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A Skeleton in the Closet

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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A Skeleton in the Closet

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Alex and Emma are about to sell their house to some friends before heading abroad to start a new life. However, just after the sales agreement is signed, they discover a hitch – a significant one that could jeopardise the transaction.

Characters

Emma

Alex

Sarah

Mark

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The living room of a suburban house, furnished only with a few moving boxes. The room opens onto a garden (on the room's side). Emma enters, struggling under the weight of a medium-sized box. She places it on the floor with difficulty and lets out a sigh of relief.

Emma (*offstage*) – Thanks for leaving me the small box, but what on earth is in it? It weighs a ton...

Alex enters with a huge box that seems very light, which he carries effortlessly.

Alex – I can't remember... It should be written on it somewhere... I've labelled everything so we can find our way around when it's time to unpack...

Emma looks at the box.

Emma (*reading*) – Plates... Oh, right... It's the dinner set your mum gave us when we got married. We've never used it, by the way...

Alex – A 24-piece dinner set... You'd need a large family for that...

Emma – I'm not on speaking terms with mine... and on your side, they're all either dead or disappeared.

Alex – Mmm...

Emma – Your mum must have imagined us with lots of children...

Alex – For the two of us, it's a bit over the top, that's for sure... Or we'd need to have lots of friends...

Alex places his large box effortlessly next to the small one.

Emma – We might have more opportunities to use it over there... And what's in yours?

Alex (*pretending to discover what's written on his box*) – Duvet covers.

Emma – Ah yes... Takes up more space, but it's much lighter...

Alex – Those were the last two boxes.

Emma – Let's leave some here so we can sit down and have a drink.

Alex – And especially to sign the sales contract... What time are they coming?

Emma – They should be here already... They shouldn't be long.

Alex – I hope they haven't changed their minds... (*He collapses onto a box, looking exhausted.*) I'm knackered.

Emma – Not as much as I am...

Emma is about to sit on another box.

Alex – Wait... (*He glances at the box.*) Not that one, it's the TV...

Emma freezes.

Emma – And you think a TV wouldn't be able to support my weight?

Alex – It's a flat-screen...

Emma places a hand on her stomach, slightly concerned.

Emma – My stomach is flat too... For now...

Alex – Better sit here, these are my books. No worries.

Emma (*ironically*) – Thanks... (*She sits.*) It feels strange being here in the middle of all these boxes... Knowing we'll never sleep in this house again...

Alex – Mmm...

Emma looks towards the garden.

Emma – Look, the dahlias are in bloom.

Alex – Mmm...

Emma – I didn't even know there were dahlias in the garden.

Alex – There used to be. I thought they'd all died...

Emma – Doesn't it make you feel anything?

Alex – What? That the dahlias have come back to life?

Emma – Leaving this house! This life...

Alex – Do you regret it?

Emma – No, not at all! But we've had some good times here, haven't we?

Alex – Yeah...

Emma – Try not to look so thrilled...

Alex sits on the same box as her and puts his arm around her shoulder.

Alex – Of course. I don't regret a single moment of the years we spent together in this house. But, you know, I think it was time to move on...

Emma – I know...

Alex – We don't have kids, or a dog, not even a goldfish... There's nothing holding us here.

Emma – I'm really happy to be starting a new life too... With you...

Alex – It's a bit like jumping into the unknown, but, you know. At least with a bungee cord...

Emma – A bungee cord, you think?

Alex – What have we got to lose? If we really don't like it over there, we can always come back.

Emma – We won't have a house anymore...

Alex – We'll buy another one! Or a flat in Paris. Anyway, this house was too big for just the two of us.

Emma – We had a garden... That's rare, so close to Paris...

Alex – We hardly ever set foot in the garden! With the weather we get in the Paris region, a terrace would be more than enough.

Emma – It's true that we're not very good with plants...

Alex – Every time we tried to plant something in that garden, it would die...

Emma – But the dahlias suddenly came back to life...

Alex – Oh no! You're not going to tell me it's a miracle! A sign from God telling us He'd rather we stayed here!

Emma – You're right, if we don't make a move now, we never will.

Alex – And I've had enough of this house... It's too full of memories.

Emma – Memories?

Alex – I'm talking about my family... And not all of them are good memories, believe me...

Emma – I understand...

Alex – And even if they were... Good or bad, you can't live your whole life surrounded by memories... It's suffocating. My grandparents lived here. I spent my entire childhood in this house before inheriting it. I was practically born in this place. I'd rather not die in it, you know?

Emma – Leaving will give us a fresh start... For both of us.

Emma's mobile phone rings. She looks at the screen but doesn't answer the call.

Alex – You're not answering? It might be them...

Emma – It's a withheld number; it's probably junk. Ever since we cancelled our Netflix subscription, they've been hounding me... Haven't they bothered you?

Alex – No.

Looking slightly embarrassed, Emma gets up.

Emma – Right, I should get things ready for the drinks... I'll see what's in the kitchen...

Alex – Need any help?

Emma – No, no, it's fine. I put a bottle of white wine in the fridge, and we've got a bit of blackcurrant liqueur left...

She exits.

Alex – OK.

Alex takes out his phone to check his messages.

Emma (*offstage*) – By the way, I forgot to keep out a corkscrew for the bottle of white...

Alex (*without looking up from his screen*) – It's not a big deal, we can always drink the liqueur...

Emma (*offstage*) – No, seriously... Look for it! I invited them for drinks, not just a digestif...

Alex – I don't know where the corkscrew is!

Emma (*offstage*) – Do you want them to sign the sales contract or not?

Alberto reluctantly puts down his phone.

Alex – Alright, I'll look for it...

He goes straight to the right box. He opens it and pulls out a corkscrew, which he brandishes in front of Emma's face as she returns from the kitchen with a tray holding everything needed for the drinks.

Emma – Well done! You can open the bottle of white wine now...

Alex – Shouldn't we wait until they get here?

Emma – Open the bottle, I'm telling you, it'll make them show up.

