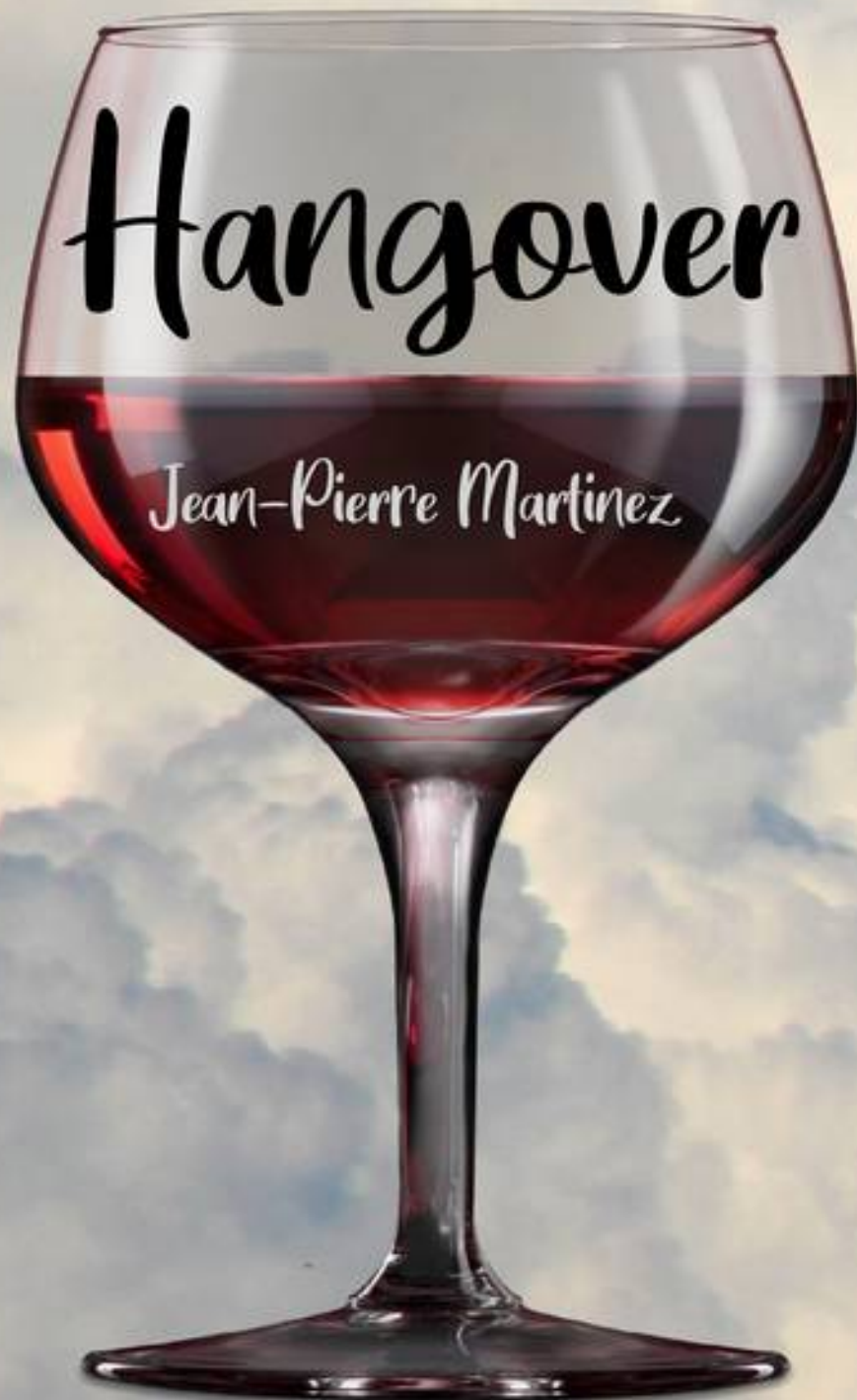


La Comédiathèque



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Hangover

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Tom and Lisa have invited David and Emma, a couple they met at a restaurant, over for drinks. They seemed to get on brilliantly after a few drinks that evening. But now that everyone has sobered up, they realise how little they have in common. It looks like being a very long evening. Unless...

Characters

Tom

Lisa

David

Emma

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A rather rough-looking couple in the cramped living room of a gloomy apartment. A grubby sofa and a coffee table covered in dirty dishes.

Tom – They're not coming.

Lisa appears to be listening.

Lisa – I never noticed you could hear the metro from here. Have you?

Tom – I'm telling you, they're not coming!

Lisa – Maybe it used to be quieter... Back when the trains were newer...

Tom – Did you at least give them our address?

Lisa – Or maybe my ears are getting sharper with age... Usually, it's the other way around...

Tom (*louder*) – Did you give them the address?

Lisa – Oh, come on, no need to yell, I'm not deaf, you know!

Tom – The metro...

Lisa – Yes, I did give them our address. On the tablecloth...

Tom – On the tablecloth?

Lisa – A piece of the paper tablecloth! We're watching our money too, you know. You think we can afford restaurants with proper cloth tablecloths?

Tom – Or maybe they lost it. Left that scrap of paper in a pocket and put it through the washing machine. Happens all the time.

Lisa – Does it? And how would you know? Since when do you use the washing machine?

Tom – A scrap of tablecloth can easily get lost.

Lisa listens again.

Lisa – There's another metro... Maybe they're on it...

Tom – We should get business cards...

Lisa – Business cards?

Tom – You can order a hundred business cards online for next to nothing.

Lisa – And what the hell would we do with a hundred business cards?

Tom – It's still better than a scrap of paper tablecloth...

Lisa – And who would you even give those hundred business cards to?

Tom – I don't know... To the people we meet...

