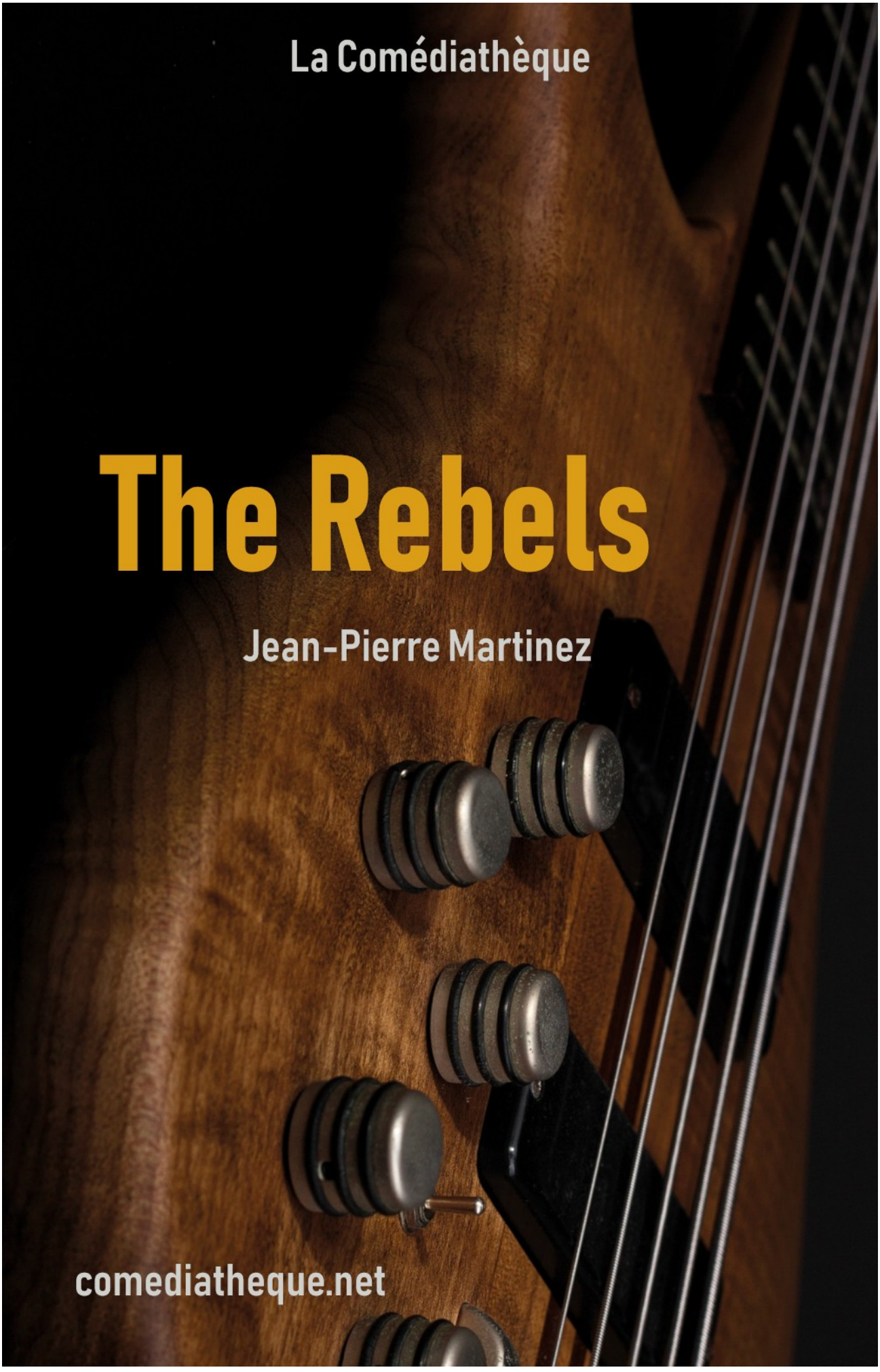

La Comédiathèque
The Rebels
Jean-Pierre Martinez
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The Rebels

Jean-Pierre Martinez

As adults, our lives rarely turn out exactly as we imagined them at twenty. And the golden memories we have of our youth are often just as far removed from what it was really like. Somewhere between the lives we dreamed of and the lives we actually lead lies a nostalgia for all the paths we might have taken. But could we really have lived a different life, or was everything decided from the start? This bittersweet comedy sketches, through a series of encounters, the tragicomic lives of people whose dreams did not quite come true.

Characters

Vincent

Fred

Max

Tom

Cecilia

Alice

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1. Emergency Exit

A man stands with his arms folded in front of an imaginary door. A woman arrives.

Cecilia – Excuse me. Is this the performers' entrance?

Tom – That's right.

Cecilia – So this is where they'll come out.

Tom – Who?

Cecilia – The band! The Rebels!

Tom – I doubt it.

Cecilia – But you just said it was.

Tom – I said it was the performers' entrance.

Cecilia – And so?

Tom – I didn't say it was the performers' exit.

Cecilia – There's a separate performers' exit?

Tom – No idea. I was told to watch this door, so I'm watching it. That's all.

Cecilia – But look. Next to "Performers' Entrance" it says "Emergency Exit".

Tom – Oh, yes...

Cecilia – That means they could also leave through here.

Tom – Only if there's a fire.

Cecilia – Do you think they'll only leave through here if there's a fire?

Tom – A fire or...

Cecilia – If there's an emergency exit, maybe there's an emergency entrance too.

Tom – For what?

Cecilia – In case the fire is outside.

Tom – Maybe.

Cecilia – So you don't know where they'll come out?

Tom – No.

Cecilia – You don't seem to know much for a security guard.

Tom – I'm just doing my job.

Cecilia – And what is your job?

Tom – Watching the performers' entrance.

Cecilia – For?

Tom – Making sure nobody gets in.

Cecilia – Except for the artists, then.

Tom – Except for the artists.

Cecilia – Well, I don't want to go in. I just want to ask them for an autograph when they come out.

Tom – They'd have to get in before they could come out.

Cecilia – Oh, they haven't come in yet?

Tom – No.

Cecilia – You could have told me that earlier.

Tom – You never asked.

Cecilia – Alright...

Tom – In that case, you can still ask them when they come in.

Cecilia – Ask them what?

Tom – Ask them which way they'll come out.

