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# Family Portrait

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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# Family Portrait

**Jean-Pierre Martinez**  
*English translation by the author*

*Two brothers and two sisters who rarely see each other reunite one last time in the family vacation home to sell it after the death of their mother. However, the issues they need to resolve are not only financial...*

## **Characters:**

Pierre

Josiane

Jeff

Frédérique

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## Morning

*The living room of a vacation home, furnished very simply. In the background, a small fireplace with no fire burning. Pierre, with a left-wing intellectual look, comes from the kitchen with a pot of hot water, which he places on the table next to a family-sized jar of Nescafé. Pierre explores all the compartments of a dish cabinet. In the last one, he finds a cup, which he places on the table. The same routine with the drawers in search of a small spoon. Pierre sits down, pours himself a coffee, and starts on the remaining Pépitos biscuits from a package. A mobile phone rings, off. Pierre sips his coffee and finishes the biscuits while reading La Vie Financière. The newspaper headlines help to place the time of action: "Y2K Bug: Markets Worried at the Dawn of the New Millennium..." A pause. Jeff arrives in striped pyjamas, looking half-awake.*

**Jeff** (yawning) – Already dressed?

**Pierre** (continuing to read his magazine) – I hate lounging around in pyjamas. There's hot water and Nes...

*To Pierre's surprised look, Jeff takes a cup and a small spoon from the cabinet, opening the right compartments and drawers directly, sits down, and pours himself a coffee. He takes the biscuit package, hopeful, but, realising it's empty, puts it back with a disappointed expression.*

**Jeff** – No more Pépitos...?

*Pierre, who finished the whole package, doesn't even seem to have any remorse.*

**Pierre** – Well, you see...!

*Jeff doesn't look happy but says nothing. Pierre adds more.*

**Pierre** – You remind me of mom... When we told her, "No more chocolate?" she would say, "Obviously, when there's some, you eat it..."

*Jeff chooses not to respond. Pierre moves on.*

**Pierre** (sighing) – I didn't sleep a wink last night. With that storm...

**Jeff** – What storm?

**Pierre** (incredulous) – Don't tell me you didn't hear anything! It sounded like cannon shots...

*No reaction from Jeff, whose behaviour Pierre observes with the eyes of an ethnologist.*

**Pierre** – You've always been a bit of a sleepwalker, haven't you?

*As a response, Jeff mechanically stirs his coffee.*

**Pierre** – I remember, once, we woke you up at eleven in the evening, making you believe you hadn't heard the alarm. We let you have your breakfast... Mom caught you outside. You were going to school in your pyjamas. A Sunday in August...

*Jeff starts sipping his coffee without responding.*

**Pierre** (*returning to the present*) – I had just fallen back asleep, and I was awakened by the garbage truck! It always comes at the same time... Five in the morning. When we were twenty, it didn't wake us up, for sure. It was the time when we went home to sleep...

**Jeff** – Mmm...

**Pierre** – So, you did sleep well?

**Jeff** – A bit tired. It's still a lot of kilometres... when you're the only one driving. Why didn't you ever get your driver's license?

**Pierre** – I did! But I failed...

**Jeff** – Once! You could have tried again...

**Pierre** – I can't stand failures. I wasn't meant to drive, that's all. And then, when I see all those idiots on the road... Did you see yesterday? Even you almost got upset! Take any guy, polite, kind, perfectly balanced. Give him a steering wheel, after ten minutes, he insults everyone and is ready to fight with anyone. How do you explain that?

*Dismayed by his brother's lack of reaction, Pierre gets up and examines the place with a circular glance.*

**Pierre** – Nothing has changed. It's been at least fifteen years since I was last here. And you?

**Jeff** – Two years, with Catherine and the kids. But never in winter.

*Pierre approaches the fireplace, blowing on his hands to warm them.*

**Pierre** – I understand why...

*He stops in front of the fireplace, on which sits a large box of matches, a carbide lamp, and a colorised black and white school photo of the two brothers in blue aprons and the two sisters in pink aprons.*

**Pierre** – Do you think it works?

**Jeff** – We always came in August... No one has ever used it.

**Pierre** – That doesn't mean it doesn't work...

*Pierre looks around.*

**Pierre** – We already have the matches. We just need the wood...

*Jeff signals him to forget about it. Pierre begins to make a circuit of the room, inspecting it as if conducting an inventory.*

**Pierre** – When do we sign with the notary?

**Jeff** – At three. If the buyer hasn't changed his mind.

*Pierre rubs his hands again to warm them.*

**Pierre** – If he visited in summer, he might...

*He throws a glance out the window.*

**Pierre** – Do you know who this guy is?

**Jeff** – What guy?

**Pierre** – The buyer!

**Jeff** – I spoke to him once on the phone. He's a Parisian. A physiotherapist, I think...

**Pierre** – Is he nice?

**Jeff** – What difference does it make?

**Pierre** – None...

*A pause.*

**Pierre** (*reluctantly*) – Is Frédérique coming with Josiane?

**Jeff** – Josiane took the night train. She should arrive this morning. Frédérique just called me from the airport. That's what woke me up...

**Pierre** – She's doing a round trip in a day?

**Jeff** – I don't know.

*Jeff sips his coffee. Pierre, again in front of the fireplace after circling the room, picks up the portrait of the four children.*

**Pierre** – I had forgotten about this photo. How did it end up here...?

**Jeff** – Mom brought it, I think. The last time she came here with Dad. Just before he went back to the Amazon...

*Pierre examines the photo closely with a half-ironic, half-bitter smile.*

**Pierre** – Funny, isn't it? Look at this. It's black and white coloured with a pencil. They used to do that back then. Colour photos were probably still experimental.

**Jeff** – It doesn't make us any younger...

**Pierre** – No. I feel like an old colorised film.

*This time, Pierre focuses on the subject and not the process.*

**Pierre** – It's strange... Everything is already there, isn't it?

*Jeff is having a hard time keeping up. He would prefer to enjoy his coffee quietly and wake up gently.*

**Jeff** – What...?

**Pierre** – In this photo! You can already see what each of us would become... Frédérique with her artificial smile. Josiane with her ironic gaze. You look like you don't care, and I have a beaten dog look.

*Jeff continues to drink his coffee without responding. Apparently, he is used to his brother's strange reflections and doesn't pay much attention to them.*

**Pierre** – Do you remember when it was taken?

**Jeff** – No.

**Pierre** – Neither do I. It's funny; I have almost no memories of my childhood. Besides, I don't have many childhood photos to help me remember.

**Jeff** – Back then, we didn't take as many photos as today.

**Pierre** – True, it's ridiculous, this habit we have now of photographing everything. Did you know that Jérôme filmed Frédérique's childbirth with the camcorder? I don't know if they replay the tape often on Saturday nights... They should have filmed the mating moment too and edited the whole thing into a documentary. You know, like "Life of Animals"... I love nature documentaries. The commentary always has a reassuring and edifying side. Like "nature is well done; we haven't invented anything," "the big ones eat the small ones, but it's to prevent overpopulation," "the weakest are condemned, it's sad, but it's to preserve the purity of the race."

*Pierre looks at the photo again.*

**Pierre** – Anyway, I would have liked to know what I looked like when I was a baby. I think this photo is one of the oldest I've seen of myself. I must have been at least five... (*Ironically*) Maybe the parents adopted me at that age, and they never dared to tell me. I've seen that in a TV movie. In that case, you wouldn't really be my siblings...

*A pause.*

**Jeff** – I think a photographer came to school.

**Pierre** – We were gathered for the photo. You remember, the classes weren't mixed yet. Even at recess, the courtyard was divided into two by an imaginary border. Boys on one side in blue smocks, girls on the other in pink. Absolute prohibition to cross the demarcation line. Except to go to the toilets, which were on the girls' side. I was in love with a girl I could only see by passing, going to pee. I had to pee often. But I never talked to her. I wonder what happened to this girl. I don't even know her name...

*A pause.*

**Jeff** – How long has it been since you saw Josiane and Frédérique?

*Pierre puts the portrait back.*

**Pierre** – Since mom's funeral... It feels weird to say that. I can't seem to realise that she's dead... It's not like it makes me particularly sad, huh? But it feels weird... to be an orphan.

**Jeff** – Dad isn't dead...

**Pierre** – We don't know about that. We haven't seen him for years. He didn't even come to his wife's funeral. Do you think if cannibals had eaten him, they would send us an announcement...?

**Jeff** – Are there still cannibals in the Amazon?

**Pierre** – There are piranhas... They say a school of piranhas can devour a cow in five minutes. They leave only the bones. So, dad, you can imagine... Well, anyway, he was never really there for us, right...? Between us, his death won't make much of a difference. Like a formality, so to say. You know, it's like those people who get married after thirty years of living together, to "officialise things." When he dies, it will be to formalise his disappearance...

*A pause.*

**Pierre** – I have a friend who did fifteen years of therapy to try to reconnect with his father. Fifteen years, can you imagine?

**Jeff** – Did it work?

**Pierre** – Well... Unfortunately, after fifteen years, his father was dead...

**Jeff** – Don't exaggerate... We're not martyrs either. We had parents at least...

**Pierre** – Yes... Yes, there's always someone worse off than oneself, for sure. But it's strange, that kind of philosophy has never really consoled me. It's like telling someone who has lost a leg: Don't complain, you could have lost both.

*A pause.*

**Pierre** – Do you know what I learned from Uncle Alberto a few years ago?

**Jeff** – What?

**Pierre** – He was the one who chose my name. Mom had just given birth. Dad must have been too busy, as usual. So Uncle Alberto went to declare me at the town hall. Apparently, they gave him a blank card for the name. After all, it was just a detail.

