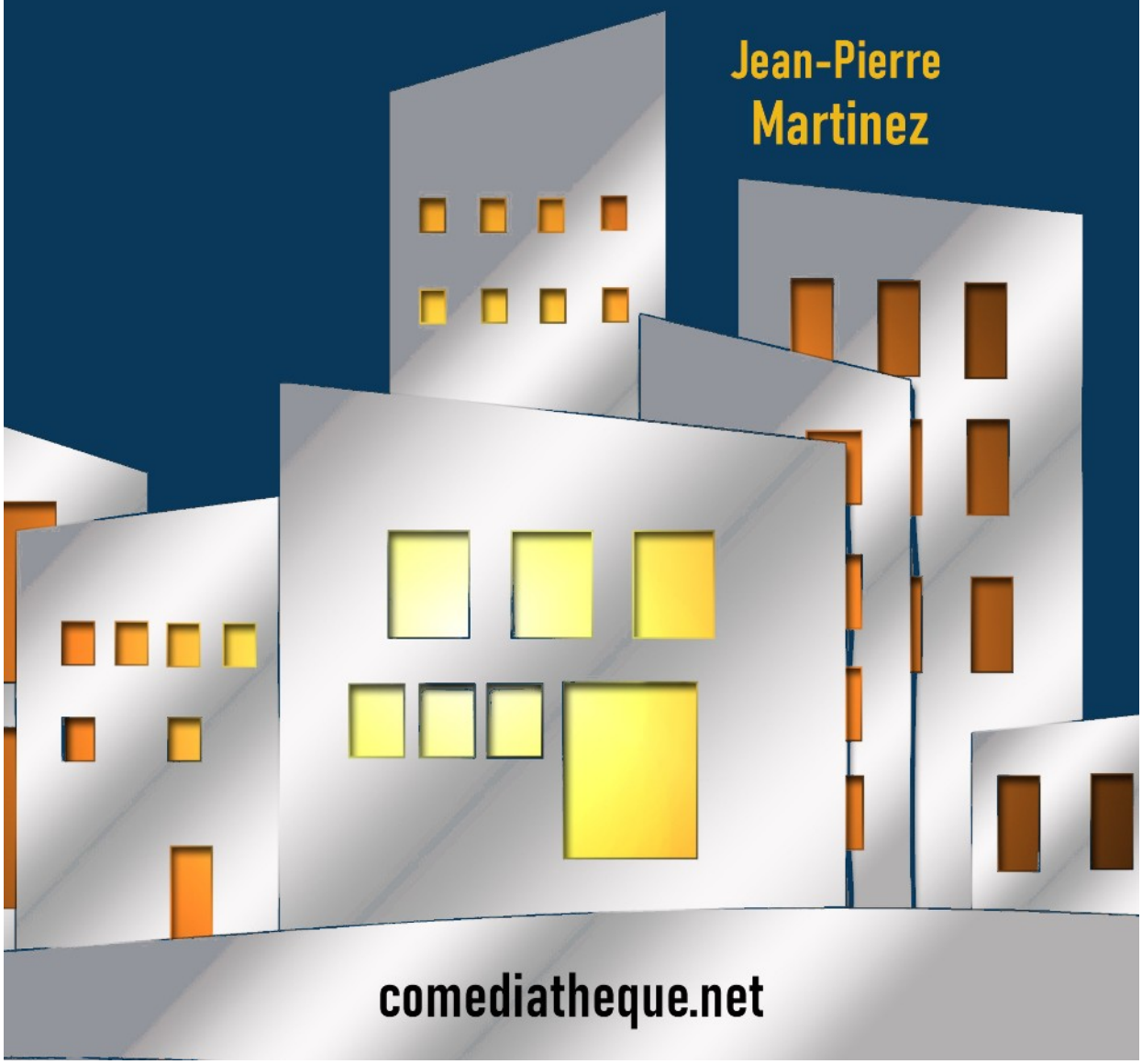
La Comédiathèque

THE HOUSE OF OUR DREAMS

Jean-Pierre Martinez



comediatheque.net

**This text is made available to read free of charge.
However, an authorization must be requested from the author
prior to any public performance, whether by professional or amateur
companies. To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez
and to request an authorization to represent one of his works:
https://comediatheque.net**

The House of Our Dreams

A Tale Told Backwards

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Translation by the author

A couple has just bought the house of their dreams at a surprisingly low price.

What could have happened there to keep it on the market for so long? The previous owners died in circumstances as dramatic as they were mysterious... A philosophical tale told backwards about the tragicomic fate of humanity in general, and of couples in particular.

Flexible cast, from 2 to 10 actors

1M/1F

2M/2F

3M/3F

4M/4F

5M/5F

© La Comédiathèque

ACT 5

They are sitting in a garden.

He – This house is absolutely perfect.

She – Yes. It's paradise.

He – And this garden...

She – The Garden of Eden.

A pause.

He – The Garden of Eden is paradise?

She – What do you mean?

He – Paradise is where you go when you're dead, isn't it?

She – The Garden of Eden is paradise on Earth. Paradise lost. Just before Adam ate all the apples, Eve chopped down the apple tree for firewood, and their son smashed his brother's skull in with the logs.

He looks at her, slightly taken aback.

He – I'll have to read the Bible again, now I've got a bit of time.

She – Anyway, this is the house of our dreams.

He – Yes. Exactly what we wanted.

She – All the shops are close by.

He – Not to mention the schools.

She – A pity we don't have children.

He – At least they won't murder each other.

