



La Comédiathèque

Déjà vu

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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In a future where assisted suicide has been replaced by voluntary recycling, a man and a woman, who met just before their reconditioning, reappear in the very ordinary home of the outdated couple they are meant to replace. Is there anything left of love when everything has been forgotten?

Characters

Man 1
Woman 1
Man 2
Woman 2

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Butterflies

A terrace at a luxury hotel. A garden table and two chairs. A man arrives, holding a drink, and sits down. Dressed casually but elegantly, he appears relaxed and serene, as if on holiday. He picks up the newspaper on the table, glances at the front page, then sets it back down. A woman arrives, similarly elegant and around the same age. They exchange faint smiles in greeting. She walks to the edge of the stage, lights a cigarette, and smokes, contemplating the view. They remain like this for a while, lost in thought. She stubs out her cigarette, turns, approaches the table, and hands him a business card.

Woman 1 – I was walking behind you in the hallway. This card fell from your pocket. I don't know if it's important...

He takes the card, looking a bit surprised.

Man 1 – Oh yes... Thank you...

Woman 1 – You're welcome.

He places the card on the table and looks at her. She seems ready to leave.

Man 1 – May I offer you a drink? (*She turns towards him*) As a thank you...

Woman 1 – Don't feel obligated...

Man 1 – Please, have a seat. (*She sits*) What would you like?

Woman 1 – I don't know... The same as you.

Man 1 – But you don't know what I'm drinking...

Woman 1 – I trust you.

Man 1 – It could be the condemned man's last drink... Poison... Hemlock, like Socrates.

Woman 1 – You look more like an English dandy than a Greek philosopher... I'll take the risk...

He smiles and exits. She picks up the card and examines it. Then, she gazes thoughtfully at the view again. After a moment's hesitation, she takes a lipstick from her bag and applies a bit. He returns with a glass.

Man 1 – These mountains... They're truly magnificent, aren't they?

Woman 1 – Yes... I've never been to Switzerland before.

Man 1 – No one comes to Switzerland... Unless they have a good reason.

Woman 1 – That's true... People say "See Venice and die," but I've never heard anyone say "See Lausanne and die."

Man 1 – Die of boredom, perhaps... (*He hands her the glass*) Here you are. Same as mine...

She takes the glass, inhales the aroma, then sips.

Woman 1 – Whisky...

Man 1 – I wouldn't call it poison. It only kills very slowly. Like cigarettes...

Woman 1 – In any case, it's very good.

Man 1 – I hope so... I asked for their most expensive. I wasn't disappointed. The nectar in this glass is almost as costly as my suite in this palace...

She smiles. They sip their drinks in silence.

Woman 1 – You intrigue me... People come to Switzerland to ski. And it's still summer. Or they live here year-round to avoid taxes. But then, they don't stay in hotels. And something tells me you're not the type to be concerned with money...

Man 1 – You think so?

Woman 1 – Otherwise, you'd have offered me an ordinary whisky. And I probably wouldn't have known the difference. I detest whisky...

Man 1 – A shame...

Woman 1 – So...?

Man 1 – It's true, I'm neither a ski enthusiast nor a tax exile... But I could ask you the same question. If you don't mind me saying, you don't quite seem at home in luxury hotels...

Woman 1 – Is it that obvious?

Man 1 – Regulars in places like these are blasé. Nothing surprises them anymore. You, though, you still have that spark of wonder...

Woman 1 – I was born poor, indeed. It's a condition that leaves scars. Even for those lucky enough to rise above it...

Man 1 – People often mock the nouveau riche, but I pity those born billionaires. You have to have known hunger to truly appreciate a good meal...

Woman 1 – I'm no billionaire. In fact, I'm not rich either. I'm only staying here for one night...

Man 1 – Don't tell me you're on your honeymoon...

Woman 1 – That's a unique way of asking if I'm travelling alone... But you haven't answered my question. What brings you here?

A pause.

Man 1 – You already know, don't you? Since you saw that card you handed back to me.

Woman 1 – Did you perhaps drop it on purpose?

Man 1 – Who's to say...

Woman 1 – A Freudian slip, then...

Man 1 – My life is just one long series of Freudian slips... Yet, I find it rather successful in the end... So, you know the establishment named on this card?

Woman 1 – A clinic...

Man 1 – Yes. A rather unique kind of clinic...

Woman 1 – The one performing these voluntary recycling procedures, still banned in France.

Man 1 – They used to call them assisted suicides. The Church was strongly opposed.

Woman 1 – And these... voluntary recyclings, do you know exactly what they entail?

Man 1 – As I understand it, it's a bit like reconditioning computers. Replace faulty parts, erase the memory, and put the device back on the market.

Woman 1 – But by definition, no one has ever been able to describe the experience afterward...

Man 1 – That's likely why there's no after-sales service.

Woman 1 – A modern form of metempsychosis, in a way. After our death, our soul would inhabit another body...

Man 1 – Or our body would become a vessel for another soul.

Woman 1 – Rather like religion, in a more modern form. Just believing in an afterlife can make our end feel less final...

Man 1 – Yes... But for those using this clinic's services, the key is ending their present suffering, whether physical or mental...

Silence.

Woman 1 – When is it?

Man 1 – Tomorrow morning. Half past eleven.

Woman 1 – I'm sorry...

Man 1 – Don't be. I've lived well. And everyone must die someday. Not everyone has the privilege of choosing the place and time...