Lisa – To the people we meet? We never meet anyone!

Tom – Well, we met these two, didn't we?

Lisa – At the rate we meet people, one business card every ten years would do us.

Tom – Yeah, I get it, but you can't order business cards one by one. It's at least a hundred.

Lisa – Well... You said it yourself, they're not coming...

Tom – If we'd handed them a business card instead of a greasy bit of paper tablecloth, maybe they'd have come...

Lisa – They'd have come? Just because we gave them a business card?

Tom – Because that damn bit of paper wouldn't have gone through the wash! A business card's made of cardboard. It's harder to lose, and even if it goes into the machine you might still be able to read it afterwards.

Lisa – Brilliant. Let's order waterproof business cards. Machine washable. See if you can find those online.

Tom – Well, they're not coming anyway...

Lisa – It's only nine o'clock.

Tom – We said half past eight.

Lisa – He said "between half past eight and nine". I remember because you asked him, "Half past eight or nine?"

Tom – And what did he answer?

Lisa – I think he thought you were joking.

Tom – Well, it's nine now. We're past the end of his little time slot, and they're still not here.

Lisa – His little time slot... Good job you didn't invite them for dinner.

Tom – Oh, so I invited them now, did I?

Lisa – Didn't you?

Tom – I said it'd be nice to meet up for a drink one evening. I didn't say which evening! You went and fixed a date.

Lisa – So you didn't want them to show up?

Tom – Well, yes, but . . .

Lisa – So why invite them for a drink? If you invite people, you have to set a date. Otherwise you look stupid.

Tom – I was just being polite.

Lisa – Polite? Tommy, now you're worrying me. Are you feeling all right?

Tom – We'd had a few laughs together... I didn't think they'd actually come.

Lisa – Well, they haven't, have they? And between you and me, they're not our sort of people. I don't know why you asked them here.

Tom – Oh really? And what sort of people are we?

Lisa – The sort that don't need business cards because there's nothing to put on them. What would you put on yours?

Tom – They could at least have rung to cancel. That's what people do, isn't it? Unless they lost our number as well. You did give them our number?

Lisa – Yes, Tom. I wrote it on the same paper tablecloth. The one they washed with their dirty laundry, remember?

The doorbell rings.

Lisa – Maybe their washing machine broke down.

Tom remains frozen.

Tom – Oh, shit. That'll be them.

Lisa – That's the risk you take when you invite people. If you don't want them to turn up, don't invite them.

Tom – Well, go and see! It could be a mistake.

Lisa gives Tom a fuming look and goes to open the door.

Lisa – Hello David!

David (*offstage*) – Good evening, Lisa! You sound surprised to see us!

Emma (*offstage*) – Didn't we say Thursday, around nine?

Lisa (*offstage*) – Yes, between half past eight and nine. But it's two minutes past nine, and Tom thought you weren't coming.

David (*offstage*) – Ha, ha! That's a good one!

Lisa (*offstage*) – Come in! Tom! It's not a mistake. It's David, with his wife!

David and Emma enter, noticeably better dressed than their hosts. They shake hands.

Tom – Hello! Hello, Emma. It is Emma, isn't it?

David – Yes, it is. She may look a little different from last week, but I assure you she's still Emma, my wife.

Tom – No, I mean... Emma's your name, right?

Emma – Of course it is. My husband's only teasing.

David (*patting his wife on the shoulder*) – Well done, Emma.

Emma – I've just been to the hairdresser.

Lisa – Oh yes, I can see that. It looks much better. Doesn't it, Tom?

Tom – What?

Lisa prefers to go on talking.

Lisa – Nothing fancy, I'm afraid. We haven't prepared anything special.

Emma – But we only arranged to come for a drink. A drink is all we need.

David – And we brought a bottle of sparkling wine.

Tom – Great! We've got lager. We can make a Royal Lager!

Lisa – A Lager Royale, Tom. If you're going to be fancy, at least say it properly.

Tom – It's still beer mixed with champagne, whichever way round you say it, isn't it?

Emma – My husband is being modest. It isn't sparkling wine. It's champagne.

David – We buy it from a small independent producer.

Emma – If you like it, we'll give you the address.

Lisa – Champagne! Tom, you can't put your cheap lager into vintage champagne.

Tom – It isn't cheap! I got it on special offer!

Lisa – Honestly, we ask you here for a drink and you bring the drink yourselves. Please, sit down. Tom, go and get the crackers and peanuts.

Tom – Have we got crackers and peanuts?

Lisa – Of course we have! I have to hide them or he eats the lot watching football on television. Then there's nothing left for visitors. Come on, Tommy, get moving!

Tom – How am I supposed to know where they are? You're the one who hid them!

Lisa – Men! Can't ask them to do a thing. I'll get them. Excuse me. Make yourselves at home.

Lisa exits.

Tom – Hope they're not too far past the date. We never have visitors.

David – Ha, ha! You really are a character, Tom! There's never a dull moment with you. Is there, Emma?

Tom, who was not joking, looks rather surprised. An awkward silence. The guests glance around the shabby room.

Emma – You've made yourselves quite comfortable here.

Tom – It's all right. Small, but at least... not too big for the two of us.

Emma – Exactly...

David – Do you have children, Tom?

Tom – No... We could have, but... No, it didn't happen...

Emma – Perhaps it isn't too late.

Tom – Oh, no, not now. Besides, there's no room. Where would we put them?

David – Yes, of course...

Lisa comes back with a tray of crackers and peanuts.

Lisa – Here we are, a few things to nibble. What, you haven't opened the champagne?

Tom – Where's the lager?

Lisa – Tom! Not mixed with real champagne!

Emma – Oh, let him. If he likes it, I'll try a little too, to keep him company.

