

La Comédiathèque



False exit

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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Translation by the author

Jack has organized a small gathering to honour the ashes of his recently departed grandfather. However, due to a mistake by the Funeral Services, his own name appears on the obituary...

10 characters:

Jack: The grandson of the deceased
Eva: His wife
Victoria: His mother-in-law
Mildred: His grandmother
Jack (or Jacky): His landlord/landlady
Gabriel (or Gabrielle): His art dealer
Anthony: A friend
Gloria: A friend
Martin (or Martina): The undertaker
Father Francis: A priest

The roles of the landlord/landlady, art dealer, and undertaker can be either male or female. One actor/actress can play multiple roles. The casting is very flexible, with potential distributions as follows:

10 actors/actresses – 3M/7F, 4M/6F, 5M/5F, 6M/4F
9 actors/actresses – 3M/6F, 4M/5F, 5M/4F
8 actors/actresses – 3M/5F, 4M/4F

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An artistic bohemian loft. Jack has organized a small gathering to honour the ashes of his recently departed grandfather. Abstract paintings are leaned against the walls. Jack enters with glasses and places them on a table arranged with a buffet for the reception. Eva arrives, dressed rather conservatively.

Eva (*referring to her outfit*) – Is this alright?

Jack – Yes, it's fine.

Eva – I was wondering if it's a bit...

Jack – No, it's discreet... It's versatile...

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

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

Eva – Anyway, we can't afford to serve them fancy hors d'oeuvres.

Jack – Yes, you're right.

Eva – Where are we going to put them, by the way?

Jack – On this small side table? What do you think? Let's remove the flower pot...

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 – Mmm... Because he started talking about eviction, you know. I think the word "bailiff" was mentioned once or twice during the conversation...

Jack – Tomorrow is another day.

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

Jack – Today? It's a cremation, not an art exhibition opening.

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

Jack – At the same time, who knows, maybe no one will show up.

Eva – With the alternate traffic restriction in place, too...

Jack – Oh yes, I forgot about that... Hopefully, they'll all have a license plate ending in an even number. That'll give them a good reason to stay at home...

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

Jack – They'll probably call to offer their condolences.

Eva – I'm talking about the traffic restriction! They could have given us a heads-up, and we could have planned accordingly.

Jack – Well, for a cremation... We didn't have much choice on the dates...

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

Jack – Who knows. Maybe it was the air pollution that did Grandpa in...

Eva – How old was he again?

Jack – One hundred and two years.

Eva – Oh yes, quite old...

Jack – At that age, one is more sensitive to the quality of the air they breathe, naturally.

Eva – That's true...

Jack – Anyway, I hope the hearse has the right 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 also introduced an alternate cremation, who knows... To stagger the emissions of carbon monoxide into the atmosphere...

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

Jack – I'm not going to pretend to cry either. I never had very warm relations with him while he was alive.

Eva – Who knows. Maybe you'll have warmer relations with his ashes.

Jack – Come on, let's not let ourselves get down... Here, let's have a drink, it'll get us in the mood before our guests arrive.

Eva – If they arrive...

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

Jack – You know, after a hundred years, funerals should be optional. We risk having a flop. As proven.

Eva – One must still grieve.

Jack – True, but we can just as well mourn people while they're still alive.

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

Jack – Admit that one hundred and two years is a reasonable age to decide to die...

Eva – I pity the person who bought his house in viager...

Jack – Oh, he's no longer someone to pity. He died ten years ago. His son too, by the way. It was his grandson who continued to pay the annuity.

Eva – Quite a family... I hope your grandfather at least left you something. Cheers!

They clink glasses.

Jack – To yours.

They take a sip.

Eva – A bit young, isn't it?

Jack – It's Beaujolais Nouveau. Well, it was...

Eva – It was?

Jack – Beaujolais Nouveau that we had left from last year. Or the year before, I can't remember.

Eva – Ah, I see. So that's what's giving it that slight taste of vinegar.

Jack – Beaujolais Nouveau isn't a wine for aging.

They sip in silence for a moment.

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

Jack – Indeed, he always managed to avoid major troubles. He survived two world wars. He even managed to receive the Legion of Honour...

Eva – A war hero?

Jack – A last-minute Resistance fighter, in any case.

Eva – A collaborator?

Jack – Let's just say he was a man of compromises. He knew how to change sides at the right moment. One side had the swastika, the other had the Cross of Lorraine...

