistake me for Inspector Columbo – I can't even find my own ID card. Or maybe the mix-up happened with someone else. Somewhere else. Earlier. But with who? Where? When? How? And even, possibly, why? Not to mention the question that's starting to bug me. What if the lady from Happy Dogs was right? What if it wasn't a mistake?

I go back home with my ears down and my tail between my legs. I'm not quite sure where I stand anymore. Worse. I'm not even sure I know who I am anymore. Alright. Time to get to work. I'll try, at least. I reluctantly pick up the package I left in the hallway. And that idiot who dropped it on the floor! I hope nothing's broken inside. But I guess for such fragile equipment, and at that price, it's well protected. I'm still surprised the package is so heavy, though. It should be full of polystyrene. And after opening the box, all I find is bubble wrap, wrapped in tape. I have a bad feeling about this. Surely it's not drugs...? I cut the plastic with a knife to see what's wrapped inside. I mentioned a package, but it's actually more like a grab bag... It's not at all what I ordered! Nor is it cannabis resin, for that matter. It's books... Not only did this idiot give me the wrong ID card, but he also gave me the wrong package!

I go back to Happy Dogs, even more furious. This time, I think I might kill someone. There's another crowd on the pavement, but much larger than a simple queue outside a shop at opening time. A siren. Flashing lights. The shop is surrounded by police. The firefighters are there too. Snippets of conversation. They're talking about a suspicious package that nobody has come to claim. The bomb squad just arrived to blow it up. This situation is starting to seem seriously sketchy. I hear a muffled explosion. Did they really just heroically destroy the computer I ordered to write my first novel? Like the other day, the young psychopath shows up with his key ring. He doesn't even seem surprised. The actress I saw at the café is also there, watching the scene among other onlookers. I could approach the police, of course. But it's a bit too late anyway to get my package back. And I'm not sure it's the best moment. I prefer to slip away before they ask me for my ID. Especially since I don't have one...

Before leaving, I pick up a leaflet from the ground. It's from a group called the Domestic Animal Liberation Front. A protest? But why Happy Dogs? Isn't it a place where animals get pampered? It's hardly an animal testing lab. It'd be like bombing a workers' union holiday centre to protest against the exploitation of the masses. Or blowing up a thalassotherapy centre to advocate for better retirement benefits.

On the other hand, putting coats on dogs, taking them to the hairdresser, and sometimes even to a therapist... Isn't that undermining their dignity as mutts? I don't know, I'm trying to make sense of it. It's true that human hypocrisy towards the animal world is absolutely astonishing. On one hand, we have these pets we treat like our own children. Sometimes better, sometimes just as poorly. On the other hand, there are those we consider only as meat. How can we justify this double standard when it comes to living, sentient beings, all equally evolved? They say an octopus is smarter than a three-year-old child. And we still happily eat our calamari. Why this difference in treatment between the pig, which we're told is the animal closest to humans, and the dog, which was once a wolf to humans? It's a form of completely unjustified animal racism, when you think about it. The French are scandalised that the Chinese put dogs on the spit. Americans are horrified that the French feast on rabbit loin, horse steak or frog legs. Indians don't eat cows because they consider them sacred. Muslims and Jews don't eat pork because they consider it unclean. It just doesn't make sense.

And it's true that a bomb here, in the city centre, out in the open, has more impact than one in a slaughterhouse, deep in some grim countryside where nobody ever goes. Why do you think concentration camps were often placed deep in the woods? So that people could later claim they didn't know. Slaughterhouses are sort of the same. Everyone's aware of them, but when it comes time to eat your steak tartare, nobody wants to think about it. My mind goes back to those two rowdy women from the shop where nothing gets sold. I can't quite picture them with blood on their hands, but... women can be unpredictable. Could they have something to do with this bombing?

Back at home. I had ordered supplies to write the manuscript for my first novel: a laptop, some reams of paper, and printer cartridges. But now I've got nothing to write with. A good excuse to keep goofing off... I take a closer look inside the package. I lean over and grab a book at random. It's called 'Blank Pages.' But it's much thinner than a phone book. It's got to be a joke! I look at the other books—they're all the same. The author's name? It's mine! Or, I mean, the same name that's on the ID card I got by mistake. Or maybe not... I'm getting more and more confused. What if that ID card really is mine? Except I'm not a woman. At least, I don't think so. There are limits, after all. I must be losing my mind. I've lost all sense of time. I look at the books in the box again. So these might be the copies of my first novel. The one I thought I hadn't even written yet... I'm not sure if I should take this as good news. It's a pretty unbelievable story. And what am I supposed to do with all these books? There are at least... I count them. A hundred books per pack. Fifty packs! That's five thousand books! What am I supposed to do with all that? I never really intended to write a best-seller. I'd have printed maybe five hundred at most. I'm already dreading the invoice from the printer when it comes...

