La Comédiathèque



False exit

Jean-Pierre Martinez





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Translation by the author

Jack has organised a small gathering to honour the ashes of his recently deceased grandfather. But because of a mistake at the funeral home, his own name appears on the funeral notice...

11 characters
Jack: the deceased man's grandson
Eva: his wife
Victoria: his mother-in-law
Mildred: his grandmother
Alex (or Alexa): the landlord or landlady
Gabriel (or Gabrielle): his art dealer
Anthony: a friend
Gloria: a friend
Charles or Charlotte: a cross-dresser (male or female)
Martin (or Martina): the funeral director
Father Francis: a priest

The landlord, art dealer, funeral director and cross-dresser
may be played by either male or female performers.
One performer can double up in several of these roles.
Casting is therefore very flexible. For example:
11 performers: 3M/8F, 4M/7F, 5M/6F, 6M/5F, 7M/4F
10 performers: 3M/7F, 4M/6F, 5M/5F, 6M/4F
9 performers: 3M/6F, 4M/5F, 5M/4F

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An artist's loft with an elegant but slightly bohemian air. Several abstract paintings lean against the walls. Jack enters carrying glasses and places them on a table laid out with snacks for a small reception. Eva enters, dressed rather formally.

Eva *(referring to her clothes)* – Will this do?

Jack – Yes, it's fine.

Eva – I was wondering whether it might be a bit…

Jack – Not at all. It's discreet. It goes with anything.

Eva – It's the dress I wore to my brother's wedding.

Jack – It should be fine for my grandfather's cremation too. Do you think peanuts will be enough?

Eva – We can't afford to put on a lavish spread anyway.

Jack – Perhaps we should avoid the word "oven" today…

Eva – You're right. By the way, where are we going to put him?

Jack – On that little table? What do you think? We could move the flowerpot.

Eva – Yes, why not. *(Eva removes the flower pot and puts it somewhere else.)* I ran into the landlord in the staircase earlier.

Jack – You didn't invite him, I hope.

Eva – I promised him that we would pay the overdue rent tomorrow morning without fail.

Jack – Tomorrow?

Eva – I had to tell him something to buy us some time.

Jack – Yes, you did well. Let's at least have some peace today.

Eva – Well… He's started talking about eviction. I think the word "court" came up once or twice…

Jack – Tomorrow is another day.

Eva – Maybe you'll finally manage to sell a painting…

Jack – Today? This is a cremation, not an exhibition opening.

Eva – I wonder if you're right about the peanuts…

Jack – Then again, perhaps no one will turn up.

Eva – And there are those traffic restrictions…

Jack – Oh yes, I'd forgotten. With any luck, they'll all have licence plates ending in an even number. That'll give them an excellent excuse to stay at home.

Eva – They could have informed us in advance, though…

Jack – They'll probably phone with their condolences.

Eva – I meant the traffic restrictions! They could have given us more warning so we could make other arrangements.

Jack – Then again, we couldn't exactly choose the date of the cremation…

Eva – True, but it's to protect the more vulnerable… Children, elderly people…

Jack – Maybe the pollution is what finally finished Grandpa off.

Eva – How old was he again?

Jack – One hundred and two years.

Eva – Oh yes, quite old…

Jack – At that age, you're bound to be more sensitive to the air you breathe.

Eva – That's true…

Jack – Anyway, I hope the hearse has the right kind of number plate.

Eva – The right number plate?

Jack – An odd number plate!

Eva – Ah yes…

Jack – Not to mention the cremation.

Eva – What?

Jack – Maybe they've introduced alternate-day cremations too. You know, to spread the emissions over several days…

Eva – You shouldn't joke about that, after all, it was your grandfather.

Jack – I'm not going to pretend to weep. We were never very close when he was alive.

Eva – Maybe you'll have a warmer relationship with his ashes.

Jack – Come on, let's not get depressed… Let's have a drink. It might put us in the mood before the guests arrive.

Eva – If they arrive…

Jack pours two glasses of red wine and hands one to Eva.

Jack – Personally, I think funerals should be optional once someone turns a hundred. You risk an empty house. Just look at us.

Eva – People still need a chance to grieve.

Jack – You can grieve for someone while they're still alive.

Eva – Yes, you're right, it's less sad, I suppose.

Jack – A hundred and two is a perfectly reasonable age to decide to die.

Eva – I feel sorry for the man who bought his house in exchange for a pension for the rest of his life…

Jack – There's no need. He died ten years ago. So did his son. It was his grandson who was still paying Grandpa every month.

Eva – What stamina! I hope you've inherited at least that from him. Cheers!

They clink glasses.

Jack – Cheers.

They take a sip.

Eva – A little young, isn't it?

Jack – It's new-season red wine. Well, it was…

Eva – Was?

Jack – A bottle of new-season wine left over from last year. Or perhaps the year before. I forget.

Eva – That explains the hint of vinegar.

Jack – Young wine isn't meant for keeping.

They sip in silence for a moment.

Eva – One hundred and two years… Can you imagine? Over a century…

Jack – Grandpa was a survivor, I'll give him that. He lived through two world wars and even got himself a military decoration.

Eva – A war hero?

Jack – More of a last-minute Resistance fighter.

Eva – A collaborator?

Jack – Let's call him adaptable. He admired the regime in power, but he always knew exactly when to switch sides. A swastika on one lapel, a Resistance badge on the other…

Eva – What did he do exactly?

Jack – Business… We never really knew what kind. I never dared to ask my father. And since he passed away before him…

Eva – If only he had left you a small inheritance. We could have paid the overdue rent and bills…

Jack – He managed the fortune he'd made, quite honestly, on the wartime black market very well until the eighties. Then, just before he retired, he invested the lot in a disastrous international transport venture.

Eva – Perhaps he was hoping it would help him escape across the border when the next war started…

Jack – I had to refuse the inheritance to avoid being saddled with his care-home debts. Those places cost more than a luxury resort! These days, you need to be rich to live to a hundred. *(The doorbell rings.)* That must be them.

Eva – Do you think so?

Jack – Unless it's the pizza delivery. I ordered a Four Seasons and a Margherita over an hour ago. Perhaps the rider has the wrong number plate…

Eva – It certainly hasn't put you off your food…

Jack – We're not going to starve ourselves to death!

Eva – I'll go and answer it. *(She exits and speaks from offstage.)* Yes, yes, this is the place. Please come in…

Jack – So, was it the pizza oven that broke down?

Martin, an employee of the funeral home, enters, followed by Eva. He is dressed in his work attire and holds an urn, with a solemn expression. The urn resembles a Chinese vase.

Martin – Good morning, sir.

Jack – Sorry, I thought you were… You're clearly not the pizza delivery driver. And I didn't order Chinese food…

Martin – Mr Delaroche, allow me, on behalf of the funeral home, to offer our deepest condolences…

Jack – Thank you… That's very kind of you.

Martin – Where should I place the ashes of the deceased?

Jack – Oh yes… *(Hesitant)* Uh, not on the buffet, though…

Eva – Not on the floor either. People might think it's an umbrella stand.

Jack *(pointing to the side table)* – Put it there, please.

Martin places the urn on the side table in a very ceremonial manner, before bowing slightly to pay tribute to the deceased.

Eva – Thank you…

Martin – If you need our services again, please don't hesitate to call.

Jack – Don't tempt fate! I hope there isn't another death in the family any time soon.

Eva – Are you not going to offer us a loyalty card at least?

Martin – I was referring to what you plan to do with your ancestor's ashes…

Eva – Of course.

Jack – We haven't decided yet, but…

Martin – It's still possible to scatter the ashes in a memorial garden, but we can also offer you other options.

Jack – Thank you. We will consider it…

Martin – Of course, there's no hurry. Not any more… *(He takes an envelope from his pocket and hands it over.)* These are the spare funeral notices. We've sent the others to the addresses you provided.

Jack – Thank you. I'm not sure if we can reuse them, but you never know.

Eva – If only they were wedding invitations. You can marry the same person more than once.

Martin – Sadly, you can only die once. *(He produces a document.)* I just need your signature here.

Jack – Certainly.

Jack takes a pen from his pocket and signs. Martin collects the document, inadvertently taking the pen as well.

Martin – Thank you. And once again, please accept our condolences…

Eva – I'll walk you out… *(She exits with Martin and continues speaking offstage.)* Thank you again… *(She comes back and sees Jack looking at the urn with perplexity.)* It's a strange feeling, having that in the middle of our living room…

Jack – Yes.

Eva – It's an unusual design for an urn.

Jack – Yes, it's a bit different.

Eva – Is it Japanese or Chinese?

Jack – I'm not entirely sure.

Eva – Did your grandfather have a special passion for Asia?

Jack – Not that I know of. But this urn was on special offer. Probably not one of their most popular designs…

Eva – Or another customer cancelled at the last moment.

They remain in silence for a moment, looking at the urn.