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 – Until the 80s, he managed the money he honestly earned on the black market during the war quite well. Unfortunately, just before retiring, he had the bad idea of investing all his fortune in Eurotunnel stocks.

Eva – Perhaps to travel more easily to London on the Eurostar during the next war...

Jack – I had to refuse the inheritance to avoid having to pay off the debts he left in his retirement home. You know, these homes cost more than Club Med? No, I swear, to reach a hundred today, you need to have the means... *(Someone rings the doorbell.)* That must be them.

Eva – Do you think so?

Jack – Unless it's the pizza delivery guy. I ordered a Four Seasons and a Margherita over an hour ago, I don't know what they're doing. The delivery guy probably doesn't have the right scooter license plate...

Eva – In any case, it's not affecting your appetite...

Jack – We're not going to starve either!

Eva – I'll go and open... *(She goes to open the door and continues speaking offstage.)* Yes, yes, this way, please come in...

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

Martin, an employee of the Funeral Services, 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 – Oh, sorry, I thought it was... No, clearly, you're not the pizza delivery guy... And since I didn't order Chinese food...

Martin – Mr. Delaroche, allow me, on behalf of the Funeral Services, to offer our deepest condolences...

Jack – Thank you... Please know that I deeply appreciate it.

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 mistake it for 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 – We remain at your complete disposal for anything you may need next.

Jack – Don't talk about misfortune! I hope the next death in the family won't be anytime 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 rush. Not anymore... (*Martin takes an envelope from his pocket and hands it to Jack.*) Here is the leftover funeral announcement. We sent the others to the addresses you provided us.

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

Eva – If they were wedding invitations, maybe. Sometimes people marry the same person multiple times.

Martin – Unfortunately, you only die once, you're right... (*Martin takes a document from his jacket pocket.*) I'll need a small signature from you...

Jack – Certainly.

Jack takes a pen from his pocket and signs. Martin takes the document and the pen back.

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 unique 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 model was on sale. Probably a range that didn't find its audience...

Eva – Or maybe an Asian customer who canceled 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 first communion gift.

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 being mean. He returned my pen... (*They still look at the urn on the side table.*) I'm starting to get hungry...

Eva – I'm already quite tipsy, actually... This Beaujolais packs a punch, doesn't it?

Jack – Yeah... It's a bit champagne-like, it seems.

Eva – I should eat something too. If your guests arrive and find me dead drunk. True, it's a cremation, not a housewarming party.

Jack – Do you think we did the right thing by 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... But the only friend I knew he had 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 take place in the strictest privacy, but you can pay your last respects at our place during the friendly gathering..."

Jack – The friendly gathering?

Eva – You wrote that part...

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

Eva – Anyway, no one is here yet.

Jack – He's been in a retirement home for twenty years. Everyone had forgotten about him. Even me.

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 – Being younger than a centenarian is not very difficult... She's in a retirement home around Nice. I sent her an invitation, but I haven't heard anything. I think she's starting to lose her mind...

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 retirement home a thousand kilometres away from your grandfather's?

Jack – At a certain age, one has the right to prefer the French Riviera to their spouse...

Eva – Alright, so what do we do?

Jack – I think we'll just munch on peanuts together... Shall I pour you another glass of last year's Beaujolais Nouveau?

Eva – Go ahead, we should finish it. I don't think it would be wise to keep it for another year...

Jack – We'll get drunk to forget that one day, we too will end up in a Chinese vase...

They clink glasses.

Eva – At the same time, we're not going to keep this here forever, are we?

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

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

Jack – The Memorial Garden... It sounds a bit like a scam, doesn't it?

Eva – I bet there's an extra charge...

Jack – We could scatter them from a bridge into the Seine. It's free, and it could be impressive... If the wind doesn't blow in the wrong direction...

Eva – Is that allowed?

Jack – It will be his final act of resistance... Posthumously...

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... Alright, 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 – It was the landlord... about your grandfather's death. Curiously, he seemed upset...

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 invitations... 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 invitation 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 – Ah, Mrs. Michon... How are you? I'm fine, thank you. But come in for a few minutes, please... Oh, alright... That's kind of you, thank you, but you shouldn't have... Oh no, it's not... No, no, wait...

Eva comes back with a chrysanthemum pot. Jack returns.

Jack – Who was it?

Eva – The neighbour, but she didn't want to come in. I think she's starting to lose her mind too... She thought it was you who had died... According to her, the landlord told her that...

