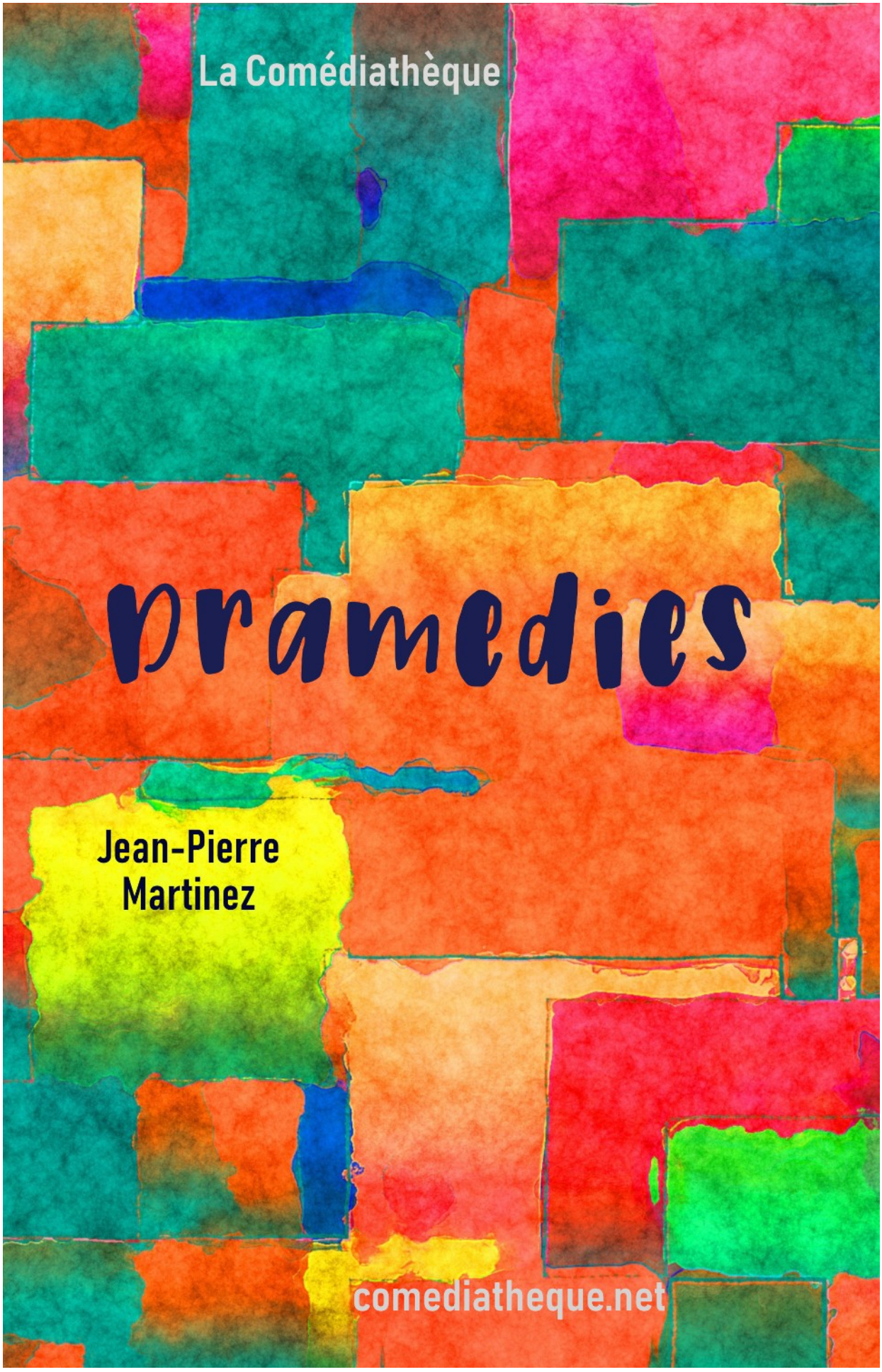

La Comédiathèque
Pramedies
Jean-Pierre Martinez
comediatheque.net

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Dramedies

Jean-Pierre Martinez

If the world is a stage, the play is often a flop. Its author remains anonymous, and the supporting players are the first to be forgotten. Between absurdity and farce, the tragicomedy of life unfolds. The important thing is not to miss your exit...

Six darkly comic sketches about the melodramas of ordinary lives.

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4. Anonymous Author.....24
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6. Crime Scene.....31

Cast
15 characters
Highly flexible casting in number and gender: performers may play several roles, and most parts may be played by actors of any gender.
From 4 to 15 performers.

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1. Fatally Funny

On a coffee table sit a coffee pot, two cups and a newspaper. Peter enters in his dressing gown, pours himself some coffee and picks up the paper. Mary, his wife, comes in.

Mary – Everything all right?

Peter – Everything's fine.

Mary pours herself a cup and observes Peter.

Mary – You look worried... Something on your mind?

Peter – No... Well... I still haven't come up with an idea for my next play.

Mary – Don't worry. It'll come to you... It always has, hasn't it?

Peter – So far...

Mary – Isn't there a story in the paper that might give you an idea?

He puts the newspaper down.

Peter – The news gets more depressing every day... I think I'll stop reading newspapers. I've already stopped watching television and listening to the radio...

Mary – True, it's hardly cheerful. But that's precisely why we'll always need writers like you.

Peter – Oh, really? What sort of writer am I?

Mary – You know... Someone who makes people laugh. A funny man!

Peter – A funny man? Is that how you see me? Just a funny man?

Mary – We need people to write good comedies! Help us forget our worries... Give us an enjoyable evening without having to think...

Peter – Without having to think?