**Jeff** – It was a different time...

**Pierre** – Even at that time, there were parents who went to the town hall to give a name to their child. Pierre... I always hated my name...

**Jeff** – It's true that in the family, we've always had a problem with names. What would I say! For ten years, everyone thought my name was Christophe. Until the day Mom realised, while asking for a birth certificate at the town hall, that Dad hadn't declared me under that name.

**Pierre** – At least he gave you a name. He even gave you his...

**Jeff** – I'm not sure I got a good deal... Jesus, it's not very easy to carry as a name.

**Pierre** – In Spain, it's very common...

**Jeff** – In France, less so. Jesus! And to think he didn't even have us baptised..

**Pierre** – Don't complain; there are Jews named Judas.

**Jeff** – Oh really?

**Pierre** – Or Germans named Adolf, if you want...

**Jeff** – Anyway, everyone has always called me Jeff. I don't know why... Everyone thinks it's short for Jean-François.

*Silence.*

**Jeff** – Are you coming for Christmas?

**Pierre** – To applaud my brother-in-law's anti-Semitic and homophobic jokes?

**Jeff** – It's just humour...

**Pierre** – Listen, with Jérôme defending the National Front ideas, claiming to vote blank, and Frédérique voting for the National Front while pretending to condemn its ideas... Together, they make up the two halves of an extreme-right voter.

**Jeff** (*weakly*) – Come on... Stop it... Their daughter's godfather is Jewish...

**Pierre** – Ah, that's the ultimate alibi! We're not racist because we have Jewish friends. Very nice ones, by the way. For Jews... They drive Mercedes like us. They go skiing in Austria, and they named their daughter Ingrid. There are idiots among the Jews too, huh! And there are even Jews in the National Front...

**Jeff** (*amused*) – You're in good shape this morning.

*Pierre also smiles, apparently satisfied with his diatribe, and pours himself another coffee. He likes to talk and listens to himself a bit.*

**Pierre** – There are limits, don't you think?

**Jeff** – Sure, sometimes he could refrain...

**Pierre** – So why didn't you say anything last time?

**Jeff** – You didn't say anything either...

**Pierre** – But I left...

**Jeff** (*getting up*) – Leaving isn't always the solution...

*Jeff moves away towards the corridor. Pierre watches him leave, stunned. Then he goes back to reading La Vie Financière. His mobile phone rings.*



**Pierre** – Yes? (*Smiling*) Yes... Yes, everything's fine... No, there wasn't much traffic on the road... No, they're arriving this morning... (*Casually*) So, did you get the lab results...? (*Disappointed*) Tonight...? No, no, I'd rather call you back... I'm not worried, but when you've never taken the test...

*Josiane arrives pulling a wheeled suitcase. She wears an extravagant outfit.*

**Pierre** (*embarrassed*) – Excuse me, I have to let you go. Josiane just arrived... Yes, yes, I'll tell them... when the time comes... Me too... I send you a kiss...

*Pierre hangs up.*

**Josiane** (*loudly*) – When did you guys arrive?

*Pierre gets up and kisses her without warmth.*

**Pierre** – Last night. Late...

*Josiane puts her suitcase down and looks around the room.*

**Josiane** – This house!

*Pierre waits for a comment that doesn't come.*

**Josiane** – It's freezing... I don't understand why our parents never had heating installed...

**Pierre** – Maybe because we only came in August...

**Josiane** – Is your brother here?

**Pierre** – He's your brother too, isn't he? He's in his room...

**Josiane** – It's true he's not an early riser...

**Pierre** – Why would you want him to get up early? We only sign this afternoon...

**Josiane** – So, what are you going to do with all that money?

**Pierre** – I don't know...

*Josiane notices La Vie Financière on the table.*

**Josiane** – Are you reading La Vie Financière now?

**Pierre** – I dabble a bit in online trading.

**Josiane** (*impressed*) – The stock market... Isn't it too risky?

**Pierre** – It's like love... If you don't want to be surprised with a child, you have to know when to withdraw.

**Josiane** – And does it pay off?

**Pierre** – Not bad.

**Josiane** – You'll have to give me advice, then. To invest my inheritance...

**Pierre** (*ironically*) – Oh, it's not very complicated, you know. With a little common sense... A few months before Christmas you buy Barbie stocks. And just before Mother's Day, you sell them and buy KitchenAid stocks.

**Josiane** – KitchenAid? Isn't it bankrupt?

**Pierre** – That's because of feminists. Now, kids don't even dare to offer a vacuum cleaner or an iron for Mother's Day...

**Josiane** (*confidentially*) – By the way, are you aware?

**Pierre** – Aware of what?

**Josiane** – About Jesus! He's going bankrupt...

**Pierre** (*exasperated*) – Can't you call him Jeff, like everyone else? Did he tell you?

**Josiane** – It's his wife. The poor boy... I don't know what he's going to do now.

**Pierre** – You could ask him.

**Josiane** – Ask Catherine?

**Pierre** – Ask him! Your brother Jeff!

**Josiane** – He wasn't made to be a boss, it was obvious!

**Pierre** – Oh really? How so?

**Josiane** – Have you seen what time he wakes up! Anyway, I couldn't close my eyes all night. There were so many people on that train! Of course, I had to fall into a tribe of Portuguese with a bunch of kids. One of them had mumps; he cried all night. The rest of the family ate watermelon and chorizo until the next morning to pass the time...

*Pierre, who can't get used to his sister's xenophobic delusions, contains his anger and opts for irony.*

**Pierre** – They didn't offer you any?

**Josiane** – They did! But I declined, of course! It stank in the compartment. I felt nauseous...

**Pierre** – I remind you that we're of Spanish origin. Your maiden name is Fernandez...

**Josiane** – Well, I'm going to freshen up a bit. I feel like I still smell like chorizo.

*She exits. Pierre closes his magazine and also leaves with towards the kitchen. Jeff arrives, dressed. He wears a fairly strict but not elegant suit, like a small business director who has made a sartorial effort for an important appointment. After a moment, Josiane returns, bundled up in a large sweater, holding Le Chasseur Français. Jeff and Josiane kiss each other without warmth.*

**Jeff** – Are you getting into hunting?

**Josiane** – It's for the ads.

**Jeff** – The ads?

**Josiane** – Matrimonial ads!

*Jeff is both surprised and a bit embarrassed.*

**Jeff** – And so?

**Josiane** – Oh, you know, it's like buying cars.

**Jeff** – Really?

**Josiane** – You have to do comparative tests.

**Jeff** – And have you found the model you wanted?

**Josiane** – Not yet. Unfortunately, at my age, I have to limit myself to the second-hand market. And you?

**Jeff** – What, me?

**Josiane** – How is your wife doing?

**Jeff** – She's fine.

**Josiane** – And the kids?

**Jeff** (*coldly*) – You can say my kids. They carry my name now...

**Josiane** – Oh, it's still not the same. Your kids are still kind of second-hand, right...?

*Jeff remains silent, visibly holding back from exploding.*

**Josiane** – And the business?

**Jeff** – It's fine...

**Josiane** (*laughing*) – With you, it's always fine, huh?

**Jeff** (*slightly annoyed*) – I didn't say it was wonderful. I said it's fine...

**Josiane** – And Pierre?

**Jeff** – What about Pierre?

**Josiane** – His job! I saw one of his soap operas on TV the other day. My son told me to watch. What nonsense!

**Jeff** – It's for young people... Anyway, it pays well.

**Josiane** – Really? I should have done that instead of getting my teaching certificate at forty to try to teach all those idiots to read...

*She immerses herself in reading her personal ads. A moment passes. Pierre comes back with hot water. Pierre, Jeff, and Josiane refill their coffee.*

**Josiane** (*with a smile*) – Oh, this Nescafé is really dreadful!

*The other two, who didn't need this kind of encouragement to drink the beverage, look at her disapprovingly. But Josiane continues on her roll.*

**Josiane** – Luckily, the jar is almost empty. It must have been there for years. A big family-sized jar like that. *(As if doing mental calculations)* At a spoonful per cup, one month a year in the summer...

*Pierre definitively pushes away his cup. The door opens. In comes Frédérique, wearing an Hermès scarf, gold jewellery, and a Vuitton bag, a very upscale look.*

**Frédérique** – Good morning.

**Pierre** *(without getting up)* – Hi.

*Josiane and Jeff get up to kiss their sister.*

**Jeff** – Did you have a good trip?

**Pierre** – It's barely an hour's flight. Not very taxing as a journey...

**Frédérique** – Always as charming...

**Josiane** *(holding the Nescafé jar)* – Do you want coffee?

**Frédérique** – Thank you, I had breakfast on the plane.

**Josiane** – You did the right thing.

**Jeff** – There's a room left for you. But you might have to change the sheets.

**Frédérique** – It's not necessary; I'm leaving again tonight...

**Josiane** – Oh really? That's a shame. Traveling so many miles for so little...

**Pierre** – Oh, it'll be about two hundred thousand each...

*The others look at him with a puzzled expression.*

**Pierre** – Frédérique came like us for the sale, right? She's not flying two thousand kilometres in a day to spend a few hours with the family by the sea in December...

**Frédérique** – Because you're not here for that either, are you?

**Pierre** – Yes... that's what I just said. We all come for that.

**Josiane** – 200,000 francs each... *(Doubting, to Jeff)* Are you sure we're selling this house for enough?

**Jeff** – It's been on sale for a year already. Even at this price, buyers didn't rush. If that physiotherapist hadn't called me a month ago...

