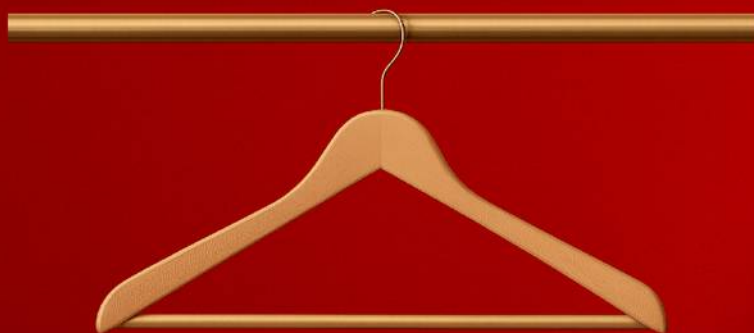


La Comédiathèque



The dressing gown

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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The Dressing Gown

A comedy by Jean-Pierre Martinez

Alex and Clara, a bank clerk and a nurse, live a quiet life in their suburban Paris flat. Until one day Alex decides to treat himself, with the €400 he won in the lottery, to a magnificent... dressing gown.

Have you ever heard of the “Diderot Effect”? It can be devastating...

Characters

Alex

Clara

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Scene 1

A modest living room in a working-class flat, furnished mainly with two rather shabby armchairs. Clara enters, carrying shopping bags from a discount supermarket. She is a middle-class woman, coming home tired after a day's work. Her mobile rings. She drops the bags and answers the call, looking exhausted.

Clara – Hello... *(She softens as she recognises the voice of the caller)* Ah, Jessica! No, no, I've just got in. *(She takes off her raincoat and sinks into an armchair)* So, how are you...? *(Her face freezes)* No...? Lola? Oh, bloody hell... I'm so sorry... And when did it happen? Right... Right... Oh, bloody hell... I don't know what to say... Seventeen years? And what did she die of? Old age...? Well, seventeen is already quite old, isn't it? For a dog. Wait, let me check on ChatGPT... Seventeen for a dog is the equivalent of ninety-one for a woman. No, of course, it's not the same as if it were your mum... Or your mother-in-law... Yes, me too, frankly I'd prefer that, but still... You do get attached. Well, listen, I'm all right... I mean... At the hospital, things are getting worse and worse, you know. With the staff cuts, now a nurse also has to do the cleaner's job. We run around all day, no time left to chat with patients. Honestly, sometimes I wonder if I shouldn't just go and work in the private sector. A cosmetic surgery clinic, why not? I'd probably be better paid. And better treated. And in a private clinic... if I sleep with the surgeon, maybe he'll give me a nose job for free. Why the nose? I don't know, it just came out. I've never liked my nose. No, because in the public sector, I swear... Even if you sleep with the director, I'm not sure they'd whip your tonsils out for nothing. Anyway... That's not why I chose this job, either. When I started, I thought I could be useful, you see... Save lives. Like in those American series I used to watch on TV. And in the end, I spend my time emptying bedpans and changing sheets... No, they say “a dog's life”, but... Dogs don't have it that bad, do they? We're the ones working to pay for their kibble, and then we have to pick up their poo! Honestly... And the advantage of a dog's life is that it doesn't last as long. No, believe me, that poor creature is better off where she is now... *(The doorbell rings)* I'll have to let you go. It's Alex. He's forgotten his keys again. And I need to get my frozen food into the freezer. On the bus I thought my waters had broken. The ice lollies were melting all over my knees... No, I'm not pregnant, why? Right, I'll call you back... OK... Love you too... And give Kevin a kiss from me...

She puts away her phone and goes to open the door. She returns with Alex, who looks very ordinary, though with a slightly absent-minded air.

Alex – Sorry, I left my keys in my desk drawer at the office.

Clara – As usual...

He suddenly lights up, excited.

Alex – Yes, but this time I've got a good excuse.

Clara – A good excuse for forgetting your keys?

Alex – A good excuse for being distracted! Guess what?

Clara – What?

He waves a lottery ticket.

Alex – My lottery numbers! They came up!

Clara – Your lottery numbers?

Alex – Well, not all of them, but...

She suddenly becomes excited too.

Clara – So we've hit the jackpot? We're millionaires?

He reins in his enthusiasm so as not to give her false hope.

Alex – Not quite... I only got four numbers, but still...

Clara – How much?

Alex – Four hundred euros.

She is clearly disappointed.

Clara – Right... I thought as much...

Alex – It's still four hundred euros. Aren't you pleased?

Clara – Yes, yes, of course, it's just that... If you'd told me straight away: “Darling, I've won four hundred euros on the lottery”... But the way you said it, I was already imagining our whole life changing. Quitting work, buying a one-way ticket to anywhere, the further the better, getting a villa by the sea, with a swimming pool...

Alex – If you live by the sea, you don't need a pool, do you...?

Clara – That's what they call luxury, I suppose. Having things you don't really need. Anyway, we don't live by the sea, and we don't have a pool either... That's what they call a shitty life...

Alex – With four hundred euros, we can still treat ourselves to a little extra...

Clara – Yes... We could always buy a book of tickets for the municipal pool. Or even an annual pass for two.

Alex – Sorry, I thought it would cheer you up.

Clara – But it *does* cheer me up! Sorry. I'm a bit on edge at the moment... And Jessica's just told me she's lost her dog.

Alex – Maybe she'll find it again.

Clara – I doubt it. She's dead...

Alex – Jessica? She's dead?

Clara – *Lola*, Jessica's dog! She's the one who's dead!

