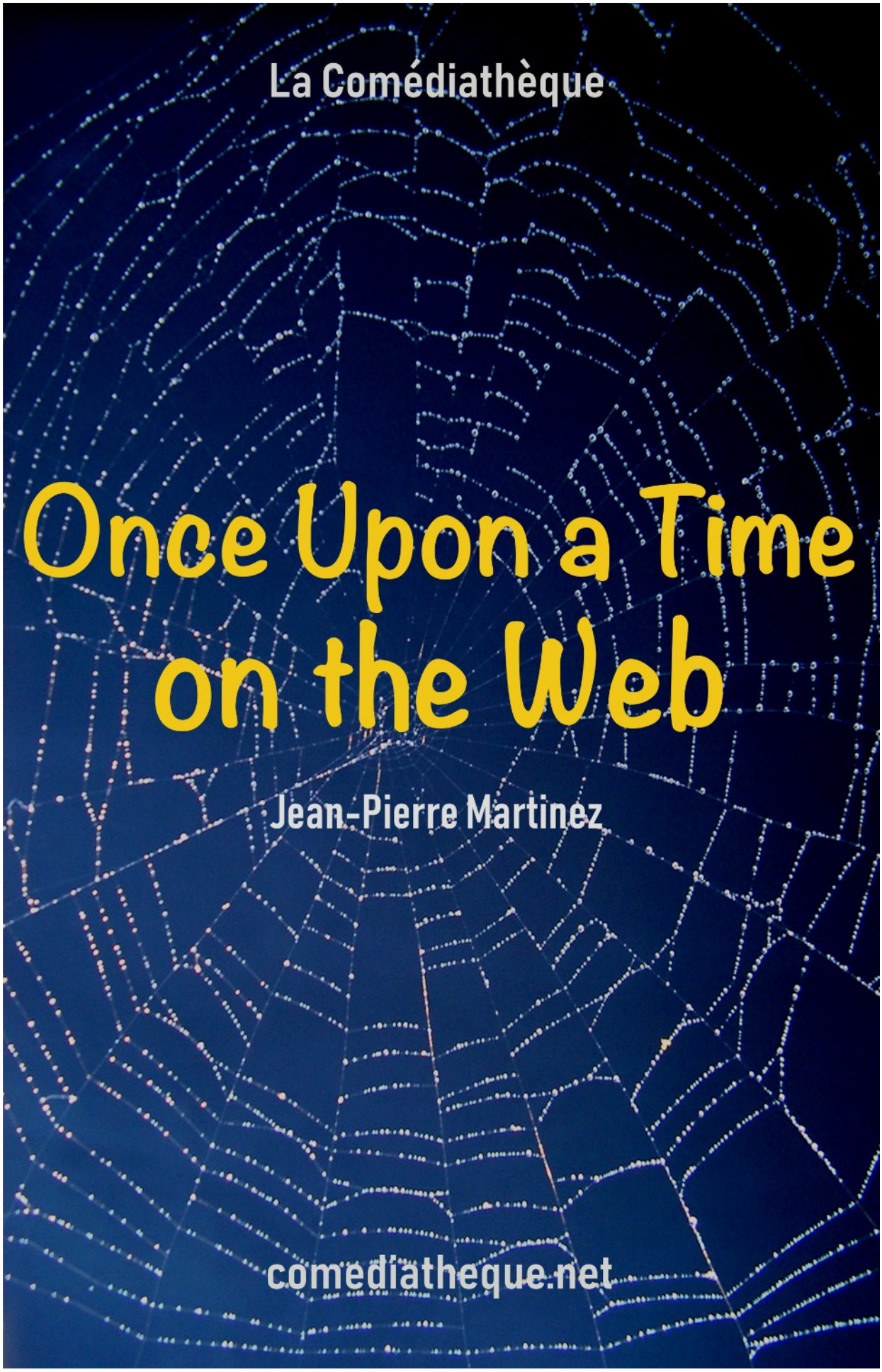

La Comédiathèque
Once Upon a Time on the Web
Jean-Pierre Martinez
comediatheque.net

The text of this play is to free download.
However, an authorisation is required from the author
for any public representation.
To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez
and ask an authorisation to represent one of his works –
https://comediatheque.net/

Once Upon a Time on the Web

Jean-Pierre Martinez

The CEO of an advertising start-up on the verge of bankruptcy has just dismissed a supposedly underperforming employee when she learns that his campaign has been selected by a major client.
How can she undo the damage and how far will she go?

Characters
Jane
Mick
Marianne
Bérangère
Charlie

© La Comédiathèque

Friday

The meeting room of the advertising start-up Once Upon a Time on the Web. It resembles a reception area cluttered with cardboard boxes and doubles as a coffee corner and photocopy room. The atmosphere is self-consciously cool and informal, but the furniture is cheap. Jane, the CEO, enters briskly, elegant and sexy. Marianne, the chief financial officer, more severe and less glamorous, follows her like a shadow, carrying a stack of files.

Jane – Where is everybody? Didn't we agree on nine o'clock?

Marianne – It's eight fifty-nine…

Jane – Fifty-nine. You really are an accountant, aren't you?

Marianne – Chief financial officer, Jane…

The two women sit down for the meeting.

Jane – Well, your watch is one minute slow.

Marianne – I very much doubt that. It's Swiss. Like me.

Jane – You're Swiss, Marianne?

Marianne – On my mother's side.

Jane – And you can't open a bank account over there for us? A Swiss accountant might not solve our financial problems, but a Swiss bank account could be a start…

Marianne – Unfortunately, I don't have Swiss citizenship. My mother moved to France shortly after I was born.

Jane – She left Switzerland for France? When everyone else dreams of moving to Switzerland? Was there a famine? Had they run out of chocolate and cheese fondue?

Marianne – No…

Jane – A revolution, then? A civil war between the chocolate makers and the watchmakers?

Marianne – My mother married a Frenchman and followed him to Paris. But I'm Swiss at heart.

