

La Comédiathèque

Park Bench Shorts

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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Park Bench Shorts

A sketch comedy

Jean-Pierre Martinez

“On the highest throne in the world, we are still only sitting on our own arse,” said Montaigne. So on a public bench, just imagine...

In a public park, on the same bench, a succession of characters with unusual lives come and sit down. Sometimes their paths cross.

Cast

21 characters, for between 5 and 21 actors.

Highly flexible casting in both number and gender: each actor may play several roles, and almost every role may be played by a man or a woman.

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1. Treasure Hunt

A bench in a public park. A man arrives, followed by a woman carrying a bag. They look a little rough around the edges. The man glances anxiously around him.

Man – Come on, there's nobody here...

Woman – Are you sure this is the place?

Man – I'm telling you, this is it!

Woman – You said that before too, and...

Man – That was the wrong park. It was the right bench, but the wrong park.

The woman looks puzzled for a moment.

Woman – How can it be the right bench if it's the wrong park?

Man – For fuck's sake! Will you stop arguing? Get the shovel out and dig!

The woman opens her bag and takes out a small folding military shovel, which she unfolds, grumbling to herself.

Woman – Why am I always the one who has to dig...? Especially after you made me dig for nothing last time...

Man – That was ten years ago, so obviously...

Woman – You got ten years in prison for robbing a supermarket?

Man – A supermarket? A gambling casino! Not a supermarket...

Woman – Oh, a casino... So how much is down there?

Man – I don't know... I didn't exactly have time to count it... Enough cash to fill a bag, anyway...

Woman – Now that's worth digging for. A casino... Me, I've never had any luck gambling.

Man – If you want to be sure of winning at roulette, turn up with a gun.

Woman – I just hope I picked the right number with you...

The man looks around again. The woman is about to start digging.

Man – Put the shovel away...

Woman – What?

Man – Put it away and sit down! Two cops are coming this way...

Reluctantly, the woman puts the shovel away. They sit on the bench.

Woman – Get the shovel out, put the shovel away... Make up your mind... So what do we do?

Man – Nothing. We sit here and wait.

He puts on a forced smile. The woman looks at him, intrigued.

Woman – Why are you grinning like an idiot?

Man – I'm not grinning! I'm trying to look innocent...

Woman – Innocent?

Man – So the cops don't notice us! You do the same. Act natural.

The woman hesitates, then imitates his artificial smile. They remain frozen like that for a moment.

Woman – I'm getting cramp in my jaw.

Man – Right, they've passed

Woman – They weren't cops. They were park wardens.

Man – How do you know?

Woman – It said so on their caps. Can't you read?

Man – You know I can't. Why are you asking?

Woman – I'm telling you, they were park wardens.

Man – All right, park wardens. What difference does it make?

Woman – None.

Man – We can't start digging a hole in a sandpit with a shovel, with all these people around.

Woman – Isn't that what a sandpit is for?

Man – For kids, yes. If people see us doing it, they'll think it looks suspicious.

Woman – Then why did you bury all that money in a sandpit? Right in the middle of a park!

Man – I had the cops right behind me! I didn't have much time to think. And I didn't have a shovel... Sand was easier to dig with my hands.

Woman – More people coming...

Man – Forget it. We'll come back tonight, when it's dark.

Woman – The park closes at seven. It says so at the entrance. You didn't read the sign.

Man – No, I didn't read the sign...

Woman – Well, tonight it'll be locked.

Man – Even better. At least nobody will bother us.

They start to leave.

Woman – You buried the bag deep enough, didn't you? With all those kids digging around in the sand all day...

Man – Don't worry. I dug a big hole.

Woman – How big?

Man – Big enough to bury a body in...

She gives him a slightly worried look. They walk away.

2. End of the Holidays

Two women arrive and sit on the bench. The first calls out to a child we cannot see, somewhere out in the auditorium.

Woman 1 – Don't run like that, Kevin, you'll fall over again!

Woman 2 – Kids, honestly...

Woman 1 – At that age they need to burn off some energy, of course.

Woman 2 – Especially boys.

Woman 1 – Yes...

Woman 2 – It's like the dog. If you don't take him out at least once a day, he's impossible in the evening.

Woman 1 – My husband's the same.

Woman 2 – Careful you don't get your dress dirty, darling! You've changed three times already today.

Woman 1 – Thank goodness they go back to school tomorrow.

Woman 2 – Don't get me started. I can't take any more.

Woman 1 – We went to the swimming pool yesterday. He nearly drowned.