**Josiane** *(accusingly)* – Maybe we should have done some advertising. I don't know, like placing a few ads...

**Jeff** – No one was stopping you. Here, in Le Chasseur Français, for example...

**Josiane** – Yes, but since you were the one taking care of it!

**Jeff** – Who decided it was my job to take care of it? I have other things to do, too. And I wasn't on-site.

**Josiane** (*not even listening anymore*) – Ah, this house! Well, tonight we'll be rid of it.

*Josiane takes another sip of her coffee.*

**Josiane** – Cold, it's even more dreadful! (*Looking at the others with a friendly expression*) Do you want more?

*Pierre and Jeff exchange a regretful look.*

**Jeff** – I'll see if I can find some newspapers.

**Pierre** – I'll join you. We'll take the opportunity to have a real coffee.

**Josiane** – Will you bring me Le Nouvel Obs? It comes out today.

*Pierre, surprised, looks at his sister.*

**Pierre** – You read Le Nouvel Observateur now?

**Josiane** (*knowingly*) – It's for the ads...

*Pierre looks at her without understanding but doesn't insist.*

**Jeff** (*to Frédérique*) – Do you want us to bring you something?

**Frédérique** – I got Madame Figaro on the plane.

**Pierre** – If we find L'Humanité Madame, we'll take it for you.

*Pierre and Jeff exit.*

**Frédérique** – He's not getting any better.

**Josiane** – Jeff?

**Frédérique** – Pierre!

**Josiane** – Oh, you have to take him as he is. He's never done anything like everyone else. Don't you remember? Even as a little boy, he learned how to knit. He even made me a scarf...

*Frédérique evidently doesn't remember.*

**Josiane** – Don't you find that strange? We've never seen him with a girl...

**Frédérique** – Maybe he didn't feel like introducing them to us...

*Seeming to care a little less, Josiane changes the subject.*

**Josiane** – And how are your children doing?

**Frédérique** – They're fine... Charlotte seems to like her school. I hope it works out this time because it's not cheap...

**Josiane** – Oh, really?

**Frédérique** – Now, you know, if you're not willing to pay...

**Josiane** – How much?

**Frédérique** – 5,000.

**Josiane** – Per year?

**Frédérique** – Per month...

**Josiane** – 5,000 francs per month! Well, that's almost what I earn as a high school teacher!

**Frédérique** – I know, it's expensive, but what can you do? If you want something good, you have to pay the price.

**Josiane** – University is free.

**Frédérique** – To end up with everyone else. Nowadays, everyone goes to university... There's no more selection!

*A pause.*

**Josiane** – And Maximilien?

**Frédérique** – He's on a three-month internship through his business school.

**Josiane** – Oh really? Where?

**Frédérique** – At McDonald's... (*A pause*) In Miami.

**Josiane** – In Miami!

**Frédérique** – Yes, he chose the international section.

**Josiane** – It must still cost you a fortune!

**Frédérique** – You can say that. Especially since the internship is unpaid. With the ticket and accommodation, it adds up to around 60,000. Well, the school takes care of everything. They have a very effective placement network. Now, to get an internship... Without connections...

**Josiane** – But what's he doing there? Is he working in marketing?

**Frédérique** – No, he's in sales.

**Josiane** – In sales...?

**Frédérique** – Yes, well, he serves customers. The American philosophy in business is that you have to start from the bottom. To really understand how things work.

**Josiane** (*bewildered*) – Are you saying you're paying 60,000 francs for your son to serve hamburgers at McDonald's for three months?

**Frédérique** – In Florida! You know, places are scarce there. They don't take just anyone. And besides, this way, he'll improve his English. It's his weak point...

*Silence.*

**Frédérique** – And Bruno, how's he doing?

**Josiane** – He studies philosophy at La Sorbonne. It seems to be going well. He has very good grades...

**Frédérique** – Philosophy nowadays... It leads nowhere, right?

**Josiane** – At least, it's free...

*A pause.*

**Josiane** – He found a girlfriend... I'm glad he's doing well. It hasn't always been easy for him. With my divorce...

**Frédérique** – Sometimes, a good divorce is better than a bad marriage...

**Josiane** – Still. No matter what you say, a child needs both their mother and father.

**Frédérique** – But you and Gérard were constantly arguing! I came to your place three times in ten years. All three times, I witnessed a quarrel. I guess it wasn't in my honour. It didn't exactly encourage me to come back...

*A pause.*

**Frédérique** – How a guy who was a psychoanalyst could be so bad at raising his kid. You never agreed on anything, especially regarding Bruno's education, and you discussed it in front of him...

**Josiane** – Well... You know what Freud said regarding children's education: "Do what you want, it'll be wrong anyway."

**Frédérique** – Even so. You always feel somewhat responsible...

*Frédérique looks around the room.*

**Frédérique** – It's sad to think that the house will be sold. We have some good memories here, after all... It's strange. Throughout the year, we crammed ourselves into a two-bedroom apartment without a bathroom, with parents overwhelmed by work who were sulking, and one month a year, we lived in a comfortable house with almost normal parents...

*A pause.*

**Josiane** – Miami Playa... What a name for a house that's not even really by the sea...

**Frédérique** – It must have reminded him of Spain... Why has he never gone back, by the way?

**Josiane** – That... We'll have to ask him... If we see him again someday... At first, I think it was because of the paperwork. He was afraid they wouldn't let him come back to France. Afterward, he probably thought it was too far...

**Frédérique** – Yeah... That's probably why he preferred to settle in Manaus... I would have bought this house. But Jérôme didn't agree. Anyway, it wasn't the right time...

**Josiane** – Oh, even at that price, I'm not sure you would have made a good deal...

*Silence.*

**Frédérique** – I don't understand why Pierre holds it against me like that. I haven't done anything to him. That also makes me sad. We used to get along well before, didn't we?

**Josiane** – Before what?

**Frédérique** (*confused*) – I don't know... Before.

*Josiane, no longer listening, also looks around the room.*

**Josiane** – We'll have to do some cleaning before we leave. There's so much dust!

***Fade out.***



## Noon

*The four of them come back from outside and take off their coats.*

**Josiane** – Well, thanks for your invitation, Jeff... So? How did you find the restaurant?

**Frédérique** – The ambiance was okay...

**Josiane** – Yes, right? It was really typical. The owner had quite a face! And we ate well. For the price...

**Jeff** – Obviously, it's not a gourmet restaurant. But in this area, there isn't much else.

**Josiane** – Sure, the fish probably wasn't the catch of the day... It's incredible to serve frozen fish just a few kilometres from the sea.

**Pierre** (*annoyed*) – Listen, next time, it's your turn to invite us, okay...? And you'll pick the restaurant.

**Josiane** – I hope we won't get sick, at least. With frozen food, you never know. Sometimes there are breaks in the cold chain...

*Pierre and Jeff exchange a dismayed look.*

**Josiane** – I'll see if I have an Alka-Seltzer. I don't feel too good...

**Pierre** – Sure, go ahead.

**Frédérique** – I think I have some.

*Josiane and Frédérique head towards the bedrooms. A moment.*

**Pierre** – She's not getting better... Well, they say the eldest in every family is always psychologically more fragile...

**Jeff** – She's always been like that. She won't change at her age.

**Pierre** (*thoughtful*) – How old is she anyway?

*Jeff doesn't respond.*

**Pierre** – So, what are we doing tonight? (*Jokingly*) Going to a club?

**Jeff** – I'm a married man. But go ahead, if you wish.

**Pierre** – At this time of the year, everything must be closed. Remember, we spent all our evenings in clubs during vacations. I was convinced that was the best place to pick up. Since everyone was there for that. Statistically, it seemed logical. Yet, I've never scored in a club. At the laundromat, on the subway, at the dentist, yes. But never in a club...

*A moment.*

**Pierre** – Women probably don't find it romantic enough. Maybe for a one-night stand with a stranger, at most. But not to meet the love of their life. The kind of guys who hit on them in clubs like they do, probably don't inspire trust. Actually, I don't know any married couple who met in a club. Do you?

**Jeff** – Yes... I met Catherine at a club.

**Pierre** (*taken aback*) – Well, I'd better go take a nap...

**Jeff** – You always tend to generalise, that's your problem. Your life isn't statistics. Statistics are the lives of others...

**Pierre** (*surprised*) – You know, that's profound what you just said?

**Jeff** (*annoyed*) – No, I don't know, obviously. When I say something sensible, it's by chance. I don't do it on purpose. Luckily, you're here to point it out to me.

**Pierre** – I'm sorry...

**Jeff** – That's your other problem, Pierre. You tend to take people for fools a bit too much.

*Jeff stands up to get a magazine, and Pierre follows suit. Josiane and Frédérique also return with magazines.*

**Jeff** (*to Josiane*) – Feeling better?

**Josiane** – I threw up everything.

**Pierre** (*dismayed*) – Feeling better then...

**Josiane** – Not really. I still feel like that slice of tuna is weighing on my stomach...

**Frédérique** – It might be an allergy. Allergies to fresh tuna are very common.

**Pierre** – In the end, that might be it. The fish was too fresh.

*Jeff reads Le Point. Pierre La Vie Financière, Frédérique Madame Figaro. Josiane finishes Le Chasseur Français before starting on Le Nouvel Obs. Pierre raises his head from his magazine and looks surprised at what Josiane is reading.*

**Pierre** – Are you looking for a husband?

**Josiane** (*laughing*) – Oh, you know, I'm not sure I'll find one at my age...

**Pierre** (*ironic*) – Between Le Chasseur Français and Le Nouvel Obs, you're covering a wide range... You should also make yourself a website, then you'd cover the entire planet.