Jane – An accountant and Swiss. Poor Marianne. And I was wondering why you never laugh at anything.

Marianne *(stiffly)* – I can be very funny sometimes, you know.

Jane checks her phone.

Jane – You don't say.

Marianne – Perhaps not during working hours, but at weekends I do occasionally crack a joke…

Jane – Right, it is nine o'clock now, isn't it?

Marianne – Er… yes, Jane.

Jane – But you said my watch was fast!

Marianne – I said that exactly a minute ago.

Jane – I'm joking, Marianne! See? No sense of humour at all! Humour matters, you know. Particularly in advertising.

Marianne – Yes, yes. Hilarious.

Jane *(weary)* – Well, a sense of humour isn't the first thing we expect from our accountant. Though, given our finances, we could use a laugh. Have you got the files on our current clients?

Marianne – Everything's here. I've colour-coded the files. Red for the urgent ones, orange for those that…

Mick, the sales director, arrives. Whatever his age, he dresses like a fashionable young man who has never had a worry in his life.

Mick – Morning, Jane! Marianne…

Marianne – And green for…

Jane – Mick, did you know our accountant was Swiss?

Mick – No, but now you mention it, I'm not remotely surprised.

Marianne – Why is that?

Mick – Your wild sense of humour. Your reckless, chaotic lifestyle.

Marianne – It's perfectly possible to enjoy a joke and believe in order, you know.

Mick – That must be why dictators were always such a laugh.

Marianne – I said I like order, not dictatorship. By the way, Mick, is your name short for Michael, like Michael Jackson?

Mick – It's Mick, as in Jagger. Rock and roll, that's me.

Bérangère and Charlie enter. Both are noticeably younger. She is beautiful, impeccably dressed and rather privileged-looking. He is unshaven, scruffy and resembles an adolescent who never quite grew up.

Mick – Beauty and the Beast! Our creative dream team! One from a very expensive private school, the other from the wrong side of the tracks. Let's see what sort of beautiful babies they make together.

Jane – Or whether the offspring will survive.

Mick – I mean your creations for the agency, of course. The future of this business rests on your delicate shoulders!

Jane – And on the brains those shoulders are supposed to support.

Bérangère *(reciting)* – Jane, you can count on my total commitment to the company. I fully embrace its business plan. I joined this team to meet new challenges and take on even more challenges.

Mick – Amen.

Jane – Fine. Now that everyone's here, we can begin.

Bérangère – I'm not late, am I? We said nine, didn't we?

Marianne – It's nine oh-one.

Mick – You all right, Charlie? You look as though you spent the night in a rubbish bin.

Charlie – I don't get the keys to my new apartment until tonight. The landlord wants to see my payslips first. Otherwise, yeah, yeah, everything's fine…

Mick pretends to catch a terrible smell.

Mick – Fine, is it? Perhaps it's a bath you need. Ever since you arrived, there's been a distinct smell of wild animal around here.

Mick waits for a laugh at his rather laboured jokes. Jane isn't in the mood.

Jane – Marianne?

Marianne – I suggest we review our current accounts. *(She takes out a rather thin file.)* This is the orange file.

Jane – All right. What have we got?

Marianne – Evening Breeze, the teenage deodorant?

Mick – Excellent product! I tested it on Charlie myself. Apparently the magic wears off after a few months, though.

Jane – Ah yes. Bérangère came up with a brilliant slogan. What was it?

Bérangère – Evening Breeze. Now even your friends can stand you.

Mick – The social-media campaign was a tremendous success. Unfortunately, the client went bankrupt before they could reap the rewards.

Marianne – And we may be next. They went bankrupt before they paid us.

Jane – I see. Next account.

Marianne – Well… that's actually it for our current clients.

Mick – So that's why it's the orange file.

Jane – Right. What about the clients we're pitching to?

Marianne – There's the Bloody Sushi campaign Bérangère and Charlie are developing together.

Jane – Bloody Sushi?

Mick – Like sushi, but made with raw meat instead of raw fish.

Jane – Of course. How did nobody think of that before?

Bérangère – And it's delivered to your door by drone.

Mick – No traffic jams.

Jane – Have you come up with a campaign?

Mick – I think we've struck gold. An edgy online video. Bérangère?

Bérangère – A couple order raw-meat sushi. There's a mix-up, and they get one meal instead of two.

Mick – So they literally tear each other apart with a blender and a hedge trimmer, fighting over who gets to eat it.

Jane – The slogan?

Charlie – Bloody Sushi. Things are about to get bloody!

Jane – Fine. If they choose our campaign, let's try collecting our fee before they go bankrupt. Anything else?

Marianne – Apple has invited pitches for the campaign launching its new iPhone. It's a huge account.

Mick – We've sent a proposal, but let's not get carried away. They're unlikely to choose a tiny outfit like ours.

Jane – Who worked on it?

Mick *(to Charlie)* – Charlie?

Charlie, who is dozing, snaps back to life when everyone looks at him.

Charlie – Huh?

Jane – What did our little genius come up with?

Charlie – A guy's holding his new iPhone in one hand and an apple in the other.

Jane – Yes?

Charlie – He's on a hands-free call with his girlfriend, and instead of biting the apple, he bites the phone.

Jane – Mm-hmm. And the slogan?

Charlie – New iPhone. It's an Apple. Just don't bite it.

Mick – Very offbeat. Very sophisticated, in a completely idiotic sort of way. It could work.

Jane – You really think so?

Mick – I know, it's absolute rubbish. Unfortunately we've already sent it. The deadline was ridiculously tight.

Jane – All right, dream team, back to work. The rest of us will go through the figures.

Bérangère and Charlie leave.

Mick *(sarcastically)* – Easier to breathe already, isn't it? Perhaps Charlie needs Morning Breeze as well.

Jane doesn't find this funny.

Jane – With the company in this state, I'm finding it rather difficult to breathe at all.

Marianne – I've prepared a financial report. The red file. Our cash flow is experiencing a slight difficulty, which we hope is temporary. I can take you through the figures to the last cent.