I rush to the local bookshop with a copy of the novel, to have it evaluated. Like an atheist who finds a communion wafer and takes it to a lab to see if it really contains the body of Christ. Or at least traces of human flesh. In the age of the Internet, walking into a bookshop is like walking into a church. It's an act of faith. We all know God is dead, but we wish we could still believe. I show the shop assistant the back cover with the author's bio: the woman on the ID card. She explains that she knows her. She's a customer. An actress who lives in the neighbourhood. Oh, for goodness' sake! The woman I saw at the café! She was probably leaving Happy Dogs. She's the one I bumped into in the shop, not the other one. I really have no memory for faces. Or maybe I'm just terribly shortsighted. Or very forgetful. Or all three. And do you think this book could sell? The girl responds with a condescending tone. 'You know, self-publishing...'. The bookshop owner comes over. She looks at me with a strange expression. I thank them and start to leave. As soon as I step outside, the bookshop owner pulls the assistant aside to whisper something while glancing in my direction. I leave without further ado.

Once outside, I look back at the shop one last time. There's a poster stuck to the glass door of the bookshop. A wanted notice. With my photo. So I'm not the only one looking for me. Did someone find my ID and want to return it? People do that for lost cats or dogs. I step closer to read it. It's a composite sketch of the suspected perpetrator of the bombing at Happy Dogs. A dangerous terrorist, allegedly a member of the Domestic Animal Liberation Front. Behind the shop window, the two booksellers are still watching me. One of them has picked up the phone. I walk away quickly.

I get back home out of breath and slam the door behind me, thinking I'm safe. But as soon as I'm inside, something feels off. I sense a presence. The police already? With police dogs, then. Because I seem to catch a whiff of German shepherd. A quick glance around confirms that nothing's missing. To be fair, there's so little in my place that a burglar would have to be pretty resourceful to steal anything. Actually, this flat isn't exactly mine. It's sublet. Or rather, it was lent to me. I never met the owner. It was the previous tenant who left the keys under the doormat when he left. But I think he had stopped paying rent long before that. This is where I am now. I don't even really have a place to call home, I'm wanted by the police, and I don't have any ID. Well, I have an ID card, but it's not mine. I check the empty room that I use as my office. Nothing's missing there either. In fact, my old computer, which broke down after catching a nasty virus, has miraculously come back to life. It's there, on the makeshift table made from a plank and two trestles. The screen's on. A file is open. I read it. There's just one title: 'Blank Pages.' I have a bad feeling about this...

I go back to the entrance and grab a book at random. 'Blank Pages,' that's the title of the novel. I open the book. Every page is blank... Like a phone book from which all the names have suddenly vanished. Or a book yet to be written. But who's going to write it? It's hard enough to sell books when there's actually something written on the pages. I go back to the computer and exit the open folder to see if there's another one on the desktop with the full text of the novel. Not forgetting to save this one, just in case. But save what? Except for the title, it's empty. What a dumb title. Not likely to be much help.

That's when the actress makes her entrance. Not in person, no. But there, on the

background image of my old resurrected computer. Her face appears on the screen right in front of me, like in a mirror, slightly in relief. It looks like she's about to speak. It's a black-and-white image. A bit blurry. A supernatural, almost eerie photo, like the ones I saw at that beyond-the-grave photographer's place and her fortune-telling succubus. Maybe, besides planting bombs during the day, at night, in their deep back room, these Russian dolls are messing with computers. And they're the ones who remotely made the hologram of the missing author appear in my place... Who is this woman facing me? Is it her ghost that I caught a glimpse of at the café? So, does she live here with me? Or maybe she lived here before. Unless I'm the one living in her place... I dare not say who's living inside her... Could it be that this woman is the real author of this novel, and I'm just the narrator? Me, who wanted to avoid falling into the "new novel" trap, did well. At least I'm not a dog. Although...

My watch has started working again. So have I... Dogs don't have watches. That's a bit of a relief. Even if some wear coats to go to the groomer. In five years, maybe, I'll have filled all these blank pages, made a name for myself, and sold these five thousand books. Write my life, or someone else's. Like a waking dream. Because until now, my life... That's why that little punk wanted to reshuffle the deck. The identity cards. This is my first novel. My first story. I'm not sure there will be a second one. You don't become a writer by filling blank pages with dark thoughts. I throw open the sliding doors to let in the light and gaze at the buildings across the way. Behind each of these windows is a name from the phone book. An assumed identity. I close my eyes. The imprint of those windows stays on my retinas. I lean in a bit further. A fleeting sensation, the feeling of falling inward. Before my memory completely fades and I hit rock bottom, I try to enter through one of those windows, into a possible life... Hoping it's not a dog's life. I open my eyes again. I'm still alive. At least, as far as I can tell.