Woman 2 – Really?

Woman 1 – I was talking to the lifeguard. He fell into the deep end and neither of us noticed.

Woman 2 – He still can't swim?

Woman 1 – Apparently not. And he's been having lessons for six months. That's exactly what I was talking to his swimming instructor about.

Woman 2 – Ah yes, the lifeguard... He's not bad, is he?

Woman 1 – You know him?

Woman 2 – He teaches Clara as well.

Woman 1 – And when you say “not bad”... you mean as a teacher?

Woman 2 – That too, yes...

They laugh.

Woman 1 – Anyway, luckily there was a woman there. She dived to the bottom and pulled him out. He was already completely blue. The lifeguard had to give him mouth-to-mouth.

Woman 2 – Mouth-to-mouth? Really? Almost makes you want to drown...

They laugh again.

Woman 1 – Kevin! For goodness' sake! You can lend her your shovel, can't you?

Woman 2 – And Clara, stop pulling his hair!

Woman 1 – Honestly... He's the spitting image of his father. Sometimes I wonder if I wouldn't rather he had drowned...

Silence.

Woman 1 – Did I really just say that...?

Woman 2 – Don't worry. I get murderous urges too sometimes. Especially towards the end of the school holidays.

Woman 1 – Still, we do love them.

Woman 2 – Of course.

Woman 1 – But we'll still be glad to go back to work on Monday.

Woman 2 – School holidays were invented by employers so their staff would be happy to go back to work afterwards.

Woman 1 – It's clouding over a bit, isn't it?

Woman 2 – Yes... I wonder if it's going to rain.

A pause.

Woman 1 – What would you do if you won the lottery?

Woman 2 – I don't know... I'd have my nose done.

Woman 1 – Your nose? There's nothing wrong with your nose. What don't you like about it?

Woman 2 – It reminds me of my mother's. She's got exactly the same nose.

Woman 1 – So?

Woman 2 – I don't know. I can't stand it...

Woman 1 – Isn't it your mother you can't stand?

Woman 2 – You think?

Woman 1 – You can't stand the sight of her. You can't even bear the smell of her. No wonder you want a different nose.

A pause.

Woman 2 – What about you? What would you do if you found a bag full of five-hundred-euro notes?

Woman 1 – I'd go and get them changed. What am I supposed to do with five-hundred-euro notes? I don't know what to do with a fifty when I get one.

Woman 2 – We've spent our whole lives counting every euro, buying clothes in the sales, comparing prices, saving on everything. I'm not sure we'd even know how to spend without counting.

Woman 1 – Exactly... We dream about winning the lottery, but if someone handed us several million right now, we wouldn't know how to spend it.

Woman 2 – Before you can learn to be rich, you have to unlearn being poor.

Woman 1 – Poverty sticks to you. You don't get rid of it just like that. When your family has been poor generation after generation, for centuries and centuries... No. Money's best left to the rich.

Woman 2 – Holidays are the same. After a while, when you've got too much time on your hands, you don't know what to do with it.

Woman 1 – Idleness and affluence aren't things they teach you at school.

Woman 2 – At school they teach you that idleness is the mother of all vices.

Woman 1 – Yes... That free time is the reward for a lifetime of hard work, and it's reserved for pensioners who are about to die.

Woman 2 – Assuming they don't die of boredom first because they suddenly have no idea what to do with all that free time.

Woman 1 – Exactly... School teaches you to work and count. To know how to do bugger all and throw money out of the window, you have to be born into a billionaire family.

A pause.

Woman 1 – Maybe we should tell them to stop digging. That hole's getting enormous.

Woman 2 – You're right. What are they trying to do, dig a grave?

The other woman seems to listen to what the children are saying.

Woman 1 – What are they saying? They've dug up a bag?

Woman 2 – Don't touch that, children. It's probably disgusting.

Woman 1 – You never know... Could be a body cut into pieces.

They laugh, then exchange a slightly worried look.

Woman 2 – Kids, that's enough now. Fill that hole in straight away and we're going home. It's going to rain anyway.

The two women get up to leave.

Woman 1 – We haven't forgotten anything, have we?

Woman 2 – As long as we don't forget the kids.

They leave.

3. The Author in Question

A man arrives and sits on the bench. After a moment, he closes his eyes. A woman arrives and sits beside him. Sensing her presence, he opens his eyes.

Man – Sorry, I didn't hear you arrive.

The woman smiles. Silence.

Woman – I'm listening...

Man – I thought you were going to ask me a question. At least to begin with.