Mary – Sorry... I meant thinking about something else.

Peter – I see. So I'm just an entertainer to you... Someone who distracts people from the real problems of society...

Mary – Society! There you go, making a grand speech. There's nothing shameful about entertaining an audience, is there?

Peter – I don't know... Maybe I want to do something else.

Mary – Such as?

Peter – Something useful...

Mary – Making people smile again is useful. And not everyone has your gift.

Peter – Yeah...

Mary – What?

Peter – I've written nearly a hundred comedies.

Mary – And they've all been big successes.

Peter – Yes, but I'm running out of ideas. Maybe I've said everything I have to say in that genre.

Mary – You want to stop writing?

Peter – I'm not sure I could stop, either... No, I was wondering whether...

Mary – If what?

Peter – What if I tried a different genre?

Mary – You mean a novel? I've been telling you for years you should try that. Some novels are funny, too...

Peter – I'm no novelist. I know that. Theatre is the only thing I can write.

Mary – Well, then, you just need to find a good subject for a comedy.

Peter – But what if I wrote... a different kind of play?

Mary – A different kind of play?

Peter – Something that wasn't necessarily funny.

Mary – A comedy that isn't funny?

Peter – No, not a comedy!

Mary – You mean... a drama with a bit of comedy?

Peter – No. A play that isn't a comedy at all!

Mary – You want to write a drama?

Peter – A drama, a tragedy... Call it what you like.

Mary – Right...

Peter – What?

Mary – I don't know... *(Silence)* Are you sure you're all right?

Peter – I've run out of comedy ideas, so I want to try something else. It's no tragedy!

Mary – OK... *(Pause)* Would you like some more coffee?

Peter – No, thanks.

Mary – Right, I'll leave you to think... about your new play.

She exits. He sighs and opens the newspaper again. The phone rings. He answers.

Peter – Hello? Oh, yes... No, no, I was just about to call you... Listen, I don't know yet... No, I'm completely out of inspiration. I know, I've always said there's no such thing. But inspiration is like God: you don't believe in it until you desperately need it... And how are you? Right... I see... All right... Look, I really have to go... Shall we call each other and arrange lunch next week? Fine, let's do that... Bye, take care.

Mary comes back, looking rather embarrassed.

Mary – I need to run a few errands; I won't be long. Are you all right?

Peter – Er... Yes. Nothing much has changed since you last asked, but yes, I'm fine.

Mary – All right, I'm off then.

Peter – Right. See you later.

She exits. He picks up the newspaper, but barely has time to read a line before the doorbell rings. He goes to answer it and returns with a woman.

Alex – I hope I'm not interrupting.

Peter – No, no, not at all, I was just... Want some coffee?

Alex – No thanks.

Peter – How nice of you to drop in without warning.

Alex – When your agent lives in the same building, there's always a risk she'll turn up uninvited...

Peter – I might have to move, then...

They share a smile, followed by an awkward silence.

Alex – So, what are you working on?

Peter – Nothing... I was on the phone to... What's her name? You know, that actress who was in... She's a publisher now.

Alex – A publisher?

Peter – You know what it's like. Life can be cruel to actresses, especially leading ladies. Once they turn thirty...

Alex – Are you looking for a new publisher?

Peter – Not really... She's the one who called. Just wanted to check in... It's starting to worry me. Everyone's asking if I'm all right today...

Alex – So... are you all right?

Peter – I'm fine, thanks... It's ridiculous...

Alex – What is?

Peter – I ended the call by saying, "Let's catch up and have lunch sometime." It just slipped out. Force of habit. We could just as easily have had lunch today.

Alex – What can you do? This is Paris. We're all terribly busy...

Peter – Or we have absolutely nothing to do, and we're pretending...

Alex – Yeah...

Peter – Take you, for example. Are you rushed off your feet today? *(Silence.)* Clearly not, or you wouldn't be here. Imagine agreeing to lunch on the spur of the moment. By tomorrow, all Paris would know you had nothing to do. That no one wanted to work with you. That you were out of work. Or worse, blacklisted. Then no one would call you, and you really would be finished.

Alex – Yeah... *(Silence)* And... is she all right?

Peter – Who?

Alex – Your publisher!

Peter – I don't know... You're right. Maybe she's the one who isn't all right. Maybe she called because she needed someone to talk to, and I practically hung up on her. I should have invited her to lunch today... And how are you?

Alex – I'm fine...

Peter – You're sure you don't want any coffee?

Alex – Positive... *(Silence)* Writing anything at the moment?

Peter – Not really. I feel as if I've come to the end of something. Maybe it's time I changed direction.

Alex – Yeah, I know. I ran into Mary on the stairs.

Peter – Don't tell me that's why you stopped by.

Alex – So, you want to write a drama.

Peter – Yes, well... Why not?

Alex – This is a joke, right?

Peter – You see, Alex, that's my problem. The moment I suggest writing anything other than comedy, everybody assumes it's a joke.

Alex – Let's just say... it's not exactly what people expect from you.

Peter – And?

Alex – It might surprise your audience... Maybe even disappoint them...

Peter – Disappoint them? I haven't written a single line, and you're already predicting disappointment. Thanks for the encouragement. Remind me why I have an agent.

Alex – So... do you have a subject in mind?

Peter – No... It's just an idea...

Alex – Right, so it's just an idea.

Peter – That's it...

Alex – Sorry. Perhaps I got carried away.

Peter – I don't know... I was thinking about writing a play about migrants who wash up on our shores. Those who haven't drowned on the crossing, of course...

Alex – A comedy? *(He gives her a pained look.)* Sorry. I don't know why I said that... So you really mean to write something serious...