Alex – Oh, bloody hell! And what did she die of? (*Clara is about to answer, but he interrupts her*) Wait, don't tell me. I don't know why I even asked, I couldn't care less. Especially today, with these four hundred euros falling into our laps...

Clara – So then? What are you going to do with this fortune?

Alex – I don't really know, actually...

Clara – Well, yes... Four hundred euros... It's not even enough for a nose job.

Alex – You don't like my nose? You've never said that before...

Clara – I was talking about mine...

Alex – Your nose is fine. Your mother's got exactly the same one.

Clara – Yes, precisely.

Alex – I don't know... You could just wear low-cut tops more often. Like your mother...

Clara – What's that got to do with my nose?

Alex – Nothing, but people would look at your nose less. Men, at least.

Clara – Thanks... That hadn't occurred to me.

Alex – It's true, four hundred euros... it's not enough for something really useful. And it's not enough to go wild with, either...

Clara – We could have a big dinner in a Michelin four-star restaurant.

Alex – I think the maximum Michelin stars is three.

Clara – Three stars it is, then.

Alex – With four hundred euros, do you really think so?

Clara – Just the once, then.

Alex – Yes, but afterwards we'd have nothing left.

Clara – To have dinner in a fine restaurant at least once in our lives, it would give us a memory.

Alex – Yeah...

Clara – I'm sure in those sorts of places you run into people who really did win the lottery. Must be like their staff canteen...

Alex – Or else I'll put it in my savings account.

Clara – Ah yes, that's certainly not a wild splurge. No wonder you work in a bank.

Alex – At the current interest rate... *(He takes out a calculator)* In... six hundred and ninety-four years we'll have half a million euros and be able to buy a house.

Clara – Or else we go to the casino and put it all on zero.

Alex – Thirty-five times the stake. *(He taps again on his calculator)* That makes fourteen thousand euros.

Clara – Or nothing at all, if by bad luck zero doesn't come up straight away.

Alex – You're right, better to spend it. I'll think about it.

Clara – Yes, do that... Meanwhile, I'll put what's left of the ice lollies in the freezer.

Alex – You bought ice lollies?

Clara – I don't know what came over me. A moment of madness. I wanted to suck on something that would really give me pleasure.

He perks up, slightly aroused by the thought.

Alex – Brilliant... We could do that together...

Clara – Too late, I'm afraid. They melted in my bag...

Blackout.

Scene 2

Alex enters carrying shopping bags from Galeries Lafayette. He crosses the stage to put them down on the side that suggests the entrance to the bedroom. He returns, takes off his jacket, looking pleased, and listens to the answering machine.

Voice-over – Hi Alex, it's Steven. I'm calling about Saturday's barbecue. Just to say... If you could get here around eight, that would be better. Jessica finishes at six at the salon, she won't be back before seven, and I've got to pick up the car from the garage before stopping at Aldi for the merguez sausages. So by the time we get the barbie going... Anyway... you'll bring dessert, as usual? Great. See you Saturday.

Alex doesn't look particularly thrilled by the invitation. Clara enters. He brightens up.

Alex – Good evening, darling. Did you have a good day?

Clara – A nightmare... Did I tell you Lola's off sick?

Alex – I knew there were health schemes for dogs now, but I didn't know they could go on sick leave... And I thought she was dead.

Clara – Lola, my colleague!

Alex – Ah, yes... Lola... Whose idea was it, anyway, giving dogs women's names. Or the other way round... Lola, honestly... Can you imagine if I were called Snoopy or Rover?

Clara – Burnout, as they say these days. We used to call it a nervous breakdown, but apparently burnout sounds more modern. Anyway, since she won't be replaced, I've got to do all her work as well as mine. I swear, at this rate, I'll be having a burnout myself before long. But you look as if you're doing all right. Have you won the lottery again?

Alex – No, but I've figured out what to do with my previous winnings.

Clara – Brilliant! I really needed some good news to cheer me up after this shitty day. So?

Alex – Surprise!

Clara – I love surprises...

Alex – Back in a tick...

Clara takes off her raincoat and sits down with an amused smile. Alex returns... wearing over his clothes a red dressing gown.

Alex – Here we are!

Clara stares at him, dumbfounded.

Clara – Here we are what?

Alex – Here we are...

Clara – And where's the surprise, apart from... that ridiculous bathrobe? We're off to a spa, is that it?

Alex – It's not a bathrobe, it's a dressing gown.

Clara – So what?

Alex – Well, that's the surprise!

Clara – A dressing gown?

Alex – Yeah.

Clara – But a dressing gown... for you or for me?

Alex – For me.

Clara – This is a joke, right?

Alex – No, why?

Clara – A dressing gown? A red dressing gown?

Alex – Why not?

Clara – But really... nobody wears a dressing gown these days. Especially not a red dressing gown.

Alex – I didn't know what to buy. I decided to treat myself to something beautiful.

Clara – Something beautiful?

Alex – I thought it would please you.

Clara – That you should buy, for yourself, such a monstrosity. That dressing gown looks like it's been cut out of the curtains of a medieval castle.

Alex – I think it's very stylish.

Clara – But where on earth did you find it?

Alex – Galeries Lafayette.

Clara – You went to Galeries Lafayette and told them you wanted a red dressing gown?

Alex – That's not exactly how it happened. I wanted to treat myself to something original. Something classy. And the sales assistant suggested this.

Clara – No, she was having you on. That monstrosity must have been stuck in stock since the last century, and they finally found a mug to palm it off on. I'm sure the sales assistant will get a bonus for managing to shift something absolutely unsellable. She flirted with you, didn't she?