I do need to get out. Even if it's just to do some shopping and fill the fridge. Otherwise, I'll starve, and all my problems will be solved. The thing is, when you're wanted by the police and don't have proper papers, leaving your home is risky. I see only one solution if I want to stay alive. And free. Become this woman. Since this card doesn't match my identity, I'll adapt my identity to match this card. That will solve two problems at once. I'll have valid ID, and a clean record. It might cause a few unexpected complications, but at this point, who cares... We'll see how it goes. Until now, I was a traveller trying to cross America with a map of France. Obviously, I couldn't find Route 66. What's the risk in trying another road?

I go to the dressing room door and open it. Like Bluebeard's wife, I wasn't supposed to open certain doors. The dressing room door, specifically. Not really the kind of room I desperately needed, given the size of my wardrobe. Am I going to find women's corpses in this closet? The previous owner's wives... That would be bad news. The dressing room is filled with women's clothing. I didn't know the owner was a woman. She'd left some of her things here, neatly arranged on the shelves or hanging in the wardrobe. I'm going to give life to this possible existence. Hers. It's almost exciting. Who hasn't dreamed, at some point, of changing skins?

So today I begin a new life. A woman's life. The life of this woman that I'll have to reinvent, since I know nothing about it. It's always better than a dog's life. Well, that

remains to be seen. What am I going to wear to go out on the street? I'll start by going to the hairdresser's to get a new look. Then, maybe, when I'm a bit older, I'll get a poodle and buy it a little coat. And I'll return to Happy Dogs with my head held high, as a proper customer. But for now, I've got a book to write...

I still haven't started writing the novel of my new life. As for booking an appointment at the hairdresser's, I'll opt for a wig for now. Until my real hair grows a bit longer. That's not guaranteed, because I don't have much left. I even feel like I lost more after the ordeal I've just been through. Fortunately, there were also two wigs in Bluebeard's dressing room. A blonde and a brunette. They look like real hair. They could be the scalps of his last wives who were a bit too curious. I went with the blonde. But I might switch to the brunette one day.

I've decided to go all in. It's do or die. I'm going back to Happy Dogs. I don't have a dog, but I'll say I'm looking for a gift for mine. For its birthday, maybe. If nobody recognises me there, I've succeeded. I can live my life as a fake blonde with real papers, without being bothered. I spruce myself up a bit before heading out. A touch of makeup. Without being too garish. It's the heels that give me the most trouble. Especially on the stairs.

So far, so good. On the street, no one turns to look at me. I get bolder and head to the café. The waiter greets me with a 'Hello, gorgeous, what can I get you?'. He's almost cheeky. That's a good sign. I drink my lukewarm coffee and leave, feeling quite pleased. I feel like a double agent. I decide not to push my luck any further this time.

To be even more convincing, I've decided to borrow a dog. Okay, 'borrow' might need a bit of explanation. It's a little black poodle. That way, it's less likely to get dirty. While I was walking in the park, dressed as a woman, it came up to me, nose wet and tail wagging. It didn't seem to belong to anyone. It wasn't attached to anyone by a leash, and it wasn't wearing a collar. With the noble intention of avoiding the dog pound, I might have somewhat hastily concluded that it was a lost dog. Even if, when I walked away carrying it in my arms, I think I heard a large lady shouting behind me. I chose not to respond and picked up the pace. The damage was done, anyway. I couldn't turn back. Some might call it kidnapping. But I'm not planning to demand a ransom. I just need this poodle for a few hours. To look the part at Happy Dogs. It's incredibly easy to kidnap a poodle. Easier than kidnapping a child, at least. And probably a lot less risky. Besides, what would I do with a child? After the initial shock, this one seems pretty docile. I'll keep it at my place for a few days before taking it out on the street. To let it get used to things. And me too.

I'm starting to almost get attached to this mutt. He hardly eats anything. He sleeps all day. I don't know his name. Between naps, before dozing off again, he gives me a sad look, in which I think I detect a certain bond. I just hope he's having good dreams. He's a bit like me, in a way. He's lost his identity. Separated, against his will, from the one person who could call him by his name: his owner. A sort of rebirth, in a sense. You have to cut the cord at some point. And that cord was in the shape of a leash. Should I give him a new name? I could give him mine. I'm not using it right now. I call him by my name, and he responds. Apparently, I could call him anything, he wouldn't care. As long as I give him his kibble afterward.



This is our first outing together. Since I couldn't steal the chain that came with him, I'm holding the poodle on a leash made of a piece of string. I hope I didn't tie the slipknot of his new umbilical cord too tightly. In any case, he seems to understand not to pull too hard. This time, I'm going straight to Happy Dogs. As I walk in, the smell seems a bit less intense and less unpleasant than the first time. Almost familiar. Maybe because I've been living with a poodle for a while now. I feel at home here. It's like coming back to my own place. Or more like a kennel. I must have been a dog in a past life. In any case, I now know what a dog's life can be like.