Woman – Oh, did you?

Man – I thought that was how it worked. You ask me questions.

Woman – Why don't you start by introducing yourself?

Man – Introducing myself? You mean... name, age, occupation... the way the police put it?

Woman – Do you regard this interview as an interrogation? So you do have something to feel guilty about...

Man – You have a point there.

Woman – I'm not here to score points either. This isn't a match. There won't be a loser.

Man – All right.

Woman – How do you present yourself to the world around you? That's the question.

Man – If I have to choose one word, I'd say I'm an author. “Writer” would sound too pretentious. Real writers are the great novelists. A playwright only writes dialogue.

Woman – So Shakespeare and Molière weren't real writers?

Man – The characters in their plays spoke in verse. I write the way people talk... I think you can call them dramatists. But “dramatist” still sounds a little too serious for me.

Woman – Why is that?

Man – Because “dramatist” has “drama” in it. I don't really see myself as a dramatist. I only write comedies. Life is tragic enough already. Why add to it?

Woman – But you are an artist?

Man – I'm not very fond of that word either. It makes an artist sound like someone who isn't an ordinary human being, but some kind of medium in contact with another world, tasked with bringing a few echoes back to the rest of us. I only talk about the world around us. A writer, especially a poet, may be an artist. An author is a craftsman. And a playwright... you could say he's a skilled worker.

Woman – So, in short, you refuse to take yourself seriously... but you would like other people to take you seriously. Isn't that rather contradictory?

Man – We should never take too seriously people who have too high an opinion of themselves. Comedy first and foremost makes fun of people who take themselves seriously.

Woman – You're about to publish your hundredth play. That's a lot...

Man – Far too many, some people will say.

Woman – Why this compulsive need to write?

Man – I've always wanted to tell stories. Probably because nobody ever told me any when I was a child. I think all these stories I invent are stories I tell myself before anyone else.

Woman – And yet you started writing quite late in life...

Man – Cervantes began writing around the age of forty.

Woman – Cervantes... So, despite everything, your model is a novelist.

Man – Don Quixote is first and foremost a comic character. Precisely because he takes himself too seriously. And because he mistakes his dreams for reality.

Woman – Mistaking dreams for reality is madness. Trying to make your dreams come true is perfectly reasonable.

Man – Turning dreams into reality is what religion and theatre both do. And in church as in the theatre, that reality depends on an act of faith by the audience. Perhaps the Church persecuted actors so zealously because it regarded theatre as a dangerous rival.

Woman – And if reality itself were only an illusion, you and I would merely be fictional creatures invented by the great director of the universe.

Man – Which brings us back to Shakespeare: all the world's a stage.

Woman – And we are merely passing through...

She stands and holds out her hand. He takes it and stands too. They leave.

4. The Sheep

A man arrives and sits on the bench. He takes a ball of wool and some knitting needles out of his bag and begins to knit. A woman approaches with a campaign smile on her face and a bundle of leaflets in her hand.

Woman – Good morning, sir. May I disturb you for a second?

Man – Er... yes.

Woman – What are you knitting? It's lovely. A scarf for your grandmother... or your granddaughter?

Man – A rope to hang myself with.

Woman – Oh. Right. Well... wool is good for winter, I suppose.

Man – I used to work in a spinning mill, but the factory closed two years ago. I've been unemployed ever since. My wife left me, I had to sell the house, and...

Woman – Well, I haven't got all day, but... do you think it'll be strong enough?

Man – It's pure new wool. Very strong, though it does itch a bit around the neck. Would you like to try it?

Woman – Perhaps another time... Let me introduce myself – in every sense of the word. My name is Marlene Cox.

Man – Cox, with an X?

Woman – Sorry?

Man – Cox, C-O-X? Not... cocks? Only because...

Woman – Oh! Yes. Er... with an X.

Man – Right. So you're standing for election.

Woman – Exactly! Are you familiar with our programme?

Man – No, but... I saw your name on a wall.

Woman – You've seen our posters. Good. Then you know our slogan too!

Man – Actually, it was more of a graffiti. It said: “Marlene Cox: up yours for five years.” I didn't think it was very tasteful, but there you are.

Woman – Oh no! That's a disgusting fake. Our slogan is: “Marlene: yours for five years.”

Man – Right... They'd just added “up”.

Woman – Unfortunately, there are still people who hate us... and do you know why?

Man – Because you're neo-Nazis?

Woman – Because we defend workers like you.

Man – I was the manager of that mill.