Woman 1 – I see... A final act of free will...

Man 1 – Tomorrow I return my key to reception for good. And I free the room for someone else. That's life...

Woman 1 – Yes. Earth is a hotel. A fleabag motel for some. A palace for others. But we're all merely passing through.

Man 1 – And... aren't you afraid of talking to a dead man walking?

Woman 1 – It's probably a one-off opportunity.

Man 1 – So you knew about this clinic...

Woman 1 – Here, apparently everyone does. When I arrived, the taxi driver said, "I hope you're not here for our death clinic."

Man 1 – And what did you say?

Woman 1 – I preferred to say I was on holiday, here to enjoy the mountain air.

A pause.

Man 1 – So you too?

Woman 1 – Otherwise, I'd never have dared approach you...

Man 1 – When?

Woman 1 – Tomorrow morning. Eleven o'clock.

Man 1 – We could almost go together.

Silence.

Woman 1 – Rest assured, I won't ask you anything about the illness that led to this decision. Unless it's simply existential pain...

Man 1 – I promise to be as discreet as you.

Woman 1 – I also won't try to make you change your mind.

Man 1 – Thank you.

A pause.

Woman 1 – And you came alone, too...

Man 1 – Yes.

Woman 1 – You could have spent this last day with those who love you.

Man 1 – My wife was the only person who truly loved me. Sadly, she went before me. I'm estranged from the little family I have left. And I have no children. What about you?

Woman 1 – I decided to spare my loved ones from this ordeal. Well... let's say I chose to face it alone.

Man 1 – A final experience of freedom, as you mentioned earlier...

Woman 1 – Today, nothing matters anymore... I've never felt so free.

Man 1 – I understand. I may even be one of the few who truly can.

Woman 1 – That's why I felt free to speak to you. I've lived my whole life for others. I want to spend this last day alone.

Man 1 – Then I'd better leave you...

He moves to get up. She holds him back.

Woman 1 – Please, stay... What I wanted was... to spend this last day with people who didn't know I'd be gone tomorrow.

Man 1 – With me, that plane's gone awry...

Woman 1 – But at least we understand each other... No need to pretend...

Man 1 – You're right... Pity is unbearable...

Woman 1 – But perhaps I'm bothering you...

Man 1 – You're not bothering me, I assure you... (*A pause*) Under different circumstances, I might have tried to charm you...

Woman 1 – How can we get to know each other when we can't talk about the future, and the past seems pointless?

Man 1 – We still have the present... We're like two butterflies, with only one day to live.

Woman 1 – And just twenty-four hours to find a soulmate...

Man 1 – We're already halfway gone. And yet, we've never lived so intensely...

They exchange a look.

Woman 1 – You're choosing to die because you no longer want to live. I'm choosing to die because medicine has already condemned me.

Man 1 – Is it truly any different?

Woman 1 – You can still change your mind...

Man 1 – So can you.

Woman 1 – For me, it would just delay the inevitable... I wish I could give you back the desire to live.

Man 1 – You've given me the desire to live this last day. With you...

He takes her hand.

Woman 1 – It's funny... I feel as though we've met before.

Man 1 – In another life, perhaps... On the Titanic...

Woman 1 – Then maybe we'll meet again.

Man 1 – Who knows? For now, let's enjoy the moment. I'm hungry. Will you dine with me?

Woman 1 – Then it's on me.

Man 1 – What does it matter... Where we're going, we can't take money with us...
Not even Swiss francs...

She smiles. They stand.

Woman 1 – If we are reincarnated, I hope it is not as a Swiss banker.

Man 1 – That's the problem with reincarnation. You never know who you'll end up
as...

They exit.

Blackout.

Update

A plain living room, furnished in an ordinary way. At one end of the stage stands a man-sized cardboard box, marked with “fragile,” “top,” and “bottom.” A man enters, looking unremarkable. He takes off his raincoat and scarf, hanging them on a coat rack. Turning around, he notices the box and seems surprised. He approaches it, examining it with a puzzled expression, then sits down and opens a popular newspaper – something like The Daily Mail, with a populist headline on a current issue. He reads for a few moments and starts to drift off. As he dozes, two feet emerge from the box, which moves to the other end of the stage, then stops. A woman enters, also looking quite unremarkable. She takes off her coat, hangs it beside the raincoat, and sets down her bag. Turning around, she notices the box. She appears surprised, approaches, and looks at it. The man stirs from his doze.

Man 2 – Oh, it’s you...

Woman 2 – Yes, it’s me... Who else were you expecting?

Man 2 – I don’t know... Where have you been?

Woman 2 – Out.

Man 2 – Right... Me too... The weather’s rubbish.

Woman 2 – As usual... What’s with this box?

Man 2 – What box?

She gestures towards the box.

Woman 2 – This box, right here!

The man looks at the box, then glances at the opposite end of the room where he’d previously seen it.

Man 2 – Oh, *that* box?

Woman 2 – Why, is there more than one?

Man 2 – No, I don’t think so...

Woman 2 – So?

Man 2 – I thought you knew...

Woman 2 – Knew what?

Man 2 – What this box is!

Woman 2 – Well, clearly, I don’t.

Man 2 – I thought it might be something you ordered. Without mentioning it...

Woman 2 – I haven’t ordered anything.

Man 2 – I don't know... A fridge, maybe. You didn't order a fridge?

