

La Comédiathèque

The Rebels

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In adulthood, our lives are not always as we had dreamed them to be at twenty. Conversely, the idealised memory of our twenties is often quite distant from the reality of our youth. Nestled between our dreamt lives and our actual life is the nostalgia for all the possibilities. The eternal question remains: could we really have lived a different life, or was it all written in advance? This bittersweet comedy sketches, in delicate strokes, the tragicomic portrait of a few characters with thwarted destinies.

Characters

Vincent

Fred

Max

Tom

Cecilia

Alice

1. Emergency Exit

He is standing, arms crossed, in front of an imaginary door. She arrives.

Cecilia – Excuse me, is this the artists' entrance?

Tom – Affirmative.

Cecilia – So this is where they'll come out.

Tom – Who?

Cecilia – The band! The Rebels!

Tom – Oh, I don't think so.

Cecilia – But you just told me it was here.

Tom – I said it's the artists' entrance.

Cecilia – And so?

Tom – I didn't say it was the artists' exit.

Cecilia – Because there's also an artists' exit?

Tom – I don't know, miss. I was just told to keep an eye on this door; that's all I'm doing...

Cecilia – But look, next to the “artists' entrance” sign, it also says “emergency exit”.

Tom – Oh, yes...

Cecilia – That means they could also leave through here.

Tom – If there's a fire, yes.

Cecilia – Do you think they'll only leave through here if there's a fire?

Tom – A fire or...

Cecilia – If there's an emergency exit, there might also be an emergency entrance.

Tom – For what?

Cecilia – I don't know... In case there's a fire outside.

Tom – Maybe.

Cecilia – So you don't know where they'll come out?

Tom – No.

Cecilia – You don't seem to know much. For a security guard...

Tom – I'm just doing my job.

Cecilia – And what is your job?

Tom – To monitor the artists' entrance.

Cecilia – For?

Tom – To ensure no one comes in.

Cecilia – Except for the artists, then.

Tom – Except for the artists.

Cecilia – Well, I don't want to go in. I just want to ask them for an autograph when they come out.

Tom – To come out, they would first need to come in.

Cecilia – Oh, they haven't come in yet?

Tom – No.

Cecilia – You could have told me that earlier.

Tom – You didn't ask.

Cecilia – Alright...

Tom – In that case, you can still ask them when they come in.

Cecilia – Ask them what?

Tom – Ask them where they're going to come out.

Cecilia – Wouldn't it be simpler if I asked them for an autograph directly when they come in?

Tom – That's up to you.

Cecilia – And if you let me in?

Tom – For what?

Cecilia – To wait for them inside. I have a feeling it's going to rain...

Tom – Ah, that's not going to be possible, miss. Unless...

Cecilia – Unless...?

Tom – Unless you leave me your phone number.

Cecilia – You've got some nerve...

Tom – No, I'm just kidding.

Cecilia – What?

Tom – Of course they're already here; the concert starts in a quarter of an hour.

Cecilia – Alright... You're quite the comedian. For a security guard...

Tom – Probably because I'm not a security guard.

Cecilia – Who are you then?

Tom – I'm here for the concert, like you. I stepped out for a smoke while I was waiting for it to start. It's a local band, you know. It's not the Rolling Stones. Do you really think they can afford a security guard?

Cecilia – I don't know...

Tom – Anyway, you're already a fan. In fact, you're the only one. They'll be pleased.

Cecilia – I was just pulling your leg as well. Actually, I was looking for the artists' entrance to get in without paying. Since I mistook you for a security guard...

Tom – I see...

Cecilia – Do you think it's possible to get in through there?

Tom – Probably. I managed to get out.

Cecilia – Well, I'll go then...

Tom – But I still don't understand why you're so keen on coming in through the emergency exit.

Cecilia – I told you. To avoid paying.

Tom – Paying? The concert is free. Do you really think anyone would pay to listen to The Rebels?

She looks taken aback.

Cecilia – You're right, I must have confused them with another band...

Tom – Leave me your number. When there's a band worth seeing, I'll give you a call...

Cecilia – Sure...

He lights a joint and offers it to her.

Tom – Want some? It's Lebanese.

She takes the joint, takes a puff, and grimaces.

Cecilia – It's from Lebanon?

Tom – Well, the guy who sold it to me was Lebanese. At least, that's what he said...

2. Disagreement

Max is there with a bass guitar that he is tuning. Fred arrives with a guitar.

Max – Have you had a look at the room?

Fred – Yeah...

Max – It's packed to bursting, can you believe it! Apparently, some people are even trying to get in through the emergency exit.

Fred – Oh really?

Max – You won't believe it, but a girl asked me for an autograph...

Fred – Did you give her your number?

Max – Not even...

Fred – She wasn't very attractive...?

Max – She was fourteen...

Fred – Right...

Max – Can you hear that?

Fred (*distracted*) – What?

Max – They're getting restless. They're already applauding. Our audience is calling for us!

Fred – Oh, right...

Max – Fred? I feel like something's happening here. You'll see, mate. In a few years, when we release our third album and do our first Olympia, we'll look back at this concert and think that's where it all began.

Fred seems to be looking for something.

Fred (*worried*) – Yeah...

Max – Are you alright? You're not too high, are you?

Fred – No, no... Well, yes, but...

Max – What's going on?

Fred – I've broken a string.

Max – You've got plenty of time to change it. And if we keep them waiting a bit... It'll build up the tension.

Fred – The problem is... I don't have a spare string.

Max – You don't have any spare strings?

Fred – I have some, but... not that one.

Max – What do you mean, not that one?

Fred – The B string. I don't have the B string.

Max – Are you kidding?

Fred – No...

Max – Bloody hell, Fred...

Fred – Don't you have one?

Max – I do. I've got two spare sets of strings for my bass. Though bass strings don't break often, you know.

Fred – Sorry...

Max – Isn't there a music shop around here?

Fred – It's Sunday.

Max – Damn... So what do we do?

Fred – Well... I won't play with that string, that's all.

