

La Comédiathèque

The Tourists

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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The Tourists

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Two tourists arrive at the villa they rented for their holidays in a Maghreb country, which was on special offer after its recent revolution. However, they find the house already occupied by another couple...

CHARACTERS

Maurice

Diana

Patrick

Bridget

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Act 1

The terrace of a villa somewhere in North Africa. A garden table. A few chairs. Two deckchairs. Maurice and Diana, a couple of Parisian bohemians, arrive, exhausted. Maurice is pulling a Louis Vuitton suitcase on wheels behind him.

Diana – It's about time... Twenty minutes from the airport, really?

Maurice – Maybe by helicopter...

Diana – I told you we should have taken a taxi!

Maurice – Admit it, it was rather picturesque...

Diana – Picturesque? Being crammed in with all those people in that cattle truck they call a bus here? I still feel like I can smell the goat...

Maurice – I don't smell anything.

Diana – They could have at least warned us it was a local bus... Two hours to get here...

Maurice sets down the suitcase and admires the view.

Maurice – We've arrived, that's what matters! And look at this view. It's magnificent!

Diana looks around and smiles briefly, before frowning again.

Diana – Where's the sea? The website said terrace with a sea view!

Maurice searches desperately, then finally finds it.

Maurice – Ah, there, over there...

Diana – I can't see anything... Where?

Maurice – Yes, there! Far to the left. Between the two camels...

Diana – Oh, yes... If you lean a bit, with good binoculars...

Maurice (*tenderly*) – Come on... The important thing is that we're here... Together... For our second honeymoon...

Diana (*softening*) – You're right... Ten years of marriage, can you believe it? If you had to do it all over again, would you?

Maurice – With my eyes closed!

Diana – And with your eyes open?

Maurice – You'll see, I'm sure we'll be very happy here... In any case, it's got to be more comfortable than the low-cost terminal at Beauvais airport...

Diana – Eleven hours of delay... Fed with rotten sandwiches. It's pure extortion. They give you food poisoning before boarding, and even the sick bags cost extra on the plane.

Maurice – At least this way, we're already vaccinated against traveler's diarrhoea...

Diana – And to think we had to cram all our things into one suitcase to avoid paying for an extra bag...

Maurice – We're travelling lighter! Otherwise, we would have brought loads of unnecessary stuff.

Diana – A woman never brings anything unnecessary in her luggage. You're confusing unnecessary with superfluous, which is absolutely essential for any woman's happiness. Especially on holiday.

Maurice – Besides, the Seychelles, with Air France and in a club hotel, honestly... It's a bit cliché, isn't it...?

Diana – That's where we had our first honeymoon!

Maurice – Exactly! Back then, the Seychelles were still an adventure. Now it's so overrated...

Diana – For our wedding anniversary, I wouldn't have minded doing something conventional.

Maurice – And here, at least, we're supporting the liberation movements in the Maghreb... Have you seen all those election posters blooming everywhere? That wind of democracy blowing through the country?

Diana – Yes, well... Spending your holidays in a villa with a pool to boost tourism after the revolution... I hope you're not imagining you're Che Guevara...

Maurice – Still, if everyone opted for solidarity holidays...

Diana – The Seychelles aren't a democracy?

Maurice – I'm not even sure if they're really a country...

Diana – Who would they belong to, then?

Maurice – A tour operator, maybe.

They glance around.

Diana – Right... What do we do? Wait for someone to arrive?

Maurice – It's open, look.

Diana – I thought the owner would be here to welcome us, in traditional dress, sitting on an oriental rug, with mint tea... Where has the legendary hospitality of the Arab countries gone? I'm telling you, the revolution isn't all good. The old customs are dying out...

Maurice – At least it shows there's no security problem. In Paris, if we left our door open like this... We wouldn't even find the door...

Diana – Let's see what it looks like inside... All I dream of is taking a shower and changing clothes...

Maurice – Me too.

They enter the house, pulling their suitcase... Immediately after, another couple arrives on the terrace, this one rather vulgar. Patrick is wearing shorts and a promotional t-shirt. Bridget, sexy and a bit vulgar, is dressed in a flashy sarong. Patrick carries a folded parasol and a radio, while Bridget has a cooler.

Patrick – Good thing we brought the parasol and the cooler, because it's scorching by the pool... I could use a drink. Aren't you thirsty, babe?

Bridget – I could drink the sea dry... (*They settle into the deckchairs, and Bridget reaches for the cooler beside her*) What do you want, Pat?

Patrick – A beer would be nice, it'll do me good...

She hands him a can, and serves herself a Diet Coke.

Bridget – This is the last one, we'll need to buy more.

Patrick – Already?

Bridget – How many have you had since this morning?

Patrick – Do you think we can find beer here?

Bridget – Maybe non-alcoholic beer.

Patrick – No way...

Bridget – They're Muslims.

Patrick – I wonder if we should have gone back to the Costa Brava...

Bridget – The Costa Brava... It's become very posh, hasn't it?

Patrick – It's certainly become very expensive.

Bridget – You think?

Patrick – It's even more expensive than France now!

Bridget – Not to mention the security... Last year, they broke into our car at a service station just after the border and stole all our luggage.

Bridget – Yeah... It was so hot on the road... I left Saint-Denis in a sarong and you in Bermuda shorts. In the end, when we arrived there, we had nothing to wear.

Patrick – That's what you call being left in your undies.

Bridget – I had to buy a whole new wardrobe on the spot, remember?

Patrick – Our bank account certainly remembers.

Bridget – No, the Costa Brava isn't what it used to be.

Patrick – And the welcome, frankly, isn't always great, is it?

Bridget – As I always say, Catalonia would be perfect if it weren't for the Catalans.

Patrick – Now that they've decided they want independence... when we go there, they treat us like invaders.

Bridget – If they're bothered by us, they just have to say so, and we'll go on holiday somewhere else.

Patrick – That's what we're doing, isn't it?

Bridget – Well then... That'll teach them, those Catalans.