Tom – See? Emma wants some too. I'll go and fetch it.

Tom gets up and exits.

David – It isn't exactly an exceptional vintage, after all.

Lisa – These days you can buy champagne at the supermarket for the price of a case of beer. Isn't that something?

David – Let's hope this one tastes nothing like beer.

Lisa – I wasn't talking about yours, of course. Yours comes from that little producer.

David – And where do you think the supermarket gets its champagne? A rather bigger producer, I imagine. I'm joking, of course.

Tom (offstage) – Lisa! Where's the lager?

Lisa (sighing) – Honestly, that man... Excuse me, I'll be right back.

Lisa goes out. Emma's polite smile immediately disappears.

Emma – David, what on earth are we doing here?

David – Don't exaggerate. They're a little... unconventional, perhaps, but perfectly nice.

Emma – Unconventional? They're a walking social disaster!

David – Darling, we can't spend all our time with people exactly like ourselves. Our colleagues, for instance... or your mother.

Emma – What's that supposed to mean about my mother?

David – Nothing. We should be open-minded. You're always telling the children to respect people who are different.

Emma – David, I'm talking about people with disabilities!

David – Well, at least with working-class people we're allowed to laugh at them. Come on, relax. Tomorrow we'll remember only the funny side of this unforgettable evening.

Emma – Tomorrow? Assuming we haven't contracted something fatal by then. Just look at this place! I was afraid I'd stick to that greasy sofa. And the dirty dishes everywhere... There's something growing on that plate!

David – Good heavens. So there is.

Emma – Suppose they insist we stay for dinner?

David – Yes, that could be rather awkward.

Emma – Awkward? It would be a damn nightmare!

David – Emma! What's got into you? You never speak like that.

Emma – I don't know. Perhaps I'm already catching it.

David – We should have checked our vaccinations before coming.

Emma – I told you this invitation was a terrible idea!

David – Well, it's a little late to worry about that now.

Emma – Listen to me, David. I'm speaking as a psychologist. There's something not quite right about that man.

David – What makes you say that?

Emma – His handshake was limp.

David – Limp? Do you mean clammy?

Emma – Limp. I felt it when we shook hands.

David – Ah. Thank goodness you studied psychology. I would never have noticed.

Emma – And spare me the speech about how tolerant you are of working-class people. I know why you really came. You want to borrow his electric jigsaw.

David – His jigsaw?

Emma – To finish those bathroom shelves! You said it yourself when we left the restaurant. "That man looks like someone who owns an electric jigsaw." Your exact words.

David – Let's calm down. We'll stay a little longer, just to be polite, then leave.

Emma – Or we could slip out while they're in the kitchen.

David – Emma, we can't simply disappear. It would be terribly rude.

Emma – They don't have our address.

David – Good point. Let's go.

They rise to leave, but Tom returns with a few cans of lager, followed by Lisa.

Tom – Found the lager!

Lisa hands David the bottle of champagne.

Lisa – Here you go. Do the honours.

David takes the bottle.

Lisa – Tom, fetch the champagne glasses!

Tom – Champagne glasses? I don't know where they are. I didn't even know we had any. I don't know what they look like!

Lisa sighs and goes out. David prepares to uncork the bottle, then hesitates.

David – Perhaps I should wait. I wouldn't want to spill this precious nectar on the carpet.

Emma – It may have been shaken about on the metro.

Tom – I'll sort out the lager.

Lisa returns with four champagne glasses and sets them on the coffee table.

Lisa – Here are the champagne glasses...

Tom – Who wants a Lager Royale?

Emma – I'll join you...

Tom pours a little lager into two champagne glasses. David uncorks the bottle.

David – There we go!

David tops up the glasses with champagne.

Lisa – Look at all those bubbles...

David – Quite.

Tom – That's how you know it's proper champagne.

Lisa – Have some crackers.

They help themselves.

Emma – Thanks...

David – Well, here's to you both.

Tom – Cheers!

They clink glasses and take a sip.

Emma – It might have been better a little colder, don't you think?

Lisa – Tastes fine to me.

Tom – You should try it with a splash of lager.

They drink again to fill the silence.

Emma – It's funny to be at your place like this...

David – It was very kind of you to invite us.

Emma – True, we hardly know each other...

David – We did have a good laugh together at the restaurant.

Lisa – We did, didn't we? Can't remember what about, though.

Emma – Nor can I, to be perfectly honest.

David – We'd had rather a lot to drink, hadn't we?

Lisa – Had we?

Emma – I was certainly quite tipsy.

Lisa – Another drink?

Emma – Yes, please.

Lisa refills the glasses.

Lisa (to David) – Still no lager in your champagne?

David – No, thank you. I prefer it as it is.

Emma – Strange weather we're having, isn't it?

Lisa – Yeah, I suppose.

Emma – Feels as if we're changing seasons.

David – We are changing seasons, darling.

Emma – Oh yes, of course. It hardly seems any time since the start of the year.

David – And before we know it, the year will be over.

Emma – It's extraordinary how quickly the year goes by.

Lisa – Yeah... (*Silence*) You all right, Tommy? Fallen asleep?

Tom – No. Why?

Lisa – You're not saying anything.

Tom – What d'you want me to say?

Lisa – When you have visitors, you're supposed to talk to them.

David – Perhaps Tom is waiting until he has something interesting to say.

Lisa – In that case, you'll be waiting a very long time.

Tom – What's that meant to mean? You think the stuff you've been talking about is interesting? (To the guests) Is it interesting, what she's saying?

Emma – Well, I...

Tom – Royal Lager, Lager Royale! You think these two came here for a lesson in fancy words? (Turning to the guests) Did you come here for a lesson in fancy words?