Max – Brilliant...

Fred – I've still got five left.

Max – Provided you don't break another one by then...

Fred – What do you expect? It's my destroyer side. Jimi Hendrix used to smash his guitar on stage...

Max – Yeah, but he waited until the end of the concert. And I'm sure he always had a spare set of strings. Why don't you have any spare strings?

Fred – I didn't have the money.

Max – That's it... But for buying weed, you always have money.

Fred moves towards him threateningly.

Fred – Hey, what's this, are you playing my mother or something?

Max – You're treating me like your mother, Fred. So it's me who should have spare strings for your crappy guitar, is it? I'm fed up with playing with a bunch of losers.

Fred – No one's holding you back, Max. You're pissing everyone off. We're here to have a good time, not to hear your moral lectures...

Fred walks off. Vincent arrives.

Vincent – Have you seen the crowd in the room?

Max – Yeah.

Vincent – Since we've had a female singer, we've been getting a lot more attention, have you noticed?

Max – She sings out of tune.

Vincent – Apparently, the guys aren't just coming to listen to her... You look down... Is there a problem?

Max – Fred's broken a string.

Vincent – And?

Max – He doesn't have a spare.

Vincent – Oh shit... *(He pulls out a joint, lights it, takes a puff, and offers it to Max.)*
Want some? It's Lebanese...

Max – No thanks, I'd prefer to stay clear-headed...

Vincent *(laughing)* – Clear-headed?

Max – So you're high too.

Vincent – Completely. Well, shall we go? I think our audience is calling for us...

Max – Damn it, Vincent, don't you get it! Fred already plays like a beginner with six strings, and with five... The crowd will slaughter us...

Vincent – The crowd? Don't worry. They're our mates! And they're even more stoned than we are...

3. Departure

Vincent and Fred are sitting at a table, having a coffee.

Vincent – Brilliant... So you're leaving in three weeks?

Fred – May 1st, yes. On Labour Day, I'm off on holiday for a year. Or more, we'll see...

Vincent – It won't be quite a holiday, will it?

Fred – When I need cash, I'll work a bit as a cook or a waiter. It's really easy there. There's work for everyone. And the French are highly regarded. Especially in hospitality. Not to mention the women, of course...

Vincent – The myth of the French lover... Lucky you... You're going to have a blast.

Fred – You should come with me.

Vincent – I can't, unfortunately. I'm starting my internship in September at a bank in Paris. And if I don't want to spend three hours commuting every day, I need to work this summer to pay for a small flat.

Fred – Oh right.

Vincent – It's definitely less glamorous.

Fred – For sure...

Vincent – Have you talked to Max about it?

Fred – Yeah. I saw him yesterday.

Vincent – How's he doing?

Fred – You know him... With Max, things are never really okay.

Vincent – He's taking his exam in two months to become a teacher; he's a bit on edge.

Fred – We hardly see each other anymore.

Vincent – He's working a lot, I think.

Fred – Or maybe he's upset with me. I don't know why.

Vincent – I think he's annoyed with both of us for quitting the band. And now you're leaving. So The Rebels are done?

Fred – They were already finished, weren't they?

Vincent – We have to face it; we'd never have become stars.

Fred – Not rock stars, at any rate...

Vincent – Anyway, I sold my drum kit to pay for the deposit on my flat.

Fred – And I sold my guitar to buy my plane ticket.

A pause.

Vincent – The Rebels, what a crappy name. I don't remember who came up with it back then.

Fred – That was me.

Vincent – Oh yeah, that's right...

Fred – When I was boarding school, in this catholic institution, it was like a real prison. We could only leave the school grounds on weekends. And even then, only if we hadn't been punished. And of course, it wasn't co-ed.

Vincent – Oh bloody hell...

Fred – Can you imagine? At an age when all you're thinking about is losing your virginity, spending the whole week with just guys, day and night. I don't know how I didn't end up gay.

Vincent – And didn't you try to escape?

Fred – One day, I organised a strike to protest our detention conditions. Everyone seemed up for it. But in the end, out of four hundred students, only three of us refused to go back to class.

Vincent – The Rebels...

Fred – There was a guy in my class who claimed to be a communist. The very diligent type, you know, but very politically committed. I asked him why he wouldn't join our protest movement. Do you know what he said?

Vincent – No.

Fred – He said: It's a rebellion, not a revolution...

Vincent – Oh right...

Fred – I don't know where he stands now with his revolution. I'm just trying to stay a rebel.

Vincent – And how did your rebellion end?

Fred – I hoped to get expelled, but no. Not at all. We got detention for four consecutive weekends.

Vincent – Oh yes, I remember. We didn't see you for a good while.

Fred – I swore to myself that after my A-levels, I wouldn't let anyone lock me up anywhere again. Especially not in an office...

Vincent – Yeah.

Fred – Aren't you freaked out about the prospect of spending your life in a bank?

Vincent – What can I do... I'm not as good-looking as you. If I want to meet women, I can't rely just on my looks. So I need to make a lot of money...

Fred – I'm going to enjoy it while I'm still young and good-looking, then... After that... I'll bet everything on humour.

Silence.

Vincent – Will you still come to Normandy for my birthday? It's in fifteen days.

Fred – Of course.

Silence.

Vincent – Are you sure you're okay?

Fred – Perfectly fine.

Vincent – It's what you wanted, right? To leave here. To see the world.

Fred – Yeah... In three weeks, it's America for me! I'll send you postcards, I promise.

Vincent – And then we'll see each other again.

Fred – Of course...

They exchange a look that says it all.

4. Future

Cecilia and Alice are sitting and having coffee.

Alice – You're going to Normandy for Vincent's birthday?

Cecilia – Yes. I can take you if you want. My mum is lending me her car.

Alice – Great. *(Pause)* I think Max said he'd be there.

Cecilia – Okay... *(Pause)* But why are you telling me that?

Alice – What?

Cecilia – About Max.

Alice – I just mentioned it...