Patrick – When Spain was still a dictatorship, we didn't have all these problems.

Bridget – I hope now that they've overthrown their dictator here, it's still going to be bearable for tourists.

Patrick – Democracy isn't all good. Just look at how things are in France...

Bridget – It's true that I wasn't very keen on the Maghreb until now, but you have to admit, at this price...

Patrick – And here, they're not really Arabs, are they?

Bridget – Oh? What else could they be?

Patrick – I don't know... Bedouins...

Bridget – Bedouins? (*Pauses*) Aren't Bedouins Arabs?

Patrick – I don't think so...

They drink from their cans, lost in thought.

Bridget – Aren't Bedouins the ones who live in the desert?

Patrick – I don't know... Why?

Bridget – Well, we're not in the desert here! We're by the sea.

Patrick – The Bedouins... You mean the ones on camels? That's more the Tuaregs, isn't it?

Bridget – And Tuaregs aren't Arabs either?

Patrick – Who knows.

Bridget – But they're Muslims, right?

Patrick – Who?

Bridget – The Bedouins!

Patrick – Oh, yes... I think so...

Bridget – So, are we in the desert or not?

Patrick – We're in the desert, but by the sea. Look, there's a camel over there, on the beach!

Bridget (*yawning*) – I'm still not over the journey.

Patrick – We've only been here an hour.

Bridget – Must be the jet lag.

Patrick – Jet lag? There's only an hour difference, babe! And only in summer...

Bridget – Well, when you're not used to it...

Patrick – It's true, it's already noon, and I'm not even hungry... Anyway, I could use a nap. What do you think?

Bridget – Why not! We're on holiday, aren't we!

They start to doze off... Maurice and Diana return to the terrace and don't immediately see Patrick and Bridget, asleep in the deckchairs.

Maurice – So? Not bad, right?

Diana – A bit rustic, but it'll do.

Maurice – Considering these people have just emerged from a half-century dictatorship...

Diana – Why half a century? Was it a democracy here fifty years ago?

Maurice – A monarchy, I think... No?

Diana – And who is that candidate for these first democratic elections?

Maurice – Which candidate?

Diana – Are there several?

Maurice – Yes, of course...

Diana – I don't know... The one whose face is everywhere on the posters!

Maurice – Ah, the favourite... He's the former justice minister...

Diana – The justice minister of the dictator they just overthrew?

Maurice – That's what I read in the papers, yes...

Diana – And that didn't surprise you...?

Maurice – What?

Diana – That dictators also have a ministry of justice!

Maurice – You're right... Actually, these poor people have never known democracy. It's going to take them some time, obviously...

Diana – Yes... French-style democracy is like fine wine, it gets better with age... But you need a certain culture to appreciate it properly.

Maurice – Yes. The palate needs to be educated.

Diana – And the sense of smell. Are you sure I don't still smell like a goat?

Maurice – No more than usual...

She gives him a puzzled look, unsure if he's joking.

Diana – It's so hot... You're right, supporting the revolution without air conditioning is really starting to feel heroic.

Maurice – Anyway, did you see? They even put drinks in the fridge! And you doubted their hospitality...

Patrick then lets out a snore. Maurice and Diana, startled, finally notice the other couple, still dozing in the deckchairs.

Diana – What's that?

Maurice – They must be the owners...

Diana – They don't look very Arab.

Maurice – Maybe they're Kabyle...

Diana – They mostly look a bit daft.

Maurice – Do you speak French?

Patrick and Bridget, rousing slightly, look at the other two with wide eyes.

Diana – Do you speak English?

Patrick and Bridget regain their senses.

Brigitte – We were just having a little nap... Are you the landlords?

Patrick – The landlords...?

Maurice – What are you doing here, my good man, if you're not the owner? Come to mow the lawn?

Patrick – Well, we're staying here!

Bridget – For the holidays, that is...

Maurice – What do you mean? But we've rented this villa!

Patrick – So have we, I assure you.

Maurice – I understand... You must be the previous tenants... You're on your way out, right?

Bridget – Not at all! We've just arrived!

Patrick – We're here for a week. And you?

Maurice – Us too...

Diana – But this is impossible! Maurice, do something...

Maurice – There must be some mistake. The owner will come and sort this out. Have you seen the owner?

Patrick – No, and you?

Maurice – Not yet.

Bridget – We arrived an hour ago by taxi.

Diana – See! If we'd taken a taxi, we'd have been here first...

Patrick – Since it was open, we went in.

Bridget – We haven't even unpacked our suitcases yet.

Diana – Well, then you can leave quickly!

Patrick – We just had time for a skinny dip in the pool.

Bridget – We didn't think we'd have company...

Diana (*eyeing Patrick*) – His face looks familiar...

Maurice (*awkwardly*) – Mine too... We must have seen them on the plane.

Diana – Maybe they're squatters...

Maurice – I'll try calling the owner. (*Maurice pulls out his smartphone under the watchful eyes of the other three*) There's no signal...

Bridget – The owner will show up eventually.

Patrick – No one's dead, clearly.

Bridget – The house is big! (*To Patrick*) See, you were worried about getting bored, just me and you. Now you've got a mate...

Patrick – Usually, we go with friends, but they weren't available...

Bridget – They both died in a car accident two months ago...

Patrick – It hit us hard, obviously.

Bridget – We'd been spending holidays together for ages.

Patrick – They had a little flat on the Costa Brava.

Bridget – They invited us every August.

Patrick – We had to find something else urgently.

Bridget – In August, you can imagine...

Patrick – So we ended up here in the Maghreb.

Bridget – It was an offer...

Patrick – It's sort of like the Costa Brava, isn't it?

Bridget – Instead of paella, we'll have couscous, and that's that.

Patrick – Swap rice for couscous, and it's pretty much the same, right? And the more, the merrier...

Bridget – Oh, we don't mind company. Right, Pat?

Maurice and Diana look overwhelmed by this flood of words.

Diana (*aside to Maurice*) – Do you think we should call the police? They seem a bit odd...