Cecilia – Wouldn't it be simpler if I asked them for an autograph directly when they come in?

Tom – That's up to you.

Cecilia – And if you let me in?

Tom – For what?

Cecilia – To wait for them inside. I have a feeling it's going to rain...

Tom – Sorry, that's out of the question. Unless...

Cecilia – Unless...?

Tom – Unless you give me your number.

Cecilia – You've got a nerve!

Tom – I'm teasing you.

Cecilia – What?

Tom – Of course they're inside. The concert starts in fifteen minutes.

Cecilia – Alright... You're quite the comedian. For a security guard...

Tom – Probably because I'm not a security guard.

Cecilia – Who are you then?

Tom – I'm here for the gig, same as you. I came out to smoke a joint before it starts. They're a local band, not the Rolling Stones. Do you really think they can afford security?

Cecilia – I don't know...

Tom – Still, they've already got one fan. Their only fan, apparently. They'll be thrilled.

Cecilia – I was teasing you too. I wanted to use the performers' entrance to sneak in without paying. I thought you were security...

Tom – I see...

Cecilia – Do you think it's possible to get in through there?

Tom – Presumably. I managed to get out.

Cecilia – Well, I'll go then...

Tom – I still don't understand why you're so desperate to get in through the emergency exit.

Cecilia – I told you. To avoid paying.

Tom – Pay? It's a free concert. Can you imagine anyone actually paying to hear The Rebels?

She looks taken aback.

Cecilia – You're right. I must have mistaken them for another band...

Tom – Give me your number. If a decent band ever comes to town, I'll call you.

Cecilia – Sure...

He lights a joint and offers it to her.

Tom – Want a drag? It's Lebanese.

She takes the joint, takes a puff, and grimaces.

Cecilia – You mean this came all the way from Lebanon?

Tom – Well, the guy who sold it to me was Lebanese. Or so he said.

2. Out of Tune

Max is tuning his bass guitar. Fred enters carrying an electric guitar.

Max – Have you looked out at the audience?

Fred – Yeah...

Max – The place is packed! Can you believe it? People are even trying to get in through the emergency exit.

Fred – Oh really?

Max – You won't believe this. A girl asked me for my autograph.

Fred – Did you give her your number?

Max – Not even...

Fred – Was she that bad-looking?

Max – She was fourteen.

Fred – Right...

Max – Can you hear that?

Fred (*distracted*) – What?

Max – They're getting impatient. They're already clapping. Our fans are calling for us!

Fred – Oh, right...

Max – Fred, I can feel it. Something's happening. In a few years, when we've released our third album and we're playing the Olympia concert hall in Paris, we'll look back on tonight and say, "That was where it all began."

Fred seems to be looking for something.

Fred (*worried*) – Yeah...

Max – Are you alright? You're not too high, are you?

Fred – No, no... Well, yes, but...

Max – What's going on?

Fred – I've snapped a string.

Max – You've got plenty of time to replace it. Besides, making them wait will build the suspense.

Fred – Only problem is... I haven't got a spare.

Max – You don't have any spare strings?

Fred – I have spare strings. Just not that one.

Max – What do you mean, not that one?

Fred – The B string. I haven't got a B string.

Max – Are you kidding?

Fred – No...

Max – For God's sake, Fred...

Fred – You haven't got one, have you?

Max – I've got two complete spare sets for my bass. And bass strings hardly ever break. See the difference?

Fred – Sorry...

Max – Isn't there a music shop nearby?

Fred – It's Sunday.

Max – Damn... So what do we do?

Fred – I'll just do without that string.

Max – Brilliant...

Fred – I've still got five others.

Max – Provided you don't break another one by then...

Fred – What can I say? I've got a destructive streak. Hendrix smashed his guitars on stage.

Max – After the show, Fred. After the show. And I bet he brought spare strings. Why didn't you?

Fred – I was broke.

Max – Sure. But you can always find the money for weed.

Fred moves towards him threateningly.

Fred – What are you, my mother?

Max – No, you're treating me like your mother. You expect me to carry spare strings for your lousy guitar? I'm sick of playing with a bunch of losers.

Fred – Nobody's stopping you leaving, Max. You're getting on everyone's nerves. We're here to have fun, not listen to you lecture us.

Fred walks off. Vincent arrives.

Vincent – Have you seen how many people are out there?

Max – Yeah.

Vincent – Ever since we got a female singer, we've been drawing bigger crowds. Noticed?

Max – She can't sing in tune.

Vincent – The boys don't seem to be coming just to listen... What's wrong?

Max – Fred's broken a string.

Vincent – And?

Max – He doesn't have a spare.

Vincent – Oh shit... (*He pulls out a joint, lights it, takes a puff, and offers it to Max.*) Want some? It's Lebanese...

Max – No thanks, I'd prefer to stay clear-headed...

Vincent (*laughing*) – Clear-headed?

Max – So you're high too.

Vincent – Completely. Well, shall we go? I think our audience is calling for us...

Max – For heaven's sake, Vincent! Fred can barely play with six strings. What's he going to sound like with five? They'll tear us apart!

Vincent – Our audience? Relax. They're our friends. And they're even more stoned than we are.

3. Departure

Vincent and Fred are sitting at a table, having a coffee.

Vincent – Great... So you leave in three weeks?

Fred – The first of May. Labour Day. Everyone else gets a day off. I'm taking a whole year. Maybe longer.

Vincent – It won't be quite a holiday, will it?

Fred – If I run short of money, I'll work as a cook or waiter for a while. It's easy to find work over there. And the French have a good reputation, especially in restaurants. Not to mention with the women...

Vincent – The famous French lover. Lucky devil. You'll have a great time.

Fred – You should come with me.

Vincent – I can't. I start training at a bank in Paris in September. Unless I fancy commuting three hours a day, I'll have to work all summer just to rent a tiny attic room.

Fred – Oh right.

Vincent – Not quite as glamorous.

Fred – For sure...

Vincent – Have you talked to Max about it?

Fred – Yeah. I saw him yesterday.

Vincent – How's he doing?

Fred – You know him... With Max, things are never really okay.

Vincent – He's sitting his exams to qualify as a teacher in two months. He's a bit tense.

Fred – We hardly see each other anymore.

Vincent – He's working a lot, I think.

Fred – Or maybe he's upset with me. I don't know why.