Jack – He pinched my pen, you know…

Eva – Your grandfather?

Jack – The undertaker! The pen your mother gave me for my birthday. Can you believe it?

Eva – You hated that pen. You said it looked like a confirmation present.

Jack – Still… A pen with a gold-plated nib. As if all of this didn't already cost us enough. Funeral services are a real racket.

Eva – They know we have no choice, so naturally…

Jack – That's true. We should be able to do it ourselves. As a family…

Eva – Do it ourselves?

Jack – How did prehistoric men do it?

Eva – I don't know… They invited their friends and had a barbecue?

The doorbell rings again, but they both continue to stare at the urn.

Jack – I hope they are still warm… *(Eva gives him a puzzled look.)* I was talking about the pizzas. This time, it must be the delivery guy.

Eva – Well, go and open the door!

Jack exits.

Jack *(off)* – Oh yes, thank you… No, no problem. *(He returns)* You see, I was wrong about him. He returned my pen… *(They still look at the urn on the side table.)* I'm starting to get hungry…

Eva – I'm already rather drunk. This wine certainly has a kick, doesn't it?

Jack – Yes. It seems to have developed a few bubbles.

Eva – I need something to eat as well. Imagine your guests arriving and finding me dead drunk. This is a cremation, not a housewarming party.

Jack – Do you think we did the right thing having him cremated?

Eva – Why not?

Jack – It's not very Catholic.

Eva – It's cheaper… *(Pause)* Why, not very Catholic?

Jack – The resurrection of the body and all that… With ashes, it must work much less well, naturally…

Eva – Was your grandfather very religious?

Jack – I don't know. The only friend I ever knew him to have was a priest…

Eva – Oh, really… Maybe you should have arranged a mass then?

Jack – Is a funeral mass expensive?

Eva – Do you think the priest will come?

Jack – I don't know… I sent him an invitation, but he might already be dead…

Eva – If he comes, that's awkward…

Jack – You think so?

Eva picks up an invitation.

Eva *(reading)* – "The funeral will be a private ceremony, but you are welcome to join us afterwards to pay your last respects over a drink among friends…"

Jack – A drink among friends?

Eva – You wrote that part…

Jack – It does sound a bit like a barbecue invitation.

Eva – Anyway, no one is here yet.

Jack – He'd been in a care home for twenty years. Everyone had forgotten he existed. Even I had.

Eva – He must have had some acquaintances left…

Jack – One hundred and two years! People who knew him are probably all dead before him.

Eva – Didn't he have any other family besides you?

Jack – No, that's why I had to take care of his funeral myself.

Eva – But his wife is still alive. Your grandmother, she couldn't take care of it? You said she was younger than him?

Jack – It isn't hard to be younger than a centenarian. She's in a care home by the sea, a long way from here. I sent her a funeral notice, but haven't heard back. I think her memory is starting to fail…

Eva – Who knows. Maybe she didn't even remember that she still had a husband.

Jack – Possible…

Eva – Otherwise, why would she have chosen a care home nearly a thousand kilometres from his?

Jack – At a certain age, you're entitled to prefer the seaside to your husband.

Eva – All right, so what do we do?

Jack – I think the two of us will be eating all those peanuts. Another glass of last year's "new" wine?

Eva – Go on, then. It would be a mistake to keep it for another year.

Jack – We'll drink ourselves senseless to forget that one day we'll end up in a Chinese vase too…

They clink glasses.

Eva – Still, we can't keep this here forever, can we?

Jack – The vase, maybe… But what's inside…

Eva – What are we going to do with the ashes?

Jack – A memorial garden? Sounds like another way of making money out of us.

Eva – I bet there's an extra charge…

Jack – We could scatter them from a bridge into the river. It's free, and it could be rather moving. Unless the wind changes direction…

Eva – Is that allowed?

Jack – That'll be his final act of resistance. After his death.

The phone rings. Eva answers.

Eva – Yes? Oh yes, hello… Thank you, that's kind of you… Yes, I know, but it happened so suddenly… No, no problem, I assure you… It's just a small gathering for… We won't make too much noise, I promise…

The doorbell rings.

Jack – I'll get it…

Jack exits.

Eva – Oh, you know, at his age, I don't think people die from anything in particular… But do you want me to pass you… All right, fine… Thank you for calling…

Eva hangs up the phone. Jack comes back with two pizza boxes.

Jack – This time, it was indeed the pizzas. And on the phone, who was it?

Eva – The landlord called… about your grandfather. Strangely enough, he sounded devastated.

Jack – Maybe he's thinking that with the inheritance, we'll be able to pay our overdue rent… I understand that it brought a tear to his eye… But how did he find out?

Eva – I added him to the list for the notices… I thought it might soften him up for a few days… It seems to be working, he didn't mention the rent again…

Jack – And did he talk to you about my grandfather's death when you met him earlier?

Eva – No, he must have received the notice in the meantime.

The doorbell rings again.

Jack – I don't think we'll ever get to eat these pizzas. I'll put them in the kitchen.

Eva – I'll open the door…

Jack – We can heat them up in the oven later…

Jack leaves. Eva goes to open the door.

Eva *(offstage)* – Oh, Mrs Green… How are you? I'm very well, thank you. Do come in for a moment… All right… That's very kind, but you really shouldn't have… No, but that's not… No, wait…

Eva comes back with a chrysanthemum pot. Jack returns.

Jack – Who was it?

Eva – The neighbour, but she wouldn't come in. I think she's getting confused too. She thought *you* were dead. Apparently, the landlord told her…

Jack – Really? I should have opened the door. I'd have loved to see her face.

Eva looks at the notice.

Eva – Hey, Jack, I've suddenly got a terrible feeling…

Jack – Huh?

Eva – Did you see this?

Jack – What?

She hands him the notice.

Eva – Look…

He glances at the notice.

Jack – And…?

Eva – Doesn't anything strike you?

Jack *(reading)* – … regret to announce the death of Mr… Damn.

Eva – Mr Jack Delaroche!

Jack – This can't be happening…

Eva – Did they mix up your name and your grandfather's?

Jack – Actually, I share the same first name as my grandfather… That's why I added "at the age of 102" to remove any ambiguity.

Eva – What ambiguity are you talking about…

Jack – But they've printed "aged 32" instead of "aged 102"!

Eva – Oh yes, now it's much more ambiguous…

The phone rings again.

Jack – I think for now, you'd better answer it…

Eva answers.

Eva – Hello? Yes… No, it's just that… Thank you… No, no, it's nothing serious… Yes, we'll be expecting you… (She hangs up.) I don't know whether the wording was ambiguous, but apparently everyone has decided it's you who died.

Jack – But why didn't you tell her on the phone?

Eva – She was your grandmother! How could I break it to her over the phone that her own husband has died?

Jack – So you prefer to let her believe it's her grandson who's no longer with us?

Eva – Apparently, she's already come to terms with that idea…

Jack – We'll have to tell her somehow.

Eva – She said she was coming. You can handle it.

They exchange a horrified look.

Jack – I think we're really in trouble now…

Eva – Well, what do we do?

Jack – I don't know. You're the widow, after all…

Eva – We could start by calling the funeral director to ask for an explanation.

Jack – Everyone thinks I'm the one who died! We'll have to explain to our guests, won't we?

Eva – You're right. Oh my God! Thankfully, no one has arrived yet…

Jack – Can you imagine? We invite them to a cremation gathering, and the deceased serves them hors d'oeuvres…

Eva – Well, we'll find a solution. At worst, we'll cancel, and we'll send a correction for the notices.

Jack – OK, I'll call the undertaker.

Eva – Exactly! He does have some responsibility in this, doesn't he?

Jack – You know what? We could start by refusing to pay his bill, that will save us some money.

Eva – We didn't have the money to pay it anyway… *(Jack leaves, the doorbell rings again, she goes to open it, and continues speaking offstage.)* Ah, Mrs Delaroche… Uh… Yes, yes, come in, please… But I have to warn you that…

Eva returns with Mildred, Jack's grandmother, who carries a suitcase.

Mildred – Please call me Mildred, my dear. So, you're Jack's widow, is that right?

Eva – Yes, you came to our wedding, remember?

Mildred – No…

Eva – I mean, yes, I am Jack's wife. But his widow…

Mildred – I'm terribly sorry about poor Jack. He was always a sickly child. The only boy I ever knew who managed to catch mumps twice.

Eva – Oh really…

Mildred – He caught every illness going. We called him "the walking germ factory". And believe me, it wasn't because he did well in science at school…

Eva – No?

Eva listens to Mildred more attentively as Jack peeks through the door. She signals him not to show himself.

Mildred – And with the life he led when he was still single… and even after. It's even surprising that he didn't die of some shameful disease. You know what I mean…

Eva suddenly listens to Mildred more intently.