Alex – She was a big woman, close to retirement.

Clara – That explains it. Back in her day, this kind of get-up might still have been fashionable. But tell me something, Alex. How much did you win on the lottery again?

Alex – Four hundred euros.

Clara – And how much did this dressing gown cost you?

Alex – It was five hundred and fifty, but the sales assistant agreed to let me have it for four hundred.

Clara – Four hundred euros for a dressing gown! That's daylight robbery!

Alex – It's a designer label... I'm sorry you don't like it. We talked about it. I didn't know what to buy. I decided to treat myself to something that would make me happy. Like you with the ice lollies...

Clara – The ice lollies? They were on offer! They cost me three euros ninety-nine!

Alex – All that just to let them melt in your bag...

Clara – Did you keep the receipt?

Alex – Yes.

Clara – Give it to me, I'll take this dressing gown back. And that sales assistant will hear from me.

Alex – Take back my dressing gown? No way!

Clara – But really, Alex, you could have bought anything with those four hundred euros. Not to mention buying *me* something, obviously. Why a dressing gown?

Alex – I don't know. I wanted... something completely useless, for once. Something no one else would ever think of buying.

Clara – Well, you've certainly succeeded there. But I don't know, you could have bought... a painting, for example. We could have hung it on the wall.

Alex – A painting? For four hundred euros?

Clara – By a young artist. At least we might have hoped it would go up in value.

Alex – And where would we have hung this painting? Honestly, Clara, in this shabby flat, a work of art would look completely out of place, wouldn't it?

Clara – This shabby flat?

Alex – We've never even redone the paintwork!

Clara – And whose fault is that?

Alex – Where are we supposed to find the money to redo the paintwork?

Clara – By winning four hundred euros on the lottery, for example. But really, Alex... do you actually know anyone who still wears dressing gowns?

Alex – Sacha Guitry wore a dressing gown very well.

Clara – Sacha Guitry? Who's that? Do I know him?

Alex – A playwright. He was very famous in the interwar years.

Clara – The interwar years? But that was a century ago! And how do you even know about Sacha Guitry? We never go to the theatre...

Alex – The sales assistant told me Sacha Guitry wore almost the same one.

Clara – Almost the same...

Alex – Anyway, I bought this dressing gown, I like it, and I'm not taking it back!

He makes a theatrical exit. She remains frozen for a moment, then takes out her phone and dials a number.

Clara – Jessica? You'll never guess what's just happened to me...

Blackout.

Scene 3

Alex, still draped in his dressing gown, stands in the middle of the stage, clearly very pleased with himself. He takes a few steps, then sits in one of the armchairs with a very theatrical flourish. He crosses his legs and places his hands flat on both armrests. Clara enters.

Clara – You're already in your dressing gown...?

Alex – Does it bother you?

Clara – I'll try to get used to it. No promises...

Alex – A dressing gown isn't a pair of pyjamas or a bathrobe. It's indoor wear, you can keep it on all day.

Clara – All day?

Alex – Only at home, of course. Not outside, obviously.

Clara – That's a relief... But when you say at home... you mean when there's no one else here, right?

Alex – Sacha Guitry would happily receive his friends at home in a dressing gown.

Clara – Sacha Guitry again! This is becoming an obsession...

Alex – Jean Cocteau or Sigmund Freud also wore dressing gowns with great style. Back then, it was a sign of relaxed elegance.

Clara – And where are you getting all this from?

Alex – ChatGPT... The dressing gown was once the privilege of the bourgeois elite and intellectuals. Some of the greatest works of literature were written by men in dressing gowns.

Clara – My grandmother wore an old dressing gown, and believe me, she never wrote a thing in her life.

Alex – Maybe so, but when I put on this magnificent dressing gown, I feel like a different man. I don't know why... It inspires me...

Clara – Don't tell me you've decided to start writing as well...?

Alex – And why not?

Clara – Well, yes, why not...

Alex – In the meantime, I also bought a pen.

He takes a fountain pen out of the pocket of his dressing gown.

Clara – A pen...? You mean...

Alex – A fountain pen, yes. A Montblanc.

Clara – A Montblanc? And what on earth is that?

Alex – It's the most prestigious brand of pen! Apparently Ernest Hemingway used to write with one. In fact, this particular model bears his name. You've never heard of Montblanc?

Clara – No. And why did you buy a pen? I mean... a luxury pen?

Alex – To go with the dressing gown!

Clara – Right... And what exactly do you plan to write with it?

Alex – I don't know... I could also use it at the bank to fill out cheque slips.

Clara – Don't tell me you're planning to go to work in your dressing gown...

Alex – Of course not! I told you, a dressing gown is indoor wear!

Clara – You're worrying me, Alex...

Alex – Actually, I wonder if I shouldn't buy a desk as well.

Clara – A desk? Why not... We could go to IKEA on Saturday, if you like.

Alex – IKEA? You must be joking! No, I mean an antique desk.

Clara – I see... To go with the dressing gown and the pen...

He shows her the screen of his phone.

Alex – Look. I found this one on an antique dealer's website.

Clara – How much?

Alex – Even more expensive than the pen. The advert says this desk may have belonged to Marcel Proust's grandfather.

Clara – *May* have belonged? And I suppose it's that slim possibility that explains such an extortionate price?

Alex – What do you think?

Clara – I think this lottery win is starting to cost us dearly, Alex. Very dearly...

Blackout.

Scene 4

Still draped in his dressing gown, Alex is seated behind a period desk, fountain pen in hand, with the concentrated air of a writer in search of inspiration. Clara enters, once again laden with shopping bags.