Peter – I'm not twenty anymore... Neither are you... Maybe it's time we started thinking about the world around us, don't you think?

Alex – The world around us?

Peter – Imagine that when we die, we're reincarnated. At random. Most people on Earth lead miserable lives, if you can call them lives at all. Apart from a privileged minority, the luckiest of whom live in tax havens, this planet is a kind of hell.

Alex – So what?

Peter – So what? Statistically, reincarnation means a one-way ticket to hell! Unless we change the world while we're alive, we're almost certain to come back to a miserable life.

Alex stares at him, stunned.

Alex – OK...

Peter – I'll let you think about that. I'm going to get dressed...

He exits. Mary enters.

Mary – Well?

Alex – He's in a bad way.

Mary – I told you.

Alex – He's talking nonsense. Death, heaven, hell...

Mary – Really?

Alex – He wants to write a play about people in exile.

Mary – Tax exiles?

Alex – People fleeing poverty!

Mary – You mean pensioners who move to Portugal or Morocco because it's cheaper to live there?

Alex – Migrants! Crossing the Mediterranean! Refugees stranded at Calais!

Mary – No way... He told you that?

Alex – I tried talking to him, but he wouldn't listen.

Mary – Where is he?

Alex – He went to get dressed.

Mary – I don't understand... This morning, he was completely normal. Well... he was his usual self, anyway...

Alex – It may pass. He's probably feeling low. But we mustn't ignore it.

Mary – Definitely... I hate to say it, but... I feel like he might have suicidal tendencies.

Alex – We should suggest he sees a doctor.

Mary – A psychiatrist, you mean?

Alex – I don't know.

Mary – Sometimes a course of vitamins is all it takes... Or a homeopath?

Peter re-enters.

Peter – Ah, you're still here?

Alex – I'll leave you two.

Peter – No, I'm not kicking you out.

Alex – I was leaving anyway. I've... I really must get going. Busy day ahead. We should call each other and have lunch sometime.

She exits. Mary gives Peter an embarrassed look.

Mary – I just told her you were home and said she could come up for a coffee...

Peter – She didn't want one.

Mary – What?

Peter – Coffee. I offered her some and she said no.

Silence.

Mary – But what is it you're looking for, Peter?

Peter – I don't know...

Mary – Aren't we happy together?

Peter – Yes, of course we are. That's not the issue.

Mary – You're seeing someone, aren't you?

Peter – No, not at all!

Mary – We've got the life we wanted, haven't we? You're doing what you love. You have no boss. You make a good living.

Peter – I know.

Mary – Then what's going on?

Peter – None of it makes sense to me anymore. I need... to try something else.

Mary – But why?

Peter – I don’t know... So that at my funeral people won’t just say, “He was a funny man.”

Silence.

Mary – Do you want us to move?

Peter – It would be the same anywhere else.

Mary – You're not going to do something stupid, are you?

Peter – Something stupid? Like what?

Mary tries to hide her unease.

Mary – I'll leave you to work...

She exits. He stands there, puzzled for a moment. He picks up a notebook and pencil and tries to write, but inspiration refuses to come. He picks up the phone and dials.

Peter – Hello, sorry, it’s me again... Listen, I’ve managed to free up this evening after all. Could you come to dinner? I want to talk to you about a new project... Of course, bring your husband. Eight o’clock? Perfect. See you tonight.

He hangs up. He returns to the notebook and pencil, starting to write feverishly. He pauses and addresses the audience.

Peter – You’ll see. This time you won’t be laughing.

He resumes writing.

Blackout.

2. It’s No Tragedy

He is standing there, looking uneasy. She arrives, ready to go out.

Her – Usually I’m the one keeping you waiting... Aren’t you ready?

Him – Yes, yes. I’m just putting on my jacket.

Her – Your leather jacket...

Him – I had it before I met you... My grandmother gave it to me. No point throwing it away now, is there? I mean... She’s dead anyway.

Her – Your grandmother’s dead?

Him – Not my grandmother! The cow! It’s cowhide...

Her – Yeah... The cow that was skinned in an abattoir so you could wear its skin...

Him – My next jacket will be made of plant-based leather, I promise. They make some amazing alternatives from pineapples and mushrooms now.

He reluctantly puts on his jacket.

Her – So, this is it, the big day?

Him – Yes, it seems so...

Her – So I’m finally meeting your parents. I was beginning to wonder if you were ashamed of me.

Him – Don’t be ridiculous! If anything, it’s the opposite...

Her – The other way around? Why? Are you ashamed of your parents?

Him – No, no, but...

Her – So, what are you afraid of, then?

Him – Nothing, I assure you!

Her – If anything, I should be the one worried. You're introducing me to your parents... This is official. It's almost an engagement, isn't it?

Him – Yes...

Her – Try to contain your excitement.

Him – Listen, there's something I need to tell you.

Her – You're scaring me...

Him – It's about my parents, actually.

Her – Your parents? What about your parents?

Him – It's not easy to say...

Her – Go on, I can handle it... If it's important, I'd rather know now. I'll feel less stupid...

Him – Let's say this dinner won't exactly be what you imagined. My parents are... How shall I put it...

Her – They're deaf? They use sign language?

Him – No...

Her – Blind?

Him – No, not that either.

Her – Are they very short?

Him – Worse than that... Well, for you, anyway.

Her – I see... They vote for the right, and you couldn't bring yourself to tell me. Is that why you've kept me away from them?

Him – No, it's not that.

Her – Of course. How silly of me. You said they ran a bookshop. How could anyone sell books and vote for the right?

Him – Don't worry, my parents don't vote at all.

Her – So what, then?

