

La Comédiathèque

Funny Stories

Jean-Pierre Martinez

comediatheque.net

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Funny Stories

A sketch comedy by
Jean-Pierre Martinez

Inspector Columbo appearing before Saint Peter...

Two cops investigating Van Gogh's death...

What was the name of the first human being whose name has come down to us?

Ten or so funny stories to make you laugh — and make you think.

1. The Sea.....	3
2. Columbo.....	8
3. Honeymoon.....	13
4. Insecticide.....	16
5. Relativity.....	18
6. Kushim.....	23
7. Reverse Shot.....	27
8. Falling Apart.....	31
9. Alternate History.....	34
10. Fantasy.....	36
And Finally.....	41

Cast

22 characters

Highly flexible casting in both size and gender: each actor can play several roles, and most roles can be played by either a man or a woman.

For 2 to 22 actors (men or women).

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1. The Sea

A man is sitting at a café table. He looks at least fifty and is wearing old-fashioned clothes. An old-fashioned suitcase lies at his feet. He stares straight ahead, towards the audience. A waitress in her thirties enters and cleans another table. She tries to catch his attention without wanting to disturb him. The man pays no attention to her. Eventually she approaches.

Woman – Excuse me, but... my shift ends in five minutes. I'll have to ask you to pay.

The man finally notices her and comes back to reality.

Man – I... I'll go, of course.

Woman – Oh no, you can stay! We're open until midnight. It's just that... I have to balance the till.

Man – I understand.

He takes a banknote from his pocket and puts it on the table. The woman looks at it curiously.

Woman – Sorry, but... we switched to the euro more than twenty years ago, you know...

The man looks at the banknote and realises his mistake.

Man – I'm terribly sorry...

He takes it back, pulls out another note and puts it on the table.

Woman – Don't you have anything smaller...?

Man – That's all I've got on me.

Woman – No problem, I'll bring you your change straight away.

Man – Don't bother... Keep it all.

Woman – It's a fifty-euro note.

Man – Oh, yes...

Woman – And your coffee is two euros.

He stares straight ahead again.

Man – How long have I been sitting at this table?

Woman – I'd say... seven or eight hours. You were my first customer when I started my shift at noon.

Man – And you didn't say anything.

Woman – Say what?

Man – Ask me to order something else, for instance... or leave.

Woman – That's not how we do things here. You order a coffee, you can stay until closing if you like.

Man – Please, keep the change.

Woman – Well... thank you... I've been doing this job for quite a while, and that's the biggest tip anyone's ever given me. Especially for one coffee.

Man – I'm glad. Really.

Woman – I didn't want to disturb you before. You looked so... lost in thought. Are you on holiday?

Man – Do I look like I'm on holiday?

Woman – I don't know... I only asked because of the suitcase.

Man – Oh, yes... The suitcase.

Woman – Are you looking for a hotel?

Man – No.

Woman – Well then... maybe I'll see you again sometime.

Man – Maybe.

He goes back to staring ahead. She is about to leave, then changes her mind.

Woman – I don't mean to pry, but... what have you been staring at for eight hours straight? I'm not even sure I've seen you blink...

Man – I'm looking at the sea.

Woman – The sea?

Man – The sea, at the exact point where it meets the horizon.

Woman – Right.

Man – Don't you ever look at the sea?

Woman – No. Well... never for that long, anyway. Never like that. And... I don't have much time.

Man – That's a shame... I mean... that you don't have the time.

Woman – I see the sea eight hours a day, all year round. To me it mostly reminds me of work... On my days off, I try to look at something else.

Man – And what do you look at on your days off?

Woman – I don't know... Television...

Man – Of course.

She looks slightly embarrassed.

Woman – No, I do look at other things besides television sometimes... Not necessarily the sea, but... I don't know... When I'm on holiday... the mountains, for instance.

Man – Ah, yes... The mountains...

Woman – So for you, it's the sea.

Man – Yes.

Woman – And... why the sea?

A pause.

Man – Everything comes from the sea, doesn't it?

Woman – Everything?

Man – Millions of years ago, the first vertebrates came out of the sea. Some of them would eventually become human beings.

Woman – Oh, right...

Man – Human beings who would go on to colonise every piece of dry land, until they brought the planet to the brink of apocalypse.

Woman – Of course...

Man – Everything comes from the sea. The best and the worst.

Woman – Come to think of it, you're not wrong. Before they sit down on this terrace, most of my customers come straight out of the water. And believe me, you get the best and the worst there too.

Man – I'm not sure I belong to the best myself.

Woman – Judging by the tip you left me, believe me, I've seen worse.

Man – But you don't know where that money came from.

Woman – Does it matter?

Man – To some people, yes.

Woman – To me, fifty euros is fifty euros.

Man – Really?

Woman – Yes... I think so.

Man – What if I hadn't earned that money honestly?

Woman – Your money's as good as anyone else's. If businesses only accepted honestly earned money, they wouldn't do much business...

Man – Every penny I own today was stolen.

Woman – Stolen?

Man – A robbery. It went wrong, unfortunately. A man died. A police officer. He had a wife and two children...

Woman – Did you kill him?

Man – No. But it made no difference. Not to the judges, anyway.

Woman – You paid your debt to society, as they say.

Man – I gave thirty years of my life for a murder I didn't commit. And I kept the money that wasn't mine. I hoped it might buy back all those lost years.

Woman – Some people give forty years of their lives just to earn a pension, you know.

A pause.

Man – All those years, I never saw beyond the four walls of my cell... How old are you?

Woman – Thirty...

Man – I was released this morning... I went and dug up the loot I'd hidden in a cemetery. The banknotes were as good as new. Money doesn't age.

Woman – And then?

Man – I took a train to see the sea.

Woman – Now I understand why you were staring at it like that.

Man – Like a man who hasn't seen a woman for years, and when he finally sees one again, all he can do is look at her. The desire to possess her is gone.

Woman – But you're free now.

Man – Freedom is the same. When you've been deprived of it for too long and suddenly get it back, you no longer know what to do with it.

Woman – You haven't even gone for a swim.

Man – I'm not sure I still know how.

Woman – I'm really sorry.

Man – Believe me, giving your life for a suitcase full of cash is too high a price to pay. I'm worth nothing now, and this money is worthless...

Woman – You mean... that suitcase is full of money?

A pause.

Man – I'll face the sea until night falls. Until the sky on the horizon merges with it.

Woman – And then?

Man – We all came from the sea. Tonight I'm going back.

The man gets up to leave. She watches him go, not knowing what to say to stop him. Then she notices the suitcase.

Woman – Sir! You're forgetting your suitcase!

Man – I'm leaving it to you. But remember: money is worthless when what you're trying to buy back is yourself.

He leaves. She looks at the suitcase, hesitates, then opens it. She takes out a bundle of banknotes.

Woman – Francs...

2. Columbo

Saint Peter (or the Virgin Mary, if the role needs to be played by a woman) is dozing in an armchair. He has a white beard, wears a robe, and an enormous key hangs from his belt. Inspector Columbo enters, wearing a rumpled raincoat and crooked tie, with a cigar in his hand. He clears his throat to announce his presence.

Saint Peter – Ah, Mr Peter Falk. I was expecting you.

Columbo – Sorry, I may be a little late. I wasn't sure I had the right door. There are two on the landing...

Saint Peter – The landing? Ah, yes, indeed...

Columbo – This one was open, so I let myself in... Maybe I should have knocked...

Saint Peter – Don't worry, you are in heaven. The other door is... Well, I'm sure you can guess. You were a police inspector. Nothing gets past you, does it?

Columbo – Oh, nothing... that's saying a lot. So there's no mistake. This is the place.

