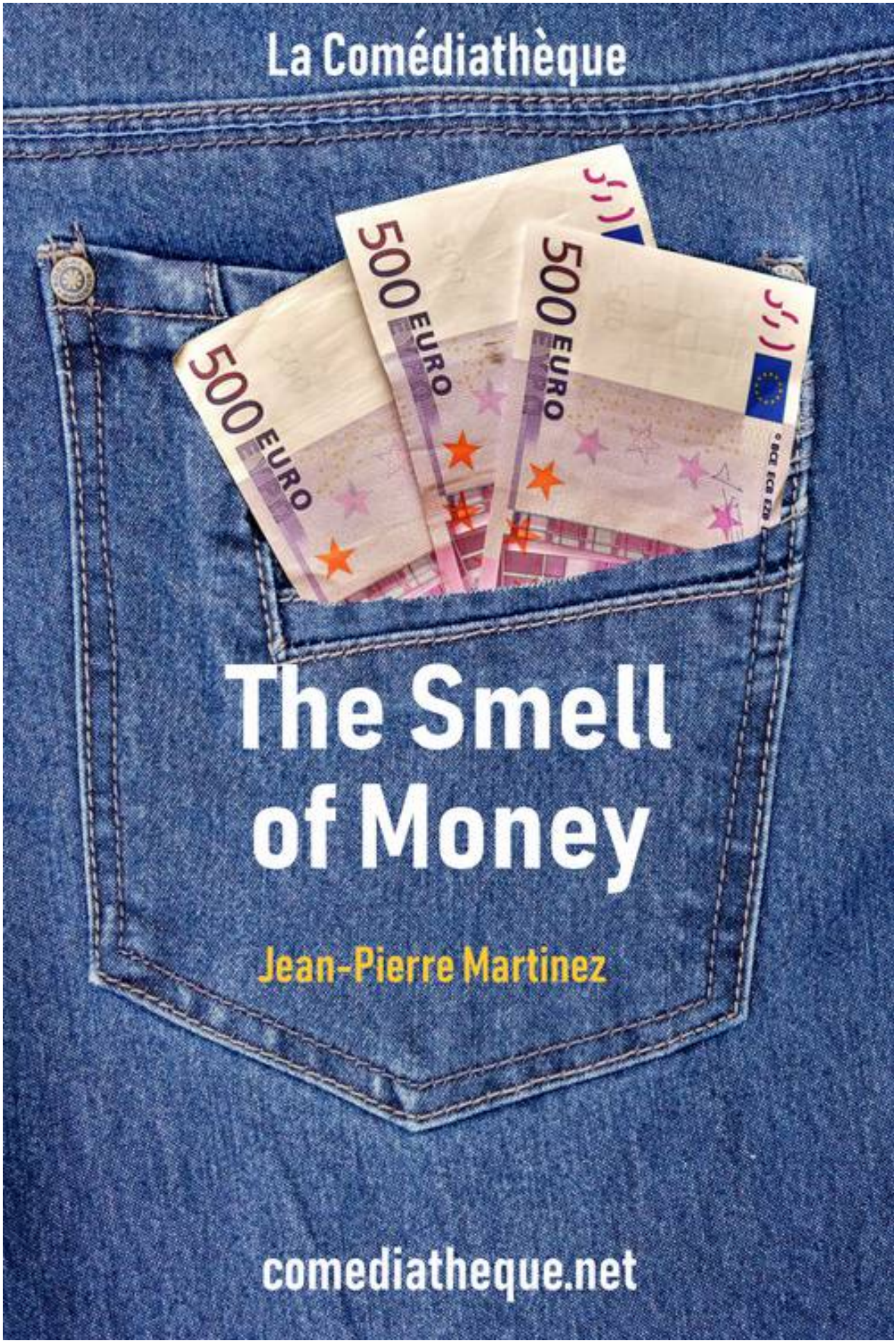

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The Smell of Money
Jean-Pierre Martinez
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The Smell of Money

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Translation by the author

Can money that stinks buy happiness? Frédéric, a penniless painter, refuses on principle the dirty money left to him by his father after his disappearance. But by rejecting an inheritance from a father who abandoned him at the age of five, he comes into conflict with his partner and his sister. Neither woman is quite so particular about the origins of this unexpected fortune, and both have good reasons not to let it slip through their fingers. Who is the man offering them ten million euros in return for a simple signature, and where did the money really come from? Everyone has their own version of the truth...

Characters
Frédéric
Delphine
Carlos
Vanessa

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SCENE 1

Frédéric's modest painting studio doubles as the living room of the loft he shares with his partner, Delphine. Behind his easel, he is working on a canvas while listening to music. Delphine comes in from outside, wearing a raincoat and carrying a briefcase.

Delphine – Hello!

Frédéric – You're already here?

Delphine – What a welcome... If I'm bothering you, I can come back in an hour.

Frédéric – Sorry... I lost track of time.

Frédéric stops the music but continues painting.

Delphine – Lucky you... This day seemed endless to me... *(She takes off her raincoat, puts down her briefcase, goes over to him and kisses him on the lips.)* Sorry to interrupt your work... I hope one day you'll have a studio of your own.

Frédéric – This one suits me just fine.

Delphine – I mean a studio of your own that doesn't double as a living room. So I don't disturb you when I come home from work.

Frédéric – You never disturb me, you know that.

She glances at the painting.

Delphine – Is this a new canvas?

Frédéric – Yes...

Delphine – Another face... Mysterious, indecipherable...

Frédéric – You can spend a lifetime trying to unravel the mystery of a face.

Delphine – And still no model...

Frédéric – Do you want me to paint your portrait?

Delphine – So you can uncover all my secrets, as you say? You would be disappointed. I have nothing to hide...

Frédéric – We all have something to hide. You will always be a mystery to me.

Delphine – What surprises you so much about me?

Frédéric – That you chose to live with me, to start with.

Delphine – That's called love, isn't it?

Frédéric – Then love is something very mysterious.

Delphine – That's true... By the way, I wonder why you chose to live with me.

Frédéric – Oh, that's very simple.

Delphine – I'm listening.

He puts down his brushes, approaches her, and embraces her.

Frédéric – Because you're a teacher employed by the French state education system! For an artist, there's nothing more reassuring than a secure public-sector job.

Delphine (*amused*) – You bastard...

Frédéric – Without you... no bank would have given us a thirty-year mortgage to buy this old garage we now call a loft.

Delphine – Well, I didn't choose you for your romanticism, that's for sure...

Frédéric – You're wrong. I'm a true romantic, forced to hide my tender feelings behind a mask of cynicism.

He kisses her.

Delphine – You're right, keep painting without a model. I wouldn't appreciate coming home and finding a naked girl lounging on my couch in a provocative pose...

Frédéric – Do you want to pose for me? Nude... in a provocative pose...

Delphine – I wouldn't have the patience. And we'd have to turn up the heating...

Frédéric – I'm not sure if we can afford that... Well, I think I'll stop here.

Delphine – I distracted you.

Frédéric – I love it when you distract me... How was your day?

Delphine – Sometimes I feel more like an animal trainer than a teacher. The bell rings, and we let the wild beasts loose...

Frédéric – They've banned animals from circuses. They should ban children from schools too.

Delphine – But then I'd be out of a job. We're already surviving on potatoes.

Frédéric – I love potatoes. Well, I love eating them with you, at least.

Delphine – We'll make it through. They'll eventually realise you have talent.

Frédéric – I haven't sold a painting in weeks.

Delphine – Your website brought in some visitors, though.

Frédéric – Yes. They come, they look, they chat... at any time. I offer them coffee, but they rarely pull out their chequebooks in the end.

Delphine – Your last exhibition went well.

Frédéric – An exhibition in a restaurant... Until I get into a proper gallery. Preferably in Paris...

Delphine – But you won't even approach any Paris galleries!

Frédéric – What's the point? No one knows me. And they're already so overwhelmed with requests...

Delphine – And what about that mysterious Russian collector of yours? The one who used to buy a painting every month and have it delivered to London...

Frédéric – I haven't heard from him lately... Perhaps he's dead...

Delphine – Come on... There will be others...

Frédéric – Of course... I took care of dinner.

Delphine – Great! What are we having?

Frédéric – Potatoes.

Delphine – Lovely... Fries? Mashed potatoes?

Frédéric – A new recipe. I think they call it... potatoes in their dressing gowns.

Delphine – I'll put mine on, and I'll be back in a moment. Ready for a romantic evening...

Frédéric – Mind if I stay as I am? Dressing gowns don't suit me.

Delphine – I'll take the opportunity to take a shower.

She exits. He looks at his painting with a dissatisfied expression. The doorbell rings. He goes to open it and returns with Carlos.

Frédéric – Please, come in... This is my studio...

Carlos – Thank you for seeing me without an appointment.

Frédéric – I'm used to it... But it's better to call ahead. I might not have been here...

Carlos – I would have come back... (*He looks at the painting*) It's very... unsettling, this portrait. But it's magnificent. Is it a man's or a woman's face?

Frédéric – That... That's part of the mystery...

Carlos – The truth never reveals itself at first glance, in all its nakedness...

Frédéric – Otherwise, we might as well take a photograph.

Carlos – Mystery is what gives the Mona Lisa its charm, isn't it?

Frédéric – At least we know the Mona Lisa is a woman... But you're right. I paint to reach a kind of truth, by showing reality as something other than what it first appears to be. I was just talking about that with my wife...

Carlos – So, you're married...

Intrigued by the personal turn the conversation is taking, Frédéric simply smiles.

Frédéric – Did you discover my paintings on my website?

Carlos – No...

Frédéric – Are you a gallery owner? Collector? Or just an art enthusiast?

Carlos – I do love painting, it's true... but I'm none of those. To be honest... I didn't come to buy a painting.

Frédéric – Now that you're here, you can still take a look, it doesn't commit you to anything.