Woman 2 – A fridge? Why a fridge?

Man 2 – It's about the right size for one, isn't it?

Woman 2 – Why would I order a fridge? And without telling you, no less...

Man 2 – To replace the old one.

Woman 2 – Our fridge works perfectly fine.

Man 2 – Yes, which is why I was surprised.

Woman 2 – Anyway, there's no saying it's a fridge.

Man 2 – No...

Woman 2 – So why call it a fridge?

Man 2 – It's just the first thing that came to mind.

They both stare at the box, perplexed.

Woman 2 – A big box like that... What could it be?

Man 2 – Who knows...

Woman 2 – It must be heavy, too.

Man 2 – Yeah...

Woman 2 – If you didn't put this box here, then who did?

Man 2 – I thought it was you.

Woman 2 – I just told you it wasn't me!

Man 2 – No need to get worked up.

Woman 2 – This box certainly didn't just walk in here on its own.

Man 2 – Maybe it was a delivery person.

Woman 2 – A delivery person?

Man 2 – A fridge delivery person! Or... something else. A delivery person.

Woman 2 – A delivery person who has keys to our place?

Man 2 – Oh, right... didn't think of that...

Woman 2 – Yeah... So how else would they have got in? Down the chimney?

Man 2 – No...

Woman 2 – You believe in Santa Claus, don't you...

Man 2 – Well, it's not Christmas anyway.

Woman 2 – And we don't have a chimney.

Man 2 – And a big box like that wouldn't fit down a chimney.

Woman 2 – If you didn't let in the delivery person, then who did?

Man 2 – Maybe the concierge.

Woman 2 – The concierge?

Man 2 – Maybe the concierge let them in.

Woman 2 – The concierge has our keys?

Man 2 – I'm not sure.

Woman 2 – I didn't even know we had a concierge. Do we have a concierge?

Man 2 – No, I don't think so.

Woman 2 – Then how could it be the concierge, since there isn't one... and he doesn't have our keys...

Man 2 – You're right...

Woman 2 – So it's a mystery.

Man 2 – Yes.

Woman 2 – This is all very strange.

They look at the box again.

Man 2 – Maybe it's a mistake.

Woman 2 – A mistake?

Man 2 – Maybe it's for the neighbour.

Woman 2 – For the neighbour, you think?

Man 2 – We should check...

Woman 2 – Which neighbour?

Man 2 – The one across the hall. We could ask if they ordered a fridge.

Woman 2 – You're starting to wind me up with this fridge. We don't even know what's in this box!

Man 2 – Then there's only one solution.

Woman 2 – What?

Man 2 – We have to open it.

Woman 2 – Open it...? And what if it's not for us?

Man 2 – I don't know.

Woman 2 – Opening a box that’s not ours isn’t really the done thing.

Man 2 – True.

Woman 2 – And once we’ve opened it, we’ll be stuck with it.

Man 2 – You’re right. Best to send it back unopened.

Woman 2 – Yeah. But who would we send it to?

Man 2 – That...

Woman 2 – And that still doesn’t explain how it got here, right in the middle of our living room.

Man 2 – No...

She looks more closely at the box.

Woman 2 – There’s a delivery address...

Man 2 – And?

Woman 2 (*reading*) – Mr and Mrs... Oh, no, it’s not a mistake. This is our address...

Man 2 – Oh, damn... So what do we do?

Woman 2 – I don’t know... But there’s no sender’s address.

Man 2 – Maybe we should call the police...

Woman 2 – The police?

Man 2 – It might be a suspicious package...

Woman 2 – We’re not calling the police just because we received a package and don’t know what it is.

A pause.

Man 2 – Or maybe it’s a gift.

Woman 2 – A gift?

Man 2 – Since we don’t know what it is... it might be a surprise!

Woman 2 – It’s not my birthday, is it?

Man 2 – No.

Woman 2 – And it’s not yours either.

Man 2 – Well then... I guess we’ll have to open it, won’t we?

Woman 2 – You think?

Man 2 – If we want to find out what’s inside...

Woman 2 – Alright... Go on, then...

Man 2 – Me?

Woman 2 – You were the one with the idea, weren't you?

He opens the box cautiously.

Man 2 – I think I see something...

Woman 2 – And...?

Man 2 – It's strange, it looks like...

Woman 2 – What?

A man emerges from the box, wearing only briefs. We'll call him Man 1 (played by the actor who was the man in the first part).

Woman 2 – What the...? Is this a joke?

Man 2 – Well, it's definitely not a fridge.

Woman 2 – He scared the life out of me... But what are you doing in there?

Man 1 smiles but doesn't answer.

Man 2 – He's not saying anything...

Woman 2 – No... He looks a bit daft...

Man 2 – Maybe he's a burglar.

Woman 2 – A burglar... who packed himself in a box and mailed himself to us?

Man 2 – You're right, that's odd...

Woman 2 – He really does look a bit clueless, doesn't he?

Man 2 – Maybe it's from the journey... If he's come from afar...

Woman 2 – From afar? In his underpants?

Man 2 – Anyway, he doesn't look dangerous. Look, he's smiling at us...

Woman 2 – Maybe he's a migrant.

Man 2 – A migrant, you think?

Woman 2 – Maybe he thought this was a way to get into the country.

Man 2 – But how would he know our address?

Woman 2 – I don't know...

Man 2 – Migrants... they're usually dark-skinned, aren't they?