Jane – Don't bother, Marianne. Mick, our income is collapsing. We don't need an accountant to tell us that unless we bring in new clients, we won't have enough to pay salaries at the end of the month.

Mick – We're going through a quiet spell, that's all. Digital advertising is booming.

Jane – Right now we're the ones about to go down in flames. I've put a great deal of my own money into this business. So have our investors.

Mick – New business is my absolute priority. I'll double my efforts, and I promise I'll bring in clients. I can feel things turning around.

Marianne – Meanwhile, we must reduce our fixed costs. The bank calls every day about our overdraft.

Mick – We can't save much more on the office. Not unless we move our headquarters into a phone booth.

Jane – We could fire someone.

Mick – Anyone in particular?

Jane – Have you got a suggestion?

Mick – You said it yourself. Do we really need an accountant to tell us we're broke? We already know.

Jane – Throwing away the thermometer doesn't cure the fever. Besides, unlike you, Marianne believes in this company enough to have invested her savings in it. She owns thirty per cent of the shares. That makes her a little difficult to fire.

Mick – If I had any savings to invest, you know I would…

Jane – I was thinking of one of our two creatives. Given the number of projects on the books, one of them should be more than enough.

Mick – But the greatest asset of an advertising agency is its people. Their creative talent, the ideas they bring to the business.

Jane – Did you say talent? That's exactly the problem. Bérangère looks as though she's just escaped from a finishing school.

Marianne – She actually has a degree from a prestigious university.

Jane – And Charlie looks as though he's just checked out of rehab.

Marianne – He claims to have attended a leading business school, but his CV seems to have been rather heavily embellished.

Jane – Let's get rid of one of these geniuses until business picks up. And take more care over recruitment next time.

Mick – I'd hate to lose Bérangère. I think she's got enormous potential.

Jane – I'm sure you do. So we're getting rid of the one who smells worse?

Mick – I thought his approach was very much in tune with the times. But if we have to choose…

Jane – Marianne?

Marianne – Charlie may have been a hiring mistake. In fact, I've already drafted his dismissal letter, just in case. It's in the green file.

Jane – Decision made. Marianne, post it by registered mail this evening.

Marianne – It's Friday. He could receive it as early as tomorrow morning. Shall I tell him in person?

Jane – Better not give him an extra day to prepare a legal case against us. And make sure it's dismissal for misconduct. We don't want complications if we need to recruit again when business picks up.

Marianne – I see. What kind of misconduct?

Jane – Take your pick. He's hopeless, he's late every other morning, his CV is a work of fiction, he leers at women, his breath smells like a camel, and he won't shut the toilet door because he's claustrophobic. I could go on.

Marianne desperately tries to write everything down in the green file.

Marianne – Very well. I'll… draw up a summary.

Jane – Anything else?

Marianne – I'd also like to discuss expense claims. They're rather excessive given the amount of business we have, and some don't seem entirely justified.

Jane – Such as?

Marianne – Mick, why did you claim four hundred and forty euros for haircuts last month?

Mick – Four separate appointments! They're business expenses.

Jane loses interest and checks her phone.

Marianne – You get your hair cut every week? I barely go once every two months!

Mick – Yes, well, it shows.

Marianne – Excuse me?

Mick – You're an accountant! Nobody cares what your hair looks like. I'm in sales. Making a good impression on clients is part of my job.

Marianne – Especially female clients, I suppose. What about those three tanning sessions last week? Business expenses too?

Mick – I don't have time for a holiday. How else am I supposed to get a tan?

Marianne – And why does an advertising executive have to look as if he's just come back from the beach?

Jane – Fascinating as this discussion is, perhaps we could save it for another day. We do have more pressing concerns.

They rise to leave.

Mick – That was quite a productive meeting, wasn't it?

Jane – Right. Back to work.

Mick *(aside to Jane)* – So, about my pay rise… *(Jane glares at him.)* Right. We'll talk about that another time.

All three leave. Marianne takes her stack of files but forgets the green one. Charlie comes back, still half asleep, and pours himself a coffee. He sets it on the green folder. While checking his phone, he knocks over his cup, spilling coffee across the open papers.

Charlie – Shit.

He tries to mop up the mess with paper towels. As he dabs the pages, his eye catches something written there, although we cannot tell whether it is still legible. Marianne rushes in.

Marianne – My green file! I left it here…

She sees the damage.

Charlie – Sorry.

Marianne looks furious but says nothing. She grabs the folder and leaves. Charlie's phone rings and he answers.

Charlie – Yeah… Yeah, everything's fine. Just trying to read my future in the coffee grounds.

Bérangère enters. Charlie gives her an openly lecherous look.

Charlie – Listen, I'm in a meeting. Can I call you back? All right. Bye, sweetheart.

Bérangère – Is there no coffee left?

Charlie – I spilled the last of it on the company's accounts. But if you make another pot, I'd love to have a cup with you. We work together and hardly ever get a chance to talk.

Bérangère *(coldly)* – I'd rather die than make you coffee. In fact, I'd rather go without coffee altogether.

She leaves.

Charlie – That much aggression… There must be some very mixed feelings behind it. I bet we'll end up getting along.

Jane comes in. Charlie smiles at her. His phone rings again, and he moves away to take the call.

Charlie – Yeah? Speaking. Tomorrow at four thirty? Fine. In Paris, right? The twenty-first district… What? There are only twenty? Then it'll be the twentieth. All right. See you tomorrow.

Jane discovers the coffee pot is empty.

Jane – Shit.

Mick returns.

Mick – What's wrong?

Jane – There's no coffee. I bet that idiot drank the last cup and couldn't be bothered to make any more.

Mick – That alone is grounds for dismissal. Don't worry, I'll make some.

He begins making coffee, filling the machine with water while casting a longing glance at his boss.

Mick – Doing anything this weekend?

Jane – Going to my place in the country.

Mick – Alone?

Jane – With Flora.

Mick – Flora?