Jack – Oh yes, indeed. I should have gone to open the door to see her reaction.

Eva looks at the invitation.

Eva – Hey, Jack, I'm suddenly seized with a horrible doubt...

Jack – Huh?

Eva – Did you see this?

Jack – What?

She hands him the invitation.

Eva – Look...

He takes a glance at the invitation.

Jack – And...?

Eva – Doesn't anything strike you?

Jack (reading) – ... have the sorrow 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 instead of 102 years, they wrote 32 years! At the age of 32!

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, I mean... Yes, thank you... No, no problem... Yes, yes, we're waiting for you... (*She hangs up*) I don't know if it was ambiguous, but apparently, everyone preferred to believe it was you who passed away...

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

Eva – She's your grandmother! How could I just casually tell her on the phone that her husband is dead?

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 invitations.

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 really sorry for poor Jack. He always had fragile health. He's the only child I know who managed to catch mumps twice in a row.

Eva – Oh really...

Mildred – I think there's no illness he didn't catch. When he was little, we called him "Culture Broth." And believe me, it had nothing to do with his academic performance...

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 – I came as soon as I heard the news, of course. I jumped on a moving train and here I am. I'm not too late, am I? I mean, for your husband's funeral...

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 recognize 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 – You should know that we do a lot of hanging in the family...

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 Beaujolais Nouveau.

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 canceling... 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 presbytery, and I'll come back later, alright?

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 a close friend of my husband. He married us in Vichy during the war. And the Marshal himself was our witness.

Eva – Oh yes.

Mildred turns to the urn and crosses herself.

Mildred – Believe me, in uniform, he was quite a dashing man... I hope you don't mind if Father Francis says a mass for the repose of his soul...

Eva – The soul of the Marshal?

Mildred – The soul of my grandson!

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

Mildred – Well, at our age, you know... Unfortunately, we only see our friends at funerals these days...

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 still... It's nice to know my grandmother cares for me.

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 that his wife has to hide in a closet when guests arrive.

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 invitation.

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

Martin (looking at the invitation) – I don't see very well...

Jack – It's me, Jack Delaroche!

Martin – Jack Delaroche, it's you?

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

Martin – I see... *(He looks at the invitation 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 – Well, it's quite evident that my husband is not 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 invitation 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 we, 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 would expect at least a small gesture of goodwill...

Martin takes out his smartphone.

Martin – Wait a moment... I have the email you sent me for the invitation here... Look... (*Jack looks*) You see? It clearly says "at the age of 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'm going to 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 – Declaring the death of your own husband... Talk about an unconscious act...

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, you know what I'll do with your collaborationist grandfather?

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

Eva – My grandfather was a resistance fighter!

Jack – You told me he joined the resistance when General Leclerc's armoured vehicles were already at Porte d'Orléans! I know there was a bit of a traffic jam on the ring road that day, 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 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 buy 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 an aesthetician...

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 check 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 invitation. But you should have called me...

Eva returns with Gabriel.

Eva – Gabriel, this is my mother. Mum, this is Gabriel, Jack's gallery owner...

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, but I won't bother you. I'll let you mourn with your 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 make deals without even realizing 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 organize 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 – Alright, 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 check 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 check 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 check 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 check*) No...?

Eva – And he said it was just an advance...

Jack – What if we hold off on refuting it for a while...

Eva – Are you kidding?

Jack – My gallery owner is ready to organize 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 – Alright, 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 organize 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 Services...

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...

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

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

Eva comes back with Jack, who holds a bouquet of flowers.

Jack – 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...

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

Eva – Uh... Yes, of course...

Jack hands her the bouquet.

Jack – 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...

Jack – 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.

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

Eva – Uh... Yes...

Jack – You can pay me when you can. In your situation...

Eva – My situation...

Jack – 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?

Jack – I rarely talk about it, but at least you can understand me... My friend was on that plane that crashed over Lake Geneva, and they never found the wreckage...

Eva – Oh my God, that's terrible... It must be difficult to grieve, especially when they didn't even find the black boxes... And what was your wife's name?

Jack – Charles.

Eva – Oh, I see...

Jack – 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...

Jack – 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?

Jack – Unfortunately, as often happens, I'm sure that it's after his death that his talent will be recognized at its true value.

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

Jack – His gallery owner?

Eva – He just left from here. He wants to organize a big exhibition for...

Jack – 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...

Jack – I'm your friend, yes or no?

Eva – How much exactly did we owe you?

