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# The Ways of Chance

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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# **The Ways of Chance**

**Jean-Pierre Martinez**

At Chance's Café, Thelma and Louise, stranded by car trouble, encounter Richard and the ghost of Virginia. An odd place for an even odder meeting, resembling both a reunion and a showdown. Because chance doesn't always work in our favour...

## **Characters**

Louise  
Thelma  
Richard

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*A countryside bar. At the centre, a counter, and in front, three tables, each with a single chair. Above the counter, a sign reads: Chance's Café. A woman enters. Clearly unfamiliar with the place, she is also surprised to find it empty. She steps forward and coughs to signal her presence.*

**Louise** (*timidly*) – Is anyone here? (*She takes a few more steps and repeats, louder.*) Is anyone here? Apparently not... Now I'm talking to myself... (*She hesitates, then sits at one of the tables, pulls out her phone, and checks the screen.*) Still no signal... (*Looking around.*) What kind of hole is this? (*She moves toward the counter.*) There has to be a phone in this place... (*She checks the counter but finds nothing and sighs.*) At the very least, I could have a coffee... This is crazy! Anyone could walk in here and make off with the cash... (*She spots a bottle and three glasses on the counter.*) Well, I could always have a little something to keep me going... (*She pours herself a glass, downs it in one go, almost choking.*) Wow... That's rather... rustic. (*Feeling braver, practically yelling.*) Is there anyone here? This can't be right. There must be a phone somewhere...

*She steps behind the counter, rummaging through the shelves and accidentally knocking down a framed portrait. Bending down to pick it up, she disappears from the audience's view. A moment later, a second woman enters. Not seeing anyone, she does the same as the first, but with more energy.*

**Thelma** (*yelling*) – Is there no one here? (*The first woman, startled, emerges from behind the counter holding the portrait, looking a bit dazed*) Oh, hello! I thought no one was here. I'll have a coffee, please.

**Louise** – Ah, no... You see...

**Thelma** – It's fine, tea will do... Do you have a phone? There's no signal here...

**Louise** – Yes, I know... No, but... It's a misunderstanding... I'm not the owner...

**Thelma** – OK... But you could still make me a coffee... or a tea?

**Louise** – I'm not the waitress either... I'm a customer, like you.

**Thelma** – Right... So... what are you doing behind the counter, then?

**Louise** – I was actually looking for a phone.

**Thelma** – And did you find one?

**Louise** – No...

**Thelma** – Right... And the owner, where are they?

**Louise** – No idea...

**Thelma** – No idea?

**Louise** – How would I know?

**Thelma** – I don't know... You just said you weren't the owner. So you already know there is an owner.

**Louise** – Not at all! I only meant that the owner isn't me. But as for the owner... I don't know...

**Thelma** – I see... So, in short, you don't belong here...

**Louise** – Exactly...

**Thelma** – I just figured, since I saw you behind the counter...

**Louise** – Look, we don't have to go on about this all night.

**Thelma** – Let's hope not... I'm exhausted...

**Louise** – Yes, me too...

**Thelma** – I got a puncture. Actually, two, to be precise. On the main road there... Well, I don't know if you'd call it a main road. Maybe a B-road. If that. More like a country lane. Anyway, I got a puncture. And would you believe it? I only have one spare.

**Louise** – Oh, you too?

**Thelma** – Well, yes... It's all well and good being cautious... but seriously, who lugs around two or three spare tires in their boot?

**Louise** – No, I mean, you broke down too? Because I got a puncture as well.

**Thelma** – You had a flat tyre?

**Louise** – Three.

**Thelma** – Really? You too?

**Louise** – That's what I'm trying to tell you.

**Thelma** – Right... And have you called for help?

**Louise** – Well... Like you said... There's no signal! And I haven't found a landline...

**Thelma** – I see...

**Louise** – I don't know what we're going to do... At least I'm not the only one... And neither are you...

**Thelma** – Right... Let's keep calm... Someone's bound to turn up...

**Louise** – If you say so...

**Thelma** – This is a café, isn't it? And the door's open.

**Louise** – Yes... (*Looking at the sign.*) Chance's Café... Strange name... I don't know if that's a good omen...

**Thelma** – Do you know how to change a tyre?

**Louise** – Yes, well, sort of... I mean, I think so... I've never actually done it, but... It can't be that hard... Unfortunately, like you said... When you only have one spare and multiple punctures...

**Thelma** – This is crazy...

**Louise** – Murphy's Law...

**Thelma** – Five flat tyres in five minutes? That's beyond Murphy's Law... And I don't believe in chance...

**Louise** – Are you saying...

**Thelma** – Someone must have put nails on the road, it's the only explanation... Or broken glass...

**Louise** – But... why?

**Thelma** – How should I know? Maybe a mechanic trying to drum up business...

**Louise** – But then, it's strange they're not here already, taking orders...

**Thelma** – Who?

**Louise** – The mechanic! And I haven't seen any garage around here. Have you?

**Thelma** – No... In fact, there's hardly anything around here...

**Louise** – Do you remember that film, *The Shining*?

**Thelma** – No...

**Louise** – Want me to tell you about it?

**Thelma** – I'd rather you didn't, actually...

**Louise** – Oh, come on! It's about a young woman who stops at a motel in the middle of the night because she's caught in a storm on the road.

**Thelma** – That's *Psycho*.

**Louise** – What?

**Thelma** – The film! It's not *The Shining* by Stanley Kubrick, it's *Psycho* by Alfred Hitchcock.

**Louise** – Oh, yes, maybe...

**Thelma** – Honestly, in our situation, I'd prefer that...

**Louise** – True, I'm not much of a film buff... By the way, I haven't introduced myself. (*Extending her hand.*) Louise.