She – Still, if we ever sell it... to a couple with children...

He – And the house is immaculate.

She – Everything has been redone, from cellar to attic.

He – Children would wreck the place.

She – It's as good as new.

He – Yes, completely renovated. And at that price, can you believe it...?

She – We certainly didn't pay much for it.

He – For a house like this.

She – So lovely, and in such a good location.

He – The paint's still fresh.

She – Everything's so white... It's almost suspicious.

He – Suspicious?

She – As if someone wanted to erase every trace of...

He – Of what?

She – I don't know.

He – Every trace of life?

She – Every trace of blood...?

They exchange an uneasy look.

He *(reassuring himself)* – I really love this house.

She – It feels so good to be here.

He – I've always dreamed of owning a house like this.

She – And today that dream has come true.

Silence. Another moment of unease.

He – Did you hear something?

She – Yes...

He – What was it?

She – I don't know.

He – Or perhaps we imagined it.

She – I'll go and see.

She gets up and returns a moment later.

He – What was it?

She – The letterbox.

He – A letter?

She – A leaflet.

He – Makes you wonder why we bothered putting a 'No Junk Mail' sign on the letterbox.

She – It's about the neighbourhood get-together.

He – The neighbours are having a party?

She – The neighbourhood get-together! Once a year, in spring. People set up tables in the street, and everyone brings something to eat and drink...

He – Oh, right... The neighbourhood party... So they're warning us they'll be making a bit of noise.

She – They're inviting us!

He – Inviting us? Us? But we don't know these people!

She – They're our neighbours now that we live here. We're supposed to get to know them.

He – I see... A neighbourhood party... Do you think we have to go?

She – We don't have to... but it might be better if we did. What do you think?

He – I don't know...

She – If we want to start fitting into the neighbourhood.

He – It's true, we don't know anyone.

She – We never even met the previous owners.

He – Mind you, we don't go out much.

She – No... Perhaps we should...

Silence.

He – Speaking of neighbours, do you know something?

She – What?

He – I wonder if the woman next door has died.

She – What makes you think that?

He – I don't know... *(A pause)* The smell, for one thing...

She – The smell?

He – Can't you smell anything?

She – No.

He – You don't need a particularly keen sense of smell... Something's rotten around here, I can tell you.

She – Really?

He – And it didn't start yesterday. It's getting stronger by the day...

She – When you say something's rotten... do you mean a dead body?

He – I don't know... I've never had occasion to sniff a corpse. Have you?

She – No. Well, yes, but... not one that smelled quite that bad.

He – Like a dead rat, if you prefer.

She – Perhaps it is a dead rat.

He – Rats? In this neighbourhood? I doubt it... It's a rather affluent area.

She – A wild boar, then...? Or a deer... I once ate some game that was positively ripe in an expensive restaurant. I imagine a corpse would taste rather like that.

He – A rotting deer?

She – I don't know... Maybe the taste... But the smell...

He – It seems to be coming from next door. Or the garden.

She – How would a deer get into the neighbour's garden?

He – Especially a dead one. Even in an affluent area like this, there isn't much hunting on horseback with hounds these days.

She – Apart from the smell, what makes you think the neighbour might have died?

He – We never see her... The shutters are always closed...

She – Perhaps she's on holiday.

He – For more than three months?

She – Why not?

He – At her age, you go on a cruise for a week. Ten days at most.

She – How do you know how old she is? We've never seen her. And how do you even know she's a woman?

He – I don't. I just pictured an old lady. The house is in rather poor condition. And women often outlive their husbands. So I deduced that...

She – I see...

He – Observation, deduction...

She – Perhaps she's gone on a very long trip. Or she's staying with her children.

He – For three months? Who could stand having their mother in the house for three months?

She – All right, let's suppose... She's dead... In her own home... And you're the only person who's noticed?

He – I've always had a very good nose...

She – Surely her family would have noticed she was missing...

He – Her family?

She – Her children.

He – What if she doesn't have any?

She – Everyone has children!

He – We don't...

She – Her husband, then.

He – You just said she was probably a widow...

A pause.

She – All right... What do we do, then? We ought to call the police...

He – The police?

She – We can't leave her there like that, waiting for...

He – Her to start decomposing?

She – How long does a body lie there before it starts to smell?

He – I wonder whether it's a good idea for us to call the police.

She – Why?

He – They might suspect us.

She – Suspect us? Of what?

He – Of murdering her!

She – You think she was murdered?

He – I've no idea... These things happen...

She – And why would they suspect us?

He – We've only been here three months, the neighbour dies at more or less the same time, and we're the ones who report it...

She – You're right, we could get into trouble... But why would we have killed her?

He – There's always a good reason to get rid of your neighbours, isn't there?

She – Such as?

He – To buy their house, for example.

She – Well, yes, but...

He – Especially if you've bought it under a life-annuity arrangement.

She – Don't tell me you bought the neighbour's house by paying her a monthly sum for as long as she lived — and then killed her.

He – Of course not! Where do you get these ideas?

She – That's a relief...

He – Mind you, it might not be such a bad idea.

She – Killing the neighbour?

He – Buying her house.

She – What for?

He – So we wouldn't have a neighbour!

She – You're worrying me again...

He – No neighbours, no neighbourhood party.

She – Of course...

He – Anyway, if she's dead, the house will probably be put on the market.

Silence.

She – I think I'm beginning to smell something too...

He – Something rotten?

She – Yes, I think so...

A pause.

He – You're not just saying that to make me happy, are you?