*Josiane genuinely interested, looks up from her newspaper.*

**Josiane** – Do you think so...?

*Pierre can't believe his sister takes him seriously.*

**Pierre** – Yes, you put your portrait, with a catchy message. You could even retouch the photo a bit. Nowadays, we do extraordinary things with digital tools...

**Josiane** – Maybe you're right. I should get into multimedia... But I'm not sure if I'll manage. Do you know about that stuff?

*Before Pierre can respond, a cell phone rings. Josiane rushes to answer hers.*

**Josiane** (*coyly*) – That must be mine... I just got one for Christmas. (*Laughing*) Gotta keep up with the times...

*She takes the call with some awkwardness. Clearly, she's not used to this kind of device.*

**Josiane** (*irritated, pressing the buttons forcefully*) – Damn, how does this thing work again...

*Pierre watches her, impressed.*

**Josiane** (*with affected friendliness, speaking very loudly*) – Hello yes... Yes, it's me... Yes, hello... Yes... Yes, in my fifties...

*She realises the others can't help but overhear her.*

**Josiane** – Well, closer to fifty than sixty... Yes, I stumbled upon your ad by chance in Le Chasseur Français and... Um, no, I don't hunt. I must have flicked through it at the hairdresser's... Divorced, that's right... And you...? (*Freezes*) Oh... And how did she die...? (*Laughing*) If it's not too intrusive, of course... Oh dear... She must have suffered a lot... I say in such cases, they should put them to sleep...

*The others look at her in disbelief.*

**Josiane** – Yes, that must have left a void for you... No, I don't have any pets... Just a son... Do you like kids...? No, I think it's a bit late for that, right...? At our ages, the baby probably wouldn't be normal...

*Josiane moves away towards the bedrooms to have some peace. The conversation is no longer audible.*

**Pierre** – Poor kid. Can you imagine? At ten years old, his mother is almost seventy!

**Frédérique** (*assertive*) – That's such a typical guy's way of thinking. Men, they have no problem leaving their wives at fifty to go populate the planet.

**Pierre** (*half-serious, half-provocative*) – For men, it's not quite the same...

**Frédérique** (*vehemently*) – Oh really? And why not? I remind you that women live longer. It would make sense for them to be able to have children later in life.

**Pierre** – The difference is that generally, fifty-year-old men have children with younger women. It averages out. Josiane, she's more into seniors, right?

**Frédérique** – How would you know?

*Jeff, embarrassed, tries in vain to convey to Pierre that it would be better to change the subject.*

**Pierre** – I don't think there are many twenty-year-old guys placing ads in *Le Chasseur Français*...

*Frédérique seems more affected than necessary by this conversation, which appears to touch her personally.*

**Frédérique** – You're all the same!

*Frédérique storms off.*

**Pierre** (*surprised*) – I didn't know she was such a feminist! What's gotten into her? I don't care if Josiane wants to date younger guys.

**Jeff** – I think the issue is more about fifty-year-old men cheating on their wives with younger girls. It's better to avoid the subject...

*Pierre, astonished, tries to understand. Josiane and Frédérique return.*

**Josiane** – What time is our appointment?

**Jeff** – The agency said 3 PM.

**Josiane** (*thoughtful*) – 800,000 francs... In the end, that doesn't amount to much... Especially when divided by four...

**Pierre** – Oh, don't worry. One of us could still die before this afternoon.

**Josiane** (*holding her head*) – It might as well be me. I really don't feel well. (*Trying to laugh*) You didn't poison me, did you?

*Josiane stops in front of the portrait of the four children on the mantelpiece.*

**Josiane** – What are we going to do with this photo?

*The others look at her without understanding.*

**Josiane** – We can't leave it here when the house is sold. Who will take it?

**Frédérique** – We could have it reprinted...

**Josiane** – The negative has probably disappeared a long time ago...

**Pierre** (*ironic*) – Let's just cut it into four. Each one takes their portrait. (*To Josiane*) You can scan yours and put it on your website to attract some perverts...

**Josiane** (*looking at the portrait, not perceiving the irony*) – Oh, it would be a shame to cut it. Such a beautiful photo.

**Pierre** – Yes, you're right. On a mantelpiece, it's decorative.

**Josiane** – Let's draw straws. There's a matchbox there.

*The others seem shocked but not enough to oppose this idea. Besides, Josiane has already grabbed the matchbox placed on the mantelpiece next to the photo. She takes four matches, breaks three, and turns around with the four matches sticking out of her hand.*

**Josiane** (*excited*) – The one with the red tip wins... Jeff, you go first.

*Jeff obeys reluctantly. He pulls a match without a red tip.*

**Josiane** – Your turn, Frédérique!

*Frédérique complies, torn between the hope of winning and a vague sense of awkwardness. Pierre observes the scene in dismay. Frédérique also draws a match without a red tip. A slight disappointment shows on her face, quickly replaced by a forced smile.*

**Josiane** (*more and more excited*) – Now, Pierre, it's between you and me.

*Pierre gets up casually.*

**Pierre** – Isn't there a story like this in the Bible? Crooks casting lots for the Holy Shroud?

**Frédérique** (*ironic*) – I didn't know you read the Bible...

**Pierre** (*dryly*) – It's general knowledge.

*Pierre pulls the match with the red tip. Childish disappointment shows on Josiane's face – she's a sore loser.*

**Josiane** – Darn it! I never have luck in games!

*Pierre takes out a cigarette and ostentatiously lights it with his match. He takes a puff with satisfaction. Josiane watches him.*

**Josiane** – You smoke now?

**Pierre** – Yes... Yes, for about forty years. Haven't you noticed?

**Josiane** – I read in a magazine the other day that each cigarette shortens life by ten minutes.

*After a pause, to Pierre.*

**Josiane** – How many cigarettes a day do you smoke?

**Pierre** – According to my calculations, I should have been dead for six months already. I don't understand.

**Josiane** – And you, Frédérique? You don't smoke?

**Frédérique** – Occasionally. Lights.

**Pierre** – Frédérique, even if she smoked joints, they would be lights.

**Josiane** – Oh, you know, lights are as harmful as the others, huh! Maybe even more.

**Pierre** – I can't remember who compared life to a bottle of booze or something. Everyone gets one at birth. Some take a little drop every day to digest, others empty it bottoms up and get a good buzz.

**Frédérique** (*ironic*) – Isn't that La Fontaine, in his fable "The Grasshopper and the Ant"?

**Pierre** – The big themes are universal... Of course, you can also be both grasshopper and ant at different times. In the '70s, you were dressing like a hippie too, don't you remember? You had a boyfriend with long hair who played the guitar. What was his name again? Oh yes, Paul! He was a teacher. Remember? You might have even been a bit left-wing at that time. You might have smoked joints without filters...

**Frédérique** – All joints have filters.

**Pierre** – Just checking if you remembered... Yes, Paul sang for a few summers, and then the next winter, you married the anaesthetist.

**Frédérique** – His name is Jérôme.

**Pierre** – Carpentier, yes. Frédérique Carpentier sounds much better than Frédérique Fernandez...

**Frédérique** – Did you want me to keep my maiden name? I don't claim my Spanish origins, if that's what you mean.

**Pierre** – Still. You could have told your kids they were vaguely cousins with their Portuguese cleaning lady. They seem to think cleaning ladies are a different race.

**Frédérique** – You're delusional!

**Pierre** (*laughing*) – Do you realise what you escaped? Dad actually called Jeff Jesus. He could have named you Mercedes. I mean, it would be silly to have the same name as your husband's car.

*Josiane looks worse and worse, but in the heat of the argument, no one really pays attention to her.*

**Josiane** – Oh my, it's spinning... I feel like my head is a watermelon...

**Pierre** – Well, yes! You've changed a lot since the '70s. I remember that during De Gaulle's referendum in '69, you argued with Dad because he was voting yes. You said it was a plebiscite. You must have learned that word at school the day before. But it impressed me. That you dared to call De Gaulle a dictator in front of Dad. I admired you for that...

**Frédérique** – You can't stay adolescent forever. Besides, it's not like you've become a rebel either. Back then, you read Rock&Folk. Now you read La Vie Financière...

**Pierre** – But I don't vote for the National Front...

**Frédérique** – Oh, come on! Just once! It was a protest vote...

**Pierre** – You could have protested by voting for the Revolutionary Communist League or the Flying Saucer Party. Why specifically the National Front? Since you don't share its ideas at all.

**Frédérique** – I don't have to justify myself.

**Jeff** (*trying to calm things down*) – Well, we should get going...

**Pierre** (*checking his watch*) – It's in an hour!

**Jeff** – If it's going to be spent arguing...

**Josiane** (*in a weak voice*) – He's right. For once that we're all together, you could make an effort, Pierre!

**Pierre** – Well, no! I'm tired of making efforts, precisely. And stop it, huh! Together! What brings us together? We came to collect our check. In an hour, we'll each go our separate ways, and we'll probably never see each other again. We need to stop with this hypocrisy!

**Jeff** – There's no point in arguing.

**Pierre** – Listen, Jeff. You're nice. But come down to earth a bit! Do you know what your dear sisters say about you behind your back? That you're nice, indeed, but you sank Dad's company because you can't get up in the morning.

*Jeff freezes.*

**Frédérique** (*getting up*) – I never said that!

**Pierre** – True. It's like in politics; you don't even have the courage of your opinions. Josiane, at least, has the merit of saying what she thinks.