**Thelma** (*shaking her hand*) – Thelma.

**Louise** – Right... So, what now?

**Thelma** – I don't know... I guess we wait... What else can we do?

*Thelma walks around the room and stops in front of a door (not necessarily visible). She tries to open it.*

**Thelma** – There's a door, but it's locked...

**Louise** – We could walk to the next village...

**Thelma** – The nearest village... I have no idea how far it is... And with these heels...

**Louise** – Plus, it'll be dark soon...

*Thelma looks around.*

**Thelma** – This is strange. I've got this funny feeling.

**Louise** – You mean... a bad feeling?

**Thelma** – It's like I know this place.

**Louise** – Oh, really?

**Thelma** – Like I've been here before, if you prefer. A long time ago.

**Louise** – You mean... in a past life?

**Thelma** – Well, back when there was an owner, anyway.

**Louise** – Or an owneress...

*Thelma moves closer to the counter.*

**Thelma** (*noticing the portrait*) – What's this photo?

**Louise** – A portrait... I think I broke the glass... The owner's going to kill me...

*Thelma picks up the portrait and examines it.*

**Thelma** – It's strange...

**Louise** – Don't tell me this portrait reminds you of something too, because this is starting to get spooky...

**Thelma** – I don't know... It's not just the photo... It's like... a sense of déjà vu. The feeling of being in this exact situation before...

**Louise** – What do you mean?

**Thelma** – Haven't you ever felt like that? Like you're acting in a film you've already seen. But you can't remember how it ends.

**Louise** – I hope it had a happy ending, this film of yours...

**Thelma** – I don't know...

**Louise** – Well, I'm going to pour myself another drink. (*She picks up the bottle and pours herself a glass.*) Want some?

**Thelma** – What is it?

**Louise** – No idea. We'll ask how much we owe when the owner shows up.

**Thelma** – Fair enough.

*Louise pours her a glass. They clink glasses.*

**Louise** – Let's not get too down over a puncture.

**Thelma** – You're right.

**Louise** – Even though, between the two of us, we've got five...

*They down their drinks in one go.*

**Thelma** (*grimacing*) – What is that stuff?

**Louise** – There's nothing on the bottle. Not even a label...

**Thelma** – The owner probably distills it in the cellar with an illegal still.

**Louise** – You think we could get into trouble?

**Thelma** – Don't you think we're already in enough trouble? Stranded in the middle of the night, in this shitty bar... I'm starting to wonder if I even want anyone to show up at this point...

*Louise looks at her, unsettled. Richard enters, carrying a travel bag. As he opens and closes the door, thunder crashes and lightning flashes, filling the room.*

**Louise** – We're saved! Here's the owner...

*Thelma seems more reserved. The man moves cautiously towards the counter.*

**Richard** – Good evening...

**Thelma** – We were starting to wonder if anyone was around.

**Richard** – Anyone?

**Louise** – You're not the owner?

**Richard** – No... I was just passing through, and...

**Thelma** – Don't tell me you got a flat too?

**Richard** – How did you know?

**Louise** – How many?

**Richard** – How many...?

**Louise** – How many tyres?

**Thelma** – How many tyres did you puncture?

**Richard** – You're not going to believe this...

**Louise** – Four?

**Richard** – Four.

**Thelma** – Well... Respect...

**Richard** – So you both... had flats too.

**Thelma** – Yeah...

**Richard** – More than one, I take it, or you'd have changed it by now.

**Louise** – Three.

**Thelma** – Two.

**Richard** – This can't be... It's a trap!

**Thelma** – Yes, that's what we were thinking too...

**Louise** – At least now that you're here, we feel a bit safer.

**Richard** – Oh, really?

**Louise** – No, I mean... having a man around.

**Thelma** – Yes... Unless it's him.

**Richard** – Me?

**Louise** – Him, what?

**Thelma** – He's the one who put those nails on the road.

**Louise** – Are you a mechanic?

**Richard** – Me? Not at all! I told you, I had a puncture, just like you. Why would I put nails on the road to puncture my own four tyres?

**Thelma** – Fair enough...

**Richard** – Thanks for the vote of confidence. I'm really touched...

**Thelma** – Sorry, but there are so many nutcases roaming free...

**Richard** – True, it does have a bit of a *Psycho* motel vibe, but don't worry, I don't keep my mother stuffed upstairs. (*Pauses, thoughtful.*) Although..

**Louise** – Although what?

**Richard** – No, I don't know... Just a feeling...

**Thelma** – Ah! You too!

**Louise** – Do you two know each other?

**Richard** – No...

**Thelma** – Well, I don't think so...

**Louise** – Anyway, if you two are in on this together and it's some kind of prank to scare me, I don't find it funny at all.

**Richard** – Unfortunately, my car has four flat tyres. That's not a joke. And my mobile's got no signal. Is there a phone here?

**Louise** – We've already looked everywhere and found nothing.

**Richard** – Right... So what do we do now?



**Thelma** – We were kind of hoping you'd have the answer...

**Richard** – I don't know... So, there's no one else here?

**Louise** – No one... It's crazy...

**Thelma** – There's a door over there, but it's locked...

**Richard** – Oh, great... I mean, too bad...

*A pause.*

**Thelma** – You're not wearing high heels, are you?

**Richard** – No... Not today... Why?

**Thelma** – You could walk to the next village. To call a mechanic.

**Richard** – The next village...? Yes, I could...

**Louise** – But?

**Richard** – Let's just say... I'd rather not leave you two here on your own.

**Louise** – I have to admit, that reassures me. *(To Thelma)* Doesn't it, you?

**Thelma** – I'd be reassured if I knew we could get out of this hole as soon as possible. If no one's coming for help, we have no idea when this will end...

**Richard** – Or how...

**Louise** – Help? Until now, we were just talking about a tow truck. This is starting to get really creepy...

*Thunder rumbles. Richard moves towards an imaginary window.*

**Richard** – It's pouring down and pitch black out there.

**Thelma** – Not wanting to leave us alone... Just admit it, you're scared...

**Richard** – I don't fancy going out in a storm at night to find a village that could be miles away. I'd call that being sensible...