Saint Peter – And believe me, we're very happy to have you with us, Mr Falk. After all... you are quite a celebrity.

Columbo – Not as famous as you! (*Looking upwards with reverence.*) And especially... not as famous as... Besides, I was only a fictional character. As an inspector, I mean. In real life, I was just an actor.

Saint Peter – Of course.

Columbo – Actually, there's something I don't quite understand... Am I here as an actor or as a character?

Saint Peter – I'm not sure I follow you...

Columbo – Television heroes aren't immortal either, you know. If the writer decides to kill them off in an episode... Even I, as an inspector, often found myself in some pretty dangerous situations. I could have been shot, or killed in a car accident. Especially with that old wreck I used to drive. Do you know my car?

Saint Peter – Where are you going with this, Inspector?

Columbo – Well, I was wondering... where do fictional characters go when they die?

Saint Peter – Nowhere, I imagine. Certainly not here. After all, they're not real people, like you and me. Well... like you.

Columbo – Of course... Although... sometimes I wonder whether, in the end, Inspector Columbo wasn't much more real than Peter Falk.

Saint Peter – For most mortals, you will be Inspector Columbo. For eternity. In the end, he's the one who will give you a form of immortality. On Earth, at least.

Columbo – But I'm here as an actor, we agree? Not as a television detective.

Saint Peter – Probably a little of both. How can one be separated from the other?

Columbo – Of course... Even though I did make a few other films.

Saint Peter – Really?

Columbo – Did you see me in *Wings of Desire*?

Saint Peter – I very rarely go to the cinema...

Columbo – Of course, but I thought that one... since it's the story of an angel...

Saint Peter – And you played the angel?

Columbo – No... Actually, I played myself.

Saint Peter – Inspector Columbo?

Columbo – Not exactly... In that film, I was Peter Falk. Playing yourself isn't as easy as it sounds, you know. It's actually quite unsettling.

Saint Peter – I must admit, Inspector, I'm beginning to lose track myself. If we could get back to...

Columbo – Sorry. I have a bad habit of making everything complicated. My wife is always telling me that... We used to bicker a lot, but deep down we loved each other very much...

Saint Peter – Don't worry. Her time will come too, and if, like you, she has lived a worthy life...

Columbo – Oh, I'm not worried about that. She's a wonderful woman. I'm sure when the time comes, she'll have a place in heaven. But until then... I'm afraid she'll get lonely, you see?

Saint Peter – I understand... Unfortunately, I don't decide the day or the hour.

Columbo – Anyway... so you called me here as an inspector too...

Saint Peter – Called you?

Columbo – I mean called me back, of course. Called me home. To you. Well, to you or... (*Looking upwards again.*) to Him. That's the expression, isn't it? God called him home...

Saint Peter – Quite... Now, if you don't mind, I'll show you...

Columbo – Do you think I'll be able to question Him?

Saint Peter – Who?

Columbo – God.

Saint Peter – You want to question God?

Columbo – That's very badly put, I admit. I mean... see Him and talk to Him?

Saint Peter – God is everywhere, even in heaven. And there is nothing to stop you hoping. So, as I was saying, I'll show you the way to... the place where you will rest in peace for eternity.

Columbo – Of course, excuse me. And... eternal rest does sound tempting.

Saint Peter – Do you see the entrance to that tunnel?

Columbo – Ah, yes... That's funny, I can even see a little light at the end.

Saint Peter – Exactly... Just head towards the light and... Don't worry about anything else. We take care of everything. Otherwise it wouldn't really be heaven, would it?

Columbo – Very well. Sorry to have bothered you. I'll go right away...

Saint Peter – Welcome to heaven, Inspector.

Columbo is about to leave, then turns back.

Columbo – Sorry, but... just one more thing is bothering me.

Saint Peter (*beginning to lose patience*) – Yes, Inspector...

Columbo – Do you know exactly what I died of?

Saint Peter – Why do you ask? You know, it doesn't matter much now.

Columbo – Force of habit, I suppose. I spent my whole life investigating how people really died. The ones I thought had been murdered, anyway.

Saint Peter – You think you were murdered?

Columbo – Just curious, I assure you. But I wouldn't want to pry. You're the one in charge of the case, after all.

Saint Peter – You died of pneumonia, if I remember correctly.

Columbo – Pneumonia...? Ah, yes, I see what you mean... Peter Falk did die of pneumonia, that's true. At least I think so... No, I meant me. Inspector Columbo.

Saint Peter – He's dead?

Columbo – That's exactly what I'm getting at. Since nobody ever saw him die in an episode, not even the last one, he must still be alive, right?

Saint Peter – How could he still be alive when he never really existed? And you, who did exist, are dead.

Columbo – Of course... You're right. Obviously. How could a fictional character outlive the actor who played him on screen? It makes no sense!

Saint Peter – Exactly... So now, if you don't mind...

Columbo – Sorry to have taken up so much of your time... I'll go into that tunnel and...

Saint Peter – Please do...

Columbo is about to leave, then turns back again.

Columbo – One last question, and then I promise I'll leave you in peace.

Saint Peter – I'm listening...

Columbo – If Inspector Columbo was never alive, then he can't be dead either, can he?

Saint Peter – I suppose not. And what do you conclude from that, Inspector?

Columbo – Since Inspector Columbo isn't dead, he has no business being in heaven... and neither do I. Because, as you so rightly said yourself, the two of us are inseparable.

Saint Peter – If you don't mind, that's for... (*Indicating the heavens.*) Him to decide.

Columbo – Obviously... And yet...

Saint Peter – What now?

Columbo – If Inspector Columbo doesn't exist, even though you're looking straight at him, how can anyone say for certain that God, whom nobody ever sees, really does exist?

Saint Peter – May I remind you that you are standing at the gates of heaven... Do you really think this is the right time to question the existence of God?

Columbo – No, of course not. If I'd won a week's holiday in a luxury hotel by the sea, I wouldn't question the existence of the hotel manager, but...

Saint Peter – But?

Columbo – But these holidays could last quite a while... To be completely honest, I'm a little afraid I'll get bored. Especially without my wife...

Saint Peter – I'm sure you'll find something to occupy yourself with until she joins you...

Columbo – Of course... I'll try to find something to do... Actually, now that I think of it... by definition, everyone here is dead, aren't they?

Saint Peter – Yes... That's rather the idea...

Columbo – And where there are dead people, there are sometimes... suspicious deaths.

Saint Peter – Suspicious?

Columbo – I can carry on doing my job!

Saint Peter – Acting?

Columbo – Police work! Where I come from, you know, it's very rare for an inspector to be able to question the victim of a murder. And of course that would make police investigations much easier.

Saint Peter – Yes, well, I'm not sure...

Columbo – I have a feeling this is going to be absolutely fascinating. You've convinced me after all. For a police officer, this really is paradise. I won't keep you any longer. I'll go right away...

He heads towards the entrance to the tunnel.

Saint Peter – Wait a minute!

Columbo – Something bothering you too?

Saint Peter – On second thought, you're right. A fictional character has no place in heaven.

Columbo – In the Middle Ages, even actors weren't allowed in.

Saint Peter – I'm sending you back where you came from. That's what you wanted, isn't it?

Columbo – You're sending me back to Earth?

Saint Peter – Don't get carried away. No, I'm sending you back into your favourite series. How many episodes were you in?

Columbo – Sixty-nine.

Saint Peter – Then you can carry on solving cases for eternity. How does that sound?

Columbo – So I'll be with my wife again? I mean... Mrs Columbo?

Saint Peter – Just go back the way you came. An angel will be waiting for you on the landing, as you call it. They'll take you home. Or rather... to Mrs Columbo's home.

Columbo – You're the one who decides... But before I go, I just have one last question...