Clara – You're home already? Don't you normally finish at six?

Alex – I took the afternoon off.

Clara – Oh, really? I suppose it wasn't to help me carry the shopping...

Alex – More shopping? I don't know how we manage to eat all this. There are only two of us, after all...

Clara – That's probably because not everything's food. There's shampoo, washing powder, toilet paper... Do you want the full list?

Alex – I'll take your word for it.

Clara – Thanks... And you, did you have a good day?

Alex – I started writing.

Clara – Writing?

Alex – Yes.

Clara – Writing what?

Alex – I don't know yet. But a pen like this... it makes you want to write, doesn't it?

Clara – Especially with a desk like that... which cost us a fortune and takes up half the room.

Alex – It's true, this living room is a bit small for an antique desk.

Clara – More like this desk is too big, and too flashy, for a council flat. They even had to take the legs off just to get it through the door.

Alex – Not to mention the lift...

Clara – The delivery men had to carry it up the stairs all the way to the eighteenth floor.

Alex – That's why I gave them a little tip.

Clara – It's not every day they have to deliver a desk like that to the top floor of a tower block.

Alex – You're right... The more I look at this desk, the more I find it clashes with everything else.

Clara – It's not too late to get rid of it. Shall I stick it on eBay? A desk that may have belonged to Marcel Proust's grandfather should sell quite well... With a bit of luck, we might even make a small profit...

Alex – I was thinking more about moving flat.

Clara – Move flat? With what money? We can barely afford the rent on this dump as it is!

Alex – I don't know, but I feel I'm at a turning point in my life.

Clara – Because you won four hundred euros on the lottery?

Alex – Things are going to change, I'm sure of it.

Clara – So you really believe all it takes is a dressing gown almost like Sacha Guitry's, a desk that may have belonged to Marcel Proust's grandfather, and Hemingway's pen... to turn you into a great writer overnight?

Alex – What's certain is that I'm not going to keep doing sudokus on it.

Clara – You're frightening me, Alex. I hate to say it, but... Maybe you should see someone, don't you think?

Alex – Because I want to evolve? Because I'm no longer satisfied with the small, humdrum life we lead?

Clara – Because ever since you put on that dressing gown, you haven't been yourself, Alex! You said it yourself! You feel like another man.

Alex – It was just a figure of speech...

Clara – I don't recognise you anymore, Alex... Before, our little life suited you just fine. I wonder if that dressing gown isn't bewitched...

Alex – Bewitched?

Clara – Or haunted! There are haunted houses, so why couldn't clothes be haunted too? Are you sure that dressing gown didn't really belong to Sacha Guitry?

Alex – Come on... You're the one raving now, darling.

She makes a gesture in his direction as if to ward off the devil, crossing her forearms.

Clara – Sacha Guitry, get out of that dressing gown!

He stares at her in astonishment.

Blackout.

Scene 5

Alex is still seated at his desk, but this time he is writing. Clara comes home from work, carrying a pizza box. Completely absorbed in his writing, he doesn't notice her right away. She watches him for a moment, cautiously. At last he sees her and jumps.

Alex – You gave me a fright...

Clara – You looked so focused, I didn't dare disturb you...

Alex – You're not wrong... I was so into it... I didn't even think about lunch.

Clara – Poor thing... Meanwhile I was at the hospital, caught between my hysterical head nurse and my incontinent patients.

Alex – I didn't even see you come in. It was the smell of pizza I noticed first.

Clara – That's sweet... And there I was, thinking you'd missed me...

Alex – When you're really hungry... I do wonder how top fashion houses haven't yet had the idea of a perfume that smells of pizza.

Clara – You don't seem short of inspiration, at any rate... What are you writing so furiously?

Alex – My memoirs.

Clara – Your memoirs? Are you feeling all right?

Alex – I feel perfectly fine, why?

Clara – No, it's just... writing your memoirs?

Alex – I didn't say I was writing my will. Don't worry, I'm not about to die. Just because one writes memoirs doesn't mean one expects to die soon...

Clara – Still, isn't it usually at the end of one's life that one writes memoirs? Don't you think it's a bit early?

Alex – Chateaubriand started writing his memoirs at forty. He was only halfway through his life...

Clara – Yes, but... you're not Chateaubriand. I imagine by forty he'd already lived quite a life. What on earth have you got to write about? You've had such a shitty life!

Alex – Thanks for reminding me. But anyone's life can be interesting, you know. It all depends how you tell it.

Clara – Even so, there are limits...

Alex – You could at least pretend to encourage me.

Clara – Yes, yes, of course... I can't wait to read it, but... Does it talk about me as well?

Alex – Not yet... For the moment, it's the life I lived before I met you.

Clara – The way you say that, it sounds like that's the most interesting part...

Alex – My life with you is only just beginning, darling.

Clara – If you say so...

She exits. He remains thoughtful for a moment, then resumes writing.

Blackout.

Scene 6

Alex is still seated at his desk, with a pile of books on it. He is writing. Clara enters, returning from work, carrying a pizza box. Alex, absorbed in his writing, does not notice her immediately.

Clara – You're getting home earlier and earlier.

Alex – I've taken a week's holiday.

Clara – I didn't know you had so many days left. Don't forget we're going to Brittany this summer to stay with my brother...

Alex – No chance of me forgetting, you remind me every day.

Clara – At least we won't have to pay for accommodation. Especially now that you've blown our holiday budget for the next three years... with your luxury dressing gown, your gold-plated pen and your antique desk.

Alex – I paid for the dressing gown with my lottery winnings.