Woman 2 – Or Arab...

Man 2 – He doesn't really look Arab...

Woman 2 – Maybe he's Ukrainian.

Man 2 – Do you speak Ukrainian?

Woman 2 – How would he understand if he doesn't speak our language?

Man 2 – Oh, yeah, good point...

Woman 2 – And even if he said yes, do you speak Ukrainian?

Man 2 – No...

Woman 2 – Do you understand our language?

Man 1 – Yes.

Man 2 – Well, there you go, he understands our language.

Woman 2 – Are you from here?

Man 1 – I don't know...

Woman 2 – He doesn't know if he's from here...

Man 2 – There are Arabs who speak our language too...

Woman 2 – So what are we supposed to do with him?

Man 2 – What do you mean, "do with him"?

Woman 2 – We can't just put him out on the street; he doesn't seem quite all there.

Man 2 – Yeah... And he's only wearing underpants.

Woman 2 – He could get hit by a car. We'd be responsible.

Man 2 – We should call the police. He might have escaped from an asylum.

Woman 2 – Let's wait a bit... Maybe he'll come to his senses and leave on his own.

Man 2 – Right, well... Have a seat, then...

Man 1 sits down.

Woman 2 – At least he's not troublesome.

Man 2 – And he's not talkative either.

Woman 2 – Why have we received a man in his underpants in a box? You have to admit, it's not exactly normal...

Man 2 – No... It reminds me of a story.

Woman 2 – What story?

Man 2 – The Trojan Horse.

Woman 2 – Trojan horse... He's not a horse! And he's alone...

Man 2 – I'm starting to get hungry. We haven't had dinner yet, with all this...

Woman 2 – Why don't you set the table? I'll go reheat the roast pork.

Man 2 – And him?

Woman 2 – What about him?

Man 2 – He might be hungry.

Woman 2 – Are you hungry?

Man 1 – I don't know.

Man 2 – He doesn't know if he's hungry...

Woman 2 – Well, set a place for him, then...

Man 2 – Maybe he doesn't eat pork...

Woman 2 – Why wouldn't he eat pork?

Man 2 – If he's Ukrainian or something like that.

Woman 2 – Ukrainians don't eat pork?

Man 2 – I don't know...

Woman 2 – Anyway, we should give him some clothes. He can't stay in his underpants.

Man 2 – Clothes... You mean mine?

Woman 2 – Yes, yours! Not mine...

Man 2 – Right, well... Come along, old chap, let's see if I can find you something...

They all exit.

Blackout.

When the lights come up, Man 1 is sitting on the sofa in striped pyjamas. The woman enters in a nightgown, not paying him any attention. She sets the breakfast table and pours coffee. Man 2 arrives, also in striped pyjamas and looking rather bleary-eyed. He sits at the table and starts sipping his coffee.

Woman 2 – Alright?

Man 2 – I got up three times to pee... Think I had a bit too much to drink last night.

Woman 2 – Yeah. And you were snoring, too.

Man 2 – Got a bit of a hangover... And you, how are you feeling?

Woman 2 – My back's still acting up... Especially at night...

Man 2 – Maybe we should think about changing the mattress.

A pause.

Woman 2 – I was half-hoping we'd dreamed it, and that he'd be gone this morning.

Man 2 – Yes. But he hasn't moved. He's still here.

Woman 2 – Do you think he slept?

Man 2 – Well, he didn't eat anything last night, that's for sure.

Woman 2 – Or this morning... Would you like some coffee?

Man 1 – I don't know.

Woman 2 – He doesn't know if he wants coffee.

Man 2 – Maybe he doesn't even know what it is.

Woman 2 – Everyone drinks coffee, don't they?

Man 2 – Well, the Chinese tend to drink tea. Or the Japanese.

Woman 2 – He doesn't look very Chinese, does he? Even in pyjamas.

Man 2 – We're going to have to get rid of him eventually...

Woman 2 – I mean, he's not really a bother. He doesn't eat, drink, or smoke...

Man 2 – True... We might even end up forgetting he's here.

Woman 2 – Still... letting someone stay here when we don't even know him...

Man 2 – And he might not even be from here.

Woman 2 – It's really not like us.

Man 2 – And what are the neighbours going to say...?

Woman 2 – The neighbours?

Man 2 – It's a bit like a ménage à trois, isn't it?

Woman 2 – He's still not very talkative...

Man 2 – No... When you ask him a question, he just says, "I don't know..."

Woman 2 – Yeah.

Man 2 – What are we going to do with him...?

Woman 2 – I don't know.

Man 2 – I don't know, I don't know... See? We're starting to talk like him.

Woman 2 – You're right; we really can't keep him here.

Man 2 – Yeah, but what can we do with him...?

A pause.

Woman 2 – You realise... if we got rid of him, no one would even notice.

Man 2 – Got rid of him? You mean...

Woman 2 – No one knows he's here...

Man 2 – Except whoever sent him to us.

Woman 2 – And we still don't know who sent him.

Man 2 – Or why.

A pause.

Woman 2 – If only he'd make himself a bit useful.

Man 2 – True. He doesn't do anything around the house.

Woman 2 – Bit like you, actually...

He gives her a slightly worried look.

Man 2 – I do set the table, though.

Woman 2 – But him, since he doesn't eat...

Man 2 – Yeah, he does absolutely nothing... He's just... there.

Woman 2 – He says nothing. He does nothing. He sees us. But we don't even know if he's interested in us.