Saint Peter – Out! Before I change my mind and send you through the other door instead, if you know what I mean...

Columbo – I'll leave you alone, I promise... I can't wait to see my wife again. Having a fascinating job and a wife who loves you — that's paradise, don't you think?

Trying to keep calm, Saint Peter does not answer. Columbo turns back and starts walking the way he came. Saint Peter sighs with relief.

3. Honeymoon

A man arrives at a hotel reception desk and addresses the receptionist.

Receptionist – Good morning, sir. How can I help you?

Guest – Hello. I'd like a room, please.

Receptionist – Certainly. A double room or a single?

Guest – A single will do. Unfortunately...

Receptionist – Business or pleasure...?

Guest – Honeymoon.

Receptionist – Sorry...?

Guest – I'm on my honeymoon.

Receptionist – Right... and you'd like a single room. Another one for your wife, perhaps... Unless she'd rather stay in a different hotel?

Guest – My wife left me... just after the ceremony.

Receptionist – I'm truly sorry to hear that...

Guest – Not as sorry as I am.

Receptionist – A domestic disagreement, I suppose?

Guest – She ran off with my best man as soon as we left the town hall. I've lost my wife and my best friend at the same time.

Receptionist – Perhaps they'll come back.

Guest – At the end of the honeymoon, maybe. I'd booked a week in the Seychelles. They left with the plane tickets.

The receptionist hesitates slightly.

Receptionist – This isn't a joke, is it?

Guest – Do I look like I'm joking?

Receptionist – To be honest, you look more like a cuckold.

Guest – Thanks. That's really cheered me up.

Receptionist – Please accept my apologies, sir. It just slipped out.

Guest – No, you're right. I do look like a cuckold.

Receptionist – I'm sure it's not the first time anyone's told you that.

Guest – No. And now I've just had it confirmed.

Receptionist – You have my deepest sympathy. And on behalf of the hotel, please accept our sincere condolences.

Guest – Thank you, but... I'm not a widower yet, you know. For now, I'm just a cuckold.

Receptionist – Of course... I... I don't know what to say... If there were anything I could...

Guest – That's very kind of you.

Receptionist – Listen, to ease your pain a little, on behalf of the hotel I can offer you a small compensation.

Guest – A compensation...? You mean...?

Receptionist – Don't get too excited... Obviously, for your wedding night, I imagine you'd rather have had a woman in your bed. Unfortunately, hotel regulations strictly forbid us to...

Guest – Of course.

Receptionist – No, I was only talking about an upgrade.

Guest – An upgrade?

Receptionist – For the price of a standard single, I can give you a superior room with a balcony on the top floor. It's much quieter than the street side. You'll see. It overlooks the cemetery.

Guest – Thank you...

Receptionist – Our guests are generally very satisfied. At least, nobody has ever complained. Do you have any luggage?

Guest – My best man left with my suitcase. As well as my wife, and our reservations for the honeymoon at a dream hotel...

Receptionist – How can you ever trust your friends again after something like that...?

Guest – Actually... he was more a friend of my wife's.

Receptionist – Yes, I gathered. But don't worry. You'll find everything you need in the vending machine upstairs. Toothbrush, comb, shaving kit...

Guest – Thank you, but... there's one last little thing bothering me. I'm not quite sure how to say this...

Receptionist – Go ahead...

Guest – My wife also took my credit card.

Receptionist – I see...

Guest – And I didn't think to withdraw any cash before the ceremony. I couldn't have known that...

The receptionist, visibly beginning to lose patience, hesitates for a moment.

Receptionist – Look, the hotel's almost empty anyway. So I'll give you one night free. But first thing tomorrow morning, you get out of here, understood?

Guest – That's extremely kind of you. Really. I don't know how to thank you...

The receptionist hands him a key.

Receptionist – Here. Your key.

Guest – Is breakfast included?

At the end of her patience, the receptionist decides not to answer.

Receptionist – Fourth floor, room 69. All that's left is for me to wish you a pleasant evening...

Guest – Thank you...

The guest is about to leave, looking thoroughly depressed.

Receptionist – You could always watch television. It might take your mind off things.

Guest – Can I have a look at the listings?

Receptionist – Of course.

The guest leafs through a television guide.

Guest – Ah, *I'll Sleep at Your Place*... My favourite programme. Do you know it?

Receptionist – I love it... Which country is it this time?

The guest looks at the listings again.

Guest – The Seychelles...

Receptionist – Some days, nothing goes right. *(She opens a drawer, takes out a box of pills and puts it on the counter.)* Here. Sleeping pills. Take two.

Guest – I'm not sure that'll be enough...

Receptionist – If it isn't, take the whole box.

Guest – God will reward you. If I hadn't been lucky enough to meet someone as kind as you, I don't know where I'd have spent the night...

Receptionist – Under a bridge, probably.

Guest – You're the kind of person I should have chosen as my best man. You know what they say: a friend in need is a friend indeed.

Receptionist – Of course...

Guest – Will you be my friend?

Receptionist – The elevator is over there. Now get out of here before I change my mind...

4. Insecticide

A man and a woman are sitting side by side. He is doing a crossword. She is looking at something on her hand. He notices.

Man – What are you looking at?

Woman – An ant.

Man – There are still ants all over the house. I put some poison down, but they don't seem to like it.

Woman – They're supposed to like it?

Man – The product! It doesn't seem to attract them...

Woman – It's not going to attract the cat, is it? That cat is such an idiot.

Man – It's in a little box with openings all around it. They're supposed to go inside, eat the poison, then carry it back to the nest and poison all the others.

Woman – Brilliant...

Man – Yeah, right... They walk straight past the box. Some of them stop and look at it, but none of them go in.

Woman – If they refuse to cooperate, then...

Man – Especially considering how much that stupid trap cost.

Woman – Maybe an ant isn't so stupid after all. I wonder if you're the one who got trapped.

Man – Yeah...

Woman – And what exactly have these ants done to you? I mean... personally.

Man – I don't know... Ants in a house... It doesn't look very clean, does it?

She continues looking at the ant.

Woman – This one looks perfectly healthy, anyway.

Man – Good for her.

Woman – She looks as if she knows she narrowly escaped a genocide.

Man – I think in this case you'd call it an insecticide.

Woman – Or an anticide. (*She watches the ant.*) I wonder if ants have private lives...

Man – Private lives? You mean... like us? After a day's work, do they go home and watch a bit of television before going to bed? So they're fresh enough to go back to work the next morning...

Woman – Do they have any individual existence at all, or is each ant just a cog in the colony? A spare part, in a way...

Man – I think it was Descartes who talked about animals as machines.

Woman – Just goes to show how much rubbish philosophers can talk. I think, therefore I am... What a breakthrough...

Man – You're right. Just because an ant doesn't think doesn't mean it doesn't exist...

She looks at the ant on her hand.

Woman – And how can we really be sure this ant doesn't think? We're not inside its head...

Man – I can accept that the stupid cat thinks about something now and then. Food, for example. But an insect...

Woman – You think insects don't think?

Man – That's why we don't feel guilty about exterminating them, isn't it? Imagine going into a shop and asking for something to poison birds because they keep messing all over your terrace.

Woman – No.

Man – With ants, you don't even need to provide a motive before buying something to wipe them out. You can buy the poison without any restrictions. They even advertise it on television. This particular stuff isn't very effective, but still...

Woman – It's true. We have more empathy for birds, which are descended from dinosaurs, than for ants, even though ants are social animals, just like us...

Man – Anyway, to answer your question, birds definitely have private lives. In spring they look for a mate, live together in a nest, raise the kids together...

Woman – And it's this anthropomorphic view of birds that explains why we protect them, while we massacre ants without giving it a second thought?