She – Saying what?

He – That you can smell a corpse.

The doorbell rings.

He – What now? Are we expecting anyone?

She – No.

He – I hope it's not another invitation.

She – We don't know anyone... An invitation to what?

He – A music festival?

She – That's coming up soon too.

He – They could combine the two.

She – A music festival with the neighbours...

He – I'll go and see...

He goes out. She sniffs the air, trying to catch a scent.

She – I'd make a terrible police sniffer dog. *(He returns)* Who was it?

He – The neighbour.

She – The dead one?

He – The other neighbour.

She – What did she want?

He – She wanted to know if the smell of a dead body was coming from our house.

She – Did she actually say 'dead body'?

He – I think she meant a dead animal. A cat, perhaps. Hers disappeared a few weeks ago.

She – What did you say?

He – I said I couldn't smell anything...

She – Good.

He – It's better not to interfere in other people's affairs.

She – Keep your head down if you want a happy life...

He – Are we happy?

She – What do you think?

Silence.

He – Strange... She told me a very odd story...

She – Who did?

He – The neighbour!

She – What story?

He – I'm not sure you want to hear it now.

She – You've either said too much or not nearly enough...

He – Remember what the estate agent told us when we bought the house?

She – What?

He – That it was for sale because the owners had died.

She – Yes... That must be why we never met them.

He – What he neglected to mention was how they died...

She – That's true. It's strange they should both have died at the same time.

He – Yes...

She – How did they die?

He – She split his skull open with an axe...

She – Oh... And where?

He – Here. In the garden.

She – You're joking! And then?

He – Then she jumped from two storeys up, into the courtyard.

She – The courtyard? You mean the garden? Our garden...?

Silence.

He – I'd wondered why this house had been on the market for so long.

She – And why nobody bought it, even at such a low price.

He – We did get a bargain.

She – Did we?

He – I don't know...

She – That must be why they repainted everything.

He – To cover up every trace of blood...

A pause.

She – Are you sure the smell of death is coming from next door?

He – What do you mean?

She – Perhaps it's coming from here.

He – That's impossible. When the police came and discovered what had happened, they must have removed the bodies.

She – Strange things sometimes happen in houses where tragedies like that have taken place...

He – Actually, I noticed something the first time we viewed the house.

She – And you didn't tell me?

He – The house was so cheap...

She – Now I understand why.

He – So do I...

Silence.

She – Look, the neighbour seems to be back from her holiday...

He – Do you think so?

She – The shutters are open...

He – At least she's not dead.

She – No... Not yet...

He – So the smell can't be coming from her house.

She – Unless it's the cat...

He – Let's say it's the cat.

She – Yes. It must be the cat.

Silence.

He – So what do we do? Are we going or not?

She – Where?

He – To the neighbourhood party!

She – I'm not sure it's a good idea.

He – You're right.

She – I can already see them exchanging looks and whispering about us.

He – 'It's them.'

She – 'The people living in the house where that massacre took place.'

He – Yes... Wondering when our turn will come.

She – Our turn?

He – To slaughter each other.

She – Do you think we could come to that?

He – We're so bored.

She – Do we have an axe?

Silence. He sniffs the air again.

He – What if it was us...

She – Us?

He – Who smelled rotten.

They look at each other, bewildered. Blackout.

ACT 4

He comes in first and looks around. She joins him.

He – So, Chief, what do you think?

She – I think they're both dead.

He – Yes... I reached the same conclusion when I saw that his head had been separated from his body and had rolled more than two metres away...

She – And her head had burst open on the courtyard paving like an overripe watermelon.

He – But what I meant, Chief, was what you think of the case...

She – I don't think anything, Inspector. I observe and deduce. That's all. Like Sherlock Holmes or Lieutenant Columbo. A good detective doesn't think. They observe, then draw conclusions from what they've seen.

He gives her a puzzled look and continues examining the scene.

He – I wonder what happened here to make an apparently ordinary couple slaughter each other with such enthusiasm.

She – What makes you think it was murder?

He – She was still holding the axe she'd used to decapitate him.

She – Don't trust appearances, Inspector. They'll lead you astray. You also failed to notice that before decapitating her husband, she chopped down an apple tree in the garden. Probably with the same axe.

He – That's true, I hadn't noticed that. I don't know much about trees, either.

She – Neither do I.

He – Then how do you know it's an apple tree?

She – Because I saw apples on the branches.

He – I didn't notice those either...

She – If I'd seen pears, I'd have deduced it was a pear tree. Cherries, a cherry tree. Observation, deduction. Never forget that, Inspector.

He – I'll remember, Chief.

She – What do we know about this... ordinary couple, as you call them?

He checks a small notebook.

He – He was a playwright... She was an actress...

She – A well-known writer?

He – One of his plays had some success a few years ago.

She – Oh? Which one?

He – A Dream of a House...

She – Never heard of it. The last time I went to the theatre was to see La Cage aux Folles.

He – You didn't enjoy it...?

She – Oh, I did. That's precisely why I decided to leave it at that. What about her?

He – Mostly supporting parts... And fewer and fewer of those. Apparently she was a few paid performances short of qualifying for artists' unemployment benefits this year.

She – That might be a reason for suicide. But hardly a motive for murder. Any criminal record?

He – An obscure plagiarism case. A shoplifting incident. Fraudulent claims for child benefits. Nothing serious...

She – Did they have children?

He – No. That's why I mentioned the benefit fraud.

She – I see... Shoplifting, you said?

He – Yes.