Cecilia – Come on... I heard a little hint in your voice.

Alice – Not at all.

Cecilia – We'll be about a hundred people at this party. Why are you talking about Max?

Alice – I don't know... Max and you...

Cecilia – Nonsense. Who told you that?

Alice – No one. But everyone knows he's in love with you, right?

Cecilia – Everyone?

Alice – Except you, apparently. Aren't you interested?

Cecilia – Is he the one who asked you to talk to me about it?

Alice – Not at all, I assure you... *(Pause)* Well, a bit...

Cecilia – Okay... I thought we were past that age.

Alice – Well, he's not, you see. *(Pause)* So?

Cecilia – I like him but... he's just a friend.

Alice – I see.

Cecilia – Yes, of course, I've noticed that...

Alice – Noticed what?

Cecilia – That he looks at me strangely.

Alice – He's quite cute, isn't he?

Cecilia – But he's so serious. If I slept with him one night, I feel like the next morning he'd bring me breakfast in bed and propose. And that a month later we'd be ordering furniture from IKEA.

Alice – And...

Cecilia – I can't picture myself in that scenario.

Alice – I understand.

Cecilia – And honestly, a guy who doesn't even have the courage to ask you face-to-face if you want to go out with him.

Alice – I guess he was afraid of getting rejected.

A pause.

Cecilia – And you?

Alice – Me?

Cecilia – Do you like Max?

Alice – I don't know... Why not...

Cecilia – Okay...

Alice – No, I just said... why not.

Cecilia – And he's sending you to talk to me on his behalf...

Alice – It seems like you impress him.

Cecilia – Unfortunately, the feeling isn't mutual. Do you see him often?

Alice – We revise for the exams together sometimes.

Cecilia – I see... Should I tell him that you're interested in going out with him?

Alice – That would be quite funny...

Cecilia – Yes.

Alice – But a bit cruel.

Cecilia – He kind of asked for it, didn't he?

They laugh.

Alice – And what about you? What are you doing next year?

Cecilia – I don't know... I don't even know what I'm doing this summer.

Alice – You're not going to drop out of university, are you? Like Fred...

Cecilia – Fred?

Alice – He's going to the States at the end of the month.

Cecilia – Oh right... Is he going for a long time?

Alice – I don't know.

Cecilia – Fred is quite a character.

Alice – More amusing than Max, anyway.

Cecilia – No, I mean... he's always joking around, but...

Alice – What?

Cecilia – I'm not sure if he's as cheerful as he likes to make out.

Alice – Do you think he's gay?

Cecilia – No... Well, I don't know. Do you think he's gay?

Alice – I don't know... You should try and find out, you'll see...

Cecilia – In any case, he's right to leave here.

Alice – Yeah... Have you ever been to the United States?

Cecilia – I think the furthest I've been in my life is London.

Alice – No? You've never flown before?

Cecilia – I have... to go to London.

Alice – You're joking?

Cecilia – No, I assure you. And you? Have you travelled a lot?

Alice – Well, I've moved around a lot. Up until I was ten. My father was in the military. But moving isn't really the same as travelling, you know. I lived in Germany and in several African countries. I can't even remember which ones. For me, moving was mostly about leaving my friends behind. When I arrived somewhere, I knew I shouldn't get too attached. Because six months later, or at most two years, I'd be moving on. And I'd never see them again.

Cecilia – And after that?

Alice – After my father died, we stopped moving. It's terrible to say, but I think my father's death was a relief for me... The chance, finally, to settle somewhere. (*She looks close to tears.*) You're not going to move away, are you?

Cecilia – No, don't worry... I'm staying here.

Cecilia puts her hand on Alice's to reassure her.

5. Taxi

Alice is standing there, appearing to wait for something. Tom arrives and starts waiting as well. He looks at her discreetly. She avoids his gaze.

Tom – Excuse me, are you waiting for a taxi?

Alice – Yes...

Tom – No, don't worry, it's not... just trying to start a conversation.

Alice – A conversation?

Tom – I mean, it's not to hit on you. I was really just asking if you were waiting for a taxi.

Alice – Alright...

Tom – You could very well be waiting for something else.

Alice – What else could you wait for at a taxi rank? A bus?

Tom – So you are waiting for a taxi...

Alice – And...?

Tom – And since you were first, the next taxi will be for you. That's why I asked. I now know I'll have to wait for the next one.

Alice – Sorry for you.

Tom – No, no, don't apologise... It's not a big deal.

Alice – I wasn't apologising.

A pause.

Tom – I'm suddenly having doubts...

Alice – Again?

Tom – Are you sure this is a proper taxi rank?

Alice – There's a sign. It says "taxi."

Tom – Yeah, but that doesn't mean much.

Alice – Oh, doesn't it?

Tom – In a place like this... It's not certain there's an actual taxi rank.

Alice – Why would it say "taxi," then?

Tom – It might just be a meeting point.

Alice – A meeting point?

Tom – I mean, a rendezvous point. In small country stations, it's often like that.

Alice – This isn't exactly a small country station...

Tom – Small provincial towns, if you prefer. People book a taxi the day before to go to the hospital or wherever, and the next day, the taxi waits for them at that spot. At a specific time. In front of the "taxi" sign.

Alice – Oh, really?

Tom – Did you book a taxi?

Alice – No.

Tom – Let's just hope it's a genuine taxi rank...

A longer silence, as doubt settles in.

Alice – So you think we're waiting for nothing?

Tom – I don't know...

A pause.

Alice – What if we called a taxi company?

Tom – That's only in Paris. In some big provincial cities, maybe. Certainly not here...

Alice – Right... so we'll just wait.

A pause.

Tom – Do you have the time, please? (*Alice gives him a surprised look.*) No, I'm not saying that to...

Alice – Start a conversation...?

Tom – I don't have a watch... (*Alice notices the watch on his wrist.*) Well, I do, but... the battery's dead.

Alice – Why do you still wear it, then?

Tom – I don't know... I suppose I got attached...

Alice – Alright...