Man – Not just ants. Flies and mosquitoes too. We squash them with complete impunity and sadistic pleasure.

Woman – And they're not even social animals.

Man – No. Insects... Except bees, because they make honey...

Woman – We assume insects have no feelings at all.

Man – To be fair, a cockroach isn't very affectionate, and you've never seen anyone keep a beetle as a pet. A snake or a reptile, maybe. An insect, never.

She looks at her hand again.

Woman – Little bastard! It stung me... How ungrateful. And there I was, trying to show a little tolerance towards its species.

She squashes the ant with a slap of her hand.

Man – Ah... Your first anticide... You'll see. The first one's always the hardest.

Woman – It must have been a red ant.

Man – There you go... Even with ants, we can't help discriminating.

5. Relativity

Saint Peter, wearing a robe and a large key at his belt, is facing a man or woman in a lawyer's gown.

Saint Peter – So, we're here to decide on the admission to heaven of a certain... Albert Einstein.

Lawyer – That's right.

Saint Peter – To make sure both sides are heard, I'll play devil's advocate...

Lawyer – Then I'll argue on Mr Einstein's behalf.

Saint Peter – Very well. Let's see... *(He glances at a thick file.)* Ah, yes. Quite a complicated case, isn't it...?

Lawyer – I've attached all of his scientific publications. You'll agree that, in this case, it's rather difficult to separate the man from his work.

Saint Peter – Certainly. But neither you nor I have the expertise required to assess the value of his research. So we'll stick to the essential question: during his lifetime, did Mr Einstein do more good than harm?

Lawyer – The theory of relativity was his.

Saint Peter – The question is whether he deserves heaven, not whether he deserved the Nobel Prize in Physics.

Lawyer – Without getting into scientific details that would be beyond us, we can surely agree that his discoveries allowed humanity to make a great leap forward.

Saint Peter – We'll come back to that, because it's certainly open to debate. But tell me... Einstein is a Jewish name.

Lawyer – Indeed... but Mr Einstein wasn't observant.

Saint Peter – It would still seem more logical for him to knock on the door of the Jewish heaven.

Lawyer – And that's exactly what he did... the moment he died.

Saint Peter – And?

Lawyer – He's been engaged in a major discussion with the rabbi who welcomed him for more than fifty years now.

Saint Peter – About whether he's worthy of entering heaven?

Lawyer – Apparently, they haven't reached that point in the discussion yet... For the moment, the rabbi is consulting the Torah to determine whether heaven really exists for Jews and, if it does, what exactly it might be like.

Saint Peter – I see...

Lawyer – My client is beginning to get a little impatient, so he decided to try his luck with you.

Saint Peter – A Plan B, in other words...

Lawyer – Let's just say that... as a scientist, Mr Einstein considers every option. And he's come to the conclusion that the Catholic heaven is much more tangible than the Jewish one.

Saint Peter – I assume you're Jewish too.

Lawyer – Non-observant, I assure you. Just like my client...

Saint Peter – You're putting me in a rather awkward position.

Lawyer – Your heaven isn't explicitly reserved for Catholics, is it? All people of goodwill are welcome...

Saint Peter – True... But to enter heaven, one still has to believe in it. And Mr Einstein could fairly be described as a committed atheist, regardless of religion...

Lawyer – Atheist is rather a strong word. I'd say agnostic.

Saint Peter – Let me read you something he wrote in one of his letters: “For me, the word God is nothing more than the expression and product of human weakness, and the Bible a collection of honourable but primitive legends which are nevertheless rather childish. No interpretation, however subtle, can change that for me.” Don't you think a man who says such things can reasonably be called an atheist?

Lawyer – And yet Einstein described himself as “a deeply religious nonbeliever.”

Saint Peter – In 1929, when a rabbi asked him whether he believed in God, Einstein replied: “I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the harmonious order of all that exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and actions of human beings.”

Lawyer – It is true that God, ever since He expelled His creatures from the Garden of Eden — thereby granting them freedom and responsibility for their actions — has kept a very low profile in human affairs.

Saint Peter – You're forgetting Jesus Christ...

Lawyer – Einstein didn't question his existence, and he had the greatest admiration for him. But you have to admit that since Jesus died, apart from the occasional miracle, God has kept a very low profile.

Saint Peter – Let's give Einstein the benefit of the doubt where faith is concerned... and look at the practical consequences of his scientific discoveries.

Lawyer – Their importance can't be denied. Einstein is regarded as the greatest genius of the twentieth century. He literally revolutionised our understanding of the universe.

Saint Peter – He has his critics too... Some claim he merely popularised the work of less famous predecessors. Others say his wife was the real inspiration behind his famous theory...

Lawyer – People also say Corneille wrote Molière's plays, and Marlowe wrote Shakespeare's...

Saint Peter – It wouldn't be the first time in history that a man took credit for his wife's genius... But I'm not qualified to judge that. That's why I was talking about the consequences of his discoveries, not the discoveries themselves.

Lawyer – On that point, there's no question. Without him, no high-definition television and no GPS.

Saint Peter – Have television and GPS made human beings better? That's the question.

Lawyer – He was also the inventor of one of the first refrigerator prototypes.

Saint Peter – Some people would say he helped pave the way for the atomic bomb.

Lawyer – He didn't actively take part in the Manhattan Project, which led to the creation of the first nuclear bomb.

Saint Peter – But he was the one who wrote to President Roosevelt urging him to launch the project without delay.

Lawyer – Only to get ahead of the Nazis in the race for the ultimate weapon.

Saint Peter – Fair enough...

Lawyer – A scientist can't be held responsible for the malicious uses made of his discoveries. Any more than God, who created Man, can be held responsible for Man's bad behaviour.

A pause.

Saint Peter – His private life hardly speaks in his favour either... He was a womaniser...

Lawyer – Nobody's perfect...

Saint Peter – Divorced.

Lawyer – I don't think the Church still bars divorced people from heaven.

Saint Peter – Remarried to his own cousin.

Lawyer – The Church doesn't explicitly forbid that either.

Saint Peter – A bad father...

Lawyer – He was a very busy man... completely dedicated to his work.

Saint Peter – We don't even know what became of his first daughter.

Lawyer – Every man has his weaknesses... But no one can deny his commitments: to pacifism, against racism...

Saint Peter – Socialist, Zionist... Let's not get into politics. It could take us very far indeed.

Lawyer – We still have to make a decision...

Saint Peter – You're right... So let's ask ourselves one simple question: would the world have been better or worse without Albert Einstein?

Lawyer – Bearing in mind that it's all very relative...

A moment of perplexity. They both leaf through their files without much conviction.

Saint Peter – It's hot in here...

Lawyer – And it's only April...

Saint Peter – Hell is right next door, and the insulation is terrible. But I can offer you something to drink, if you like...

Lawyer – Gladly.

Saint Peter steps out for a moment and returns with two bottles of Corona.

Saint Peter – Here you are.

Lawyer – Beer? In heaven...?

Saint Peter – Alcohol is forbidden in Islam...

Lawyer – Alcoholic or not, the important thing is that it's nice and cold.

They drink with obvious satisfaction.

Saint Peter – So what are we going to do with your Albert Einstein? Jewish, atheist, sorcerer's apprentice, misogynist, possible plagiarist and definite rascal... You have to admit that as applications for heaven go, his CV isn't exactly working in his favour.

Lawyer – He wasn't a saint, that's true, but... he wasn't the devil either.

They take another sip.

Saint Peter – You said he invented the refrigerator?

Lawyer – At the very least, you could say he was a pioneer in the field. He even filed a patent.

Saint Peter – So in a way, it's partly thanks to him that we can enjoy a nice cold beer today...

Lawyer – It's less glorious than being the man behind the famous formula $E = mc^2$, but at least it's more concrete.