Woman – We defend managers too.

Man – Actually, I owned it. I inherited the factory from my father, who inherited it from my grandfather.

Woman – Don't worry. We also defend employers and people who live off their investments.

Man – Can you really defend workers against employers and employers against workers at the same time?

Woman – You can if you reject the pernicious concept of class struggle, which was invented by the left to divide the French people. We have only one enemy: the foreigner. The foreigner from abroad, and the foreigner within.

Man – My grandfather was Lebanese, and our factory mainly employed North African workers.

Woman – What about the sheep?

Man – Sorry?

Woman – You spun wool, didn't you?

Man – The wool came from Kashmir.

Woman – When it comes to industry, what matters to us is where things are made. As long as they're made in France...

Man – Well, now they're made in China...

She slips a leaflet into his hand.

Woman – Anyway, I'll leave you our programme.

He glances at the leaflet.

Man – “Marlene, yours for five years...”

Woman – At least, unlike the other candidates, I don't make promises I can't keep. Can I count on you on Sunday?

Man – If I haven't hanged myself by then.

Woman – Not on the Lord's Day, surely... At least wait until Monday!

She walks away. He looks at the programme again, doubtfully, then gets up and leaves as well.

5. Coffee Break

Two plain-clothes police officers arrive and sit on the bench to drink coffee from paper cups.

Police Officer 1 – What are you working on at the moment?

Police Officer 2 – The usual. A mother who let her kid drown at the swimming pool.

Police Officer 1 – Manslaughter?

Police Officer 2 – More like a Freudian slip.

Police Officer 1 – Where was the lifeguard?

Police Officer 2 – In the changing rooms, with the mother, as it happens. He was teaching her how to give mouth-to-mouth.

A pause.

Police Officer 2 – What about you?

Police Officer 1 – A bloke who got ten years for robbing a casino. The money was never found.

Police Officer 2 – Everything's got so expensive. Soon, when people rob a supermarket, they won't bother taking the till. They'll leave with packets of pasta and bottles of cooking oil.

Police Officer 1 – He must have hidden the money somewhere.

Police Officer 2 – So?

Police Officer 1 – He's just been released. We're keeping an eye on him in case he decides to go and get his money back.

Police Officer 2 – How much?

Police Officer 1 – About five million.

Police Officer 2 – Jackpot.

Police Officer 1 – He must have thought it was safer to rob a casino than wait to win the lottery

Silence.

Police Officer 2 – Why did you choose this job?

Police Officer 1 – For the money... No, I'm joking. I don't know. When I was a kid, we used to play cops and robbers. Like an idiot, I thought wearing a uniform would help me with women.

Police Officer 2 – Bad luck. You're a plain-clothes cop.

Police Officer 1 – That must be why I'm still single. What about you?

Police Officer 2 – I'm still married. For the moment...

Police Officer 1 – No, I mean why did you join the police?

Police Officer 2 – To save the world. I was fascinated by superheroes when I was a kid. Since I didn't have any superpowers, I joined the police. At least I'd have a gun. And it turns out you're not even allowed to use it. Not even to kill yourself.

Police Officer 1 – We should have been lifeguards. You don't get many chances to save lives, but at least you can spend all day looking at women in swimsuits.

Police Officer 2 – We didn't have the build for it.

Police Officer 1 – Probably why we ended up in the police. Speaking of which, we'd better get back to work.

Police Officer 2 – Is your casino robber around here?

Police Officer 1 – The park wardens spotted him this morning with an accomplice. They were playing in that sandpit with a shovel.

Police Officer 2 – At least they've kept their inner child alive. Maybe we should have been robbers instead of cops.

A woman arrives carrying a bundle of flyers.

Woman – Good morning, gentlemen. Do you like theatre?

Police Officer 2 – We're more into crime shows, really, but...

Woman – It's a little comedy on at a theatre just round the corner, every day except Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Police Officer 1 – So every Sunday.

Woman – At precisely 6:37 p.m. You're in luck, it starts in fifteen minutes.

She hands them a flyer each. They take them and glance at them.

Police Officer 1 (*reading the flyer*) – *Bad Play Seeks Good Audience*. Is that the title?

Woman – It's avant-garde theatre. You know, a play within a play, that sort of thing.

Police Officer 2 – What's it about?

Woman – It's about a playwright who is about to write his hundredth play and is completely paralysed by writer's block.

Police Officer 1 – Sounds bloody boring, doesn't it?

Woman – Look, I just hand out the flyers.

Police Officer 2 – You're not in it?