Alex opens the bottle.

Alex – Didn't they say they'd come a bit early to help us with the move?

Emma – They must have been held up...

Alex – They haven't done a thing, but we still have to offer them drinks...

Emma – They're buying the house from us... We need to do things properly...

Alex – What does she teach again?

Emma – Sarah? P.E.

Alex – Ah yes, I thought so...

Emma – What do you mean?

Alex – Oh, nothing... I was just wondering what she might teach... (*Emma decides not to respond*) And Mark? I know he's in sales, but I can't remember what he sells.

Emma – He works for Gillette, I think... He sells razors.

Alex – Ah... I see...

Emma – See what?

Alex – Why it's so dull!

Emma – If only you could be a bit more polite... I get the impression that, unconsciously, you don't want to sell this family home...

Alex – I'll make an effort, I promise...

Emma – I'm afraid of the worst...

Alex – But at the same time, they're not buying this place just to do us a favour...

Emma – It's true, it does help us out a lot.

Alex – Still... They're getting a good deal.

Emma – You think we're selling it too cheap?

Alex – I do think we could've got a bit more, yes.

Emma – We were in a hurry... And besides, they're friends...

Alex – Well, friends... Sarah is just a work colleague, isn't she?

Emma – Even at that price, buyers weren't exactly lining up.

Alex – Yes... It's true that it's simpler this way...

Emma – It's just a small get-together... Signing the contract... Then we leave France... Anyway, we won't see them again...

Alex – OK. But I really don't know what I'm going to talk to him about... Definitely not literature. And since I'm not interested in football, dogs, or cars...

Emma – Just talk about politics. Strangely enough, it's become a very safe topic: everyone's against the government's policies, even if it's for completely opposite reasons.

Alex – In the end, our president will have achieved national unity... against him.

The doorbell rings.

Emma – Ah, there they are!

Alex – About time...

Emma goes to open the door.

Emma (off) – Hello, hello...

A dog barks.

Alex – Oh great, they've brought their mutt too...

Mark (off) – Snowy, be quiet!

Sarah (off) – I told you to leave him in the car...

Emma (off) – Poor thing... Just let him run around in the garden, he'll be happier.

Mark – Come on, Snowy!

Emma returns with Mark, dressed in a blazer and tie with a salesman's smile, accompanied by Sarah, lively and attractive.

Sarah – Are you sure it's not a bother?

Emma – Not at all. And besides, this house is almost yours already...

Mark (*joking*) – Well, we haven't signed the sales contract yet...

Alex – Hello Sarah, hello Mark...

Sarah – Hello, hello...

Mark – Hi Alex. I've let Snowy loose in the garden, is that alright?

Alex – Absolutely! He needs to check out the house too.

Sarah – It's a luxury having a garden so close to Paris.

Mark – It's certainly better for Snowy.

Alex – What breed is he?

Mark – A wire-haired fox terrier.

Alex – Ah, of course... Snowy!

Mark – Speaking of wire-haired... You could've shaved before having guests over!

Alex – Oh, yes, I... With the move, I haven't even had time to...

Mark – Just kidding... (*Mark holds out a package to Alex.*) Here, a little gift! In case you can't find razor blades in the wild place you're moving to...

Sarah – Some people bring flowers, he brings razors blades...

Alex – Well, thanks, Mark.

Emma – I hope you're not won over by him offering you a razor...

Sarah (*not quite understanding*) – Ah, right...

Emma – It can be a bit offensive to give a girl a razor...

Sarah (*laughing loudly*) – Oh, right!

Alex – I feel a bit awkward... I'm not sure what I could offer you. (*He looks around, picks up a book from a box, and hands it to Juan.*) Here, it's my latest novel.

Mark – Thanks...

Alex – You're not obliged to read it, you know.

Mark (*reading the title*) – I don't even understand the title, to be honest...

Emma thinks it's best to change the subject.

Emma – But please, have a seat! Make yourselves at home... (*Mark and Sarah look at the boxes, wondering where they might sit.*) Oh yes, sorry, all the chairs are already packed for the move...

Alex – But you see, the boxes are quite comfortable.

They sit down.

Emma – Just to let you know, we only have kir...

Sarah – Kir?

Alex – It's white wine with blackcurrant liqueur.

Sarah – Oh, right...

Mark – Well then... A kir for everyone.

Emma – Alright...

She starts serving drinks.

Sarah – Just water for me, thanks. I've given up alcohol...

Emma – Help yourself then...

Alex – Peanuts?

Mark – Thanks...

He takes a handful from the bowl offered by Alberto, who then presents the bowl to Sarah.

Sarah – No thanks... Peanuts are just fat and salt... I'm trying to avoid that...

Emma – Really?

Sarah – You should be careful too... Haven't you put on a bit of weight?

Emma – I don't know...

Mark is busy checking messages on his phone. Alex and Emma exchange a concerned look.

Sarah – Oh, that reminds me of the woman taking over your job at the school...

Emma – What?

Sarah – You wouldn't believe it... She's huge! She must have gobbled down loads of peanuts...

Emma – Oh, really?

Sarah – I mean, I don't know... When you're like that, you should at least try to exercise a bit... I thought she wouldn't even fit through the classroom door...

Alex – Sometimes, it's genetic...

Sarah – Genetic or not, a bit of sport and a diet have never hurt anyone...

Alex – Exactly... That's why we were hoping you'd come a bit earlier to get some exercise with these boxes...

Mark finally puts his phone down.

Mark – Oh yeah, sorry I couldn't help with the boxes, but I've been swamped at work. It's madness at the company right now.

Alex – Crisis or not, people still need to shave... Even the unemployed, if they want to stand a chance of getting a job...

Mark – Ah yeah, definitely...

There's an awkward silence.

Emma – In any case, we're really pleased that it's you buying the house. You're still sure about it, right?

Sarah – Mark thought it was a bit big, but I managed to convince him. And you never know, the family might grow...

Mark, once again focused on his phone, doesn't react.