Saint Peter – Then we'll give him a place in heaven as the inventor of the refrigerator.

Lawyer – A wise decision.

Saint Peter initials a document and hands it to the other.

Saint Peter – What exactly does $E = mc^2$ mean? I've never really understood it.

Lawyer – Basically, it's the principle of equivalence between mass and energy. Under certain conditions, mass turns into energy, and vice versa. In the end, replace E with divine energy and it's practically proof that God exists.

Saint Peter – Don't push it...

Lawyer – You're right... A nice cold beer — now that's proof that God exists.

Saint Peter – Since we've made our decision, bring him in. We'll raise a glass with him...

Lawyer – You'll see. He's worth getting to know.

6. Kushim

A prehistoric man enters. He is dressed simply in an animal skin and carries a flint axe. He sits on a rock to rest and begins to doze. In a flash of light, a woman appears wearing a futuristic jumpsuit, with a laser gun at her belt. The prehistoric man, naturally startled and defensive, jumps up and brandishes his axe.

Woman – Don't worry, my good man. I mean you no harm.

Man – Who are you, stranger? What are you doing here?

Woman – I'm a time traveller. Yes, I know, you don't really understand what that means. That's normal.

Man – A traveller?

Woman – Through time, yes. How can I explain this...? I come from the future, if you prefer.

Man – The future? What's that? Is it far away? Beyond the mountains?

Woman – Of course... How could a prehistoric man possibly grasp the concept of the future? What defines you, after all, is that you haven't entered history yet.

Man – History? What history?

Woman *(to herself)* – Well... this isn't going to be easy... *(To him.)* The future, my good man! Tomorrow, for example, is the future. Do you understand? I live in the future and... I've come to pay you a little visit. To see what life is like for you in the Stone Age.

Man – I don't know anyone called Stone. How am I supposed to know his age?

Woman – No, the Stone Age... I mean prehistory. Because you haven't left us any account of what your life was like. You don't know how to write yet.

Man – What's writing?

Woman – Writing is... It's a bit like the drawings you make on the walls of your caves. Except they don't actually look like anything. But they still mean something.

Man – Drawings that don't look like anything? What could they possibly mean?

Woman – Well, they mean... the same thing as when you speak.

Man – If it's the same as speaking, what's the point?

Woman – So people can remember you! When you can't speak anymore. I mean, when you're dead...

Man – I remember dead people perfectly well... The ones I knew, anyway. The others...

Woman – You know what? Let's forget about writing, because at this rate we'll never get anywhere. So, before I materialised in front of you, I lived in the future. And the future is... tomorrow, if you like.

Man – Tomorrow?

Woman – Yes, well, tomorrow... quite a few tomorrows, actually. Let's say... a few million.

Man – No.

Woman – All right... Let's try this another way. Before you started using that stone axe, how did you hunt?

Man – I don't know.

Woman – Well, with your bare hands, I suppose. And before you learned to control fire, how did you eat your meat?

Man – I don't know.

Woman – Raw! That's the past. When you were an ape. The present is now. You use stone weapons and cook your meat. Tomorrow, you'll replace the stone axe with a hunting rifle and the fire with an electric oven. That's the future. Do you see what I mean?

Man – No.

Woman – The future is progress. And once you've made a lot — and I mean a lot — of progress... (*Indicating herself.*) you'll look like this.

Man – And this is progress?

Woman – Well... yes! Can't you see it?

Man – No.

Woman – So, as I was saying, we know very little about you, or any of your prehistoric contemporaries. Not one of your names has come down to us. What's your name?

Man – Kevin.

Woman – Right... In any case, no Kevin's name has survived from prehistory. And do you know why?

Man – No.

Woman – Because none of those names was ever written down during that very long period. Do you know the first human name to have been literally engraved in the memory of humankind?

Man – No.

Woman – Kushim. In fact, we don't even know whether Kushim was a man or a woman. But we do know what Kushim did for a living.

Man – What?

Woman – An accountant. Kushim's name appears on a clay tablet found in Mesopotamia. A tablet dating from the fourth millennium before Christ.

Man – Jesus Christ?

Woman – I'll tell you about that another day... But you see, the first celebrity in history wasn't a king, a warrior or a poet. It was an accountant. Kushim didn't sign a great saga or a holy book, but an invoice for a delivery of grain.

Man – What's an invoice?

Woman – Exactly... *(To herself or the audience.)* It's not easy having a conversation with someone who doesn't share any of your references... What do you do for a living, my good man?

Man – I'm a hunter-gatherer.

Woman – Of course.

Man – What about you?

Woman – Me? I'm a researcher. I specialise in prehistory. Now that we can travel through time, I can do fieldwork directly on site. So if you don't mind, I'm going to ask you a few questions. It's for my thesis.

Man – All right.

Woman – First, a few questions for the official record. Name: Kevin. Date of birth: I'll leave that blank. Occupation: hunter-gatherer. Married?

Man – Married?

Woman – Is there... a Mrs Kevin? *(He doesn't seem to understand.)* Do you have a wife?

Man – I had two, but a bear ate one last week, and the other left with a hunter who brought more game back to the cave than I did. I clubbed two more women I found lost in the forest and brought them home. They seem quite happy...

Woman – I'll tick widowed, separated... and cohabiting. Now, let's talk about your way of life. What are your days like, my good man?

Man – In the morning, I get up with the sun and go for a swim in the river. Then I go hunting with my friends. When we get back, we cook meat over the fire. I have a little nap after lunch with my two women. In the afternoon, we do a bit of fishing. And in the evening, we tell stories around the fire...

Woman – Well... that sounds like the ideal holiday. It almost makes me want to stay. *(A short alert sounds. She checks the screen of her device, then turns back to him.)* Unfortunately, my life is a little more complicated. I'll have to leave you now, but I'll come back. I promise.

Man – All right... And if you want to be my third wife...

Woman – I'll think about it... But now, to make sure I don't alter the course of history, I'm going to expose you to a burst of radiation from this gun that will make you forget this whole conversation. Don't worry, it isn't dangerous and it's completely painless.

She takes out the gun. He looks at it curiously. With a sudden movement, he manages to grab it and points it at her.

Man – Is this a new hunting weapon?

Woman – Not exactly. But you still need to know how to use it. Give me that...

The prehistoric man pulls the trigger. A flash of light bursts from the barrel, freezing the woman for a moment. When she begins to move again, she looks completely disoriented.

Woman – Hello... What am I doing here? And who are you?

Man – My name is Kevin. What about you?

Woman – I can't remember anything... Not even my name... Do you know what I'm called?

Man – We'll call you Kushim.

Woman – Kushim?

Man – Welcome to prehistory, Kushim.

Woman – What's prehistory?

Man – Well... prehistory is now.

Woman – Right... And what do you do for a living, Kevin?

Man – I'm a hunter-gatherer. I do a bit of fishing too. What exactly can you do?

Woman – Nothing... Oh, yes, I can count, I think. And write too.

Man – What do you want to count?

Woman – I don't know... I could count the animals you bring back from hunting and the fish you catch.

Man – What's the point?

Woman – I don't know. Anyway, that's all I know how to do.

Man – All right. I'll talk to the others. Come with me.

Woman – I'm coming...

Man – If you're no use to us, worst case, we can always eat you.

Woman – You can always use a good accountant, you know. You'll see, I'm going to change your lives.

Man – You think so?

Woman – I'm sure of it. You'll see, I'm going to put you in the history books.

Man – History? I hope it's not some kind of scam...

7. Reverse Shot

The stage is empty except for a painting, with only the back of the canvas visible, leaning against the back wall. Gendarme 1 is there, going over some notes. Gendarme 2 enters. The two gendarmes may be played by either men or women.