David – No, of course not...

Tom – See? They didn't come for a lesson. They came for a drink!

Lisa – Well, go on then! Say something interesting to our guests, if you can.

Tom – Yeah, why not? (A pause) Nothing springs to mind just this second, but we’ve got time, haven’t we? You two in a hurry?

David – No, not especially.

Tom – See? They’re not in a hurry. We’re having a drink. You’re the one making everyone nervous!

David and Emma exchange a puzzled look.

Emma – So... what do you both do? For work, I mean. We barely had a chance to talk properly last time.

Tom and Lisa say nothing. They exchange sulky glances over their champagne, forgetting their guests. Tom seems to be searching for something to say.

Tom – Was the traffic bad?

Lisa rolls her eyes at the banality of the question. Tom glares back at her.

Emma – We came by metro.

David – We’re only three stops away.

Emma – You can hear the trains rather clearly from here, actually.

Lisa – There! See?

David – Really? I can’t hear anything.

Tom – My wife hears voices like a prophet. Except hers come with train announcements.

David – Apparently mine does too.

Emma – David!

David – I’m joking. Perhaps it’s tinnitus.

Emma – Tinnitus? Why would Lisa and I hear the same train at the same moment if it were tinnitus?

Tom – Tinni-what?

David – Hearing sounds that aren’t actually there.

Lisa – Sounds that aren’t there? You calling us mad? Not our fault you’re both deaf as posts. Right, Molly?

Emma – Er... my name’s Emma.

Tom – Emma, Molly... Practically the same thing. Especially when you can’t hear properly.

Lisa – Anyway, these two wanted to know what you do that’s so interesting.

Tom – You mean for a job?

Lisa – Yeah, for a job!

Tom – At the moment I work for the municipal waste services.

David – Waste services?

Lisa – He's a rubbish collector.

Tom – I think they'd worked that out.

Emma – There's dignity in every job. Whatever would we do if nobody collected our rubbish?

Lisa – Exactly. Your rubbish? He's the one who picks it up.

Tom – You wouldn't believe what people throw away. Found a baby once.

Emma – A baby?

Tom – A live one, mind you. It was the day we collected bulky waste.

Lisa – We thought about keeping it, but there were too many forms to fill in.

Emma – I suppose things were simpler in the time of Moses.

Tom – Moses?

Emma – You know, the baby found floating down a river in a basket. The Pharaoh's daughter took him in.

Tom – So?

Emma – Well... a basket rather than a rubbish bin, but it's a similar story.

Lisa – Never heard that one. Was it recent?

David and Emma exchange a worried glance.

David – And what about you, Lisa? May I ask what you do?

Tom – Lisa? Nothing.

Lisa – I'm off sick.

Tom – Have been for five years.

Lisa – Is it my fault I'm depressed?

Tom – It's not mine either.

Lisa – We'll see about that.

David – What did you do before your illness?

Lisa – I worked in the prison service.

Tom – She was a prison officer. A warder, if you like.

Emma – Oh... That must have been rather depressing.

Lisa – It's where I met Tom, actually.

David (to Tom) – Were you a prison officer too, before you went into waste collection?

Lisa – Oh no. Tom was a guest.

David – A guest?

Emma – You mean...? Oh. I see.

Lisa – We met in prison. On opposite sides of the bars. Later we found something in common.

Tom – I’m still serving my sentence. Just at home now.

David – Ah, you mean an electronic ankle tag?

Tom – No. A gold-plated wedding ring.

David – Ha... Very good, Tom.

Silence.

Lisa – Aren’t you going to ask why my husband was in prison?

Emma – Well...

David – We wouldn’t wish to pry.

Tom – Misunderstanding.

Lisa – A terrible miscarriage of justice.

David – So he was acquitted after a retrial?

Lisa – Not exactly. His sentence was reduced. Apparently the only person Tom convinced of his innocence was his lawyer.

Tom – And he was the lawyer the court gave me.

Tom takes a cracker. Lisa shoots him a disapproving look.

Lisa – Help yourselves while there’s something left. And what about you two?

David – Well, I... But perhaps Emma should go first.

Emma – I work with children with disabilities.

Tom – You mean... kids who isn’t normal?

Lisa – “Aren’t normal”, Tom. You say “aren’t”, not “isn’t”.

Emma – We usually say “children with disabilities”.

Lisa – Right. What’s wrong with them, then? Missing an arm or a leg?

David – More a screw loose, perhaps.

Emma shoots him a stern look.

Emma – Children with developmental difficulties. Many are autistic.

Tom looks puzzled, evidently unfamiliar with the term.

Tom – Oh, yeah. Autistic...

Emma – Some of them find communication particularly difficult.

Lisa – You ought to take Tom on, then. And you, David? You work with idiots too?

David – No, I teach physical education at a secondary school. Though sometimes I feel as if I'm working with people who can't move at all.

Emma – David, please.

David – My wife dislikes jokes about these things.

Lisa – A sports teacher! Well, I can see those muscles through your tight shirt.

Tom – And I'm supposed to be the dirty-minded one!

Lisa – We can still look if we're not allowed to touch, can't we?

The guests are embarrassed.

Emma – Perhaps we ought to go. David? Remember, my parents are expecting us for dinner.

David – Your parents? Oh... yes, of course.

Lisa – Bored of us already?

Emma – Certainly not. It's just...

Lisa – See, Tommy? A bit more conversation and we might have a few more friends. Not that your business cards would help...

David – Business cards?

Tom – You've got business cards?

David – Yes. Mostly Emma, for her work.

Lisa – To give to the nutcases she meets outside work?

Tom – Leave us one before you go.

Lisa – Got any kids?

Emma – Yes, a boy and a girl. They're with my mother at the moment.