Tom – No, I'm joking. The battery just gave out. Just now.

Alice – Bad luck.

Tom – So?

Alice – So?

Tom – Do you have the time?

Alice – Oh, sorry... (*She looks at her watch.*) It's almost midnight...

Tom – Midnight...

Alice – Yes... There's little chance that someone has booked a taxi to go to the hospital at this time.

Tom – Unless it's an emergency... But in case of a heart attack or stroke, you wouldn't book a taxi the night before, would you?

Alice – No... probably not.

Tom – I don't know... Maybe it really is a proper taxi rank...

Alice – We'll wait a bit longer.

Tom – Even if it is a taxi rank, it doesn't necessarily mean a taxi will actually show up. On a Sunday night, at midnight, in this dump of a town...

Alice – You're not exactly an optimist, are you? I'm beginning to wonder if I did the right thing by starting this conversation.

Tom – Sorry... But I can be very funny sometimes, you know?

Alice – Probably unintentionally, I'd guess.

Tom – Can I ask where you're heading?

Alice – Why?

Tom – Oh, not to...

Alice – To hit on me.

Tom – It's just that... it would be a miracle if just one taxi arrived within the next hour, let alone a second one. I was thinking if we're heading more or less in the same direction, we could share. I mean, take the same taxi.

Alice – Well, I don't know...

Tom – Where are you going?

Alice (*pointing in a direction*) – I'm going that way...

Tom (*a bit taken aback*) – Oh, right...

Alice – And you?

Tom – Me too... More or less...

Alice – We'd need to get a taxi first.

Tom – I assure you, I'm not saying this to hit on you, but...

Alice – If you stopped starting every sentence with "I'm not saying this to hit on you," I assure you it would be a bit more credible.

Tom – Sorry...

A pause.

Alice – Well, go ahead then.

Tom – No, it’s just... I have this feeling that I’ve seen you somewhere before.

Alice looks momentarily bewildered.

Alice – Wait... “Do you have the time?” “I feel like I’ve seen you somewhere before?” “Do you still live with your parents?” It’s almost done as well. What’s the next question? “Do you happen to have a light?” Relax. We’ve already started the conversation.

Tom – OK.

Alice – If you have something interesting to say, go ahead, I’m listening. Don’t bother with the preliminaries because I assure you, preliminaries are not your thing...

Tom – Sorry, it’s just that... I really had the feeling I’d seen you somewhere before.

Alice – Sorry, I’m a bit on edge...

A pause. He pulls out a cigarette and looks in his pockets for something to light it with. In vain.

Tom – So, I’m hesitant to ask if you have a light...

Alice – I don’t. I don’t smoke.

He puts away his cigarette.

Tom – Never mind... I mean... Good for you if you don’t smoke.

Alice – Yes.

A pause.

Tom – Waiting for a taxi...

Alice – Yes, I got that.

Tom – No, it’s... It’s the title of a song I wrote a long time ago.

Alice – You write songs?

Tom – Yes... Well, no, not anymore, but... Why, do I look like someone who writes songs?

Alice – I don’t know. I don’t know anyone who writes songs. At least not personally. And what was that song about?

Tom – It’s the story of a guy who... who waits for a taxi.

Alice – Yes, from the title, I suspected as much. Is that it?

Tom – It was a long time ago. I don’t remember it very well. The first line was... it’s nearly midnight under the pallid neon lights, and for over an hour alone in front of this station... And the chorus was, I’m waiting for the taxi, taxi, taxi...

Alice – I’m waiting for the taxi, taxi, taxi...?

Tom – Yes. That’s what I remember...

Alice – Right... And did your taxi eventually show up?

Tom – No... You see... I'm still waiting for it...

Alice – That's not very encouraging.

Tom – Well, the whole taxi thing was symbolic, of course. The guy waiting for the taxi... that will take him somewhere. It was a bit like me when I was younger, you see. Me or someone else. At eighteen, we're all waiting for something to happen, aren't we? For life to embrace us. For someone to come...

Alice – I see. And in your case, then, no one came.

Tom – No... Well, actually, yes... Since then, I've taken quite a few taxis, of course. But not the one that would have taken me where I really wanted to go.

Alice – And where exactly did you want to go?

Tom – I don't know...

Alice – Well, for now, I'd quite like to get home.

Tom – So, you don't live with your parents.

Alice – No. Why? Do you live with your parents?

Tom – No... Well, it depends.

Alice – Depends?

Tom – Depends on the day.

Alice – Right...

A pause.

Tom – It's coming back to me now!

Alice – What?

Tom – Where we've seen each other before.

Alice – And?

Tom – You were at that party at Vincent's tonight too.

Alice – Yes, indeed... Sorry, I don't remember you.

Tom – I asked you to dance. You actually refused...

Alice – That didn't leave much of an impression on you, did it? You didn't remember me earlier...

Tom – There was mood lighting over there; you looked more... Over here with the neon lights...

Alice – Thanks.

Tom – No, but you're very pretty too.

Alice – And now, are you sure you're not trying to hit on me?

Tom – Maybe a little bit now, yes.

Alice – I had planned to go home with a friend who has a car, but she found a guy over there, so...

Tom – Oh yes, unlucky. I mean, for you.

Alice – I thought I might find a taxi. And you?

Tom – Actually... I wasn't really invited to that party. Well, I was, but... I was invited by a friend who couldn't come at the last minute, so...

Alice – So, you didn't know anyone.

Tom – So, I didn't see myself staying there to sleep.

Alice – Your sensitivity is commendable.

Tom – I came by train. But I missed the last one. The next one is at 7:32 tomorrow morning, I checked.

Alice – And in the meantime, the station is closed.

Tom – I'm not sure it's worth waiting.

Alice – For the taxi, you mean?

Tom – We have to face the facts, no taxi is going to come here tonight.

Alice – I live thirty kilometres away; I can't walk home.

Tom – Apart from the 7:32 train, I don't see any other option.