Patrick – How about we have an aperitif while we wait? Babe, get us some olives?

Bridget – On it, my love.

Bridget goes into the villa.

Patrick – I've run out of beers. But we have a bottle of red wine and some cans of Coke. How about a calimochó? Do you fancy one?

Diana (*aside to Maurice*) – This is a nightmare... I don't even understand what he's saying...

Maurice – Calimochó. It's red wine mixed with Coke.

Diana – What a horror...!

Patrick serves the drinks. Bridget returns with the olives.

Bridget – Here's something to nibble on!

Patrick – And something to sip on! (*Patrick raises his glass*) Cheers, everyone!

Bridget – Go on, have some olives...

Patrick – Have you been to this country before?

Diana – How on earth did they manage to rent the same villa twice?

Maurice – Well, I never...

Diana – Do you have the rental contract?

Patrick – Oh, yes, here you go... (*He hands the rental contract to Diana*) Mr and Mrs Martin... It's written right there...

Diana – Mr and Mrs Martin!

Patrick – But you can call me Pat...

Bridget – And I'm Bridget.

Maurice – We have the same surname...

Patrick – What...?

Diana – Our surname is also Martin! It must be because of this homonymy...

Bridget – Oh, really?

Patrick – That's funny...

Bridget – Well, you know what they say: there's more than one donkey called Martin!

Patrick – That's what my teacher always used to say in school... There were two of us with that name in the class. But the other one, he was such a teacher's pet, you know? Always getting top marks. It wasn't you, was it? You look a bit like him.

Maurice – Oh, I don't think so...

Patrick – Right, babe, doesn't he look a bit like Mo? You knew Mo!

Bridget – No...

Patrick – Yes, Mohamed!

Bridget – Oh yes! Mohamed Martin.

Patrick – He preferred to be called Mo because he was a bit embarrassed by his name.

Bridget – He was a foster kid, you see. But since he was already three when he was adopted, his parents kept his original name.

Patrick – We went to school together, me and Mo! At Gagarine College.

Bridget – That's where we met, actually, isn't it, Pat?

Patrick – Gagarine! The teacher always said to me: when they put all the fools into orbit, you'll be spinning for a long time!

Bridget – You're right, Diana. It must be because of this homonymy...

Diana – Pardon?

Bridget (*to Maurice*) – They must have thought my husband and you were one and we were the same couple...

Patrick – Yeah... We've got the same name... Who knows, we might be cousins.

Bridget – Look, the house is big. And we're practically family. Why don't we spend the holidays together?

Diana – Together?

Patrick – We'll share the rent!

Bridget – And for the food, we'll make a kitty.

Patrick – Just like with our friends.

Maurice – Your friends?

Bridget – The ones who passed away!

Patrick – What do you think?

Bridget – It's already such a bargain... Split it in half...

Patrick – At this price, it's cheaper to come here than to stay home watching TV, that's for sure.

Bridget – If only there were good things on TV!

Diana (*to Maurice with irony*) – Well, there you go... You wanted to save money, and you've done it... But say something...

Maurice – For now, there really isn't much else we can do...

Diana – Thanks, that's exactly what I expected you to say... But surely, there must be some hotels around here?

Patrick – Oh, well... There's not much, really... From what we saw on the taxi ride here. It's the boonies. Or rather the desert.

Bridget – Except for a few Bedouin tents...

Patrick – And what's the little lady's name?

Maurice – Martin, as I said! She's my wife. We're both called Martin.

Diana (*aside to Maurice*) – They must be simpletons, it's unbelievable...

Patrick – No, I mean your first name! Not your... surname.

Diana – Diana. My name is Diana.

Patrick – Alright... And him, then, it's Maurice. Hey, that's funny. Maurice. Mo! Like my mate in school! But he wasn't Maurice, though.

Bridget – Another drink, anyone?

Maurice – No, thank you...

Patrick – And what do you do, Mo?

Maurice – Er, I'm a journalist...

Patrick – Really? For which newspaper?

Maurice – Golf Magazine International.

Patrick – Oh, I see... A big-time reporter, then... (*To Diana*) And you, ma'am?

Diana – I'm a painter.

Bridget – A painter? Oh, that's not a common job for a woman.

Patrick (*to Bridget*) – You wanted to redo your kitchen, babe, you should ask her for a quote.

Diana – Um... No, I... I don't paint kitchens...

Bridget – Oh, really? So what do you paint, then?

Diana – Mainly cows.

Bridget – Cows?

Diana – Calves too, sometimes.

Maurice – My wife is an artist.

Diana – An animal painter.

Patrick – Oh, right... And you specialise in bovines?

Bridget – Well, that's unfortunate, because around here... Except for the camels.

Diana – We're on holiday...

Bridget – That's funny. I've never met an artist painter before. Could you paint my portrait?

Patrick – The lady said she only paints cows...

Diana – And you, Patrick?

Patrick – I'm in frozen foods.

Diana – Oh, right... Hence the t-shirt, I suppose...

Maurice – And you, Bridget, what do you do for a living?

Bridget – Me? At the moment, I work in a massage parlour.

Maurice (*intrigued*) – A massage parlour...?

Patrick – Darling... I've told you before, the correct term is physiotherapist...

Bridget – Massage parlour is simpler, isn't it?

Patrick – My wife is a medical secretary...

Bridget – I'm sure we'll find we have lots in common.

Diana – Besides our name, you mean?

Patrick – Right, babe, you gonna start dinner? I'm getting hungry...

Bridget – Are you going to join us for dinner?

Patrick – I'm not sure if...

Diana – This will all be sorted very soon. We're not getting too comfortable just yet...

Bridget – Don't worry, I'll do the first round of washing up...

Diana – That's very kind, but we'll find a little restaurant around here...

Maurice – It's our wedding anniversary today...

Patrick – Oh, in that case... We won't be third-wheeling, will we, Bridget?

They leave.

Diana – Did you really need to tell them it was our wedding anniversary?

Maurice – It was the only thing I could think of to decline their invitation...