Jane – I'm beginning to wonder whether it's sensible. She's not due for another two weeks, but she's enormous. I swear there are at least six in there.

Mick – Six? Wow. And who's the proud father?

Jane – A German shepherd.

Mick – Better than a Swiss accountant, I suppose. But a German shepherd? What, an actual shepherd from Germany?

Jane – A German shepherd!

Mick – She slept with a shepherd?

Jane – Who did?

Mick – Flora.

Jane – She's a bitch!

Mick – Now, let's not judge her too harshly. Let whoever is without sin… *(He hesitates.)* Who exactly is Flora?

Jane – Flora is my German shepherd. My dog!

Mick – Ah. Well, that explains everything.

Jane's phone rings. She answers.

Jane – Once Upon a Time on the Web, hello?

Mick switches on an electric coffee grinder, making a deafening racket.

Jane – Sorry? I can hardly hear you. *(She motions to Mick, who moves away with the grinder.)* You're calling from New York? That must be why the connection's so bad. Our Apple pitch? Yes, I know, perhaps it wasn't our strongest idea… You think it's brilliant? Of course, it's wonderfully offbeat. Exactly the kind of absurd humour young people love. That's our signature. We believe in fresh talent. You want to meet the creative who came up with it? Charlie, yes. His style is certainly… distinctive. Naturally, it's a team effort. Oh, him and nobody else? And you've definitely chosen our agency? That's wonderful! May I have a number where… You'll call back Tuesday? Perfect. Enjoy your weekend in the Big Apple. No, the Big Apple means New York! I wasn't calling you a great big apple! Yes, just like our silly slogan: "It's an Apple. Just don't bite it." Very funny indeed. I look forward to Tuesday.

She ends the call. Mick comes back with the ground coffee.

Jane – You'd better sit down, Mick.

Mick – What's happened? Decided to spend the weekend with me rather than your dog? You can bring her along, you know.

Jane – Better: Apple has chosen our campaign!

Mick – Charlie's idea?

Jane – The head of Apple's European division just called. The decision is made. He's spending the weekend in New York, and he'll confirm everything officially on Tuesday.

Mick – That's unbelievable! It's a huge account!

Jane – This will solve our cash-flow problems for the next fifty years. We'll need to hire more people!

Mick – And move offices. Goodbye to this meeting room that looks like an acupuncturist's waiting room.

Jane – Obviously, we can't fire Charlie now.

Mick – And we should revisit my pay rise. I'm the one who pushed for hiring him, and I was never comfortable with the idea of letting him go. I have an eye for talent.

Jane – Is Marianne in her office?

Mick – She said she was going to the post office with a registered letter.

Jane – Oh no… *(She snatches up her phone.)* Marianne? Please tell me you haven't posted Charlie's dismissal letter. Shit! *(She ends the call.)* She's just posted it.

Mick – Oh. That's a problem.

Charlie returns, glued to his phone.

Charlie – A joint? Oh, right. How much would that cost? A hundred euros? That's expensive for a joint! Oh, that's the full call-out fee… How did I notice? When I pee in the sink it ends up on my shoes. Must be a drainage problem. Right, tomorrow morning, about eleven. *(He ends the call and turns to Jane and Mick.)* Hey, you made more coffee. Great.

He helps himself to a cup under their watchful gaze and wanders off again.

Mick – We had the only creative genius in this whole town capable of selling a campaign to Apple, and our accountant has just mailed him a letter firing him for misconduct.

Jane – The idiot!

Marianne enters in time to hear the last remark.

Mick – We were just talking about you.

Marianne – I beg your pardon?

Jane – Sorry. It's not your fault. But for once, couldn't you have waited a little before doing exactly what I asked?

Marianne – Would you have preferred a negotiated departure?

Mick – When he reads that he's being fired because we can't stand the smell of him…

Marianne – I also added that he'd put his hand on my backside.

Mick – Really? *(Marianne glares at him.)* I didn't realise he was quite that desperate.

Marianne – What is going on?

Jane – Apple's chosen Charlie's proposal.

Marianne – They… No!

Jane – And they insist that this idiot personally oversee the campaign.

Mick – Right. What do we do? Marianne, any ideas? After all, you're the one who got us into this mess.

She gives him a murderous look.

Marianne – Shall we discuss your acupuncture expenses as well?

Jane – First, Charlie must not find out Apple has chosen his idea. Under any circumstances.

Marianne – He'll find out eventually.

Jane – The later the better. That buys us time to fix this.

Marianne – Could we take his idea and have Bérangère develop it? We can tell the client later that Charlie's left the company.

Mick – Or died of an overdose.

Jane – I don't like it.

Mick – You're right. Bérangère has many qualities, but I see her more as someone who writes glossy adverts for luxury handbags.

Jane – The client specifically asked to meet Charlie. We can't let them down. It's a miracle they picked us in the first place.

Marianne – And it's definitely decided?

Jane – Yes. They've only asked us to keep it confidential until Tuesday.

Mick – So we've got the weekend.

Marianne – Why not just tell him the truth?

Jane – Tell whom?

Marianne – Charlie!

Jane – The truth? "We planned to fire you without compensation because we thought you were a loser, but now Apple wants your idea, we're relying on you to respect the wonderful relationship of trust we've always had with you"?

Marianne – When you put it like that…

Jane – He'll turn up on Monday furious, with a dismissal letter we couldn't even be bothered to hand him personally. Then when he learns the client wants him and nobody else…

Mick – He won't be stopping for farewell drinks. He'll take the Apple account straight to some rival agency run by an executive with an even better tan than mine.

Marianne – While he worked here, his contract included a non-compete clause. Once that letter takes effect, we'll have released him from it.

Jane – Any agency would offer him a fortune if he brings Apple with him.

Mick – Of course. But what can we do now?

Marianne – There's only one solution. He must never receive that letter.

Jane – Or at least not until he's signed a new contract binding him much more tightly to us.

Marianne – Ideally before he learns the whole company's future depends on him. Otherwise his salary demands might become rather ambitious.