She – Him or her?

He – Her.

She – Perfume? Make-up? Lingerie? Those are usually the things women steal from shops...

He consults his notebook.

He – An axe.

She – An axe? Then there may have been premeditation...

He – If it was the same axe she used to decapitate her husband.

She – Why would she steal an axe if she already had one?

He – I don't know... Some women shoplift just for the thrill of it...

She – An axe?

He – It's true, an axe is rather unusual...

She – A hatchet, perhaps. That would be more feminine... Or a bread knife. Possibly a nail file.

He – To chop down a tree?

She – It's a small tree, Inspector. Didn't you notice that either?

He – And as for... the plagiarism, Chief, what do you think?

She – You don't know what it means, do you?

He – Let's say... I'm not entirely sure.

She – Plagiarism is theft.

He – Like stealing an axe from a hardware shop?

She – Yes. Except that the hardware shop is a writer's brain, and the thief steals the writer's ideas.

He – I see... Like a vampire sucking its victim's blood... Perhaps she split his skull open to rummage around in his brain and steal whatever was inside...

She – Why would she have thrown herself out of the window afterwards?

He – What could an actor possibly steal from a playwright?

She – Their lines, probably. It's a common failing among actors. Eventually they convince themselves they wrote the words they're performing.

He – Really?

She – I once knew a tragic actor who became convinced he'd written every one of Racine's plays.

He – I imagine he ended up in a psychiatric hospital.

She – He ended up in the French Academy.

He – The French Academy...?

She – It's like a constitutional council, but for writers. A kind of retirement home, if you like. Except that instead of playing Scrabble, they decide which words the rest of us are allowed to use in Scrabble.

He – Is it serious, Chief?

She – Is what serious?

He – Plagiarism!

She – We're all counterfeiters, Inspector. We spend our lives repeating the ready-made phrases we learned at school, distorting them along the way. If we imprisoned everyone who wasn't really the author of the rubbish they spout all day, hardly anyone would be left at liberty.

He – Even though, as Michel Audiard said, 'A seated intellectual won't get as far as a fool who keeps walking.'

She – That was Jacques Audiberti.

He – Never heard of him...

She – 'One fool who walks is worth ten intellectuals sitting down.' Even Michel Audiard sometimes borrowed from his fellow writers. Though in this case, I'm not sure which of them borrowed from the other.

He – So, in short... none of us has invented anything.

She – Life is a constant struggle against mediocrity — the kind that makes you plagiarise others before you end up plagiarising yourself...

He – That's so clever... I'm not sure I understand it all...

She – Real intelligence, Inspector, means knowing when to shut your mouth. Very few people can manage it. Even I sometimes catch myself delivering lines... that aren't my own.

He – Is that one yours, Chief?

She – Unfortunately not. Pick up a piece of that watermelon and put it in an insulated evidence bag. We'll send it to the lab for analysis.

He – Yes, Chief.

She – And don't forget your gloves...

He – So I don't contaminate the sample.

She – Yes... And, above all, so you don't get your hands dirty...

He – Or dirty the house.

She – That would be a shame. It's so clean in here.

He – Apparently they had the place repainted every year.

She – Probably after every crime.

He – You think there were others?

She – I've told you. I don't think anything.

He goes out. She looks around, sniffs the air, then gets down on all fours and sniffs about like a police dog. He returns and stares at her, rather taken aback.

He – Picked up a scent, Chief?

She stands up.

She – Trust my nose, Inspector. This house smells of death.

He – There are two corpses right beside us. That's normal, isn't it?

She – I mean something smells rotten. Decaying flesh, if you prefer. But this couple died only a short while ago.

He – How do you know?

She – Her brains were still steaming when we arrived.

He – It is rather cold in here. But if I may contradict you, Chief, I think the smoke came from a cigarette that hadn't been properly put out. I found the burnt stub in a corner of the courtyard.

She – All the more reason. If the condemned person's last cigarette is still smoking, they can't have been dead for long. *(She sniffs again.)* I'm telling you, something about this case stinks...

He – And what conclusions do you draw from these observations, Chief?

She – There are at least three possibilities.

He – I'm listening.

She – Either the victims were rotten even while they were alive.

He – Yes...

She – Or the smell comes from other, more decomposed corpses we haven't found yet. Bodies buried in the cellar, for example.

He – How long can a man lie buried before he starts to rot?

She – Well, assuming he wasn't rotten before he died...

He – That's not one of yours either, then...

She – No.

He – Whose is it, boss?

She – Shakespeare. In Hamlet. Assuming he really wrote his own plays, of course.

He – You think Shakespeare was a plagiarist too?

She – Who knows...

He – And what's your third theory, Chief?

She – What if we're the ones who smell rotten...?

He – I'd never have thought of that...

She – That's why I'm the Chief and you're only an Inspector.

He – Of course, Chief.

She – I've given a great deal of thought to human nature. I've reached certain conclusions, which I may put into a book when I retire, for the benefit of future generations.

He – Really? What kind of book, Chief? A detective novel?

She – More like... a sort of Bible.

He – I see... The bible for a crime drama series...

She – Honestly, Inspector! A Bible! A new New Testament, if you like.

He – Oh, right...

She – Would you like a preview of some of my reflections?

He – Why not...?

A brief silence to build dramatic suspense.

She – Do you know how many human beings have lived and died on this planet before us, Inspector?

He – No.

She – About a hundred billion. For every person alive today, there are more than ten in cemeteries and elsewhere.

He – That's quite a crowd.