Vincent – I think he's angry with both of us for giving up the band. And now you're leaving. So that's the end of The Rebels?

Fred – They were already finished, weren't they?

Vincent – Let's face it. We were never going to become stars.

Fred – Not rock stars, at any rate...

Vincent – Anyway, I sold my drum kit to pay for the deposit on my flat.

Fred – And I sold my guitar to buy my plane ticket.

A pause.

Vincent – The Rebels. What a ridiculous name. Who came up with it again?

Fred – That was me.

Vincent – Oh yeah, that's right...

Fred – When I was at that Catholic boarding school, it was like a prison. We were only allowed beyond the gates at weekends, provided we weren't in detention. And of course it was boys only.

Vincent – God...

Fred – Imagine it. At the age when you think of nothing but losing your virginity, you're shut in with other boys day and night. I've no idea how I came out of it straight.

Vincent – And didn't you try to escape?

Fred – Once I organised a strike over our conditions of imprisonment. Everyone sounded keen, but when the time came, only three out of four hundred boys refused to go back to class.

Vincent – The Rebels...

Fred – There was a boy in my class who called himself a communist. Brilliant student, very politically committed. I asked why he wouldn't join our protest. Know what he said?

Vincent – No.

Fred – "This is a rebellion, not a revolution."

Vincent – Oh right...

Fred – I wonder how his revolution's coming along. I'm just trying to remain a rebel.

Vincent – And how did your rebellion end?

Fred – I was hoping they'd expel me. Not a chance. They gave us detention for four weekends running.

Vincent – Oh yes, I remember. We didn't see you for a good while.

Fred – I swore that once I'd finished school, I'd never let anyone lock me up again. Especially in an office.

Vincent – Yeah.

Fred – Doesn't the thought of spending your whole life in a bank terrify you?

Vincent – What choice have I got? I'm not as good-looking as you. If I want to attract women, I can't rely on looks alone. I'll have to make a fortune.

Fred – So I'll make the most of being young and handsome while I can. After that, I'll have to rely on my sense of humour.

Silence.

Vincent – You'll still come to Normandy for my birthday, won't you? It's on 30 April, the day before you leave.

Fred – Of course.

Silence.

Vincent – Are you sure you're okay?

Fred – Never better.

Vincent – It's what you wanted, right? To leave here. To see the world.

Fred – Yeah. Three weeks and I'm off to America! I'll send postcards, I promise.

Vincent – And then we'll see each other again.

Fred – Of course...

They exchange a look that says it all.

4. The Future

Cecilia and Alice are sitting and having coffee.

Alice – You're going to Normandy for Vincent's birthday?

Cecilia – Yes. I can take you if you want. My mum is lending me her car.

Alice – Great. *(A pause.)* I think Max said he was coming too.

Cecilia – Okay... (*Pause*) But why are you telling me that?

Alice – What?

Cecilia – About Max.

Alice – I just mentioned it...

Cecilia – Come on. I heard something in your voice.

Alice – Not at all.

Cecilia – We'll be about a hundred people at this party. Why are you talking about Max?

Alice – I don't know... Max and you...

Cecilia – Nonsense. Who told you that?

Alice – Nobody. But everyone knows he's in love with you, don't they?

Cecilia – Everyone?

Alice – Except you, apparently. Aren't you interested?

Cecilia – Is he the one who asked you to talk to me about it?

Alice – Not at all, I assure you... (*Pause*) Well, a bit...

Cecilia – I thought we'd grown out of that sort of thing.

Alice – Well, he's not, you see. (*Pause*) So?

Cecilia – I like him but... he's just a friend.

Alice – I see.

Cecilia – Yes, of course, I've noticed that...

Alice – Noticed what?

Cecilia – That he looks at me strangely.

Alice – He's quite cute, isn't he?

Cecilia – He's so serious, though. If I slept with him one night, I can just see him bringing me breakfast in bed the next morning and proposing. A month later we'd be choosing flat-pack furniture at IKEA.

Alice – And...

Cecilia – I just can't see myself in that life.

Alice – I understand.

Cecilia – And honestly, a man who hasn't even got the nerve to ask me out himself...

Alice – Maybe he's afraid you'll turn him down.

A pause.

Cecilia – And you?

Alice – Me?

Cecilia – Do you like Max?

Alice – I don't know... Why not...

Cecilia – Okay...

Alice – No, I just said... why not.

Cecilia – And he's sending you to talk to me on his behalf...

Alice – You intimidate him, apparently.

Cecilia – Unfortunately, the feeling isn't mutual. Do you see him often?

Alice – We sometimes study for our teaching exams together.

Cecilia – I see... Should I tell him that you're interested in going out with him?

Alice – That would be quite funny...

Cecilia – Yes.

Alice – But a bit cruel.

Cecilia – He kind of asked for it, didn't he?

They laugh.

Alice – And what about you? What are you doing next year?

Cecilia – I don't know... I don't even know what I'm doing this summer.

Alice – You're not going to drop out of university, are you? Like Fred...

Cecilia – Fred?

Alice – He's going to the States at the end of the month.

Cecilia – Oh right... Is he going for a long time?

Alice – I don't know.

Cecilia – Fred's a strange one.

Alice – Funnier than Max, anyway.

Cecilia – No, I mean... he's always joking around, but...

Alice – What?

Cecilia – I'm not sure he's as happy as he pretends to be.

Alice – Do you think he's gay?

Cecilia – No! Well, I don't know. Do you?

Alice – There's one way to find out...

Cecilia – In any case, he's right to leave here.

Alice – Yeah... Have you ever been to the United States?

Cecilia – I think the farthest I've ever travelled is the Ardèche, a few hours away.

Alice – Really? You've never been on a plane?

Cecilia – I have. To go to the Ardèche.

Alice – You're joking!

Cecilia – I'm not. What about you? Have you travelled much?

Alice – I moved a lot as a child. My father was in the military. We lived in Germany and in several African countries. I don't even remember which ones. But moving isn't the same as travelling. To me, it meant leaving my friends. Every time I arrived somewhere, I knew not to get attached. Six months, maybe two years later, we'd be off again and I'd never see them.

Cecilia – And after that?

Alice – Then my father died, and we stopped moving. It's awful to admit it, but I think his death came as a relief. For the first time, I could put down roots. *(She seems close to tears.)* You're not planning to move away, are you?

Cecilia – No, don't worry. I'm staying.