Diana – I swear... We should have gone to the Seychelles... Preparing for the next revolution...

Maurice tries to make a phone call again.

Maurice – Still no signal...

Diana – Tell me this is a nightmare and I'll wake up...

Maurice – We might as well look on the bright side...

Diana – Oh really? And what's the bright side?

Maurice – Otherwise, we'd never have spent the evening with people from Saint-Denis...

Diana – We came here to experience local culture, not to make friends in the suburbs of Paris... How do you know they're from there anyway?

Maurice – I don't know, just a guess.

Diana – So what's our plan?

Maurice – Besides waiting...

Diana – I refuse to spend a night in this house with those two idiots! Do you know what your problem is, Maurice? You're a wimp!

Maurice – Do you have a better idea?

Diana – I don't know! Maybe we should check the suitcase for the agency's number in Paris!

He brings the suitcase and tries to open it with a key.

Maurice – I can't get it open.

Diana – Let me try...

She tries to open it but fails.

Maurice – It seems like it's the wrong key.

Diana (*horrified*) – It's the right key... but it's not the right suitcase!

Maurice – What? But it looks like our Vuitton!

Diana – This one is a real one.

Maurice – Ours wasn't real?

Diana – We must have taken the wrong suitcase from the airport carousel...

Maurice – Taken the wrong one? How did we manage that?

Diana – You picked it up! It was too heavy for me! Didn't you notice it was different?

Maurice – I didn't know ours was a fake!

Diana – I even put a red ribbon around the handle to identify it...

Maurice – Everyone puts a red ribbon around the handle to identify their suitcase!

Diana – Now we have nothing left!

Maurice – Nothing left?

Diana – Just the dirty clothes we're wearing...

Maurice – At least we still have our passports, Visa cards, and traveler's cheques...
(*notices her look*) No?

Diana – After customs, I slipped the pouch with all our documents in an outer pocket of the suitcase...

Maurice – You're joking!

Diana – You told me there were no security issues in this country, thanks to fifty years of dictatorship... You said we could even leave the doors open...

Maurice – And?

Diana – Well, our papers aren't in the outer pocket of this suitcase!

Maurice – That means I must have taken the right suitcase from the carousel... The swap must have happened later, in the airport hall. When I left you alone with the luggage to sort out a taxi...

Diana – So now it's my fault!

Maurice – Tell me the truth, Diana. Did you leave that suitcase unattended even for a moment?

Diana – No, I swear! Well... I did go to the loo... It was urgent... Obviously, I couldn't take the suitcase into the cubicle...

Maurice – Oh, right...

Patrick – Blimey, you two look glum!

Maurice – It's not our suitcase.

Diana – Ours got nicked.

Bridget – That's odd. We were told there were no security issues here.

Diana – All our traveler's cheques are gone...

Bridget – Traveller's cheques...

Patrick – They still make those?

Diana – We don't have a penny left...

Maurice – Not even for food...

Bridget – Well, now you have no choice!

Diana – No choice?

Patrick – About our invitation to grab a bite! Some couscous! Come on, love, set two more places!

Diana – What's that?

Patrick – Couscous.

Maurice – From a tin?

Bridget returns with two more plates and some tins.

Bridget – We were advised to avoid fresh food here...

Patrick – Because of the runs, you see...

Bridget – Our doctor warned us before we left. Only canned food...

Maurice – Tinned couscous... Really...

Patrick – Yes, it's tinned, but it's locally made...

Diana – They sell tinned couscous here? That's quite revolutionary...

Bridget – Well, not exactly here...

Patrick – At least for export.

Bridget – We bought it at our supermarket, in Saint-Denis...

Diana – See, Maurice, you were right. They are from Saint-Denis.

Patrick – And guess what... it's fair trade couscous!

Maurice and Diana look dumbfounded.

Bridget – I think it's actually made in this country.

Patrick – It says on the tin. Made by women in a cannery that respects human rights.

Diana – Your way of supporting the Arabian revolutions...

Patrick (*to Maurice*) – Funny, though, your face really rings a bell...

Diana – Meanwhile, we have nothing to wear.

Patrick – Not even a swimsuit for the pool.

Bridget – I could lend you one, if you like! Though I'm not sure I have a second one... We tried to pack light since we brought all our food for the week...

Diana – Brilliant... One swimsuit between us... We'll take turns swimming... (*To Maurice*) Or we could all go skinny dipping with our new friends... Eh, Maurice?

Bridget – Would you like to borrow a dress?

Diana – I doubt we're the same size... But we'll try to open this suitcase. Maybe we'll find something to wear in it...

Bridget – Right, we'll wait for you to eat the couscous then...

Blackout.

Act 2

Maurice and Diana return, dressed in oriental attire – a djellaba and babouches for him, and a belly dancer outfit for her. Patrick and Bridget widen their eyes.

Bridget – Hey! We didn't say it was a costume party!

Patrick – In holiday clubs, the entertainers provide the costumes. We didn't plan anything like that here...

Diana – We couldn't open the suitcase, but we found these in a closet...

Patrick – And you say you don't have passports anymore? Dressed like that, they'll never let you back into Paris.

Bridget – But honestly, it suits you both so well!

Patrick – How about a little belly dance routine after dinner, eh, Diana?

Diana (*stiffly*) – In your dreams...

Bridget – Shall I serve?

Bridget serves, placing a tin of couscous on each plate.

Diana – At least the portions are fair...

Maurice – Doesn't look half bad.

Bridget – Appetite is the best seasoning. That's what my mother always said.

They start eating.

Patrick – Fancy a drop of red?

Diana looks puzzled.

Maurice – He means wine.

Patrick – So tell me, Mo, you must see a lot with your job?

Maurice – Oh, you know, one golf course looks much like another. It's just the number of holes that varies sometimes...

Bridget – That's interesting... What made you want to become a journalist at Golf Magazine?

Patrick – Are you passionate about golf?

Maurice – My wife's father owns the magazine.

Patrick – Ah, I see...