Eva – Uh… Not really…

Mildred – As soon as I heard, I got on the first train. I'm not too late, am I? For the funeral, I mean…

Eva – No, no… Not at all… Well…

Mildred – I understand that you're upset. I loved my grandson too. I shouldn't tell you this, but he was my favourite.

Eva – Did you have others?

Mildred – Not that I can remember.

Eva – There's something I need to tell you, Mrs Delaroche…

Mildred – Mildred. Please call me Mildred. Is my husband not here?

Eva – Uh… Actually… Yes, well… Not exactly…

Mildred – Well, you have to excuse him. At his age, I don't know if he'll be able to make the trip.

Eva – Of course…

Mildred – My husband may be a hundred years old, and even though we don't see each other much anymore, it would still be a shock if I learned that he's passed away just like that. All of a sudden.

Eva – I understand… My condolences… I mean, for Jack's death… Or rather…

Mildred – I'll still go and say hello to him at his retirement home. I'm not sure if he'll recognise me anymore, but well, he's starting to lose his memory, you know. By the way, what did he die of?

Eva – Who?

Mildred – I think, with all this, my dear, it's you who's starting to lose your mind. Jack, of course! My grandson. Your husband! What happened to him?

Eva – Oh yes… Well…

Mildred – Sorry, I didn't mean to be intrusive… It's still so fresh… You can tell me about it later if you prefer. He didn't hang himself, did he?

Eva – No, not yet…

Mildred – Just so you know, quite a lot of people in our family hang themselves…

Eva – Oh really?

Mildred – Especially the men… I don't know why, but hanging isn't very feminine… *(Jack makes another appearance, Eva signals him to come, but he prudently stays hidden, while Mildred spots the urn.)* So, you had him cremated?

Eva – Yes, it was… It was what he wanted, I think. I hope you don't mind…

Mildred – Well, that way, at least you know his germs won't outlive him…

Eva – Yes…

Mildred – Is it Chinese or Japanese?

Eva – Well, we don't really know… It's Asian, though…

Mildred – Ah yes…

Eva – Would you like something to drink? There's orange juice… or young red wine.

Mildred – I wouldn't want to disturb you. Nobody has arrived yet… I might be a bit early, sorry.

Eva – Uh, no, no, you're right on time… It's just that… Actually, we were even thinking about cancelling… I mean…

Mildred – Don't worry. I don't like ceremonies either. But well, we have to mark the occasion. He was your husband, after all… Listen, I'll go visit Father Francis at his house, and I'll come back later, all right?

Eva – Let me walk you out…

Mildred – He's an old family friend whom I knew well in the past. Oh, I forgot to tell you… I asked Father Francis to come and bless my grandson's ashes…

Eva – Father Francis?

Mildred – He was an old friend of my husband's. He married us during the occupation. The head of the wartime regime himself was our witness.

Eva – Oh yes.

Mildred turns towards the urn and makes the sign of the cross.

Mildred – He was a striking figure in uniform, believe me. I hope you won't object if Father Francis says a Mass for the repose of his soul.

Eva – The soul of the wartime leader?

Mildred – The soul of my grandson!

Eva – Oh yes, of course! If it can help…

Mildred – That's the trouble when you get to our age. You only ever see your friends at funerals.

Eva – Of course…

Mildred – It's like we almost wish someone would die just to have the opportunity to see those who are left.

Eva – Yes… *(Mildred exits with Eva, who continues talking offstage.)* See you later, Mildred!

Jack returns. Eva reappears as well.

Jack – Why didn't you tell her I wasn't dead?

Eva – She didn't let me get a word in! And I didn't know how to tell her that her husband was the one who had passed away!

Jack – Oh damn…

Eva – And you? Why didn't you come out of hiding?

Jack – I was afraid she'd have a heart attack if she saw me!

Eva – We really need to find a way to end this absurd situation…

Jack – Well, being dead isn't all bad… Did you hear? She said I was her favourite grandson.

Eva – She doesn't have any others!

Jack – Maybe, but it's still nice to know my grandmother thinks I'm special.

Eva – She also said you were a real degenerate… infected with all sorts of sexually transmitted diseases.

Jack – Come on, you know she's starting to lose her memory. Besides, that was before I met you.

Eva – Not exactly what she said…

The doorbell rings.

Jack – Probably more condolences…

Eva – You're right… It's best for you to stay hidden while I pave the way for your resurrection.

Jack – I feel like a zombie my wife has to hide in a closet whenever someone comes to visit.

Jack exits. Eva opens the door.

Eva *(off)* – Ah, we were just waiting for you! We have a few questions to ask you, you see… *(She returns with Martin.)* Dracula, you can come out of your coffin, it's the undertaker!

Jack comes back.

Martin – Hello, Mr Delaroche, and once again, on behalf of the funeral home, please accept our condolences. I was still in the neighbourhood with another client, so I thought it would be easier to come back.

Jack – So you got my message.

Martin – Yes, but I didn't quite understand what your problem was. What can I do for you, Mr Delaroche?

Jack shows him the notice.

Jack – What can you do for me? Look! Here it is, my problem…

Martin *(looking at the notice)* – I don't see very well…

Jack – It's me, Jack Delaroche!

Martin – Jack Delaroche, it's you?

Jack – According to your notice, I'm the deceased!

Martin – I see… *(He looks at the notice again)* And you're saying you're not dead?

Jack is on the verge of breakdown.

Jack *(to Eva)* – You go ahead, because otherwise there's going to be a second corpse…

Eva – You can see perfectly well that my husband isn’t dead!

Martin turns to the urn.

Martin – Then who is in this urn?

Eva – It's Jack Delaroche, his grandfather!

Martin – Ah yes, I understand now… A little case of mistaken identity, then.

Jack – A little case? Everyone thinks I'm dead!

Martin – Yes, that's unfortunate indeed. You should have specified on the notice that it was your grandfather…

Jack – But that's what we did! I added "at the age of 102"!

Eva – Look! Instead, you wrote "at the age of 32"…

Martin – It must be a little typo. We just hired a new secretary.

Jack – A little typo? I call that a major professional mistake!

Eva – So, what do you propose?

Martin – I'm a bit caught off guard right now…

Jack – And what about us? Do you think we're not caught off guard? We're expecting lots of people for this emotional farewell ceremony, and there's just a small error about the deceased's identity!

Eva – We were hoping for some gesture of goodwill…

Martin takes out his smartphone.

Martin – Wait a minute… I have your email about the funeral notice right here… *(Jack looks.)* See? It definitely says "aged 32"…

Jack – You were the one who handled it, right?

Eva – Oh, now it's my fault! You should have taken care of it yourself, huh? Do I ask you to cremate my mother?

Jack – Your mother is still alive! Unfortunately…

Eva – I could kill you…

Martin tactfully retreats.

Martin – I'll leave you to settle this little family dispute… Don't worry, I know the way.

Martin exits.

Jack – Reporting your own husband's death… Talk about a Freudian slip.

Eva – Oh, that's enough! Everyone can make mistakes, right?

Jack – Still, between 102 and 32…

Eva – Just stop it… You should have taken care of it yourself! After all, he's your grandfather, not mine!

Jack – I had other things to do, you know.

Eva – Oh, right! Mister works… Mister is an artist… I'm only good at writing invitations.

Jack – Well, actually, no. Not even that. Look… *(Seeing the murderous look Eva gives him, Jack immediately regrets his remark.)* I'm sorry, I…

Furious, Eva looks around for something to throw at him. She eventually seizes the Chinese urn and brandishes it as if she wants to smash it on the ground.

Eva – Here's what I think of your grandfather, the collaborator!

Jack – No, not that, please. Not Grandpa!

Eva – My grandfather was in the Resistance!

Jack – You told me he joined the Resistance when the liberating troops were already entering the city! Granted, there may have been a traffic jam on the way in, but still…

Eva – How dare you insult the memory of my grandfather now?

Jack – I'm just saying that your grandfather wasn't exactly a Resistance fighter from the beginning…

Eva – I don't know what's stopping me from…

The doorbell rings, interrupting Eva's gesture. Jack seizes the urn from Eva's hands.

Jack – Do you mind if I retrieve Grandpa?

Jack places the urn back on the side table.

Eva – I'm sorry, I don't know what got into me.

Jack – We're a bit on edge, it's normal. *(The doorbell rings again)* You'd better go and answer.

Eva – I'm going… *(Jack exits, while Eva opens the door and continues speaking offstage)* Oh, hello, Mum…

Victoria *(off)* – My poor dear! I can only imagine how you must be feeling… *(Eva returns with Victoria, her mother)* I came as soon as I heard, of course.

Eva – Thank you, but you didn't have to. Besides…

Victoria – I'm sorry I didn't have time to bring flowers.

Eva – Oh, you know, it's not necessary. In fact, I hardly knew him…

Victoria – I'm glad you're taking it this way. But still, finding out that your husband is dead through an invitation… You could have called me!