She – And it'll only get worse, believe me.

He – Really?

She – You'll see. As you get older, you end up knowing more dead people than living ones.

He – True...

She – And the day will come when there are only dead people left on Earth.

He – The end of the world, you mean?

She – The end of humanity, at any rate. At this rate, it may not be far off. Earth will be nothing but an empty house, haunted by all the dead who have lived in it, one after another, since the dawn of humankind.

He – That's beautiful, Chief.

She – Unfortunately, those aren't my words.

He – Whose are they?

She – The author of this play, I imagine. Unless he's merely another common plagiarist.

He – And what do we do about this double murder?

She – We'll have to trace this chain of dreadful events backwards, from the latest killing to the very first victim of this serial killer.

He – You think we're dealing with a serial killer?

She – Death! Death is responsible for all these deaths! There's no such thing as a natural death, Inspector. Every death is a homicide. Death has murdered all these people.

He – But when you say trace the events backwards, you mean...?

She – The first murder! The first criminal case.

He – Which case?

She – Cain and Abel, of course.

He – I've never heard of it. Cain and Abdel, did you say?

She – Have you never read the Bible? Or Victor Hugo? 'The eye was in the grave, staring at Cain.' Doesn't that mean anything to you?

He – No. A hidden camera inside a grave?

She – God invented surveillance cameras first, Inspector. We police officers are merely His humble servants.

Silence.

He – So you think the Earth could disappear one day?

She – Earth is like a house. You buy it from somebody when you arrive, sell it to somebody else when you leave, and hope to make a little profit on the way. You imagine the house has always been there, and always will be. But somebody built it once, and somebody will eventually destroy it.

He – I'm starting to smell it too.

She – Smell what?

He – That smell of death.

She – That smell, Inspector, is the scent of life before us. The hundred billion human beings who came before us. The Earth is a charnel house, a mass grave, one enormous cemetery beneath the moon.

He – I suppose those aren't your words either...

She – Who knows... I sometimes improvise. Have you seen Night of the Living Dead?

He – The one where corpses climb out of their graves, wander into town and devour fresh human flesh?

She – A hundred billion! Can you imagine? And that doesn't count the wild animals we're about to wipe out, or the domestic animals we raise in cages and slaughter on an industrial scale so we can eat them at a Sunday barbecue with friends after church.

He – There is something rather nice about a barbecue...

She – Imagine if, one night, they all came back to eat us. All the chickens, pigs and calves we've butchered in our slaughterhouses!

He – That is frightening...

She – Not to mention the vegetables!

He – Vegetables? You mean chips?

She – Just imagine! Night of the Living Dead, except it's potatoes, carrots and turnips climbing out of the ground at night to devour us! Imagine it, Inspector!

He – I'm trying, Chief. I'm trying... Now, what shall we do with these two?

She – What do you think of the house?

He – It's not bad.

She – Not bad?

He – No, you're right. It's absolutely perfect.

She – As it happens, I've been looking for a house in this area. But with the miserable salary we're paid every month... Even though I earn three times as much as you.

He – Nothing needs doing to it. Near all the shops. And there's a school not far away.

She – The house will surely go on the market now.

He – Now?

She – Now that the owners are dead.

He – Could you live in a house where something so dreadful had happened?

She – Couldn't you?

He – I think I'd have nightmares...

She – So you think it'll sell for less?

He – I think the house is unsellable...

She – I agree.

He – Around here it'll always be known as the house where the massacre happened. The murder house.

She – Do you know Cézanne's painting The Hanged Man's House?

He – Who?

She – We don't even know whether anyone was ever hanged in that house. Perhaps it simply belonged to a Breton called Pen'Du — a name that sounds like the French word for 'hanged'.

He – Oh, a Breton...

She – But think of the estate agent's problem. Who would want to buy the house of a hanged man? That one at least became a famous painting. But for every Hanged Man's House painted by Cézanne, how many houses have seen someone hang themselves without anybody ever knowing?

He – Well, you have to hang yourself somewhere.

She – Somewhere else. Not in my house. It would lower the value. Hence the expression.

He – Which expression?

She – 'Go and hang yourself somewhere else!'

He – Oh, I see...

She – What if we bought this house?

He – We?

She – For next to nothing. You and me. You must have some savings?

He – We could certainly get it cheap. But you said nobody would buy it.

She – We buy it for practically nothing, wait for things to settle down, repaint it, then sell it for a handsome profit.

He – And who would live here in the meantime?

She – You and me!

He – You and me?

She – Don't you find me attractive, Inspector?

He – Oh, yes, of course, it's just that...

She – What?

He – No, nothing... *(A pause)* And do you find me attractive, Chief?

She looks at him in surprise.

She – I was joking, Inspector.

He – Of course, Chief.

She – You and I already know each other far too well. We'd end up getting bored.

He – We might even start off bored.

She – And believe me, in my experience, many couples end up butchering each other at home simply to escape boredom.

He – You think she cracked his skull open and then threw herself out of the window, all to put a little excitement into their married life?

She – Are you married, Inspector?

He – No.

She – Then you couldn't possibly understand.

Blackout.

ACT 3

He is sitting motionless. She comes in from outside, wearing a raincoat and carrying an axe.

He – All right?

She – Yes.

She takes off her raincoat.

He – Had a good day?

She – It was all right.

He – Good. *(A silence, during which she sharpens the axe on a stone.)* Is there something you want to tell me?

She – What else is there for us to say that we haven't said already? We'd only be repeating ourselves, wouldn't we?