Lisa – So why did you come here, anyway?

David – Sorry?

Emma – Because you invited us.

David – We arranged to come for a drink around nine.

Tom – Eight-thirty to nine, actually.

Emma – Well, you did invite us, Tom.

Lisa – They came here to laugh at you, Tommy. That’s why.

Emma – But no, not at all!

David – Does it really matter whether we arrived at half past eight or nine?

Tom – Of course it matters! Means you spent the whole time wondering whether to come.

Lisa – And now you want to leave already. That’s damn rude.

Tom – You thought, “If we turn up at nine, that’s half an hour less we have to put up with them.” Didn’t you?

Lisa – Exactly! We’re not good enough for them to arrive at the beginning of the time they said.

Emma – We did arrive on time. We said between half past eight and nine.

Tom – Nine-oh-two!

David gets up.

David – Now that’s quite enough. We come for drinks, bring a bottle of champagne, and all you can offer us is a few stale crackers. Then you start shouting at us!

Tom – Oh, so you brought champagne, did you? And why d’you think you brought champagne?

David – Why?

Tom – To make us feel small! That’s why!

Emma – To make you feel small?

Lisa – To humiliate us! “They never drink champagne in that dump. Let’s take them a bottle. Give them a change from their cheap lager.” That’s what you thought!

Tom – And not the really good stuff, either! Just some bargain-bin champagne. They won’t know the difference, will they? Never had a glass of champagne in their lives!

Lisa – Well, we have. And proper champagne too.

Tom – At your sister’s wedding last year, we had the expensive stuff. Don Penguin, wasn’t it?

Lisa – Dom Pérignon, Tom! And it was better than this fizzy cider you brought us.

Emma – This is getting ridiculous.

David – I take it you’d already started drinking before we arrived.

Lisa – Hear that, Tommy? Now he’s calling us alcoholics. And you just sit there.

Tom – That’s not very nice, David. You don’t talk like that to friends.

Lisa – And our crackers aren’t good enough either?

Tom – You thought they were stale, did you?

Lisa – I thought they was perfectly good crackers. Ordinary crackers.

Tom – “They were”, Lisa. Not “they was”. The gentleman’s a teacher, remember.

Lisa – Teacher? Give me a break! He teaches sports! Do you need a degree for that, or can you just put on shorts and show off your muscles?

David – Come along, Emma. We’re leaving. We do not have to put up with this.

Lisa – Go on, then. Off to your mother-in-law’s for dinner! At least think up a better excuse next time.

Tom – Yeah. No one’s ever been in that much of a rush to eat with their mother-in-law.

Lisa – Next time get your stories straight before you come.

Emma – I knew this was a bad idea.

They prepare to leave.

Tom – Where d’you think you’re going? Leaving already? That’s not polite.

David – We told you, we’re expected for dinner.

Tom – There’s still champagne left. We can’t waste it.

Lisa – Then you can try our lager. We get ours from a little supplier just down the road. The corner shop, actually.

Emma – We’ve had quite enough, thank you. We’re going.

Tom intervenes.

Tom – In my home, I decide when people leave.

David – Do you intend to keep us here by force?

Tom – Why not?

David – Be reasonable, Tom. You’re hardly in a position to overpower me. You can barely stand.

Tom – Maybe. But I’ve got something more convincing.

Tom produces a revolver. David and Emma stare at it, terrified.

David – I think we’ve got off on the wrong foot. Why don’t we all calm down and have one last drink before parting as friends?

Tom – There you go. I wouldn’t want you leaving with the wrong impression.

Lisa – Or being put off coming back. We might not be rich, but we know how to entertain.

Tom – And we’ve got our pride. Lisa, fetch the lager and some glasses.

Lisa – We haven’t got any cold.

Lisa brings out a few cans of lager and some glasses.

Tom – Doesn't matter. Warm beer never killed anyone.

Lisa – You don't mind your lager warm, do you, Molly?

Emma – Not at all, really. Please don't trouble yourself.

David – That's perfectly fine, thank you.

Lisa – Usually we drink it straight from the can. But as we've got guests, I'll fetch some coasters.

Emma – There's really no need to trouble yourself.

Lisa goes out.

Tom – Come on, we're friends now. No need to stand on ceremony, right?

David – Of course. If that's what you... if that's what you want.

Tom pours the lager into the glasses. Lisa returns with a few mismatched coasters and puts them on the table.

Tom – Now this is what I call a drink!

They clink glasses.

Lisa – Here's to you.

Tom – To friendship, Dave! Mind if I call you Dave?

David – Not at all.

Tom – Because David, no offence, but...

David – My friends call me Dave.

Tom – There you go! Guessed it first time.

Lisa – He's a born psychologist, my husband.

Emma – So I see.

Tom – I'm Tommy. What about you, sweetheart? Got a pet name?

Emma – Not really...

Lisa – Go on. Don't be shy.

Emma – My parents called me Emmy when I was little.

Lisa – Emmy? That's not short for Molly.

Emma – No, you see, my actual name is...

Lisa – Molly it is, then. A name like Molly doesn't need shortening. Help yourself to some snacks.

Tom – Canapés, Lisa. They're called canapés. So what d'you think of our lager?

David – Yes... It's... quite refreshing.

Emma – It certainly has a rather distinctive taste.

Lisa – A distinctive taste...

Tom – Just kidding. You don't have to pretend you like it.

Lisa – Who cares what it tastes like?

Tom – A few cans of that and you'll forget all your troubles. Have a cracker, Molly.

Emma – Thank you.

Emma forces down another cracker.

Tom – So what now? Fancy a bit of poker?

Lisa – Strip poker? Tom, you don't suggest strip poker the first time people come to your house. Didn't you read that book on manners?