Eva – Oh no, but I have to tell you…

Victoria – It's sad, but I always told you he wasn't the right man for you.

Eva – Why do you say that?

Victoria – Artists are all well and good. But if you hadn't been there to fill the fridge with your earnings as a beautician…

Eva – Life isn't just about money.

Victoria – Maybe, but it does help to pay the rent, doesn't it? Well, now that he's gone, if you want me to advance you a little on your inheritance…

Eva – My inheritance?

Victoria – I mean mine, of course. Because I imagine he won't leave you much. Except debts and infections, or worse. *(Glancing at the paintings)* Not to mention all these dreadful paintings. He never managed to sell a single one in his lifetime.

Eva – You told me you were already in debt! That you couldn't lend us a penny!

Victoria – Yes, but that was before…

Eva – Oh, I see… So if I asked you to write me a cheque right now…

Victoria – I'm your mother, after all. Now that you're a widow…

Eva – Widow… I still struggle with that word, though.

Victoria – You know what they say: one man's death is another man's opportunity.

Eva – Are you really sure they say that?

Victoria – Well, now you can remarry…

Eva – Remarry? That's monstrous, what you're saying!

Victoria – I'm sorry. It's still a bit early, I suppose… But at your age, you shouldn't waste too much time, you know…

Eva – Thanks… That really boosts my morale…

Victoria notices the urn.

Victoria – What's this? One of his last works?

Eva – You could say that, yes… *(The doorbell rings)* What is it now?

Victoria – You invited people, didn't you? It's only natural they come to pay their last respects to your husband! The sooner it's done, the sooner you can move on…

Eva exits.

Eva *(off)* – Oh, Gabriel… I'm sorry, my husband is not here…

Gabriel *(off)* – Of course, I'm aware of that. I received your notice. But you should have called me…

Eva returns with Gabriel.

Eva – No, you see, it’s all been a misunderstanding…

Victoria – Hello…

Eva – Gabriel, meet my mother. Mum, this is Gabriel, Jack’s art dealer.

Victoria – Delighted to meet you…

Gabriel – Hello, Madam. And my condolences. Your son-in-law had immense talent. Sadly, he left us before he could achieve public recognition, as is often the case with avant-garde geniuses…

Victoria – So, do you really believe all these dreadful paintings can fetch a good price?

Gabriel – You know, it's sad to say, but a deceased painter always sells much better…

Victoria – Oh, really? And why is that?

Gabriel – Mostly because, unfortunately, we can be sure that a painter, once dead, won't create any more paintings.

Victoria – In my son-in-law's case, I wonder if that's not for the best… *(She laughs loudly, to the consternation of the others)* I'm kidding…

Eva – Shall I get you some orange juice?

Victoria – Yes, please.

Eva – I was asking…

Gabriel – Thank you, I won’t intrude. I’ll leave you to grieve together as a family.

Victoria – But you're not bothering us at all, are you, Eva? So, you're an art dealer, right?

Gabriel – I own an art gallery, indeed.

Victoria – Well, because I bought a painting a long time ago at a flea market, and I was wondering how much it might be worth exactly… Sometimes you pick up a bargain without even realising it… They talked about a story like that on TV a few days ago, do you remember?

Eva – Well, Mum, could you leave us now?

Victoria – I won't be far. I'm going to buy a small bouquet of flowers to mark the occasion. *(Seeing her daughter's angry look)* If you need me, just call, okay?

Eva accompanies her mother to the door. Gabriel takes the opportunity to glance at the paintings against the walls. Eva returns.

Eva – I'm sorry…

Gabriel – I hadn't seen his latest works, they're truly remarkable. *(Noticing the urn)* And from what I see, he also ventured into ceramics. Is it Chinese or Japanese?

Eva – It's a funeral urn.

Gabriel – Ah, I see… *(Understanding)* Oh, I see… So it's… We're really nothing, aren't we?

Eva – Help yourself to some peanuts…

Gabriel – Listen, I don't want to rush you, but I was thinking we could organise a retrospective of his work.

Eva – Just yesterday, you refused him a simple exhibition… You said he wasn't ready yet…

Gabriel – Now, I believe he's ready…

Eva – Because he's dead?

Gabriel – We could take advantage of the temporary emotion caused by his passing to allow the public to rediscover his work. Well, to discover it, at least…

Jack is about to come out of his hiding spot, but upon hearing the last phrase, he reconsiders.

Eva – Well, I'll discuss it with… I mean… Yes, I'll think about it…

Gabriel – All right, I'll let you think about it… But you shouldn't take too long. Call me…

Eva – I won't forget…

Gabriel takes out a cheque from his pocket and hands it to her.

Gabriel – Here, it's a small advance in case you say yes… You can just give me the cheque back if you change your mind…

Eva – Thank you…

Gabriel – Don't bother, I know the way…

Gabriel leaves. Jack comes back.

Jack – I knew your mother adored me, but to this extent…

Eva – The silver lining of your death is that she's now ready to write me a cheque to pay off our debts.

Jack – And Gabriel already wrote you one!

Eva – It's crazy. Now that you're dead, everyone wants to give me money.

Jack – Let me see… *(He takes the cheque)* No…?

Eva – And he said it was just an advance…

Jack – What if we wait a little before putting the record straight…

Eva – Are you kidding?

Jack – My gallery owner is ready to organise a retrospective of my entire body of work!

Eva – Yes, well… Posthumously, I remind you!

Jack – Gabriel is right, a dead painter sells much better than a living one. My death is an unexpected opportunity to bounce back in life!

Eva – Wait, could you say that again? I think there's something wrong with that sentence…

Jack – This exhibition could really launch me!

Eva – Launch you? You'll be a dead painter!

Jack – It's still better than an unknown painter…

Eva – And after the exhibition, what do you plan to do? Disappear? Commit suicide? Resurrect?

Jack – I don't know… We'll improvise…

Eva – Okay… *(Pointing at the urn)* And what about him? What are we going to do with him?

Jack – Oh yes, that's right, I forgot about him…

Eva – Yes, because your grandfather is really dead!

Jack – Well, no one really cares about my grandfather, right?

Eva – Except his wife, maybe…

Jack – All right, we'll have to deal with grandma… But she's not in a hurry to be a widow. Whether she learns about her husband's death now or in a few days…

Eva – A few days? Do you think that will be enough time to organise a retrospective of your entire body of work?

Jack – Let's say a month.

Eva – Perfect. And what are you going to do for a month? Keep hiding in the bathroom?

Jack – I must remind you that all this, at the beginning, is a bit your fault.

Eva taps on her phone.

Eva – Look. I found the email I sent to the funeral home…

Jack – And?

Eva – Okay, I messed up with the age. But I did specify that it was your grandfather…

Jack looks at the phone screen she shows him.

Jack – Oh yes… "Jack, his grandfather, aged 32."

Eva – Admit it, that should have raised some eyebrows… Grandfather at 32!

Jack – Instead, they removed "his grandfather" and left "aged 32"… What a bunch of idiots!

Eva gives him a suspicious look.

Eva – Let me get this straight… You didn't do it on purpose, did you?

Jack – Are you out of your mind or what?

Someone rings the doorbell.

Eva – We weren't expecting anyone for your grandfather's death, but apparently, the announcement of your disappearance is causing more emotion…

Jack – That's a good sign for my posthumous exhibition, then… I'll go back to the bathroom.

Eva – And what if someone asks to wash their hands?

Jack – You're right… I'll hide in the closet.

Jack opens a closet door and slips inside.

Eva – Let's hope no one thinks of putting their coat in there… *(Eva goes to open the door and continues speaking offstage.)* Ah, Mr Lambert…

Alex – Call me Alex, please. May I come in for a few minutes?

Eva – Of course! You're at home after all…

Eva comes back with Alex, who is carrying a bouquet of flowers.

Alex – I won't disturb you for long, I just wanted to tell you that…

Eva – Yes, I know… I'm really sorry for the little delay in the payment…

Alex – Let's not talk about that, please. There are more important things in life, right?

Eva – Uh… Yes, of course…

Alex gives her the flowers.

Alex – Here, it's for you.

Eva puts on a big smile, thinking it's really for her.

Eva – Thank you, it's very gallant of you… It's been a long time since a man has given me flowers…

Alex – Well, when I say for you, it's mostly for…

Eva – Of course, what was I thinking… But it really wasn't necessary. Here, I'll put them here for now…

She puts the bouquet in the urn.

Alex – As for the rent, don't worry about it. You already have enough to worry about at the moment, right?

Eva – Uh… Yes…

Alex – You can pay me when you can. In your situation…

Eva – My situation…

Alex – I also lost my partner a few years ago. Believe me, I know what it's like…

Eva – I'm really sorry to hear that. I didn't know… And how did it happen?

Alex – I almost never speak about it, but I think you can understand. My partner was on a plane that crashed into a lake near the border, and the wreckage was never found…

Eva – How awful! It must be hard to find peace when they haven't even found the flight recorders. And it wasn't such a big lake, was it?