Carlos – What I have to tell you has nothing to do with painting, unfortunately...
Frédéric – I'm listening...
Carlos – I've come to give you some bad news.

Frédéric – I thought as much... But go on, please.

Carlos – You might already be aware...

Frédéric – No, no... Let's just say... I'm not used to strangers ringing my doorbell out of the blue to bring me good news.

Carlos – Behind bad news, you know, there's often a positive aspect.

Frédéric – You're starting to worry me a little... You're not a Jehovah's Witness, are you?

Carlos – No, don't worry.

Frédéric – Then who are you? And what do you have to tell me so urgently?

Carlos – I am... Well, I was your father's lawyer.

Frédéric – My father?

Carlos – Charles. Charles Andreani. You are indeed his son?

Frédéric – Yes... So they say.

Carlos – Well... Your father has left us.

Frédéric – I'm sorry for your loss. But you know, my mother, my sister, and I, he left us many years ago as well.

Carlos – I meant to say that... Mr. Andreani has passed away.

Frédéric – I understood.

Carlos – I know you haven't had any contact with your father for a long time, and I understand that this visit comes as a surprise. I could have sent you a letter, of course. But I wanted to inform you in person.

Frédéric – I was five when my father left France. My mother died a few years ago. She hadn't heard from him for a very long time, and of course he didn't come to her funeral either. So you can imagine that the news of his death doesn't exactly devastate me.

Carlos – I understand.

Frédéric – According to what my mother told us, he went to the United States hoping to make a fortune there by opening a restaurant... That's all I know...

Carlos – He died in Mexico. That's where he had been living for years.

Frédéric – Are you Mexican?

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

Frédéric – I wouldn't have expected anything less. And what was he doing in Mexico?

Carlos – He owned... restaurants, actually. Well, more like bars...

Frédéric – Our mother told us that his business in the United States didn't go as well as he had hoped.

Carlos – That's why he went to Mexico.

Frédéric – And he chose a lawyer to inform me of his death? Is he trying to sue me?

Carlos – I understand your bitterness, believe me.

Frédéric – I doubt it.

Carlos – But beyond the emotional aspect, there are also legal and financial matters. That's where I come to the positive aspect...

Frédéric – Meaning?

Carlos – You are his son. That makes you his heir.

Frédéric – The heir?

Carlos – Along with your sister, of course.

Frédéric – Did you go see Vanessa?

Carlos – Yes.

Frédéric – But what exactly has he left? Bars? I like Corona beer, but I can't really see myself running a bar in Mexico. And I doubt my wife would fancy working the till either.

Carlos – Your father did own bars, that's true. But in the last years of his life, he had disengaged from that business and had invested a significant portion of his fortune in Europe.

Frédéric – Did you just say... his fortune?

Carlos – Yes... Well, he wasn't a billionaire either.

Frédéric – But we're talking about how much, exactly?

Carlos – I can't give you an exact figure today, but you'll know soon. For now, I wanted to tell you about your father's death.

Frédéric – Are you really a lawyer?

Carlos – I was primarily his confidant... and his friend.

Frédéric – His friend?

Carlos – Let's just say I helped him out of some rather difficult situations more than once.

Frédéric – So you're a lawyer... when you say "delicate situations", does that include prison as well?

Carlos – You know, you don't make a fortune without taking some risks. Especially in Mexico. Which sometimes means taking a few liberties with the law...

Frédéric – I'm not sure I want to know more.

Carlos – Maybe it's better that way, indeed.

Frédéric – And I can still refuse the inheritance.

Carlos – I'll let you think about it, but that would be a shame.

Frédéric – I've thought it through. Money doesn't interest me. Especially not my father's money.

Carlos – Take the time to mourn. And talk to your wife. Women often give good advice. Especially when it comes to money...

Frédéric – I've been mourning for a long time already. And I suppose the funeral has already taken place?

Carlos – There was no funeral. His body was not found.

Frédéric – What do you mean, his body was not found? How did he die?

Carlos – He was in a small plane that crashed into the sea off Veracruz, on the Mexican coast. All they found was wreckage from the fuselage...

Frédéric – My father remained a very... elusive man, right to the end.

Delphine returns, wearing a robe.

Delphine – Sorry to receive you like this, I didn't know we had visitors...

Carlos – I apologise, dear Madam... In fact, I was just leaving...

Delphine – I'm not the one chasing you away, I hope. You know, I can take off this robe. (*Carlos looks at her in surprise.*) Well, I mean... to put on something more decent instead.

Carlos – It's late. We will meet again soon to discuss all of this. With a clear head. Madam, my respects.

Frédéric – I don't even have your contact information...

Delphine makes a motion to see him off.

Carlos – I will contact you. Don't worry, I know the way.

He leaves.

Delphine – Who was that guy?

Frédéric – A friend of my father.

Delphine – Your father? You told me you barely knew him. I thought he was dead...

Frédéric – Yes, me too...

Delphine – And what did he want?

Frédéric – To inform me that my father had died.

Delphine – I'm truly sorry.

Frédéric – Well, at least now it's official...

Delphine – Are you okay?

Frédéric – The last time I saw him, I was still a kid.

Delphine – But you remember him?

Frédéric – I'm not quite sure anymore what I remember... and what I've made up. It all gets a bit mixed up in my head...

Delphine – So you're resentful towards him... Well... you used to be.

Frédéric – I resented him, of course. At first. Then I started blaming myself...

Delphine – Why?

Frédéric – I wondered if it was because of me that he left.

Delphine – That's silly... but I understand that. You should have asked your mother about it...

Frédéric – Yes... But those aren't the kind of subjects that are easy to bring up with your mother.

Delphine – Obviously...

Frédéric – And then, after a while... I made peace with it. I had almost managed to forget about him. If I had crossed paths with him on the street, I probably wouldn't have recognised him.

Delphine – And tonight, a stranger rings the doorbell to inform you of his disappearance...

Frédéric – It still feels strange to know that he's really dead.

Delphine – I don't know what to say...

Frédéric – I didn't say it particularly saddened me. He abandoned all of us years ago, and we never heard from him again.

Delphine – So why bother having someone notify you of his death?

Frédéric – It's apparently for settling the inheritance.

Delphine – Ah yes, that's true... There's that too... And he entrusted a friend to handle his inheritance?

Frédéric – This guy was also his lawyer...

Delphine – He doesn't really look like a lawyer.

Frédéric – Yes, that's what I thought when I saw him.

Delphine – What's his name?

Frédéric – I didn't even think to ask him. I was so surprised. He's Mexican.

Delphine – Mexican?

Frédéric – Yes, I know, he doesn't look Mexican either...

Delphine – Well, we've never been to Mexico. I imagine Mexicans don't all have dark complexions, or go around in sombreros with bandoliers across their chests like Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary...

Frédéric – Definitely not the lawyers, at least... According to him, my father ran shady bars in Mexico.

Delphine – He told you that just like that? Shady bars?

Frédéric – That's what I understood. Anyway, I'm going to refuse the inheritance.

Delphine – Well... Are you sure?

Frédéric – Sure about what?

Delphine – That you want to refuse the inheritance.

Frédéric – I don't want complications. And most importantly, I don't want that money.

Delphine – Is it a lot of money?

Frédéric – I don't know... He didn't tell me.

Delphine – And you didn't ask him?

Frédéric – He had just informed me of my father's death...

Delphine – I'm sorry, but since you told me that you didn't care much... It's foolish of me. The death of a father certainly doesn't leave anyone indifferent.

Frédéric – He didn't tell me the exact amount of the inheritance. But based on what I know about my father, there are probably more troubles to expect than money.

Delphine – Still, think about it. Refusing your father's inheritance isn't just about money. There's a symbolic dimension to it as well...

Frédéric – Oh, really...? I would talk to my psychoanalyst about it, but I can't afford one.

Delphine – Exactly... We don't have too much money.

Frédéric – We have enough to get by.

Delphine – If you say so.

Frédéric – As long as we can afford to buy potatoes...

Delphine – It's up to you... It's your father...

Frédéric – That's it... It's my father...

Delphine – And your sister?

Frédéric – He went to see her too.

Delphine – We'll be hearing from her soon, then.

Frédéric – Definitely not tonight. She must be quite upset about all this...

Delphine – Don't you want to call her?

Frédéric – What would I say to her?

Delphine – I don't know... Well... Let's sit down to eat.

The doorbell rings.

Frédéric – And here I was thinking of having a quiet evening...

Delphine goes to open the door. She comes back with Vanessa, Frédéric's sister.

Vanessa – So, did you see him?

Delphine – He just left. You could have bumped into him...

Vanessa (*very excited)* – That's a crazy story! I feel like I've seen Santa Claus, and I'm pinching myself to make sure I'm not dreaming.

Frédéric – Hi Vanessa. I suppose by Santa Claus, you're referring to that Mexican lawyer who just informed us of our father's death.

Vanessa – This isn't another one of your jokes, is it...

Frédéric – No, no, don't worry. It's not a joke. Dad is really dead...

Vanessa (*recovering a bit*) – It's true... He was our father, after all...

Delphine – Do you want something to drink? Coffee?

Vanessa – Thanks, I'm already worked up enough...

Frédéric – How about a calming herbal tea?

Vanessa – Well, at the same time, everyone believed he was dead for a long time. So, it's just a confirmation.

Delphine – OK... No herbal tea either...

Vanessa – I heard there wasn't even a funeral. It's unbelievable...

Frédéric – Why? Would you have gone?

Vanessa – Wouldn't you?

Frédéric – I don't know. Mexico is far away...

Vanessa – Well... He's dead, and that's it... But did he talk to you about the inheritance?

Frédéric – You know me... Money...

Vanessa – Well, whatever we think about money... We're talking about ten million euros here...

Delphine – Sorry?

Vanessa – Isn't that what he told you?

Frédéric – He wasn't that specific. And I didn't ask for details...

Vanessa – It would be around 5 million each.