Tom – A bit of poker, I said! Not strip poker! You really are going deaf. Or maybe you're hearing things again. Dying to get a look at Dave's backside, are you?

Lisa – A metro train was going past just then.

Tom – Yeah, you've got messages from the heavens, except you keep getting train announcements. Anyone else hear the metro?

Emma – No...

Tom – The train's going round in your head, Lisa. And I reckon it's about to come off the rails.

David – Actually, I think I heard something that time.

Lisa – See? I'm not making it up!

Tom – Right, forget poker. No takers.

Tom brandishes the revolver.

Tom – How about Russian roulette? Haven't played that for ages.

David – Personally, I'd still prefer poker. Wouldn't you, Emma?

Emma – Poker sounds lovely. I don't know the rules very well, but I'm willing to learn.

Lisa – Don't worry, Tom's joking.

Tom – Not drunk enough for Russian roulette yet. Maybe later.

Emma – How about Scrabble?

David gives her a disapproving, anxious look.

David – I'm not sure our hosts would...

Lisa – Scrabble? That's the one where you have to make words, isn't it?

Tom – Sounds like a pain in the neck.

David – Let's forget Scrabble, then. I have to play with my mother-in-law every Friday.

Emma (*stiffly*) – I had no idea you found it such a burden.

David – Well, now you know.

Lisa – Don't start arguing, you two. We haven't got any games anyway.

Tom – Didn't we have a Monopoly set?

Lisa – What d'you think, Molly?

Tom – I like a game of Monopoly. We made one in prison out of cardboard and shirt buttons.

Emma (*with a nervous laugh*) – I expect you landed on the "Go to Jail" square quite often.

Dead silence. David glares at Emma. Then Tom bursts out laughing.

Tom – Ha! That's a good one! You crack me up, Molly!

Lisa – You're funnier than you look.

Tom – Ours was a special Monopoly. We changed "Go straight to Jail" to "Go straight to the brothel". Cheered everyone up no end.

Lisa – I confiscated it at work. That's why we've still got it.

David – I see...

Tom – Want to see it?

David – Why not? Molly... I mean, Emma?

Tom – First, another drink.

He refills their glasses, knocking the revolver on the table. The guests watch anxiously.

Emma – I'm not sure that's wise. And my mother will be expecting us...

David – If that's all that's worrying you...

Emma shoots him a furious look.

David – Since we're friends now, may I ask you something, Tom?

Tom – Of course. We're friends, aren't we?

David – What exactly landed you in prison? I mean... what was the miscarriage of justice about?

Tom – Miscarriage of justice?

Lisa – Which one? His whole life's been one long miscarriage of justice. Sometimes I think even his birth was a mistake.

Tom – I was known as "the Innocent One" in prison.

Lisa – Though I'm not sure that was the only reason.

Tom – Fate's always had it in for me.

Lisa – First time he went in, it was for armed robbery.

Tom – It was the bank downstairs from where I lived. The cashier thought he recognised me. Of course he recognised me! He saw me pass every morning on my way to the bar next door.

David – And was that robbery committed with this gun?

Tom picks up the revolver.

Tom – This? Nah, this one's made of soap.

Emma – Soap?

Tom – The real one's in a kitchen drawer. Good copy, isn't it?

David – Remarkable.

Tom – Made it in prison. I was planning to escape.

David – You're evidently quite skilled with your hands.

Lisa – I took it off him before he did anything stupid. With good behaviour he only had a few years left.

Tom – The last few years are the longest. Same as marriage.

Emma – So it isn't a real gun...

Tom examines the revolver and puts it back on the table.

Tom – A work of art. Took me months. Shame I never got to use it.

David and Emma stare at him, speechless.

Emma – Well... Perhaps we really should be going.

David – I think I need another little drink first.

David, now quite tipsy, opens another can of lager and pours it into his glass.

Emma – So now you're having more lager as well.

Lisa – There's still some champagne left. We can't waste it.

David – Quite right, Lisa. That would be a shame.

David pours the remaining champagne into his glass of lager.

Emma – You're mixing lager and champagne again?

David – No, my dear. This is a Champagne Hangover. A very different thing.

Tom – Looks like my Royal Lager to me.

David – Only the name is different, Tom. And I've just invented it. *(He takes a sip.)* Rather unusual, but not bad. Better than lager on its own. Anyone care to try?

Tom – No champagne left.

David – Then here's to us!

He drains his glass.

Emma (*trying to calm him*) – Haven't you had rather enough?

David – Relax. A little excess every now and again won't hurt.

Emma – But my mother will be waiting...

David – Oh, stop it! Your mother isn't expecting us! Do you think they haven't worked that out? We go to your mother's on Fridays. And at your mother's it isn't "half past eight or nine". It's seven-ten exactly!

Tom and Lisa exchange a puzzled look.

Lisa – Looks like this is getting interesting.

Emma – Well, I'm leaving anyway.

David grabs the revolver and points it at Emma.

David – You're not going anywhere, Molly!

Emma – David! It's made of soap!

David – Yes, well... even so...

An uneasy pause.

Lisa – Tom, you are sure this is the fake one? I mean, it's beautifully made, but...

Tom – You think?

Tom takes the revolver from David's shaking hand and examines it.

Tom – Well, would you look at that! It's such a good copy even I've got them mixed up.

Lisa – Because that one's the real one, Tommy! No wonder it looks real!

Tom – Oh yeah. You're right.

Emma is frozen with fear.

Emma – I never imagined you would point a gun at me. Your own wife!

David – I thought it was soap.

Lisa – You could've killed her, Dave.

Tom – Guns can be dangerous when you're not used to them.

Lisa takes the revolver from Tom.