**Thelma** – Call it whatever you want.

**Louise** – Let's not start arguing! If we want to get out of here, we need to stick together!

**Thelma** – You're right, I'm sorry...

**Louise** – It could be worse... At least we're sheltered.

**Thelma** – Yes... But if we have to spend the night here, I wasn't prepared for that.

**Louise** – Neither was I. Even if I had a bag in the boot... With this rain...

**Richard** – And I don't think we should be expecting room service...

**Thelma** – At least you came with a bag. You're the prepared type...

**Richard** (*surveying the room*) – I don't get the impression the owners live here.

**Louise** – I saw a few ruined houses, but no lights.

**Thelma** – Yes, it's like an abandoned village.

**Louise** – Still, it's odd... an open bar just sitting here in the middle of nowhere, in a ghost town.

**Richard** – Especially a bar with no owner or no customers.

**Louise** – Well, we're here... but we could have done without it... Fancy a drink to perk you up?

**Richard** – Thanks, but I'd rather not drink alcohol.

**Thelma** – Smart move. One of us should stay clear-headed. You'll be our designated captain.

**Louise** – Unfortunately, you won't be able to drive us home smashed, as all three of our cars are out of action.

**Thelma** – I feel like I'm shipwrecked on a deserted island.

**Louise** – Yes, castaways on the road...

**Thelma** – Well, deserted... Not exactly...

**Louise** – Would you rather be alone?

**Thelma** – No... But unless someone has a plan to get us out of here...

*A pause.*

**Richard** – What kind of car do you have?

**Thelma** – A red Ford Fiesta, why?

**Richard** – And you?

**Louise** – Same. Well, it's blue.

**Richard** (*to Louise*) – And you said you have two flat tyres. If we put the two spare wheels on her car, one of us can drive it to the nearest garage!

**Thelma** – That makes sense...

**Richard** – One wonders why you didn't think of it earlier... Right, give me your car keys. Where are you parked?

**Thelma** – Wait, not so fast... Just now, you didn't want to go out in the rain for fear of getting wet...

**Richard** – Yes, but now we have a chance not to spend the night here.

**Louise** – She's got a point. What's stopping you from taking off with both of our cars?

**Richard** – First off, because five out of your eight tyres are flat. And secondly, I'd have a hard time driving two cars at once...

**Thelma** – Yes, but once you get the tyre fixed! And you're supposedly going for a tow truck. What guarantee do we have that you'll come back for us?

**Louise** – Sorry, but... we don't really know you. You could be a thief who set this all up just to steal a car.

**Richard** – A Ford Fiesta? Trust me, if I were a car thief, I'd go for something a lot simpler—and definitely more expensive.

**Thelma** – Still, throwing nails on the road is like casting a net in the sea. You never know if you're going to catch a small fish or a big one... You get what I mean?

*Exasperated, Richard pulls a set of keys from his pocket and holds them out to her.*

**Richard** – Here, take my 4x4 keys...

**Louise** – But how do we know you actually have the car to match? We haven't seen it, have we? Did you?

**Thelma** – No...

**Richard** – You could just come with me! Change two tyres in the rain. Then drive for miles along mountain roads in the middle of the night with a stranger. All to find a closed garage, wake up the mechanic, and convince him to come out here and help us.

**Louise** – Put it that way...

**Richard** – You're both pretty suspicious, but... you're not exactly in a position to negotiate... So let's say, it's take it or leave it, alright?

*Thelma takes the keys Richard hands her.*

**Thelma** – OK... My car's parked right outside, in the car park.

**Louise** – Mine too.

*The two women hand him their keys.*

**Richard** – I'll come back for you as soon as I can. With a tow truck...

*He exits, leaving his travel bag behind.*

**Louise** – I think we can trust him, don't you?

**Thelma** – Do we really have a choice? *(She looks at the keyring.)* BMW... A dealer's car...

**Louise** – And he left his bag behind... *(She moves closer to the bag.)* I wonder what's in it.

**Thelma** – I don't know... Drugs?

**Louise** – You think?

**Thelma** – Why don't you take a look?

*Louise hesitates, about to open the bag when Richard returns.*

**Richard** – Sorry... I forgot this...

**Thelma** – Don't you want to leave it here? Why take it with you?

**Richard** – Let's just say I'm the suspicious type too...

*He exits again, taking the bag with him.*

**Louise** – So now we just wait, then...

**Thelma** – Yes... And hope that bastard actually comes back for us.

**Louise** – We'll never know what's in that bag.

**Thelma** – He certainly seems attached to it...

**Louise** – Fancy another drink?

**Thelma** – Not sure that's wise... I don't know what it is, but it's strong...

**Louise** – I'm starting to feel lightheaded too. I hope that sadist hasn't drugged us...

**Thelma** – What?

**Louise** – If this is all set up... maybe he left that bottle on the counter with drugs in it. So he could take advantage of us later...

**Thelma** – Rape the two of us and then drive off with our old, battered Ford Fiesta? If he was going to do that, he'd have gone for something newer... and more luxurious.

**Louise** – Beggars can't be choosers...

**Thelma** – Haven't heard that one in ages... My aunt used to say it all the time when I was little...

*A pause.*

**Louise** – Anyone waiting for you?

**Thelma** – No, no one in particular. You?

**Louise** – Me neither... You realise? No one would even notice if we disappeared...

**Thelma** – Not for several days, at least.

**Louise** – I never come this way. I thought I'd take a shortcut. I don't even know where we are.

**Thelma** – And it's not like we can use our phones to track our corpses. There's no signal...

**Louise** – You're really comforting, aren't you?

**Thelma** – And what about him? What's he doing around here?

**Louise** – I don't know... And you?

**Thelma** – Me?

**Louise** – What are you doing here?

**Thelma** – Here? Honestly, I'm not really sure where we are either. I was on my way to a funeral, in some godforsaken village. My GPS died. Never found it. I was just trying to get back home...

**Louise** – Family?

**Thelma** – An old aunt, one I'd nearly forgotten about. The same one I mentioned earlier. I don't even know why I go to these funerals anymore.