Jack – Please, I've already told you that... 6,263 euros.

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

Jack – 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?

Jack looks at the paintings and picks one almost at random.

Jack – How about this one?

Eva – I can see you have a good eye...

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

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

Jack – I hope so... 6,263 euros, 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 accompanies Jack as he takes his painting. Eva returns. So does Jack.

Jack – Oh, damn! 6000 euros! 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 a little embarrassed.

Eva – Thank you, that's kind... Do you want something to drink? I have some Beaujolais Nouveau.

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 Beaujolais...

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 don't know how I should take that, indeed...

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 night, during one of their nights out with the guys, Jack was so drunk that he spent the night with a transvestite. He only realized it 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, of course... But as your mother says, one dead, ten more appear. So honestly, if you feel like hooking up with Anthony to console yourself, if I were you, I wouldn't hesitate!

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 – Right, sure. Your grandmother is right, you're just a depraved person! So, you're also sleeping with transvestites?

Jack – Today, we say transgender. She told me her name was Charline! The next morning, I had doubts, so I searched through her purse. It's true that apparently, on her truck driver's license, it said Charles.

Eva – So, you admit it!

Jack – I'm telling you I didn't know it was a guy!

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.

Priest – 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?

Priest – 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. Armando...

Priest – 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 just arrived from Marseille. He surprised us...

Priest – Ah yes, indeed, the resemblance is striking. At the same time, the last time I saw your brother was at his baptism... Hello, sir.

They shake hands.

Jack – Please, Father, call me Alberto.

Priest – I thought your name was Armando.

Jack – Armando, 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.

Priest – Ah, you had him cremated...

Eva – Yes, I know, it's not very Catholic, but I didn't know. And that idiot from the Funeral Home didn't tell us anything when we placed the order.

Priest – 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?

Priest – I'm sorry, my son, but when it comes to God, I follow only one...

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

Priest – 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 fertilization. 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...

Priest – Uh, yes...

Jack gazes at the paintings.

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

The priest glances at the paintings.

Priest – 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.

Priest – God will recognize his own.

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

The priest still seems unsure.

Priest – Well, yes... (*Seeing the urn*) So here lie the ashes of...

Eva – Yes.

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

Priest – In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...

Jack – Amen.

Priest – 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, Armando?

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

Priest – 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?

Priest – 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...

Priest – Well, I think it's time for me to go. I have some parishioners I need to visit...

Jack – Come on, Father, you'll celebrate the Beaujolais nouveau with us, won't you?

Priest – I didn't think that kind of revelry was appropriate at a time like this...

Eva – Trust me, Beaujolais nouveau is always in season. I drink it all year round. (*Eva empties her glass again and already seems quite tipsy.*) Ah, that feels good...

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?

Priest – 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.

Priest – 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.

Priest – 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 realize we're organizing 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 – Alright, 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 check to your gallery owner, give up the one my mother wanted to give me, and find another way to pay our overdue rents?

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 exits. The doorbell rings. Eva goes to open the door. Anthony and Gloria arrive.

Anthony – Hello Eva... It's us again...

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

Victoria arrives as well.

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

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

Anthony – He was my best friend.

Victoria (*handing a check to Eva*) – Here, I've made you a check... 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 a glass of Beaujolais, it'll cheer us up. And I'm sure Jack wouldn't want us to be sad at his funeral.

He pours himself a glass of Beaujolais, without serving the others.

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

Eva – Yes, of course, but...

Gloria – Wherever he is, I'm sure he's watching us right now, and he wouldn't want to see us crying.

Jack sticks his head out of his hiding place but quickly goes back inside. 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...

Anthony – Thirty-two years old, it's still very young to die...

Gloria – 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 like that... We just mean that he was more of a... tormented artist.

Victoria – Well, more like just tormented.

Eva – Van Gogh also committed suicide. And he was an immense 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 – Alright... 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 beforehand to avoid a too violent 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. *(In a lower voice)* I wonder if I did the right thing by telling her that her husband was cheating on her with transgender truckers...

Victoria – It's just a little rough patch, Eva. It's normal after such a shock.

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.

Priest – 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 – Alberto, his twin! Well, he's not his twin. He's Jack!

Priest – His twin... Oh yes, of course... Armando...

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

Everyone looks at Eva with a pitying look.

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

Anthony – Armando's grandfather?

Victoria – But who is Armando?

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

No one comes. Eva leaves.

Gloria – Poor thing...