Clara – And so you've taken a week off.

Alex – I need time to write.

Clara – Evenings aren't enough for you anymore?

Alex – In the evenings you're here, I find it hard to concentrate.

Clara – I'm not sure how to take that. Is it the thrill of seeing me again after being deprived of me all day, or just the noise I make doing the washing up and flushing the loo?

Alex – A bit of both...

Clara – Yet I've already stopped watching TV so I wouldn't disturb you.

Alex – That's why I'm wondering if I shouldn't take a year off.

Clara – You mean... a year's unpaid leave?

Alex – There's more to life than money.

Clara – No, but money does help pay the rent. Especially if you're thinking of moving to a bigger flat more in keeping with your dressing gown and your new desk.

Alex – Do you have another solution?

Clara – You could always write at night.

Alex – I'm not an evening person, let alone a night owl... No, mornings are when my mind's clearest.

Clara – Clear-headed...? You're thinking of quitting your job to become a writer, when up till now the longest thing I've seen you write is a postcard? All because some sales assistant at Galeries Lafayette sold you that ridiculous old-fashioned dressing gown? And you call that being clear-headed?

Alex – Why are you getting so worked up? It's not like I've started taking drugs!

Clara – Well, to be honest, I think I'd almost prefer that... (*She notices the pile of books*) What are all these books?

Alex – I've started rereading the classics. You should do the same. Now that you don't watch telly anymore...

Clara – Rereading the classics? That's a joke! The last book I saw you read was a Peanuts strip.

Alex – Well, let's say reading then... Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot... The Age of Enlightenment.

Clara – But wake up, Alex! The Enlightenment's over!

Alex – A pity, it was a much more interesting period than ours, and it led to the French Revolution.

Clara – Anyway, you'd better take off that dressing gown and get ready, because unless you've forgotten, it's Saturday. We're going to Kevin and Jessica's barbecue tonight. Since she isn't dead...

Alex – To be honest, I'd have preferred...

Clara – Sorry?

Alex – No, I mean... I've cancelled.

Clara – What?

Alex – Well, I mean... I told them we weren't coming.

Clara – *We*...? So now you decide for me as well? You could at least have asked my opinion! I even bought the dessert!

Alex – You said yourself you were tired...

Clara – It's you who's tiring me out, Alex!

Alex – And anyway, a barbecue, honestly... It's so vulgar, isn't it? Do you really think the philosophers of the Enlightenment sat around a barbecue, remaking the world while writing the *Encyclopaedia*? No, they went to literary salons...

Clara – Fine... Well, I'll go to that vulgar barbecue then. It'll be a break for me.

Alex – Very well, I'll use the time to write...

Clara – Is that your final word?

Alex – I'm telling you, I hate barbecues. And let me remind you, I'm a vegetarian.

Clara – You? A vegetarian? Since when? Only yesterday we had a bacon pizza!

Alex – Yes, well... Bacon hardly counts as meat... And you can make an exception now and again. But gathering with friends to watch slices of dead animals sizzling on a grill?

Clara – Very well then, I'll leave you to write your memoirs of the good old days before you'd even met me. But one day you'll regret not going to that barbecue, Alex, mark my words...

She storms out, furious.

Blackout.

Scene 7

Alex is still seated at his desk in his dressing gown, but this time with a pipe in his mouth. Clara returns from her barbecue, a little tipsy.

Clara – You're smoking a pipe now?

Alex – I wanted to try. I thought maybe the ideas would come more easily with something in my mouth.

Clara – Funny, I was having the same thought while Kevin was driving me back...

Alex – Writers often smoke a pipe. Even women.

Clara – Women?

Alex – George Sand smoked a pipe.

Clara – George Sand was a woman?

Alex – Her real name was Aurore Dupin.

Clara – You seem to know a lot about women and pipes. But your pipe isn't even lit.

Alex – It's just to chew on. But you're right, maybe I should move on to weed.

Clara – Weed?

Alex – Baudelaire smoked hashish, you know. He talks about it in *The Artificial Paradises*.

Clara – OK...

Alex – It helped him find inspiration... Would Baudelaire really have been such a great poet if he hadn't smoked hashish?

Clara – Don't tell me you've been smoking weed behind my back?

Alex – You, on the other hand, look as if you've been sucking on more than ice lollies at that barbecue, am I wrong?

Clara – Who knows... But sucking isn't really cheating, is it?

Alex – I was only talking about too much to drink, but if there's something else you'd like to tell me...

She looks a little embarrassed.

Clara – Anyway, they wanted to know why you weren't there. I didn't know what to say.

Alex – To be honest... I feel that all those people we hang around with don't really lift me up.

Clara – No kidding...

Alex – That they're holding me back from making progress, if you like.

Clara – Your progress? You mean climbing up the ladder, I suppose.

Alex – I'd say it's more that they drag me down, you see.

Clara – No kidding...

Alex – Yeah... When I'm with them, I feel like I stoop to their level.

Clara – Let me remind you, Alex, those friends who are too beneath you are also mine, Alex. When you insult them, you insult me too...

Alex – I wasn't talking about you, darling. But yes, I think you deserve better than that as well.

Clara – If you keep turning away from your real friends, Alex, you'll end up all alone.

Alex – Sometimes it's better to be alone than in bad company.

Clara – And with tired phrases like that you expect to write a masterpiece? Maybe I'm not good enough for you anymore either...

Alex – But really, I never said that...

Clara – Careful, Alex. If you think your life was more exciting before you met me, I could give you back your freedom sooner than you think... I had a life before you too, you know. I had dreams, just like you. I gave all that up, and for what? *(In a melodramatic tone)* You couldn't even give me a child...