Him – It's about... the dinner... Well, food, in general.

Her – Food...?

Him – I haven't told you the whole truth.

Her – All right... Your parents are Jewish and keep kosher. What's the problem? You can be vegan and keep kosher. It's easier, actually. It's mainly meat that has to be kosher, isn't it?

Him – Yes... Well, I don't really know...

Her – Fruit and vegetables are wonderfully ecumenical. I'm sure veganism could put an end to religious wars. At the dinner table, at least. That would be a start... While we wait for peace in the Middle East.

Him – It's a bit more complicated than that...

Her – What? The Middle East conflict?

Him – No, my parents.

Her – I get it. They're observant, so you've let them think their future daughter-in-law is Jewish. And now you don't know how to tell them you're dating a non-Jewish woman...

Him – Don't worry, no one in the family is Jewish.

Her – What makes you think that would bother me? What do you take me for?

Him – No, the issue is that...

Her – Go on. This is getting weird.

Him – My parents aren't really booksellers.

Her – What do you mean, “not really”? You're either a bookseller or you're not. How can you “not really” be a bookseller?

Him – They’re not booksellers at all... And they’re not quite as vegan as I told you.

Her – What do you mean, “not as”?

Him – They eat vegetables, of course, but...

Her – They’re only vegetarian? Well, it’s no tragedy. Do you really think I’m that narrow-minded? But why tell me they were vegan?

Him – I said it because... I knew it was important to you.

Her – You’re the one I’ll be living with! You share my values and that’s enough. You can’t choose your family, as they say. Still less your in-laws...

Him – I don't know how to say this...

Her – So, your parents aren't booksellers. So what? What do they do, then?

Him – They own the butcher’s shop on the corner...

Her *(stunned)* – The butcher’s...

Him – The horse-meat butcher’s. Between the shoe repair shop and the tobacconist. You know the one?

Her – This is a joke, isn't it?

Him – No.

Her – You told me everyone in your family was vegan, except your grandmother. And now you’re telling me I’m about to marry a butcher’s son?

Him – I’m not a butcher! I’m only the butcher’s son...

Her – When were you going to tell me? At the wedding reception? Between the donkey sausage and the horse steaks?

Him – No! That's why I'm telling you now...

Her – My parents are vegan, remember. Wild horses couldn’t make them compromise on that.

Him – Wild horses?

Her – If you think that’s funny, I don’t. So what do we do now?

Him – I'm truly vegan! I mean, I became one after meeting you... That doesn't change things for us, does it?

Her – You may think it’s a small detail. To me, it’s a matter of principle.

Him – Are you mad at me?

Her – I need time to think about this. *(She hesitates.)* But not now. They invited us, didn’t they? So I’ll go. I’m not one to run away. We can talk about it afterwards. Shall we?

Him – The problem is...

Her – Oh, there's another problem?

Him – I didn't dare tell them you don't eat meat.

Her – No, tell me you're joking...

Him – I don’t think they’d understand... They’re getting on in years. You don’t want to shock them at their age. It might kill them. My father has a weak heart...

Her – You could have broken it to them gently.

Him – Let's say I couldn't find the right moment...

Her – Of course...

Him – You can just eat the vegetables... Just say you're not very hungry... Or that you're unwell...

Her – You know what? I think you’re the one who needs professional help.

She takes off her coat.

Him – So, you're not coming...

Her *(horrified)* – A horse butcher's?

Him – So you’d abandon a butcher’s son who’s only just converted to veganism? Without you, I might fall off the wagon. Straight back into the meat counter...

Her – Are you mocking me now?

Him – Don’t look at me like that. I feel as if you’re going to kill me.

Her – Believe me, the thought has crossed my mind...

Him – Calm down! You’re vegan, remember. Surely “Thou shalt not kill” is your favourite commandment?

Her – It used to be...

Him – Please tell me it still is!

Her – I’ll strangle you, then ask for forgiveness afterwards.

She moves towards him, threateningly.

Him – Don't do this, please.

Her – I don't know what's holding me back...

Him – You really believed all that?

Her – What?

Him – Come on! You haven't seen a horse-meat butcher's around here in years. On the corner, between the tobacco shop and the shoe repair shop, there's an organic food store! If you did the shopping once in a while, you'd know...

Her – Your parents aren't butchers?

Him – My parents run a bookshop, vote for the left and are vegan. Just as I've always told you.

Her – You're crazy! Why would you make up such a story?

Him – I wanted to know how much you loved me. And now I know. So you really wouldn't marry a butcher's son?

Her – I don't know... Probably not. But I'd have ended up killing you, that's for sure.

Him – So it could have ended in tragedy? The Capulets were butchers and the Montagues were vegans...

Her – And instead we've ended up in a good old-fashioned farce.

Him – Can't change who we are...

Her – It's no tragedy.

Him – Right, shall we go? We're going to be late.

Her – Let's go. You haven't forgotten the carrot cake?

Him – Don't worry, bunny. It's already in the car.

Her – By the way, was that a proposal?

Him – Yes...

Her – That must be the most unexpected proposal a woman has ever received.

Him – I am a playwright, after all. I've been rehearsing it for a week. So what's your answer?

Her – I'll wait until I've met your parents before deciding.

They exit.

Blackout.

3. Behind Closed Doors

A couple. Four chairs. They are sitting.

Her – Everything all right?

Him – Fine... And you?

Her – Fine... *(Pause.)* Would you like something to drink?

Him – What?

Her – An aperitif? Some peanuts?

Him – No thanks. I'm fine.

A pause.

Her – Nice here, isn't it?

Him – Here?

Her – In this house.

Him – Yes... *(Pause.)* But it isn't our home.