Frédéric – Don't get too carried away... I'm afraid it's not that simple...

Vanessa – Even if there are some formalities and we have to wait a bit to access the funds...

Frédéric – That's not what I was thinking about...

Vanessa – What else?

Frédéric – He mentioned some more or less legal affairs. In Mexico. And believe me, for an activity to be considered illegal in Mexico, we're definitely not talking about a simple tax fraud.

Vanessa – He assured me it was all perfectly legal. He'd reinvested it in property in Paris...

Frédéric – It's still dirty money. Doesn't that bother you?

Vanessa – Money is money. And money has no smell.

Frédéric – Ah, I see... If we start invoking popular wisdom, then...

Vanessa – Don't you agree, Delphine?

Delphine – It's your father... It's up to you to decide what you want to do with that money...

Vanessa – Money comes and goes. As long as now it's clean money...

Frédéric – It's called money laundering...

Vanessa – Money changes hands! What tells you that at some point, the cash you have in your pocket wasn't used to buy drugs?

Frédéric – You're right... Money is dirty by nature. I think Freud even said it was shit. That's why I try not to carry any in my pockets.

Vanessa – Of course, I forgot... Monsieur is an artist... Monsieur is above all that sordid business of money...

Frédéric – Not everyone can make a living from real estate speculation like your dear husband...

Vanessa – Because art isn't a market, is it? Well, for artists who manage to sell their paintings, of course...

Delphine – Maybe we should calm down a bit, okay?

Vanessa – Well, let me tell you, I wouldn't turn down five million. No matter where they come from... It's our father, after all. We can't say he took much care of us. We're entitled to a little compensation...

Frédéric – Our father? We know nothing about his life. Even less about his affairs. As for his so-called Mexican lawyer...

Vanessa – He's not coming to ask us for money, he's coming to give us money!

Frédéric – Remember, when you accept an inheritance you inherit the liabilities as well as the assets. In his case, I'm not sure the assets outweigh the liabilities. In more ways than one...

Delphine – You could accept it subject to an inventory of the assets and debts...

Vanessa – She's right... We could always consult a notaire, a French legal specialist in inheritance matters.

Frédéric – And you really think some small-town notaire could tell us whether to accept a Mexican mobster's inheritance?

Delphine – A mafia member... Don't you think you're exaggerating a bit...?

Frédéric – And what does your husband think about it?

Vanessa – Marc? I haven't talked to him about it yet... I wanted to be sure.

Frédéric – Sure about the amount of the inheritance?

Vanessa – Sure that I'm not dreaming!

Frédéric – Well, thank you for your visit, Vanessa. It's true that you don't honour us with your presence often...

Vanessa – I could return the compliment. How long has it been since you last saw your nephew and niece?

Delphine (*to lighten the mood*) – Don't you want to stay for dinner with us?

Frédéric – We made potatoes... It'll be a change for you... You probably don't eat them frequently... You'll see, they're very good... when prepared properly.

Vanessa (*to Delphine*) – That's kind of you, thank you, but I don't think I could eat anything. Besides, I have to go. Marc will wonder where I've been. And the kids too. Let's talk about all this tomorrow, okay?

Frédéric – Sure... Good night... And sweet dreams...
Vanessa – It's incredible... Ten million...

Vanessa leaves.

Delphine (*sarcastic*) – You were right, she seems completely devastated by her father's death...

Frédéric – I don't understand... She doesn't even need the money... Her husband earns more in a month than the two of us in two years.

Delphine – Her husband, yes...

Frédéric – She doesn't even need to work!

Delphine – Exactly... Maybe she wants to have her own money. To be less dependent on her husband.

Frédéric – If I had five million, I wouldn't even know what to do with it.

Delphine – Five million? Neither would I. But I know exactly what I'd do with five thousand euros. As for the rest, we'd have plenty of time to think. I'm sure we'd come up with ideas...

Frédéric – Yeah. Like what?

Delphine – I don't know... Pay off the mortgage on this loft, for a start. Then the bank wouldn't take half my salary every month, and we might even have enough left to put butter on our potatoes...

Frédéric – Be careful, butter makes you gain weight.

Delphine – I've lost three kilos over the past year, and you haven't even noticed. Think about it, Frédéric. Five million could change our lives.

Frédéric – For the better, are you sure? (*Ironically*) To quote the great proverbs, like my sister, I remind you that according to popular wisdom, "money doesn't buy happiness"...

Delphine – What exactly bothers you about the idea of having a few million? If you're trying to sell your paintings, it's to have money.

Frédéric – Don't you start as well! Money that I would have earned on my own, yes. But I can't see myself living off the money of a man whom I've always despised. I have the right, don't I? And besides, we don't really need the money.

Delphine – Speak for yourself...

Frédéric – Excuse me?

Delphine – You don't need money, I'm the one paying the bills!

Frédéric – Alright... Here we are...

Delphine – If you have a good reason to refuse this money, tell me, Frédéric. If it's something serious, I'll understand.

Frédéric – I wasn't abused as a child, if that's what you mean... My father abandoned us. I don't want anything from him. That's all. Aren't we happy together?

Delphine – Yes...

Frédéric – This money won't bring us anything good, believe me. Nothing that comes from my father can bring us anything good.

Delphine – I understand that all of this isn't easy for you. But today, I'm asking you to think about me a little.

Frédéric – About you?

Delphine – You've realised your dream, Frédéric. You're a painter.

Frédéric – Yes... Thanks to you, I know...

Delphine – If I didn't have to work anymore...

Frédéric – I thought you loved your job as a teacher. That you felt useful...

Delphine – I did love it... But I feel less and less useful. Teaching in suburban schools has become exhausting. I wouldn't mind letting someone else take over, so I could finally try doing what I really want...

Frédéric – Like what?

Delphine – Do you think I'm incapable of having personal desires?

Frédéric – Not at all! I'm just asking what you would do if you didn't have to work anymore!

Delphine – I don't know... Maybe I would start writing...

Frédéric – I didn't know you wanted to write... You've never mentioned it to me...

Delphine – Because until now, you see, having two artists in our relationship was at least one too many...

Silence.

Frédéric – Alright, I promise I'll think about it...

Delphine – Thank you...

Frédéric – But I can't promise I'll change my mind...

Fade to black.

SCENE 2

Frédéric is painting, but this time without music. The phone rings. He reluctantly picks it up.

Frédéric – Hello...? Crédit Solidaire bank? Oh, yes... We do have an account with you... And a thirty-year mortgage, yes... I see... Well, no, actually, I don't understand... There must be a mistake... I know, Crédit Solidaire never makes mistakes... No, of course not... I'll speak to my partner; she deals with... And she'll call you back... Right... Thank you... Merry Christmas to you too...

He sighs, looking worried, and goes back to painting. The doorbell rings. He opens the door, visibly upset, and returns with Carlos, a briefcase in one hand and a paper bag in the other.

Frédéric – Seems like we can't get rid of each other...

Carlos – I bought some chouquettes at the bakery downstairs. They're little sugar-topped French pastries. They looked so good I couldn't resist. *(He offers the bag.)* Would you like one?

Frédéric – You really think you can buy me with a few chouquettes?

Carlos – I'm not here to buy you, Frédéric. I'm offering you five million, with no strings attached.

Frédéric takes the paper bag and places it on the table next to a coffee maker.

Frédéric – I'm supposed to offer you coffee in return, I imagine.

Carlos – In exchange for five million? I knew Paris was expensive, but that would be the most expensive coffee I've ever had.

Frédéric – So, do you want a coffee or not, damn it?

Carlos – Well, I wouldn't say no. It's so kindly offered...

Frédéric pours him a coffee. They sit down, each take a chouquette, and eat it.

Frédéric – Thanks for the chouquettes...

Carlos – It's been years since I've had any...

Frédéric – Don't they have chouquettes in Mexico?

Carlos eats a chouquette.

Carlos – They're my madeleine, as Proust would say... One bite, and all my childhood memories come flooding back...

Frédéric – So you used to live in France... You speak French better than I do, by the way. What took you to Mexico?

Carlos – I'll tell you about my life another time... For now, it's about your father.

Frédéric – I'm listening...

Carlos – I need to know your decision. Your sister, you're aware, has decided to accept the inheritance.

Frédéric – And what if I refuse?

Carlos – She'll get all of it.

Frédéric – And she doesn't care where the money comes from?

Carlos – I gave her all the necessary guarantees, and her notaire too. Everything complies with French tax law.

Frédéric – If you say so... But that wasn't my question. It may be legal money now, but where did it originally come from? I need to know...

Carlos – Your sister doesn't have as many scruples as you do.

Frédéric – I'll take that as a compliment...

Carlos – And your brother-in-law either...

Frédéric – My brother-in-law is a property dealer. You know enough French to realise that someone who buys and sells property isn't necessarily a model of moral integrity. So where did the money come from?

Carlos – I told you, your father owned bars.

Frédéric – Don't make fun of me. You don't make ten million over twenty years by selling tequila to Mexicans.

Carlos – I'll be frank with you... The bars your father owned also employed... hostesses.

Frédéric – Hostesses? Really? So my father ran brothels and I'm the son of a pimp.

Carlos – That's one point of view.

Frédéric – Isn't it yours?

Carlos – It's a bit like painting, you know. Things always seem very simple when you see them from a distance. When you get closer, you realise they're more complex.

Frédéric – Thanks for this little lesson in perspective... But you told me my father was in trouble with the law. I imagine that in Mexico, people don't worry about a simple pimping case. By any chance, did my father sell anything other than women and alcohol in his brothels?

Carlos – Indeed, he occasionally provided some clients with less legal substances...

Frédéric – So he was also a drug dealer.

Carlos – I would say more of a retailer. I've been honest with you. But it's better that you don't know more.

Frédéric – Ah, because there's something else?

Carlos – Your father wasn't the bastard you think he was.