**Louise** – When you get an invitation, you always feel a little obliged.

**Thelma** – Yes... And since she had no direct heirs, she left me a few thousand euros. Whatever she had in her savings. I guess I owed her that much. Though, after paying for that bloody funeral, I'm starting to wonder if I'm going to end up losing money...

**Louise** – And you won't even have been able to attend...

**Thelma** – I imagine no one will have noticed my absence... Especially if there was no one else at her funeral. She was a bitch. Everyone hated her.

**Louise** – Including you?

**Thelma** – During the summer holidays, my parents worked. I could've stayed with her – she lived out in the countryside. But she always had a good excuse to dodge it. So my parents sent me to camp every year... right up until I was fifteen. And you?

**Louise** (*thoughtfully*) – Summer camp?

**Thelma** – What brings you to this area?

**Louise** – Oh yes... You'll laugh, but I was going to a funeral too.

**Thelma** – Well, that's amusing, indeed. Don't tell me it was my aunt's funeral, that we're cousins, and now I'll have to share her savings with you...

**Louise** – No, it was my husband's funeral.

**Thelma** – Oh... I'm sorry... I didn't know...

**Louise** – No need. We'd been separated for over ten years. I only went out of duty, really. Well, it's a chapter closed.

**Thelma** – Yes...

**Louise** – I can't even hope to inherit anything from him. The divorce was only finalised recently, after years of proceedings.

**Thelma** – That's really unfortunate.

**Louise** – Yes... Though it would have helped. I'm sick of slogging every day – Sundays and bank holidays – just for a pittance.

**Thelma** – And what do you do for work?

**Louise** – I'm a carer.

**Thelma** – Not the most glamorous job, is it?

**Louise** – No... And you?

**Thelma** – Assistant accountant. Not much more exciting, but at least it's less messy...

**Louise** – Are you married?

**Thelma** – Widowed... Three times.

**Louise** – Excuse me...?

**Thelma** – Married three times. Widowed three times. Guess marriage isn't my strong suit.

**Louise** – Wow... That's unusual... I'm really sorry...

**Thelma** – Believe me, it's not easy finding someone for the fourth...

**Louise** – So, if I'm getting this right, you're not exactly swimming in happiness either...

**Thelma** – Some people just aren't meant for happiness...

**Louise** – Maybe you should see someone.

**Thelma** – I saw an analyst for five years. Cost me a fortune.

**Louise** – And...?

**Thelma** – After five years, I realised the only thing that felt lighter after each session was my bank account.

**Louise** – So you stopped...

**Thelma** – Yes... But first, I made sure I got my money back.

**Louise** – Excuse me?

**Thelma** – Psychoanalysts, they only deal in cash, you know. All under the table. I knew where the bastard kept his fifties. On my last day, I took the lot while he was busy on the phone with his next victim.

**Louise** – And he didn't report you?

**Thelma** – No... He probably wasn't exactly a saint himself...

**Louise** – That's the first time I've heard of someone robbing their own therapist...

**Thelma** – It's risk-free, I assure you. I wonder if, in the end, I even made a profit...

*Richard returns, soaking wet and clearly annoyed.*

**Louise** – Well?

**Richard** – I couldn't find a spare tyre in the red Ford Fiesta.

**Louise** – There wasn't a spare?

**Richard** – No.

**Thelma** – You didn't know?

**Louise** – I bought it second-hand! I didn't think to check for a spare.

**Richard** (*giving her a dark look*) – I'm soaked to the bone.

**Louise** – Or, maybe it was stolen... I mean, people do steal spare tires, right?

**Thelma** – But you have a spare, don't you?

**Richard** – Yes, but I don't drive a Ford Fiesta. And I seriously doubt my 4x4's spare will fit one of your little cars.

**Louise** – Please, watch your language!

**Thelma** – Just because yours is bigger...

**Richard** – You, I suggest you keep quiet, or I might actually lose my temper.

**Thelma** – Alright, I didn't say a thing...

**Louise** – We're all a bit tense, it's understandable. But let's stay calm, alright? It's not that bad.

**Richard** – Speak for yourself...

**Louise** – Someone's bound to come along this road. They'll see our three cars, the flat tyres, and call the police.

**Richard** – The police...

**Thelma** – That doesn't exactly seem to thrill you... You don't want to deal with the police?

**Richard** – I don't plan on rotting here waiting for someone to show up, alright? Is that so hard to understand? (*He checks his phone.*) Still no signal...

**Louise** – So what do you suggest we do now?

**Richard** – Me? I'm not suggesting anything! As soon as the rain stops, I'm gone. You two can figure it out. That's my suggestion.

**Thelma** – Very gallant, thank you...

**Richard** – In the meantime, I'm having a drink to warm up.

*He walks to the counter, pours himself a glass, and downs it in one go, coughing afterward.*

**Thelma** – Yes, definitely more of a man's drink...

*Silence. They each sit at a table.*

**Louise** – I can't hear the storm anymore... (*She goes to look out the window.*) Looks like it's stopped raining...

**Thelma** – So you can finally leave us, and abandon us to our fate...

*But Richard doesn't seem in a hurry to leave.*

**Louise** – Have you changed your mind?

**Richard** – I can't walk... Not very far, anyway.

**Louise** – Why's that?

**Thelma** – Don't tell me you're wearing stilettos after all...

**Richard** – I've got flat feet...

**Louise** – Flat feet? I thought that was just an excuse people used to dodge the draft...

**Richard** – Unfortunately, some of us really do have flat feet...

**Thelma** – So, looks like you're stuck with us. Unlucky for you... *(Pauses)* If only we had a deck of cards, we could play a game.

**Louise** – Want me to see if I can find one?

**Thelma** – No, I'm just messing with you... I'm not in the mood for cards. Are you?

**Louise** – Not really...

*Louise starts pacing back and forth.*

**Richard** – Could you stop moving around like that? It's making me nervous.

**Louise** – Sorry... *(She sits down at a table and suddenly looking unsettled.)* Why this table?

**Thelma** – Oh, so now we're doing philosophy... Why this table? Why this chair? Why is there something rather than nothing?