Woman – No.

Police Officer 1 – But you've seen the play, haven't you?

Woman – The author hasn't written it yet. At least, that's what I understood.

Police Officer 2 – So you're handing out flyers for a play that hasn't been written yet.

Woman – He's still got fifteen minutes...

Police Officer 1 – Fifteen minutes? For the author to write the play, the actors to learn the lines, and the director to give them at least some direction?

Woman – Then again, he isn't setting the bar very high... *Bad Play Seeks Good Audience*. I almost feel like I'm begging.

Police Officer 2 – Are you getting paid?

Woman – Not even that. They've just invited me to the opening night.

Police Officer 1 – Tonight, then.

Woman – Will you come?

Police Officer 2 – Why not?

Woman – Tell them I sent you. They'll give you two tickets for the price of one.

The woman walks away.

Police Officer 1 – You're not seriously going, are you?

Police Officer 2 – No, but she looked so desperate.

Police Officer 1 – Right. Back to work, then.

They get up and leave.

6. The Blues

Two pensioners arrive at a leisurely pace and sit on the bench. For a moment they stare straight ahead in silence.

Pensioner 1 – You all right?

Pensioner 2 – No. I'm not all right.

Pensioner 1 – Yes, I can see that. You don't look all right. What's wrong?

Pensioner 2 – The whole world is falling apart around us and you ask me what's wrong?

Pensioner 1 – Oh, right... the world. You frightened me. I thought there was something wrong.

Pensioner 2 – No, no, don't worry, everything's fine. Here we are, sitting comfortably on our bench like first-class passengers on the Titanic. We'd rather not know what's happening down in the hold. And we just sit here waiting calmly to hit an iceberg and sink into the abyss.

Pensioner 1 – You didn't sleep well, did you?

Pensioner 2 – Don't you understand? We live on a tiny island of wealth surrounded by an ocean of misery.

Pensioner 1 – You're in a very nautical mood this morning...

Pensioner 2 – Yeah.

Pensioner 1 – Are you voting on Sunday?

Pensioner 2 – Honestly, I don't know if there's any point any more.

Pensioner 1 – Left or right?

Pensioner 2 – Left, right... I'm not even sure what those words mean any more. They all end up following the same policies anyway.

Pensioner 1 – Nobody's going to raise our pensions, that's for sure. Still, social issues matter.

Pensioner 2 – Don't get me started on social issues... I was a maths teacher. My father was a primary-school teacher. My grandfather was a Spanish Republican. The left I knew was anti-clerical. Secularism, sexual liberation, feminism, the pill, abortion... that was what the left stood for.

Pensioner 1 – OK...

Pensioner 2 – The left I knew was fiercely anti-clerical, because Catholicism was the bosses' religion. Today's left bends over backwards to accommodate religious fundamentalism on the pretext that this time it's the religion of the oppressed. Sorry, but I'm still a Marxist: religion is the opium of the people. End of story.

Pensioner 1 – Take it easy. You'll give yourself a heart attack.

Pensioner 2 – You're right, when you think about it. Why should we care about any of this? In a few years, abortion will be banned again throughout Europe, as it already is in the United States, men and women won't be allowed to use the same swimming pool, state schools will have disappeared in favour of religious schools. But we'll be dead...

Pensioner 1 – Got the blues?

Pensioner 2 – Yes. I've got the blues.

Pensioner 1 – Come on, then. Let's have a little game of boules. That'll cheer you up.

They get up and walk away.

7. A Bone of Contention

A man and a woman arrive. They look at the bench.

Woman – So this is the one?

Man – Yes, Mr Mayor. I mean Madam Mayor.

Woman – So in your opinion, the simplest thing would be to remove it?

Man – It's become the meeting place for all the junkies in the neighbourhood.

Woman – But the park is closed at night, isn't it?

Man – All you have to do is climb over the fence. Every morning we find syringes all over the place. We've even found them in the sandpit. A child could easily prick themselves on one. Mothers have complained to the council, and may I remind you that every mother is also a voter.

Woman – On the other hand, this is the bench those same mothers sit on while they watch their children playing in the sand with used syringes.

Man – Yes.

Woman – So if we take the bench away, where are they supposed to park their backsides?

Man – That's true too.

Woman – That's what you call a dilemma.

Man – Yes.

Silence.

Woman – Do you know how to spell “dilemma”?

Man – No.

Woman – Neither do I. I'll have to look it up when I get home. It's a word I use a lot these days. Just in case I ever have to write it...

Man – Yes.