Gendarme 2 – Strange weather for July, isn't it?

Gendarme 1 (*distracted*) – Yes... The kind of weather that makes you want to kill yourself...

The other gendarme gives them a surprised look.

Gendarme 2 – It's broad daylight, but it feels like night...

Gendarme 1 – A bit like this whole case. Everything looks simple, but nothing is clear.

Gendarme 2 – So, what happened here?

Gendarme 1 – Apparently, a suicide. Some poor man shot himself in the heart.

Gendarme 2 – So he's dead.

Gendarme 1 – Yes... but not straight away.

Gendarme 2 – Really...

Gendarme 1 – He was only wounded. He managed to make his way back to the attic room he was renting at this inn, and didn't die until the following day. Today, in other words.

Gendarme 2 – Were you able to take a statement from him?

Gendarme 1 – I asked him a few questions, but he was already more or less unconscious. Or maybe he just didn't feel like confiding in a gendarme.

Gendarme 2 – You should have pretended to be a priest. Heard his confession before giving him the last rites. I'm joking... Did you manage to get anything out of him?

Gendarme 1 – I asked if he'd tried to kill himself. He replied... "I believe so."

Gendarme 2 – "I believe so"?

Gendarme 1 – "I believe so."

Gendarme 2 – Is that all?

Gendarme 1 – No. He added, "Don't accuse anyone else."

Gendarme 2 – That is strange. Still... he confirmed it was suicide.

Gendarme 1 – Yes.

Gendarme 2 – In that case... there's nothing more for us to do here.

Gendarme 1 – I suppose not.

Gendarme 2 – You don't sound convinced. If the poor man said he killed himself, we have no reason to doubt him.

Gendarme 1 – No, of course not.

Gendarme 2 – Why would he say he'd killed himself if he hadn't?

Gendarme 1 – To protect someone, perhaps...

Gendarme 2 – You mean... his murderer?

Gendarme 1 – I don't know. But I don't trust appearances.

Gendarme 2 – This is more than just appearances. It's a confession... from the victim. Or from the culprit, if you prefer. It's not often that a suicide victim is able to confirm that he committed his own murder.

Gendarme 1 – Yes, I suppose you're right.

Gendarme 2 – Did they find the murder weapon? I mean, the weapon supposedly used to...

Gendarme 1 – No. Apparently it was a revolver he'd stolen from someone. A fairly primitive weapon.

Gendarme 2 – No wonder he missed.

Gendarme 1 – There's something odd... Do you know what his last words were?

Gendarme 2 – He was certainly talkative for a suicide victim... So what did he say?

Gendarme 1 – “Missed again.”

Gendarme 2 – “Missed again”?

Gendarme 1 – That's what he said to his brother, who'd come from Paris to be with him in his final hours. I imagine he meant he'd failed at everything in life. Even his suicide.

Gendarme 2 – And you say he went back to his room after he was shot. So where did this alleged suicide actually take place?

Gendarme 1 – In a field.

Gendarme 2 – A field?

Gendarme 1 – A wheat field, yes.

Gendarme 2 – And you think that detail might be important?

Gendarme 1 – What detail?

Gendarme 2 – First you said a field. Then you specified a wheat field.

Gendarme 1 – Oh, yes... No... I just happened to say it.

Gendarme 2 – Besides, how do you know it was a wheat field and not a potato field, for example?

Gendarme 1 – You'll see...

Gendarme 1 turns the canvas around. Until now, only the back has been visible. It is Vincent van Gogh's final painting, Wheatfield with Crows. At the director's discretion, Gendarme 1 may simply show the painting to Gendarme 2 without allowing the audience to see the painted side.

Gendarme 2 – What on earth is that monstrosity?

Gendarme 1 – His last painting.

Gendarme 2 – So this drifter painted?

Gendarme 1 – Yes... He was known as a painter.

Gendarme 2 – But he wasn't a well-known painter?

Gendarme 1 – No. I mean people knew he was a painter. That was his profession. But I don't think he was famous. Otherwise he wouldn't have ended his days in such poverty.

The other gendarme examines the painting.

Gendarme 2 – You're right. It is a wheat field. Did you notice any other clues in the painting that might help us?

Gendarme 1 – What kind of clues could you find in a painting?

Gendarme 2 – I don't know... He might have painted his murderer. Coming towards him from the other side of the field.

Gendarme 1 – Apparently he didn't have time.

Gendarme 2 – He had time to paint the crows.

Gendarme 1 – Then we'd have to question the crows. They must have seen everything.

Gendarme 2 – Was there an autopsy?

Gendarme 1 – His doctor examined the body.

Gendarme 2 – His doctor? I see... A rather makeshift autopsy, then. And what does our amateur pathologist have to say?

Gendarme 1 – According to him, the shot was aimed at the heart, but the bullet was deflected by a rib and ended up in the abdomen.

Gendarme 2 – Fired at point-blank range?

Gendarme 1 – He's a homeopathic doctor, you know. Not a ballistics expert. We can't draw any firm conclusions from what he says...

Gendarme 2 – A dark case indeed. As dark as the sky he painted in this picture just before he was shot.

Gendarme 1 – Actually, we're not even sure the shooting really happened in this wheat field.

Gendarme 2 – So no direct witnesses.

Gendarme 1 – Apart from the crows? No. No witnesses. Just rumours.

Gendarme 2 – What kind of rumours?

Gendarme 1 – About two young troublemakers. Two brothers. Boys from a respectable family spending their holidays here. Apparently they used to pick on him, and they may have killed him accidentally while trying to get back the gun he'd stolen from them.

Gendarme 2 – But he said he'd killed himself. Why would he try to protect the people who tormented him?

Gendarme 1 – I don't know... Christian charity, perhaps.

Gendarme 2 – Yeah...

Gendarme 1 – So what do we do?

Gendarme 2 – Let me get this straight. We have a drifter who dies two days after being shot in the chest. We don't know exactly where or when the shooting happened, who fired the shot, or even what weapon was used. So it could have been suicide, murder or an accident.

Gendarme 1 – Yes, that's about it.

The other gendarme thinks for a moment while examining the painting.

Gendarme 2 – The man who painted this must have been seriously depressed, don't you think?

Gendarme 1 – Definitely.

Gendarme 2 – Why don't we go with suicide? It seems to suit everyone.

Gendarme 1 – And a tortured artist who kills himself... that's romantic. It might even help build his legend.

Gendarme 2 – Believe me, in a week everyone will have forgotten even this drifter's name. What was his name, anyway?

The other gendarme checks a piece of paper.

Gendarme 1 – Van Gogh.

Gendarme 2 – Van Gogh?

Gendarme 1 – Vincent van Gogh. He was Dutch.

Gendarme 2 – One thing's certain: his paintings will never end up in a museum.

Gendarme 1 – You never know...

Gendarme 2 – Would you hang that above the sideboard in your dining room?

Gendarme 1 – No.

Gendarme 2 – Then let's go. We've wasted enough time here already.

8. Falling Apart

A woman is there. A man arrives.

Woman – Hello, how are you?

Man – Do you really want to know how I am?

Woman – Yes, of course... Well, no, I was only being polite, but... Why? What's wrong?

Man – What's wrong? The die is cast, madam. There's no turning back. Global collapse has already begun.

Woman – Collapse? The collapse of what?

Man – Our collapse! The collapse of our civilisation! If you can call it a civilisation...

Woman – Oh, right... Our civilisation... You scared me. I thought you meant your roof. Or mine.

Man – But that's exactly it! The house is on fire, and the roof is about to come crashing down on us.

Woman – Right... Apart from that, are you all right?

Man – You think everything's all right?

Woman – I still have my allergy problems, but... it's not the end of the world.