Diana – I bet you're not particularly into animal paintings either... (*Aside to Maurice*) Holding out for those Turkish delights is going to be tough...

Patrick refills the glasses.

Bridget – This suitcase saga is incredible...

Patrick – Well, if someone swapped mine for another, I'm not sure I'd complain.

Bridget – What's in the one you got back?

Maurice – We couldn't open it.

Patrick – We'll see about that later...

Bridget (*playfully*) – No lock can withstand Pat. Right, honey?

Patrick – She finds that funny because we met at a singles club...

Diana – I thought you two met in school.

Patrick – Oh no, we knew each other in school, but we didn't start dating until later...

Bridget – Each girl had a padlock, you see what I mean...

Patrick – And every guy had a key. The game was to find the right lock.

Bridget – Patrick didn't have the right key, but he still managed to open my lock. He's quite handy, you know.

Maurice looks a bit uncomfortable. Diana prefers to continue her train of thought.

Diana – Anyway, I'm not sure it's very proper to rummage through someone's suitcase when you don't know them...

Bridget – Right then, let's move on to dessert.

Bridget gets up.

Bridget – No, no, stay seated... Can you help me clear the table, my sweet?

Patrick and Bridget exit.

Diana – What if it's them?

Maurice – What?

Diana – The suitcase! Maybe they swiped our suitcase!

Maurice – But there's nothing valuable in our Vuitton suitcase. Besides, it's a fake! Why would they exchange it for a real one?

Diana – I don't know... Just to prank us!

Maurice – Do you really think they're capable of such a sophisticated prank?

Diana – I'm going to discreetly check if our suitcase is in their room.

Patrick and Bridget return and cross paths with Diana as she exits.

Bridget – Where are you going? We're about to eat some Turkish delights!

Diana – I'm just going to freshen up a bit.

Patrick chuckles while looking at their oriental costumes again.

Patrick – So, Mo! It is said that Arabs struggle to integrate in France, but you have already adopted the country's dress style. If they won't let you back into France, you might as well learn the local language and seek political asylum here...

Maurice tries to keep a straight face. Diana exits.

Bridget – Stop teasing him.

Patrick – Come on, we've got to have a laugh, right? We're on vacation! It's quite amusing though... He's Mo's spitting image.

Bridget – Mohamed Martin...

Patrick – Everyone used to tease him about that...

Bridget – When he got flustered, he started stuttering.

Patrick – Are you sure you've never lived in Saint-Denis, Maurice?

Maurice (*stuttering*) – No, no, I... I... I don't think... In fact, I... I... I'm Mo... I'm Mo... I'm Maurice, I assure you.

Patrick – Mo, is that you?

Bridget – No, it can't be... Mohamed Martin... But yes, it's him!

Maurice – Well, you see... My wife doesn't know... We met at Sciences Po... At Karl Marx High School in Saint-Denis, I got a scholarship and...

Patrick – And now, you're called Maurice...

Maurice – I asked to change my first name... But I'd prefer if this stayed between us, okay?

Bridget – Sure... Maurice...

Diana returns.

Diana – There you go...

Bridget – Can you help clear the table, darling? I'll make some mint tea...

They exit, exchanging a knowing glance.

Maurice – So?

Diana – Our stuff isn't in their room. They have two suitcases. One with their clothes, and the other full of couscous tins...

Maurice – It wasn't half bad, actually... for tinned couscous.

Diana – It's suspicious, isn't it?

Maurice – What do you mean?

Diana – A suitcase full of couscous tins... Maybe they're traffickers?

Maurice – Traffickers of tinned couscous?

Diana – What if those tins contain something else...

Maurice – Like what?

Diana – I don't know... Drugs...

Maurice – Who would be dumb enough to smuggle drugs into a Maghreb country hidden in fair-trade couscous tins...?

Their gaze turns simultaneously towards Patrick and Bridget who have just returned.

Patrick – All done with the dishes!

Diana – Yep... The good thing about canned food is that the dishes are done quickly.

Diana – Especially when you eat straight out of the tin.

Patrick – But that doesn't solve your suitcase problem.

Maurice – For now, I don't see what else we can do...

Diana – When they realise their mistake, the person who took our suitcase will surely contact us...

Patrick – Did your suitcase have your address on it?

Maurice – Our address in France, yes.

Diana – In Paris!

Bridget – It won't help much if the guy sends your suitcase back to France...

Patrick – And on the suitcase you have now, is there an address? A phone number?

Maurice returns with the suitcase.

Maurice – No...

Diana – Maybe inside?

Maurice – We don't have the key to open it.

Patrick – That's not a problem... (*Playfully to Maurice*) Hey, Ali Baba! (*He picks the lock with a fork*) Open sesame! There we go!

The suitcase finally opens. General consternation.

Maurice – What is this?

Patrick – Looks like banknotes...

Bridget – You were worried about not having enough money for your stay...

Diana – But these aren't euros.

Maurice – Not local currency either...

Patrick – It's some weird writing.

Diana – Looks like Cyrillic.

Patrick – Like what?

Maurice – Must be rubles...

Diana – Oh my God...

Bridget – Who goes on holiday to the Maghreb with a suitcase full of rubles?

Diana – The Russian mafia.

Maurice – This must be dirty money.

Patrick – Hence the suitcase swap...

Diana – What?

Patrick – Seen it in a movie. They used you as mules!

Diana – Mules?

Bridget – There's more than one donkey named Martin...

Patrick – To get through customs!

Maurice – You really think so?

Diana – So what do we do? We have to get rid of this money...

Patrick – Yeah, but the problem is these guys will surely want their cash back. They're not known for their sense of humour...

Diana hurriedly closes the suitcase.

Diana – You're right! It's better if we pretend we never opened this suitcase and don't know anything about it.

Maurice – What if the guy who rented us the house was in on it?

Patrick – It is strange we haven't seen the owner yet.

Diana – What if he's part of an Islamic terrorist group...

Patrick – What would Islamists want with a suitcase full of rubles?