Frédéric – You've just told me that he was a pimp and a drug trafficker. Just out of curiosity, may I know your definition of a bastard?

Carlos – Those brothels existed before Charles took control. Prostitution is the oldest profession in the world. And drug trade didn't wait for your father to thrive in Mexico either. He didn't invent anything, you know...

Frédéric – I'll repeat my question: is there anything else I should know?

Carlos – Your father had been in trouble with the law, yes. He had served time in prison. And he was about to go back when he died in that plane crash.

Frédéric – For what reason?

Carlos – He was accused of murder. Given his background, he faced a life sentence...

Frédéric – A judicial error, I suppose.

Carlos – Your father didn't kill anyone in cold blood, I promise you.

Frédéric – That's reassuring, indeed. So he was a hot-blooded man?

Carlos – All you need to know is that Charles had withdrawn from his businesses in Mexico and reinvested the money in luxury apartments in Paris and London. Everything he owned is now perfectly legal. I saw to that.

Frédéric – But it's still dirty money.

Carlos – Clean and dirty, you know... You shouldn't judge people too quickly. Especially not your parents. You think you know them better than anyone else, but in the end (*He approaches the easel and points to the painting*) you only know the face they show you. The tip of their inner iceberg...

Frédéric – I know nothing about my father... I don't even remember what he looked like anymore...

Carlos – All the more reason not to condemn him based on appearances.

Frédéric – My only luxury is being able to look at myself in the mirror every morning... I'm not giving that up for five million euros.

Carlos – No one can force you to accept this inheritance. But I think it would be a mistake for you to refuse it. A mistake that you will no doubt regret one day...

Frédéric – Is that a threat?

Carlos – It's friendly advice. If you turn down your share, it will all go to your sister. That's all.

Frédéric – And you've told her all this?

Carlos – She told me clearly that she didn't want to know.

Frédéric – I see...

Carlos gets up to leave.

Carlos – I'll let you think about it until tomorrow. Then I'll have to leave...

Frédéric – As you wish, but after what you've just told me, do you really think I'm going to change my mind?

Carlos admires the painting again.

Carlos – What you're painting is really beautiful...

Frédéric – Thank you...

Carlos – And that face vaguely reminds me of someone I used to know...

Frédéric – Oh yes...?

Carlos – You have a lot of talent. An artist like you should only care about his art. I think that's what your father would have wanted.

Frédéric – Did he tell you that?

Carlos – Thanks for the coffee.

Carlos leaves. Frédéric looks perplexed. Delphine comes in.

Frédéric – So, how was your day?

Delphine – The usual... Forty pupils per class... whose names I have to learn... and not all of them are easy to pronounce. A few new faces among the teachers... Freshly graduated young ones we have to be careful not to discourage, while we ourselves struggle to keep believing.

Frédéric – You don't have an easy job, I know... But if you don't even believe in it any more...

Delphine – I believe in it, Frédéric... The day I really don't believe in it any more, I won't be able to continue.

Frédéric – I'm afraid that one day, you won't believe in me any more...

Delphine – That will never happen, don't worry.

Frédéric – In the end, I'm just like all those kids with unpronounceable names. I also need someone to believe in me. Without you, I would have given up a long time ago...

They share a quick embrace.

Delphine – How was your day?

Frédéric – Nothing special...

Delphine – Well...

Frédéric – Oh, yes... Crédit Solidaire called.

Delphine – I know... They called me on my mobile...

Frédéric – Is something wrong?

Delphine – They couldn't take this month's mortgage payment. Our account is overdrawn...

Frédéric – And it's only the 20th of the month...

Delphine – Yes... December 20th... But since you stubbornly refuse to believe in Santa Claus...

Frédéric – If only I could sell one painting. Just one...

Delphine – I'll take up some private tutoring.

Frédéric – I could give some too.

Delphine – Painting lessons?

Frédéric – Well, yes, not maths lessons...

Delphine – And do you really think you'd find students?

Frédéric – I could put up a notice at the bakery.

Delphine – Yes... But you'll have less time to paint...

Frédéric – I'll manage.

A moment passes.

Delphine – I ran into the lawyer on my way here.

Frédéric – Yes.

Delphine – And...?

Frédéric – Nothing. He brought me some chouquettes. There are some left. You should taste them. They're really good...

Delphine – Don't you think it could solve all our problems?

Frédéric – I had a discussion with him. He told me how my father made his fortune.

Delphine – How?

Frédéric – His money comes from drugs and prostitution. My father had been to prison, and if he hadn't died in that plane crash, he would have faced life imprisonment. For murder...

Delphine – Okay...

Frédéric – I feel there is a "but"...

Delphine – But after all, what's done is done. Imagine you won the lottery! If you had won the lottery, would you take the money?

Frédéric – Of course.

Delphine – So what's the difference?

Frédéric – Lottery money doesn't come from drugs and prostitution.

Delphine – For plenty of people struggling to get by in this country, the lottery is an addiction. The prize money comes from minimum-wage workers spending part of their wages on tickets each month, dreaming of a fortune, and sinking a little deeper into poverty instead of buying food or paying for their children's school meals. Is that really any better? A handful of winners pocket that money each week. What world are you living in, Frédéric?

Frédéric – You seem to know a lot about the Française des Jeux, the French national lottery. And yet you don't even play...

Delphine – What do you know about it?

Frédéric – Do you play the lottery?

Delphine – Sometimes.

Frédéric – You never told me.

Delphine – Well, you see, in the end, I also have my share of mystery.

Frédéric – I'm sorry.

Delphine – Sorry for what?

Frédéric – That you've been reduced to playing the lottery in the hope of paying the mortgage.

Delphine – I've put my faith in you, Frédéric.

Frédéric – And you've lost.

Delphine – No, I've won. I know you have talent.

Frédéric – The challenge is convincing others of that.

Delphine – We'll get there. But for that to happen, you have to be able to keep painting. Not by wasting your time giving drawing lessons to teenagers or pensioners.

Frédéric – I can't do that.

Delphine – What?

Frédéric – Take this money.

Delphine – Where will that money go if you don't take it?

Frédéric – To my sister... But she won't take it.

Delphine – You think so?

Frédéric – When she finds out where that money really comes from, she'll refuse the inheritance. Just like me.

Delphine – You want to bet?

Frédéric – What can I give you if I lose this bet?

Delphine – I don't know... Five million?

Fade out.

SCENE 3

The same set. Frédéric is with Vanessa, more excited than ever.

Vanessa – It's incredible! Dad running brothels in Mexico! It's like something out of a film...

Frédéric – Yes... A film noir...

Vanessa – That's a crazy story!

Frédéric – Watch out, Vanessa, you're saying that every other sentence.

Vanessa – What?

Frédéric (*imitating her*) – That's a crazy story!

Vanessa – Oh, you think so too. That's exactly what I said...

Frédéric – Yes...

Vanessa – You have to admit, what's happening to us is quite unusual.

Frédéric – It doesn't seem to affect you much, knowing that your father was a pimp and a drug trafficker.

Vanessa – Mum always made him out to be a loser. Well, at least he was successful.

Frédéric – Excuse me? Successful at what?

Vanessa – He made a fortune! I feel like I've won the lottery!

Frédéric – You are not going to talk about the lottery too.

Vanessa – It does seem similar, doesn't it? All this money suddenly falling from the sky...

Frédéric – We're talking about our father's death, aren't we?

Vanessa – Yes, well, we hadn't seen him for years. And you hardly knew him. We're not going to cry over it, are we?

Frédéric – Don't tell me you're going to accept this inheritance?

Vanessa – Are you kidding? Why wouldn't I accept it?

Frédéric – It's drug money! Prostitution! Crime!

Vanessa – Carlos told us the murder charge was a mistake...

Frédéric – Nevertheless, it's dirty money!

Vanessa – Maybe it was. Now it's clean money. But do as you wish...

Frédéric – I don't understand. You don't need the money.

Vanessa – What do you know?

Frédéric – You live in a big bourgeois house, you have two cars, a ski apartment, a villa by the sea...

Vanessa – That's Marc's money.

Frédéric – You're married, aren't you?

Vanessa – You can never have too much money. Not everyone is cut out for bohemian life, like you. And what does Delphine think about it?

Frédéric – Leave Delphine out of it... And what does Marc say?

Vanessa – Money, you know... He doesn't care where it comes from. As long as everything is legal...

Frédéric – So you're going to accept this inheritance...

Vanessa – Absolutely! Twice over, if I could!

Frédéric – If you do that, we will never see each other again.

Vanessa – We don't see each other much anymore... Do what you want...

Frédéric – Fine, then get out of here... And deal with your conscience...

Vanessa – If you weren't so blinded by your pride, Frédéric, you'd notice that other people around you have problems too.

Frédéric – Stop, you're going to make me cry. And don't tell me you're going to donate that money to charities...

Vanessa – I'm not trying to profit at your expense, Frédéric. If your share of the inheritance comes to me, I swear I'll give that money to a charity.

Frédéric – Seriously? And which one, if I may ask?

Vanessa – An organisation against violence against women... Why not?

Vanessa leaves. Frédéric remains momentarily perplexed, not fully understanding. Delphine arrives.

Frédéric – Were you there?

Delphine – Yes, I live here. And I wasn't eavesdropping, if that's what you mean.

Frédéric – That's not what I said. So, you heard everything...

Delphine – Yes... So after disowning your father, you're going to disown your sister too?

Frédéric – I didn't see her like that. And I'm disappointed...

Delphine – Yes, indeed... I think you don't know your sister very well.

Frédéric – Oh, really?

Delphine – You spend your time painting faces, trying to unravel their mysteries, as you say. But do you look at the faces of those around you?

Frédéric – I think so...

Delphine – If you had, you'd have noticed the marks on your sister's face...

Frédéric – What marks?

Delphine – Forget it, just go...

Frédéric – I don't want to be like her, that's all. Is that how you see us?

Delphine – How?