Her – Oh, isn't it?

Him – No.

Her – That's true.

Him – Is this a house or an apartment?

Her – An apartment, I think. I'm not sure.

A pause.

Him – Do you remember where our home is?

Her – Our home?

Him – Our real home. Where we live.

Her – No... Do you?

Him – Neither do I. I can't even remember what it looked like.

Her – We've moved so many times.

Him – That's true. We do move a lot.

Her – Yes. More and more often.

Him – We really should try to remember.

Her – Remember what?

Him – Where we actually live.

Her – All homes look a bit alike.

Him – Even if they're apartments.

Her – There are bedrooms. A dining room. A kitchen.

Him – In the kitchen, there's a fridge, a cooker, a table, drawers...

Her – In the drawers, there are forks, knives, teaspoons.

Him – In the bedrooms, there are children. Sometimes...

Her – If there aren't any, they've probably grown up and moved to another home.

A pause.

Him – Do you think they'll come back one day?

Her – The children?

Him – The owners!

Her – Who knows... How long have we been here?

Him – I don't know... Quite a while, hasn't it?

Her – Yes.

Him – I keep worrying that the doorbell will ring and it'll be them.

Her – The children?

Him – The people who live here! The real owners...

Her – Oh, right...

Him – Aren't you?

Her – Yes. Actually, I wonder if the doorbell works.

Him – What?

Her – The doorbell! We've never heard it.

Him – Anyway, when the people who live here come back, they won't ring the bell.

Her – Why not?

Him – It's their home. They'll have the key.

Her – Of course.

Him – People don't ring the doorbell when they come home. They have no reason to think someone will be inside while they're out.

Her – True... Do we have the key?

Him – I don't know. Do you have the key?

Her – No.

Him – Neither do I.

Her – Then how did we get in?

Him – I can't remember.

Her – Maybe someone let us in.

Him – Who would have let us in?

Her – The owners?

Him – But we're alone in this flat.

Her – How long have we been here?

Him – I don't know...

A pause.

Her – That must be why we never go out. We wouldn't be able to get back in.

Him – No. Since we don't have the key.

The doorbell rings. They exchange a worried look.

Her – Do you think it's them?

Him – We said if it were them, they wouldn't ring.

Her – So who could it be?

Him – Who knows...

Her – What do we do?

Him – We should answer it, right?

Her – Do you think so?

Him – They've seen the light on. They know we're here.

Her – This is it... We're done for...

Him – We're going to have to move again.

Her – Where would we go?

Him – I'll pack our suitcase.

Her – Do we have a suitcase?

Him – Everyone has a suitcase at home, don't they?

Her – I'll go and answer it...

Him – What are you going to say to them?

Her – I don't know...

Him – We'll have to explain why we're here. In their home.

Her – They're probably just back from holiday.

Him – I'll see whether we've got a suitcase.

She exits. He goes out too. She returns with another couple. Michael carries a bottle, and Christine has a bunch of flowers. He returns with a suitcase.

Her – This is Michael and Christine.

Him – Oh, hello...

Michael – Hello! How are you?

Him – I'm fine, and you?

Christine – Great! Going on holiday?

Him – No. Why?

Michael – You're holding a suitcase...

Him – Oh, no, I... I was just going to put it away. You know how it is with suitcases. You never know where to keep them.

Her – And an empty suitcase takes up as much space as a full one.

Christine – Yes. But it's lighter.

Michael – True. We should always travel with empty suitcases. It would save a lot of weight.

They all laugh, a little awkwardly.

Christine – So, how are you?

Him – I'm fine.

Michael – We brought champagne to celebrate.

Him – Celebrate what?

Michael bursts out laughing.

Michael – "Celebrate what?" You always have a joke ready, don't you?

Christine – He's funny! Here, I brought some flowers.

Her – Oh yes, lovely.

Him – I'll get the flutes.

Her – You want us to play them a tune?

Michael – No, champagne flutes!

Her – Oh, right!

They laugh again.

Christine – She's funny!

Her – And I'll find a vase. For the flowers.

Christine – Would you like a hand?

Him – No, no, we'll manage!

Her – Please, sit down!

Him – Make yourselves at home.

Her – You know the house.

They both exit.

Michael *(smiling)* – They're so funny...

Christine – Yes...

Michael – They haven't changed. Still as...

Christine – You think so?

Michael – What?

Christine – That they haven't changed.

Michael – Now that you mention it, I suppose...

Christine – They look nothing like the people we saw here last week...

Michael – Well, a bit, maybe...

Christine – Hmm...

Michael – And you know, people... They change...

Christine – Not this much... Not in a week...

Michael – It was a week ago?

Christine – It was last week. The last time we saw them.

Michael – It's true, they've changed quite a lot.

A pause.

Christine – Or maybe they're not the same people.

Michael – Not them? Then what would they be doing here? If it's not their home...

A pause.

Christine – You think we could have got the wrong door?

Michael – I don't think so... Besides, they seem to know us, don't they? If they know us, surely we know them.

Christine – Yes, of course...

The man returns.

Him – I'm terribly sorry, I couldn't find any champagne flutes.

Christine – Oh, men...

Michael – Just ask your wife.

The woman returns as well.

Him – Do you know where the champagne flutes are, darling?

Her – No... There might not be any...

Christine – You don't own any champagne flutes? Everyone has champagne flutes, surely?

Michael – It doesn't matter. We'll drink it from regular glasses.

Christine – You must have wine glasses? *(They look uncertain.)* Jam jars, even?

Him – I didn't see anything...

Her – I couldn't find a vase either.

Christine – Surely you have some glasses. In a kitchen...