Mick – How? The registered letter's already in the mail.

Marianne – We could ambush the person delivering it, knock them out and steal the mailbag.

Mick and Jane aren't sure whether she's joking.

Jane – Rather extreme, don't you think?

Mick – Is that Swiss humour?

Marianne – I did something similar to Santa Claus when I was little. That's how I discovered Santa was my mother's lover.

Jane – We just have to stop Charlie going home before Tuesday.

Marianne – Easier said than done.

Mick – Invite him to your country house for the weekend. Thank him for his excellent work, talk about his future.

Marianne – And get him to sign the contract while he's there.

Charlie returns. The others fall silent in embarrassment.

Charlie – Need another coffee. I feel like absolute shit this morning. No idea why.

Jane – Go ahead. Freshly brewed.

Mick – I made it.

Marianne – Mick makes excellent coffee.

Charlie is about to pour himself a cup when Jane hurries to intercept him.

Jane – Allow me.

Mick – Well, we'll leave you two to it. *(He signals to Jane to speak to Charlie.)* Marianne, coming?

Marianne – Where?

Mick *(leading Marianne out)* – Didn't you want to discuss my expenses?

Jane – Sugar?

Charlie – Three, please.

Jane – There you are. A good coffee first thing in the morning. Packed with vitamins. I mean caffeine. You know, we spend all day passing each other in the office, but we never really talk. Same with Marianne. I didn't even know she was…

Charlie – Gay?

Jane – Swiss. Did you?

Charlie – No.

Jane – You think you know the people you work with. And yet… Until today I didn't even know how many sugars you put in your coffee.

Charlie – Three.

Jane – Charlie, have you got any plans for the weekend?

Charlie – Overtime? I thought business was slow. I was wondering whether I should start looking for another job.

Jane – Good heavens, no! Things aren't nearly as bad as they seem. We're growing. We'll need every talented person we've got. Actually, I wanted to discuss your future.

Charlie – My future? I didn't know I had one.

Jane – We're delighted with your work, Charlie. Naturally, we were observing you at first, but it's time to give you a proper opportunity and show you the confidence you deserve.

Charlie – Oh. Right.

Jane – I'd like to offer you a new contract, one that reflects your abilities. Would you be free to discuss it this weekend?

Charlie – This weekend? Where?

Jane – I've got a country house just outside Paris. Pool, tennis court, the works. Why not join me? You might even get to see Flora give birth.

Charlie – Well… the plumber's coming tomorrow morning, and there's an IKEA delivery in the afternoon. Now I've got proper payslips, I can finally move out of the squat and into a real apartment. It's in Paris somewhere. The twenty-first district, I think.

Jane – The twenty-first? You mean the twenty-first century. Paris only has twenty districts.

Charlie – Maybe next weekend?

Jane – We'll talk about it.

Charlie – Cool.

Charlie leaves. Mick and Marianne return.

Mick – Well?

Jane – He's stuck at home tomorrow waiting for the plumber.

Marianne – A gas leak. That would explain an accidental explosion.

Jane – A water leak!

Mick – And remember, we only want to stop him getting the letter. We need him alive for the Apple campaign.

Jane – Someone would have to go to his place and keep an eye on him all weekend, so they could intercept the letter before he sees it.

Mick – Which means spending the whole weekend with him.

Marianne – At his place.

Mick – For that sort of mission… it would have to be a woman.

Jane and Mick turn to look at Marianne.

Marianne – You cannot ask me to do that!

Mick – You suggested firing Charlie, didn't you? And you were in such a hurry to post that letter.

Mick – Besides, you said he'd already grabbed your backside. Obviously he finds you attractive. Or he's not very particular.

Marianne – What?

Jane – The future of this company is at stake, Marianne. I'm personally asking you to make this sacrifice.

Marianne – You want me to sacrifice myself for the company?

Mick – A heroic sacrifice, for the good of the nation. Sorry, the company.

Jane – If you don't help, we're finished. This company is our homeland, Marianne, and our homeland is in danger!

Marianne – But… I can't, Jane.

Jane – Why on earth not?

Marianne – Well… for one thing, I'm not attracted to men.

Jane – Surely you could make an effort.

Charlie returns.

Charlie – I need to photocopy a payslip for the landlord.

Jane and Mick give Marianne pointed looks, urging her to carry out their plan.

Jane – Right. Back to work, Mick.

Jane and Mick leave Marianne alone with Charlie. He helps himself to another coffee. Marianne watches him helplessly as he approaches the photocopier.

Marianne – Shall I photocopy it for you? I'm used to doing that sort of thing.

Charlie – Thanks, I can manage.

Marianne stares at him strangely, making him uncomfortable. He struggles with the machine.

Marianne – It's out of paper.

Charlie – Oh.

Marianne – Do you know how to refill it?

Charlie – Er… no.

Marianne – Thought not. Same as the coffee machine. You can't refill that either. Men… Leave it to me. Photocopiers are temperamental, you know. Like women. Oh, now there's a paper jam. I'll sort it out. We might as well have a little chat while we wait. We never get time to talk. It's all so hectic around here.

Charlie – Seems pretty quiet to me.

Marianne – At least it's Friday.

Charlie – Yeah.

Marianne – Got plans?

Charlie – For what?

Marianne – The weekend.

Charlie – Got a leaking pipe to fix and an IKEA wardrobe to assemble.

Marianne – I could help, if you like. *(With clumsy innuendo.)* I'm very good with my hands.

Charlie looks alarmed rather than seduced. Marianne throws herself at him, embraces him and tries to kiss him.

Marianne – Your smell drives me wild, Charlie!

Fortunately, Charlie's phone rings, saving him.

Charlie – Sorry, must be the plumber. I really have to answer. *(He manages to free himself.)* Hello? Yes, speaking. Hang on a second.

Charlie hurries out. Jane and Mick return.

Mick – What on earth did you do to make him run away like that?

Marianne – I told you it wouldn't work!