Emma – Oh, really?

The dog barks in the background.

Alex – Are you thinking of adopting a second dog?

Emma gives him a sharp look.

Emma – Well, at least Snowy seems to like the garden.

Alex – And what does Tintin think?

Victoria gives him another disapproving look.

Mark – Eh?

Emma – Do you want to have one last look around?

Sarah – No, it's alright... We know this house by heart. We already feel like it's ours... Don't we, Mark?

Mark reluctantly puts his phone down.

Mark – Ah, yes, it's a lovely house... I did think it was a bit big, but...

Alex gives Emma a discreet signal.

Emma – Right... Shall we sign this contract then? Get it all done with...

Sarah – Let's do it...

Emma brings out the papers she's prepared and places them on the box serving as a table. Mark searches his pockets.

Mark – Ah, I don't have a pen...

Sarah – Neither do I.

Alex (*to Emma*) – What about you?

Emma – I had one a moment ago... I'm not sure what I did with it... Don't you have one?

Mark – A writer always has a pen on him, right?

Alex – I write on a computer.

Sarah – It's true, with all these screens nowadays... Soon, we'll only see pens in museums...

Emma – Which box did you put the pens in?

Alex – I don't remember... I don't think I made a box just for pens... Ah, yes, there should be one in the box with the bank papers. Cheques are one of the last things I still write by hand... (*To Sarah*) Sorry, I think you're sitting on it...

Sarah stands up. He opens the box and takes out a pen.

Alex (*triumphantly*) – Here we go!

He hands the pen to Mark. Mark takes it and pretends it doesn't work.

Mark – Oh, looks like it's not working... (*Alex and Sarah freeze.*) Just kidding.

He signs and passes the pen to Sarah, who also signs. They both sign two copies. Alex hands one to Mark.

Alex – There you go, one for you, one for us...

Mark – Perfect.

Emma – Well... Let's celebrate! Shall I pour you another?

Mark – Go on, then!

Emma pours the drinks.

Emma – To your new life in this house that's now yours.

Mark – To your new life on the other side of the Pacific.

Sarah – It's the Atlantic.

They toast and drink.

Mark – But seriously, Paraguay... I don't even know exactly where that is...

Alex – It's Uruguay.

Mark – Are you really sure you're not making a big mistake?

Alex – No, actually, we're not sure at all, but...

Emma – Alex wanted a change of life... To find new sources of inspiration, and I...

Sarah – It's true, you can write novels from anywhere.

Alex – Exactly...

Emma – And teaching French can be done anywhere as well.

Mark – As for me, my interest in literature stops at Tintin...

Sarah – He's read them all.

Alex – All of them? Incredible...

Emma gives him another disapproving look.

Mark – And where did this idea of writing books come from? It's not exactly ordinary...

Sarah – Is it a family tradition or something? Was your father a writer too?

Mark – Wait, Sarah, being a writer isn't like being a shopkeeper or a mechanic. It's not a small business, it's high art. You don't inherit the profession from your father like a butcher's shop...

Alex – My father was a film stuntman.

Sarah – Oh, I see... From cinema to literature... There was something there, after all... Were you very close to your father?

Alex – I barely knew him, actually. He was always abroad for shoots.

Sarah – That must have been hard for your mother.

Alex – Yes... Especially since he was unfaithful with just about anyone.

Sarah – When you're apart for so long, obviously... Especially in the film industry, there are so many temptations...

Alex – Yes... It seems he couldn't resist temptation... One day he left and never came back... I was very young... I don't even know if he's still alive.

Mark – Great... But why Uruguay? Had you been there before, or...?

Emma – Not at all... But I found a position there at the Lycée Français de Montevideo.

Mark – Montevideo...?

Alex – The capital of Uruguay.

Mark – Oh, right...

Alex – We wanted to move to Latin America... So we thought, why not Uruguay?

Emma – Alex is passionate about Latin American literature...

Alex – And there are all the pre-Columbian archaeological sites as well.

Emma – It's a bit of a crazy project... We'd been talking about it for a while... And suddenly we decided... Very quickly... But if you think too much, you never do anything, right?

Mark – Yeah...

Alex – Of course, there are also those who never think and still do nothing.

Emma – It's an adventure, obviously, but at the same time, it's what we wanted.

Alex – Anyway, we're very excited about moving...

Mark – And do you already have accommodation there?

Emma – The school is providing us with an apartment while we get ourselves organised.

Alex – Then we'll try to find a house... It seems it's very easy to find one there.

Sarah – For almost nothing, you can get a villa with a sea view.

Mark – Is there a sea in Uruguay?

Alex – It seems so... Or the houses are just very tall...

Emma – You must come and visit us!

Alex gives her a disapproving look.

Sarah – Why not? Right, Mark?

The dog starts barking again.

Sarah – What does that dog want now?

Mark – Can you see what's wrong with him, darling?

Sarah – You go! He's your dog, after all!

Alex – You've trained him badly, Mark... I was talking about the dog, obviously...

Mark gets up and goes out.

Sarah – That mutt drives me crazy... I didn't want him... But Mark already had him when we got married.

Emma – Oh, blended families can be quite tricky...

Alex – But you've been married quite a while, haven't you? The dog doesn't seem that old...

Sarah – Oh no, but it wasn't this one. This is the third.

Alex – The third one of the same brand?

Emma – For a dog, you say "of the same breed," Alex...

Sarah – Just fox terriers with rough coats...

Alex – And do they all get called Snowy?

Sarah – This one is Snowy number 3... But we just call him Snowy, like the others...

Mark comes back with a bone in his hand.

Sarah – What's that?

Mark – A bone, apparently.

Sarah – And where did you find that?

Mark – I didn't find it, Snowy did! He had it in his mouth when I went to check on him. That's why he was barking. He wanted to show it to us...

Emma – It's true that a bone like that only comes around once in a dog's lifetime...

Alex – Oh yes... I'm sure the first two Snowys never found a bone of that size... Well done, Snowy! World champion...