Her – I couldn't find the kitchen.

An awkward moment.

Michael – Well, you know what? We'll drink from the bottle. Like the Russians!

Christine – Do Russians drink champagne from the bottle?

Michael – The Cossacks, certainly. Without even dismounting. They would just slice the top off the bottle with...

Christine – With a sabre.

Her – In the meantime, do sit down.

They all sit. Awkward smiles. Silence.

Him – And the children, are they well? *(Michael and Christine, who clearly don't have children, exchange a puzzled glance.)* No, I mean children in general. Not necessarily yours. If you don't have any...

Her – Or not anymore... I mean... You might have had children and lost them.

Him – I didn't say that was the case.

Awkward silence.

Her – I'll see if I can find some peanuts...

She exits.

Him – Anyway, it's nice of you to drop by.

Christine – We are friends, aren't we?

Him – Of course.

Michael and Christine exchange an awkward look. Christine signals Michael to go ahead.

Michael – My question might sound silly, but... do you actually live here?

Him – Why do you ask?

Christine – The friends who live here don't look anything like you.

Michael – The last time we came, they looked nothing like you...

She returns.

Her – I found the peanuts!

Christine – You found the kitchen?

Her – I even found some glasses.

Michael – Then we can have a drink!

Christine – Go on...

Michael opens the bottle and pours the champagne. They raise their glasses.

Michael – To your health!

Him – To friendship!

They drink.

Her – Have some peanuts.

They eat peanuts.

Christine – I've never dared ask you, but...

Him – Yes...?

Christine – How did you two meet? *(An embarrassed silence.)* Sorry, that was terribly personal. I don't know what came over me...

Her – No, no, it's just that...

Him – We don't really remember.

Christine – You don't remember?

Michael – You don't remember where you met?

A pause.

Her – I think it was here, wasn't it?

Christine – Here?

Her – One day we realised we were living in the same apartment.

Him – Yes, funny that... I think that's how it happened.

Her – It was a long time ago, of course.

Him – Yes... A week, maybe.

Her – Yes, about a week.

Christine – Oh, that long?

Him – And you?

Michael – Us?

Her – Have you known each other long?

Christine – No, not very...

Michael – I'd say... Yes, not very long.

Christine – We met in the entrance hall downstairs.

Michael – I had a bottle of champagne.

Christine – And I had a bouquet of flowers.

Michael – We figured we must be going to the same place.

Christine – Since I didn't have the door code...

Michael – Nor did I. I pressed a few doorbells at random. You were the first to let us in.

Christine – Since he seemed to know where he was going, I followed him.

Him – Ah, yes...

Her – Yes. It’s... a lovely story.

Him – Very romantic.

Her – You’ll see. It’ll end in marriage.

Michael and Christine exchange an uncomfortable look.

Michael – So, if I understand correctly, no one here really knows each other.

Her – Apparently not.

Christine – And none of us seems to belong in this apartment.

Him – Apparently not...

Michael – Then whose home is this?

Silence.

Christine – Would you like more champagne?

Her – Thank you, but it’s getting late. We should probably be going.

Him – Thank you for your hospitality, anyway.

Michael – No trouble at all.

He picks up the suitcase and heads towards the door with Her.

Christine – Shall I see you to the door?

Her – Don’t trouble yourself. We know the way.

Michael – Want help with the suitcase?

Him – No... It weighs nothing... It's empty.

Christine – Well... See you again sometime!

Michael – And thank you for dropping by!

They exit. Michael and Christine sit back down. Silence.

Christine – You all right?

Michael – Fine... And you?

Christine – Fine... *(Pause.)* Would you like another drink?

Michael – No, thanks, I'm fine.

Christine – Some peanuts?

He grabs a handful of peanuts and begins chewing.

Christine – It's nice here, isn't it?

Michael – Yes... *(Pause.)* But it isn’t our home.

Christine – That's true.

Michael – Is it a house or an apartment?

Christine – An apartment, I think.

Blackout.

4. Anonymous Author

She stands in the middle of the empty stage, looking around. He comes in.

Him – Ah, there you are! I was looking all over for you...

Her – The last removal truck has just left with the final boxes.

Him – You checked everywhere? Nothing left in the house?

Her – Nothing. Except our memories...

He places a hand on her shoulder.

Him – Come on... We'll make new ones!

Her – Of course. But having plans for the future doesn't stop you feeling nostalgic.

Him – Any regrets?

Her – No...

Him – Remember the first time we came to see this house?

Her – It was empty then, too.

Him – And between those two moments, we lived. We filled this house with furniture, paintings, children...

Her – And it filled us with joy, happiness, memories.

Him – Those are coming with us.

Her – And we're leaving this place almost as spotless as we found it.

Him – Much cleaner, if you ask me.

Her – I wonder who'll come next. We know nothing about them.

Him – And they'll know nothing about us.

Her – Just as we know nothing of those who were here before us.

Him – People come and go. Houses stay.

Her – Until they fall down too. Or somebody demolishes them to build an apartment block.

Him – Some houses are haunted by bad memories.

Her – Yes... Every house has a story. Stories.

Him – Like the story of a crime, for instance.

Her – A crime?

Him – Not every crime happens in the street, you know. Most are committed in people's homes. Often within the family... When one of those crimes makes the news, the house becomes impossible to sell. Sometimes they must knock it down and build another one. A house with a clean slate...

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

Him – Who knows... Maybe this house, before us, didn't only witness happy times.

Her – Well, at least we never found any bodies in the cupboards.

Him – Maybe if we'd dug around in the cellar...

Her – Right... Well, in that case, I think we should get going.

Him – See? You just had to ask...