He – Right... And... if you don't mind me asking... What are you doing with that axe?

She – Ah... Now there's a question you've never asked me before...

He – Probably because it's the first time you've come home carrying an axe...

She – Exactly... A first time... I thought I'd surprise you, you old stick...

He – It's also the first time you've called me an old stick... So?

She – I'm going to chop down the tree at the bottom of the garden.

He – With an axe?

She – Of course! Not a nail file.

He – What's that tree ever done to you?

She – It's rotten.

He – Rotten?

She – Rotten to the core. The slightest gust of wind and it could come crashing down on us.

He – We hardly ever stand underneath it.

She – We might want to have a barbecue.

He – We never have barbecues. I don't even know where this tree is.

She – That doesn't surprise me. You never leave the house any more. Not even to go into the garden.

He – I didn't know we owned an axe.

She – We didn't.

He – So you've bought an axe...

She – I didn't buy it. I stole it.

He – An axe is rather bulky... How do you steal one?

She – You can't. The security guard caught me on the way out. I had to pay for it in the end.

He – We can surely afford an axe. Why didn't you want to pay?

She – So there wouldn't be a receipt, obviously!

He – And what's the point of buying an axe without a receipt?

She – No receipt, no trail! If you bought a gun to kill someone, you'd rather there wasn't a receipt, wouldn't you?

He – I suppose so... Well, I'm trying to imagine it. I've never bought a gun. And I've never killed anyone. Until today...

She – You're right. Buying a gun could arouse suspicion. More than buying an axe, at any rate. Even with a receipt...

He – So you do realise this is a serious act, if not actually a criminal one...

She – I do realise. Don't worry.

He – I could understand chopping down a tree in the heat of the moment. A plane tree, say, because it hurled itself under your car while you were driving along peacefully, blind drunk. But like this, in cold blood? With an axe you've obtained for that very purpose? It's an execution! Premeditated murder. And I'm warning you, I won't be an accessory to a crime like that.

She – Don't worry. You won't take part in the massacre. *(Lowering her voice)* Not as an accomplice, anyway...

He – Why now?

She – Because it's rotten, I told you.

He – Since when?

She – I don't know... It happened gradually. Once there's a worm in the fruit, sometimes it starts eating away at the whole tree.

He – I didn't even know we had a tree in the garden. What kind is it?

She – An apple tree.

He – We have a fruit tree in the garden?

She – It's half dead already. It hasn't produced any apples for ages.

He – That's no reason to get rid of it like that.

She – That tree has disappointed me terribly. I had such high hopes for it.

He – You say it's half dead. Which means it's still half alive.

She – It's too late. I'd rather put it out of its misery.

He – It could still produce a few apples.

She – That's precisely what I hold against it.

He – Sorry?

She – All its life, that tree has done nothing but produce apples. And if it limped on for another ten or twenty years, all it would ever produce would still be apples.

He – Apple trees produce apples. What did you expect?

She – I expected it to surprise me.

He – So you'd rather chop it down.

She – What's the point? The tree has become utterly predictable. And predictability is so depressing.

He – What will you do with the trunk?

She – The trunk? The same as the head, I suppose. Cut it all into pieces, put them in plastic bags, and throw the sections into the bin outside, a little at a time, so the rubbish collectors don't notice.

He – Notice what?

She – You're not supposed to put old branches in the household rubbish. Not even in small pieces.

He – All the more reason not to chop down the apple tree.

She – Enough talking. The sooner it's done...

She takes a step towards the exit. He gets up and confronts her.

He – What if I don't agree?

She – Oh? What would you do?

He – I could stop you.

She – Stop me? You?

He – Certainly. And what would you do if I tried?

She – I don't know... *(She brandishes the axe.)* I could split your skull open with this axe, for instance. Just to see if there's actually a brain inside.

A pause.

He – So you're still angry that I put my name on the script of your play...

She – That's called plagiarism, isn't it?

He – It was better that way. I've told you a hundred times. I was already fairly well known as a writer. It reassured the producer.

She – It mainly reassured you. Finally getting your name on something worthwhile...

He – The play was a flop.

She – Some plays get a second chance. Ruy Blas was very badly received on opening night. It became a classic, and they even turned it into a film with Montand and de Funès: La Folie des grandeurs, Delusions of Grandeur.

He – Delusions of grandeur... You really should see someone. You think you're Victor Hugo now?

She – Why not? Ruy Blas is also the story of an impostor. Although its hero does have a certain grandeur.

He – The House of Our Dreams? You seriously expected to achieve immortality with that?

She – It didn't stop you signing the manuscript!

He – In fact, I wonder whether you didn't borrow a little from La Folie des grandeurs when you wrote that rubbish.

She – Now you're accusing me of plagiarism! Everything's upside down!

She advances threateningly with the axe. He takes a cautious step backwards.

He – Don't forget there was a receipt in the end. And the shop management probably reported the incident to the police. You're already on record for shoplifting.

She – And you're on record for plagiarism. It's not the first time you've passed off someone else's work as your own.

She raises the axe.

He – The police will come. You'll never get away with calling it a crime of passion. You'll get life.

She – Marrying you was a life sentence... *(She lowers the axe, apparently resigning herself.)* But you're right... It would be too risky. It's not worth it...

He – Come on, put that axe down before someone gets hurt.

She – I wonder why we came here to bury ourselves alive...

He – So do I...

She – I don't know why, but I've always felt there was something wrong with this house.

He – What?

She – I don't know...

He – Like a curse.