**Josiane** (*fanning herself with *Le Chasseur Français**) – Maybe I should go get some fresh air...

**Frédérique** – Wait, who are you to give lessons to everyone...?

**Pierre** – I might not be much, but what I have, I didn't just say yes in front of the mayor to get it.

**Frédérique** (*shaken*) – What exactly do you mean?

**Pierre** – You think you're superior to us because you have a huge mansion and an expensive car. But apart from finding your nouveau riche life completely pathetic, what have you done to have all this? Marry an anaesthetist and give him two ill-mannered children! Life is not a general anaesthesia...

**Frédérique** (*getting up to face him*) – And what have you done so extraordinary in your life? You think you're a writer because you've translated three cheesy novels. A screenwriter because you've come up with some dumb sitcoms.

**Pierre** – Your kids watch those dumb sitcoms. And those cheesy novels, if you weren't ashamed to buy them, you'd read them too. Besides, you don't need to. Your whole life is a sappy romance novel. But have you noticed, in those romances, the story ends when the young nurse marries the rich doctor. Nothing about the thrilling life of housewives. Or else it's *Madame Bovary*...

**Frédérique** – Well, as far as you are concerned, you're not close to getting married... You've always lived like a selfish person. I wonder what kind of woman would want you. You'll end up a bachelor...

**Pierre** – I'd rather end up a bachelor than an old fool.

**Frédérique** – It's not mutually exclusive...

*Josiane seems ready to faint, but no one notices.*

**Josiane** – I hope I'm not going to pass out... My ears are buzzing...

**Pierre** – You see, what I can't stand about you is not that your standard of living is oversized compared to your intellectual quotient; it's that you still manage to think that the minimum wage of the Arabs picking up your trash affects your vacation budget. Your vacations at the Club Med, with a few organised outings outside the camp to observe the locals' customs. Without getting out of the SUV...

*Frédérique and Pierre lock eyes. Suddenly Josiane collapses. The other three, bewildered, finally turn to her and rush to her side.*

**Frédérique** – Josiane? Are you okay?

*Frédérique slaps her sister's cheeks harder and harder to revive her. Josiane reacts but remains more or less unconscious.*

**Pierre** – Maybe we should take her to the hospital.

***Fade to black.***



## Afternoon

*The four of them return. Frédérique gives her arm to Josiane.*

**Josiane** – Oh, I'm fine now, you know.

**Jeff** – Maybe you should lie down for a bit, no...?

**Josiane** – We have to go back to the notary's office now. We're probably already late. And you need my signature.

**Jeff** – I called them to postpone the appointment. You can go rest.

**Josiane** – Well...

*Josiane heads towards the bedroom, accompanied by Frédérique.*

**Pierre** – Do you think it was our argument earlier that put her in this state? I didn't know she was that sensitive...

**Jeff** – I don't understand. I had tuna too, and I'm fine... Frédérique might be right; it could be an allergy.

**Pierre** – I think if she were allergic to tuna, at her age, she would have noticed by now. It's not the first time in her life she's eaten tuna. If it were, I don't know, a panda steak with eucalyptus oil, I might consider it. But a slice of tuna in Provencal sauce...

**Jeff** – What did the doctor say?

**Pierre** – I don't know. Frédérique was with her.

*Frédérique returns.*

**Jeff** – So? Is it an allergy?

**Frédérique** – No...

**Pierre** – Food poisoning?

**Frédérique** – It has nothing to do with what she ate...

*The other two are starting to get a little intrigued.*

**Jeff** – I suspected as much...

**Pierre** (*sarcastic*) – So what is it then? Early signs of menopause...?

**Frédérique** – Josiane has the mumps... The doctor gave her antibiotics...

**Jeff** (*surprised*) – The mumps? Isn't that a childhood disease?

**Pierre** (*joking*) – So what? Given her mental age...

*Faced with the disapproving looks of the other two, Pierre tries to lighten the mood.*

**Pierre** – Okay, okay... It's not the end of the world.

**Frédérique** – No, but Jérôme says that when you catch childhood diseases as an adult, there can be complications.

**Jeff** – What kind of complications?

**Frédérique** – For pregnant women with rubella, fetal malformations.

**Pierre** (*laughing*) – If that's all... In Josiane's case...

**Frédérique** (*slyly*) – With mumps, testicular infections leading to potential permanent sterility in men.

*Pierre freezes and digests this information. Silence.*

**Pierre** (*to Jeff, feigning detachment*) – Did you have the mumps when you were little?

**Jeff** – Yes... Didn't you?

**Pierre** – I don't know...

*Josiane returns. Pierre takes a step back.*

**Josiane** – I couldn't sleep, so...

**Jeff** – We're early. I said we'd be there around five.

*Josiane's phone rings. She answers, still speaking loudly, with the same affected friendliness as during the first call.*

**Josiane** – Hello, yes... Yes, it's me... Yes, hello... (*Changing tone, more natural*) Oh, sorry, Pascal, I didn't recognise your voice. How are you...? (*Shocked*) Your wife...? A car accident... Oh, darn... I'm really sorry... Oh, yeah, I see... Poor thing... And how old was she...? Oh, yeah, that's not much... And she's really dead...? Well, yeah, if they told you... Listen, the insurance will reimburse you... How many miles did she have on the clock? Oh, even so... And your wife, is she okay? Well, that's the main thing, right? She wasn't at fault, at least...? Oh, if we can't even stop on the emergency lane to answer the phone...! They should make up their minds... Friday? Yes... Yes, okay, Pascal... Goodbye.

*She hangs up.*

**Josiane** – That was my dentist.

*The others look at her, astonished. Josiane realises*

**Josiane** – Well, I say my dentist because he is a dentist. We do theatre together...

*A moment of shock.*

**Jeff** – You do theatre with your dentist?

**Josiane** – Well, yes.

**Pierre** – A dentist involved in theatre... I thought that was genetically impossible. He must be a mutant.

**Frédérique** – Are you sure he's a dentist?

**Pierre** – He wouldn't say that just to brag, would he...

**Josiane** – It's my front teeth that I'm worried about... He cemented them for me, but I don't know how long it will hold... What can you do... We all have rotten teeth in the family.

**Pierre** – One more flaw we inherited from our parents.

**Frédérique** – With your inheritance, you can afford implants. Like me...

**Josiane** – Breast implants?

**Frédérique** – Dental implants!

**Josiane** – Ah... At the same time, I don't know if it's worth it anymore... From the age of sixty, you know, we settle for the temporary. When we get something redone, it's like with cars. We think, well. If it lasts a few more years... maybe another part will give out before.

**Pierre** – It's funny, I didn't know about this passion for automobiles of yours...

**Jeff** (*looking at his watch*) – Well, we really have to go now. Josiane, are you sure you're okay?

**Josiane** (*getting up, full of energy*) – Of course! I'm not dead yet, you know! Not until I've received my inheritance...

**Jeff** – Do you have the parents' family record book? The notary wanted a photocopy...

*Josiane searches her bag, takes out the document, and displays it.*

**Josiane** – Here it is!

**Pierre** (*intrigued*) – Can I see it?

*Josiane seems to hesitate.*

**Josiane** – Why...?

*The others look at her, intrigued by her reluctance.*

**Pierre** – I don't know, I've never seen it... I'm not even sure I know the third middle name of my paternal grandmother...

*Josiane hands him the family record book, and Pierre flips through it while the others get ready to leave.*

**Pierre** – Well, I bet you don't know what time I was born either...? You already can't remember my birthday...

*The others ignore Pierre's irony. He continues to flip through the family record book, and his smile fades.*

**Pierre** (*reading*) – Fifth child...

*Pierre, no longer joking, turns to the others, who are also frozen.*

**Pierre** – Did you know we were five?

**Josiane** (*after a moment*) – Well... Yes...

**Frédérique** – I think so... I wasn't sure...

*Jeff, not really moved, searches his pockets.*

**Jeff** – Where did I put my keys again...

**Pierre** – Is that all the reaction you have to learning at the same time that you had a little sister and she died...

*Jeff stops searching for his keys, realising the gravity of this information. Frédérique leans over the family record book over Pierre's shoulder.*

**Frédérique** – Emilie. Deceased on... She was fifteen days old...

**Pierre** – Fifteen days is a long time... You have time to get attached... (*To Josiane*)  
So, you knew? Why didn't you tell us anything?

**Josiane** – Mom never talked about it... What would it have changed?

***Blackout.***

## Evening

*The four siblings enter the room, coming from outside. They remove their coats in silence. Pierre and Frédérique sit down.*

**Josiane** (*with affected cheerfulness*) – Well, it deserves a celebration, doesn't it?

*The others look at her. A heavy atmosphere is palpable. They are torn between the satisfaction of settling an important matter and the feeling that a chapter of their lives has just turned. Josiane, who seems oblivious to these subtleties, searches in a cupboard.*

**Josiane** – I think I saw a bottle of sparkling wine around here. We can't leave it for them. It might be a little warm, but anyway...

*She takes the bottle from the cupboard, along with four glasses.*

**Frédérique** – I think I'll pass. Sparkling wine doesn't agree with me too well...

**Josiane** (*opening the bottle*) – Come on, you'll toast with us!

*Josiane pours her a glass without waiting. Frédérique lets it happen. Josiane hands out the glasses.*

**Pierre** (*ironic*) – What are we toasting to?

**Jeff** (*without joy*) – To the sale.

**Josiane** – To our checks!

*They clink glasses.*

**Josiane** – That physiotherapist was cute... (*To Jeff*) Is he married?

**Jeff** – I don't think so...

**Frédérique** – He seemed a bit effeminate, didn't he?

**Josiane** – In any case, I would have asked him for a few massages... But it would have been a shame to give him the mumps. It seems that sometimes, in men... Right, Frédérique?