Man 2 – Bit like God, really.

Woman 2 – Except we're sure he exists.

Man 2 – Yes... And he takes up quite a bit of space. Do you think we could fit three people on the sofa?

A pause.

Woman 2 – Maybe we should give him a name.

Man 2 – A name? What for?

Woman 2 – I don't know.

Man 2 – If we give him a name... we might get attached. And if we then have to... get rid of him.

Woman 2 – You're right...

Man 2 – What's he going to do all day? While we're out.

Woman 2 – We're rarely out...

Man 2 – Still, we go out occasionally. Are we just going to leave him here alone?

Woman 2 – We could put the TV on for him.

Man 2 – You think he'd watch it?

Woman 2 – I don't know. I think I'd feel better knowing he's just sitting in front of the TV when we're not around.

Man 2 – Alright. (*He turns on the TV, and the other doesn't move.*) Do you really think we can leave him here on his own?

Woman 2 – Well, we need to go out, don't we? Just to get the shopping, at least.

Man 2 – And I need to go buy my crosswords.

Woman 2 – After all, what's the risk? Even a dog, you leave it at home alone.

Man 2 – Worst-case scenario, he'll chew up the sofa cushions...

Woman 2 – I'll go get dressed.

Man 2 – Me too.

They leave. Man 1 picks up the remote and changes the channel.

Blackout.

Man 2 and Woman 2 return together. They hang their raincoat and coat on the coat rack. They glance around the room suspiciously.

Man 2 – There's no one here...

Woman 2 – No.

Man 2 – Maybe we dreamed it...

Woman 2 – Both of us?

Man 2 – A collective hallucination.

Woman 2 – Feels strange...

Man 2 – Yes... We'd almost got used to it...

Woman 2 – I'll be right back. I'm going to the loo.

Man 2 – At least there'll be more room on the sofa.

Man 2 settles onto the sofa and reads his newspaper. Woman 2 returns, pushing Man 1 in front of her. He's dressed exactly like Man 2.

Woman 2 – We celebrated too soon.

Man 2 – Where was he?

Woman 2 – In the bathroom.

Man 2 – What was he doing in the bathroom?

Woman 2 – Nothing...

Man 2 – We could always just leave him in the bathroom, after all. At least he wouldn't be underfoot all day.

Woman 2 – Oh yeah? And what if we need to use the bathroom?

Man 2 – Good point... What about the basement?

Woman 2 – Even a dog, you wouldn't lock it up in the basement.

Man 2 – Not even sure we have a basement, to be honest.

They both pause, thinking.

Woman 2 – We could make a lamp out of him... Just stick a lampshade on his head.

Man 2 – Or a coffee table... On his knees, with a tray on top.

Woman 2 – Or an armchair...

Man 2 – An armchair?

Woman 2 – A stool, then.

Man 2 – A footstool...

They look at him, puzzled.

Woman 2 – Look, he's dressed just like you.

Man 2 – He's helped himself from my wardrobe. Doesn't seem to think twice about it...

Woman 2 – He does look a bit like you, doesn't he?

Man 2 – You think?

Woman 2 – Must be the clothes...

Man 2 – We don't know what he's thinking.

Woman 2 – We don't know if he's completely dim, or...

Man 2 – He's always got that smile.

Woman 2 – Yes... He looks pleased to be here.

Man 2 – Or maybe it's just a grimace.

Woman 2 – A grimace?

Man 2 – A smirk, if you prefer.

Woman 2 – You come up with the oddest words sometimes.

Man 2 – It's the crosswords. Sometimes you learn new words.

Woman 2 – Doesn't mean you have to use them.

Man 2 – And him? Do you think we could teach him something?

Woman 2 – Like what?

Man 2 – I don't know... Cleaning, cooking... Maybe some DIY... So he could be useful.

Woman 2 – You mean like a household servant...

Man 2 – Well, it's not like we went looking for him.

Woman 2 – We could end up in trouble with the police.

Man 2 – Trouble?

Woman 2 – He's been here so long... We could be accused of holding him hostage.

Man 2 – We'll just say he arrived in the post.

Woman 2 – No one's going to believe that... (*A pause*) Did you keep the box?

Man 2 – Yes, I think so... (*Silence*) Maybe he's a robot.

Woman 2 – A robot.

Man 2 – They make them very lifelike nowadays... So I hear...

Woman 2 – A robot...

Man 2 – He came in the post... People don't arrive by post. But robots...

Woman 2 – Why would anyone send us a robot?

Man 2 – I don't know...

Woman 2 – Did you order a robot?

Man 2 – No...

Woman 2 – A robot that looks like you, dresses like you, and does nothing.

Man 2 – Thanks for not saying *just like you*.

Woman 2 – He does move a little, though...

Man 2 – If you take him by the hand, yes. Otherwise...

Woman 2 – It's true, he never takes any initiative.

A pause.

Man 2 – Or maybe he's an alien.

Woman 2 – An alien?

Man 2 – Why not?

Woman 2 – Aliens usually arrive in flying saucers! They don't come through the post!

Man 2 – Fair point...

Woman 2 – And why would aliens want to come here?

Man 2 – To spy on us, maybe. See how we live...

Woman 2 – They'll be disappointed...

Man 2 – Right, I'm going to wrap up the meat.

Woman 2 – Do you think we can leave him like this while we're both asleep?