Lisa – One twitch of your finger and bang. Especially with an antique like this. It hasn't even got a safety catch!

Lisa puts the revolver back on the table.

Tom – Come on. Everyone sit down and have another drink.

Tom refills the glasses.

Lisa – I think we've finished the crackers.

Tom – All this drinking's made me hungry. What about you?

David – Yes...

Tom – Stay for dinner, why don't you? Since it turns out you're not going to your mother-in-law's tonight.

Emma also seems rather drunk now.

Emma – I must have got the day wrong. It isn't Friday?

David – No, but we wouldn't want to impose.

Lisa – There's nothing in the fridge anyway. Just stale bread.

Emma – Have you got milk and sugar?

Lisa – I expect so.

Emma – I could make French toast.

Tom – French toast?

Emma – We often made it when I was a scout. It takes five minutes, and it'll use up the bread. (*To Lisa*) Could you show me the kitchen?

Lisa leaves with Emma.

Tom – Women, eh? At least we'll have five minutes' peace.

David – Yes...

A pause.

Tom – I can hear the metro too, you know.

David – Really?

Tom – Just winding her up.

David – I see.

Tom – You know what your problem is, Dave?

David – No.

Tom – Your mother-in-law.

David – That's not entirely untrue. Lisa was right: you do have quite an insight into people, Tom.

Tom – Aren't we on first-name terms by now?

David – Yes, of course.

Tom – I could get rid of her for you, if you want.

David – I beg your pardon?

Tom – Had enough of Scrabble every Friday?

David – Well, yes, but...

Tom – Come on, Dave. A real man doesn't play Scrabble, he plays poker! Scrabble's for women. You teach sport, don't you?

David – Yes, but...

Tom – There'd be a few expenses, of course.

David – Surely you're joking, Tommy?

Tom picks up the revolver.

Tom – This one isn't made of soap. And when I use it, there's real trouble.

David – You can't be serious.

Tom – This old thing has made a lot of people happy.

David – Happy?

Tom – That bank job was my first. I soon realised hold-ups weren't for me.

David – I see.

Tom – Too risky. Especially at my age.

David – Your reflexes can't be what they once were.

Tom – Exactly. And ten years in prison, with my liver the way it is? That could turn into a life sentence.

David – So you decided to give up crime?

Tom – Not exactly. Just found something easier.

David – Ah. That's reassuring.

Tom – Went into business for myself. With Lisa. She knew her way round weapons too. Met her in prison. Told you that, didn't I?

David – Yes.

Tom – Collecting rubbish is my cover. My real job is taking care of people who are causing my clients trouble.

David – A bodyguard, you mean?

Tom – I don't like the term, but most people say "contract killer".

David – A contract killer?

Tom – I prefer "bounty hunter". You know, like those cowboys in the old films.

David – Oh... yes.

Tom – Had a poster of one on my prison cupboard. Short-barrelled rifle, strapped to his thigh with a leather cord. Like a garter.

David – A garter?

Tom – Other inmates laughed at me. Their cupboards had posters of women in stockings and garters. Mine had a cowboy.

David – But, Tommy... A bounty hunter and a hired killer aren't exactly the same thing, are they?

Tom – Depends how you look at it. I rid society of people who make trouble. A kind of justice. Private justice, that's all.

David – When you put it like that...

Tom – So what d'you say, Dave?

David – I don't know. Is it expensive?

Tom – Special price for a friend.

David – Tempting, I admit, but...

Emma returns, carrying a frying pan.

Emma – And here's the French toast!

Tom – If you want both of them dealt with, I'll give you a discount.

Lisa returns with plates.

Lisa – You two look like you're getting along at last.

Emma – What were you whispering about?

Tom – Nothing you need worry about, Molly. Business.

Emma serves the food.

Emma – There's enough for everyone. You had rather a lot of stale bread in the kitchen.

Lisa – I think it was there when we moved in.

David – Only a little for me, thank you.

Tom – Previous tenant must have kept rabbits in cages.

Lisa – Wouldn't surprise me. A colleague from the prison let me have this luxury apartment when he retired. Maybe he liked having cages at home too, with quieter inmates.

Tom begins to eat.

Tom – This is good! You're a proper cook. Might keep her a bit longer, eh, Dave?

They all laugh.

Lisa – It's funny, isn't it?

David – What is, Lisa?

Lisa – I never thought you'd come. And here we are, all four of us, eating stale bread together after a few drinks.

Emma – Why did you think we wouldn't come?

David – We can tell them now. We were hesitant, I admit. You were the one who didn't want to come, Emma. You said Tom and Lisa weren't really our sort of people.

Tom – Not our sort! That's exactly what Lisa said about you.

Emma – We'd only exchanged a few words at the restaurant. That's hardly enough to know people, let alone become friends.

Tom – Goes to show first impressions are usually right.

Lisa – Do you go to that pizza place often?

David – It was our first visit. Quite an unusual place, wasn't it?

Emma – David thought it looked rather like one of those pizzerias in gangster films. We went in out of curiosity. Are you regulars?

Tom – That's where I do business.

Emma – Business? I thought you collected rubbish.

Tom – I do. Get rid of rubbish. I've just made part of it private.

Emma – How interesting. I've been considering setting up on my own, actually.

Lisa – With those head cases you work with?

Emma – As a psychologist, yes. What kind of business are you registered as? Self-employed?

Tom – Yeah, something like that.

Emma – And does Lisa help?

Lisa – We work together.

David – Really?

Tom – We do the cleaning together. And if there's anything left, I finish it off with the electric jigsaw.

David – I knew you looked like a man who owned a jigsaw.

Emma – Working together as a couple must be wonderful... if you get along.

Tom is about to light a cigarette.