Jane – You can't have tried very hard. I'm disappointed in you, Marianne. Very disappointed. Why put your life savings into this business instead of a nice Swiss bank account if you're not prepared to fight to save it?

Marianne – I invested in this company because of you, Jane.

She leaves, close to tears.

Mick – Did you know our accountant was a lesbian? On top of being Swiss?

Jane – Marianne's a lesbian?

Mick – She said she didn't like men.

Jane – That doesn't necessarily mean she likes women.

Mick – She certainly seems to like you. In any case, she's clearly not the right woman to seduce Charlie.

Jane – What if he's gay too?

Mick – Not falling for a Swiss accountant who's not attracted to men doesn't make a man gay, believe me.

Jane – I made a pass at him as well, and he'd rather assemble a wardrobe!

Mick – True enough.

Jane – We should check.

Mick – What?

Jane – Whether he's gay!

Mick – How?

Jane – Make a pass at him yourself. See how he responds.

Mick – You must be joking.

Jane – The survival of this company is at stake. Including your job.

Charlie comes in to fetch something from the supply cupboard.

Jane – I'm sure you'll be very discreet.

Mick walks up to Charlie.

Mick – Charlie, fancy a weekend away, just the two of us? I know a cheap motel just off the motorway. Very cosy.

Charlie gives him a surprised look, briefly takes off his headphones, puts them back on and continues looking through the cupboard. Jane is appalled.

Mick – See? He's not gay.

Jane – Or perhaps he just doesn't fancy you.

Mick – Why wouldn't he? I get my hair cut every week and use a tanning salon twice a month!

Jane – No need to take it personally.

Mick – You didn't make much impression on him either.

Jane – We obviously haven't discovered what makes him tick.

Bérangère enters. As Charlie leaves, he turns to give her a long, admiring look. Jane and Mick notice.

Bérangère – Just getting a cartridge for my printer.

Jane and Mick stare at her as she rummages in the cupboard. Feeling their eyes on her, Bérangère becomes uneasy.

Mick – I told you she had enormous potential.

Bérangère – Is something wrong?

Jane – How long have you been working here, Bérangère?

Bérangère – Nearly six months.

Jane – And are you happy with us?

Bérangère – Jane, you can count on my total commitment to the company. I fully embrace its business plan. I joined this team to meet new challenges and take on even more challenges.

Jane *(interrupting)* – Wonderful. Mick will explain the exciting business plan we've devised for you this weekend. Won't you, Mick?

Mick – You wanted fresh challenges? You're certainly not going to be disappointed.

Mick leads Bérangère out. Marianne returns.

Marianne – I'm sorry I got so emotional earlier.

Jane – Forget it. I think we've found another solution.

Marianne – Good. There's something I was thinking…

Jane – Yes?

Marianne – I could come to your country house and help draw up Charlie's contract.

Jane – That can wait until Monday. I wouldn't want to take advantage of you. Of your time, I mean.

Marianne – I haven't got any plans for the weekend.

Jane – That's very kind, but it won't be necessary. Actually, I've never understood why people want houses in the country. If the countryside is such fun, why is everyone leaving it? It's rather depressing, you know. Particularly at this time of year.

Marianne – It's May.

Jane – Exactly. In winter you can at least gather wood and light a cosy fire, maybe roast some chestnuts. But in spring…

Marianne *(suggestively)* – There's no wrong time of year for a roaring fire, you know.

Bérangère storms back in, followed by Mick.

Bérangère – Have you any idea what you're asking me to do?

Marianne decides it would be wiser to leave.

Mick – It's just one night with Charlie. We're not asking you to marry him!

Bérangère – As a matter of fact, I'm getting married in three months. I was planning a weekend away with Hubert.

Mick – Hubert? Is he a German shepherd?

Bérangère – He's my fiancé!

Mick – The survival of this company depends on you, Bérangère.

Jane – Which means your job depends on it too.

Bérangère – Are you blackmailing me? I could take you to court!

Jane – Must you use such dramatic language?

Bérangère – It's only aggravated pimping, after all.

Mick – What's aggravating about it?

Bérangère – The fact that he's a disgusting pig, for a start!

Jane – We're about to land the contract of the century, Bérangère. I won't forget your sacrifice, and I'll reward you accordingly.

Bérangère – How much?

Jane – Pardon?

Bérangère – How much is my sacrifice worth to you?

Jane – You're a fast learner. Good. Give me time to check with finance. How would you feel about a director's position?

Mick – Director?

Jane – Relax, Mick. With this account, we can afford more than one director.

Bérangère – All right. I'll try.

Charlie passes by. Mick and Jane quietly disappear.

Bérangère – I've made fresh coffee, if you want some.

Charlie – Thanks, but I've already had three cups. I'm actually starting to feel awake.

Bérangère – Listen… I think we got off on the wrong foot, you and I.

Charlie – Oh, really?

Bérangère – You know I think you're an exceptional creative talent.

Charlie – Do you?

Bérangère – That's probably why I've been a bit… aggressive towards you. I was afraid you'd overshadow me.

Charlie – I see.

Bérangère – But I need to overcome that insecurity, Charlie. And I need your help.

Charlie – Well, I was just going to lunch.

Bérangère – You know what? Lunch is on me. We can talk properly.

Charlie – I'm having lunch with my mother.

Bérangère – Then you can introduce us!

Charlie – Isn't that a bit soon? And frankly, if I could get out of having lunch with my own mother, I would.

Bérangère – Why don't we meet up this weekend?

Charlie – I've got an IKEA wardrobe to assemble.

Bérangère – No! That's my favourite thing in the world! I love assembling IKEA furniture!

Charlie – You're joking.

Bérangère – I know it sounds mad. Everybody else hates it. I find it relaxing. Some people do puzzles; I assemble furniture. I've got a complicated chest of drawers at home. Sometimes at the weekend I take it apart and put it back together two or three times. Without the instructions! Just to unwind.