**Pierre** (*annoyed*) – Okay, that's enough...

**Frédérique** – Anyway, he wasn't very old. It's curious to buy a country house at that age... (*Emotional*) It feels strange to think that this house is sold. That we won't come back here anymore...

**Jeff** – Yes. The summers were nice...

**Pierre** – We hadn't been coming here much already...

**Frédérique** – In any case, it's been a long time since we came here together...

**Josiane** – Fourteen years.

*The others look at her, surprised.*

**Josiane** (*with a frozen smile*) – The last time the four of us were here together. Fourteen years ago.

*The other three remain perplexed by this precision, showing a sensitivity generally well hidden in Josiane.*

**Josiane** – We celebrated Bruno's birthday. He still talks about it when we look at the photos. We threw him a nice party... It was a year before my divorce... At that time, I also would have liked to see you more often.

*The others fall silent, uncomfortable, even though Josiane maintains her smile.*

**Josiane** – Are you leaving tonight, Frédérique?

**Frédérique** – Yes, normally... Well, I'm not obliged. I have an open return...

**Jeff** – You can stay with us until tomorrow. We'll drop you off at the airport on the way.

**Pierre** (*ironic*) – Well, if you're in a hurry, go ahead... Everyone knows you're very busy...

**Jeff** (*authoritatively*) – Pierre...

*Pierre gestures to indicate that he concedes.*

**Frédérique** – Okay, fine.

**Josiane** – There you go, that way, we'll spend the evening together! As a family...

*Silence.*

**Pierre** – Do you want to go to a restaurant? It's my day of kindness, I'll treat you. With my check...

**Frédérique** – What generosity...

*Pierre makes an effort not to respond to the provocation.*

**Pierre** – Well, not to the lunch place, in any case... It was quite disgusting... What an idea to open a restaurant in a place like that...

**Josiane** – It's nicer to eat here, isn't it? It will be the last time.

**Jeff** – What are we eating?

**Josiane** – We'll figure something out. We'll clean out the cupboards.

*Jeff searches the cupboard and takes out what he finds.*

**Jeff** (*like a waiter at a fancy restaurant*) – Spaghetti aged ten years, accompanied by a small sauce from a nearly expired can.

**Josiane** – Oh, we're also starting to exceed the freshness expiration date.

*Frédérique disappears into the kitchen with the provisions. Josiane follows her. Pierre and Jeff are left alone. A moment.*

**Pierre** – I know about the business... What are you going to do?

**Jeff** – I don't know. There are still many things to sort out.

*Silence.*

**Jeff** – So, is that what you think too? That I sank the company because I wasn't up to the task?

**Pierre** – I think this company could only run with someone willing to dedicate twenty hours a day to it. Like Dad. But Dad, that was a different time. You didn't want that, and I find it normal. None of us would have done it.

**Jeff** – I shouldn't have agreed to take over.

**Pierre** – There had to be a scapegoat...

*A moment.*

**Jeff** – I might open a restaurant...

**Pierre** – A restaurant? But you don't even know how to cook spaghetti...

**Jeff** – Not a gourmet restaurant. I was thinking more of a pizzeria. Making pizzas doesn't require cooking skills. And then, of course, I'll hire staff.

**Pierre** (*worried*) – Do you have a plan already?

**Jeff** – Yes... The restaurant where we had lunch. The owner wants to sell it... That's why I took you there. To get your opinion.

*Pierre, embarrassed, doesn't respond.*

**Jeff** – Well?

**Pierre** – Why here?

**Jeff** – Why not? Catherine and I were fed up with the Paris region. And for the kids, it will be great. There's accommodation above. We'll breathe the countryside air. Now that the company is closing... I need to find a new direction. What do you think?

**Pierre** (*uncomfortable*) – Well... It's not in a great location, is it?

**Jeff** – It's next to the train station.

**Pierre** – There are only two trains a day.

**Jeff** – There's a terrace.

**Pierre** – Yes. Stuck between the railway and the road. It's a bit unfortunate for the countryside. And the terrace is only for good weather. Here, in summer, it's fine. But the rest of the year, it's not very busy, right? We weren't on top of each other at noon... Why do you think the owner is selling?

**Jeff** (*disappointed*) – With reasoning like that, we'd never do anything... We need to attract people and build loyalty, for sure. But there's no pizzeria in the area. I'm sure it can work. Just because we're by the sea doesn't mean we want to eat fish every day.

**Pierre** – Pizzas, either.

*A moment.*

**Pierre** – Have you already committed to this restaurant deal?

**Jeff** – Yes... I signed the sales contract... I found out the restaurant was for sale when I came to take care of the house. We had to act fast. We made the decision...

**Pierre** – So now, what do you want me to say? If you wanted to ask for my opinion, why didn't you do it before?

**Jeff** – Because I was sure you'd criticise. Of course, you always know everything. Everything goes well for you.

**Pierre** – Stop. It's been over a year since I wrote anything, or at least sold anything... It's not my style to complain, that's all. But I've had quite a few failures, believe me. And not just in my professional life...

*Pierre can see that his brother is offended.*

**Pierre** – I'm sorry, Jeff. You ask for my opinion, and I give it to you. But I'm not a restaurant specialist either. I could be wrong. I'm just willing to be wrong...

*The tension eases.*

**Pierre** – So, do you also think like Frédérique, that I'm selfish and pretentious?

**Jeff** – I think you should try to be a bit more lenient... Understand others...

**Pierre** – I know. I shouldn't have talked like that to Frédérique earlier.

**Jeff** – You've always been the family's troublemaker... But you're right. It's not good to always accept everything without saying anything.

**Pierre** – I just wanted us to stay a bit closer to each other. A bit more supportive.

**Jeff** – We were never very supportive, you know... It's just that you don't remember well. When we were kids, we played the worst pranks on each other. Once, you even chased me in the garden with a hammer... I've never been so scared in my life. Do you remember?

**Pierre** – Yes...

**Jeff** – I always wanted to ask you. If you had caught me that day, would you really have smashed my skull?



**Pierre** – Probably not. But I was so happy to have scared you. I was the youngest, you see. For once, someone was afraid of me, and it was exhilarating. After that, Frédérique told me I was crazy. She seemed so convinced that for a long time, I wondered if I really was. Sometimes, I still wonder... You're right, the four of us never really got along. It's the myth of the good old times. In the end, nothing has changed...

**Jeff** – What has changed is that back then, we had to put up with each other. After selling the house, there's nothing forcing us to do that anymore. Now is when we need to get along. If we want our children to have uncles and aunts.

**Pierre** – Our children... I do not have any... And then... What do we have left in common?

**Jeff** – Nothing. Nothing that can't be divided by four.

**Pierre** – Do you regret selling the house?

**Jeff** – Anyway, it's too late.

**Pierre** – It already was before we signed, right? I couldn't see myself spending my summer vacations here with Jérôme, crying over the Social Security deficit and the taxes that strangle liberal professions in France... I'm surprised he never made the connection, by the way. It's true, if Social Security is in deficit, it's because these people earn too much money, right?

*Suddenly, the lights go out.*

**Jeff** – Damn, a power outage.

**Pierre** – There are matches on the mantelpiece.

**Jeff** – What we need is water...

**Pierre** – What?

**Jeff** – Pass me the water bottle on the table.

*Pierre hands him the bottle, not understanding. Jeff fills the carbide lamp on the mantelpiece, strikes a match, and lights the lamp. A faint glow illuminates the room.*

**Pierre** – What is this?

**Jeff** – Don't you remember?

**Pierre** – No...

**Jeff** – It rained all day. Quite rare here in August. Dad decided to take us snail hunting. He dragged us to all the hardware stores in the area to find this contraption.

**Pierre** – Oh yes, the carbide lamp...

**Jeff** – Even though we had two or three flashlights at home. I wonder why he needed a carbide lamp to go snail hunting. It must have reminded him of his youth.

**Pierre** – How does it work?

**Jeff** – Carbide is a kind of coal. Water drips onto it, and it produces a gas that burns.

**Pierre** – I didn't remember that.

**Jeff** – In the end, you didn't come with us. Dad woke us up at four in the morning. But that morning, you couldn't get out of bed...

*A moment.*

**Jeff** – We went alone, the two of us. It was funny. He spoke in a low voice, as if he was afraid the snails would run away hearing us approach. We brought back a full bucket... The next morning, they were everywhere in the house. We forgot to put a lid on the bucket. A snail can travel quite a distance in one night...

*A moment.*

**Jeff** – I think Dad was disappointed that you didn't come with us...

*The lights come back on.*

**Pierre** – That wasn't long.

*Jeff turns off the lamp. Silence. Pierre, embarrassed, changes the subject.*

**Pierre** – And your little family, how are they?

**Jeff** – Catherine started training as a junior accountant. That way, she can manage the accounts at the restaurant. I don't think I'm cut out for that...

**Pierre** – And your children? It's been a long time since I've seen them...

**Jeff** – They're doing well.

**Pierre** – Funny. I'm not saying this to please you, but I've never seen such well-behaved children.

**Jeff** – That's because you don't see them often...

**Pierre** (*smiling*) – You're right. We should be able to choose our children. And children their parents...

**Jeff** (*amused*) – You know what you just said is pretty silly, right?

**Pierre** – I know. It's because I don't have children. It would scare me, actually, to have one. Especially a boy. What if he looks like me... I'm not sure I could really tell him why life is worth living. In the end, I'm like dad. I wouldn't know how to tell my son that...