Sarah – That's incredible! Did he find it in the garden?

Mark – Where do you think he found it?

Sarah – It's huge for a lamb bone...

Mark – Have you roasted a wild boar in your garden recently? You could have invited us to the barbecue!

Emma – We never do barbecues...

Moment of awkward silence.

Sarah – It's curious... This bone looks eerily like a human tibia, don't you think?

Emma – Are you joking?

Sarah – No...

Alex – Have you ever seen a human tibia? I mean, without the flesh around it...

Sarah – You know, to become a PE teacher, we do have a few anatomy lessons... It's been a while, and I often skipped classes, but yes... It looks a lot like that...

Emma – This is insane... Oh no, it can't be a tibia...

Mark – Wait, I'll check on Wikipedia...

He takes out his phone and types on it. He examines the bone with a sceptical expression.

Mark – Oh no, a tibia doesn't look like this at all...

Emma – Phew... I thought so too...

Mark continues typing on his phone.

Mark – Actually, this bone looks a lot like a femur...

The others look at him in dismay. He holds up his phone screen to show them the image.

Emma – Damn... It's true...

Moment of stunned silence.

Mark – This is crazy...

Sarah – Did you know you had human bones in your garden?

Emma – No...

Sarah – And to think we've just signed the contract...

Alex – Wait, it's just a tibia!

Mark – A femur, I tell you.

Alex – And even so, we're not even sure...

Mark – I don't think there's any doubt now.

Sarah – But where could this bone possibly have come from?

Emma – I don't know... Maybe the house was built on an old cemetery...

Sarah – That's not a very convincing argument. If we'd known...

Emma – Have you heard of anything like that, Alex?

Alex – A cemetery here? No.

Emma – It must be something much older then.

Mark – You mean a Roman cemetery, or something like that?

Emma – Who knows...

Mark – Oh, bloody hell! Can you imagine? If we found Tutankhamun's skeleton in the garden.

Alex – Well, Tutankhamun is more of an Egyptian thing...

Mark – Anyway, the Historic Monuments people are going to come and inspect...

Sarah – That's for sure.

Mark – I know someone to whom this happened... They came with diggers and turned the whole garden upside down...

Sarah – And how did it end?

Mark – In the end, they only found a few amphorae which they put in a museum, and they gave the house back to them...

Alex – Are you sure you didn't read that in Tintin?

Mark – Meanwhile, they couldn't live in their house for years...

Sarah – Really?

Emma – Well, it's still very unlikely that it's a Roman necropolis... The bone doesn't look that old.

Sarah – Oh really, and how can you tell?

Emma – Do you know what was here before your grandfather built the house?

Alex – Probably fields. Fields that have been ploughed for centuries. If there were any bones or archaeological remains, we would have found them a long time ago.

Sarah – So it's much more recent...

Emma – It might date from the war...

Mark – The war? You mean...?

Emma – Were there any battles here during the war?

Alex – Not that I know of...

Sarah – So it's even more recent...

Emma – More recent than the war? You don't just bury someone in your garden like that, it's illegal. Ashes, maybe, but not a body.

Sarah – In that case, there's only one remaining hypothesis.

Emma – What?

Sarah – A crime.

Alex – A crime?

Mark – Do you see any other reason for burying someone in the garden?

Alex – I don't know... I'd never thought about it until today, you know... But it's true, the funeral services do charge such outrageous prices... Maybe someone wanted to save on a relative's funeral.

Sarah – What should we do, call the police?

Emma – Let's not jump to conclusions too quickly...

Alex – It's certain that it could bring complications.

Mark – Well, now that we know...

Sarah – We can't just pretend we don't know...

Mark – That would be concealing a body.

Alex – Concealing a body... Are you sure you're not overreacting a bit? It's just a bone...

Sarah – You don't just lose a tibia like that...

Mark – It's a femur.

Sarah – Yes, okay, a femur.

Mark – And if there's a femur, the rest of the skeleton can't be far away...

Sarah – We can't buy a house with a body buried in the garden...

Alex – On the other hand... We've already signed the contract...

Emma – And we're about to leave!

Mark – Maybe you are, but we're not in such a hurry.

Emma – You can't do this to us!

Alex – You don't have the right!

Emma – You signed the contract...

Sarah – Oh yes, but now... It's not that simple...

Mark – Isn't this a case of force majeure to cancel a sale contract?

Sarah – Human bones...

Mark – It's more serious than if we hadn't managed to get our mortgage or something like that...

Sarah – Who knows... There might be more scattered around the garden.

Mark – And the garden is large...

Emma – What a situation... I don't know what to say...

Sarah – I can't imagine living in a house with a corpse in the garden...

Mark – Maybe more than one...

Emma – More than one?

Mark – And you, haven't you ever noticed anything?

Emma – We never go into the garden...

Alex – And we don't have a dog that digs up bones...

Emma – So, what do we do?

Alex – I'm going to take a look.

Mark – I'm not sure if we should touch anything...

Sarah – If it's a crime scene...

Emma – Your dog certainly wasn't shy about it...

Alex – Fine, we'll say it's the dog's fault. I'm going. We need to get to the bottom of this.

Mark – I'll come with you.

Alex – You don't trust me, do you? Afraid I'll make the evidence disappear?

Mark – I'm just coming with you, that's all...

Alex and Mark go out. Sarah gives Emma an embarrassed look.

Sarah – You have to understand us as well... We'd prefer to be reassured...

Emma – No, no, I understand. It's normal...

Emma's phone rings. After a moment's hesitation, she answers.

Emma – I told you not to call me on my mobile... Let alone on my landline! I told you not to call me at all!

She puts her phone away, furious.

Sarah – Was it him?

Emma – Yes... Thanks for not telling Alex anything about my little slip-up during the New Year's party with the philosophy teacher...

Sarah – We're friends, right? But reassure me, you're not leaving because of that, are you?

Emma – Let's just say it's why I didn't oppose the move and did everything to speed things up...