The trainee is there. So is the boss. Apparently, she didn't see the need to fire that SOB. Or maybe she's his mum. Or he's her lover. A few ladies are waiting for their turn to have their dogs groomed. No particular reactions when I walk into the shop, apart from a vague 'Good morning, madam.' Nobody seems to know me. Or recognise me. To this respectable shopkeeper, I'm just an ordinary customer. With the added promise of becoming a regular. I look at the leashes and collars for my poodle. The young gigolo walks behind me, almost brushing against me. He whispers something suggestive in my ear. 'Looking for anything in particular?' 'Thanks, I'm just browsing.' A weirdo, I'm telling you. The boss still acts like she's not interested in me. She's probably waiting for me to take the bait before she reels me in. She rummages through her papers, picks up her phone, and dials a number. Strangely enough, my phone starts vibrating right away. I might have pushed my luck too far. One phone call and that's it, she's got me. "Hello, sir, I've got good news for you." 'Yes,' I reply. 'We've found your ID card. The lady brought it in. You should come by the shop to collect it.' I mumble a brief response, as quietly as possible, covering my mouth with my hand, then I put my phone away.

That was a close call. I'm sweating. A cold sweat. I feel like a fish suddenly pulled out of the water, half its mouth ripped off. Before being thrown back in as a show of kindness toward the animal kingdom. I still find it hard to gauge the consequences of this sudden, unexpected resurrection of my original identity. Still in a daze, I listen to the conversations around me. The parcel bomb attack was claimed by the Domestic Animal Liberation Front. And two women have been arrested. At least I'm off the hook for that one. I also noticed my composite sketch isn't posted around town anymore. However, I suddenly see, on the wall behind the boss, another wanted notice. This one is for a black poodle that looks a lot like the one I'm holding on a leash. There's a photo of him, but really, nothing looks more like a black poodle than another black poodle. I could always dye mine white. Anyway, nobody's recognised my dog as the star of this missing-pet alert yet. It's the piece of string that seems to shock the other customers. The poor thing is almost suffocating. I loosen the slipknot a bit around his neck. I choose a leather leash and a matching collar. I pay, and I'm about to leave.

That's when a woman bursts into the shop like a madwoman. This one, I can say, is really obese. I'm wondering how she managed to get through the door so quickly. She points an accusatory finger at me and snaps in a murderous tone, 'But that's my dog! Youki!' The poodle wakes from his torpor and perks up his ears. It seems that name vaguely rings a bell for him. He starts yapping, softly at first, then a bit louder. 'Youki! It's Mummy!' All the other mutts start barking too. And the old ladies begin shouting at me with menacing looks. If I stay here, I'm going to get lynched. The

woman keeps screaming, 'Youki! Youki! Come, my Youki!' Forgetting the slipknot around his neck, the poodle leaps toward his former owner. As the string tightens suddenly like a bowstring and the noose cinches abruptly around his carotid like a lasso, the poodle freezes in mid-air before crashing heavily to the ground. He starts yelping and convulsing. The big woman is about to faint. 'Oh my God, Youki!' The shop owner rushes to catch her as she falls backward, while the trainee cuts the hanging rope with a quick slash of a box cutter, at the risk of slicing the dog's vocal cords too. I take advantage of the chaos to grab my ID card, which I see on the counter next to my change. And I run for it, despite my high heels.

I end my mad dash limping. I broke a heel. Once I turn the corner, I take off my wig and catch my breath. This nightmare is over. I'm back to myself. I've got my ID back. Then I feel a presence behind me. A police dog that followed me to put me on a leash and drag me off to the pound? I don't feel like running anymore. I've never felt so alone. I turn around. It's the presumed Youki. But is that really his name? But what if the woman who claims to own him is just a mythomaniac, like me? The poodle, anyway, is overjoyed to see me. He's yapping cheerfully and wagging his tail. As if we hadn't seen each other for months, even though we just parted. Now he's even peed on me. Looks like he's already grown fond of me too. In the end, I might not even need a leash.

I walk away with this not-so-grudge-bearing dog. I'll have to get him dyed white, though. I still haven't written that first novel that will make me an author, but at least I've gained a travel companion. Now I just need to find the way. To be honest, I don't even know if it's a male or female dog. It's grey and damp out. Everything I see is ugly. Nothing is certain, but everything is possible. Even the worst. We haven't seen the sun in quite some time around here. In less than five billion years, it'll be dead. And Earth with it. But dogs don't know that. Happy dogs...

## *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 13<sup>th</sup>  
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 13<sup>th</sup>  
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 Pyramids  
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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