Her – Thanks... I know I can always count on you in difficult times.

They head toward the exit. She bends down and picks something up from the floor.

Him – What is it?

Her – A manuscript, by the look of it.

Him – A manuscript?

Her – Seems to be a play.

Him – How can you tell?

She flips through the pages.

Her – It has people talking to one another, rather than a narrator. Unlike a novel.

Him – I see... Dialogues...

Her – Or it could be a film script.

Him – Is it about a crime?

Her – I don't know.

Him – It must have been wedged behind a radiator, and with the move, it fell to the floor. The paper's completely yellowed.

Her – But the words are still legible, after all these years. Imagine that.

Him – What is it? A comedy? A drama?

Her – We'd have to read it.

Him – Who could have written this?

Her – Someone who lived here before us, I suppose.

Him – Imagine if it's a masterpiece...

Her – It could just as easily be a terrible play.

Him – Is it signed?

Her – No... I can't see an author's name.

Him – It might never have been published. An anonymous manuscript, imagine that! You could put your name on it and publish it. You're a publisher. It would be easy for you.

Her – That would be plagiarism.

Him – Not if the author's dead and no one even knows they wrote it...

Her – I'll start by reading it...

Him – Isn't it strange?

Her – What?

Him – We're leaving this house, and taking someone else's story away with us.

Her – I just hope it isn't a tragedy...

Him – At least we didn't find a body.

Her – It almost makes me want to search...

Him – You think?

Her – Perhaps the author is buried in the cellar...

They leave.

Blackout.

5. Scene Change

A flashlight beam cuts through the darkness. Then another. The first beam lights up the second person's face.

Him – Oh, it's you! You gave me a fright...

Her – Well?

Him – It's done, everything's in the truck.

Her – It all went smoothly?

Him – The usual.

She sweeps the flashlight beam across the audience.

Her – So, no one was there...

Him – With the racket that dog made when I arrived... If anyone was in the house, they'd have woken up.

Her – Unless they're dead.

Him – Don't say that. Imagine breaking into a house at night and finding a corpse...

Her – With the luck I've had lately, I wouldn't be surprised.

Him – Yeah... I saw that happen in a film once. Can't remember what it was called...

Her – You can tell me about the film later. And the dog... Is it all right?

Him – Thanks for asking whether I got bitten...

Her – Did you?

Him – It tore my trousers to shreds. I had to knock it out.

Her – If there's no one around, we can turn on the lights, right?

Him – Go ahead. The houses around here are empty. Mostly holiday homes. And some people have already moved away.

Her – Because of all the burglaries, probably.

Him – If this keeps up, there'll be nothing but empty houses left to rob around here.

She flicks a switch and the lights come on. His clothes are in tatters.

Her – Ah yes, that dog really did a number on you. Poor thing... You didn't hurt it too much, did you?

Him – Why? Are you going to report me to the animal welfare people?

They look around.

Her – You've really cleared the place out. There's nothing left.

Him – Everything's loaded in the truck.

Her – Anything interesting?

Him – Mostly furniture. A few ornaments. Terrible taste.

Her – I see...

Him – Nouveau-riche taste.

Her – Better to be newly rich than newly poor.

Him – There was a safe, though.

Her – Really?

Him – I cracked it.

Her – How much?

Him – It's all in the truck. I didn't count it.

Her – We'll check it out in a bit. Let's not hang around here. You checked the other rooms?

Him – I cleared them all. Did you come with Bob?

Her – I slept in the car on the way here. I don't even know where we are. *(She looks around again.)* Amazing how one empty house can look just like another.

Him – Yeah...

Her – You're sure it's the right house?

Him – You saw the cross painted on the wall outside. Bob checked out the place last week.

Her – Yes... One of those marks that means valuables inside, no alarm, easy to break into...

Him – He got it right. Except for the dog. It must've been asleep when he came by.

Her – Strange. This place looks vaguely familiar...

Him – Maybe it belongs to someone you know...

Her – Maybe...

She picks something up from the floor.

Him – What's that?

Her – An electricity bill.

Him – Must've fallen from a drawer.

Her – It has my name on it...

Him – No...?

Her – I thought as much...

Him – You mean...

Her – This is my house! I can't believe it... You've burgled my house!

Him – How was I supposed to know? There was a cross on the wall. Didn't you tell Bob where you lived?

Her – No... Did you?

Him – It never crossed my mind...

Her – Damn it... Of all the houses in the world...

Silence.

Him – Well... At least moving out will be easier...

Her – I had no intention of moving.

Him – So what do we do?

Her – What else can we do? We'll have to put everything back. All that tasteless furniture and those ornaments. Nouveau-riche taste...

Him – OK...

Her – And give me my money back. Maybe I can use it to buy a new safe, now you've broken into mine.

Him – No great loss. Your safe was rubbish. I got into it in five minutes.

Her – Unbelievable. I just hope the dog's all right...

Him – You're still worried about that bloody mutt?

Her – He's my dog! You knocked out my dog!

Him – Oh, right, sorry... Don't worry, it'll be fine.

Her – Yes... He was lying outside his kennel when I came in. I wondered why he didn't bark at me.

Him – Well, he recognised his owner, didn't he?

Her – And I didn't even recognise my own house...

Him – And then they say animals aren't as clever as us.

Her – Right, back to work. We've got a lot to do.

Him – Or we could report the burglary, and you could claim it on the insurance.

Her – You think?

Him – We get rid of this junk, if we can find someone to buy it. And you get to redecorate...

Her – Yes... And it’ll save the director a scene change.

Him – Shall we leave through the courtyard or the garden?

They exit.

Blackout.