**Richard** – Where's the spare tyre gone...?

**Thelma** – And if my aunt had one, would she be my uncle?

**Louise** – No, I mean... There are three tables here. I don't know why I naturally sat at this one. I could've chosen any of them. Why this one, specifically?

**Richard** – Random chance, I guess... What's the big deal? Let's not waste the evening on it.

**Louise** – It's almost like it's my usual seat...

**Thelma** – Usual? Why? Do you come here often?

*Louise glances at the bar's sign.*

**Louise** – *Chance's Café*... I swear I've been here before... But how? I can't remember...

**Thelma** – What I'd like is to forget it as quickly as possible...

**Louise** – So, you've been here before?

**Thelma** – I don't know...



**Louise** – But earlier, you said you'd been here too...

**Thelma** – It's a roadside bar... We could've all passed through here years ago, on our way to a holiday with our parents...

**Louise** – Holidays... Wait, it's coming back to me now... Chance's Café! I came here during summer camp!

**Thelma** – Really?

**Louise** – You too?

**Thelma** – Yes, maybe...

**Louise** – You were the one who mentioned summer camp earlier... Because your aunt didn't want you to stay with her.

**Thelma** (*looking around*) – Yes, it vaguely rings a bell...

**Louise** – Of course! This was the place!

**Thelma** – The place for what?

**Louise** – It's here I lost my virginity!

*Thelma seems shocked.*

**Thelma** – No way... Now I remember. Me too!

**Richard** – Excuse me, am I interrupting?

**Thelma** – Summer camp! It was right over there, in the woods. We were so bored. This is where we'd meet up with friends.

**Louise** – So we could make out away from the chaperones.

**Thelma** – Or sometimes with them...

**Louise** – Yes... And more, if we hit it off. In the barn next door...

**Thelma** (*looking at the table*) – Unbelievable... Our carvings are still on this table...

**Louise** – No wonder I instinctively chose this one. Look! It's where he carved our names with a pocket knife... Louise and Richard!

**Thelma** – Richard?

**Richard** – Richard?

**Louise** – The counsellor! It was with him that... well, my first time... I must have been fifteen... He was five years older...

**Thelma** – He'd just got his camp leader's certificate.

**Louise** – So you too... You were at camp here?

**Thelma** – I didn't recognise the village. Back then, it was still a bit inhabited... I think it's no coincidence I picked this table either... Look... My name's on it too... along with...

*Louise leans over to get a closer look.*

**Louise** – Richard?

**Thelma** – Maybe it wasn't the same year...

**Louise** – It was the summer of my O-levels... The others went on a night hike to watch the fireworks. My best friend was grounded for disciplinary reasons. I pretended to be sick to stay with her. What was her name again?

**Thelma** – Thelma.

**Louise** – Of course! Thelma! That was you! I'd never have recognised you.

**Thelma** – Me neither... I suppose we've changed a bit. But... I didn't remember we were that close...

**Louise** – Friendship is like love, it's not always mutual...

**Thelma** – And Richard, the counsellor, we left him here to watch over us. Fat chance... He really took care of us...

**Louise** – Well, he was excused from the hike... because of some issue.

**Thelma** – What was it again? Not an embarrassing illness, but something like that...

**Louise** – Flat feet...

**Thelma** – That's it!

*The two women turn to look at the man.*

**Richard** – Lots of people have flat feet. And I assure you I've never set foot here in my life...

**Thelma** – Just another coincidence, I guess... And I'm sure your name isn't really Richard either?

**Richard** – No... And I don't have a camp leader's certificate...

**Louise** – Then what's your name, then?

**Richard** – If you don't mind, I'd rather wait until we know each other a bit better before sharing that.

**Louise** – If you were the one who deflowered us both, I'd say we're already quite close...

**Richard** – I'm telling you, I'm not Richard, and I've never deflowered anyone... as far as I know... At least, not here... And certainly not you!

**Louise** – The bastard!

**Thelma** – Yes... We were fifteen and he was twenty. That was practically corruption of a minor.

**Louise** – He didn't rape me either, but... Well, he swore he loved me. That I was the only one. So you too...?

**Thelma** – Yes, he told me I was the only one too. That we were going to get married. I was young. I believed him.

**Louise** – Actually, I didn't care about that idiot. I just wanted to get it over with. To become a woman.

**Thelma** – Yes. It was the night of the fireworks. Everyone had gone to watch them.

**Louise** – No? Don't tell me you too...? So, both of us... it was the same night!

**Thelma** – Some fireworks... More like a damp squib...

**Louise** – Yes, that's true... And it was raining that night too...

**Thelma** – No, I'm talking about my first time. With Richard... Because it wasn't just his feet that were flat... I still wonder how he managed to pop both our cherries one after the other.

**Richard** – And they say men are vulgar...

**Thelma** – But it really was raining that night.

**Louise** – Yes. I remember...

**Thelma** – So it was the same year... The same night...

**Richard** – It often rains on National Day around here.

**Thelma** – You seem to know the area quite well all of a sudden... Richard...

*Louise approaches the bar and picks up the portrait*

**Louise** – I knew this photo looked familiar... Virginia! In the end, it was for her that bastard left us both. Do you remember?

**Thelma** – She was the owner's daughter. So that's why this photo is here...

**Louise** – She was quite something... She'd be our age now.

**Richard** – If she was your age back then, that makes sense...

**Louise** – Yes, she was wilder than us, but she played the innocent little girl.

**Thelma** – That's how she fooled that idiot. Let's be honest, he wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed.

**Louise** – Not very bright, but definitely motivated.

**Thelma** – We used to call him Dicky...

**Louise** – Yes... Exactly, because of... Well, he hid it well too...

**Thelma** – I wonder if he got involved with her mother, too.

**Louise** – Her mother?

**Thelma** – The bar's owner.

**Louise** – Oh, I mean, that guy was an animal.

**Thelma** – Well, Virginia's mother wasn't exactly shy either.

**Louise** – True.

**Thelma** – According to all the boys at camp, all it took was a little cash.

**Louise** – Yes... They spent all their pocket money on her, but it was definitely more valuable than the biology lessons we got at school.