Alice (*looking at her watch*) – It's not even half past midnight yet. We're not going to wait here for seven hours!

Tom – Especially since it's not very warm.

Alice – We could go back over there, of course, but...

Tom – To that party, you mean?

Alice – At Vincent's place, yes.

Tom – Honestly, I'm not sure I want to go back there.

Alice – Oh really?

Tom – Actually, Vincent threw me out.

Alice – He threw you out? Why?

Tom – A murky story about money that went missing from a bag. Since I was the only one nobody knew, I was, of course, the prime suspect. I swear it wasn't me.

Alice – I know.

Tom – Thanks. Do I really look like someone who would steal from guests at parties where I'm not invited?

Alice – Actually, you do.

Tom – So how do you know I didn't steal the money?

Alice – Because that money is mine. I thought it had gone missing. I mentioned it to my friend Cecilia, who mentioned it to Vincent. But I've just found my money in the lining of my bag.

Tom – Right. So essentially, it's thanks to you that I was thrown out like a thief.

Alice – I didn't know my friend would mention it to Vincent. And make such a fuss. That's partly why I left, actually. I was very uncomfortable...

Tom – And so was I.

Alice – I'm really sorry.

Tom – Yeah.

Alice – Here, if a taxi does eventually show up, I'll invite you to come with me. I'll drop you off, and I'll pay for the ride.

Tom – You're not taking much of a risk. No taxi is ever going to come here tonight.

Alice – So what can I do to make you forgive me? Even though none of this is really my fault...

Tom – Shouting thief because you can't find your money... and letting an innocent get accused.

Alice – Well... I didn't accuse anyone, it was my friend who...

Tom – I saw the hatred in their eyes, I assure you. They could have lynched me...

Alice – Are you sure you're not exaggerating a bit?

Tom – OK, there is one thing you could do to make me forgive you.

Alice – Go on...

Tom – Dance with me.

Alice – Pardon?

Tom – Earlier, I asked you to dance, and you refused. Give me this dance.

Alice – Here? At a taxi stand?

Tom – We don't have anything urgent to do, do we?

Alice – There's not even any music!

Tom – I've got some on my phone. You owe me this, don't you?

Alice hesitates.

Alice – OK, but we're only talking about dancing, right?

Tom – Right.

He takes out his phone, plays a very classic slow tune, puts the phone on the ground, and opens his arms.

Alice – Are you always ready to whip out a slow dance as soon as you meet a girl at a taxi stand?

Tom – If you prefer another song...

Alice – Let's go for it. After all, what do I have to lose, since you're not trying to hit on me at all...

She agrees to let him embrace her, and they start to dance.

5. Proposal

Alice is having a coffee. Max arrives.

Alice – How are you?

Max – I've got a bit of a headache, but I'm OK. I think I overdid it with the champagne...

Alice – It's not every day you get to see your best mate get married.

Max – No...

Alice – It was nice.

Max – Yes.

Alice – It's been a while since we've all been together like this.

Max – Yes... Well, almost all of us...

Alice – We should do this more often.

Max – Yes. We'll have to find another occasion.

A pause.

Alice – I do have an idea, but...

Max – Oh really?

Alice – Not you?

Max – I don't know...

A pause.

Alice – We've been together for a while now. I'm pregnant...

Max (*pretending to be surprised*) – You're pregnant? (*She doesn't seem to find it funny.*) I'm joking...

Alice – I know, traditionally... it would be your place to propose to me, but... since it hasn't happened.

Max – I'm sorry, I didn't realise... it was important to you.

Alice – I didn't say it was important, but... it would make sense, wouldn't it?

Max – Make sense?

Alice – I mean, it would be the logical thing to do. We live together, we're having a baby...

Max – Of course.

Alice – Show some enthusiasm.

Max – Sorry, it’s just that... I didn’t expect we’d have this conversation this morning. I told you, I’ve got a hangover...

She gets up.

Alice – It was already hard enough for me to bring it up, but now, you know, I feel... really awful.

He gets up and embraces her.

Max – I’m sorry, I’m really sorry. Of course, we’ll get married... We love each other, don’t we?

Alice – I’m the one who’s sorry. Sorry. I wasn’t very... It’s my first proposal, you see.

Max – Yes... It’s a bit obvious.

Alice – But it shouldn’t be an obligation either... If you don’t want to...

Max – Alice, do you want to be my wife?

Alice – Yes, I do.

Max – Then I declare us united in marriage.

Alice – You may kiss the bride...

They kiss.

7. Emergency

Vincent is there. He looks unwell. Cecilia arrives, somewhat flustered.

Cecilia – I've managed to reach them.

Vincent – So?

Cecilia – They're sending an ambulance. How are you feeling?

Vincent – I can't feel my arm...

Cecilia – You'll be fine. They'll be here in a few minutes. Well, I hope...

Vincent – A heart attack, at my age... It seems I was only early for this...

Cecilia – Don't talk nonsense. And it might not be a heart attack. But it's best not to take any risks.

Vincent – I'm really sorry for you... Becoming a widow on your wedding anniversary would be quite a blow...

Cecilia – Don't joke about that. We'll do everything we can to make sure you pull through.

Vincent – Of course... *(A pause)* But if, by some misfortune, I don't make it, there's something I need to tell you.

Cecilia – Please. I know better than you where all the paperwork is; I'm the one who files it. Maybe you should rest instead.

Vincent – I wasn't talking about the paperwork, but... while we're waiting for the ambulance, we can talk, can't we?

Cecilia – Of course... But if it's to confess that you've been cheating on me with my best friend, think carefully. If you get out of the hospital in two hours, you might regret sharing that kind of confession...

Vincent – I've never cheated on you, Cecilia.

Cecilia – So I'm listening...

Vincent – First, you need to know that I love you.

Cecilia – I know, Vincent. You tell me every day.

Vincent – And you respond that you love me too.

Cecilia – Because it's true.

Vincent – But you only respond... You never say it first.

Cecilia – I love you, Vincent. How can you doubt it?

Vincent – I know, but...