Diana – Maybe they're funded by the Chechens? Chechens are Muslims too...

Bridget – Oh shit! If we'd known there were Chechens around, we would never have come... You said it was just Bedouins!

Patrick – Calm down, darling, it's just a possibility. *(To Diana)* Do you really think they might come tonight to slaughter us like sheep?

Bridget (*tearfully*) – And here we came for a peaceful little holiday... You were right, Pat, we should've gone back to the Costa Brava!

Silence.

Diana (*to Maurice*) – And what if it's them?

Bridget – Us?

Diana – We arrive here, they're already here. And wouldn't you know it, they have the same name as us! We don't even know them! Maybe they're the ones sent to retrieve the suitcase! Maybe they're going to slit our throats during the night!

Maurice – They're fellow countrymen, after all...

Diana – Fellow countrymen? They live in Saint-Denis! It's full of mosques over there!

Maurice – Have you been there, in Saint-Denis?

Diana – I saw it in a TV report...

Patrick – Oh, missy, you need to calm down!

Bridget – We invite them to eat couscous with us, and suddenly they're calling us Islamists...

Patrick – You're the ones who got us into this mess!

Bridget – It's true. We didn't ask for any of this!

Patrick – You come barging into our place like that, with your high and mighty attitude.

Bridget – And now it's the Gulf War!

Diana – Your place? This is our place! Right, Maurice? Say something, for goodness' sake!

Maurice – Yes, well... It's not the time to get worked up... We need to stick together...

Patrick – Yeah, well, I say – deal with it yourselves! They handed you that suitcase, didn't they? We've got nothing to do with it. I'm going to put the meat in the cloth. You coming, babe? Seriously!

Patrick and Bridget exit. Maurice and Diana remain there, visibly at a loss.

Diana – I think we should probably take turns keeping watch during the night...

Blackout

Act 3

Maurice and Diana, who have clearly spent the night on the terrace, wake up to the call to prayer from the muezzin.

Diana – We're still alive...?

Maurice – I think so.

Diana – And the suitcase is still here?

Maurice – Yes...

Another call to prayer from the muezzin.

Diana – What is that?

Maurice – The call to prayer...

A moment passes.

Diana – What if this is a gift from heaven...

Maurice – What?

Diana – After all, if no one claims this money in a year and a day... we could just say we won the lottery.

A moment passes.

Maurice – What's the exchange rate for the ruble...?

Diana – I don't know, but when you have a suitcase full of them... we should be set for a while...

Maurice – We'd still need to figure out how to bring all these rubles back to France...

Diana – We could use the empty couscous cans...

Maurice picks up a forgotten empty can from a corner and examines it.

Maurice – The expiration date has passed... Must have been on sale. That's why they bought a whole stock...

Diana – This story is quite unusual.

Maurice – Yes...

Diana – What if this was all set up? Like a hidden camera prank, you know. The kind of show where they trick celebrities with unbelievable stories.

Maurice – But we're not celebrities...

Diana – We should check if there's a camera somewhere. *(She starts looking around)* Or people hiding somewhere, watching us and laughing.

She scans the darkness towards the audience, seeing nothing.

Maurice – That would mean Patrick and Bridget are actors...

Diana – Why not?

Maurice – Trust me, I have good reasons to believe that's not the case...

Patrick and Bridget enter, him in pyjamas and her in a bathrobe.

Diana – You're right... Even great actors couldn't pull off a chav act as convincingly...

Bridget – Did you sleep well?

Diana – Not really, actually.

Bridget seems to encourage Patrick to say something.

Patrick – Well, sorry about last night... I got a bit carried away.

Bridget – My husband can be a bit touchy...

Maurice – It's nothing, really.

Diana – I think I'll go freshen up a bit...

Maurice – Me too...

Bridget – I made coffee. Will you join us for breakfast?

Maurice and Diana smile and exit.

Patrick – They left their suitcase here...

Bridget – That's not very smart...

A pause.

Patrick – It's a shame they're the only ones getting a slice of this jackpot...

Bridget – True...

Patrick – Why shouldn't we get a share too?

Bridget – We could definitely use it more than they could...

Patrick – It's like the lottery... It's always those who don't need it who win.

Bridget – The old folks, the rich...

Patrick – Or those who are too poor to know what to do with that much money...

Bridget – Yeah... Who spend it all and end up even poorer than before...

Patrick – Me, I'd know exactly what to do with all that cash, trust me...

Bridget – Yes, but that suitcase belongs to them...

Patrick – Belongs to them? You're kidding! It just happened to fall into their hands, that's all. And if we'd been mistaken for mules...

Bridget – You're right... There's more than one donkey named Martin...

Patrick – There's got to be a way to...

Bridget – To what...?

Maurice and Diana come back.

Bridget – Want some coffee?

Maurice – We've thought it over. We're going to call the police, and they'll handle it. It's safer.

Patrick – If I were you, I wouldn't do that...

Diana – Why not?

Patrick – In a place like this, you know how the police can be...

Diana – It's true that just a few weeks ago around here, the police around here were still torturing regime opponents...

Patrick – So just imagine if they show up and find you here dressed like a Taliban with your suitcase full of rubles... They'll think you're members of Al Qaeda...

Maurice – You think so...?

Patrick – At best, you'll end up rotting in jail for years before anyone even looks at your case.

Bridget – It's a pretty messed-up situation... Even I'm not sure I've got it all figured out...

Diana – Let's just burn it all! Since it's dirty money...

Patrick – But what if those bastards come looking for their cash?

Diana – No one's come looking so far.

Patrick – They might be waiting for a better time.

Bridget – Yeah... Isn't it Ramadan right now?

Maurice – So, what do we do?

Patrick – Wait a bit longer to see if the owner shows up?

Maurice – The owner of the house?

Patrick – The owner of the money!

Bridget – The Chechen mafia!

Maurice – You might be right... What do you think, Diana?

Diana – Honestly, I don't know what to think anymore.

Bridget – Well, I'll make some more coffee.

Patrick – No, I'll do it...