Woman – Right, what do we do? Leave the bench, the junkies carry on using it to shoot up, and the mothers carry on worrying that their kids might catch HIV. Or we remove the bench and nobody can sit down.

Silence.

Man – Or we could put in a second bench.

Woman – A second bench?

Man – For the junkies.

The woman looks at the bench, then at the man.

Woman – That's not a bad idea.

Man – Thank you.

Woman – But what makes us think everyone will use the bench meant for them?

Man – We put up a sign.

Woman – A sign? Something like... “Bench reserved for junkies”? We'd have invented an open-air drug consumption site. I'm not sure all our constituents would approve.

Man – Then we do it the other way round. On this one we put: “Bench reserved for parents accompanied by their children.”

The woman thinks.

Woman – Mr Deputy Mayor, you're a genius.

Man – Thank you, Madam Mayor.

They both sit on the bench.

Woman – It really would have been a shame to remove this bench.

She takes a joint out of her pocket.

Woman – Fancy a joint?

Man – Go on, then...

She lights the joint, takes a couple of drags and passes it to him.

Woman – Now we just have to hope the junkies don't get the idea of coming here to shoot up with their kids.

He looks at her, perplexed. They get up and leave.

8. A Romantic Date

A man arrives. He hesitates, looks around, checks his watch and eventually sits down. A woman arrives.

Woman – Hello. Are you...?

He stands up.

Man – Yes. Sorry, I'm a little early.

Woman – So am I.

Man – Please, have a seat.

They both sit. An awkward silence.

Woman – A date in a park, on a public bench... That's original.

Man – Yes. It's... It's because of the song...

Woman – The song...?

Man – A song by Brassens. You know, the famous French singer... The one about lovers kissing on public benches.

Woman – Oh yes... Well, we're not quite there yet.

Man – No, of course... Sorry...

Woman – No, it's very romantic. And anyway... you've got a very friendly face.

Man – Thank you.

Silence.

Woman – It's strange. We don't know each other and... I don't even feel the need to ask you any questions.

Man – Neither do I.

Woman – I feel as if I already know everything I need to know about you.

Man – So do I. It's strange.

A pause.

Woman – Can you imagine? A man and a woman meet. They don't ask each other anything about their past. And they spend the rest of their lives together as though their lives had begun that day.

Man – Without either of them knowing where the other came from or what they'd done before.

Woman – Do you think that's possible?

Man – When you live with someone, don't you always end up finding out everything about them?

Woman – Then they shouldn't live together.

Man – Not live together?

Woman – Let's say they meet every Thursday at the same time, on the same bench. They spend a while together, then they go their separate ways.

Man – Without either of them telling the other anything about their private life?

Woman – Nothing.

Man – But they're in love?

Woman – Oh yes. Of course.

Man – But on a bench...

Woman – If they want to fool around, there are always the bushes nearby.

Man – Yes, that's... very romantic.

Woman – It could be the plot of a novel, couldn't it?

Man – True. It does sound like something out of a novel.

Woman – But...?

Man – A man and a woman who know nothing about each other, meeting secretly in a park once a week to have sex in the bushes...

Woman – You're right. It sounds more like a prostitute meeting one of her regulars...

Man – Yes...

Silence.

Woman – I noticed a little hotel not far from here on my way over...

The man leaps to his feet.

Man – Let's go.

She gets up too. They leave.

9. No Fixed Abode

A homeless woman arrives and settles down on the bench. A homeless man arrives.

Homeless Man – Hey! That's my bench!

Homeless Woman – Your bench?

Homeless Man – That's right.

Homeless Woman – It's a public bench. How can it be yours?

Homeless Man – You're new, aren't you?

Homeless Woman – Why?

Homeless Man – You don't know the rules.

Homeless Woman – What rules?

Homeless Man – The rules. The law of the street.

Homeless Woman – Who made up these rules? You?

Homeless Man – No.

Homeless Woman – So why should this bench belong to you?

Homeless Man – Well... because I've been sleeping on it for a week.

Homeless Woman – There are loads of benches in this park. And the park is closed at night. Find another one.

Homeless Man – Yeah, but I'm used to this one.

Homeless Woman – You're a real homebody for a homeless man.

Homeless Man – A homebody? Me?

Homeless Woman – You don't know what that means, do you?

Homeless Man – No.

Homeless Woman – Go on, sit down. I'll find another bench if you're that attached to this one.

The homeless man hesitates for a moment, then sits down.

Homeless Man – You'll see. When you don't have a home any more, habits are all you've got left.