She – What if we moved?

He – With what money? Unfortunately your masterpiece won't pay off the mortgage. And neither will your acting fees.

She brandishes the axe again, threateningly.

She – Is that a criticism?

He – You wouldn't dare. It would be too much like a bad stage farce.

She – A woman chopping her husband into pieces with an axe?

He – A cheap horror film, if you prefer.

She – On the other hand...

He – What?

She – Some dreadful films make a fortune...

He – For example?

She – Chainsaw Murder.

He – But this is just an axe, and just a woman killing her husband.

She – When you haven't got much of a budget...

He – Sorry, I don't buy it.

She – Think of the first murder in human history.

He – Cain and Abel?

She – One man strangles his brother with his bare hands. That's all. The investigation consists of a surveillance camera installed by God in the murderer's tomb. And the book is still a bestseller today.

He – Yes, but nobody had done it before. These days, even with murder, it isn't easy to surprise people.

She – You're right. It's terribly depressing. Makes me want to kill myself. Well, I'll start by finishing off the apple tree. That should calm me down...

She picks up her axe and prepares to leave.

He – I'll set the table... and think about another script.

She – Why don't you give me a hand instead?

He – What for?

She – To chop down that bloody apple tree! If we don't want it falling on the neighbour's fence, you'll have to push from the other side while I cut through the trunk.

He – All right, but be careful. Accidents happen so easily...

She – Especially when you're using an axe for the first time in your life...

They go out. A pause.

Offstage voice – Cut! That's not what I wrote, for God's sake!

Blackout.

ACT 2

She is there. He arrives.

He – I had a strange dream... More of a nightmare, actually.

She – What?

He – I dreamed you were leaving me...

She looks embarrassed.

She – Do you know your lines?

He – Don't you?

She – Yes, yes, I think so...

He – Shall we run through it one last time?

She – All right...

He – Apparently the writer's a psychopath. Change a single word of his script and he'd be capable of killing us.

She – And he's the director too.

He – That's the trouble with auteur cinema...

She – Shall we start?

He – I'll go out and make my entrance again.

She – Me too...

They both go out. He returns after a moment and sits down. She enters wearing a raincoat and carrying an axe.

He – All right?

She – Yes.

She takes off her raincoat.

He – Had a good day?

She – It was all right.

He – Good. *(A silence, during which she sharpens her axe on a stone.)* Is there something you want to tell me?

She – What else is there for us to say that we haven't said already? We'd only be repeating ourselves, wouldn't we?

He – Right... And... if you don't mind me asking... What are you doing with that axe?

She – Ah... Now there's a question you've never asked me before...

He – Probably because it's the first time you've come home carrying an axe...

She – Exactly... A first time... I thought I'd surprise you, you old stick...

He – It's also the first time you've called me an old stick... So?

She – I'm going to chop down the tree at the bottom of the garden.

He – With an axe?

She – Of course! Not a bread knife.

He stops, disturbed.

He – Not a bread knife?

She – Isn't that what I'm supposed to say?

He – Yes. Yes, of course. But that line... It's pretty stupid, isn't it?

She – Well, yes, but...

He – What if we asked the writer to change it? I don't know, we could say... 'Not a nail file.' That would be funnier, wouldn't it?

She – You think so...?

He – I think it would.

She – You said yourself he hates anyone changing a single word of his text. I think he's in a murderous mood today... And there's an axe on the set...

He – You're right. We still need the fees for this shoot to qualify for our benefits this year... This is no time to get fired. Shall we start again?

She – All right.

He concentrates for a moment and starts again.

He – All right?

She – Yes.

She – There's something I want to tell you.

He *(surprised)* – Yeah...

She – It's not easy.

He – What isn't?

She – I'm leaving you.

He – That's not in the script, is it?

She – No, that isn't.

He – We said we wouldn't change the script.

She – I've just been offered a role. The role of a lifetime...

He – Who?

She – The writer. Well, the director.

He – What sort of role?

She – He's just asked me to marry him.

He – Your hand?

She – Yes. He's asked for my hand... and the rest of me. To be his wife, if you prefer.

He – He's got some nerve... What did you say?

She – Yes.

He – Just like that? He asks you to marry him and you say yes?

She – You never asked me to marry you.

He – A man you hardly know?

She – I know him a bit better than that...

He – Oh, right... *(A pause)* You want us to get married, is that it?

She – I'm sorry. We're finished.

He – I don't understand...

She – There's nothing to understand.

He – You're leaving me... just when we've moved into a new house?

She – You can keep the house.

He – You mean I can keep paying the mortgage on my own...

She – You didn't want children. The house was already too big for the two of us.

He – I could have changed my mind. Do you want a child?

She – It's too late.

He – Why?

She – I'm already pregnant... That's why I couldn't put off telling you any longer.

He – Telling me you're pregnant?

She – Telling you I'm leaving!

He – What if the baby's mine?

She – It isn't.

He – How can you be sure?

She – We haven't made love for six months.

He – That long? Are you sure?

She – Long enough to know this baby isn't yours.

Silence, as he absorbs the blow.

He – All right...

She – I'm truly sorry...

He – Fine...

She – Will you be all right? I mean... to shoot this scene?

He – I'll be fine... We're professionals, aren't we? The show must go on...

She – I think he's waiting for us...

He – Don't worry... We'll shoot this... auteur film.

She – I'm glad you're taking it like this.

He – And you can count on me to stick to the script, word for word...

Offstage voice *– If everyone's ready, let's shoot it. Quiet on set.*

Silence.