Bridget – You sure you can handle it?

Patrick – Of course! You're on vacation, after all. Take a break, babe...

Patrick leaves. The other three stay there, lost in thought. Bridget's phone rings.

Bridget – Hello? Yes, I'll put her on... *(To Diana)* It's for you. Some guy with a Belgian accent...

Diana – Yes? *(Her face falls)* Okay... No, no... Alright... We'll do as you say...

She hands the phone back to Bridget, looking shaken. Maurice and Bridget exchange puzzled glances.

Diana – It was them...

Bridget – Them? Who?

Patrick returns.

Patrick – Babe? I can't find the coffee filters... *(Seeing their faces)* What's going on?

Diana – Some guy on the phone with a weird accent. He says he has our suitcase...

Maurice – And?

Diana – He wants to make a trade...

Bridget – A hostage exchange?

Diana – A suitcase exchange!

Patrick – What do you mean?

Diana – We have to put the suitcase on the terrace, go inside the house, and the guy will come to swap the real suitcase with a fake one.

Bridget – A fake suitcase?

Diana – Ours.

Maurice – This feels like a bad spy movie...

Diana – He emphasised there should be no witnesses.

Maurice – But why did he call on Bridget's phone?

Bridget – It's not the first time we've been mixed up... It's probably that homophobia thing again...

Patrick – I think we should do what they say... These guys don't mess around...

Diana – No witnesses...

Bridget – They might just kill us all anyway. After they get the suitcase. All because of you!

Maurice – Hey, we didn't ask for any of this!

Bridget – We might never see Saint-Denis again...

Patrick – Don't worry, babe. If we do exactly what they say, I'm sure we'll be fine.

Bridget grabs the bottle of red wine.

Bridget – I think I need a drink.

Diana follows suit, pouring herself a drink too.

Diana – Me too...

Blackout.

Act 4

In the dim light, a man in a djellaba with the hood up carefully picks up the suitcase. Brigitte sneaks up behind him and knocks him out with the parasol. The man collapses. The lights come back on.

Bridget – Come quick! I got him!

Maurice and Diana rush over. The man is unconscious. Bridget pulls off his hood.

Bridget – Pat!

Diana – See? What did I tell you? It was them!

Maurice – But then why would his wife knock him out?

Patrick regains consciousness.

Patrick – Okay, I admit... I just wanted to get the cash...

Bridget – But why didn't you tell me?

Patrick – I was afraid you wouldn't agree...

Bridget – Oh, Pat... At least I didn't hurt you too much, right?

Diana – The bastard.

Bridget – Hey, watch your mouth, you skank. That's my man you're talking about!

Maurice – And what were we supposed to do if the guy on the phone had really come to get his money?

Patrick – I was the one who called.

Diana – Ah, I see...

Diana – He deserves a good beating, right Maurice?

Patrick – Give it a shot, Mo.

Maurice – We're civilised people, aren't we? And we're in a country that's just getting back to democracy. Let's not resort to violence...

Patrick – Okay, but we still want our share of the treasure.

Diana – What share?

Patrick – Half. Or I spill everything. Right, Mo?

Diana – Spill what?

Maurice – I'll explain it to you, honey... Alright, so, fair share it is...

Bridget – That's it. Just like with the couscous.

Maurice opens the suitcase and they take a closer look at the bills.

Bridget – But it's not Cyrillic, it's Greek.

Patrick – It's drachmas!

Diana – They're drachmas!

Bridget – How do you know that?

Diana – You think we're illiterate or something?

Patrick – My parents had a holiday in Greece just before the euro came in. They brought back some bills. I remember well. Look, there's even the Colosseum drawn on it!

Diana – You mean the Parthenon, probably...

Bridget – But what would Russian mobsters be doing in a North African country with a suitcase full of drachmas?

Patrick – Maybe they're fake bills?

Diana – Who'd be dumb enough to make fake drachmas decades after the euro came in?

Maurice – You've got a whole suitcase of expired canned couscous!

Diana – Maybe we can still trade them for euros.

Bridget – No, unfortunately, not since January 1, 2012.

Maurice – Are you sure?

Patrick – My parents kept the bills for a few years, thinking they'd go back to Greece someday. When they finally decided to exchange them, it was too late. So they handed them off to us.

Bridget – For years, we used those bills to play Monopoly at home. That's why we know those bills so well.

Maurice – And to think we almost killed each other...

Everyone sighs.

Bridget – All this for what?

Patrick – For money that's worth nothing now. (*Patrick pours drinks*) Come one, it's my round! This will help us recover from the shock.

They toast.

Bridget – Like my mum always used to say: money doesn't bring happiness.

Diana – Not drachmas, anyway. Especially when they're no longer exchangeable...

Maurice – No one's coming to claim this money, that's for sure.

Bridget – All's well that ends well.

A pause.

Diana – Right, I'm going to call the consulate about the lost suitcase and see what they can offer us.

Maurice – They'll give us temporary papers to get back to France.

Diana – And they might advance us some money.

Bridget – If not, we'll lend you some.

Patrick – As French people abroad, we've got to stick together. Here, Mo, I'll start by giving you some clothes – you can't stay dressed like that... and neither can I.

Diana exits to make the call, followed by Patrick and Maurice who go to change.

Bridget – Well, I guess I'll do some tidying up.

Bridget tunes the radio.

Speaker – Concerns are growing about Greece leaving the eurozone; an emergency meeting was held this morning to...

Bridget changes the station and hears some oriental music. She continues tidying up. Patrick and Maurice return. Patrick is back in his previous outfit, and Maurice has chosen a similar, very tacky outfit to Patrick's.

Bridget – Oh, that looks great on you.

Patrick – Another little splash of red?

Maurice – Come on! (*Pat pours drinks.*) Now we just need to figure out what to do about the house...

Patrick – Now that we've gotten to know each other and become friends... Why don't we spend the holidays together, huh Mo? After all, we've known each other since childhood, right?

Diana returns.