Frédéric – Can you picture us living a lavish lifestyle with money from a mafioso?

Delphine – Whether you like it or not, that mafioso was your father.

Frédéric – That's something I can't change, indeed, but I don't have to accept his money.

Delphine – It's no longer his money. He's dead! It's just money. If you won't take it, your sister will. If she won't, someone else will. And if nobody wants it, it goes to the state. The Mexican state!

Frédéric – Maybe they need it more than us.

Delphine – We've got bills to pay... I've got no choice... I'll ask my mother to lend me that money. And she's not a multimillionaire...

Frédéric – Can you imagine living in an apartment that was bought with money from prostitution? Come on... You're a teacher! I thought that meant you had to have a certain moral code...

Delphine – And you dare lecture me about morality? The few paintings you sell go to wealthy Parisian 'bobos'—bourgeois bohemians—who hang them in their living rooms! Not to mention your mysterious Russian collector. Do you know where his money comes from? Did you ever ask him for proof that his fortune was legitimate? Russia has a mafia too, you know!

Frédéric – Maybe, but that guy is not my father.

Delphine – As far as I know, you don't give your paintings to humanitarian organisations. You try to sell them on the art market. Is that what being a socially committed artist means? Isn't it a kind of prostitution too?

Frédéric – So you're calling me a whore!

Delphine – I'm the one working while you live off me!

Frédéric – So you're calling me a pimp...

Delphine – You're a hypocrite, Frédéric. But you're no better than the others. If you took that money, I wouldn't have to work anymore.

Frédéric – I thought you loved your job!

Delphine – Let's just say I've fulfilled my passion, and I would move on to something else. And you, you wouldn't need to...

Frédéric – Paint?

Delphine – Chase after clients!

Frédéric – Fine. You're right, I'll take the money. But remember, it'll be my money. If we change our way of life, you'll be living off me. Then we'll see which of us is the real whore.

Delphine – I won't burden you with that. You can afford all the whores you want. I'm leaving.

She leaves.

Fade to black.

SCENE 4

Frédéric is dozing off on the couch. The doorbell rings. He wakes up and goes to open the door, full of hope, but returns disappointed with Vanessa.

Vanessa – Sorry, am I disturbing you?

Frédéric – I'm a bit surprised, that's all. I thought I told you I never wanted to see you again...

Vanessa – That's precisely why I'm here, to ask for your forgiveness... Well, to attempt a reconciliation. Isn't Delphine here?

Frédéric – She's gone...

Vanessa – Gone? You mean...

Frédéric – She left me.

Vanessa – I'm truly sorry... It's not because of... But no, obviously, you don't leave a man who's just inherited five million.

Frédéric – If you say so...

Vanessa – Unless, of course, that idiot refuses the inheritance.

Frédéric – Have you come back just to call me an idiot? I think you've misunderstood the word 'reconciliation'...

Vanessa – Don't worry, she'll come back... If she was going to leave you, she would have done it a long time ago. Well, I mean...

Frédéric – Yes, what do you mean?

Vanessa – I mean that to have stayed with you up to that point, she really had to love you.

Frédéric – I'm not sure how I should take that either...

Vanessa – Frédéric, you're broke. And you can be insufferable.

Frédéric – Well, I think we've made up enough now. So if you don't have anything else to tell me...

Vanessa – I'm sorry. I'm... a bit confused.

Frédéric – What did you want, exactly?

Vanessa – To know if I could sleep here...

Frédéric – Sorry?

Vanessa – Just for tonight.

Frédéric – What's going on?

Vanessa – I had a fight with Marc too...

Frédéric – Really... You see... Money can't buy happiness...

Vanessa – So you're granting me asylum?

Frédéric – Okay... But only for tonight...

Vanessa – Thanks... *(They both look slightly embarrassed.)* I could do with a stiff drink. How about you?

Frédéric – You're right, let's drown our sorrows in alcohol.

Vanessa – Do you have any tequila?

Frédéric – You're going to laugh, but yes.

Vanessa – Let's finish the bottle.

Frédéric – We're not going to get drunk, there's only a little left. The bottle has been here for so long, I wonder if all the alcohol hasn't already evaporated.

Vanessa – What could possibly remain in a bottle of tequila when all the alcohol has evaporated?

Frédéric – I have no idea... Let's drink, we'll find out.

He empties the remaining contents of the bottle into two glasses.

Vanessa – Ah! In France they say that if you get the last drops from a bottle, you'll be married within the year.

Frédéric – We're already married.

Vanessa – Divorced within the year, then...

Frédéric – Thanks, that really lifts my spirits.

They clink glasses.

Vanessa – Salud!

Frédéric – Salud...!

They down their drinks in one gulp.

Vanessa – Don't you have anything else?

Frédéric – Yes. Vodka. There's a little left in the bottle too.

He refills the glasses. They clink glasses again.

Vanessa – Do you know how to say 'cheers' in Russian?

Frédéric – No, but after a few more drinks, perhaps I'll remember. That's another empty bottle. I think there's some whisky left. And some raki. And an old cognac.

Vanessa – How long have these bottles been here?

Frédéric – They were already here when we bought the flat...

Vanessa – Come on, let's finish them all. Tequila, vodka, whisky, raki, cognac...

Frédéric – The most international drinking binge in the history of drinking binges.

Vanessa – It'll remind me of my youth. When I wanted a drink, I'd sneak a little from each bottle at home, so Mum wouldn't notice.

Frédéric – I never noticed anything either.

Vanessa – You, you never notice anything, that's what characterises you.

Frédéric – Really? So that's how you see me?

Vanessa – I'd rather not know how you see me...

Frédéric – Yes... Maybe you're right... A little bit of hypocrisy in social relationships can't hurt.

Vanessa – Especially in family relationships.

Frédéric – I'm not used to drinking like this.

Vanessa – But it feels good, doesn't it?

Frédéric – Yes...

Vanessa – So let's not think about the hangover we'll have tomorrow morning... It would spoil all the fun...

Frédéric – There are so many things we wouldn't do in life if we didn't think about the consequences.

Vanessa – Like having children, for example.

Frédéric – That's probably why I've never had any.

Vanessa – Yes... But you think too much. That's your problem.

Frédéric – And you don't think enough. It averages out.

Vanessa – How long has it been since we got drunk together?

Frédéric – We've never got drunk together.

Vanessa – That's a pity. It might have made family life much easier. It's hard to stay angry with someone who's seen you throw up in their lap.

Frédéric – Try to give me a little warning, though. Delphine cares a lot about her carpet. It's an heirloom from her grandmother...

Vanessa – In the meantime, pour me another one, will you?

Frédéric – OK... What are we drinking?

Vanessa – We have a choice, don't we?

He seems hesitant in front of all those bottles.

Frédéric – I don't know...

Vanessa – What?

Frédéric – If we really have a choice.

Vanessa – Who cares which bottle we choose, so long as we end up throwing up?

Frédéric – No, I mean... choice. Destiny, you know?

Vanessa – Destiny?

Frédéric – Are we truly free in our choices, or is everything written in advance?

Vanessa – Well, are you going to pour me a drink, or not?

He refills the glasses while continuing his thoughts.

Frédéric – If you could live your life again, knowing what you know now, would you make all the same choices?

Vanessa – You mean, would I decide to go through it all again?

Frédéric – Imagine. You wake up one morning, and you're fifteen years old again. As if everything you experienced afterwards was just a dream. And you had to start over.

Vanessa – I'm already getting a headache.

Frédéric – Would you like to make different choices? Try a different path? Could we even do that? And above all, would this other life we chose be better or worse?

Vanessa – I don't know...

Frédéric – By trying to do the opposite of our mistakes, wouldn't that be another mistake?

Vanessa – Do I really have to answer that?

Frédéric – I would even say more, can we really do anything in life other than make mistakes?

Vanessa – I think I'm going to be sick.

Frédéric – Was it the drop of raki that tipped you over the edge, or my philosophical reflections?

Vanessa – The mixture of both, I believe... I'm going to take a shower and go to bed.

Frédéric – Well... Good night then...

Vanessa goes out. Frédéric pours himself another drink. Delphine comes in. At first he doesn't notice her, and then jumps when he sees her. He is rather drunk.

Frédéric – I didn't hear you come in.

Delphine – I just came to grab a few things...

Frédéric – Okay...

Delphine – Have you been drinking?

Frédéric – Yes...

Delphine – You never drink.

Frédéric – There's a first time for everything, you see. I wanted to prove to you that you can always change. Especially for the worse...

Delphine – I'm sorry it has come to this...

Frédéric – No, I'm the one who's sorry. Forgive me.

Delphine – We're hurting each other. For no reason. When we have everything to be happy.

Frédéric – Except money, apparently. But I'll do whatever you want.

Delphine – I love you. You're the one that I want. Not this cursed money...

They are about to kiss. Sound of vomiting. Delphine sees the glasses.

Delphine – You weren't alone?

Frédéric – Well, yes... No...

Sound of a toilet flushing. Then a shower.

Delphine – Is there anyone in the bathroom? You replaced me so quickly!

Frédéric – No, come on, what are you thinking... And where would I have found someone to replace you so quickly... Unless I paid...

Delphine – You're not getting away with a clever remark this time because tonight, I don't have much of a sense of humour.

Frédéric – She's my sister.

Delphine – You're kidding me! Two hours ago, you two were enemies for life, and she is back at your place to take a shower? Is she having a water outage or something?

Another sound of vomiting.

Frédéric – Apparently, she mainly came to throw up... She had an argument with Marc...

Delphine – Well, well... And she turns up at our house?

Frédéric – I like it when you're jealous... Even if it doesn't really suit you. You've got a nasty little curl to your lip. All that's missing is the foam at the mouth. You look ready to kill someone.

Delphine – I'm going to check the bathroom, and if it's not your sister, it might indeed end in a passionate drama.