Cecilia puts her hand on Alice's to reassure her.

5. Taxi

Alice is standing there, appearing to wait for something. Tom arrives and starts waiting as well. He looks at her discreetly. She avoids his gaze.

Tom – Excuse me, are you waiting for a taxi?

Alice – Yes...

Tom – No, don't worry, it's not... just trying to start a conversation.

Alice – A conversation?

Tom – I mean, it's not to hit on you. I was really just asking if you were waiting for a taxi.

Alice – Alright...

Tom – You could very well be waiting for something else.

Alice – What else could you wait for at a taxi rank? A bus?

Tom – So you are waiting for a taxi...

Alice – And...?

Tom – And since you were first, the next taxi will be for you. That's why I asked. I now know I'll have to wait for the next one.

Alice – Sorry to hear that.

Tom – No, no, don't apologise... It's not a big deal.

Alice – I wasn't apologising.

A pause.

Tom – I'm suddenly having doubts...

Alice – Again?

Tom – Are you sure this is a proper taxi rank?

Alice – There's a sign. It says "taxi."

Tom – Yeah, but that doesn't mean much.

Alice – Oh, doesn't it?

Tom – In a place like this... It's not certain there's an actual taxi rank.

Alice – Why would it say "taxi," then?

Tom – It might just be a meeting point.

Alice – A meeting point?

Tom – No, I mean a pick-up point. You see them at small railway stations.

Alice – This isn't exactly a small country station...

Tom – Small towns, if you prefer. People book a taxi the day before to go to hospital, or wherever, and the next day the taxi waits for them at that spot. At a set time. Right by the sign that says "Taxi".

Alice – Oh, really?

Tom – Did you book a taxi?

Alice – No.

Tom – Let's just hope this really is a taxi rank...

A longer silence, as doubt settles in.

Alice – So you think we're waiting here for nothing?

Tom – I don't know...

A pause.

Alice – What if we called a taxi company?

Tom – That's only in Paris. In some big provincial cities, maybe. Certainly not here...

Alice – Right... so we'll just wait.

A pause.

Tom – Do you have the time, please? (*Alice gives him a surprised look*.) No, I'm not saying that to...

Alice – Start a conversation...?

Tom – I don't have a watch... (*Alice notices the watch on his wrist.*) Well, I do, but... the battery's dead.

Alice – Why do you still wear it, then?

Tom – I don't know... I suppose I got attached...

Alice – Alright...

Tom – No, I'm joking. The battery just gave out. Just now.

Alice – Bad luck.

Tom – So?

Alice – So?

Tom – Do you have the time?

Alice – Oh, sorry... (*She looks at her watch*.) It's almost midnight...

Tom – Midnight...

Alice – Yes... There's little chance that someone has booked a taxi to go to the hospital at this time.

Tom – Unless it's an emergency... But in case of a heart attack or stroke, you wouldn't book a taxi the night before, would you?

Alice – No... probably not.

Tom – I don't know... Maybe it really is a proper taxi rank...

Alice – We'll wait a bit longer.

Tom – Even if it is a taxi rank, it doesn't necessarily mean a taxi will actually show up. On a Sunday night, at midnight, in this dump of a town...

Alice – You're not exactly an optimist, are you? I'm beginning to wonder if I did the right thing by starting this conversation.

Tom – Sorry... But I can be very funny sometimes, you know?

Alice – Probably unintentionally, I'd guess.

Tom – Can I ask where you're heading?

Alice – Why?

Tom – Oh, not to...

Alice – To hit on me.

Tom – It's just that... it would be a miracle if just one taxi arrived within the next hour, let alone a second one. I was thinking if we're heading more or less in the same direction, we could share. I mean, take the same taxi.

Alice – Well, I don't know...

Tom – Where are you going?

Alice (*pointing in a direction*) – I'm going that way...

Tom (*a bit taken aback*) – Oh, right...

Alice – And you?

Tom – Me too... More or less...

Alice – We'd need to get a taxi first.

Tom – I assure you, I'm not saying this to hit on you, but...

Alice – If you stopped starting every sentence with "I'm not saying this to hit on you," I assure you it would be a bit more credible.

Tom – Sorry...

A pause.

Alice – Well, go ahead then.

Tom – No, it's just... I have this feeling that I've seen you somewhere before.

Alice looks momentarily bewildered.

Alice – Wait. "Have you got the time?" "Haven't we met somewhere?" You've almost asked if I still live with my parents. What comes next? "Got a light?" Relax. We're already talking.

Tom – OK.

Alice – If you've got something worth saying, say it. Spare me the opening lines. Believe me, you're no good at foreplay.

Tom – Sorry, it's just that... I really had the feeling I'd seen you somewhere before.

Alice – Sorry, I'm a bit on edge...

A pause. He pulls out a cigarette and looks in his pockets for something to light it with. In vain.

Tom – So, I'm hesitant to ask if you have a light...

Alice – I don't. I don't smoke.

He puts away his cigarette.

Tom – Never mind... I mean, bad luck for me. Good for you, though, not smoking.

Alice – Yes.

A pause.

Tom – Waiting for a taxi...

Alice – Yes, I got that.

Tom – No, it's... It's the title of a song I wrote ages ago.

Alice – You write songs?

Tom – I used to. Why, don't I look like someone who writes songs?

Alice – I don't know. I don't know anyone who writes songs. At least not personally. And what was that song about?

Tom – It's the story of a guy who... who waits for a taxi.

Alice – Yes, from the title, I suspected as much. Is that it?

Tom – It was years ago. I barely remember it. The first line went something like: "Near midnight under sickly neon light, he stands alone outside the station..." And the chorus was: "Waiting for the taxi, taxi, taxi..."

Alice – I'm waiting for the taxi, taxi, taxi...?

Tom – Yes. That's what I remember...

Alice – Right... And did your taxi eventually show up?

Tom – No... You see... I'm still waiting for it...

Alice – That's not very encouraging.

Tom – It was a symbol, obviously. A man waiting for a taxi to take him somewhere. That was me when I was young. Me, or anybody. At eighteen, we're all waiting for something to happen, aren't we? For life to sweep us away. For somebody to turn up...

Alice – I see. And in your case, then, no one came.

Tom – Not that I haven't taken taxis since. Just never the one that would have taken me where I really wanted to go.

Alice – And where exactly did you want to go?