Diana – All set. I left them our address... (*Notices Maurice's outfit*) Did you change?

Bridget – Oh yes, it makes a difference, doesn't it? He looks younger like that, don't you think?

Under the influence of alcohol, Maurice seems seriously uninhibited.

Maurice – Patrick and Bridget are suggesting we spend the holidays together. What do you think, honey...

Diana (*aside*) – Look, Maurice... We probably have a lot to learn from hanging out with folks from Sarcelles, but still...

Maurice – Saint-Denis.

Diana – Yeah, well, it's basically the same, right?

Maurice – No, it's not the same, Diana!

Diana – How do you know that?

Maurice – I studied at Gagarin College with Patrick. Mo, that's me, Diana! And if you don't like it, that's tough!

Diana – What? But what are you talking about?

Bridget – Now that's quite a coming-out!

Maurice – I'm fed up with lying. Ever since I met you, I've done everything to fit the image you expected of me. Especially the image your parents expected of me! But I'm fed up now.

Diana – You're out of your mind!

Maurice – I even changed my name for you!

Diana – Aren't you named Maurice?

Maurice – My real name is Mohamed. I came here to reconnect with my roots! To get in touch with my ancestors!

Diana – He's drunk, that's it. But honestly, Maurice, your ancestors are Gauls!

Maurice – I do have Bedouin blood in my veins, Diana. I'm a man of the desert! A nomad! I can't stand golf courses anymore, you understand?

Bridget – What's the difference again between a Bedouin and a Muslim?

Diana – Don't listen to him, he's not in his right mind, you can see that.

Maurice – Deep down, I know I'm meant to live in a tent, in the middle of the sands! Not in a duplex in Paris.

Diana – Fine! If that's all it takes, next time we'll go camping on the beach!

Maurice – I'm a Tuareg, Diana! And you've turned me into... a tourist!

Bridget, quite drunk herself, feels it's a good time to lighten the mood.

Bridget – How about we have a barbecue at noon?

Patrick – Can't you see it's not the right moment, babe... Seriously, sometimes you really lack tact, you know?

Bridget – Lack tact? So now you're calling me stupid too!

Patrick – What's wrong with you, babe?

Bridget – I'm not your babe, first of all! And if you were really a man, you'd start by making me one!

Patrick is left stunned.

Maurice – Now we just need some sausages.

Diana – Excuse me?

Maurice – For the barbecue!

Diana – We don't even have paper to light it.

Maurice (*losing it*) – We've got the drachmas! We've got the damn drachmas! We're not going to keep them to play Monopoly!

Maurice starts tearing up the bills and throwing them onto the barbecue.

Patrick – Don't worry. We also brought some merguez.

Blackout.

Act 5

Maurice, Diana, Patrick, and Bridget return from the pool.

Patrick – Ah, that's refreshing!

Maurice – Yeah, clears the mind...

Diana – And the stomach... Those sausages were a bit greasy, weren't they?

Maurice – I didn't even know canned sausages existed.

Diana – I have to admit, the pool is stunning.

Bridget – Well, we're going to change. Coming, Diana? I'll lend you something to wear, anyway. I have a pretty good idea of what could be your style...

The two women exit.

Patrick – How did you manage to hide from your wife that you're Muslim, Mo? From what I've seen, you're still circumcised, right?

Maurice – I told her I was a non-practicing Jew... And to keep it believable, I fast for Yom Kippur once a year.

Patrick – Ah, well, that's something...

A pause.

Patrick – Fancy a digestif?

Maurice – Sure!

Patrick takes out a bottle from the cooler and pours two glasses. They toast.

Maurice – Excellent! What is it?

Patrick – Ouzo. We've got a whole stash at home. How about some music?

Patrick turns on a radio. After searching for a while, he settles on a station playing Arabic music. After a while, Bridget and Diana return. Diana is now dressed in the same sexy and tacky style as Bridget.

Patrick – Oh yeah, that looks great on you!

Diana – You think so? What do you think, darling?

Maurice is a bit taken aback. The music stops.

Speaker – We interrupt this musical program for a special news flash. The news has just come in. It has caught all economic analysts by surprise. The drachma has once again become the official currency of Greece as of this morning, following its exit from the euro. We will, of course, keep you updated on all the consequences of this decision. But if you have any drachmas forgotten in a drawer or a suitcase, now is the time to dig them out...

Maurice – We burned all ours to light the barbecue...

Speaker – And now, a bit of classical music on this day of mourning for Europe...

All eyes turn to the still-smoking barbecue. Diana's mobile phone starts ringing. Maurice turns off the radio.

Diana – Yes...? Okay... Understood...

She puts away her phone. The other three are hanging on her every word.

Diana – Some guy from the consulate is coming over in person to give us our temporary passports...

Maurice – And...?

Diana – And to pick up the Louis Vuitton suitcase. They've been looking for it everywhere since this morning...

Maurice – The consulate?

Diana – It's the suitcase of a French diplomat who's vacationing here.

Maurice – Here? Not because it was on sale, right?

Diana – He's been invited to the palace by the former Minister of Justice. He came to support his presidential candidacy...

Patrick – With a suitcase full of drachmas?

Diana – Well, the Greeks did invent democracy after all.

Maurice – But it's France that invented the secret funding of election campaigns, which adds to the charm of French-style democracy. Did they say anything else?

Diana – They specifically mentioned not to open the suitcase. It's a diplomatic Vuitton.

A police siren is heard in the distance.

Maurice – I think we're in trouble...

Patrick – And we don't even have a car to make a getaway.

Maurice – Apart from jumping on those camels we see over there and disappearing into the desert.

Diana – You who wanted to awaken the Tuareg inside you, now's the moment.

Maurice – Last time I rode a camel, I was eight. It was in a wildlife park.

Bridget's mobile phone rings. She answers.

Bridget – Hello, yes... (*She covers the receiver with her hand*) It's the owner of the house. He's asking if our vacation is going well. What should I tell him?

A police siren is heard nearby.

Fade to black.

The End.

About the author

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

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

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

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

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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