Alex – They say the plane sank in the deepest part, on the other side of the border.

Eva – You know how secretive some people can be about money… If there were wealthy tax exiles on that plane, we may never see the bodies. By the way, what was your wife's name?

Alex – Michael.

Eva – Oh, I see…

Alex – But what happened to your husband? I saw him in the stairwell just a week ago. He seemed perfectly fine…

Eva – Yes… It took us all by surprise…

Alex – You don't have to talk about it now, I understand. But know that I had a lot of respect for your husband.

Eva – Would you like a little pick-me-up?

Alex – Unfortunately, as often happens, I'm sure his talent will finally get the recognition it deserves, now that he's dead.

Eva – Yes, that's exactly what his gallery owner was telling me.

Alex – His gallery owner?

Eva – He was here just now. He wants to organise a big exhibition for…

Alex – That's a great idea. I'm sure your husband's paintings will sell like hotcakes now. And his value will skyrocket.

Eva – Yes, certainly… My husband also held you in high regard. I'm sure he would have liked… But I'm thinking of something, I don't know if I should tell you…

Alex – I'm your friend, yes or no?

Eva – How much exactly did we owe you?

Alex – Please, I've already told you that… 6,263.

Eva – Listen, here's the thing… Would you accept one of my late husband's paintings as payment for that amount?

Alex – Uh… Why not… After all… Now that you're a widow, besides… I probably won't see that money again anyway…

Eva – You won't regret it, believe me. Which one do you want?

Alex examines the paintings and picks one almost at random.

Alex – How about this one?

Eva – I can see you have a good eye…

Alex – This painting will hold a sentimental value for me above all.

Eva – And I'm sure you're not making a bad deal either.

Alex – I hope so… 6,263, after all, it's a significant sum… Well, I'll take my leave now. But if you need anything… You know where to find me.

Eva – I'm very grateful… Thank you. Really, thank you… Let me walk you out…

Eva walks Alex out as he takes the painting. She returns. Jack comes back too.

Jack – Oh, damn! Six thousand! My first client! Bravo!

Eva – You're right, it's great to be the widow of Van Gogh. He has never been so nice to me. It's crazy, I think if I had asked him for more money on top of what we already owe him, he would have lent it to me interest-free.

Jack – Maybe you should have asked… Because let's face it: I won't stay dead forever.

Eva – That's for sure…

The doorbell rings.

Jack – Business is picking up… I'm going back to my tomb…

Jack retreats back into the closet as Eva opens the door.

Eva – Ah, Anthony!

Eva returns with Anthony, who carries a wreath with the inscription: "To my best friend."

Anthony – My poor darling… As soon as I received your announcement, I rushed over. But you should have called me!

Eva – I… I didn't want to bother you.

Anthony – You know I've always been there for you, right? And now more than ever…

Eva – All of this is still so…

Anthony – I understand… I really liked Jack. Not to brag, but I think I was his best friend… Oh, by the way, I brought this…

Anthony hands the wreath to Eva, who takes it, looking a little embarrassed.

Eva – Thank you, that's kind. Would you like a drink? There's a bottle of young red wine.

Anthony – Oh yes, why not? *(Eva pours him a glass, which he drinks in silence, making a face.)* His passing affects me deeply too, you know. I swear, it's turning my stomach…

Eva – Maybe it's the wine…

Anthony – But you have to overcome this ordeal. *(He hugs her and holds her tight.)* Life goes on, Eva!

Eva – Yes, of course. *(Jack, furious, sticks his head out of his closet, but she signals him not to show himself.)* Wait, I'm having a bit of trouble breathing here…

Anthony releases his embrace.

Anthony – Sorry, excuse me… *(He looks around.)* Are these his last paintings?

Eva – Yes…

Anthony – What talent! I believe he would have amazed us all if he had lived.

Eva – He could still amaze you, believe me…

Anthony – But well… We have to move on.

Eva – It's still a bit early, isn't it?

Anthony – I'll wait, Eva. As long as it takes…

Eva – I'm sorry?

Anthony – You know exactly what I'm talking about, but I don't want to rush things… Between us, I probably shouldn't tell you this because he was my friend, but Jack didn't deserve you.

Eva – I'm not quite sure how to take that…

Anthony – Take it as a compliment, I assure you. If I told you everything I know about Jack…

Eva – Oh, really?

Anthony – But I'd rather you keep a good image of your husband… while his ashes are still warm. Anyway, if you need to talk to someone, one evening… even in the middle of the night…

Eva – Of course… I have your number, Anthony… Now, I need to…

Anthony – You probably want some time alone, I understand…

Eva – Thank you…

Anthony – Listen, Eva, when I see you like this, so…

Eva – So…?

Anthony – So…

He hesitates, then suddenly tries to kiss her. Surprised, Eva lets him for a moment, then weakly pushes him away.

Eva – But really, Anthony…

Anthony – I'm sorry, I don't know what got into me.

Eva – Don't you think you're moving a bit too fast, though?

Anthony – You're right… I'll come back in an hour or two, okay?

Eva – Okay.

Anthony – Don't bother, I know the way…

Anthony leaves. Eva, still troubled, straightens her outfit a bit. Jack comes out of his hiding place, furious.

Jack – Well… He's wasting no time, that guy… My best friend, what a joke…

Eva – What can you do… He thinks I'm a widow.

Jack – And you, you can't say you pushed him away violently either!

Eva – It's true that it's not unpleasant, this feeling of being back on the market…

Jack – Come on! Just say you'd prefer me to be really dead!

Eva – No! It's just that… *(The doorbell rings)* You better not stay here…

Jack – You're right… It might be another one of your new suitors…

Jack goes back to hiding. Eva goes to open the door.

Eva *(off)* – Oh, Gloria. It's nice to see you. *(Eva comes back with Gloria.)* You can't imagine what's happening to us.

Gloria – I know, Eva. Your mother warned me. But you should have sent me an announcement.

Eva – Oh no, it's just because…

Gloria – It's okay, don't worry! I understand that you have a lot on your mind. By the way, I ran into Anthony in the staircase, he told me a bit…

Eva – No, but it's not at all what you think…

Gloria – About you and Anthony, you mean? No, I don't think anything…

Eva – Oh yes, but no… I wasn't talking about Anthony… Listen, let me explain everything to you…

Gloria – Let me speak first… I understand your pain, of course. But I always thought Jack wasn't the right guy for you…

Eva – Oh really? You too. And why is that?

Gloria – I don't know if I should tell you this now, but I think it can help you with your grief…

Eva – What?

Gloria – But Jack was a womanizer, Eva! He cheated on you with anything that moved!

Eva – Jack? Are you sure…

Gloria – I'm in a good position to know, believe me…

Eva – You slept with Jack?

Gloria – No, I would never do that to you. You're my best friend. But believe me, if I had wanted to…

Eva – So Jack made advances to you?

Gloria – But he made advances to all women! And when I say women…

Eva – Sorry?

Gloria – Anthony didn't tell you?

Eva – Don't tell me that Jack also slept with Anthony!

Gloria – No. But Anthony told me that one evening, when they were out drinking, Jack was so drunk that he spent the night with someone dressed as a woman. He only realised the next morning.

Eva – Oh really?

Gloria – Listen, it doesn't matter now. And what can you do? Men are like that. Well, not all of them, fortunately.

Eva – I'm devastated…

Gloria – Anyone would be upset, of course… But as your mother says, when one man dies, ten others come along. If you want to find comfort in Anthony's arms, I wouldn't hesitate if I were you!

Eva shoots a murderous look towards the cupboard.

Eva – I'll think about it… Thanks for the advice, anyway…

Gloria – Otherwise, what's the use of having a best friend? Well, I absolutely have to go now, but I'll come back later, okay?

Eva – Please do… Where he is, Jack won't escape like that, anyway… *(Gloria leaves, and Jack reappears, looking sheepish.)* I'm going to kill you, so I won't even have to send out an announcement, it's already done!

Jack – I swear she's lying! They're all lying!

Eva – Why would they tarnish the memory of a dead man if it wasn't true?

Jack – For fun! And because he's not here to defend himself… That's why!

Eva – Oh, really? Your grandmother was right about you, you're a complete degenerate! So you sleep with cross-dressers too?

Jack – People usually say "transgender" now. She told me her name was Charlotte! The next morning I had my doubts, so I looked in her handbag. And on her heavy-vehicle driving licence, the name was Charles.

Eva – So, you admit it!

Jack – I swear I didn't know she was a man!

Eva – But I don't care if it was with a man, a woman, or anything in between! The important thing is that you cheated on me!

Jack – Hey, you're not the one to talk when you're already letting my best friend fondle you while my ashes are still warm!

They're about to come to blows when a priest in a cassock shows up in the middle of this domestic scene.