Tom – I don't know...

Alice – Well, for now, I'd quite like to get home.

Tom – So, you don't live with your parents.

Alice – No. Why? Do you live with your parents?

Tom – No... Well, it depends.

Alice – Depends?

Tom – Depends on the day.

Alice – Right...

A pause.

Tom – It's coming back to me now!

Alice – What?

Tom – Where we've seen each other before.

Alice – And?

Tom – You were at that party at Vincent's tonight too.

Alice – Yes, indeed... Sorry, I don't remember you.

Tom – I asked you to dance. You actually refused...

Alice – That didn't leave much of an impression on you, did it? You didn't remember me earlier...

Tom – At the party there was soft lighting and you looked... With these fluorescent lights...

Alice – Thanks.

Tom – No, I mean you're very pretty here too.

Alice – And now, are you sure you're not trying to hit on me?

Tom – Maybe a little bit now, yes.

Alice – I had planned to go home with a friend who has a car, but she found a guy over there, so...

Tom – Oh yes, unlucky. I mean, for you.

Alice – I thought I might find a taxi. And you?

Tom – Actually, I wasn't invited. Well, not directly. A friend invited me, but then he couldn't make it, so...

Alice – So, you didn't know anyone.

Tom – So I couldn't exactly stay the night.

Alice – How very considerate.

Tom – I came by train. But I missed the last one. The next one is at 7:32 tomorrow morning, I checked.

Alice – And in the meantime, the station is closed.

Tom – I'm not sure it's worth waiting.

Alice – For the taxi, you mean?

Tom – We have to face the facts, no taxi is going to come here tonight.

Alice – I live thirty kilometres away; I can't walk home.

Tom – Apart from the 7:32 train, I don't see any other option.

Alice (*looking at her watch*) – It's not even half past midnight yet. We're not going to wait here for seven hours!

Tom – Especially since it's not very warm.

Alice – We could go back over there, of course, but...

Tom – To that party, you mean?

Alice – At Vincent's place, yes.

Tom – Honestly, I'm not sure I want to go back there.

Alice – Oh really?

Tom – Actually, Vincent threw me out.

Alice – He threw you out? Why?

Tom – There was some money missing from a handbag. Because nobody knew me, I was the obvious suspect. I swear I didn't take it.

Alice – I know.

Tom – Thanks. Do I really look like someone who would steal from guests at parties where I'm not invited?

Alice – Actually, you do.

Tom – So how do you know I didn't steal the money?

Alice – Because it was my money. I thought I'd lost it, and I told Cecilia. She told Vincent. But I've just found it inside the lining of my bag.

Tom – Right. So essentially, it's thanks to you that I was thrown out like a thief.

Alice – I didn't know my friend would mention it to Vincent. And make such a fuss. That's partly why I left, actually. I was very uncomfortable...

Tom – And so was I.

Alice – I'm really sorry.

Tom – Yeah.

Alice – If a taxi does turn up, you can ride with me. I'll drop you off and pay the fare.

Tom – You're not taking much of a risk. No taxi is ever going to come here tonight.

Alice – So what can I do to make you forgive me? Even though none of this is really my fault...

Tom – Shouting thief because you can't find your money... and letting an innocent get accused.

Alice – Well... I didn't accuse anyone, it was my friend who...

Tom – I saw the hatred in their eyes, I assure you. They could have lynched me...

Alice – Are you sure you're not exaggerating a bit?

Tom – OK, there is one thing you could do to make me forgive you.

Alice – Go on...

Tom – Dance with me.

Alice – Pardon?

Tom – I asked you to dance earlier and you said no. So give me that dance now.

Alice – Here? At a taxi stand?

Tom – We don't have anything urgent to do, do we?

Alice – There's not even any music!

Tom – I've got some on my phone. You owe me this, don't you?

Alice hesitates.

Alice – All right. But we are just dancing, agreed?

Tom – Right.

He takes out his phone, plays an old-fashioned slow song, puts the phone on the ground and holds out his arms.

Alice – Do you always keep a slow dance ready on your phone in case you meet a woman at a taxi rank?

Tom – If you prefer another song...

Alice – Let's go for it. After all, what do I have to lose, since you're not trying to hit on me at all...

She agrees to let him embrace her, and they start to dance.

6. The Proposal

Alice is having a coffee. Max arrives.

Alice – How are you?

Max – My head's killing me, but I'll survive. I think I had too much champagne...

Alice – Your best friend doesn't get married every day.

Max – No...

Alice – It was nice.

Max – Yes.

Alice – It's been a while since we've all been together like this.

Max – Yes... Well, almost all of us...

Alice – We should do this more often.

Max – Yes. We'll have to find another occasion.

A pause.

Alice – I do have an idea, but...

Max – Oh really?

Alice – Not you?

Max – I don't know...

A pause.

Alice – We've been together a while. And I'm pregnant...

Max (*pretending to be surprised*) – You're pregnant? *(She doesn't laugh.)* I'm joking...

Alice – I know you're traditionally supposed to propose, but since you haven't...

Max – I'm sorry, I didn't realise... it was important to you.

Alice – I'm not saying it's essential. But it would make sense, wouldn't it?

Max – Make sense?

Alice – We live together. We're having a baby. It's the natural next step.

Max – Of course.

Alice – Try not to sound too thrilled.

Max – Sorry. I just wasn't expecting this conversation first thing this morning. Like I said, I've got a hangover.

She gets up.

Alice – It was already hard enough for me to bring it up, but now, you know, I feel... really awful.

He gets up and embraces her.

Max – I'm sorry, I'm really sorry. Of course, we'll get married... We love each other, don't we?

Alice – I'm sorry too. I didn't quite... It's my first marriage proposal, you know.

Max – It shows. A little.

Alice – But it shouldn't be an obligation either... If you don't want to...

Max – Alice, will you marry me?

Alice – Yes, I do.

Max – Then I hereby pronounce us husband and wife.

Alice – You may kiss the bride...

They kiss.

7. Emergency

Vincent is there. He looks unwell. Cecilia arrives, somewhat flustered.

Cecilia – I've managed to reach them.

Vincent – So?

Cecilia – They're sending an ambulance. How are you feeling?

Vincent – I can't feel my arm...

Cecilia – You'll be fine. They'll be here in a few minutes. Well, I hope...