**Thelma** – And the practical work was included in the deal.

*They laugh, glancing at Richard, who looks thoroughly displeased. Louise then grows serious.*

**Louise** – There was a sordid incident that year, wasn't there?

**Thelma** – Sordid? You mean, aside from the fact that we both lost our virginity to a flat-footed creep on the same night?

**Louise** – No, I'm talking about when someone stole from the bar's cash register. You remember?

**Thelma** – Yes...

**Louise** – Well, since the three of us were the only ones there, Richard got blamed for it.

**Thelma** – Poor thing...

**Louise** – He swore he had nothing to do with it... but they fired him anyway.

**Thelma** – Yes...

**Louise** – I'm not exactly proud of it, but honestly, I was kind of relieved... it felt like a little revenge.

**Richard** – Revenge?

**Louise** – He ditched both of us, for that cow, Virginia.

**Richard** – I see...

**Louise** – I said I wasn't proud of it. But at the same time, it wasn't my fault he got fired, even if he didn't do it.

**Thelma** – It was me.

**Louise** – What?

**Thelma** – I was the one who took the money and made sure he got the blame...

**Richard** – What? *(The two women look at him, surprised by his sudden reaction, and he repeats, more quietly.)* I mean... what?

**Thelma** – I knew where the owner kept the key to the back office. It was too tempting.

**Louise** – Still...

**Thelma** – It was my way of getting back for losing my virginity... Dicky had given me his lighter, with his initials engraved on it. I left it by the till, in the locked office. I knew he'd get blamed. I wanted my revenge too.

**Richard** – That's monstrous!

**Thelma** – Why do you care? You're not Richard.

**Richard** – I just think it's completely irresponsible, that's all.

**Louise** (*to Thelma*) – Is this some kind of joke? Trying to trap him into admitting he's Dicky?

**Thelma** – Who knows...

**Louise** – Anyway, the money was never found.

**Thelma** – And my parents never sent me back to camp.

**Louise** – Mine neither...

**Thelma** – To be fair, two or three girls came back pregnant that year.

**Louise** – All thanks to Dicky...

*Richard looks visibly disturbed.*

**Richard** – I'm going outside to check if it's still raining... and to have a smoke.

*He exits. The two women exchange a look.*

**Louise** – Do you think it's him?

**Thelma** – The camp counsellor? I don't know... It'd be one hell of a coincidence for the three of us to end up here.

**Louise** – But hen again... it's Chance's Café...

**Thelma** – All because of those flat tyres... What if it wasn't a coincidence?

**Louise** – What do you mean?

**Thelma** – The flat tyres, at least. Sometimes the police scatter things on the road to puncture tyres when they set up roadblocks...

**Louise** – Why would they set up a roadblock?

**Thelma** – How should I know...? Maybe they're chasing a terrorist. Or a gangster.

**Louise** – He doesn't exactly look like a terrorist. And we didn't see any police.

**Thelma** – Maybe they lifted the roadblock but forgot to remove the nails.

**Louise** – Hmm...

*They pause for a moment.*

**Thelma** – He left his bag.

**Louise** – Oh, right...

**Thelma** – Now's our chance.

*Thelma moves towards the bag and opens it.*

**Louise** – What's in it?

**Thelma** – You won't believe it...

**Louise** – What?

**Thelma** – Money.

**Louise** – Money?

**Thelma** – A lot of it.

**Louise** – No way... So, he really did steal from the bar's till back then?

**Thelma** – That was thirty years ago! There wasn't enough back then to fill a bag with cash, believe me.

**Louise** – So what's all this money?

**Thelma** – There are plans too... *(She pulls out some papers and looks at them.)*  
Blueprints for a casino.

**Louise** – A casino?

**Thelma** – The one he must have robbed, probably...

**Louise** – Oh, damn...

**Thelma** – I've never seen this much cash in one place. Not even at my therapist's...

**Louise** – So he really is a thief...

**Thelma** – At twenty, he was wrongly accused. Maybe he decided to make a career of it. For real, this time...

**Louise** – What do we do? Call the police?

**Thelma** – I remind you, we have no way of contacting anyone... or we wouldn't be stuck here.

**Louise** – Oh, right...

**Thelma** – You should go see what he's up to...

**Louise** – Why me?

**Thelma** – Find out if he's planning something dodgy.

**Louise** – Dodgy? Why me?

**Thelma** – He hates me. Try to keep him busy for a while.

**Louise** – Why?

**Thelma** – Just do it, for heaven's sake! For the sake of our friendship... Remember, I was your best friend.

**Louise** – You're not planning to steal his money, are you?

**Thelma** – What do you take me for?

**Louise** – Someone who once robbed her therapist.

**Thelma** – Well, yes, this money's stolen too...

**Louise** – Is stealing stolen money still theft?

**Thelma** – Unfortunately, legally, it's called *possession of stolen property*...

**Louise** – I'm going.

*She exits. Thelma moves to the bar, takes out some tablets from her bag, crushes them, and pours the powder into a glass. She nearly gets caught when the others return, but doesn't flinch.*

**Thelma** – Is it still raining?

**Richard** – No...

**Thelma** – We definitely got off on the wrong foot, didn't we? I'm really sorry.

**Richard** – Alright... Let's just drop it...

**Thelma** – Come on, let's have a drink, all together... To our reunion...

**Louise** – It's crazy, isn't it? You, here, with your two exes... All we're missing is the bar owner...

**Thelma** – And her daughter.

**Louise** – You're not going to pretend to break down again, are you?

**Thelma** – Just to rekindle the spark for two long-lost virgins, thirty years later...

*The supposed Richard doesn't seem amused. Thelma pours three glasses and hands one to Louise and one to Richard.*

**Richard** – So it really was you who took that money?

**Thelma** – I'll tell you... but only if you admit you're Richard.

*Richard hesitates.*

**Richard** – OK... It's me.

**Louise** – What a coincidence! At this point, I think we can even call it fate. It's a little spooky, don't you think?

*They hear fireworks, and see the glow of colourful reflections.*

**Richard** (*worried*) – What's that?

**Thelma** – Isn't it National Day today?

**Louise** – Another coincidence...

**Thelma** – A real fireworks display... like a sort of commemoration.

**Richard** – Your turn to talk now, Thelma... It's like poker. I've shown my hand, now you show yours.

**Thelma** – Alright... Yes, it was me who took the cash from Chance's Café.

**Louise** – I knew it... I suspected it, even back then...

**Thelma** – There wasn't much, anyway. Quite disappointing. Just like my first time with Richard. But, as I said... it was mostly for revenge...