Father Francis – The door was open. I knocked, but since no one answered… I allowed myself to come in…

Eva – Who are you, anyway? An exorcist? *(Pointing to Jack)* Are you here to free this sex-obsessed man from the demon inside him?

Father Francis – I am Father Francis. It's your grandmother who… *(Crossing himself)* But I thought you were dead! I was just coming to pray for the salvation of your soul…

Jack – That is to say… *(To Eva)* Say something, will you?

Eva – Yes… My husband is indeed dead… But this man is… his twin brother. Arthur…

Father Francis – Oh really… I didn't know that Jack Jr. had a twin brother.

Eva – It's very recent. Well, I mean… I also didn't know I had a brother-in-law… He's just arrived from abroad. He surprised us…

Father Francis – Ah yes, indeed, the resemblance is striking. Then again, the last time I saw your brother was at his baptism… Hello, sir.

They shake hands.

Jack – Please, Father, call me Albert.

Father Francis – I thought your name was Arthur.

Jack – Arthur, of course. But I am so overwhelmed. As soon as I learned about my brother, I came right away. And to think that I can never meet him other than in the form… *(With a glance at the urn)* of a pile of ashes.

Father Francis – Ah, you had him cremated…

Eva – Yes, I know cremation isn't very Catholic, but I didn't realise at the time. And that idiot at the funeral home never mentioned it when we made the arrangements.

Father Francis – So you had a twin brother and you didn't know?

Jack – I had just found out about him. I finally discover a long-lost brother, and destiny snatches him away from me immediately! It's like a true Greek tragedy. For what sin do the Gods want to punish me like this? Do you have any idea, Father?

Father Francis – I'm sorry, my son, but when it comes to God, I follow only one…

Eva – Of course… Well, Arthur, you should know that Father Francis is a monotheist.

Father Francis – But anyway, how is it possible not to know you have a twin brother?

Jack – It's a complicated story involving frozen sperm, embryo trafficking, and in vitro fertilisation. It's quite a tale to tell. But as they say, the truth always comes to light, doesn't it, Father? In vitro veritas, as you say in Latin…

Father Francis – Uh, yes…

Jack gazes at the paintings.

Jack – In any case, he was an extraordinary artist…

The priest glances at the paintings.

Father Francis – I'm not well-versed in art, but…

Jack – Admittedly, his style wasn't conventional, but I believe deep down he had a profound respect for religion. Just like me.

Father Francis – God will recognise his own.

Jack – Indeed, there's something mystical about his painting, don't you think?

The priest still seems unsure.

Father Francis – Well, yes… *(Seeing the urn)* So here lie the ashes of…

Eva – Yes.

The priest blesses the ashes with a sign of the cross.

Father Francis – In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit…

Jack – Amen.

Father Francis – I will hold a mass on Sunday at my parish for the repose of his soul.

Jack – Ah yes, a mass. That's a good idea. What do you think, Eva?

Eva – Yes, if that's what you want… I mean, yes. A mass. Considering all that my husband had to answer for, it can't hurt, after all. Isn't that right, Arthur?

Jack – So, you were a friend of my grandmother? It's strange, she never mentioned you to me…

Father Francis – Truth be told, she never mentioned having a second grandson either… So, if I understand correctly, you knew your grandmother, but not your twin brother? I must admit, I'm a little confused…

Jack – Yes, me too…

Eva decides to intervene to change the subject.

Eva – And what about you, Father? How did you get to know Mildred, I mean, my husband's grandmother?

Father Francis – I was her confessor when she was still a teenager. I gave her her first communion. And I officiated at her wedding.

Jack – So you knew my grandfather too.

Eva – Yes, since the priest says he married them…

Jack – Of course…

Father Francis – Well, I really should go. I have some parishioners to visit…

Jack – Come on, Father. At least join us for a glass of this rather dubious young wine!

Father Francis – I didn't think that kind of revelry was appropriate at a time like this…

Eva – Oh, there's never a bad time to drink young wine. I've been drinking the same bottle for ages. *(She drains her glass. She is already rather tipsy.)* That's better…

The priest looks at them both with a worried expression, as if they were demons.

Jack – Come on! Indulge yourself, Father! These visits to your parishioners can wait a bit, can't they?

Father Francis – I'm afraid not, my son, it's last rites.

Eva – Ah… In that case, Father… I grant you my forgiveness.

Jack – Go in peace, in the name of the Lord.

The priest retreats cautiously.

Father Francis – I'll come back in a little while to greet Mildred.

Jack – Ah yes, Mildred… Grandma… She'll probably be very surprised to see the three of us reunited.

Father Francis – Don't worry about it… I'll close the door when I leave…

The priest leaves.

Jack – A saintly man.

Eva – Yes. I would also like a mass to be said for me while I'm still alive.

Jack – It must be very moving to attend one's own funeral…

Eva – To see all those people crying over your ashes who hated you when you were alive…

Jack – Maybe I could manage to attend the mass incognito, hiding behind a pillar in the church with dark glasses?

Eva – With music, it would be even more moving, wouldn't it? Mozart? What do you think?

Jack – It would really please me to hear the Requiem one last time. Do you know what Mozart said about this work?

Eva – No…

Jack – "I fear that I am composing this requiem for myself." A few months later, he was dead. At least I'll be able to hear it while I'm still alive…

There is a moment of hesitation.

Eva – Do you realise we're organising your own funeral right now?

Jack – Yes, and it's starting to freak me out a bit.

They both try to regain their composure.

Eva – All right, that's enough, we have to end this charade right now, otherwise we'll really go crazy.

Jack – I think we're already a little drunk. But you're right. I'll call them all one by one.

Eva – You know that you'll have to return your cheque to your gallery owner, give up the one my mother wanted to give me, and find another way to pay our overdue rent?

Jack – What can you do? All good things must come to an end. Even death…

Eva – I never thought I'd hear you say that one day.

Jack leaves the room. The doorbell rings. Eva goes to answer it. Anthony, Gloria and Charlotte arrive, Charlotte carrying a bouquet. The role of Charlotte can be played by a woman or a man dressed as a woman; the character's gender remains ambiguous.

Anthony – Hello, Eva… It's us again…

Gloria – We weren't going to leave you all alone on a day like this!

Anthony – Eva, I'd like you to meet Charlotte.

Eva – Charlotte?

Anthony – She was… a friend of Jack's. She insisted on coming to pay her last respects.

Charlotte – Hello, Mrs Delaroche. Anthony told me the news, and… *(She offers Eva the flowers.)* Here. They were his favourites…

Eva – Really?

Charlotte – I met him at art school. He was such a thoughtful man. He always arrived at the life-drawing sessions with a bunch of flowers.

Eva – Really? I had no idea my husband painted flowers as well…

Charlotte – Actually, he mostly painted nudes.

Eva – Ah. That makes more sense.

Charlotte – I used to pose for him when I was a student, to earn a little extra money. That's how I met your husband. He was very talented.

Eva – You posed naked for him, and he didn't notice anything? Love is blind, but I thought painters were meant to have good eyesight…

Charlotte – Er… Yes…

Eva – Unless this is another case of mistaken identity… Forgive me for asking, Charlotte, but do you have a licence to drive heavy goods vehicles?

The others are caught off guard. Fortunately, Victoria's arrival creates a diversion.

Victoria – Hello, everyone. For those who don't know me, I'm the mother-in-law of our dear departed…

Charlotte holds out her hand to Victoria.

Charlotte – How do you do? Charlotte.

Charlotte shakes Victoria's hand. Victoria winces.

Victoria – Quite a firm handshake…

Charlotte – Please accept my condolences.

Eva – Charles used to pose nude for Jack.

Victoria looks Charlotte up and down.

Victoria *(with a knowing look)* – I see… What a terrible business…

Gloria – It's a great loss for all of us.

Anthony – He was my best friend.

Victoria *(handing a cheque to Eva)* – Here, I've made you a cheque… If it can help ease your pain of being a widow…

Eva – Thank you, but…

Victoria – In any case, it should be enough to cover the cremation expenses.

Anthony – Come on, let's have some of that red wine. It'll cheer us up. And I'm sure Jack wouldn't want us to be miserable at his funeral.

He pours himself a glass of wine without offering any to the others. They help themselves.

Gloria – That's true. He loved life so much, didn't he?

Eva – Yes, of course, but…

Charlotte – Wherever he is, I'm sure he's watching us now, and he wouldn't want us to cry.

Jack peeks out but immediately hides again when he sees Charlotte. Anthony raises his glass.

Anthony – To life that goes on! Without him…

They toast.

Gloria – I know it's not easy for you to talk about it, but how did he die?

Eva – I'm not quite sure how to tell you this, but…

Gloria – Thirty-two… That's terribly young to die.

Charlotte – He was thirty-two?

Victoria – He was already a bit depressed, wasn't he?

Gloria – You mean…? No? Don't tell me… He committed suicide?