Frédéric – We'll wrap the body in the shower curtain, and I'll help you make it disappear...

Vanessa arrives.

Vanessa – If it's me you're talking about, I'm not sure I'll accept your hospitality after all...

Delphine – Good evening, Vanessa... No, no... Don't worry... We were talking about Frédéric's mistress.

Vanessa – I see...

Frédéric – Who doesn't exist, I assure you...

Delphine – I mistook you for my replacement.

Vanessa – I'm sorry for barging in like this without warning. I'll leave you.

Delphine – No, no, you can stay. You shouldn't go back there tonight...

Frédéric – And what if Marc turns up here? In this state, I might try to hit him. And I'd be the one who got hurt...

Vanessa – He doesn't know I'm here, don't worry... Well, I'll go to bed... You two probably have a lot to talk about...

Delphine – Good night, Vanessa... And be careful with the carpet in the bedroom...

Vanessa leaves.

Frédéric – That money has already nearly broken up two couples.

Delphine – Well, for hers, I don't think it's that.

Frédéric – What is it, then?

Delphine – I don't know...

Frédéric remains thoughtful for a moment.

Frédéric – When he died, he was wanted for murder...

Delphine – I'm sorry. You're right. Refuse the inheritance. I'll stay with you. For who you are. For your integrity.

Frédéric – I don't know where I stand anymore... I know almost nothing about my father, apart from his criminal record... And now, he's left me enough money so that I won't have to work again until the end of my days...

Delphine – Let's go to bed... Things will look better in the morning... *(He stumbles and she takes his arm.)* Want me to carry you to bed?

Fade to black.

SCENE 5

Delphine is having a cup of coffee. Vanessa enters in a bathrobe.

Vanessa – Good morning, Delphine... And thank you again for your hospitality.

Delphine – It's nothing. Did you sleep well...?

Vanessa – No... but it has nothing to do with the bedding.

Delphine – Yes, I saw the dead bottles.

Vanessa – Those weren't the only corpses haunting me last night...

Delphine – Would you like a coffee?

Vanessa – Thank you, yes.

Delphine pours her a cup of coffee.

Vanessa – I know you've never liked me.

Delphine (*taken aback*) – But why are you saying that?

Vanessa – I didn't say you hate me... But you see me as a kept woman, don't you? A narrow-minded bourgeois lady.

Delphine *(trying to joke)* – And a little old-fashioned around the edges...

Vanessa – You were right... I didn't like myself either...

Delphine – And now?

Vanessa – Now, I don't know where I stand anymore.

Delphine – That's a start...

Vanessa – Please don't judge me, you know... I really need this money, even if it seems strange to you...

Delphine – I'm listening... You can trust me...

Vanessa – I'm not getting along with Marc anymore. He has a mistress. And let me tell you, she certainly exists...

Delphine – Do you know her?

Vanessa – She's his assistant at the estate agency. She's ten years younger than him. And more importantly, she's ten years younger than me.

Delphine – Why don't you just leave him?

Vanessa – It's not that simple... He used to oppose the divorce because he didn't want to split our assets or pay me maintenance. And now that I'm about to inherit...

Delphine – Does he know about it?

Vanessa – He was there when Carlos came by last time.

Delphine – But he can't refuse the divorce, can he?

Vanessa – I don't work. I'm completely dependent on him. And then there are the children... He's twisted, you know. If all this ends up in front of a judge, I don't know what he would be capable of, just for the pleasure of separating me from my children.

Delphine – What do you mean?

Vanessa – He'll say I'm mentally unstable. That I once tried to kill myself...

Delphine – Is that true?

Vanessa – It was an accident, I swear! I take sedatives. That day I took two that shouldn't have been mixed. I passed out. The emergency services came... Marc will use that as evidence to try to get custody of the children. I couldn't bear that. And next time, I wouldn't make a mistake...

Delphine – I understand... But you can't keep going like this...

Vanessa – This money would allow me to leave. Even if I have to give him a part of it, just to make him leave me in peace...

Delphine – You can't give in to this blackmail. It's despicable...

Vanessa – I don't know any more... He frightens me... When Carlos visited, Marc was very friendly to him, but afterwards he told me he wanted his cut of the inheritance, or else...

Delphine – Or else what? (*Vanessa clutches her robe tighter*) What are those bruises you're hiding under your robe...

Vanessa – It's nothing... I just fell...

Delphine – Not to me, Vanessa...

Vanessa – I know, it's hard to believe... You wonder how I can accept this...

Delphine – I'm asking you.

Vanessa – I've never been used to making decisions.

Delphine – Do you want Frédéric to talk to him? He's your brother, after all...

Vanessa – Marc would take his revenge on me... Maybe even on the children... Please, don't tell Frédéric about it...

Delphine – You can't accept this, Vanessa. You need to get help...

The doorbell rings. Delphine goes to answer it and returns with Carlos.

Carlos – Good morning, Vanessa... I didn't expect to find you here, but it's good that I see both of you, with your brother...

Delphine – I'll leave you... I'll go and tell Frédéric. He's in the shower...

She exits.

Carlos – I regret your brother's choice. You should convince him to accept.

Vanessa – My brother is not someone easy to convince...

Carlos – Yes, I've noticed...

Vanessa – I understand him, but I don't have a choice.

Carlos – Why?

Vanessa – Let's just say... this money would allow me to regain my independence. If my husband agrees to let me go, of course.

Carlos – Doesn't your husband make you happy?

Vanessa – I've wanted to divorce for a long time... But... I'm afraid.

Carlos – Afraid? Afraid of what?

Vanessa – I'd rather not talk about it...

Carlos stands up and gently points to the bruise on Vanessa's cheek, hidden behind a strand of hair.

Carlos – Has your husband already laid a hand on you?

Vanessa's silence is answer enough. Abruptly, Carlos pulls back her dressing gown at the shoulder and discovers more bruises.

Carlos (*icy*) – He's the one who did that to you...?

Vanessa adjusts her robe.

Vanessa – I want to divorce, but he won't let me.

Carlos – He won't...?

Vanessa – Now that he knows I'm going to receive a large inheritance, he wants his share.

Carlos – You didn't sign a marriage contract setting out how your property would be divided?

Vanessa – No.

Carlos – In any case, he has no claim on your inheritance.

Vanessa – I know... But... it's not that simple.

Carlos – Don't worry... I will explain it to him...

Vanessa – I don't think that will be enough, unfortunately.

Carlos – It will be enough, believe me. I may not look like it, but... I can be very persuasive.

Frédéric arrives and seems surprised by the closeness of Carlos and Vanessa. He also notices his sister's distress.

Carlos – Although as far as your brother is concerned, I haven't yet managed to convince him...

Vanessa – I'm going to finish getting dressed...

She leaves.

Carlos – Your sister is a very endearing person.

Frédéric – I'd rather use the word clingy, but... yes.

Carlos – She's also very fragile. Some people might abuse her...

Frédéric – What do you mean?

Carlos hesitates but changes the subject.

Carlos – You should accept my proposal.

Frédéric – "Your" proposal?

Carlos – Your father's proposal.

Frédéric – But he didn't intentionally decide to leave me that money, did he? I'm just the direct heir...

Carlos – He didn't have time to draft a will. But I know he would have wanted this inheritance to go to you.

Frédéric – What if, quite simply, I wasn't cut out to be rich?

Carlos – Nobody is cut out to be rich. That's the whole point of being rich...

Frédéric – I only need a hundred thousand euros to solve my immediate cash problems.

Carlos – Sorry. This isn't a legacy you can pick and choose from. It's an inheritance: all or nothing.

Frédéric – I don't know.

Carlos – I'll come back tomorrow with the power of attorney. You'll just have to sign, and I'll take care of the rest. Meanwhile, I'd like to give you this...

He hands him a thick notebook.

Frédéric – What is this?

Carlos – His diary.

Frédéric – His diary?

Carlos – Or his logbook, if you prefer.

Frédéric – I didn't know mafia bosses kept diaries... Rather incriminating, isn't it?

Carlos – I found it among his papers. You can read it later. I hope it will help you understand some things...

Frédéric – Have you read it?

Carlos – I skimmed through it... I wanted to have a look at it before giving it to you.

Frédéric takes the diary.

Frédéric – Thank you. Would you like something to drink? I have some leftover bottles...

Carlos – Another time... I have an urgent matter to attend to... (*He glances at the ongoing painting one last time*) I really like your paintings... Your father had several of them at his place...

Frédéric – Sorry?

Carlos – He had a gallery owner in London buy them for him. He thought very highly of you. Don't disappoint him...

He leaves, leaving Frédéric stunned. Delphine returns.

Delphine – Are you okay?

Frédéric – So it was my father buying my paintings in London, through my supposedly Russian client...

Delphine – Are you sure?

Frédéric – He's been the one keeping me afloat all these years. Without him, I wouldn't have sold a single painting.

Delphine – It's incredible! ...As your sister would say.

Frédéric – I didn't want this dirty money, but in reality, I was already living with it...

Delphine – So what do we do?

Frédéric – A little more or a little less... My sister is right, money is always dirty.

Delphine – So, are you accepting the inheritance after all?

Frédéric – We'll find a way to give some to charity, as my sister suggested... Just enough to ease our consciences without costing us too much...

Fade out.

SCENE 6

Frédéric is reading his father's diary. He looks moved. Delphine comes in.

Delphine – Already up?

Frédéric closes the diary.

Frédéric – I didn't sleep a wink last night.

Delphine pours herself a coffee.

Delphine – I know... Me neither...

Frédéric – I had to read this.

Delphine – Do you want to talk about it?

Frédéric – It's strange... I knew nothing about my biological father, and now that he's dead, I know more about him than any child will ever know about his father.

Delphine – I hope it helps you reconcile with him a bit.

Frédéric – I wish we'd been able to make peace while he was alive, but...

Delphine – Will you tell me about it?

Frédéric – Of course... You can even read it. A bit later...