**Jeff** – Maybe it'll be a girl...

*Pierre gets up, troubled.*

**Pierre** – Excuse me, I need to make a phone call.

*Pierre takes out his mobile phone and is about to leave. As Jeff heads towards the bedrooms, Pierre remains in the room.*

**Pierre** – It's me... Yes, I know... but it wasn't the right time to tell them that. I argued with my sister again... Oh, as usual, but this time, I told her everything that had been bothering me. I shouldn't have, but it feels good... (*Changing tone, with false casualness*) So, did you call the lab...? Negative! (*Sighing, relieved*) Wow... I'm still more reassured! I admit I was a little apprehensive. Even though I take no risks, statistically, at fifty, a bachelor like me... Even with the monastic life I led before meeting you... (*Worried again*) By the way, when you get home, could you check in my health record in the bottom drawer of my desk if I've ever had mumps?

*Jeff returns and sits back down. Pierre, embarrassed, goes towards the bedrooms to finish his phone call. Frédérique comes from the kitchen, a sponge in hand.*

**Pierre** (*moving away*) – No, I'll explain... No, of course, it's not urgent, but...

*Pierre disappears into the bedrooms. Frédérique wipes the table. She looks at Jeff sitting impassively while she's busy.*

**Frédérique** (*joking*) – Everything alright?

**Jeff** (*concerned*) – Yes...

*A moment.*

**Jeff** (*choosing his words*) – You know, don't be too hard on Pierre...

**Frédérique** (*hurt*) – This time, he crossed the line. No one had ever talked to me like that. Do you think I can accept without flinching what he said to me earlier?

**Jeff** – He, too, often had to endure a lot without saying anything... And to be honest, he's not the only one...

*Frédérique looks at him, a little surprised.*

**Jeff** – Listen, Frédérique, I didn't appreciate either Jérôme's vulgar jokes on the night of mom's funeral. We could have taken the opportunity to get together a bit... as a family. He should have shown some respect... (*A pause, with suppressed anger*) Next time he will stay in his place, or he'll get my fist in his face.

*Frédérique is surprised by this unusual display of authority from Jeff.*

**Frédérique** (*unsettled*) – I'm sorry... I know, he was awful. I told him after, I swear...

**Jeff** – After, it was too late...

**Frédérique** – Anyway, it won't happen again...

**Jeff** – That's for sure, Frédérique. You don't bury your parents twice... (*Getting up*) There are appointments we can't afford to miss. We missed too many, the four of us...

**Frédérique** (*trying to press on*) – But him, too, don't you think he could be a little more tolerant...?

**Jeff** – I'll put a tablecloth.

*Pierre comes back from his room. Josiane arrives with a camera.*

**Josiane** – What if we took one last photo of all four of us here? I have a self-timer!

*The others seem a bit embarrassed, but Josiane has already placed the camera on the table after setting the timer. The four take their places in front of the fireplace, in the same position and with the same awkward look as in the school portrait. The flash goes off. They separate. Josiane puts away her camera.*

**Josiane** – I'll have four copies made and framed... It will be your Christmas present.

*A moment.*

**Josiane** – Well, I'll put the spaghetti on to cook.

*Jeff and Frédérique also get up.*

**Jeff** – I'll open the can.

**Frédérique** – I'm setting the table.

**Pierre (joking)** – I really can't see what else I could do...

**Frédérique** – You can help me set the table...

*Jeff and Josiane disappear into the kitchen. Frédérique and Pierre set the table in silence, then sit down. Pierre looks rather cheerful. He whistles.*

**Frédérique** – You suddenly seem very cheerful. Is it the sale of the house or the prospect of never seeing us again that delights you so much?

**Pierre** – For mumps, don't know yet, but I just found out I'm not HIV positive...

*Frédérique is a bit surprised.*

**Pierre** – I met someone. We took the test...

**Frédérique (coldly)** – Congratulations... But be careful. Couple life is the beginning of bourgeois life. Isn't that what you thought not so long ago?

**Pierre** – Okay, I'm sorry for earlier. But it had to come out. It must be the midlife crisis. *(A pause)* You know, I haven't really become what I dreamed of being either.

**Frédérique** – At least you tried...

**Pierre** – Yes. Yes, I tried. But I didn't succeed... Anyway... You know what I blame you for, deep down?

**Frédérique** – Oh, because it's not over?

**Pierre** – For not having sorted things out. Thirty years ago, we at least agreed on one thing, that we didn't want to live like our parents. But by wanting to do exactly the opposite, I think you were mistaken too.

*Frédérique, holding back tears, looks at the fireplace.*

**Frédérique** – I'm cold.

**Pierre** – Too bad there's no wood...

**Frédérique** – It has never been used. It would be a shame to dirty it now...

*Awkward silence.*

**Pierre** – Did you know the company was going bankrupt?

**Frédérique** – What company?

**Pierre** – Dad's company! Well, Jeff's...

**Frédérique** – No...

**Pierre** – Josiane told me this morning. You would have known anyway.

**Frédérique** – I suspected it would end like this.

**Pierre** – It's probably for the best, in the end.

**Frédérique** – Sure, he wasn't really cut out for business...

**Pierre** – Especially family business.

**Frédérique** – With the money from the house, maybe he can start something of his own...

**Pierre** – Yes...

*Silence.*

**Frédérique** – Jérôme and I are getting divorced...

**Pierre** (*taken aback*) – Oh really...? Why...?

**Frédérique** – Well... His assistant is also named Frédérique. Let's say he tends to confuse us... At the clinic, he mistakes her for his wife, but younger. And at home, he takes me for his maid...

**Pierre** – I'm sorry about that...

**Frédérique** (*amused*) – Don't tell me that not seeing Jérôme anymore breaks your heart...

**Pierre** (*relaxing*) – Breaking my heart, no. That would be an exaggeration...

**Frédérique** – For me too, I think it's for the best. The kids are grown up. I can finally exist a little on my own.

**Pierre** – Ah, existing on your own! Be careful; it's not always easy every day. It's a future ex-bachelor who tells you that!

**Frédérique** – You know, being a couple isn't always rosy either, you'll see. It's a future ex-housewife who tells you that... But I wouldn't want to discourage you. I just hope that, at least, you won't leave your wife for someone younger in ten years.

**Pierre** (*amused*) – My wife...? Anyway, in ten years, I'll be almost sixty. And from that side, no risk. I skipped a step. I'm going directly with someone younger...

**Frédérique** – How old?

**Pierre** – Twenty-eight...

**Frédérique** – You take them straight from the cradle...

**Pierre** – I always take them at the same age. It's me who's getting older...

**Frédérique** – That won't stop me from coming to your wedding. If you invite me...

**Pierre** – Marriage is certainly not on the horizon. But maybe for my civil partnership...

*A moment. They look at each other.*

**Pierre** – You're the first in the family I'm telling this to...

**Frédérique** (*emotional*) – Why me?

**Pierre** – I guess I don't hate you as much as it seems. And I remember that you were also the first to tell me about your marriage. Or rather, you told me that Jérôme had proposed to you. You were waiting for my blessing to say yes. Oh, I knew it was just a game. Nevertheless, I was glad you gave me that mark of trust. Like an idiot, I told you to go ahead and marry him! If only I had known... He was nicer back then.

**Frédérique** – Yes...

**Pierre** – He had long hair... Well, he had hair... It's crazy how things have a tendency to degenerate. For me, at the beginning, you were the image of the ideal family.

**Frédérique** – You know, I'm not sure the ideal family exists...

*Josiane comes back with a dish of spaghetti. Jeff follows her with a few pieces of wood in his hands.*

**Jeff** – There was an old chair in the kitchen, completely eaten by worms. We can use it for a bit of fire.

**Pierre** – There are some old sentimental novels there for kindling. I even think I wrote some of them...

**Josiane** – By the way, I suggest we burn all the furniture. For what they're worth! The move will be faster!

*Jeff lights the fire. They all watch the flames, pensive.*

**Pierre** – It reminds me of an image from my history book when I was in elementary school. I don't know why, but it stuck with me. It depicted a Renaissance ceramist, breaking his furniture at home to keep his wood-burning oven alive and fire his enamels. It was presented as a heroic act. The destitute artist sacrificing everything for his art. It's funny. I have almost no memories of my childhood. Why do I remember that?

**Frédérique** – It reminds me of a song: books in the fire, the teacher in the middle! It's the first subversive slogan I learned in kindergarten. I thought it would really happen like that at the end of my first year of school. And then no... We just went home, and we were bored all summer.

**Josiane** (*watching the books burn*) – I had a French teacher when I was in high school. A guy without age. Not very old but completely extinguished. I found out that in '68, he burned all the books in his library, in public. A kind of auto-da-fé, in a burst of revolutionary enthusiasm. After that, I didn't see him the same way. I observed him in class. I wondered what remained of that touch of madness.

*A moment.*

**Pierre** – Jeff?

**Jeff** (*smiling*) – I lit the fire. Isn't that enough for you?

*They still watch the fire in silence. Josiane takes a piece of the chair to put it in the fireplace. She stops, intrigued, examines the piece of wood, and weighs it.*

**Josiane** – It's weird. It's all light. It looks completely eaten from the inside...

*The others, still in their reverie, don't pay attention to her.*

**Josiane** – I read something about termites in *Le Chasseur Français*. It seems terrible. You can't see them. They silently eat everything, bit by bit, for years. Everything made of wood. Up to the framework... And one fine day, the roof of the house falls on you, without warning.