Sarah – Because changing schools was still simpler than selling the house and moving to Uruguay, right? Is it really that serious with this philosophy teacher?

Emma – No, not at all! It was just a minor incident. I was a bit down that night... and quite drunk. But he hasn't stopped harassing me since. I swear I don't know how to get rid of him.

Alex returns.

Alex – Get rid of whom?

Emma – The... The guy from Netflix...

Sarah – And Mark?

Alex – I managed to get rid of him. I knocked him out with a spade and buried him in the garden next to the other one.

A moment of stunned silence, interrupted by Mark's arrival.

Mark – We didn't find anything. The dog dug a hole in the dahlia bed, but there's no sign of skeleton...

Sarah – Maybe we need to dig deeper.

Alex – We could do that next weekend, hire a digger and turn over the garden...

Emma – What if we just said we never found that bone? And go ahead with the sale...

Sarah – Mmm...

Mark – It's worth considering...

Sarah – What do you think, Mark?

Mark – Yeah... I don't know... But with a serious discount then...

Alex – What?

Emma – A discount?

Alex – That's blackmail!

Emma – And we've already agreed on the price in the contract.

Alex – You've signed!

Mark – An contract is just a piece of paper... We can always sign another one... I brought a blank copy just in case...

Alex – Oh, right... So he had everything planned...

A heavy silence.

Emma – And how much would you offer, out of curiosity?

Sarah – I don't know...

Mark – I think a 25% discount...

Emma – 25%!

Alex – He's not a businessman for nothing.

Mark – Oh, come on, with your high and mighty attitude! We might not be as intellectual as you, but we're not stupid enough to buy a house with a crime scene in the middle of the garden...

Sarah – It's true, we are talking about a corpse...

Alex – A corpse... It's just a bone!

Sarah – And between us, you didn't exactly give us a friend's price either...

Alex – Oh, right... No small profit, eh? He doesn't lose his head, that one...

A moment of tension.

Emma – Right... I'm going to fetch some nibbles, we'll all calm down, and we'll find a solution, okay?

Mark – Okay...

Emma – Come and help me, Alex...

Alex – Aren't you worried about us being robbed while our backs are turned? Or the china set from my mother...

Emma (*authoritatively*) – Come on, I'm telling you!

They exit.

Sarah – 25%, don't you think you're exaggerating a bit?

Mark – We can always try; we'll see...

Sarah – At that price, we were already getting a good deal.

Mark – Yeah, it did seem a bit suspect. I thought your friend gave you that price because she owed you something.

Sarah – No, I assure you...

Mark – You know she's having an affair with the biology teacher, don't you? You were the one who told me you saw them groping each other in the bathroom on New Year's Eve...

Sarah – It's the philosophy teacher, not the biology teacher.

Mark – Yeah, but it's basically the same thing, isn't it?

Sarah – And you think she'd give me a friend's discount for that?

Mark – You could have reported her to her husband...

Sarah – No, I don't think she accepted our offer because of that.

Mark – Yeah, well, now I understand better... In this house, it's not just a lover in the closet; there's also a corpse in the garden...

Sarah – Still, 25%... We shouldn't push it too far, or they might change their minds...

Mark – You think so?

Sarah – The perfect is the enemy of the good, Mark. If we tear up the contract and they sell to someone else...

Mark – They do seem eager, especially her...

Sarah – A house like this... We won't find another one anytime soon.

Mark – What do you want? Negotiating is always a game of poker bluff...

Sarah – But I really like this house!

Mark – Even with a corpse buried in the garden?

They fall silent as Alex and Emma return.

Emma – Okay, we'll agree to a 10% discount.

Sarah – 10%... Mark?

Mark – So you're admitting it...

Alex – What? Not at all!

Emma – It's just... a goodwill gesture.

Mark – 10% for complicity in a murder? That's not much...

Emma – Don't you think you're pushing your luck a bit?

Sarah – Great... Now it's going to be our fault.

Mark – Oh, and honestly, I'm not sure we're going to sign at all...

Sarah – A house that might have belonged to a serial killer...

Alex – It's a family home!

Mark – Well, that's your family you're talking about...

Sarah – Unless this crime is much more recent...

Emma – Are you accusing my husband of being a serial killer?

Sarah – There's no smoke without fire...

Mark – And there's no femur without a corpse...

Sarah – Anyway, I found this sudden departure suspicious...

Alex – What?

Mark – It's true, why are you so eager to leave the country?

Sarah – And selling the house to “friends” instead of going through an estate agent like everyone else.

Mark – Especially to Uruguay – a country that doesn't have an extradition treaty with France.

Alex – This is ridiculous! We're caught up in some wild fantasy here!

Emma – We've been planning this move for years!

Mark – Which just makes it seem more premeditated...

Emma – Right... So we're supposed to be friends, and five minutes later, because your dog found a bone in the garden, you accuse us of being criminals?

Mark – Yeah, some friends...

A moment of extreme tension.

Sarah – Look... I think we've all gotten a bit carried away... Let's take a deep breath and calm down, alright?

Emma – Mmm...

Sarah – And besides, we didn't say it was you... (*To Alex*) You said it was a family home. Maybe it was your father. Since he also disappeared... He did disappear, didn't he?

Alex – Yes...

Sarah – Maybe he fled because of that... To avoid justice...

Alex – My father?

Sarah – Or maybe it was your grandfather! Perhaps he killed a German during the war and buried him in the garden. Who knows, your grandfather might be a hero! He could even be posthumously awarded the Légion d'Honneur...

Alex – My grandfather was a great admirer of Marshal Pétain... And the only medal he received was the Francisque...

Mark – Oh, right...

Alex – Anyway, this is all completely absurd... And we don't owe you any explanations. Are you the police?

Mark – Do you want us to call the police?

Sarah – Mark, please... Let's sort this out among ourselves, shall we?

Alex – But seriously, who does Tintin think he is?

Emma – Alex, don't make it worse...

Alex – And besides, why couldn't the bone have come from your place?