Eva – It's a bit more complicated than that…

Anthony – I shouldn't say this, but in a way, it doesn't surprise me…

Eva – Oh, really? And why is that?

Anthony – We can't say that his life was a resounding success, can we?

Eva – Oh, I see…

Gloria – Don't take it that way. We just mean he was what you might call a… tortured artist.

Victoria – More tortured than artist, I'd say.

Charlotte – You know, Eva, Van Gogh killed himself too, and he was a great artist.

Gloria – Well, let's not dream too much. Committing suicide doesn't automatically make you a genius painter.

Anthony – That's unfortunately true…

Gloria – Indeed.

Eva is outraged.

Eva – So that's how you see my husband? As a failure, to the point that his life wasn't worth living?

Gloria – Not at all!

Anthony – We didn't say that.

Victoria – But you have to admit that his suicide is the only thing he managed to accomplish in his life.

Eva takes a deep breath before speaking up.

Eva – All right… Well, I'm going to disappoint all of you! I have something to tell you…

Gloria – Yes…?

Eva – Jack isn't dead. He's hiding in that cupboard. He's going to join us, but I thought I should warn you first, so you wouldn't get too much of a shock.

She waits for a reaction that doesn't come.

Gloria – Of course, Jack is with us in our hearts. And he always will be, right?

Anthony – That's obvious.

Eva – No, I mean… He's really in that cupboard. Alive.

The others exchange an embarrassed look.

Victoria – Come on, Eva! Jack isn't alive in that broom cupboard. He's in that Chinese vase, dead.

All eyes turn to the urn. Jack takes the opportunity to come out of his hiding place and exits to the bedroom.

Anthony – I think it's best not to upset her.

Victoria – Absolutely…

Gloria offers her a glass.

Gloria – Here, have a drink. It'll do you good. *(Quietly)* I wonder whether I should have told her that her husband was sleeping with transgender truck drivers…

Charlotte – It's just a rough patch, Eva. After such a shock, it's perfectly understandable.

Gloria – You'll need some time to grieve, but you'll see. You'll eventually forget about him.

Eva – Fine, if that's what you want. *(Eva opens the cupboard without looking inside.)* So…?

The others look at the empty cupboard. Eva turns to the cupboard and still doesn't see her husband.

Eva – Come on, Jack, stop acting like a child and come out.

Eva examines the cupboard and is taken aback.

Eva – I don't understand… Jack! But where did he go?

General embarrassment.

Gloria – Eva, your husband is dead…

The doorbell rings.

Victoria – I'll get it…

Victoria leaves.

Father Francis – Hello, my child. Has Mildred not arrived yet?

Victoria returns with the priest.

Victoria – Oh, Father, you might be able to help us. I think my daughter still can't accept that she's a widow…

Eva – Father, have you seen Jack's twin?

Victoria *(aside to the priest)* – I wonder if her ex-husband didn't cast a spell on her. Perhaps, Father, you could intervene, like in horror movies, using a crucifix and holy water…

The priest is a bit overwhelmed by the situation.

Eva – Albert, his twin! Well, he's not his twin. He's Jack!

Father Francis – His twin… Oh yes, of course… Arthur…

Eva – Yes well, Arthur, if you prefer. Well, Arthur doesn't exist!

Everyone looks at Eva with a pitying look.

Eva – But I'm telling you, it's his grandfather who died!

Anthony – Arthur's grandfather?

Charlotte – But who on earth is Arthur?

Eva – Look, this is ridiculous. He can't be far. Jack! Jack!

No one comes. Eva leaves.

Charlotte – Poor thing…

Gloria – That bastard has really driven her out of her mind…

Anthony – I think we should leave her to rest for a bit.

Gloria – We're entrusting her to you, Father.

Father Francis – I'll do my best, but I warn you, I don't perform miracles…

Anthony, Gloria and Charlotte leave.

Victoria – Eva!

Victoria leaves. The priest's phone rings, with religious music (organ or Gregorian chants style).

Father Francis – Hello? Ah, Mildred! Yes, yes, I'm here. You got lost? Where are you? All right, don't move. I'll come get you.

The priest leaves. Jack arrives. Eva returns too.

Eva – Why didn't you come when I called you?

Jack – Listen, I didn't want to shock them by abruptly popping out of a cupboard like that!

Eva – So you'd rather make me look like a crazy person?

Jack – Anyone could have a heart attack if I suddenly appeared like that! Even Jesus waited three days before leaving his tomb. And even then, he made sure news of his resurrection got around first, so nobody would be traumatised…

Eva – Really? Or does this have something to do with that Charlotte… or should I say Charles?

Jack – I'm telling you, we need to break it to them gently…

Eva – Stay right there. My mother will be back, and you'll have an opportunity to practise being gentle! I'll go get her.

Eva leaves.

Jack – Maybe an opportunity to get rid of my mother-in-law. I believe she has a delicate heart.

Jack lies down on the floor and covers himself with a sheet (which can be the tablecloth). Martin returns.

Martin – Is anyone there? *(Martin spots Jack)* Mr Delaroche? So, in the end, he's dead after all…

Victoria returns and sees Jack.

Victoria *(perplexed)* – What is he doing here? I thought his wife had opted for cremation?

Martin – Apparently, she changed her mind…

Victoria – How can one change their mind after a cremation?

Martin – Well, the good news is that for the obituary, nothing changes… Anyway, I'll come back later… Madam, my regards… and my condolences, of course…

Martin leaves.

Victoria – Eva!

Eva returns. Jack remains lying on the floor.

Eva – So, you see, he's alive!

Victoria – Look for yourself…

Eva – It's not true!

Victoria – Didn't you have him cremated? Then who's in that urn?

Eva – Oh no… Jack!

Jack rises like Dracula.

Jack – Ooooh…

Victoria – Lord God!

Victoria faints, pulling the urn down with her.

Eva – Mum! *(Panicked)* Do you think she's dead?

Jack – I'm afraid not…

Eva – You monster!

Jack – She had it coming, didn't she?

Eva – At least pick up your grandfather. While I take care of my mother…

Jack – For Grandpa, I might need to get the vacuum…

Victoria regains consciousness a bit and sees Jack.

Victoria – So it's true, you're not dead?

Jack – Sorry to disappoint you, Mother-in-law.

Eva – Don't worry, it's just a small mistake from the funeral home. *(To Jack)* Go get a wet cloth, can't you see she's not feeling well?

Victoria – Oh, my God!

Victoria faints again. Jack leaves. The grandmother returns with the priest.

Mildred – I wanted to visit my husband at his retirement home, but the receptionist told me that unfortunately, he had left a few days ago. I don't know where he could have gone…

Eva – They didn't tell you?

Mildred – No… They seemed a bit embarrassed… I wonder if he has a mistress…

Father Francis – Still, at his age…

Mildred – You can tell you don't know men… I mean… In any case, thank you for coming to support us in this ordeal, Father. It's a great comfort to us.

Eva – Yes, isn't it?

Mildred – Unfortunately, poor Jack has left us forever.

Eva – Forever… Who knows…

Father Francis – Sorry?

Eva – A miracle is always possible… Didn't Jesus himself resurrect three days after his death?

Father Francis – Yes… But he wasn't cremated.

Mildred – Poor child… I don't think she has fully realised yet…

A noise is heard next door. Victoria regains consciousness.

Eva – Would you like a little pick-me-up? I think you'll need it…

Father Francis – Thank you, but I only drink communion wine.

Victoria – Yes, I'll have some.

Eva pours a glass for her mother.

Eva – Have some peanuts, Father.

The priest takes a handful of peanuts and starts eating them.

Father Francis – Dear Mildred. *(To Mildred)* To think I once bounced you on my knee! You haven't changed a bit.

Mildred – Flatterer…

Father Francis – But tell me, you didn't say you had two grandsons.

Mildred – Two grandsons?

Father Francis – Yes, the twins!

Mildred – Twins? *(Aside to Eva)* I think this poor priest is starting to lose his sanity… Do you mind if I use your bathroom to freshen up?

Eva – Of course…

Mildred leaves. The landlord arrives.

Alex – I heard a loud noise like something heavy falling, and I got worried… Is everything all right, Eva?

Eva – Oh, that noise… Um… Yes, don't worry… It was just my mother.

Victoria – Thanks for your concern…

Jack returns with a washcloth in each hand, pretending to be a ghost.

Jack – Ooooh…

He freezes when he sees Alex. The priest makes the sign of the cross.

Father Francis – Jesus, Mary, Joseph…

Alex – Mr Delaroche? So, you're not dead?

Jack – Well, not entirely…

Father Francis – I knew Jack didn't have a twin brother…

Alex – What does that mean?

Jack – It's a little misunderstanding… But I assure you, I don't feel very well right now…

Alex – This is monstrous. Pretending you're dead just to get an extension on rent payment!

Eva – It's not at all what you think, I assure you…

Alex – You're fine, right? And as for the piece you gave me earlier, you can keep it! Tomorrow, I'll start eviction proceedings.