**Richard** – You bitch!

**Louise** – That's all in the past, isn't it?

**Richard** – Because of you, I got kicked out of that camp. And I never worked as a counsellor again.

**Thelma** – Once you're labelled as a sexual delinquent...

**Richard** – If my life went off the rails, it's because of you, you cow.

**Thelma** – Oh, we all have our little problems...

**Richard** – I'm going to strangle you...

*He stumbles toward her, beginning to feel the effects of the sedative.*

**Louise** – Oh my God! He's having a seizure! Must be the emotion...

**Richard** (*leaning on a table*) – I don't know what's happening to me... I feel dizzy... This cow poisoned me...

**Thelma** – He's just drowsy. It's the sleeping pills.

**Louise** – Sleeping pills?

**Thelma** – The ones I slipped into his drink.

**Louise** – Why would you do that?

*Richard collapses into a chair, then falls asleep, his head on the table.*

**Thelma** – He was about to strangle me!

**Louise** – This is a nightmare... This can't be happening... It's the kind of thing you'd only dream up.

**Thelma** – Well, I don't plan on sleeping here.

*She moves behind the bar, bends down, and reveals a key.*

**Louise** – What's that?

**Thelma** – The key to the back room. It's still hidden in the same spot.

**Louise** – You knew where the owner hid the key...

**Thelma** – Yes.

**Louise** – So you really did steal that money.



**Thelma** – Of course!

*Thelma moves toward the door and opens it.*

**Louise** – Oh my God... What are we going to find behind that door? Skeletons from the past...

*Thelma pauses, then turns back toward Louise.*

**Thelma** – You don't know how right you are...

**Louise** – What...?

**Thelma** – I've got good news and bad news.

**Louise** – Bad news?

**Thelma** – There's a woman in there. Hanging by the telephone.

**Louise** – She'll finish her call eventually.

**Thelma** – No. When I say “hanging,” I mean it literally...

**Louise** – No... You're joking...

**Thelma** – Want to check? But I warn you, it's not a pretty sight. She's hanged herself with the phone cord.

**Louise** – Oh no... That's awful... Tell me this is a nightmare... That I'm going to wake up...

**Thelma** – I'd never seen a hanged person before, but it's truly horrifying.

**Louise** – We need to call the police!

**Thelma** – I keep telling you, we don't have a signal! And as for the landline... we'd have to disconnect her first.

**Louise** – Oh, that's right...

**Thelma** – And besides, this whole situation is getting a bit complicated to explain to the police, don't you think?

**Louise** – You think?

**Thelma** – Let me try to summarise. By sheer chance, after a series of flat tyres, I run into the counsellor who took my virginity thirty years ago, along with the girl he also deflowered the same night. Back then, the counsellor was wrongly accused of a theft I committed out of revenge for his fling with the owner's daughter, a notorious tramp. And now, this bastard's just robbed a casino, but we're all stuck here because he has flat feet... Should I keep going?

**Louise** – You're right... I'm starting to get lost myself...

**Thelma** – And I've simplified it.

**Louise** – But who is she? The woman in there?

**Thelma** – I'm not sure, but I'd say... Virginia.

**Louise** – Virginia? The bar owner's daughter?

**Thelma** – Even all blue, she looks a lot like the girl in the photo.

**Louise** – Oh my God. But what is she doing here?

**Thelma** – Maybe she took over the bar after her mother.

**Louise** – No, I mean... what's she doing here, hanging?

**Thelma** – How would I know?

**Louise** – Maybe she hung herself after you stole the bar's cash...

**Thelma** – What?

**Louise** – Maybe it led to the bar going bankrupt. Or her mother dying.

**Thelma** – But that was thirty years ago!

**Louise** – Who knows... It's the butterfly effect... one thing leads to another... She never saw Dicky again. Instead of leaving, she must have taken over the bar, teaching evening classes to the pimply camp boys just to make ends meet... Maybe that's what drove her to this desperate act.

**Thelma** – Hmm...

**Louise** – It's horrifying!

**Thelma** – It's fate. Nothing we can do about it.

**Louise** – We need to find a way to alert the police.

**Thelma** – If we call the police, Richard will get arrested. And this time, for a crime he actually committed.

**Louise** – True...

**Thelma** – The best thing we can do is get out of here.

**Louise** – But how?

**Thelma** – That's the good news. I found something else in that cupboard...

**Louise** – What?

*Thelma goes back into the room and returns with a tyre.*

**Thelma** – A spare wheel!

**Louise** – No way?

**Thelma** – And believe me, this wheel is the wheel of fortune!

**Louise** – How do you mean?

**Thelma** – We take the cash, and we're out of here...

**Louise** – We can't do that...

**Thelma** – Remember, that guy is a predator. He took advantage of us thirty years ago.

**Louise** – Yes, well...

**Thelma** – He cheated on both of us with that cow, Virginia. You wanted revenge, didn't you?

**Louise** – Yes, of course, but...

**Thelma** – That tramp hung herself, and he'll end up in jail for a crime he actually committed. Meanwhile, we'll be sipping cocktails somewhere in the tropics. Life hasn't been kind to us. This is our revenge.

**Louise** – You think?

**Thelma** – Do you really want to end up as a carer forever? Trust me, it's like with my therapist, he won't press charges.