Mark – From our place?

Alex – It was your dog who brought it here. Maybe it found the bone in your garden, put it in the car, and then buried it here.

Emma – Oh, actually, that's a good point... Why not?

Mark – Are you hearing this, Sarah? Now they're blaming Snowy...

Alex – In that case, the serial killer would be you!

Emma – Maybe you should dig up your own garden with a digger!

Sarah – We don't even have a garden!

Mark – They don't like animals, you can tell. And animals can sense when they're not liked.

Sarah – That's probably why he went to dig up that bone in their garden...

Mark – Still, without him, we'd never have found out about the corpse...

Emma – No, but can't you see how absurd all this is? Think about it! If Alex had killed someone and buried them in the garden, I'd know.

Mark – Maybe you did know...

Alex – But now that I think about it... What if Tintin deliberately brought that bone here?

Sarah – Why would we have done that?

Emma – To get a discount...

Mark – What?

Alex – I also thought it was suspicious that he pulled out a second blank copy of the sales contract from his sleeve. It was like he had everything planned, the bastard...

Mark stands up and challenges Alex.

Sarah – Look, you're not going to start fighting, are you?

Emma – And you with your aerobics class—enough already!

Sarah – Aerobics class?

Emma – You're accusing us of being a devilish couple, and we're supposed to stay silent?

Mark – And you're accusing us of being crooks!

Sarah – And maybe Alex doesn't know anything after all. What if it's you, Emma?

Emma – Me?

Sarah – Maybe you kill your lovers and bury them in the garden to get rid of them when they become too troublesome!

Alex – What lovers?

Mark – It's true. We haven't seen that biology teacher for a while.

Alex – So, if I understand correctly, I'm the only one who doesn't know anything.

Emma – It's not the biology teacher, it's the philosophy teacher! He's on sick leave. He's depressed!

Alex – Does it bother you if I join the conversation?

Emma – Sarah was there when he called me earlier! How could his skeleton be buried in the dahlia bed?

Alex – Who called? Wait, this concerns me too...

Sarah – You'll have to ask your wife...

Alex turns to Emma.

Emma – No, she's just making things up to get back at me, you can see that...

Mark – Right, we'll leave you to sort out your family issues...

Sarah – And as for the house, you'll find another buyer!

Mark – I wasn't in favour anyway. I thought it was too expensive. I told Sarah, but she didn't want to haggle with friends...

Alex – Well, now we're no longer friends, it's much simpler.

Mark – Come on, Sarah. Let's go...

Mark and Sarah leave. Alex and Emma remain, stunned.

Alex – So... What's this about the philosophy teacher?

Emma – It's nothing... She's just making things up to get revenge, don't you understand?

Alex – She said this guy called you earlier... Wouldn't your lover be called Netflix by any chance? Is he the one harassing you?

Emma – Look, Alex, don't you think there are more urgent matters than a jealousy crisis? If we don't sell this house before moving to Uruguay, we're in trouble! We were counting on this money to settle there!

Alex – That's true...

Emma – And it's not like the phenomenal sales of your latest novel are going to afford us a villa with a sea view in Montevideo!

Alex – Thanks for reminding me...

Emma – Well, sorry!

Alex – But once we sort this problem out, we still need to discuss your Netflix subscription.

Emma – Right, in the meantime, what are we going to do about the house?

Alex – I don't know... We could find a new buyer...

Emma – In such a short time... That's not going to be easy.

Alex – Yeah... And hoping that these collaborators don't report us to the police in the meantime...

Emma – Do you think they could go that far?

Alex – During the war, I'm sure they'd have been the type to report Jews to the Gestapo just to get a bigger apartment.

Emma – Maybe we should preemptively report ourselves to show our good faith...

Alex – Report ourselves? But we're not guilty!

Emma – No, of course not... I mean... Maybe we should notify the police ourselves to show that we have nothing to hide.

Alex – I'm not sure that's a good idea...

Emma – So what do we do?

Alex – I don't know...

Alex pours two glasses.

Alex – Here, let's have a drink, it'll clear our heads...

They drink in silence.

Emma – And what about the bone? Do you have any idea?

Alex – Are you going to accuse me too?

Emma – No, obviously not, but that femur didn't just appear on its own!

Alex – And why should it be up to me to solve this mystery? Sarah has a point. It could just as easily be you!

Emma – Do you see me killing someone and burying them in the garden?

Alex – I can actually picture you doing just that!

Emma – I don't know... It's your family home... Family secrets do exist. Are you hiding something from me?

Alex – Not at all!

Emma – You've never been good at lying...

Alex – Unlike you, you mean?

Emma – I'm sure you're hiding something.

Alex – Funny, I feel the same way about you... But not about the same thing...

Emma – Are you really sure you don't know anything?

Alex – It's true that we've already found bones in the garden...

Emma – What?

Alex – There are bones everywhere, aren't there? Life appeared on Earth three billion years ago. We're living on a pile of bones!

Emma – Not human remains!

Alex – I didn't know they were human remains...

Emma – But who could it be?

Alex – I don't know...

Emma – After all, Mark might be right... What if it's your father?

Alex – My father? If he had killed someone, the police would have eventually found out, wouldn't they?

Emma – Not if he was the victim.

Alex – Who would have wanted to kill my father and bury him in his own garden?

Emma – Your mother.

Alex – My mother?

Emma – A woman always has a good reason to want to kill her husband...

Alex – And vice versa...

Emma – You told me he disappeared not long after you were born. Maybe your mother killed him during his last visit and buried him here...

Alex – Why would she do that?

Emma – You said he was cheating on her with anyone who moved.

Alex – Fortunately, adultery doesn't necessarily lead to murder...

Emma – And the bones you found, didn't they make you think?

Alex – I don't know... I thought they were cow bones.

Emma – Cows in the Paris suburbs?

Alex – In my grandfather's time, there were still farms around here.