Delphine – Okay.

Frédéric – Believe me, there's enough here for a novel.

Delphine – Will you write it?

Frédéric – It's too close to my heart, I couldn't do it. And besides, you're the writer, aren't you?

Delphine – Yes... Well, I haven't written anything yet...

Frédéric – I don't believe you.

Delphine – Okay, I have a few notes in my drawers. And the start of a novel...

Frédéric – I can't wait to read it...

Delphine – And what if you're disappointed?

Frédéric – Nothing that comes from you could ever disappoint me.

Delphine – Now, I'm the one who will need you to believe in me.

Frédéric – Watch out... I said it wouldn't disappoint me, I didn't say I would necessarily find it good...

Delphine – If it's that bad, you'll tell me, right?

Frédéric – What do you think?

Delphine – I think you'll be able to make me understand.

Frédéric – One day, I'll show you my first painting.

Delphine – Have you kept it?

Frédéric – Of course I don't show it to anyone. But when I really doubt myself, I take a look at it. It shows me how far I've come, and cheers me up... At least until I think about how far I still have to go.

Delphine – I'm curious to see it...

Frédéric – You'll see. It might help you be kinder to your first novel. Do you think Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa perfectly on his first attempt? Genius doesn't exist. Neither do truth and perfection. Genius means persisting in making mistakes until you manage to make a sublime one.

They are about to kiss, but the doorbell rings. Delphine goes to open the door and returns with Vanessa, looking somewhat calmer and smiling, holding a paper bag.

Vanessa – Hi, Fred. Hello, Delphine. I've brought you some chouquettes.

Frédéric – What's this sudden craze for chouquettes? Is the bakery round the corner having a sale?

Delphine – Do you want a coffee?

Vanessa – Yes, please.

Frédéric – You seem to be doing better.

Vanessa – I'm getting a divorce.

Frédéric – In your case, I imagine that's good news.

Vanessa – It is.

Delphine – Have you and Marc managed to come to an amicable agreement?

Frédéric – He didn't ask you to give him half of your inheritance, did he?

Vanessa – No. He didn't ask me for anything at all. I don't know why, but now he's being very nice to me.

Delphine – And you didn't promise him anything in exchange for his consent to the divorce?

Vanessa – Nothing... Even regarding the children, he agrees to let me have sole custody.

Frédéric – That's what you wanted, right?

Vanessa – Of course. That's why I didn't want to divorce until I was sure I could keep them with me.

Frédéric – Do you think he would have been capable of hurting the children?

Vanessa – I don't know...

Delphine – And... do you have any idea what could have made him change his attitude so suddenly?

Vanessa – No... *(A pause.)* The other day he came home with bruises on his face. I don't know if there's any connection...

Frédéric – Ah, yes... Maybe a little...

Vanessa – Do you have any idea who could have done that to him?

Frédéric – It wasn't me, I swear.

Vanessa looks uncomfortable.

Delphine – I'm going to finish getting ready.

Delphine exits.

Frédéric – Is there something else you wanted to tell me?

Vanessa – Yes...

Frédéric – I'm listening.

Vanessa – Mum used to talk to me a lot, you know... Especially towards the end of her life... She would confide in me sometimes...

Frédéric – More than she did to me, that's for sure... And...?

Vanessa – There's one thing she never told you... Well, I think so... Something I'd like you to know...

Frédéric – Okay...

Vanessa – Actually, if your father left...

Frédéric – "My" father? He's your father too, isn't he?

Vanessa – If Charles left... it's because our mother had been unfaithful to him.

Frédéric – Sorry?

Vanessa – The truth is, I'm not his daughter. When Charles found out, he decided to leave for America.

Frédéric – Did Mum tell you that?

Vanessa – Yes.

Frédéric – Okay... (*Pauses*) And what about me?

Vanessa – You?

Frédéric – Whose son am I?

Vanessa – You are Charles's son, don't worry.

Frédéric – As the son of a pimp and a drug dealer, I'm not sure that reassures me, but alright... Fine...

Vanessa – Well, she didn't say anything about you, in any case.

Frédéric – Okay... And what about you, whose daughter are you?

Vanessa – Charles's best friend, who was also his business partner, I think. A man called Karl, who disappeared shortly after I was born.

Frédéric – Hopefully not under mysterious circumstances...

Vanessa – Mum never saw him again. And neither did I, of course...

Frédéric – And that would explain why Charles abandoned us all?

Vanessa – He felt betrayed. By his wife. By his friend. He couldn't bear it. That's why he left for America.

Frédéric – And you're telling me this now?

Vanessa – It was mainly my business.

Frédéric – Then why tell me today?

Vanessa – I'm going to accept the inheritance, and you're thinking of refusing it. It would be absurd if all the money ended up with me instead of you, when I'm not even his daughter...

Frédéric – He acknowledged you, didn't he? You carry his name.

Vanessa – When he registered my birth at the town hall, he still didn't know I wasn't his daughter.

Frédéric – You're not responsible for all of this, Vanessa. You're like me, you have suffered. For me, you'll always be my sister... For better or worse...

Vanessa – So, will you be willing to share with me?

Frédéric – Of course... I wouldn't know what to do with five million, let alone ten.

Vanessa – Thanks, Fred... You know, I never hated you... as much as I made it seem.

Frédéric – That's a confession that means a lot to me.

Vanessa – I think the truth is that I was just jealous of you.

Frédéric – Me? I'm a failed artist. I live off my wife. And according to her, I'm a know-it-all...

Vanessa – Yes, that... That's not entirely untrue either...

Frédéric – So, what exactly are you jealous of?

Vanessa – Your independence, I suppose. You chose your own life, against all the odds. You tried to make your dream come true... You didn't succeed...

Frédéric – Thanks...

Vanessa – But at least you tried.

Frédéric – Yeah... What about you?

Vanessa – My problem was that I didn't have any dream at all... So I settled for getting married, to someone who would take good care of me. Well, that's what I thought...

Frédéric – So, you also believe that we don't have a choice...

Vanessa – Choice...? Life is like Scrabble. Everyone plays by the same rules, and you're led to believe everyone has the same chance of winning. But when you keep drawing useless letters... W's, K's, Y's...

Frédéric – Add a few more letters and you can spell whisky.

Vanessa – That's exactly what I did... Whisky, vodka, raki...

They share a sibling embrace.

Frédéric – I'm truly sorry. It was right in front of me, and I didn't see it...

Vanessa – Yes... For a painter... it's ironic. Not seeing anything...

Frédéric – I blame myself... I was your big brother, it was my job to protect you.

Vanessa – My half-brother...

Frédéric prefers to return to joking.

Frédéric – You're right... The good news in all this is that... you're only my half-sister, after all.

Vanessa – And even with that, all your troubles are because of me, you see...

Frédéric – Strangely, I'm not surprised...

Vanessa – I also told you this so that you could be a bit more understanding towards your father.

Frédéric – Well... not all betrayed husbands go to America to open brothels...

Vanessa – No... It's destiny, as you say. I guess that was also written in advance...

Frédéric – Yeah...

Vanessa – And what about you?

Frédéric – What about me?

Vanessa – Since we're in the sharing mood... Is there something you know that I should know?

Frédéric – Not yet...

Vanessa – What do you mean, not yet?

Frédéric – Carlos gave me... Dad's diary. I haven't finished reading it yet.

Vanessa – I thought only slightly depressed young girls wrote a diary...

Frédéric – I suppose that old pimp had a feminine side too.

Frédéric hands her the diary; she flicks through it. The doorbell rings. Delphine returns with Carlos.

Carlos – There, all the documents are here. All you have to do is sign.

Vanessa – Alright.

Carlos – But before that, I need to tell you something.

Frédéric – Again? You certainly know how to build up suspense.

Delphine – Yes... You should write plays...

Frédéric – I'm listening... But I fear the worst...

Carlos – In Mexico, your father took a child under his protection. An orphan who is now five years old...

Frédéric – That's how old I was when he abandoned me...

Carlos – Your father didn't have time, before he died, to formally adopt this child...

Vanessa – And?

Carlos – Your father's plan was to bring her back to France, to give her a good education and a better future. But now...

Frédéric – I think I'm starting to understand...

Vanessa – And you're saying she's not his biological daughter.

Carlos – She's the child of a prostitute who worked in one of his establishments and died shortly after giving birth. Obviously, we don't know who the father is...

A moment of silence.

Vanessa – And our inheritance is on condition that we look after this child?

Carlos – It isn't written in a will, because Charles never made one. But I'm certain it's what your father would have wanted...

Vanessa – I don't know what to say... Frédéric, what do you think?

Frédéric – Do we really have a choice...?

Carlos – Legally, you could accept the inheritance without doing anything for the child.

Delphine – Legally, yes. But it would be monstrous...

Frédéric – Do you have a photo?

Carlos – Of course.

Vanessa – You realise, Frédéric, that if we look at this photo, even for a second, we won't be able to go back...

Frédéric – Give me that photo.

Carlos hands him the photo, and he looks at it for a long time before passing it to Vanessa.

Vanessa – No, sorry... I can't take it... Not right now...

Delphine takes the photo and looks at it. She exchanges a meaningful glance with Frédéric.

Frédéric – Do you have any more news like this? Because if you do, you might as well tell us everything at once...

Carlos – I believe this time, you know everything.

Frédéric – I don't think so.

Carlos – Let's say... everything you need to know.

Silence.

Vanessa – I already have two children... And I don't have a husband anymore...

Frédéric – But you're a multimillionaire.

Carlos – It's a significant decision. If you wish, I can give you some time to think about it.

Frédéric – If we think about it, we'll say no. My sister is right, I think too much.

Carlos – So, is it a yes?

Frédéric – Delphine?

Delphine – We haven't had any children. I don't really know why.

Frédéric – My personal history didn't encourage me to start a family.

Delphine – I didn't insist. I didn't want to lose you. This will be the child we didn't have together...