Charlie – Well, whatever you're doing seems to work. You look incredibly relaxed. Could we talk later? I really need to… I've got a desperate urge to…

Bérangère – Yes?

Charlie – Go to the toilet.

Bérangère – Oh.

Charlie leaves. Bérangère remains, bewildered. Jane and Mick return.

Jane – Well?

Bérangère – I don't think it's going very well.

Jane – You'll have to try harder, darling, or you're fired!

Mick – Go on, chase after him!

Bérangère – He's gone to the toilet.

Jane – Believe me, that's no problem. He never shuts the toilet door!

Furious, Bérangère heads after him. Her phone rings.

Bérangère – Hubert! What timing… Actually, terrible timing. I was just about to call. This weekend's off, I'm afraid. We're swamped at work. Don't bark at me! Listen…

She leaves.

Mick – Since everyone's pairing off and breaking up, how about dinner with me tonight?

Jane – Sorry, I really can't think about that now. Once we've signed the contract and Flora's given birth, perhaps. Then we can celebrate.

Mick – Promise?

Jane – Promise.

They leave. Charlie returns with Bérangère.

Bérangère – Give me those papers. I'll make the copies.

Charlie – Don't tell me you enjoy photocopying too?

Bérangère – I'm unusual, I know. You'll discover I'm a very unusual girl.

Charlie – Listen, I'm sorry, but this weekend really isn't going to work.

Bérangère – Wait, a message… Oh my God! It's from the caretaker. My building has just burned down! Apparently someone started the fire.

Charlie – Seriously?

Bérangère – I've no idea where I'll sleep tonight. I've got no friends. None outside social media, anyway. Could you put me up for a few days?

Charlie – The thing is… I've only got one bed.

Bérangère – I'll curl up on the floor at your feet, Charlie. Like a faithful little dog. I won't be any trouble.

Charlie – But… I haven't got a dog.

Charlie moves away, pursued by Bérangère's increasingly desperate attentions.

Bérangère – Don't leave me!

Jane and Mick, who have been watching, return.

Jane – Now all we can do is wait.

Mick – It's going to be a long weekend.

Jane – I'm cancelling my trip to the country. I'll stay here in case anything happens. I can sleep on the sofa.

Marianne arrives.

Marianne – I'll keep you company. I've got nothing planned. We can work on Charlie's new contract.

Jane – Thank you, Marianne. It's a comfort to know I can count on you when things get difficult.

The two women embrace. Mick looks alarmed.

Mick – I'll stay too.

Marianne shoots him a hostile glance.

Jane – Are you sure?

Mick – We have to stick together. I'll spend the weekend working on the accounts.

Marianne – The accounts? That's my job. I thought you were staying here with us.

Mick – The Apple account, damn it! The advertising campaign!

Jane – All right, Mick. No need to shout.

Blackout.

Saturday night

Dim light. Jane, Mick and Marianne are asleep, sprawled together on the sofa. Mick has his head on Jane's shoulder and one arm around her.

Blackout.

Marianne has her head on Jane's shoulder and one arm around her. They wake up and Jane recoils.

Blackout.

Mick has his head on Marianne's shoulder and one arm around her. They wake up and both recoil.

Blackout.

Monday morning

Marianne enters and makes coffee. Jane follows.

Marianne – Any news from Charlie?

Jane – Nothing.

Mick arrives too.

Mick – Well?

Marianne – We don't know.

Mick – If Bérangère couldn't intercept the letter, he may not even bother coming back to the office.

Jane – Even if he knows he's been fired, he doesn't know Apple picked his idea. He'll still come in to collect his final pay.

Mick – Unless Bérangère told him.

Marianne – Told him what?

Mick – About Apple!

Marianne – Why would she do that?

Charlie comes in. Everyone watches for a reaction.

Jane – Morning, Charlie!

Charlie – Hi.

Mick – Good weekend?

Charlie – Mm.

He carries on towards his office.

Mick – If he'd received his dismissal letter, I think he'd have said something.

Marianne – Perhaps it hasn't arrived yet. The post can be unreliable.

Jane – Only Bérangère can tell us.

Bérangère arrives, looking grim.

Jane – Well?

Mick – Was the IKEA wardrobe difficult to put together?

Bérangère pulls a letter from her pocket and holds it up.

Bérangère – I got the registered letter from the delivery person.

Mick – Brilliant!

Marianne – How did you manage that?

Bérangère – Charlie was still asleep.

Mick – A well-earned rest after battle.

Bérangère glares at him.

Bérangère – I pretended to be his wife and signed for it.

Jane – Thank goodness!

Mick – Everything all right? Did it go well?

Bérangère – Would you like the details?

Marianne – It's the result that matters.

Jane – Now you can get back to your fiancé. Take the day off if you like.

Bérangère's phone rings. She answers.

Bérangère – Hello? Hubert, darling! What? No, that's not what happened! I can explain! Please listen to me! He's hung up.

She puts her phone away.

Jane – What's the problem now?

Bérangère – That was Hubert, my fiancé. He's found out I spent the weekend at Charlie's and he's dumped me. I wonder how on earth he heard about it.

Jane – Well, no point giving you the day off, then. Come on, give me the letter.

Bérangère – Not so fast. I'll hold on to it until we've discussed my promotion and pay rise.

Jane – I told you, when we've secured the Apple account, we'll reward your dedication. For now, back to work as if nothing's happened. I'll get Charlie to sign the contract Marianne prepared.

Charlie comes in for coffee. Mick, Marianne and Bérangère leave.

Jane – Ah, Charlie. Just the person I wanted to see.

Charlie – You're not firing me, are you? I've only just moved into my new apartment.

Jane – Of course not! Whatever gave you that idea? Quite the opposite. I want us to develop a much closer relationship.

Charlie – Is that a marriage proposal?

Jane – Almost. Take a look.

She shows him the contract on the table. He leans over to read it and accidentally spills his coffee on it.

Jane – You complete idiot! I mean, don't worry, it's nothing. I'll fetch another copy.