**Louise** – I don't know... it doesn't feel very moral...

**Thelma** – If fate brought the three of us together tonight at Chance's Café, it can't be for nothing, right?

**Louise** – I don't know why, but I trust you. And I've got something to confess too.

**Thelma** – Oh really?

**Louise** – I admired you a lot back then.

**Thelma** – Admired, as in...?

**Louise** – You were everything I wasn't. You dared to do everything...

**Thelma** – Well, as you can see, things haven't exactly worked out for me.

**Louise** – Honestly, the only reason I slept with Richard was to be like you. To feel closer to you.

**Thelma** – Oh, I see...

**Louise** – Our time has come, Thelma, I can feel it! We're picking up right where we left off thirty years ago.

*She moves closer, and Thelma instinctively steps back.*

**Thelma** – There's also a phone in there, but I think we'd better keep a low profile...

**Louise** – After Richard was kicked out of camp, maybe she stayed near the phone all those years, waiting for a call from him that never came.

**Thelma** – Oh, please... You should write romantic novels...

**Louise** – And out of despair, she eventually hanged herself with the phone cord...

**Thelma** – Yeah... Must be that...

**Louise** – All because of the miscarriage of justice Richard suffered... because of us...

**Thelma** – Miscarriage of justice... Let's not get carried away. There wasn't even a trial.

**Louise** – Are you sure it's Virginia?

**Thelma** – I don't know... She looks a lot like her mother... Especially now...

**Louise** – Now that she's hanging from the phone?

**Thelma** – Now that she's thirty years older! Don't think she's still the young girl who drove all the camp counsellors crazy. And as for us—have you looked at us lately? We haven't exactly stayed young either. If we want any chance of finding a gigolo, we're going to have to flash the cash...

**Louise** – We can't just leave them both here like this...

**Thelma** – You're right. We're not monsters, after all... *(She takes a wad of cash from the bag and places it on the table where Richard is slumped, asleep.)* For the staff, as they say at the casino.

**Louise** – There's one thing I don't understand...

**Thelma** – What?

**Louise** – How could she hang herself and close the door behind her, leaving the key in its place?

**Thelma** – Do you want us to call the police and let them solve the mystery?

**Louise** – You're right, it's really none of our business...

**Thelma** – But if you ask me, that girl didn't hang herself alone...

**Louise** – And the nails? Who put those down?

**Thelma** – They're probably partners in crime.

**Louise** – Of course... Dicky and Virginia...

**Thelma** – Maybe he staged it as a suicide to keep all the cash for himself.

**Louise** – And she knew he'd come this way after the heist. So, she put down the nails to make sure he'd stop here instead of running off with the cash...?

**Thelma** – Or maybe... it's fate.

**Louise** – Fate?

**Thelma** – Hansel and Gretel left pebbles to find their way home. Maybe fate scattered nails to bring us back together...

**Louise** – At *Chance's Café*...

**Thelma** – I think we were meant to meet here.

**Louise** – It's destiny.

**Thelma** – Virginia... Now I remember. Chance was her family name, hers and her mother's.

**Louise** – Of course... *Chance's Café...*

**Thelma** – Goes to show, chance doesn't always work in your favour.

**Louise** – Do you think we're responsible?

**Thelma** – Responsible for what?

**Louise** – For her suicide!

**Thelma** – I don't know, and frankly, I don't care. Let's just get out of here.

**Louise** – Which car are we taking? Yours or mine?

**Thelma** – Mine only needs two tyres replaced.

**Louise** – Yes... but mine's practically new.

*Thelma takes a coin from her pocket, flips it, catches it, and covers it with her other hand.*

**Thelma** – Heads, yours. Tails, mine.

*She reveals the coin.*

**Louise** – Let's go.

**Thelma** – Grab the spare tyre!

**Louise** – Oh, right, sorry...

*They exit, one carrying the bag and the other the spare tyre. Darkness. Lights up. Richard wakes, alone. He sees the wad of cash on the table. Realising the bag is gone, he mutters.*

**Richard** – Those bitches... *(Pauses)* They won't get far. I sabotaged the brakes on the Ford Fiesta. The one belonging to that cow Thelma. The way down's steep, and the cliff's never far from the road... *(He gets up, staggering.)* The question is, which car will they put those wheels of fortune on...?

*We hear the sound of screeching tyres, then a crash.*

**Richard** – There's still some justice in this world... *(Pauses)* Doesn't exactly help me get out of here... *(He walks to the counter and looks at the portrait.)* Virginia... She really looks like her mother now...

*A phone rings from the back room. He looks toward the door.*

**Richard** – The door! It's open...

*He walks toward the door, stopping at the threshold. The phone continues to ring.*

**Richard** – Do I answer it?

*He steps into the back room. The phone stops ringing.*

**Richard** – Hello?

*The sound of a police car siren wails, its flashing lights filling the scene.*

*Blackout.*

**The End.**

## *About the author*

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

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

## **Other plays by the same author translated in English:**

### **Comedies for 2**

EuroStar  
Heads and Tails  
Him and Her  
Is there a pilot in the audience?  
Last chance encounter  
New Year's Eve at the Morgue  
Not even dead  
Preliminaries  
Running on empty  
The Costa Mucho Castaways  
The Joker  
The Rope  
The Window across the courtyard

### **Comedies for 3**

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

### **Comedies for 4**

A Cuckoo's nest  
A hell of a night  
A Skeleton in the Closet  
Back to stage  
Bed and Breakfast  
Casket for two  
Crisis and Punishment  
Family Portrait  
Family Tree  
Four stars  
Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>  
Gay friendly  
Hom to get rid of your best friends  
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  
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

### **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  
Nicotine  
Offside  
Open Hearts  
Reality Show  
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  
For real and for fun  
Him and Her  
Lost time Chronicles  
Open Hearts  
Sidewalk Chronicles  
Stage Briefs  
Stories to die for

### **Monologues**

Happy Dogs  
Like a fish in the air



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