She rushes out. He remains, dumbfounded.

Blackout.

Scene 8

Alex is at his desk, on which a pile of handwritten pages has accumulated. He is writing. Clara enters. She has clearly sobered up.

Clara – Sorry about last night, I had a bit too much to drink. I was talking nonsense.

Alex – I've already forgotten it, don't worry. I worked all night. I think I've finished my memoirs... Well, the first part at least...

Clara – So you're going back to work then?

Alex – That will depend on how my manuscript is received... If it's a success, I could write the second volume...

She picks up the pile of ink-covered pages.

Clara – Manuscript, that's the word for it. Nobody writes by hand anymore, you know. If you sent this to a publisher, I'm not sure they'd even bother deciphering your hieroglyphs.

Alex – You're right... Maybe you could type it up?

Clara – Type it up? What era are you living in, Alex? Typewriters don't even exist anymore! And what do you take me for, your secretary?

Alex – Sorry, I'll find someone else to do it.

Clara – Why bother writing by hand if you're just going to have it typed up afterwards? You might as well write directly on a computer, don't you think?

Alex – Yes, but a computer...

Clara – It wouldn't really go with the desk and the dressing gown.

Alex – Exactly...

Clara – You really need an update, Alex... You don't even have a mobile phone. *(Pointing at the landline)* You've still got that old phone from the last century, with the answering machine.

Alex – It's true, I think I was born in the wrong era.

Clara – And what's the right era for you? The interwar years, as you call them?

Alex – Why not? The Roaring Twenties must have been fantastic.

Clara – You think so? It wasn't all champagne and soirées like for Sacha Guitry, you know. With your luck, you'd have fought in both wars, like my great-grandfather. If you hadn't died in the first one, of course...

Alex – Anyway, I think I've always dreamed of being a writer, Clara. I found a photo of me when I was a little boy, sitting at my father's desk with his pipe in my mouth.

Clara – A whole symbol... You should tell that to a shrink...

He hands her the photo.

Alex – Here, look... It's a photo I've never shown to anyone...

She looks at the photo and seems a little moved. She gives it back to him.

Clara – Yes... Dreams are all very well and good, but you have to grow up, Alex! Unless you want to end up under a bridge with a bottle of cheap wine one day... That's what I was always taught, anyway...

Alex – I know it's not easy for you, but... we only live once. For years I worked at a bank counter, smiling at customers, doing the same gestures and saying the same words, day after day. I'll follow my dream, Clara. And if I fail, at least I'll have tried.

Clara – Meanwhile, I'll be the one working to pay the rent and fill the fridge. But I'm not sure that will be enough for long. Because, in case you hadn't noticed, it's not only the dressing gown that's red. Our bank balance is in the red too.

Alex – I really am sorry... but for me this is a matter of survival. I had to do something... to try and change my life.

Clara – Oh, really? Maybe it's time you changed wife as well. Found one that fits better with your new lifestyle.

Pause.

Alex – So typing the manuscript, that's a no?

She grabs the manuscript, furious, and storms out.

Blackout.

Scene 9

Alex is still at his desk, but he looks idle. The phone rings. He doesn't answer. The answering machine clicks in.

Voice-over – Hi, it's Jessica. I was calling to see how Alex is doing. Clara told us you'd had a bit of a stomach bug... Hope you're feeling better. And Clara, how are you? I think you went a bit heavy on the sangria last night, didn't you? You were wild! I've never seen you like that... Luckily Kevin drove you home, otherwise I'd have been a bit worried. Oh, and by the way, you left your handbag in his car, so you'll have to come round to ours to pick it up. Right, shall we do it again next Saturday? But with Alex this time. Lots of love.

Alex doesn't react at all. Clara returns.

Clara – Are you all right? You look strange...

Alex – No, no, I'm fine... Must be the baby blues...

Clara – The what...?

Alex – For a writer, once you've written the final full stop to your manuscript, it's the start of a difficult ordeal, you see... I feel a bit like a woman who's just given birth.

Clara – Except your labour wasn't exactly painful, was it? Sitting comfortably behind your desk in that magnificent dressing gown.

Alex – They say great pain is silent.

Clara – I read the manuscript on my lunch break before typing it up.

Alex – And?

Clara – It's full of spelling mistakes...

Alex – Right...

Clara – There's no spellchecker on your Montblanc pen.

Alex – Sorry... And apart from that?

Clara – Apart from that... it's good.

Alex – Do you really think so?

She suddenly seems much more enthusiastic.

Clara – I couldn't put it down until I'd finished. I didn't even think about eating either.

Alex – You're not just saying that to please me...?

Clara – I had no idea you had such a talent for writing.

Alex – Neither did I, honestly...

Clara – You should send it to a publisher.

Alex – Yes... I'm not so sure about that...

Clara – But really... if you wrote all that, it's not just to leave it in a drawer, is it?

Alex – I'm afraid I might not be good enough. After all, I'm just a lowly bank clerk.

Clara – Except that this lowly bank clerk, when he puts on his magic dressing gown, instantly turns into a literary genius.

Alex – Don't overdo it, it still has to sound believable...

Clara – You're a superhero, Alex! And that dressing gown is your Superman costume !

Alex – Do you really think so...?

Clara – I'll type this manuscript... And I'll take care of sending it to the greatest publishers in Paris.

Blackout.

Scene 10

Alex is seated at his desk, looking idle, with a pile of letters in front of him. Clara enters.

Clara – Has the mail come?

Alex – It's here...