Cecilia – What?

Vincent – I've always wondered if I'm really the love of your life.

Cecilia – The love of your life?

Vincent – It sounds a bit silly, but... I've always thought that deep down... you were still in love with Fred.

Cecilia – Fred?

Vincent – The weekend I celebrated my birthday in Normandy, you went out with him.

Cecilia – That was a long time ago, Vincent. You and I weren't together yet.

Vincent – Of course. I'm not blaming you for cheating on me. In fact, I'm not blaming you for anything.

Cecilia – I never saw him again after that weekend. He didn't even come to our wedding. How can you say that?

Vincent – Exactly. Maybe if you had seen him again...

Cecilia – You're torturing yourself unnecessarily, Vincent... Do you really think this is the right time?

Vincent – I've never dared to talk to you about this. And maybe I won't have another chance.

Cecilia – My affair with Fred lasted only one evening. I had a bit too much to drink. It was a trivial matter. I've known a few men before you, you know?

Vincent – But Fred was my best friend.

Cecilia – Tell me instead how you're feeling?

Vincent – Terrible.

Cecilia – I think I hear the ambulance.

Vincent – That's a police siren. Ambulances don't make that noise.

Cecilia – They should be here soon...

Vincent – So?

Cecilia – So what?

Vincent – I was there too that evening. I courted you. But it was Fred you went out with.

Cecilia – Yes.

Vincent – Why?

Cecilia – Fred was leaving for the United States the next day. He was leaving France for a long time. Perhaps forever.

Vincent – And that’s why you went out with him.

Cecilia – I knew I wouldn’t see him again. Not for a long time anyway. Yes, maybe I was in love with him. But I didn’t love him. It’s you I love. And it’s you I married.

Vincent – I wish you’d been in love with me back then.

Cecilia – I am now. And I won’t let you go.

Vincent – I won’t go, I promise.

Cecilia – I chose you, Vincent. Could we have lived another life, either of us? I don’t think so. Not all adolescent dreams are meant to become realities.

Vincent – My dream was you. And you made it come true.

A moment of emotion.

Cecilia – My turn to ask a question. I need to know.

Vincent – Yes...

Cecilia – Did you know you had heart problems?

A pause.

Vincent – Yes.

Cecilia – But you didn’t tell me...

Vincent – Would you have married me if you had known?

Cecilia – That’s a strange question.

Vincent – Sorry... I was afraid that... I didn’t want you to see me like this.

Cecilia – Like this?

Vincent – I didn’t want you to pity me.

She holds his hand.

Cecilia – I still hear a siren.

Vincent – This time, it’s definitely an ambulance.

Cecilia – I’ll go and let them in. It’ll be alright, I promise...

Vincent – Of course... It’ll be alright...

8. Friends

They are sitting at a table, having coffee. An awkward silence.

Fred – I didn't know he was ill... I mean... ill with his heart.

Max – Neither did I.

Fred – Of course. Otherwise, you'd have told me...

A pause.

Max – He hadn't mentioned it to anyone. Not even to his wife, apparently.

Fred – I'm not surprised. Vincent... he had a winning mentality. Everything always went his way.

Max – The biggest salary, the biggest car... The most beautiful wife...

Fred – What he liked was being admired. He wouldn't have tolerated being pitied.

Max – But he's still dead.

Fred – You can't win every time.

Max – No... I'd even say that in the end, you're bound to lose. Everyone. Even those with a... winning mentality.

A pause.

Fred – And you, how are you?

Max – I'm fine.

Fred – So you haven't left the area.

Max – No. I haven't even left the school, you know. I became a teacher there. I'll probably stay until retirement. I must not have a winning mentality, as you say.

Fred – I was talking about Vincent. Still so touchy...

A pause.

Max – And you?

Fred – I'm fine.

Max – Still in real estate?

Fred – Still. But I've travelled quite a bit.

Max – To the United States?

Fred – The United States. Asia. Now I live in the South.

Max – The South of France?

Fred – Lyon.

Max – Married?

Fred – Married. And divorced. And you?

Max – Divorced. And remarried.

A pause.

Fred – How long has it been since we've seen each other?

Max – I don't know... A long time.

Fred – It's a shame.

Max – Mmm...

Fred – We were very close, after all. We were friends.

Max – Yes.

Fred – We still are, aren't we?

Max – Of course...

Fred – But we don't see each other anymore.

Max – You said it, you live in the South.

Fred – Lyon isn't the end of the world.

Max – No. It's not really the South, either.

Fred – I don't know. Where does the South start?

Max – Exactly, I don't know. I'd say Montélimar.

Fred – But Lyon isn't the North. It's not the Centre, either. The East?

Max – Not really.

Fred – Not the West, anyway.

Max – Lyon is a challenge to all geographers, myself included. It's not a location, it's a destination. Proof: Gare de Lyon is in Paris.

Fred – You're right. Lyon is in the middle of nowhere. You arrive by motorway, and you cross it through a tunnel. That's probably why I live there. I've always had trouble settling down somewhere...

Max – I've never managed to move, you see. That's probably why I became a geography teacher. To travel without leaving home.

A pause.

Fred – April 13th, 2010.

Max – Sorry?

Fred – The last time we saw each other was April 13th, 2010.

Max – What a memory...

Fred – It was Vincent's birthday. He'd organised a big party at his country house in Normandy.

Max – Ah yes, maybe. Anyway, it wasn't at his wedding. You weren't there.

Fred – I was far away... In San Francisco, I think. I couldn't make the trip... Is that a criticism?

Max – No. Just an observation.

Fred – I've never really liked ceremonies.

Max – But you still came to his funeral.

Fred – Yes... (*Pause*) What happened that night that meant we never saw each other again?

Max – We're seeing each other today.

Fred – Yes... More than ten years later. And it took Vincent's death...

Max – We didn't see each other much before that party in Normandy, did we? That's life. We took different paths. Our paths didn't cross anymore...

A pause.

Fred – So you've never forgiven me?