Vincent – A heart attack at my age... Trust me to be ahead of my time only when it comes to that.

Cecilia – Don't talk nonsense. And it might not be a heart attack. But it's best not to take any risks.

Vincent – I'm sorry, darling... Making you a widow on our wedding anniversary would be quite an achievement.

Cecilia – Don't joke about that. We'll do everything we can to make sure you pull through.

Vincent – Of course... (*A pause*) But if, by some misfortune, I don't make it, there's something I need to tell you.

Cecilia – Please. I know where all the documents are better than you do. I'm the one who files them. You should rest.

Vincent – I wasn't talking about the paperwork, but... while we're waiting for the ambulance, we can talk, can't we?

Cecilia – All right. But if you're about to confess an affair with my best friend, think carefully. If you're discharged in two hours, tomorrow you may wish you'd kept quiet.

Vincent – I've never cheated on you, Cecilia.

Cecilia – So I'm listening...

Vincent – First, you need to know that I love you.

Cecilia – I know, Vincent. You tell me every day.

Vincent – And you say you love me too.

Cecilia – Because it's true.

Vincent – But only in reply. You never say it first.

Cecilia – I love you, Vincent. How can you doubt it?

Vincent – I know, but...

Cecilia – What?

Vincent – I've always wondered whether I was really the love of your life.

Cecilia – The love of my life?

Vincent – It sounds a bit silly, but... I've always thought that deep down... you were still in love with Fred.

Cecilia – Fred?

Vincent – The weekend I celebrated my birthday in Normandy, you went out with him.

Cecilia – That was a long time ago, Vincent. You and I weren't together yet.

Vincent – I'm not saying you cheated on me. I'm not accusing you of anything.

Cecilia – I never saw him again after that weekend. He didn't even come to our wedding. How can you say that?

Vincent – Exactly. Maybe if you had seen him again...

Cecilia – You're torturing yourself unnecessarily, Vincent... Do you really think this is the right time?

Vincent – I've never dared to talk to you about this. And maybe I won't have another chance.

Cecilia – Fred and I spent one evening together. We'd had a bit to drink. It meant nothing. I'd been with other men before you, you know.

Vincent – But Fred was my best friend.

Cecilia – Tell me instead how you're feeling?

Vincent – Awful.

Cecilia – I think I hear the ambulance.

Vincent – That's a police siren. Ambulances don't make that noise.

Cecilia – They should be here soon...

Vincent – So?

Cecilia – So what?

Vincent – I was there that night too. I tried to win you over. But you chose Fred.

Cecilia – Yes.

Vincent – Why?

Cecilia – Fred was leaving for America the next day. He was going away for a long time, maybe forever.

Vincent – And that's why you went out with him.

Cecilia – I knew I wouldn't see him again for years, perhaps ever. Yes, maybe I had a crush on him. But I didn't love him. I love you. You're the man I married.

Vincent – I wish you'd been in love with me back then.

Cecilia – I am now. And I won't let you go.

Vincent – I won't go, I promise.

Cecilia – I chose you, Vincent. Could either of us have lived another life? I don't believe so. Not every dream we have at twenty is meant to come true.

Vincent – My dream was you. And you made it come true.

A moment of emotion.

Cecilia – My turn to ask a question. I need to know.

Vincent – Yes...

Cecilia – Did you know you had heart problems?

A pause.

Vincent – Yes.

Cecilia – But you didn't tell me...

Vincent – Would you have married me if you had known?

Cecilia – That's a strange question.

Vincent – Sorry... I was afraid... I didn't want you to see me like this.

Cecilia – Like this?

Vincent – I didn't want you to pity me.

She holds his hand.

Cecilia – I still hear a siren.

Vincent – This time, it's definitely an ambulance.

Cecilia – I'll go and let them in. It'll be alright, I promise...

Vincent – Of course... It'll be alright...

8. Friends

Fred and Max are sitting at a table having coffee. An awkward silence.

Fred – I didn't know he had a heart condition... I didn't know he was ill.

Max – Neither did I.

Fred – Of course. Otherwise, you'd have told me...

A pause.

Max – He hadn't mentioned it to anyone. Not even to his wife, apparently.

Fred – That doesn't surprise me. Vincent always had to be a winner. Everything seemed to go his way.

Max – The biggest salary, the biggest car... The most beautiful wife...

Fred – What he liked was being admired. He wouldn't have tolerated being pitied.

Max – And yet he died.

Fred – You can't win every time.

Max – No. In the end, everyone loses. Even the born winners.

A pause.

Fred – And you, how are you?

Max – I'm fine.

Fred – So you haven't left the area.

Max – No. I haven't even left the school, you know. I became a teacher there. I'll probably stay until retirement. I must not have a winning mentality, as you say.

Fred – I was talking about Vincent. Still so touchy...

A pause.

Max – And you?

Fred – I'm fine.

Max – Still in real estate?

Fred – Still. But I've travelled quite a bit.

Max – To the United States?

Fred – The United States. Asia. Now I live in the South.

Max – The South of France?

Fred – Lyon.

Max – Married?

Fred – Married. And divorced. And you?

Max – Divorced. And remarried.

A pause.

Fred – How long has it been since we've seen each other?

Max – I don't know... A long time.

Fred – It's a shame.

Max – Mmm...

Fred – We were very close, after all. We were friends.

Max – Yes.

Fred – We still are, aren't we?

Max – Of course...

Fred – But we don't see each other anymore.

Max – You said it, you live in the South.

Fred – Lyon isn't the end of the world.

Max – No. It's not really the South, either.

Fred – I don't know. Where does the South start?

Max – Exactly, I don't know. I'd say Montélimar.

Fred – But Lyon isn't the North. It's not the Centre, either. The East?

Max – Not really.

Fred – Not the West, anyway.

Max – Lyon is a challenge to all geographers, myself included. It's not a location, it's a destination. Proof: Gare de Lyon is in Paris.

Fred – You're right. Lyon is in the middle of nowhere. You arrive by motorway, and you cross it through a tunnel. That's probably why I live there. I've always had trouble settling down somewhere...

Max – I've never managed to move, you see. That's probably why I became a geography teacher. To travel without leaving home.

A pause.

Fred – 30 April 2010.

Max – Sorry?

Fred – The last time we saw each other was 30 April 2010.

Max – What a memory...

Fred – It was Vincent's birthday. He'd organised a big party at his country house in Normandy.