Lisa – Not in here.

Tom – All right. You smoke, Dave?

David – No, thank you. With my job...

Tom – Come out onto the balcony anyway. We can talk business.

David – I'm not sure...

Emma – Go on, David!

David – Very well.

They go out.

Emma – You really ought to leave him.

Lisa – What?

Emma – I'm a psychologist, Lisa. Believe me, that man's a psychopath.

Lisa – You mean he's dangerous?

Emma – He's been in prison and he has a revolver!

Lisa – Oh, that...

Emma – He doesn't mistreat you, does he?

Lisa – Well, he never helps round the house. Caught him peeing in the kitchen sink once. With the dirty dishes still in it.

Emma – Good heavens. Have you never considered divorce?

Lisa – No. But I often think about killing him.

Emma – Well... that's a start. But what keeps you with a man like that?

Lisa – Habit. And the fear I'd only find another one who was worse.

Emma – Worse? Is that even possible?

Lisa – I worked in a prison. It's possible, believe me. I picked the best of the lot.

Emma – Well, precisely. It would be like me choosing a husband in a psychiatric hospital and picking the least disturbed patient.

Lisa – That's life. Most people meet their partners at work, don't they? You happy with yours?

An awkward silence.

Emma – Can I tell you something in confidence?

Lisa – Course. We're friends, aren't we?

Emma – Perhaps it's the champagne, and perhaps because I feel I can trust you... I haven't told anyone this yet.

Lisa – Told anyone what, Molly?

Emma – I've met someone.

Lisa – A man, you mean?

Emma – Yes.

Lisa – Oh. I see.

Emma – I never imagined it would happen to me again, but it has.

Lisa – Who is he?

Emma – You don't know him.

Lisa – I gathered that. What sort of guy?

Emma – A friend from childhood, the son of our neighbours. We even had a little romance when we were scouts. Then he spent a long time in hospital. I ran into him again last month, visiting my mother, and it was as if we'd never been apart.

Lisa – And what about Dave?

Emma – I don't know. I'm terribly ashamed. I still love David, of course, but... Moses gets on so well with my mother.

Lisa – Moses?

Emma – His name's Moses. I've even thought about killing him.

Lisa – Why? You've only just found him again.

Emma – David! My husband!

Lisa – Oh. Right.

Emma – It's ridiculous, of course.

Lisa – Not necessarily.

Emma – You really think so?

Lisa – Your husband's the careful sort, isn't he? Bet he's got life insurance. Am I right?

Emma – Yes.

Lisa – So if something happened to David, you'd be a widow.

Emma – Well, obviously.

Lisa – A well-off widow, too.

Emma – But why would anything happen to David? He's in excellent health. He teaches sport!

Lisa – Leave that to the professionals.

Emma – Professionals?

Lisa – I could take care of it, if you wanted.

Emma – What exactly do you do?

Lisa – I arrange contracts.

Emma – Contracts? Employment contracts?

Lisa – No. Contracts on people's lives.

Emma – Life insurance?

Lisa – More like death insurance.

Tom and David return.

Tom – You won't regret it.

David – I certainly hope not.

Tom – How are you two getting on?

Lisa – Talking business, just like you.

Tom – Oh yeah?

Lisa – I reckon business is looking up, Tommy.

Emma – Well, we really must be going. David?

Lisa – Won't stay for dinner?

Tom – You could at least have put the dirty dishes in the sink. What will our friends think?

Lisa – When I put them in the sink, you pee on them! Really, won't you stay?

David – We wouldn't want to impose.

Tom – Another time, then.

Lisa – Think about what I said, Molly.

Emma – Of course. Here's my card, if you'd like to call.

David (*to Tom*) – And here's mine.

Tom – See? They've got business cards!

Lisa – Have a good journey home.

David – Thank you for everything. Come along, Molly.

Emma – My name really is Emma, actually.

David – Next time, you must come to us.

Lisa – Then we'll bring the ammunition.

Emma (*aside to David*) – Aren't you going to ask about the jigsaw?

David – For your mother?

Emma – For the bathroom shelves!

David – Perhaps when we know each other a little better.

They shake hands.

Lisa – Have a safe journey.

Tom – Yeah. See you around.

Emma (*aside to David*) – You see? His hand is limp.

David and Emma go out.

Lisa – Well, they came after all.

Tom – Yeah. And we got on all right, didn't we?

Lisa – Don't think that friendship's going to last, though.

Tom – Hard to keep friends in our line of work.

Lisa – Still, we should have people round more often.

Tom – Yeah.

A pause.

Lisa – You were right, actually. We should get business cards made.

Tom – I'll drink to that.

They finish their drinks.

Lisa – Heard it this time?

Tom – What?

Lisa – The metro!

Tom – No.

Blackout.

End.

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez first took to the stage as a drummer in several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then worked as a television screenwriter before returning to the stage as a playwright. He has written around a hundred scripts for television and 123 plays, some of which have become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). His plays have been performed in more than 100 countries and translated into around 50 languages.

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/>

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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 Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (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](#).

Jean-Pierre Martinez recently returned to music, writing original songs inspired by his poems and plays.

With **Jean-Pierre Martinez Music**, he extends that creative universe through original songs: short stories in musical form, humorous or melancholy, in which each song sometimes becomes a miniature theatrical scene.

<https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/>

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

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
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
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
Cards on the Table
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 Ways 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
Hangover
Happy Hour
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
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police
Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's
Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
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 Most Beautiful Village in
France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Blackouts
Don't panic!
Dramedies
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
Every Colour under the Sun
For real and for fun
Funny Stories
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
Memoirs of a Suitcase
No Sense Off Limits
Now and then
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Open Letters
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

*All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded
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