Homeless Woman – I hope I don't get used to sleeping outside.

Homeless Man – We all say that. At first... How long have you been on the streets?

Homeless Woman – I don't know... a month. What about you?

Homeless Man – I've lost count. Fifteen years. Twenty. The street is like prison, except you're locked up outside.

Homeless Woman – I've just come out of prison. Believe me, I'd rather be outside. Have you ever been inside?

Homeless Man – No.

Homeless Woman – That doesn't surprise me. You've got a kind face.

Homeless Man – Sometimes I wish I looked mean. You get more respect on the streets that way.

A pause.

Homeless Man – Wasn't there anyone waiting for you when you came out of prison?

Homeless Woman – I already had problems with my family before. Once you've been in prison, people treat you like a leper. People would rather stay away from you. And prison isn't even contagious.

Homeless Man – What did you do to end up inside?

Homeless Woman – My boss kept coming on to me. I cut his carotid artery with a utility knife.

Homeless Man – With that on your CV, finding another job isn't going to be easy.

Homeless Woman – I'm heading south for the grape harvest. Luckily, there's a shortage of farm workers, so they're not too fussy. At least I'll have somewhere to sleep.

Homeless Man – For as long as the harvest lasts, anyway.

Homeless Woman – Why don't you come with me?

Homeless Man – I'm not used to working any more. If you're going to work in the morning, you need to have slept in a bed.

Homeless Woman – They'll give you a bed there.

Homeless Man – I'm not sure I still know how to sleep in a bed. Be careful. For now, the street is still yours. When you've forgotten how to sleep in a bed, that's when you're really on the street.

Homeless Woman – I'll leave you your bench.

Homeless Man – Thanks.

She walks away. He watches her go, seems to hesitate, then gets up too.

Homeless Man – Wait...!

He leaves.

10. People

A very smartly dressed man wearing a top hat arrives, followed by another man in a chauffeur's uniform and cap.

Chauffeur – Sir needn't worry. The breakdown service will come for the Rolls, and another car is on its way to take us back to the château.

Billionaire – Thank you, my good man.

The chauffeur wipes the bench with a handkerchief.

Chauffeur – If sir would care to sit.

The billionaire sits and looks around him.

Billionaire – All this is very picturesque... But where exactly are we?

Chauffeur – To be precise... we're at the corner of...

Billionaire – No, I mean what is this place?

Chauffeur – It's a park, sir.

Billionaire – A park?

Chauffeur – A public garden.

Billionaire – Really?

Chauffeur – I thought it would be better to wait for the car here than in the street or in a café. It's a very working-class neighbourhood, you know. People like them aren't used to seeing people like you.

Billionaire – People like me...?

Chauffeur – People in your position.

Billionaire – We could have remained incognito. They have no reason to know I'm a baron and have the fifth-largest fortune in Europe.

Chauffeur – Believe me, sir, you wouldn't have gone unnoticed.

The billionaire looks around again.

Billionaire – A public garden...

Chauffeur – Like the gardens at your château, sir, only open to everyone.

Billionaire – But I can't see a château...

Chauffeur – The château is... the town hall.

Billionaire – I see.

Chauffeur – People come here with their children to get a little fresh air.

Billionaire – Ah yes... people...

Chauffeur – When they're not working, obviously.

Billionaire – Of course. It's quite clean, actually. And... the people themselves look after it, I suppose? I believe that's what they call an allotment.

Chauffeur – Er... no, sir. Allotments are for growing vegetables. This is a public garden. It's maintained by the council gardeners.

Billionaire – I see. And people come here to rest.

Chauffeur – Exactly. To replenish their labour power, as Marx puts it.

Billionaire – I beg your pardon?

Chauffeur – Karl Marx, sir. For Marx, labour is a commodity. Its value is equivalent to the value of all the material and non-material goods required to reproduce it. That means not only housing and food, but also a few essential forms of entertainment to prevent the proletariat from falling into depression and being tempted by suicide.

Billionaire – I see... Bread and circuses, as Julius Caesar used to say...

Chauffeur – Yes, if sir prefers to put it that way. But if I may say so, the phenomenon of class struggle, which inevitably leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat, is analysed far more thoroughly in *Capital*.

Billionaire – You've read *Capital*?

Chauffeur – Haven't you, sir?

Billionaire – Good heavens, no, I confess I haven't...

Chauffeur – I always keep a copy in the Rolls. I spend a great deal of time waiting for sir, so I use the opportunity to educate myself. It's my bedside reading, as they say. For some people it's the Bible; for me it's *Capital*.