Max – Ah yes, maybe. Anyway, it wasn't at his wedding. You weren't there.

Fred – I was far away... In San Francisco, I think. I couldn't make the trip... Is that a criticism?

Max – No. Just an observation.

Fred – I've never really liked ceremonies.

Max – But you still came to his funeral.

Fred – Yes... (*Pause*) What happened that night that meant we never saw each other again?

Max – We're seeing each other today.

Fred – Yes... More than ten years later. And it took Vincent's death...

Max – We didn't see each other much before that party in Normandy, did we? That's life. We took different paths. Our paths didn't cross anymore...

A pause.

Fred – So you've never forgiven me?

Max – Forgiven you for what?

Fred – You know very well.

Max – I assure you, I don't.

Fred – And you'll never forgive me.

Max – Forgive you for what?

Fred – For being with Cecilia! On Vincent's birthday.

Max – Why would I hold that against you?

Fred – Because you were in love with her, I imagine.

Max – Nonsense.

Fred – Weren't you in love with her?

Max – Maybe a little...

Fred – You had always been in love with her. I show up that night, I hadn't seen her for... and she falls into my arms.

Max – I wasn't dating her. It's not like she cheated on me with my best friend.

Fred – So you remember. And you held it against me.

Max – Yes.

Fred – It was she who came to me.

Max – Of course. And you let it happen, as usual.

Fred – I never saw her again after that. And she didn't try to see me again.

Max – Why are you telling me this? Is it less serious if it was just a one-night stand?

Fred – In the end, a few months later, she was dating Vincent. And you never held it against him.

Max – Well, he married her.

A pause.

Fred – Did you continue to see them?

Max – Yes. Occasionally. The town isn't very big, you know.

Fred – But we don't see each other anymore.

Max – It's hard to stay friends with someone who lives five hundred kilometres away. But it's even harder to stay angry with a friend who lives right across the street.

A pause.

Fred – So I'm the bad guy, is that it?

Max – I didn't say that.

Fred – Will you come to my funeral, at least?

Max – You're talking nonsense. And I might die before you do.

Fred – I was drunk that night. Like everyone else. She came on to me. I let it happen, as you say. She wanted to hook up with someone. I don't know why, but I was the one she chose.

Max – Because she knew it didn't matter to you, probably. That you wouldn't even try to see her again afterwards.

Fred – Probably, yes.

Max – That's probably why all the girls fall into your arms.

Fred – Yes. And why I can't keep any of them.

Max – It's true, I was jealous. Jealous of your success. I'm the sort of man a woman could marry. And that scares them off. I envied how carefree you were...

Fred – And I envied your rigour.

Max – You mean my rigidity, I suppose.

Fred – I thought you'd do something with your life. I mean, something meaningful.

Max – But in the end, we haven't done anything important, you see. Neither of us.

Fred – Anyway, none of us three became a rock star, like we all dreamed back then when we were touring the local halls with that band...

Max – The Rebels...

A pause.

Fred – So that's it... It's because of Cecilia...

Max – No.

Fred – Don't tell me it's because of that last gig we did together? And I completely messed up because a string was missing from my guitar...

Max – Do you really think it's because of a girl, Fred? Or a broken string? That if I forgave you, we'd be friends again, like we were years ago?

Fred – I don't know.

Max – It's true, if you'd played a bit better at that gig, we might have done a few more. But I'm not stupid. I know that band wasn't meant to last. We'd never have become professional musicians. As for becoming famous...

Fred – So why?

Max – You don't understand, Fred. We're not angry. We've simply lost touch. In a way, that's worse. Out of sight, out of mind. We don't do anything together. We have nothing left to share. That's why we aren't really friends anymore. A friendship doesn't die on a particular day, the way Vincent did. It fades away. We avoid meeting because seeing each other reminds us of being young, and of all the promises we made — to each other and to ourselves — that we never kept.

Fred – So what is friendship, in your opinion?

Max – I don't know... Someone whose opinion matters. Someone you can laugh with, make plans with. And what plans have we got now? Another coffee at another funeral in a year or ten? We no longer share any dreams, Fred. I'm not even sure I have dreams of my own. Whenever we meet, we only talk about the good old days. That's why I avoid it. It depresses me. Doesn't it depress you?

Fred – I'm sorry...

Max – Sorry for what?

Fred – For disappearing. For deserting you. For abandoning our friendship.

Max – It's not your fault. Or mine. That's life. What could we still do together?

Fred – I don't know.

Max – We used to dream of recording an album in England and playing the Golf Drouot, that legendary rock club in Paris.

Fred – Well, I did achieve that part of the dream. I play golf every Saturday. With my colleagues from work.

Max – Sorry, I don't know how to play golf, and I'm not sure I want to take it up.

A pause.

Fred – Anyway, the Golf Drouot had already closed by the time we were playing.

Max – See? We were has-beens before we'd even begun.

Fred – We could take up hiking. You know, with those walking poles. It's more our age than rock music.

Max – You live in Lyon, and I'm in the Paris suburbs.

Fred – We could meet near Dijon and each travel halfway. With the high-speed trains, it's easy...

Max – Even when we lived just two streets away from each other, we had already drifted apart. And when you left... I don't blame you, of course. You had new things to experience. I did too, actually. They weren't the same...

Fred – And then, we needed to find a real job to make a living. We can't stay stuck on impossible dreams forever. You're right. Even back then, we knew we'd never become stars...

Max – Anyway, now we're sure.

Fred – And is that why, in your opinion, we're not friends anymore? Because we couldn't fulfil our teenage dreams?

Max – No. Not just because of that. We could have found other dreams. We could have even laughed together about our failures.

Fred – So why?

Max – When we were really friends, we saw each other every day, we even lived together for a while, we went on holiday together.

Fred – It sounds like you're talking about an old couple.

Max – It was a bit like that, wasn't it? Minus the sex. Don't worry, I never fancied you. But yes, love and friendship are much the same. Neither survives very well on leftovers.

Fred – And then you got married. So did I...

Max – Our wives became our best friends, with sex thrown in. And even after they leave us, they often remain the friends who know us best. We were friends because neither of us had a wife, Fred. Friendship is a single man's game.

Fred – So we won't see each other again.

Max – I don't know. Sometimes it's even sadder to see each other than to not see each other.

Fred – And you don't have any friends anymore?