Frédéric – That will justify taking this money. For this child. To give her a happy life. At least a better life...

Vanessa – Yes. For her it would make amends, and for you it would be a kind of... penance. *(The others look at her, surprised.)* For accepting dirty money, I mean...

Frédéric – I didn't want to accept the money out of self-respect. But in the end, self-respect, dirty money... Love isn't always clean either...

Carlos – I also have the adoption papers for the child... If you agree, you just need to sign.

Delphine – And where is this child?

Carlos – In an orphanage in Mexico.

A moment.

Frédéric – We accept this inheritance. And we’re adopting this child...

Vanessa – Thank you... I'll help you, I promise.

Delphine (*to Vanessa*) – I'm sure you'll make a wonderful aunt...

Carlos – Then, all you have to do is sign.

Frédéric – Fine.

Carlos – Don't you want to read first?

Frédéric – I don't really know why, but I trust you.

Frédéric and Vanessa sign the documents.

Carlos – With this power of attorney, I can take care of the necessary formalities for you. You'll be notified when the property and funds are transferred.

Delphine – And what about the child?

Carlos – With these documents, you can go and collect her legally. In a few weeks...

Delphine – We will go as soon as possible.

Carlos – Thank you.

Vanessa – You made the right choice, Frédéric.

Frédéric – I don't think I had a choice. But it was the right choice nonetheless.

Carlos – Well, then I will leave you. As a family.

Delphine – Thank you...

Carlos is about to leave.

Vanessa – Will we see each other again?

Carlos – Only God knows... But I'll keep in touch with you from afar...

Delphine and Vanessa move away for a moment. Frédéric speaks to Carlos in private.

Frédéric – And what about my sister? Did you manage to talk to her husband?

Carlos – We had a little talk. I reminded him of a few points of inheritance law.

Frédéric – You're quite a teacher. He'd never listened to anyone before... My sister says his face is a bit bruised. When you explain the law, do you sometimes underline your arguments with your fists?

Carlos – I gave him a choice between a divorce and becoming a widower. I made it clear that I meant his wife becoming a widow. He understood perfectly.

Frédéric – Why are you doing all this for us?

Carlos – As I told you, your father was a friend. I'm used to handling his affairs...

Frédéric – And what was my father like? As a friend...

Carlos – Not very demonstrative. But he was someone you could rely on. He could have died for you...

Vanessa approaches.

Vanessa – I'll go too. The kids are waiting for me. We've temporarily settled in a hotel. (*To Carlos*) Can you give me a ride?

Carlos – Of course...

Carlos and Vanessa leave.

Delphine – Do you think she's already found herself a new protector?

Frédéric – I thought you were going to say pimp... (*Incredulous*) No...? He could be her father.

Delphine – At this point, nothing could surprise me anymore...

Frédéric – What do you mean?

Delphine – Maybe he's the friend of your father... His partner who slept with his wife.

Frédéric – And who could be Vanessa's father?

Delphine – What was the first name of that guy who also mysteriously disappeared?

Frédéric – Karl.

Delphine – Karl, Carlos... It's unsettling, admit it.

Frédéric – I think we're starting to go off the deep end, aren't we?

Delphine – Yes... And who knows, maybe your mother made all this up.

Frédéric – You think...?

Delphine – I have to say that, by the end, she was seriously losing her mind, wasn't she?

Frédéric – And why would she have invented this... Karl? Why would she have claimed to have cheated on my father? It's not the kind of thing you brag about.

Delphine – I don't know... Maybe to justify why your father abandoned you. To help you come to terms with it. It's hard to accept that a father would abandon you for no reason. At least here, he had a reason. She took the blame on herself, in a way...

Frédéric – Yeah...

Delphine – Or maybe she was simply insane.

Frédéric – Well... I don't know if we can say that everything ends well.

Delphine – We're still going to get five million...

Frédéric – I'll be able to continue painting.

Delphine – And this will be my last school year.

Frédéric – Next year, all you'll have to worry about is the literary season, when the new books come out.

Delphine – And our first trip as millionaires will be to Mexico.

Frédéric – You mean our last couple's trip without children. Because after...

Delphine – In the end, Carlos had a good heart.

Frédéric – Yes. One thing's for sure, he had a good right hook.

The phone rings.

Delphine – Hello...? Crédit Solidaire bank...? Oh, yes...

Frédéric – Let me speak to them... *(He takes the phone.)* Yes... I'm terribly sorry, but we'll have to change banks... That's right. We're moving to a bank more suited to our financial situation... Goodbye.

Delphine – Fatherhood suits you.

Frédéric – I was waiting for this to truly become a man...

He glances at his computer that just made a sound.

Frédéric – Oh, a new order... from my mystery client.

Delphine – So it wouldn't be your father after all?

Frédéric – Then who?

Delphine – That Mexican lawyer...? You told me he really appreciated your paintings...

Frédéric – Maybe...

Delphine – Or maybe... your father isn't really dead.

Frédéric – Excuse me...?

Delphine – Carlos said his body had never been found. For a guy wanted by the police, dying is a good solution.

Frédéric – And then come back under a false identity. But someone would recognise him!

Delphine – There's also plastic surgery.

Frédéric – And he would have abandoned his child?

Delphine – It wouldn't be the first time he changes his life, leaving everything behind.

Frédéric – And he's not really abandoning his child since he managed to pass her on to us.

Delphine – He can't take her on the run, that's all, and he wanted to secure her future. Just like ours...

Frédéric – You think so?

Delphine – And what if it was him?

Frédéric – Him?

Delphine – Carlos, your father!

Frédéric – But come on, I would have recognised him!

Delphine – If he'd had his face done...

Frédéric – Still...

Delphine – You hardly knew him... And Charles... Carlos... Carlos is the Spanish form of Charles, isn't it?

Frédéric – So, according to you, Charles, Karl, and Carlos would be the same person...?

Delphine – It's just a hypothesis. We'll probably never know...

Silence.

Frédéric – I don't know if we'll ever see him again...

Delphine – It's unlikely. It's too dangerous for him...

Frédéric looks at the photo of the little Mexican girl.

Delphine – Do you think it's true what he told us?

Frédéric – What?

Delphine – That she's the daughter of a prostitute, born to an unknown father... Maybe she's his daughter... What did your father look like?

Frédéric – I don't remember very well.

Delphine – Don't you have a photo?

Frédéric – I burned them all.

Delphine – She looks a bit like you...

Frédéric – You think so?

Delphine – You're right. You could spend your whole life trying to understand a face...

Frédéric – And even then, we're not even sure if we'll succeed.

Delphine – Especially when people willingly change their faces...

Frédéric – I have the feeling that we're not done with this family saga... But can we still call it a family?

Delphine – We're going to have one after all...

Frédéric – Yes... A child to whom we'll give all the care and love she needs for twenty years, and who will blame us for everything we haven't done for her. Holding us responsible for everything that goes wrong in her life...

Delphine – I can't wait to start.

Frédéric – Me too...

Delphine – I think I've got an idea for my first book. Not a novel, but a play. I've even got the title: The Smell of Money...

Frédéric – Or perhaps The Price of Pride...

She looks at the painting.

Delphine – This face, it's your father's, isn't it?

Frédéric's mobile phone rings.

Frédéric – Hello? Yes, speaking... No, I didn't... All right... No, no, tomorrow at three in the afternoon is fine. Perfect... See you tomorrow. Thank you... *(He puts his phone away.)* That was the director of one of the most prestigious art galleries in Paris. She wants to exhibit my paintings.

Delphine – No way?

Frédéric – I assure you... I hope it's not a joke.

Delphine – I don't think so.

Frédéric – What if it's Carlos?

Delphine – Carlos?

Frédéric – Well... Charles... Or Karl... Maybe he went to see them... He offered them money... Or worse... He threatened them...

Delphine – Your self-confidence never ceases to amaze me... So you think a gallery would only agree to show your work if someone threatened them?

Frédéric – Sorry... I'm just not used to this... But they said they already knew my work... Someone must have...

Delphine – It's me.

Frédéric – You?

Delphine – I went to see them with your catalogue.

Frédéric – And they accepted me on the strength of a catalogue?

Delphine – They were interested. They came here, and I showed them your paintings. On a day when you weren't here.

Frédéric – Why didn't you tell me anything?

Delphine – I didn't want you to be disappointed. Just in case it didn't work out... And besides, you wouldn't have believed it anyway.

Frédéric – But you believed in it.

Delphine – I've always believed in you.

Frédéric – In the end, I'm like God or Santa Claus... I need people to believe in me to continue to exist.

Delphine – Anyone would believe in Santa Claus if he brought them five million euros in his sack...

They embrace. She looks at the painting.

Delphine – Have you finished your portrait?

Frédéric – I think so...

Delphine – It's magnificent... It'll be the centrepiece of your first exhibition in Paris.

Frédéric – Yes...

Delphine – It looks a bit like God, doesn't it?

Frédéric – I don't know... What does God look like?

Delphine – Like the image we have in our minds, I suppose.

Frédéric also gazes at the painting.

Frédéric – Or like Santa Claus... The one you never see but who brings you gifts...

Delphine – We'll try to make something clean out of all this dirt.

Frédéric – Hoping that we truly have a choice.

Delphine – Let's hope... And if it turns out that we didn't have a choice after all... we will have always had hope.

Frédéric – Hope keeps us alive...

Delphine – Promise me you won't start quoting proverbs left and right like your sister?

Frédéric – My half-sister... Well, I think so...

Blackout.

End

About the author

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

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his websites :

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the contact form on his websites.

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

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

https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

Comedies for 2

A Thwarted Vocation
EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cards on the Table
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Horizons
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap backward for Mankind
The Ways of Chance

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Hangover
Happy Hour
How to get rid of your best friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more

At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe the savage beasts
Neighbours' Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a lovely village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Most Beautiful Village in France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

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

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

free of charge from his websites:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

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