6. Crime Scene

Inspector Ramirez enters, followed by his deputy, Sanchez. They look around.

Ramirez – You haven't touched anything?

Sanchez – No... What would I have touched?

Ramirez – True... I've never seen a crime scene quite so... utterly empty.

Sanchez – Yes...

Ramirez – Finding evidence is going to be difficult.

Sanchez – What can we send to the lab? Apart from the air we're breathing.

Ramirez – You know, that's an idea...

Sanchez – You want me to send an air sample to the lab?

Ramirez – There's no obvious murder weapon... Perhaps it was gas poisoning.

Sanchez – Only an autopsy would tell us that...

Ramirez looks around again.

Ramirez – An autopsy, certainly, but... where are the bodies?

Sanchez looks around too.

Sanchez – Apparently, there are no bodies either.

Ramirez – What do you mean, no bodies? Without bodies there's no murder! And without a murder there's no crime scene!

Sanchez – There must be victims. Otherwise, why would we be here?

Ramirez – There are victims, but no bodies?

Sanchez – I don't see any...

Ramirez – Perhaps the killer disposed of the bodies. But how?

Sanchez – I suppose that's what we're here to find out...

They look around again, then at the floor.

Ramirez – I don't see anything.

Sanchez – Ah, I think I've got something.

Ramirez – What is it?

Sanchez – A book.

Ramirez – A book?

Sanchez *(leafing through it)* – A play.

Ramirez – How do you know it's a play?

Sanchez – It was published by La Comédiathèque.

Ramirez – Do you think it could help with our investigation?

Sanchez – Who knows? *(He reads on.)* This is unsettling... The characters have exactly the same names as us...

Ramirez – No?

Sanchez – Inspector Ramirez and his deputy, Sanchez...

Ramirez – Let me see. *(He takes the book and reads a few pages.)* And the descriptions match exactly those of the victims we were sent to investigate.

Sanchez – Then... if we follow that reasoning... we must be characters in a play?

Ramirez – Worse. We must be dead...

Sanchez – And they sent us to investigate our own disappearance?

Ramirez – This is the strangest case I've encountered in my entire career.

Sanchez – What sort of play? A comedy? A tragedy?

Ramirez – You know me, theatre's not really my thing...

Sanchez – What's it called?

Ramirez – It's No Tragedy.

Sanchez – I didn't say it was. I asked you for the title.

Ramirez – It's No Tragedy. That's the title.

They exchange baffled looks.

Sanchez – How can characters in a play die when they don't actually exist?

Ramirez – This is all a bit unusual.

Sanchez – Dying on stage, no less...

Ramirez – So you think... we're on a theatre stage?

Sanchez turns to the audience.

Sanchez – Look at those people sitting in the dark... It's as though they've come to watch us.

Ramirez – Damn, you're right... Who are they? Witnesses?

Sanchez – Maybe they're here to watch the re-enactment.

Ramirez – Unbelievable. Don't tell me they paid to get in as well.

Sanchez – Why don't you ask them?

Ramirez – You think we can talk to them?

Sanchez – I don't know...

Ramirez – It might help with our investigation...

Sanchez – Maybe they saw something...

Ramirez approaches a member of the audience.

Ramirez – Did you pay for your ticket?

A brief improvisation depending on the spectator's response, or lack of one.

Sanchez – And... did you see anything?

Ramirez – We'll have to solve this one ourselves, as usual.

Sanchez – Yes, because it seems our characters didn't leave much of an impression...

Ramirez – Sadly, that's the fate of most of us: to leave no trace when our time on Earth is over.

Sanchez – Still... Us, theatre characters...

Ramirez – True... We might have hoped for a bit of recognition...

Sanchez – Perhaps the play was a flop. When a play's a masterpiece, people remember its characters, don't they?

Ramirez – Especially the leads... Some characters even become more famous than their authors.

Sanchez – Take Sherlock Holmes. Everyone remembers him. But who remembers who wrote him?

Ramirez – Elementary, my dear Watson. Arthur Conan Doyle.

Sanchez – Alas, you're no Sherlock Holmes.

Ramirez – And you're no Doctor Watson.

Sanchez – Otherwise, we'd have solved this mystery ages ago.

Ramirez – What can I say? We're only supporting characters.

Sanchez – The ones everyone forgets as soon as the curtain falls... Who said life is a dream?

Ramirez – Life... It seems long, especially at the beginning. We start speaking our lines in Act One.

Sanchez – At first we don't realise the entire play has already been written.

Ramirez – Then little by little we remember each line as we say it.

Sanchez – Until we remember the words before we've said them.

Ramirez – And as the play comes to an end... all we can hope for is a good exit.

Sanchez – Smells rather stale in here, doesn't it?

Ramirez – That's the smell of theatre.

Sanchez – Well, the good news is we've found the bodies.

Ramirez – Yes. And they're beginning to smell.

Sanchez – The smell of characters decomposing... From all those flops that didn't survive their first run.

Sanchez – The plays that failed to find an audience, as they say...

Ramirez – Ours must have been out of step with the times... Take an air sample. We'll send it to the lab.

Sanchez takes a small bottle from his pocket, uncaps it, waits a moment, then caps it and puts it back in his pocket.

Sanchez – There we are. The play is over.

Ramirez – Time to leave the stage. For good. That was our final performance...

Sanchez – Let's head out this way.

Ramirez – To think all these poor people paid to be here...

Sanchez – It's no tragedy.

Ramirez – We should have called it Autopsy of a Flop.

Sanchez – I'd have preferred a masterpiece. Something that would have made us immortal.

Ramirez – Maybe next time...

They exit. 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/

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 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 ...
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 free of charge from his websites:

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