Man – But that's exactly what it is. It's the end of the world!

Woman – You have allergies too?

Man – Yes. I'm allergic to this society, which is digging its own grave with its own teeth, devouring the planet's resources day after day.

Woman – Of course...

Man – Have you heard about deforestation?

Woman – Defloration? What can you do...? It has to happen sometime. I was fifteen when it happened to me. It was with a friend of my mother's and... But why are you asking me about that?

Man – Forests! I'm talking about forests. Or what's left of them. Deforestation! You have heard of it, haven't you?

Woman – Yes, well... vaguely...

Man – Every second, the Amazon rainforest loses an area the size of a football pitch.

Woman – Oh, right... That's a lot of football pitches.

Man – Sixty a minute. Three thousand six hundred an hour. Thirty-one million five hundred and thirty-six thousand a year.

Woman – Well... looks like we won't be running out of football on television any time soon. That's why I cancelled my sports package. Nothing but football. Do you like football?

Man – I hate football.

Woman – Anyway, the Amazon is a long way away. And Brazilians love football, don't they?

Man – The Amazon rainforest, madam, is the planet's lungs. When the Amazon rainforest coughs, the whole world catches a cold.

Woman – My lungs are allergic to tree pollen. So if there were fewer trees on the planet, I'd probably breathe better. I asked my neighbour to cut back her plane trees, but she won't hear of it. What am I supposed to do? If it were a dog barking too loudly, I could always throw it a piece of meat laced with arsenic. But a tree... What can you do to a tree? You can't poison it. I mean the tree, not my neighbour. Although... I could give her a poisoned apple... I've got an apple tree in my garden.

Man – And global warming? Have you heard of that?

Woman – It's true we've been having lovely autumns these past few years. Last year I didn't turn the heating back on until October. With heating oil costing what it does, that saves a bit of money...

Man – And child labour?

Woman – Oh yes, child labour, now that really is a problem. It makes me furious. I have seven grandchildren, and unfortunately I'm not sure they'll find any work when they finish their studies.

Man – And animal welfare?

Woman – People who abandon their cats at motorway service areas when they go on holiday should be castrated. Mind you, I had mine castrated, but that was at the vet's. You have no idea what those little creatures cost. I even took out pet insurance...

Man – I'm talking about slaughterhouses, madam!

Woman – Slaughterhouses... You're right... I saw a documentary about them on television last week. When you see those poor people working on the line in there all day. Covered in blood. For miserable wages. I really feel sorry for them. Still, if you want a good steak now and then... I always say slaughterhouses are like hospitals. They should be treated as a public service. Those people aren't paid enough. Nobody wants to work in slaughterhouses anymore... With unemployment so high. Would you work in a slaughterhouse, even if the pay was good?

Man – What I'm trying to explain to you, madam, is that we're all going to die...

Woman – And I completely agree with you! That's what I'm always telling my mother. She's ninety-two, my mother. We're all going to die, so... whether it's from that or something else. There's no point depriving yourself. Because if my mother had to give up her daily pack of cigarillos and her little glass of rum after every meal... I think that would finish her off. Do you smoke?

Man – No.

Woman – Very sensible. You don't drink either, I suppose.

Man – No.

Woman – At her retirement home they call her Fidel.

Man – Fido?

Woman – Fidel Castro! Because of the cigars and the rum. Maybe a little because of the beard too... Do you have a mother?

Man – No.

Woman – Everyone has a mother, don't they?

Man – Mine died last week. From a computer virus.

Woman – A computer virus?

Man – A virus that mutated from an Australian computer to adapt to ostriches, and then spread to humans. Especially those who already had a tendency to bury their heads in the sand.

Woman – I see. So that's why... I could tell something was wrong.

Man – I'm falling apart.

Woman – I'm so sorry. Really. If there's anything I can do for you... But for now, I'm afraid I have to leave you. I need to go and feed my cat. Because if he doesn't get his little minced steak every day... Anyway, have a nice day!

Man – Have a nice day, madam.

9. Alternate History

A man and a woman are sitting side by side. He is casually looking at his phone. She is reading a book with intense concentration. She turns the last page, puts the book aside and sits there thoughtfully for a moment.

Woman – Did you know Christopher Columbus never realised he'd discovered America?

Man – What do you mean...?

Woman – Right up until his death, fourteen years after first setting foot in America, and after four voyages there, he still hadn't realised it was a new continent. He thought he'd simply discovered a new sea route to the Indies...

Man – Oh, right...

Silence.

Woman – It's incredible when you think about it...

Man – Think about what?

Woman – What the world would look like today if Christopher Columbus hadn't discovered America...

Man – What?

Woman – Imagine... The Queen of Spain refuses to finance his risky expedition, just as the kings of Portugal and England had before her.

Man – Right...

Woman – Or maybe he simply gets shipwrecked.

Man – And then...?

Woman – Then he doesn't discover America! And we go on knowing nothing about each other right up to the present day. Native Americans on one side of the Atlantic, Europeans on the other.

Man – Uh... yeah.

Woman – But can you imagine the consequences?

Man – What consequences?

Woman – I don't know... No Coke in the fridge, no American TV shows, no McDonald's around the corner...

Man – Oh, right...

Woman – And on the other side, same thing. Pre-Columbian civilisations continue to flourish. Manhattan Island is covered in pyramids instead of skyscrapers.

Man – Aren't the pyramids in Mexico?

Woman – All right... tipis, then, if you prefer.

Man – But if Columbus hadn't discovered America in 1492, someone else would have discovered it a little later, wouldn't they?

Woman – Much later, perhaps. In the meantime, Native Americans move into the modern age too. They start building ships, and... that's not all...

Man – What?

Woman – They're the ones who cross the Atlantic and discover Europe. They colonise us. They wipe out a large part of the population and force the rest onto reservations...

Man – Oh, right...

Woman – The President of France is Aztec, the prime minister is Inca and the ministers are Maya. The official language of France is Quechua.

Man – You certainly know a lot about this.

Woman – I've just read a book about it... Can you imagine the situation we'd be in?

Man – I'm trying...

A moment of intense thought.

Woman – And the same goes for Africans...

Man – Africans?

Woman – Imagine they'd developed a little faster than we did. No slavery. Or else we're the slaves. They're the ones who come and colonise us. The president is Black. Half the ministers are North African. Same goes for the police. We're the ones living in social housing in the suburbs, and they're the ones stopping us on every street corner and asking to see our papers just because we look pale.

She is becoming rather overexcited. He looks at her with some concern.

Man – Are you sure you're all right...?

She seems to come back to reality and tries to compose herself.

Woman – You're right. I don't know what came over me.

Man – Maybe we should turn the television back on...

Woman – Yes, that would be better.

He gives her a reassuring smile, picks up a remote control, points it towards the auditorium and presses a button.

10. Fantasy

A man and a woman are dozing side by side in what will turn out to be airplane seats. The man gradually wakes up. He stretches, yawns and glances around absent-mindedly, then suddenly looks surprised. He takes a closer look, and his surprise turns to alarm. He looks out of the window, which does nothing to reassure him. He stares at the sleeping passenger beside him, who is snoring. He clearly doesn't know what to do. He gently nudges her with his elbow. She gradually wakes up too. When she opens her eyes, she realises that the man beside her is staring at her, which naturally makes her uncomfortable.

Man – Are you all right?

Woman – Er... yes.

Man – Were you asleep?

Woman – Yes... Well, I was trying to sleep...

Man – So you're awake now. We agree on that.

Woman – Why are you asking me that?

Man – Because I'm wondering if I'm dreaming. Although this would be more of a nightmare. So if you're awake, that means I must be awake too...

Woman – What's wrong?

Man – What's wrong? Look around...

Still half asleep, she looks around.