Blackout.

ACT 1

He is there. She enters.

He – Has he gone?

She – He'll be back in an hour, to give us time to make up our minds.

He – And decide whether to make an offer... or not.

They look around them.

She – Well, what do you think?

He – I can't believe it.

She – Neither can I...

He – It really is absolutely perfect.

She – There's even a garden.

He – A garden or a courtyard?

She – A courtyard big enough to have a tree.

He – Really?

She – However hard I look, I can't find a thing wrong with it.

He – And compared with everything else we've seen...

She – Most of it was more expensive...

He – Much more expensive.

She – There must be a mistake in the asking price. It's impossible.

He – They've left a zero off the end.

She – Unless they're in a tremendous hurry.

He – Who owns it?

She – The estate agent said the owners were dead.

He – So they're not in a hurry.

She – Perhaps their heirs are.

He – He said it's been on the market for years.

She – How can it be in such good condition?

He – It looks as though someone has just finished cleaning.

She – I don't understand.

He – Do you think there's a catch?

She – I can't see one, however hard I look.

He – The neighbourhood seems very quiet too. And rather well-to-do.

She – All the charm of an old house with every modern comfort.

He – Completely renovated.

She – Nothing needs doing.

He – We're starting to sound like the estate agent.

She – It's incredible... You'd think no one had ever lived in this house.

He – All these spotless white walls...

She – It's so clean... It's almost frightening.

He – Yes... There's something strange...

She – What?

He – No, nothing. It's silly.

She – Go on... We're about to get into debt for half a century. We may spend the rest of our lives here... If you've got something to say, now's the time.

He – I don't know... I've got an odd feeling.

She – A feeling?

He – Can't you smell something?

She – No... I can't smell anything...

He – Like a smell of...

She – A smell of what?

He – I don't know. The smell of... bodies.

She – Body odour, you mean... like a crowded bus in the rush hour?

He – Yes, something like that... Except the passengers have already got off.

She – Perhaps it's the estate agent... He didn't seem entirely clean.

He – But enough to make the whole house smell, fifteen minutes after he left?

She – Or perhaps it's us...

He – Us?

She – We've been running around all morning. Even with a good deodorant...

He – No, I promise you... It's not that kind of smell.

She – I can't smell anything... Are you sure?

He – I think so...

She – What kind of smell?

He – I don't know... Like... the smell of everyone who came before us.

She – Came before us here? In this house?

He – Owners come and go. Houses stay.

She – But surely they don't leave their smell behind...

He – I'd be curious to know how many people have owned this house.

She – The notary could tell us, couldn't they?

He – Do you think so?

She – Or we could check the land registry. Go right back to the first owner. The person who built it. The first to live here.

He – When it was still untouched by anyone living in it. By any memory...

She – When it was only a building plot.

He – Planning permission.

She – A building project.

He – A plan.

She – A simple idea.

He – A desire.

She – When this house was nothing more than a dream of a house.

He – In the end, if you go back far enough, dreams are the only reality there is.

She – We'll have to try explaining that to our bank manager.

He – You're right. Because to borrow a sum like this...

She – When you're a freelance performer with irregular work...

He – And we're not even sure we'll have enough paid acting jobs to remain eligible.

Silence.

She – So, what do we do?

He – I think we have to decide. At this price, it won't be on the market for long.

She – It's certainly cheap for such a lovely house, but can we really afford it?

He – A fifty-year mortgage would bring down the monthly payments.

She – We'd still have to stop going out to meet the repayments.

He – Or find some extra income.

She – Any ideas?

He – It's a big house. We could let a room to passing tourists, travelling businesspeople, couples having affairs...

She – Of course... Why not open a brothel upstairs and an illegal gambling den in the basement?

He – Or we could rent it out for film shoots.

She – Film shoots?

He – As a location for films.

She – Really?

He – A friend of mine does that. Apparently you can charge a fortune if the house is interesting and exactly what the director's looking for.

She – What kind of films would anyone shoot here?

He – I don't know... Porn films?

She – Imagine if our friends recognised the house.

He – If they recognise it, that means they watch porn films... They're hardly likely to mention it to us...

She – True.

He – Would you prefer horror films?

She – There are other sorts of film, aren't there? Romantic comedies...

He – When you think of everything that must have happened in this house since it was built...

She – Yes... It must have been the setting for every kind of scene from married life.

He – Films of every genre...

She – Hopefully not horror films.

He – Mostly domestic rows, I imagine.

She – Let's try not to add too many of those ourselves...

He – An empty house, between one set of occupants moving out and the next moving in, is like a bare stage in a theatre. Or a film set between shoots.

She – The actors have just left, taking their scenery with them.

He – Others will arrive with their own props and their own story.

She – The newcomers know nothing about the play that's just ended.

He – And they don't yet know much about the one they're about to perform.

She – Tragedy or comedy? Or tragicomedy...

He – Between performances, only an empty stage remains. But the air still carries the scent of everyone who has passed across it.

She – That smell of life and death... That's the smell of theatre.

A pause.

He – So, shall we take it?

She – It's the house of our dreams, isn't it?

He – Yes.

She – That's given me an idea.

He – An idea for a house?

She – An idea for a play...

He – A play? What would you call it?

She – The House of Our Dreams...

He – If the play's a success, perhaps it'll help us pay off the house.

They take each other's hands and look happily around them, then straight ahead.

Blackout.

The 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 – October 2024
ISBN : 978-2-38602-260-9
Play available for free download