Max – Forgiven you for what?

Fred – You know very well.

Max – I assure you, I don't.

Fred – And you'll never forgive me.

Max – Forgive you for what?

Fred – For being with Cecilia! On Vincent's birthday.

Max – Why would I hold that against you?

Fred – Because you were in love with her, I imagine.

Max – Nonsense.

Fred – Weren't you in love with her?

Max – Maybe a little...

Fred – You had always been in love with her. I show up that night, I hadn't seen her for... and she falls into my arms.

Max – I wasn't dating her. It's not like she cheated on me with my best friend.

Fred – So you remember. And you held it against me.

Max – Yes.

Fred – It was she who came to me.

Max – Of course. And you let it happen, as usual.

Fred – I never saw her again after that. And she didn't try to see me again.

Max – Why are you telling me this? Is it less serious if it was just a one-night stand?

Fred – In the end, a few months later, she was dating Vincent. And you never held it against him.

Max – Well, he married her.

A pause.

Fred – Did you continue to see them?

Max – Yes. Occasionally. The town isn't very big, you know.

Fred – But we don't see each other anymore.

Max – It's complicated to stay friends with someone who lives five hundred miles away, but it's even more complicated to stay angry with a mate who lives right across the street.

A pause.

Fred – So I'm the bad guy, is that it?

Max – I didn't say that.

Fred – Will you come to my funeral, at least?

Max – You're talking nonsense. And I might die before you do.

Fred – I was drunk that night. Like everyone else. She came on to me. I let it happen, as you say. She wanted to hook up with someone. I don't know why, but I was the one she chose.

Max – Because she knew it didn't matter to you, probably. That you wouldn't even try to see her again afterwards.

Fred – Probably, yes.

Max – That's probably why all the girls fall into your arms.

Fred – Yes. And why I can't keep any of them.

Max – It's true, I was jealous. Jealous of your success. I'm the one you could marry. So I scare them off. I envied your lightness...

Fred – And I envied your rigour.

Max – You mean my rigidity, I suppose.

Fred – I thought you'd do something with your life. I mean, something meaningful.

Max – But in the end, we haven't done anything important, you see. Neither of us.

Fred – Anyway, none of us three became a rock star, like we all dreamed back then when we were touring the local halls with that band...

Max – The Rebels...

A pause.

Fred – So that's it... It's because of Cecilia...

Max – No.

Fred – Don't tell me it's because of that last gig we did together? And I completely messed up because a string was missing from my guitar...

Max – Do you really think it's because of a girl, Fred? Or a broken string? That if I forgave you, we'd be friends again, like we were years ago?

Fred – I don't know.

Max – It's true, if you'd played a bit better at that gig, we might have done a few more. But I'm not stupid. I know that band wasn't meant to last. We'd never have become professional musicians. As for becoming famous...

Fred – So why?

Max – You don't understand, Fred. We're not angry with each other. We just lost touch, that's all. And in a way, that's much worse. Out of sight, out of mind, you know the saying? We don't do anything together anymore. We have nothing left to share. That's why we're not really friends anymore. Friendship doesn't die on a specific day. Like Vincent. We drift apart gradually. And we don't see each other again, because when we do, it reminds us of our youth. All the promises we made to each other, all the promises we made to ourselves, that we didn't keep.

Fred – So what is friendship, in your opinion?

Max – I don't know... It's when someone's opinion matters to you. When you have a laugh together. When you have shared plans. What are our plans? To have another coffee together in a year or ten years, at another funeral? We don't have any dreams in common anymore, Fred. And I'm not sure I still have any dreams. When we meet, we only talk about the good old days. That's why we don't see each other anymore. Because it depresses me. Doesn't it you?

Fred – I'm sorry...

Max – Sorry for what?

Fred – For not being there. For deserting. Deserting our friendship.

Max – You're not to blame. Neither am I. That's life. What projects could we still have together?

Fred – I don't know.

Max – Back then, we dreamed of recording an album in England. Of doing a gig at the Golf Drouot.

Fred – Well, I've almost fulfilled my dream, then. I play every Saturday at the golf course. With my work colleagues.

Max – Sorry, I don't know how to play golf, and I'm not sure I want to take it up.

A pause.

Fred – Anyway, the Golf Drouot, even in our time, was already gone.

Max – Well, you see, even back then, we were already has-beens.

Fred – We could take up hiking... With walking sticks, you know? It's more our age than rock music, isn't it?

Max – You live in Lyon, and I'm in the Paris suburbs.

Fred – We could hike near Dijon. Each of us could do half the journey. Now, with the TGV...

Max – Even when we lived just two streets away from each other, we had already drifted apart. And when you left... I don't blame you, of course. You had new things to experience. I did too, actually. They weren't the same...

Fred – And then, we needed to find a real job to make a living. We can't stay stuck on impossible dreams forever. You're right. Even back then, we knew we'd never become stars...

Max – Anyway, now we're sure.

Fred – And is that why, in your opinion, we're not friends anymore? Because we couldn't fulfil our teenage dreams?

Max – No. Not just because of that. We could have found other dreams. We could have even laughed together about our failures.

Fred – So why?

Max – When we were really friends, we saw each other every day, we even lived together for a while, we went on holiday together.

Fred – It sounds like you're talking about an old couple.

Max – It was a bit like that, wasn't it? Without the sex. Don't worry, it never tempted me. But yes. Love, friendship... It's quite similar. And it doesn't handle reheated stuff well.

Fred – And then you got married. So did I...

Max – Our wives became our best friends. With the added sex. And even after they leave us, our wives often remain our most faithful friends. We were friends because we didn't have wives, Fred. Friendship is a single person's thing.

Fred – So we won't see each other again.

Max – I don't know. Sometimes it's even sadder to see each other than to not see each other.

Fred – And you don't have any friends anymore?

Max – Sharing a barbecue once a month and a holiday rental once a year, is that really being friends?

Fred – So what do we do?

Max – I didn't say it was your fault. I just want to make peace with myself, you understand? The self I used to be friends with.