Clara – And?

Alex picks up a few letters at random and reads.

Alex – “After careful consideration, we regret to inform you that your manuscript does not correspond to our current editorial priorities...” *(He reads another letter)* “We read your manuscript with interest. Unfortunately, while we recognise its qualities, it does not fit the direction of our catalogue at this time...” I've got about ten like that. The others didn't even bother to reply.

Clara – They didn't even read it...

Alex – How do you know?

Clara – If they had, they'd at least have taken the trouble to send a personalised answer.

Alex – Or they did read it, at least the beginning, and decided it wasn't worth more than a standard rejection letter.

Clara – Apparently Gallimard first rejected Marcel Proust's debut manuscript.

Alex – *In Search of Lost Time*... As for me, I'll never get back the time I wasted on that rubbish. And I'm making you waste your time too...

Clara – Luckily Proust didn't give up after that first failure. He published his novel at his own expense... and it became the most famous work in French literature.

Alex – You seem to know a lot about it...

Clara brandishes her mobile phone.

Clara – Wikipedia! And do you know who rejected Proust's manuscript at Gallimard?

Alex – No...

Clara – André Gide!

Alex – So what?

Clara – So... the greatest geniuses are often misunderstood! Especially at the beginning.

Alex – Yeah... Or maybe I'm just a weekend scribbler, and they understood that perfectly well. You were right. Who could possibly be interested in the life of a lowly bank clerk?

Clara – You said it yourself: it's all in the telling! (*She grabs a book from the desk, opens it and reads*) “For a long time, I used to go to bed early. Sometimes, as soon as the candle was out, my eyes would close so quickly I didn't even have time to say to myself: I'm falling asleep...” Thrilling, isn't it? No wonder Gide dozed off reading it...

Alex –Thanks for trying to cheer me up, Clara, but let's be honest. I'll never be Marcel Proust. Any more than you'd turn into Jimi Hendrix in a few weeks just by picking up a guitar.

Blackout.

Scene 11

Alex is seated in one of the armchairs. He is no longer wearing his red dressing gown. Clara enters.

Clara – What happened to your dressing gown?

Alex – I put it up for sale on eBay.

Clara – But... why did you do that?

Alex – That damned thing nearly ruined us! And our relationship... You were right, it must have been bewitched.

Clara – I only said that in the heat of the moment...

Alex – Well, I did some digging... Turns out I really did fall prey to a kind of madness. Ever heard of the Diderot effect?

Clara – The what?

Alex – Or the Diderot syndrome, if you like. He wrote about it back in 1769, in a piece called *Regrets on Parting with My Old Dressing Gown*.

Clara – What kind of story is that?

Alex – One day Diderot was given a magnificent dressing gown.

Clara – Red, I suppose...

Alex – A comfortable, luxurious garment, but one that didn't fit with his austere life as a philosopher of the Enlightenment.

Clara – And then?

Alex – He started to feel his modest home was unworthy of that wretched gown. Swept away by a frenzy of buying, he replaced all his shabby furniture with sumptuous pieces, began living like a bourgeois... and lost his inspiration.

Clara – Yes, but in your case it's just the opposite. Diderot abandoned writing after his dressing gown. You, it was this dressing gown that pushed you, late in life, to embrace a literary career.

Alex – With what result? No one wants my book, I've fallen out with all my friends, and we nearly ended up divorced.

Clara – Oh, don't exaggerate... It was just a little blowjob in his car to thank him for driving me home. And I was completely pissed...

Alex – I'm going to burn my manuscript as well.

Clara – Don't do that, please!

Alex – And why not?

Clara – Because... I hate to admit it, but you were right. It's true we'd slipped into a routine. This crisis has actually done us some good, and maybe it's what will save our relationship.

Alex – Yes, but teenage crises, even late ones, never lead anywhere. It's over now, don't worry. On Monday I'm going back to work at the bank.

Clara – As you wish... But I'd started to get attached to that dressing gown too. It feels strange seeing you without it...

Blackout.

Scene 12

Clara is seated at the desk. Alex returns, his arms full of shopping bags. He is wearing shoes of different colours.

Alex – I stopped off to do the shopping on my way home from work.

Clara – Great...

Alex – Everything all right?

Clara – Yes... And you?

Alex – Fine. Same old routine.

Even though he tries to put on a brave face, he doesn't look completely happy. Clara notices.

Clara – Are you sure you're all right?

Alex – Of course! Why wouldn't I be...?

Clara – I don't know... For a start, because your two shoes aren't the same colour...

Alex – Oh yes, so they're not...

Clara – You went the whole day without noticing?

Alex – Yes...

Clara – And nobody at the office said anything?

Alex – No, but it's true they were giving me odd looks...

Clara – Who knows... Maybe you're starting a new trend... Since you didn't manage to bring the dressing gown back into fashion...

Alex – I'll just put the frozen stuff in the freezer. I even bought ice lollies. And this time, I didn't let them melt, believe me. They're still hard as a rock...

Blackout.

Scene 13

Clara is once again seated at the desk, looking at a computer screen. Alex enters.

Alex – Looks like you've taken a liking to that desk after all. What are you up to?

Clara – I have to confess something, Alex...

Alex – Don't tell me you've decided to start writing too.

Clara – No, don't worry.

Alex – If this is about that little slip with Kevin, I've already forgotten it, honestly. And frankly, I'd rather not know the details...

Clara – It's not that, Alex. I'm being serious...

Alex – What?

Clara – After your manuscript was rejected by every publisher, I took it upon myself to self-publish your book on Amazon.

Alex – And?