Victoria – That jerk really drove her crazy...

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

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

Priest – I'll do my best, but I warn you, I don't perform miracles...

Anthony and Gloria leave.

Victoria – Eva!

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

Priest – Hello? Ah, Mildred! Yes, yes, I'm here. You got lost? Where are you? Alright, 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 – Admit it, that kind of surprise could give someone a heart attack! Even Jesus Christ waited three days before emerging from the tomb. And even then, he spread

rumours about his resurrection to avoid traumatizing anyone... Trust me, a gentle approach is much wiser...

Eva – Stay right there. My mother will be back, and you'll have an opportunity to practice 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. Delaroché? 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...

Priest – 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...

Priest – Sorry?

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

Priest – Yes... But he wasn't cremated.

Mildred – Poor child... I don't think she has fully realized 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...

Priest – 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.

Priest – Dear Mildred. (*To Eva*) I used to make her sit on my lap. You haven't changed at all.

Mildred – Flatterer...

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

Mildred – Two grandsons?

Priest – 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.

Jack – I heard a loud noise like something heavy falling, and I got worried... Is everything alright, Eva?

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

Victoria – You're welcome...

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

Jack – Ooooh...

He freezes when he sees Jack. The priest crosses himself.

Priest – Jesus, Mary, Joseph...

Jack – Mr. Delaroche? So, you're not dead?

Jack – Well, not entirely...

Priest – I knew Jack didn't have a twin brother...

Jack – What does that mean?

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

Jack – 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...

Jack – You're fine, right? And as for the piece you gave me earlier, you can keep it! Tomorrow, I'll send the bailiffs.

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 prepared a draft of the invitation for the vernissage and...

He spots Jack.

Gabriel – Jack! You're not dead?

Jack – Well... I mean, I was, but...

Gabriel – Don't tell me you organized this fake cremation just so I'd agree to organize 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 unrecognized genius!

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

Gabriel leaves. Anthony returns with Gloria.

Gloria – I forgot my purse... (*Seeing Jack*) Jack? You're not dead?

Jack – Well, no, sorry. It's a long story...

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 lunges at Anthony. Eva intervenes. The priest crosses himself.

Eva (*suddenly furious*) – Let him go!

Eva firmly pushes Anthony back, sending him flying into the set, much to everyone's surprise.

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.

Anthony and Gloria leave, leaving Jack seeming completely defeated.

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

Eva – Everything will be alright, 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, the bailiffs will be here tomorrow...

Priest – 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 recognizes 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.

Priest – I would even say it's a true miracle...

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

Priest – Unfortunately not, Mildred. If I had that power, I would have been canonized 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...

Priest – 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...

Priest – 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. Delaroché. I wanted to know what you had decided regarding your husband's body. (*Martin spots Jack*) Mr. Delaroché? 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 Services, 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, with the Vichy supporter, it was more of a marriage of convenience than a marriage of 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 being shaved at the liberation...

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

Jack – Or maybe I'm the hidden grandson of Marshal Pétain! You told me 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.

Priest – 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?

Priest – 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...

Priest – 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...

Priest – 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 an extremist 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 Services...

Jack – I fear the worst.

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

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

Eva (*reading*) – "Funeral Home Error in your Favour"...

Jack – Sounds like a chance 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 – The real question is what to do with your Vichy supporter 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...

Fade out.

Sound of the vacuum cleaner.

The End

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez was first a drummer for several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then began a career writing television scripts before turning to theatre and writing plays. He has written close to a hundred scripts for television and as many plays, some of which have already become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). He is one of the most produced contemporary playwrights in France and in other francophone countries. Several of his plays are also available in Spanish and English, and are regularly produced in the United States and Latin America.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>). However, public productions are subject to SACD filing.

For those who prefer reading or working from books, printed versions of his plays can be purchased from Amazon for a price similar to that of photocopying this document.

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

A Cuckoo's nest
A sailor went to sea...
A simple business dinner
All's well that starts badly
An innocent little murder
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Cheaters
Check to the Kings
Crash Zone
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but stable
Eurostar
Four stars
Fragile, handle with care
Friday the 13th
Heads or Tails
Him and Her
In lieu of flowers
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Last chance encounter
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
One marriage out of two
Preliminaries
Quarantine
Running on Empty
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Ideal Son-in-Law
The Jackpot
The Joker
The perfect Son-in-Law
The Performance is not cancelled
The Smell of Money
The Window across the courtyard
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!

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