Billionaire – But tell me, my good man... You've read *Capital*, fine... but you're not actually a Marxist, are you?

Chauffeur – Yes, sir.

Billionaire – Karim, you mean you're a Marxist as well as a Muslim?

Chauffeur – Yes, sir.

The billionaire looks at him, perplexed.

Billionaire – Never mind. I'll keep you anyway.

Chauffeur – Thank you, sir...

The billionaire's mobile phone rings. He answers.

Billionaire – Ah, my dear, it's you. The most extraordinary thing has happened to us. A hose burst on the Rolls in the middle of a working-class housing estate and we had to take refuge in a public park... A public park, my dear. A public garden, if you prefer.

More quietly.

Billionaire – But tell me, my dear, did you know our chauffeur was a Marxist? No, no, of course it doesn't bother me, but... you could have told me. Right, we'll discuss it later, all right?

The chauffeur's mobile phone rings too. He answers.

Chauffeur – OK, thank you...

To the billionaire.

Chauffeur – Your car is waiting, sir.

They get up to leave.

Billionaire – Very well, then, let's go... But this little adventure has turned out to be rather amusing, hasn't it?

Chauffeur – Yes. Actually, it reminds me of a film...

Billionaire – A film? What film?

Chauffeur – A French film, sir. With...

Billionaire – Don't tell me that, as well as being Muslim and a communist, you're also a film buff?

They leave.

11. The Chips

The two crooks from the first scene return.

Man – This time everyone's gone.

Woman – The park is closed and it's dark. We shouldn't be here.

Man – What, you getting nervous?

Woman – What we're doing isn't exactly legal.

Man – Which bit isn't legal? Climbing over the park fence or digging up a bag of money stolen from a casino?

Woman – Fine, if you say it's here.

Man – I'm telling you, it's here. Go on, dig...

The woman takes the shovel out of her bag.

Woman – OK.

Blackout. Lights up.

They stare at a bag sitting on the bench.

Man – Told you it was here.

Woman – You were right.

Man – Go on, open it.

Woman – Here?

Man – We can at least have a look.

The woman opens the bag eagerly. She looks surprised by what she sees. She takes out a handful of casino chips.

Woman – What the hell are these?

Man – That's what I grabbed at the casino.

Woman – Chips?

Man – Yes, chips. There's a fortune in there, you know.

Woman – Chips? You stole chips?

Man – We can still take them to the cashier and cash them in.

Woman – Yeah... You could also steal someone's shopping trolley in a supermarket before they've paid for any of it.

Man – The croupier had set off the alarm. It was all I had time to grab. I could already hear the police sirens.

The woman stares at the bag in disbelief, then looks up at the man.

Woman – Right... I really hit the jackpot with you.

Man – I thought we could cash them in...

A pause.

Woman – There's still something I don't understand.

Man – What?

Woman – If you only stole chips, why did you get ten years in prison?

Man – I don't know... In the papers, the casino owner said several million had been stolen.

Woman – I see... He must have claimed all the cash in the till had been stolen too, then got the insurance company to pay out.

Man – Some people are so dishonest, I swear.

Woman – Yeah...

Man – So what do we do?

Woman – The casino owner doubled his money on the whole thing. If you take his chips back, maybe he'll agree to buy them back from you for half their value in exchange for your silence.

Man – Think so?

Woman – Worth a try.

They leave.

The two police officers return and stop for a moment in front of the bench.

Police Officer 1 – I didn't understand a thing. Did you?

Police Officer 2 – Avant-garde theatre, you know.

Police Officer 1 – Then again, we only paid for one ticket.

The woman who handed them the flyers earlier arrives.

Woman – So, did you enjoy it?

Police Officer 2 – Yes, it wasn't bad...

Police Officer 1 – So that was his hundredth play?

Woman – Apparently.

Police Officer 2 – You'd think for his hundredth he might have made a bit more effort.

Woman – Yeah...

Police Officer 1 – Fancy coming for a drink with us? It's on us...

Woman – Why not?

Police Officer 2 – Let's go.

Police Officer 1 – So apart from theatre, what do you do for a living?

They leave.

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 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](#).

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
Horizons
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
Requiem for a Stradivarius
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
Such a Lovely Village
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
Backstage Bits
Don't panic !
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
For real and for fun
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lost time Chronicles
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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Avignon – September 2026
© La Comédiathèque – ISBN 978-2-38602-414-6
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