Fred – What if we started a rock band again?

Max – That would be pathetic...

A pause.

Fred – Are you sure all that really happened?

Max – What?

Fred – What you're describing. Our friendship, the way you were talking about it earlier.

Max – I don't know. Doesn't it?

Fred – We were constantly jealous of each other. We were ready for any betrayal just to be in the spotlight, just to have a girl, even if it meant stealing her from your best mate. In fact, we hated each other.

Max – Yes... But we had a lot of laughs. And at least we were alive. How long has it been since you really laughed?

Fred – A long time, I think. As long as you, I imagine.

Max – Exactly. We don't laugh together anymore. And I'm not sure we laugh much in general. What's called laughing, you know? Until you get a bellyache. Do you remember our laughs? Maybe that's what friendship is. That's our lost paradise. Laughter...

A pause.

Fred – I'm going to move back to Paris.

Max – Not because of our conversation, I hope?

Fred – I'd been thinking about it for a while. Because Lyon, between us...

Max – It's up to you...

Fred – We could always go hiking in the Bois de Vincennes...

Max – It's tempting. I'll think about it.

Fred – I have to go. My train is in fifteen minutes.

Max – OK. You have my number.

They stand up, hesitate, and share a warm embrace. Fred is about to leave.

Fred – By the way, for my move... can I count on you?

Max – Friends are made for that, aren't they?

9. Return

Fred arrives from one side, Cecilia from the other.

Cecilia – Fred? What are you doing here?

Fred – Well, you see, I... I've come back.

Cecilia – Come back?

Fred – I live in Paris now.

Cecilia – Great... I'm pleased to see you.

Fred – Me too... How are you?

Cecilia – I'm OK... Better.

Fred – I'm really sorry.

Cecilia – That's life. But it's hard...

Fred – I understand.

Cecilia – I imagine it's hard for you too. He was your friend.

Fred – Yes.

Cecilia – And how are you doing?

Fred – I'm fine.

Cecilia – Are you going to stay in Paris for long?

Fred – I bought a house.

Cecilia – You managed to find a house in Paris?

Fred – I work in real estate, you know.

Cecilia – Oh yes, that's true.

Fred – Parc Montsouris.

Cecilia – Parc Montsouris... That's the South, isn't it?

Fred – The South of Paris, yes. It's the first time I've bought a house. Until now... I was more of a nomad.

Cecilia – And Max, have you seen him?

Fred – I'm leaving him right now. He gave me a hand with my move.

Cecilia – Friends are for that, aren't they?

Fred – Yes... And do you still see them? I mean... since they got divorced.

Cecilia – Of course. Alice is a friend...

Fred – Oh yes, that’s right... I even think that without you...

Cecilia – What?

Fred – Nothing... So, you... you’re going to stay around here.

Cecilia – For now, yes. After that, we’ll see. I’m not quite sure where I stand.

Fred – I understand... So, will we see each other again?

Cecilia – Maybe. But I need to go now...

Fred – Of course. I need to go too.

Cecilia – See you soon, maybe...

They both prepare to leave in their separate directions. He calls her back.

Fred – Cecilia?

Cecilia – Yes?

Fred – If I had asked you to come with me to the United States that night, would you have come?

Cecilia – You didn’t ask me.

She smiles and leaves. He stands there for a moment before heading off himself.

10. Epilogue – The Maze

Two characters wearing masks or blindfolds. One comes from one side, the other from the opposite side. They seem frustrated to meet each other.

Him – So?

Her – Nothing...

A pause.

Him – What if we try over there?

Her – I just came from there.

Him – And have we already tried that way?

Her – Yes.

Him – Are you sure?

Her – Absolutely. And several times.

Him – Then I don't see any more...

A pause.

Her – How long have we been lost in this maze?

Him – I don't know. A long time...

Her – All this time wasted looking for the exit, and we still haven't found it.

Him – What if there isn't one...

Her – Then how did we get in?

Him – I don't know. Do you remember when we entered?

Her – No... but there must have been a moment when we came in. Otherwise, how did we end up here?

Him – You're right. We must have come in somewhere.

Her – Yes. Through the exit.

Him – We came in through the exit?

Her – I don't know... Do you think there could be an entrance and an exit?

Him – That would make two possible exits...

Her – And we haven't found either?

Him – Or there was only one entrance, and it was blocked off once we were inside.

Her – They? Who are they?

Him – I don't know... Someone must have designed this maze, right? And since it wasn't us...

Her – Are you sure it isn't us?

Him – If it were us, we'd know where the exit is, wouldn't we?

Her – Yes, I suppose...

Him – Or maybe we've forgotten.

Her – Forgotten what?

Him – Forgotten where the exit was.

A pause.

Her – Do you think we're the only ones in this maze?

Him – We've never met anyone else.

Her – Maybe our paths have never crossed.

Him – I doubt it...

Her – Why not?

Him – Every time we go off in different directions to find the exit, we always end up back here.

Her – True... We never find the exit, but we never get lost. We always end up back here...

Him – Yes... We're doomed to stay together.

Her – Doomed?

Him – Did I say "doomed"?

Her – You said "doomed to stay together".

Him – No, I meant... Apparently... it's our fate. We're meant to live together.

Her – Yes... but then why spend all our time looking for the exit?

Him – I don't know.

Her – Do you think if we found the exit, we wouldn't stay together?

Him – Together? Outside, you mean?

Her – Yes, outside... Do you think the first thing we'd do when we got out is go our separate ways?

Him – That... we'll never know.

Her – Unless we find the exit...

Him – Yes.

Her – What if we stopped looking?

Him – Stop looking for the exit?

Her – Why not?

Him – And what would we do instead?

Her – I don't know. We could... I don't know...

A pause.

Him – Maybe it's better if we keep looking, don't you think?

They start moving again.

Her – I'll see if it might be that way.

Him – And I'll try this way.

Her – We'll meet back here?

Him – OK...

They each go out the opposite side from which they entered.

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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