Emma – And to think you saw a psychoanalyst twice a week for over ten years! And during that time, with all the bones you found in your garden, you never suspected you could have pieced together the puzzle of your missing father... Honestly, if I were you, I'd ask for a refund.

Alex – Yeah, well, I'll do that then...

Emma – Do you realise? At 50 euros a session! We wouldn't even have had to sell the house to move to Uruguay!

Alex – If we hadn't sold the house, we'd never have left!

Emma – Besides, it's still not sold...

Alex – And do you really think it's that easy to consider that your mother could have killed your father and buried him in the dahlia bed?

Emma (*looking towards the garden*) – Well, the dahlias seem to have benefited from it... (*They sit back down, dejected.*) What's the biggest thing you've ever killed in your life?

Alex – I don't know, I'm not a hunter. A spider...

Emma – A spider?

Alex – No, but a big one...

Emma – I meant at least a mammal. Insects don't count...

Alex – No, I can't think of anything... Oh wait, I remember now. I once ran over a hedgehog crossing the road.

Emma – Did you stop?

Alex – A hedgehog! It's not like a cat or... It's a wild animal.

Emma – I hope it died instantly.

Alex – It was manslaughter... And it was a small hedgehog... Can you imagine me going to a vet with a half-squashed hedgehog?

Emma – Poor little hedgehog...

Alex – It was on the motorway. I could have killed myself hitting that hedgehog! A tyre bursting at that speed, can you imagine? It's unforgiving. And you're only thinking about the hedgehog!

Emma – So, what do we do now?

Alex – The vet idea gives me a thought! What if we showed the bone to Pierre?

Emma – Pierre?

Alex – The bookshop owner next door!

Emma – Why would a bookseller know more about bones than us? He specialises in religious and mythological books. If it were a unicorn's bone, maybe...

Alex – Before he was a bookseller, he was a vet.

Emma – Really? I didn't know that. What a strange idea...

Alex – Anyway, that's not the issue. He should be able to tell us for sure if it's a cow's bone or not.

Emma – At the same time... We're in the city, he probably only treated cats or dogs... Maybe parrots, occasionally...

Alex – He's had training. They must teach them to distinguish between a human femur and a cow's.

Emma – Do you think?

Alex – We need to be certain. We can't sell the house without knowing... Imagine if the new owners discover more remains while digging the garden...

Emma – You're right... And besides, your mother is dead. If she's the one who killed your father, she's not at risk anymore...

Alex – Yes, well, I'd prefer not to... It would be quite a scandal, wouldn't it?

Emma – Anyway, we're moving to Uruguay... So the neighbours...

Alex – Yeah... And even if the bookseller confirms it's a human bone, we could always keep it to ourselves...

Emma – Unless your vet turns us in to the police...

Alex – They're bound by medical confidentiality, aren't they?

Emma – Not in cases of murder... It's doctors who are bound by confidentiality, not vets. And he's a bookseller now...

Alex – He's very Catholic...

Emma – In that case, we could always rely on the confidentiality of confession...

Alex – I'll just send him a photo with my phone. It'll be less compromising... (*He looks around*) By the way, where's that bone?

Emma – It was here a moment ago...

Alex – Maybe those bastards took it as evidence...

The doorbell rings.

Emma – That's it... It's the Gestapo... They're coming to get us...

Alex – You mean the police...

Emma – Isn't that what I said?

Alex – That's not what I heard...

Emma – Anyway, it's too late to run. Where do you want to go?

Alex – To Uruguay? Mark says there's no extradition treaty with France... (*She looks at him in astonishment*) OK, I'll check...

He goes out and returns a moment later with Mark and Sarah, who look sheepish.

Sarah – I think we owe you an apology...

Mark – It's true, we might have gotten a bit carried away.

Emma – We're all a bit on edge, which is understandable. With our move and the sale of the house...

Mark – I think we let our words get the better of us.

Sarah – We shouldn't let this come between us; that would be a shame...

Alex remains cautiously silent. Mark faces him and extends his hand. Alex agrees to shake it.

Mark – We don't want to cause you any more trouble.

Sarah – And we do care about this house...

Mark – We'll stick to what's in the sale contract, alright?

Alex – So that's why you've come back?

Mark – Yes...

Sarah – And we also came to return this.

She pulls the bone from her handbag.

Sarah – We found it in the car...

Mark – It must have been the dog who took it without us noticing...

Sarah – It just goes to show... Bones can travel far with a dog.

Mark – True... After all, we don't know where this bone came from... It could be from anywhere...

Alex – Yes, that's exactly what I was saying earlier... I find you suddenly very accommodating... What made you change your mind?

Emma – Is there something else?

Mark and Sarah exchange an embarrassed glance.

Mark – Snowy had chewed on the bone a bit, so I looked closer at the place where he made a mark with his teeth...

Emma – And?

Sarah – Actually... It's a plastic bone.

Emma – Pardon?

Mark – It is indeed a human femur, but it's a plastic one.

Alex – Are you sure?

Mark – I held my lighter underneath to check, and there's no doubt. It's plastic. (*He hands the bone to her*) Here, you can still smell it.

Emma puts her nose to the bone.

Emma – Ah yes, you can definitely smell the plastic. (*To Alex*) Do you want to have a sniff?

Alex – No, I'm fine, thanks...

Emma – A plastic bone? What does that mean?

Sarah – Someone might have been playing a prank on you?

Alex – I don't know...

Mark – It might have come from one of those skeletons used in schools to teach children about anatomy...

Sarah – But why bury a plastic skeleton in the garden...?

Emma – Was there a school around here once?

Alex – My grandfather was a schoolteacher...

Mark – Well, there you go!

Alex – Now that I think of it... When I was a kid, I often saw that skeleton at home. We called it Martin...

Emma – You see... In the end, your psychoanalysis did yield some results... But couldn't you have remembered that earlier? It would have spared us this little misunderstanding...

Alex – It's only coming back to me now. I hadn't made the connection before, and I wasn't completely sure it was a real memory. I talked about it a lot with my therapist... But I thought Martin was an imaginary friend...