He leaves.

Victoria – But then who is dead?

Eva – No one.

Jack – Well, someone is…

Eva – It's not a family member…

Jack – Well, sort of…

Eva – We're not going to get out of this mess.

Gabriel arrives.

Gabriel – So, Eva, have you thought about my proposal? I've drafted an invitation to the exhibition opening and…

He spots Jack.

Gabriel – Jack! You're not dead?

Jack – Well… I mean, I was, but…

Gabriel – Don't tell me you organised this fake cremation just so I'd agree to organise a retrospective of your work?

Jack – It's a little more complicated than that, I assure you…

Gabriel – No, you're a real psychopath…

Jack – But are we still doing the exhibition or not?

Gabriel – I don't want to see you in my gallery ever again, is that clear?

Jack – But you said earlier that I was an unrecognised genius!

Gabriel – I said that because I thought you were dead!

Gabriel leaves. Anthony returns with Charlotte.

Anthony – Charlotte forgot her handbag, and her driving licence is in it… *(He sees Jack.)* Jack? You're not dead?

Jack – No. Sorry to disappoint you.

Anthony – You disappoint me, Jack… You disappoint me greatly… But how… How could you play this grim comedy on all of us? And especially on me, your best friend!

Jack – My best friend, you say? I haven't been dead for five minutes, and he's already trying to get with my wife!

Anthony – At least I know a woman when I see one…

Jack – You bastard!

Jack throws himself at Anthony. Charlotte steps between them. The priest makes the sign of the cross.

Charlotte *(suddenly furious)* – Will you let go of him!

Charlotte grabs Anthony and sends him flying across the room, to everyone's astonishment.

Charlotte *(calm again)* – I can't stand violence…

Eva – Yes, I can see that…

Anthony – I'd rather leave, fine… But know that from now on, I'm no longer your best friend. In fact, I'm not your friend at all.

Charlotte – And for your information, you can drive a heavy goods vehicle and still be feminine!

Anthony and Charlotte leave. Jack looks utterly dejected.

Jack – I have the unpleasant feeling that everyone resents me for not being dead…

Eva – Everything will be all right, you'll see…

Jack – You think so… We're on the verge of divorce, we're estranged from what's left of our family, we've lost all our friends, I have no gallery, we're facing eviction tomorrow…

Father Francis – And if it were within my power, I'd excommunicate you on the spot! It's a disgrace…

Mildred comes back from the bathroom but doesn't see Jack right away.

Mildred – Well, what's with the long faces?

Eva *(aside to Jack)* – We still need to tell your grandmother she's a widow…

Mildred spots Jack.

Mildred – Good morning, sir… *(She recognises Jack)* Oh my God! So it was true, Father! Jack has a twin brother?

Jack – Uh… No, Granny… Not exactly…

Mildred – But then that means… Jack? You're alive!

Eva – Yes… Right? It's amusing.

Father Francis – I would even say it's a true miracle…

Mildred – My grandson, resurrected after being cremated! Are you responsible for this miracle, Father?

Father Francis – Unfortunately not, Mildred. If I had that power, I would have been canonised a long time ago… Anyway, you'll have to let me know who I should say a mass for on Sunday.

Eva – It's just a little misunderstanding…

Father Francis – In the meantime, do you mind if I go wash my hands? I may not perform miracles, but administering last rites can be extremely messy sometimes.

Eva – Please, Father, it's this way…

Father Francis – Unless it's the peanuts…

The priest leaves. Mildred looks at the urn.

Mildred – So who is in the Chinese vase?

Jack – Someone you don't know.

Eva – Well, actually…

Martin returns and addresses Eva.

Martin – Ah, Mrs Delaroche. I wanted to know what you had decided regarding your husband's body. *(Martin spots Jack)* Mr Delaroche? But I thought you were dead. You really need to make up your mind…

Jack – I told you, it's my grandfather, the deceased!

Mildred – Your grandfather?

Eva – Yes, your husband, Mildred.

Mildred – Ah, I see…

Eva – I'm sorry, really. We didn't know how to tell you.

Martin – So, in conclusion, here's the widow… Dear Madam, on behalf of the funeral home, I offer you our condolences.

Jack – Well, you can leave now, please?

Martin – I'll go… And as for the bill, I…

Jack gives him a deadly look.

Martin – We'll discuss that later, you're right…

Martin leaves. Mildred doesn't seem very affected. She holds out her glass.

Mildred – Well, I could use a little red wine.

Eva pours her a drink.

Jack – It doesn't seem to faze you much, Granny, finding out that you're a widow…

Eva – We went through all this to spare her feelings…

Mildred – We all have to leave this world someday… And he was very old, wasn't he?

Eva – A hundred and two years old.

Mildred – Listen, Jack. I can tell you now that he's dead…

Jack – What now?

Mildred – Your grandfather… wasn't really your grandfather.

Jack is taken aback.

Jack – What do you mean, he wasn't really my grandfather?

Mildred – Let's say… your father wasn't your grandfather's biological son.

Jack – So my grandfather wasn't really my grandfather.

Mildred – That's what I was trying to tell you, indeed.

Jack – It's curious, you see, but that actually makes me feel relieved, not having a grandfather who collaborated…

Eva – So, if I understand correctly, Jack's father is the result of an extramarital affair.

Mildred – Your real grandfather is a man I knew intimately a few months before my church wedding.

Eva – And I imagine that's what hastened the ceremony a bit…

Jack – I see… So marrying that collaborator was more a matter of convenience than love.

Eva – And that's why even after so many years, you didn't share the same retirement home.

Jack – But then who is my grandfather?

Mildred – It's… It's hard to say…

Jack – Don't tell me he was an SS officer and you married Grandpa to avoid having your head shaved after the liberation…

Mildred – Oh no, dear, what are you thinking…

Jack – Or perhaps I'm the secret grandson of the wartime dictator! You said he was a witness at your wedding…

Mildred – Actually, your grandfather is still alive.

Eva – You see, Jack, it's actually good news… You lose a deceased grandfather, but you gain another one who's very much alive.

Jack – So, I can meet him?

Mildred – In fact, you've already met him.

Jack – Oh, really…?

Mildred – But your grandfather doesn't know that he has a grandson.

Eva – We're starting to sound like a soap opera…

Jack – Can I still see him?

Mildred – As soon as he's back from the bathroom.

Jack is stunned.

Eva – Now I understand what you meant by "biblically knowing" him.

Mildred – Given his condition, you'll understand that it's best for him to continue not knowing he has a grandson.

The priest returns from the bathroom.

Father Francis – I'm not sure if this is the right moment to tell you, but I wanted to let you know that there's a small leak under the holy water font in the bathroom…

Jack – The holy water font?

Father Francis – Did I say holy water font? Sorry, I meant the sink, of course.

Jack – A leak… Yes, yes, it's the perfect moment, Father, actually…

Eva *(whispering to Jack)* – You may not be able to call him grandfather, but you can still call him Father…

Father Francis – Well, my children, I believe it's time for me to take my leave. Today has been quite an emotional rollercoaster for all of us…

Jack – That's right. Goodbye, Father…

Father Francis – Are you coming, Mildred?

Mildred – I'm coming, Father…

Priest *(to Jack)* – I'll also say a prayer for you. It seems you could use one…

Mildred – Well, I was delighted to see you again on the occasion of your cremation, Jack.

Mildred and the priest leave.

Jack – I thought I was the grandson of a collaborator, but it turns out I'm the grandson of a fanatical priest… I'm not sure if this is an upgrade after all.

They both remain dejected for a moment.

Eva – At least, we can finally eat our pizzas in peace… I'll put them back in the oven…

Eva's phone rings.

Jack – See, you spoke too soon…

Eva looks at her phone screen.

Eva – It's a text message… A message from the funeral home…

Jack – I fear the worst.

Eva – No, no, you'll laugh, but it's actually good news.

Jack – Good news from the funeral home? I'd be curious to know what that could be.

Eva *(reading)* – "Funeral Home Error in Your Favour"…

Jack – That sounds like a card from Monopoly.

Eva – They reviewed our case and admitted some fault. They're willing to make a goodwill gesture.

Jack – Oh really? And what do they propose? If it can help us cover part of our overdue rent and avoid eviction…

Eva – They're offering us the Chinese vase as a gift.

Jack – As you mentioned earlier… We can still use it as an umbrella stand…

Eva – That still leaves the question of what to do with your collaborator grandfather.

Jack – Well, in the end, he's not truly my grandfather. He's just my grandmother's husband.

Eva – A cuckolded husband.

Jack – And a collaborator…

Perplexed, they both contemplate the Chinese urn for a moment.

Eva – OK, I'll get the vacuum cleaner…

Jack – I'll empty the bag.

Eva – It feels good to get rid of all that baggage…

Blackout. The sound of a vacuum cleaner.

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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