Clara – The first week, we sold one copy.

Alex – A mistake, surely. Some guy must have hit the wrong key when placing the order.

Clara – Last week we sold two.

Alex – Must have been Jessica and Kevin... That bastard Kevin. He owed me that much...

Clara – Three days ago we sold twenty-three.

Alex – I didn't know we had that many friends...

Clara – Yesterday, the total was a hundred and twelve...

Alex – No way?

Clara – And today we've already passed a thousand!

Alex – So... my book is already a bestseller!

Clara – And you're a successful author!

Alex – Incredible... To think I might never have bought that dressing gown...

Clara – I always believed in you, Alex.

Alex – Thank you, darling. But you know what they say: behind every great man, there's a great woman.

Clara – Not too great, though, or she might cast too big a shadow.

Alex – That must be why men rarely choose a woman taller than themselves. Or else they start wearing heels...

The phone rings. Clara answers.

Clara – Hello... Yes... Yes, of course... Yes, I'll put him on... (*Lowering her voice to Alex*) Confidential Press. They've noticed your book sales on Amazon are skyrocketing, and they want you to send them the manuscript...

Alex – This time, I really feel like we've hit the jackpot!

Blackout.

Scene 14

Alex and Clara are seated, each in an armchair, a glass of champagne in hand. The bottle sits on the desk, in an ice bucket.

Clara – You're right, Alex. This council flat doesn't really suit our lifestyle anymore.

Alex – In fact, I wonder if you shouldn't give up your job too.

Clara – Now that you write on the computer, you don't need me to type your manuscripts anymore.

Alex – If I really am a successful author, I'm going to need an agent...

Clara – I've got another idea in mind...

Alex – Anyway, I'll need to find a subject for my next book. That won't be easy...

Clara – Especially since you've done things a bit backwards.

Alex – Backwards?

Clara – You started with your memoirs...

Alex – I can't spend my whole life just telling my own story, that's for sure.

Clara – Yeah... You'll need to start taking an interest in other people's lives too.

Alex – Other people? You mean... Kevin and Jessica, for example?

Clara – Why not?

Alex – It's true, in their own way, they're real characters.

Clara – A barbecue could make a good play.

Alex – A farce or a tragedy?

Clara – Depends how it ends, I suppose...

Alex – Unfortunately, since I no longer have that dressing gown, I've lost my inspiration.

Clara – Don't worry... I've got a surprise for you...

She exits and returns with the dressing gown.

Alex – You bought another one? The sales assistant told me it was the last...

Clara – It's yours. I bought it back on eBay.

Alex – I did wonder how I'd managed to find a mug to take it off my hands, even at half price. So it was you?

Clara – If it really was thanks to this dressing gown that you wrote your first bestseller...

Alex – By the way, how are sales going?

Clara – Unfortunately, they dropped to twelve copies yesterday.

Alex – Oh, damn it...

Clara – Maybe just a bit of turbulence...

Alex – Or else they realised I was a fraud...

Clara – The title may have been misleading, to be fair.

Alex – *Diderot's Dressing Gown.*

Clara – They must have thought it was a newly discovered text by Diderot with that title.

Alex – Yes, maybe we got a bit carried away...

Clara – Just as well we haven't handed back the keys...

Alex – And that you haven't resigned from the hospital.

Clara – I did that yesterday. But it doesn't matter, I've already found work in a clinic. I'll be paid twice as much!

Alex – So I don't need to go back to work!

Clara – Maybe part-time...

The phone rings. Alex answers.

Alex – Hello...? Oh, hi Jessica... Yes... No... Right... Yes, I'll tell her... OK... No, no... Bye Jessica...

Clara – Was that Jessica?

Alex – Yes... While Hoovering Kevin's car, she found a bra under the back seat.

Clara – Oh, really...?

Alex – She was wondering if it was yours...

Blackout.

Scene 15

*Alex is seated at his desk, writing. He is once again wearing his dressing gown.
Clara enters with a big smile.*

Clara – You've started writing again...

Alex – In a manner of speaking...

Clara – Have you found a new idea for your next novel?

Alex – I'm doing a crossword...

Clara – Ah... so back to square one?

Alex – Before that I was doing sudokus...

Clara – You're right, from sudokus to crosswords... You could say you've turned a corner.

Alex – I used to be a man of numbers, now I've become a man of letters. And you? You seem in a good mood... Are my book sales picking up again?

Clara – No, but I played the lottery too!

Alex – And?

Clara – I won!

Alex – The jackpot?

Clara – Two euros.

Alex – That just covers the ticket!

Clara – I preferred to see it as a sign of destiny. So, I decided to treat myself as well.

Alex – More ice lollies? I hope they didn't melt all over your knees this time...

Clara – No, not ice lollies...

Alex – Oh, no? What then?

Clara – Surprise!

She exits and returns with a guitar case.

Alex – What on earth is that?

Clara – You'll never guess...

Alex – A machine gun?

She opens the case and takes out an electric guitar.

Clara – A guitar!

Alex – I didn't know you played the guitar...

Clara – I don't... Not yet. But I've always dreamed of playing.

Alex – Really? You never told me that.

Clara – I've got my own secret garden, you know...

Alex – The beginning of a great career for you as well, then...?

She launches into a frenzied strum. The soundtrack erupts with jarring chords, then breaks into a dizzying Hendrix-style solo. He stares at her, stunned.

Blackout.

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

A Thwarted Vocation
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
Pentimento
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
The Way of Chance

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
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
How 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
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
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
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Backstage Bits
Don't panic !
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
For real and for fun
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
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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