Max – Having a barbecue together once a month and sharing a holiday rental once a year... Does that really make us friends?

Fred – So what do we do?

Max – I'm not blaming you. I'm trying to make peace with myself, you see. With the person I used to be. The person who was your friend.

Fred – What if we started a rock band again?

Max – That would be pathetic...

A pause.

Fred – Are you sure all that really happened?

Max – What?

Fred – What you're describing. Our friendship, the way you were talking about it earlier.

Max – I don't know. Were we?

Fred – We were constantly jealous of each other. We were ready for any betrayal just to be in the spotlight, just to have a girl, even if it meant stealing her from your best mate. In fact, we hated each other.

Max – Yes... But we laughed. And at least we were alive. When was the last time you had a really good laugh?

Fred – A long time, I think. As long as you, I imagine.

Max – Exactly. We don't laugh together anymore. I'm not sure either of us laughs much at all. Proper laughter. The kind that makes your stomach hurt. Remember that? Perhaps that's what friendship was. Our lost paradise. Laughter...

A pause.

Fred – I'm going to move back to Paris.

Max – Not because of our conversation, I hope?

Fred – I'd been thinking about it anyway. Because Lyon, frankly...

Max – It's up to you...

Fred – We could always go walking in the Bois de Vincennes, that big park east of Paris...

Max – It's tempting. I'll think about it.

Fred – I have to go. My train is in fifteen minutes.

Max – OK. You have my number.

They stand up, hesitate, and share a warm embrace. Fred is about to leave.

Fred – By the way, for my move... can I count on you?

Max – That’s what friends are for, isn’t it?

9. Return

Fred arrives from one side, Cecilia from the other.

Cecilia – Fred? What are you doing here?

Fred – Well, you see, I... I've come back.

Cecilia – Come back?

Fred – I live in Paris now.

Cecilia – Great... I'm pleased to see you.

Fred – Me too... How are you?

Cecilia – I'm OK... Better.

Fred – I'm really sorry.

Cecilia – That's life. But it's hard...

Fred – I understand.

Cecilia – I imagine it's hard for you too. He was your friend.

Fred – Yes.

Cecilia – And how are you doing?

Fred – I'm fine.

Cecilia – Are you going to stay in Paris for long?

Fred – I bought a house.

Cecilia – You managed to find a house in Paris?

Fred – I work in real estate, you know.

Cecilia – Oh yes, that's true.

Fred – Parc Montsouris.

Cecilia – Parc Montsouris... That's the South, isn't it?

Fred – The south of Paris, yes. It's the first house I've ever bought. Until now, I've always been something of a nomad.

Cecilia – And Max, have you seen him?

Fred – I was just with him. He helped me move.

Cecilia – Friends are for that, aren't they?

Fred – Yes... And do you still see them? I mean... since they got divorced.

Cecilia – Of course. Alice is a friend...

Fred – That's right... And I think if it hadn't been for you...

Cecilia – What?

Fred – Nothing... So, you... you're going to stay around here.

Cecilia – For now, yes. After that, we'll see. I'm not quite sure where I stand.

Fred – I understand... So, will we see each other again?

Cecilia – Maybe. But I need to go now...

Fred – Of course. I need to go too.

Cecilia – See you soon, maybe...

They both prepare to leave in their separate directions. He calls her back.

Fred – Cecilia?

Cecilia – Yes?

Fred – If I'd asked you to come to America with me that night, would you have come?

Cecilia – You never asked.

She smiles and leaves. He stands there for a moment before heading off himself.

10. Epilogue – The Labyrinth

Two figures, wearing masks or blindfolds. The two roles may be played by any two actors from the main cast. One enters from each side. They seem annoyed to encounter one another.

Man – So?

Woman – Nothing...

A pause.

Man – What if we try over there?

Woman – I just came from there.

Man – And have we already tried that way?

Woman – Yes.

Man – Are you sure?

Woman – Absolutely. And several times.

Man – Well, now I'm stumped...

A pause.

Woman – How long have we been lost in this maze?

Man – I don't know. A long time...

Woman – All this time wasted looking for the exit, and we still haven't found it.

Man – What if there isn't one...

Woman – Then how did we get in?

Man – I don't know. Do you remember when we entered?

Woman – No... but there must have been a moment when we came in. Otherwise, how did we end up here?

Man – You're right. We must have come in somewhere.

Woman – Yes. Through the exit.

Man – We came in through the exit?

Woman – I don't know... Do you think there might be both an entrance and an exit?

Man – That would give us two possible ways out...

Woman – And we haven't found either?

Man – Or perhaps there was just one entrance, and somebody sealed it off after we'd gone in.

Woman – Somebody? Who?

Man – I don't know. Someone must have designed this labyrinth. And it wasn't us...

Woman – Are you sure it wasn't?

Man – If it were us, we'd know where the exit is, wouldn't we?

Woman – Yes, I suppose...

Man – Or maybe we've forgotten.

Woman – Forgotten what?

Man – Forgotten where the exit was.

A pause.

Woman – Do you think we're the only ones in this maze?

Man – We've never met anyone else.

Woman – Maybe our paths have never crossed.

Man – I doubt it...

Woman – Why not?

Man – Every time we set off in opposite directions looking for a way out, we end up meeting right here.

Woman – That's true. We never find the exit, but we never get completely lost. We always find each other...

Man – Yes... We're doomed to stay together.

Woman – Doomed?

Man – Did I say "doomed"?

Woman – You said "doomed to stay together".

Man – No, I meant... It looks as though this is our fate. We're meant to be together.

Woman – Yes... but then why spend all our time looking for the exit?

Man – I don't know.

Woman – Do you think if we found the exit, we wouldn't stay together?

Man – Together? Outside, you mean?

Woman – Outside, yes. Do you think we'd go our separate ways the moment we got out?

Man – That... we'll never know.

Woman – Unless we find the exit...

Man – Yes.

Woman – What if we stopped looking?

Man – Stop looking for the exit?

Woman – Why not?

Man – And what would we do instead?

Woman – I don't know. We could... I don't know...

A pause.

Man – Maybe it's better if we keep looking, don't you think?

They start moving again.

Woman – I'll see if it might be that way.

Man – And I'll try this way.

Woman – We'll meet back here?

Man – OK...

They leave in opposite directions, each by the side from which the other first entered.

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:

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