Man 2 – I don't know. Does it scare you?

Woman 2 – Now that you've suggested he might be an alien!

Man 2 – We could lock him up somewhere overnight.

Woman 2 – Lock him up? Where?

Man 2 – In the bathroom.

Woman 2 – The bathroom locks from the inside.

Man 2 – Oh yes, that's true...

Woman 2 – Or we could tie him up.

Man 2 – Tie him up like a dog...? Isn't that a bit inhumane?

Woman 2 – You were the one who said he was an alien robot.

Man 2 – I didn't say I was sure.

Woman 2 – Oh well, let's just leave him as he is.

Man 2 – Right... *(To Man 1)* Well then, goodnight...

Man 1 – Goodnight.

Woman 2 – At least he's polite...

Man 2 – Yes... Let's hope he doesn't murder us in our sleep.

Woman 2 – Well, we all have to die of something...

They exit.

Blackout

Man 1 is on the sofa in striped pyjamas. The breakfast table is set. Woman 2 enters in a nightgown and seems surprised to see the table already prepared. She pours herself some coffee and starts sipping it. Man 2 enters, also in striped pyjamas, still half-asleep.

Woman 2 – Thanks for setting up breakfast. It's not our anniversary, is it?

Man 2 – Breakfast? It wasn't me; I just got up...

Woman 2 – Then who was it?

They both look towards Man 1.

Man 2 – Do you think it was him?

Woman 2 – Who else?

Man 2 – Well then... Thank you.

Man 1 – You're welcome.

Woman 2 – Another new word...

Man 2 – Yes...

Woman 2 – Seems like he's expanding his vocabulary.

Man 2 – Yes. I even caught him doing my crosswords...

Woman 2 – Maybe he's starting to get attached to us. He made breakfast to thank us for letting him stay.

Man 2 – Or he's trying to make himself likable, so we don't kick him out.

Woman 2 – True... Kids do that too...

Man 2 – Make breakfast, you mean?

Woman 2 – Try to get people to like them... so they won't be thrown out. *(Pause)*
Why didn't we have kids, by the way?

Man 2 – You were the one who didn't want them.

Woman 2 – Me?

Man 2 – I thought you didn't want any.

Woman 2 – Me? Not at all!

Man 2 – Guess we misunderstood each other.

Woman 2 – Well, it's too late now anyway.

They look at Man 1.

Man 2 – Bit old to be a child, though, isn't he?

Woman 2 – Yes... He's about your age... But he looks a bit younger, doesn't he?

Man 2 – You don't even know how old he is!

Woman 2 – I don't know... But he doesn't look his age.

Man 2 – Right, I have my doctor's appointment this morning.

Woman 2 – And I need to do some shopping. *(She turns to Man 1)* You'll be good while we're out, won't you?

Man 2 – I can't tell if you're talking to him like he's a child or a dog!

Woman 2 – You wouldn't leave a child alone, though.

Man 2 – Maybe, if we're lucky, he'll do some cleaning while we're gone. If he's been watching you.

Woman 2 – You've been watching me for years, and you've yet to learn...

They stand up and exit.

Blackout.

The same living room. Man 1 is sitting on the sofa. Another box, identical to the previous one, is positioned in a corner of the room. Man 2 and Woman 2 return together. They hang their coats on the coat rack. Woman glances at Man 1 and smiles. Then she notices the box, and her smile fades.

Woman 2 – You’ve got to be kidding me...

Man 2 – What? (*He notices the box too*) No...

Woman 2 – What on earth is that now...?

They look at the box, perplexed.

Man 2 – Do you think more of them will keep showing up?

Woman 2 – I don’t know.

Man 2 – It’s starting to feel like an invasion, isn’t it?

Woman 2 – An alien invasion, you mean? By post?

Man 2 – It is strange, I’ll give you that.

Woman 2 – Yeah...

Man 2 – Still, we don’t know what’s in this one yet.

Woman 2 – Go on, open it!

Man 2 opens the box. A woman emerges (played by the actress who was the woman in the first part). She’s in a nightgown, with a smile on her face.

Man 2 – This time, it’s a woman...

Woman 2 – Looks like we’ve got ourselves a couple.

Man 2 – Do you think they’re...?

Woman 2 – Husband and wife?

Man 2 – Why not?

Woman 2 – They don’t seem to know each other... They’re not saying a word to each other.

Man 2 – I hope they don’t start multiplying...

Woman 2 – She seems more alert than he does...

Man 2 – You think?

Woman 2 – He doesn’t look particularly clever, does he?

Man 2 – I don’t know... I played a game of draughts with him yesterday, and he beat me.

Woman 2 – That still doesn’t tell us what we’re supposed to do with her.

Man 2 – Do you think we should keep her?

Woman 2 – What else can we do?

Man 2 – They're starting to take up quite a bit of space.

Woman 2 – We can't just leave her standing in the middle of the living room. Let's have her sit next to him.

Woman 2 takes Woman 1 by the arm and sits her down next to Man 1 on the sofa.

Man 2 – Soon we won't even be able to sit on our own sofa.

Woman 2 – If only we had a guest room. But we don't have any friends.

Man 2 – No, but now I feel like I'm seeing double.

Woman 2 – You're right. It's more like a double household than a love triangle.

Man 2 – Yeah...

Silence. Woman 1 leans over to Man 1 and whispers something in his ear.

Woman 2 – I think she just said something to him...