Jane leaves. Marianne returns.

Charlie – Guess what? The boss has offered me a promotion!

Marianne – Really? And you accepted?

Charlie – Of course.

Marianne – Good. Then you'd better live up to expectations.

Charlie – What expectations?

Marianne – The Apple account you've just won us! The client may insist on working with you personally, but…

Charlie – Apple chose my proposal?

Jane returns with a fresh contract and gives Marianne a murderous glare.

Charlie – Oh, now I see why everyone's being so nice to me!

Jane – Didn't I tell you? I thought Marianne already had.

She glares at Marianne, who realises her mistake.

Marianne – Oh. He hadn't signed the contract yet.

Charlie – Don't worry. You believed in me when the business was struggling, when you could easily have fired me. I won't let you down.

Jane – Exactly! We've never doubted you for a moment.

Charlie – All the same, you'll understand if I read this carefully. Now that I'm such a sought-after creative talent.

Jane – Of course.

Charlie – Give it here. I'll take my time over it.

He takes the contract and leaves. Jane turns to Marianne.

Jane – Well done! Now he'll bleed us dry.

Marianne – If I hadn't set fire to Bérangère's building, she might never have agreed to spend the weekend with him.

Jane – You set fire to her building?

Marianne – She might have changed her mind and gone home.

Bérangère comes in.

Bérangère – You really burned down my building?

Jane – I'll explain later.

Marianne – You were insured, weren't you?

Bérangère – You're all completely insane!

Jane – We'll discuss it after Charlie signs his contract, shall we?

Bérangère – I'll bleed you dry too!

Jane – Let's all stay calm, please.

Bérangère – And what if he finds out you were planning to dismiss him for misconduct?

Marianne – I'm sure we can reach an agreement.

Bérangère hands Jane a document.

Bérangère – Here's my agreement. I've prepared my own new contract. All you have to do is sign.

Jane reads it, sighs and signs.

Jane – They'll be the death of me.

Charlie returns, much more confident now.

Charlie – Well, I've looked through it. On the whole, it's fine. I trust you.

Jane – Wonderful.

Charlie – Just one detail. I've added a zero to the annual salary. With an account as important as Apple, I assumed Finance had made a mistake. Isn't that right, Marianne?

Marianne – Of course.

Charlie – Just sign here, and we can forget all about it.

Jane signs.

Jane – There.

Charlie takes his contract. Mick enters.

Mick – Everything going well?

Jane's phone rings.

Jane – Yes… No! Yes, of course… Oh my God. I'm coming right away!

She puts away her phone.

Mick – Apple?

Jane – Flora's given birth! I'll grab my bag and go straight to the clinic. Can you believe it, Mick? Sextuplets!

She hurries out.

Marianne – Flora? Who's Flora?

Mick – Didn't I tell you? Jane and I couldn't have children together, so we found a surrogate mother. Much more convenient, really. And not nearly as expensive as you might think.

He leaves. Marianne follows, stunned. Charlie and Bérangère are alone.

Bérangère – You've done well for yourself. They wanted to fire you.

Charlie – I know.

Bérangère – Then why didn't you say anything?

Charlie – Would you have spent the weekend with me if I had?

Bérangère – Bastard! And did you know you'd won the Apple account?

Charlie – I didn't win the Apple account.

Bérangère – I don't understand.

Charlie – I'm the one who called Jane on Friday, pretending to be Apple's head of Europe.

Bérangère – You made a complete fool of me.

Charlie – Now that I'm earning a six-figure salary, perhaps I can persuade you to stick around. You're single now, aren't you?

Bérangère – You didn't tell Hubert about us, did you?

Charlie *(unconvincingly)* – Me? How could you possibly think that?

Bérangère – Well, you did pretend to be the next Steve Jobs.

Charlie – And thanks to me, you've got a pay rise too.

Bérangère – They'll find out tomorrow you've tricked them!

Charlie – They've signed our contracts, haven't they? We'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

Bérangère – The company's already bankrupt. And with our astronomical new salaries…

Charlie – Greece went bankrupt too, and the Colosseum is still standing.

Bérangère – The Colosseum is in Rome. You're thinking of the Parthenon in Athens.

Charlie puts his hands on her shoulders.

Charlie – I believe in us, Bérangère. Life is a bold investment in the future. Governments borrow money just to pay the interest on what they already owe!

Bérangère – Mm.

Charlie – Besides, I could get myself hired by another agency before they fire me. Now that I'm the highest-paid creative in Paris, everyone will be fighting over me.

Charlie and Bérangère leave. Jane and Mick return, closely followed by Marianne.

Mick – Dinner together tonight to celebrate? You promised.

Jane – All right. I have to run now. *(To Marianne.)* And if you'd like one, don't hesitate. I can't possibly keep all six.

Marianne is devastated.

Mick – Surely it's time to take the company public? And we must discuss my stock options.

Jane's phone rings.

Jane – Once Upon a Time on the Web, hello?

Marianne – You'll never be the father of those six babies, Mick.

Jane turns her back on them and takes the call.

Jane – Yes, speaking.

Calmly, Marianne unfolds a pocketknife.

Mick *(unsuspecting)* – What's that? A Swiss Army knife?

Marianne – Exactly. I always carry one.

Mick – Planning to open a bottle of wine to celebrate our happy news?

Marianne – You'll see.

She stabs Mick, who collapses.

Jane – Yes, I'm speaking to the bank… Please don't worry about our overdraft. I was waiting until I was absolutely sure before calling, but now I can tell you with complete confidence: all our little problems have been solved for good.

Blackout. Lights up. All five performers return for a brief comic dance to a high-energy rock number (for example, 'Start Me Up' by the Rolling Stones).

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:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

This text is protected under copyright laws.
Criminal copyright infringement will be investigated
and may result in a maximum penalty of up to 3 years in prison
and a EUR 300,000 fine.

Avignon – September 2026
© La Comédiathèque – ISBN 978-2-38602-425-2
https://comediatheque.net/
Play available for free download