Sarah – A skeleton?

Alex – You don't always choose your friends... Even your imaginary ones...

Mark – But why did your grandfather end up with that skeleton if it was from the school?

Alex – Maybe it was given to him as a retirement gift.

Sarah – Yes...

Mark – That doesn't explain why he buried it in the garden...

Emma – Maybe to get rid of it.

Alex – Or to play a prank on us, as you mentioned earlier... My grandfather was quite the prankster...

Mark – I thought he was a close friend of the Marshal.

Alex – That doesn't mean he didn't have a sense of humour...

Moment of perplexity.

Sarah – And where's the rest?

Alex – The rest?

Sarah – The rest of the plastic skeleton!

Alex – That...

Mark – If we find the rest of it, we'll keep it for you.

Emma – That way, at least you'll get to recover an old friend.

Alex – Well, the main thing is that it's not actually a real bone.

Emma – No bone, no corpse. And no corpse, no crime.

Sarah – Yes, all's well that ends well...

General relief, mixed with some embarrassment.

Emma – So, shall we stick to the sale contract?

Mark – A promise is a promise.

Sarah – And we're still friends, right?

A slightly awkward silence.

Emma – One last drink to celebrate?

Mark – I don't think that would be very sensible...

Sarah – We'll be going. We've had enough excitement for one day.

Mark – So, see you soon for the final signing?

Alex – We've given our notary the power to handle everything for us. We're leaving for Uruguay next week...

Sarah – Well, have a good trip...

Mark – We'll visit you as we mentioned, right?

Alex – That's right...

Mark and Sarah leave with a frosty atmosphere.

Emma – I'll see you out...

Barking is heard. Emma returns.

Emma – Phew...

Alex – Yes... I thought we'd never get rid of them...

Emma – Are you talking about the house or Mark and Sarah?

Alex – Both...

They sit down on a cardboard box, exhausted.

Emma – It's incredible, this story about the plastic skeleton...

Alex – Yes, "incredible" is the word...

Emma – I didn't know your grandfather was a teacher...

Alex – My grandfather was a butcher.

Emma – What?

Alex – He bought this house with the money he made during the war selling sausages on the black market.

Emma – But why did you tell them that...?

Alex – We had to come up with something. Do we want to sell this house or not?

Emma – But I don't understand... The bone is definitely plastic. Look!

Alex – Yes. My father had a plastic femur.

Emma looks momentarily stunned.

Emma – Was he some kind of cyborg or...?

Alex – I told you he was a stuntman... After a serious accident, they gave him a plastic femur...

Emma – So you think that...

Alex – I don't know... Maybe my mother poured lime on the corpse to make it disappear, and only the plastic femur survived...

Emma – But why would she do that?

Alex – Probably because of his numerous affairs. You know, some people get so jealous they're willing to kill when they find out they've been cheated on.

Emma – So you think that's it? It's your father's femur?

Alex – After quite a few shenanigans, my mother gave him his last stunt...

They contemplate the bone, thoughtful.

Emma – You're right, it's better to forget all this...

Alex (*waving the bone*) – At least now I'll have a keepsake of Dad...

Emma – The victim and the murderer are both dead.

Alex – And it's been a long time, so the statute of limitations has long expired.

Emma – It's not always a good idea to dig up the past or unearth old skeletons... One must know how to forgive and forget... We need to move forward!

Alex – Mmm...

Emma – Anyway, kudos for the story about the teacher and anatomy classes... You're a novelist for a reason. And that skeleton named Martin... Where do you come up with all this?

Alex – It might not be my father's plastic femur...

Emma – So where could this bone have come from?

Emma's phone rings.

Alex – Aren't you going to answer?

Emma – No...

Alex – Is it Netflix again?

Emma – Yes...

Alex – And how far did you go with Netflix... Did you have a subscription? Or was it pay-per-view?

Emma – It was just a little slip-up one evening, I swear.

Alex – Why didn't you tell me? We promised to be honest with each other if something like this happened. Better to tell the truth than to lie.

Emma – Yes, but the timing was wrong.

Alex – I don't know if there's ever a good time to admit such things like this. But why?

Emma – Because I had another piece of news to share with you.

Alex – Are you leaving me?

Emma – I'm pregnant...

Alex – By whom?

Emma – Well... That's why I said the timing was wrong... I wanted to avoid hearing that question...

Alex – It is a bit legitimate, don't you think?

Emma – There's absolutely no chance that anyone other than you is the father. I swear on this child I'm carrying.

Alex – The baby must be very small still... How can you be so sure?

Emma – Because I haven't slept with... Netflix. I swear!

Alex – OK, let's assume that... But don't tell me you rushed our move to Uruguay to distance yourself from the crime scene?

Emma – No... Although there is a bit of that...

Alex – If we decided to leave, it was because we had nothing to keep us here. Maybe with a child, we might have decided to stay...

Emma – That's also why I didn't tell you before the signing... I didn't want it to stop us from starting a new life. I don't want this child to symbolize resignation; I want it to be a new beginning.

Alex – So our child will be born in Uruguay... Aren't you scared?

Emma – There are hospitals in Uruguay too. Lots of children are born there every day... With you by my side, I'm not afraid of anything...

Alex – Given my family history, aren't you worried about ending up buried in a garden bed of dahlias?

Emma – I trust you... I know you don't have a green thumb...

Alex – So, did you cheat on me or didn't you?

Emma – Technically, no, I assure you...

Alex – Technically? I'm not sure that reassures me. Where does cheating begin for you?

Emma – Come, I'll show you where cheating on one's husband begins... before I get as big as a cow...

She embraces him and leads him towards the wings.

Alex – Excuse me, but... I remind you that we no longer have a bed.

Emma – Perfect... That way, it'll be even more like an affair...

They exit.

Blackout.

The End.

About the author

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

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

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

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 Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
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 Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

Comedies for 5 to 6

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

Comedies for 7 or more

At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe the savage beasts
Neighbours'Day
Offside
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

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

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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