Man 1 and Woman 1 glance in their direction.

Man 2 – Yes... Looks like they're talking about us...

Woman 2 – What could they be plotting...?

Man 2 – We should ask them.

Woman 2 approaches the other two.

Woman 2 – Were you talking about us?

Woman 1 – Yes...

Man 2 – And... was there something specific you wanted to ask us?

Man 1 – Yes...

Woman 1 – Who are you?

Man 2 and Woman 2 exchange a worried look.

Blackout

Couple 1 is sitting at the table, in pyjamas and nightgown, having breakfast.

Woman 1 – A bit more coffee?

Man 1 – Yes, please.

She fills his cup with a smile. They sip their coffee and grimace.

Woman 1 – Could you pass the sugar, please?

Man 1 – Of course...

He hands her the sugar.

Woman 1 – Thank you. You're very kind.

They sip their coffee. An awkward silence.

Man 1 – Excuse me, but... do we know each other?

Woman 1 – No, I don't think so.

Man 1 – That's what I thought. (*Another pause*) Still, I feel like...

Woman 1 – Yes, me too.

Man 1 – Do you remember anything? I mean... before arriving here.

Woman 1 – Absolutely nothing.

Man 1 – Me neither.

They take another sip of coffee.

Woman 1 – This coffee is really terrible.

Man 1 – Yes, we'll need to buy a better one.

Couple 2 enters, dressed similarly. They look surprised to see their spots already taken and aren't quite sure what to do.

Man 2 – They're starting to get a bit too comfortable, don't you think?

Woman 2 – Yes... It doesn't feel like it's our place anymore.

Man 1 – Would you like some coffee?

Woman 1 – It's still hot.

Man 2 – Yes, thank you...

Woman 2 – I'd like some too. No sugar, please.

Woman 1 serves them two cups.

Man 1 – Please, have a seat.

Woman 1 – We were just finishing anyway.

Couple 1 gets up and exits with a smile.

Man 2 – They're really quite nice.

Woman 2 – Yes, they left us some coffee.

Man 2 – But as for the bread...

Woman 2 – There are only crumbs left.

Man 2 – Did you sleep well otherwise?

Woman 2 – I had a strange dream.

Man 2 – Me too.

Woman 2 – I dreamed I was alive.

Man 2 – How can you dream that you're alive?

Woman 2 – I don't know...

Man 2 – If you're dreaming that you're alive, doesn't that mean you're already dead?

Woman 2 – Yes, that would be logical. (*Pause*) So, do you think all of this is just a dream?

Man 2 – More like a nightmare, then...

Woman 2 – But we exist! If we didn't exist, we'd know it, wouldn't we?

Man 2 – Then again, if we don't exist, how would we know we don't exist?

Woman 2 – This is getting too complicated for me.

Man 2 – I think, therefore I am. But if I'm not, I can't think that I'm not...

Woman 2 – I'm going to get some more coffee...

Couple 1 enters, now dressed as Couple 2 was, when not in nightwear.

Woman 1 (to Man 1) – Do you think we can leave them alone in the house?

Man 1 – For now, we don't have much choice.

Woman 1 (to Couple 2) – We're going out to do a bit of shopping.

Man 2 – Shopping? What kind of shopping?

Woman 1 – We can't stay dressed like this forever...

Man 1 – And food... Aren't you tired of eating all this junk?

Man 2 – Well... We're used to it...

Woman 1 – We'll go to the market and buy fresh produce.

Woman 2 – Do you need any money?

Man 1 – No need, thank you.

Woman 1 – We took your debit card.

Woman 2 – Ah, very well...

Man 1 – Right... Be good while we're out...

Couple 1 exits. Couple 2 exchange a perplexed look.

Woman 2 – They've left.

Man 2 – Do you think they'll come back?

Woman 2 – I hope so... They left with the bank card.

Man 2 – This might sound strange, but when they're not here, I feel like I exist even less. Don't you?

Woman 2 – Yes... *(Pause)* Where did you put the boxes?

Man 2 – In the broom cupboard.

Woman 2 – I'll be right back...

Woman 2 exits. Man 2 picks up the newspaper, glances at it, and sets it down again.

Man 2 – It's yesterday's, and I've already done the crossword. I hope he remembers to buy today's paper.

Woman 2 returns with a piece of paper.

Woman 2 – I couldn't find the sender's address...

Man 2 – And?

Woman 2 – But there was a phone number, in tiny print. I wrote it down here.

They look at the box.

Man 2 – So, what do we do?

Woman 2 – I'll call...

She dials a number on an old landline phone.

Man 2 – No answer?

Woman 2 – It's ringing... Yes, hello! Yes, it's... Oh, you already know who I am... So, you're aware... Right... So I imagine it's a mistake... No? What do you mean, no...? Alright... No, no, we'll wait for your call... Thank you... Yes, same to you...

She hangs up.

Man 2 – Well?

Woman 2 – It's the Ministry of Being or Not Being.

Man 2 – Ah, yes... Used to be called the Ministry of Being and Nothingness, I think.

Woman 2 – Ministries change names with every government.

Man 2 – And?

Woman 2 – They said they're our replacements.

Man 2 – Our replacements? What do you mean?

Woman 2 – They reviewed our file. We're not efficient enough. We don't work anymore. We don't consume enough. We're ill too often. And our carbon footprint is catastrophic.

Man 2 – So?