Woman – What? What's going on?

Man – What's going on? When I fell asleep, this plane was full. There wasn't a single empty seat. I wake up, and now there's nobody here but us...

She looks around again.

Woman – You're right.

Man – I don't understand...

Woman – Maybe we slept longer than we thought... Perhaps we've already reached our destination. We were asleep, so we forgot to get off. And the flight attendants didn't dare wake us.

Man – Yes, that was my first thought too. But take a look out of the window.

She looks.

Woman (*in disbelief*) – No...

Man – We're still flying!

Woman – Do you think the plane could have taken off again for somewhere else without anyone thinking to wake us?

Man – Taken off again? Empty?

Woman – You're right. That doesn't make sense...

Man – Exactly. That's what worries me.

Woman – Still, planes do sometimes fly without passengers. If a plane breaks down, for example, they send another one to pick up the stranded passengers.

Man – This isn't a subway train with two passengers who forgot to get off at the end of the line. It's an airplane. At the very least, they'd clean it before taking off again, wouldn't they? They would have seen us.

Woman – True... This is all very strange... So what do we do?

Man – I'm going to take a look.

Woman – Where?

Man – See if I can find a flight attendant. Ask them what's going on...

He gets up. She is becoming increasingly worried.

Woman – You're going to leave me here alone?

Man – I have to see if there's anyone behind the curtain...

Woman – What curtain?

Man – The curtain separating the passenger cabin from the toilets and the cockpit!

Woman – Oh, right... Fine. I'll wait here...

Man – Yes, I'm not too worried about that... Although...

Woman – What?

Man – More than three hundred passengers have already disappeared.

Woman – Thanks. That's very reassuring...

Man – I'm going.

He walks towards the curtain at the back, lifts it and disappears behind it. She becomes increasingly anxious. She looks around in panic, takes a tablet from her bag and swallows it. Then she takes another. The man returns.

Woman – So? What did she say?

Man – Who?

Woman – The flight attendant.

Man – There's nobody there.

Woman – Nobody? What do you mean, nobody? There has to be a flight attendant.

Man – No flight attendant. No steward either. Nobody.

A stunned silence.

Woman – If the plane is flying empty, maybe they don't need a full crew. Perhaps there are only the pilot and co-pilot on board.

Man – Yes. That's what I thought too...

Woman – And...?

Man – The cockpit door was slightly open. I knocked, and when nobody answered, I went in...

Woman – And...?

Man – Do you really want to know?

Woman – If it's what I think it is, I'm going to find out sooner or later.

Man – There's nobody in the cockpit either.

Another stunned silence.

Woman – You're right. This has to be a nightmare... We're going to wake up and...

Man – I've already pinched myself three times...

Woman – This isn't some kind of joke, is it?

Man – A joke?

Woman – A hidden-camera prank or something...

Man – If it is, the camera is very well hidden. And so is the crew. There aren't many places to hide on an airplane.

Woman – Oh my God... Have we entered the Twilight Zone?

Man – I'd like to reassure you, but unfortunately... I really have no idea what's happening to us. Unless we're dead.

Woman – Sorry?

Man – The plane crashed while we were asleep, and we're already in the afterlife.

Woman – Right... So the best you can do to reassure me is tell me we might already be dead...

Man – I'm just as worried as you are, you know.

Woman – On the other hand... if we're already dead, at least we can't die again.

Man – You think when you die, you end up alone on a pilotless plane with no known destination? And the only thing you know for certain is that you're going to crash when the fuel runs out...

Woman – In that case, it sounds a lot like life, doesn't it?

Man – Besides, we're not completely alone. There are two of us.

Woman – But what could have happened? They can't all have jumped out with parachutes.

Man – And why would they do that?

Woman – Are you absolutely sure there's nobody else?

Man – Go and look if you want, but you don't make three hundred passengers and an entire crew disappear just like that.

Woman – So what do we do?

Man – What do you expect us to do? Do you know how to fly an Airbus?

Woman – I can barely manage my Twingo.

Man – Apart from waiting until we run out of fuel...

Woman – How long do you think we've got?

Man – We've already been flying for quite a while. And this isn't a long-haul flight. I'd say an hour at most.

A heavy silence.

Woman – I'm not quite sure how to say this, but...

Man – Yes?

Woman – No, really... it's a little embarrassing...

Man – Go on. Especially if you're thinking what I'm thinking...

Woman – It makes me want to...

Man – Me too... (*An awkward pause.*) But when you say that... you mean with me, possibly?

Woman – I don't have much choice, do I...? And I've always dreamed of doing it with a stranger in an airplane toilet.

Man – Mind you, the toilet isn't strictly necessary... We're the only people on the plane.

Woman – Yes, but in my dream, it happens in an airplane toilet.

Man – Your dream? You think we're dreaming?

Woman – I don't know about you, but me... I do have this dream quite often.

Man – Well, just in case... now or never, right?

Woman – Shall we?

Man – Let's go.

They both get up.

Woman – You'll see. We're going to wake up...

Man – Why do you say that?

Woman – In my dream, when I get to the toilet door, it's locked... And that's when I wake up.

Man – Let's just hope it's open this time.

Woman – Did you check?

Man – Check what?

Woman – Earlier, when you went to see if anyone was behind the curtain. Did you check the toilet?

Man – No... You think that's where all three hundred passengers and the entire crew might be hiding?

Woman – I don't know what to think anymore... But you have to admit, if the toilet door was locked from the inside... that wouldn't be very reassuring.

Man – Unless it's the pilot...

Woman – Maybe with a flight attendant...

Man – We have no choice. We have to go and see...

They disappear behind the curtain at the back.

Lights.

The same situation as at the beginning. The man wakes up, slightly disoriented but without panicking. The woman wakes up too.

Woman – Are you all right?

Man – Yes.

Woman – I think we fell asleep in front of the television. What were we watching again?

Man – I can't remember... A film. It was set on an airplane.

Woman – I had a strange dream.

Man – So did I.

Woman – It was really frightening and at the same time...

Man – And...?

Woman – Maybe we should go to bed.

Man – Will you tell me about your dream?

Woman – Yes...

They leave.

And Finally

A man and a woman are sitting in what will turn out to be theatre seats. At the director's discretion, the two actors may also be seated among the audience. The woman is dozing. The man gently shakes her awake.

Man – Wake up, the show's over. People are starting to leave. If we don't want to draw attention to ourselves...

The woman gradually comes to.

Woman – I'm really sorry. Did I fall asleep?

Man – I kept nudging you whenever you started snoring, but you were sleeping so deeply... I didn't have the heart to wake you.

Woman – So I missed the whole play?

Man – I'm not sure you missed much. I think I dozed off a few times myself...

Woman – That's strange. I had some very odd dreams.

Man – What kind of dreams?

Woman – I can't really remember... Funny stories... I didn't think you could dream so much in such a short time. How long was the play? An hour?

Man – An hour in real time. But it felt like an eternity...

Woman – My dreams were completely crazy... Inspector Columbo and Einstein arriving in heaven. Two cops investigating Van Gogh's death...

Man – Shame you can't remember them. You could have turned them into a comedy made up of sketches.

Woman – Maybe they'll come back to me...

Man – But for now, we'd better go... People are starting to give us funny looks...

Woman – Anyway, thank you. I had a really good time.

Man – I'm glad you enjoyed it.

Woman – Yes. We should go to the theatre more often...

They get up to leave.

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 websites :

<https://jeanpierremartinez.net/>

<https://comediatheque.net/>

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the French Society of Authors (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the contact form on his websites :

<https://jeanpierremartinez.net/en/contact-2/>

<https://comediatheque.net/contact-form/>

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

Apocalypse, a musical
tragicomedy
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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