Woman 2 – They're replacing us.

Man 2 – This is insane... But what are they going to do with us?

Woman 2 – That, I don't know yet...

Man 2 – They're not going to recycle us, are they? Like ordinary packaging?

Woman 2 – They said they'd call back.

Man 2 – Are we just going to accept it?

Woman 2 – What else can we do? It's the Ministry...

Silence.

Man 2 – So, those two... they're our replacements.

Woman 2 – Apparently.

Man 2 – But who are they?

Woman 2 – People... with hard drives reformatted.

Man 2 – And we can't be reformatted?

Woman 2 – They say no... Our model is too outdated... No updates possible anymore...

Man 2 – Replaced...

Woman 2 – It's true, we're not irreplaceable...

Man 2 – Yeah... Maybe we let ourselves go a bit.

Woman 2 – And now it's too late... (*The phone rings, and she answers*) Yes...? Right... No, no... Okay...

Man 2 – Was that them?

Woman 2 – Yes.

Man 2 – And?

Woman 2 – We have to reuse the boxes for the return of the old models.

Man 2 – The old models... You mean... us?

Silence.

Woman 2 – Do you think our replacements are better than us?

Man 2 – Well, they do seem a bit more... sprightly.

Woman 2 – Sprightly?

Man 2 – And he beat me at draughts...

Pause.

Woman 2 – They don't say much. They barely know anything.

Man 2 – But apparently, they’re quick learners.

Woman 2 – Yes... As fast as we’re forgetting the little we still know.

Man 2 – What if we got rid of them...?

Woman 2 – Are we even allowed to do that?

Man 2 – Probably not. But then they’d have no one to replace us.

Woman 2 – It’s the Ministry, though... We could get into serious trouble...

Man 2 – Trouble...? Worse than being dead, you mean?

Couple 1 enters, now dressed much more elegantly. They don’t even seem to notice Couple 2.

Man 1 – We’ll need to think about redecorating.

Woman 1 – Yes... Not to mention the paintwork.

Man 1 – Needs a refresh, as the estate agents say.

Woman 1 – I’ll put the groceries in the fridge. And speaking of fridges, we’ll need to replace the appliances too...

Man 1 settles onto the sofa and opens The Times.

Man 2 – You didn’t happen to pick up my crossword puzzle, did you?

Man 1 – Ah, no, sorry... But we could play a game of chess if you’d like.

Man 2 – Chess?

Woman 2 – You’ll have to teach him, then...

Woman 1 returns and glances at Couple 2.

Woman 1 – They’re still here...

Man 1 – Yes.

Woman 1 – When are they coming to collect them?

Man 1 – They said soon...

Woman 1 – I feel a bit sorry for them, but still...

Man 1 – Yes... They just couldn’t adapt.

Woman 1 – What are we supposed to do with them in the meantime...?

Man 2 and Woman 2 exchange a worried look.

Blackout

The same living room. Two boxes sit on opposite sides of the stage. Couple 1 re-enters.

Man 1 – So, is it done?

Woman 1 – Yes. I put them in the boxes.

Man 1 – But they're not staying here, are they?

Woman 1 – They'll pick them up tomorrow.

Man 1 – Good.

Silence.

Woman 1 – Do you think one day it'll be our turn?

Man 1 – Most likely...

Woman 1 – And who will replace us?

Man 1 – Others, I imagine. Better versions of us.

Woman 1 – We'd better keep updating ourselves regularly, then...

Man 1 – How about we get to know each other first?

Woman 1 – Alright. But how can we get to know each other when we don't even know ourselves? We don't remember anything.

Man 1 – That's true.

Woman 1 – We're a bit like newborns.

Man 1 – Newborns know everything about themselves but nothing about the world around them. For us, it's more the opposite.

Man 1 – Yes... We're refurbished.

Woman 1 – The operating system is still there.

Man 1 – It's the memory and personal data that have been wiped.

Woman 1 – We should probably find out a bit about who these people were.

Man 1 – If we're supposed to replace them...

Woman 1 – I wonder where they're being sent back to.

Man 1 – Probably the same place we came from.

Woman 1 – And why did they choose the two of us...

Man 1 – Do you think it wasn't by chance?

Woman 1 – I don't know why, but I'm glad to be here with you.

Man 1 – Me too.

Woman 1 – Maybe we knew each other in another life.

Man 1 – Do you think we were already husband and wife?

Woman 1 – Or maybe we missed each other. We didn't meet at the right time, or we met too late.

Man 1 – Then this is our second chance.

Woman 1 – That's very romantic...

Man 1 – Yes... We should celebrate!

Woman 1 – I think I saw a bottle of whisky in a cupboard.

She steps out briefly. He looks around with a slight look of bewilderment. She returns with two glasses and hands him one. They toast.

Man 1 – To our meeting, then...

Woman 1 – Or to our reunion, who knows...

They drink.

Man 1 – This is the worst whisky I've ever had. Don't you agree?

Woman 1 – Or maybe I just don't like whisky...

They look around, then raise their glasses towards the boxes.

Man 1 – One life ending... and a new one beginning...

Woman 1 – Yes... And, given where we're starting from... things can only improve.

The doorbell rings.

Man 1 – That must be for the boxes...

Blackout.

The End.

About the author

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

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

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Comedies for 2

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

Comedies for 3

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

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
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 13th
Gay friendly
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Quarantine
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

Comedies for 5 to 6

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