*The three others look at each other, not knowing whether to laugh or worry. They look at the ceiling. Jeff takes the piece of wood and examines it.*

**Frédérique** – So?

**Jeff** (*doubtful*) – It might just be worms. But I don't know. I've never seen termites... What do they look like?

**Pierre** (*to Josiane*) – Wasn't there a picture in your article?

**Josiane** – I didn't pay attention. They live in a community, like ants or bees.

**Pierre** – But they don't make honey...

*Josiane examines the chair she's sitting on.*

**Josiane** – This one is already well attacked too.

*The others cast a worried look at their chairs, as if suddenly afraid that they might collapse under their weight.*

**Pierre** – Maybe we should take a look at the framework in the attic.

**Jeff** (*getting up*) – I don't know if we have a ladder.

*Pierre gets up too and goes out with Jeff. Josiane and Frédérique watch them leave, worried.*

**Frédérique** – Darn it! That would be a disaster!

**Josiane** – No kidding. If the roof collapses on us tonight. (*Pause*) Fortunately, we just signed the deal.

*Frédérique looks at her, outraged.*

**Frédérique** – Wait! If that's really the case, we can't act like we don't know.

**Josiane** – We didn't know when we signed...

**Frédérique** – That would be fraud! And we can't take such responsibility! Imagine if the new owners get buried under the debris. They might have children...

**Josiane** – Oh, that's their problem, huh... When you buy a house, you check the framework...

*A moment.*

**Josiane** – Or we could set it on fire before leaving. The insurance will pay. Fires happen every day...

**Frédérique** – The day after selling the house? They'll find it suspicious. There will be an investigation. Insurance fraud can be costly.

*Jeff and Pierre come back.*

**Josiane** – So?

**Jeff** – Hard to say. We don't see much. It's certain that the framework is a bit rotten, but it's not exactly in its prime either. We should have this examined by a specialist.

**Frédérique** – That would be better, wouldn't it? We could get into trouble...

**Pierre** – I don't know the legislation on this. But it's certain that the buyer could sue us. If he realises we sold him a house infested with termites. Just replacing the framework would cost him half the price of the house.

**Josiane** – And for us, if we have to pay for a new framework, there's no point in selling this house.

**Pierre** (*sighing*) – That's what I thought... It was too easy.

**Frédérique** – So what do we do?

**Jeff** – We'll see tomorrow, but it would be better to put the sale on hold until an inspection is done. We'd be safer that way. We don't want to end up with a lawsuit in a year.

**Frédérique** – With damages to pay...

**Josiane** – What a legacy! I was wondering where all that dust was coming from, too...

**Frédérique** (*getting up*) – I think we'd better go to bed.

**Josiane** (*worried*) – Do you think it's safe to sleep here? Maybe we should go to a hotel?

**Pierre** – Statistically, it would be the devil's own luck for this house to come crashing down on us tonight, especially when we haven't been here together for fourteen years.



*They are about to head towards the bedrooms.*

**Jeff** (*joking*) – Just try not to sneeze too loudly.

*They laugh.*

***Fade out.***

## Next morning

*Frédérique, sitting alone in the living room, smokes a cigarette while finishing her coffee. She is already dressed and wearing makeup. Josiane enters in a nightgown and doesn't look very fresh. She tries to unclog her ears with her little finger.*

**Josiane** – I feel like I have plugged ears... I'm sure this damned kids gave me mumps...

**Frédérique** (*perplexed*) – Who?

**Josiane** – In the train! This bunch of Portuguese guys...

*Frédérique prefers not to insist.*

**Josiane** – And those spaghetti made me thirsty. I hope the sauce wasn't expired for too long. (*Pouring a glass of water and looking at her sister*) Oh, you look terrible too...

**Frédérique** (*annoyed*) – I didn't sleep well, that's all...

**Josiane** – Isn't it because of your argument with Pierre yesterday at noon? You know him, he always has to say out loud what others are thinking silently...

*Frédérique looks at her, puzzled, but prefers not to respond. Josiane pours herself a cup of coffee.*

**Josiane** – I didn't sleep well either. It's because of those termites. I dreamed they were eating us too during the night. Starting with the brains.

*Frédérique looks perplexed. Josiane dips her lips into her coffee and grimaces while holding her stomach.*

**Josiane** – This coffee makes me nauseous... (*Pause*) I think I'm going to vomit...

*Josiane leaves and crosses paths with Pierre, who arrives, not very awake.*

**Pierre** – Damn! You don't look fresh either.

**Frédérique** (*sarcastic*) – Thanks. Josiane just told me the same thing.

*Pierre pours himself a coffee.*

**Pierre** – I meant for myself too... Past fifty, when Cinderella goes to bed after midnight... The next morning, she has a head like a pumpkin...

**Frédérique** – Are you comparing yourself to Cinderella?

**Pierre** – You women can always put on makeup before going out in the street.

**Frédérique** – I'm already wearing makeup...

*Pierre stirs his coffee.*

**Pierre** – Sorry. It's the approach of Christmas. It depresses me. I have to be unpleasant with everyone, I don't know why. Well, I have a bit of an idea...

*Silence.*

**Frédérique** – One day, Dad took me aside in his car before going to work. I must have been five or six. He announced me that Santa Claus didn't exist. Just like that. I hadn't asked him anything. At first, I was quite proud. It made me a big girl. But I soon understood what he meant by that...

**Pierre** – Every time he wanted to remind us of how naive we were, he would throw it at us ironically: you still believe in Santa Claus!

**Frédérique** – To get back at him, I, in turn, revealed to the teacher's daughter that Santa Claus didn't exist. The next morning, her mother slapped me twice... Not only did Santa Claus not exist, but I had to keep it to myself!

**Pierre** – Should we always forgive our parents... just because they may have had an unhappy childhood too?

**Frédérique** – I thought that becoming a mother myself would make me more lenient with mine. But no. It just allowed me to realise the extent of the affection they failed to give us.

*Josiane comes back, dressed, with a garbage bag in hand.*

**Josiane** – Jeff isn't ready yet? He's always the last one up... Well, I'm going to throw the rest of the spaghetti, or it'll stink. With that sauce, it didn't smell very good when we ate them... (*Pause*) And then I vomited in the bag so as not to clog the sink...

*Stunned looks from the other two. Josiane leaves with the garbage bag. Jeff arrives as well. Like the day before, he moves around blindly. But he's dressed and ready to leave. He pours himself a coffee.*

**Frédérique** – It's time to say goodbye to this house... It's the last time we're having breakfast together here. Just like when we were kids...

*Embarrassed silence.*

**Frédérique** – Nothing prevents us from seeing each other again...

**Pierre** – Yes... (*Bitterly*) But does it really do us any good?

*Josiane hurries back.*

**Josiane** (*dramatically*) – Someone stole our garbage can!

**Pierre** (*sarcastic*) – Was there something valuable inside?

*Jeff, intrigued, goes outside to check.*

**Josiane** – It's unbelievable! Can you imagine, they're even stealing garbage cans now. And mind you, we're in the countryside!

*A pause. Jeff comes back.*

**Jeff** – It wasn't stolen; it burned. Since it's plastic, there's nothing left. Luckily, it didn't set the house on fire.

*Jeff gives Josiane a suspicious look.*

**Jeff** – Did you put the fireplace ashes in the trash last night?

*Frédérique and Pierre also turn their gaze towards Josiane.*

**Josiane** – I thought there were no more embers...

**Jeff** – Seems like it was still smouldering under the ashes.

**Pierre** – We might not report it to the police then...

**Josiane** – It's incredible how these trash cans catch fire like that. It's dangerous.

*The others exchange a brief glance, accustomed to Josiane's lack of sincerity.*

**Pierre** – Maybe we should bury it in the garden this time. With the emanations from the Bolognese sauce, Josiane's vomit, and the hot coals... It could trigger an unpredictable chemical reaction.

**Jeff** (*somewhere else*) – There's a shovel in the toolshed.

*Everyone looks at him.*

**Jeff** (*understanding the message, resigned*) – Okay, I'll go...

*Josiane continues her twisted train of thought.*

**Josiane** – What was that physiotherapist's name again?

**Pierre** – William.

**Josiane** – Right, William... What a silly name... Well... To buy this run-down house... I would have given him my phone number though, but... He did seem a bit...

**Pierre** – A bit what...?

**Josiane** – Didn't you see he was gay?

*Frédérique, feeling uncomfortable, observes Pierre's reaction, who decides to speak.*

**Pierre** – I have something to tell you... Might as well say it now...

*Josiane listens. Frédérique smiles at her to encourage her.*

**Pierre** – That guy, who bought the house. William. He's... my partner.

*Frédérique is as surprised as Josiane, since she expected a different kind of coming-out.*

**Frédérique** – Well, you've decided to surprise us...

**Josiane** – The gay physiotherapist... Your partner... You mean... he bought the house on your name?

**Frédérique** – Why did you do this? We could have arranged something if you wanted to keep the house...

**Pierre** – I was afraid it would be complicated...

**Frédérique** (*sarcastic*) – Well, now it's much simpler, indeed.

**Josiane** – And then you're not making a bad deal after all...

**Pierre** – The house has been on sale for over a year. No one wanted it...

*Silence from the others, each disturbed in their own way by this revelation.*

**Pierre** – Wait, let me remind you that you just sold us a house that might be completely eaten by termites...

**Josiane** (*understanding less and less*) – Sold you...? You mean...?

*Frédérique comes to Pierre's rescue.*

**Frédérique** – It's his partner... We don't need to spell it out for you...

*Josiane finally understands.*

**Josiane** (*amused*) – Ah, okay! I thought so...

**Frédérique** (*sarcastic*) – Yes, women's intuition...

**Pierre** – You'll always be welcome in this house...

*Jeff comes back from the garden.*

**Jeff** – This is crazy!

**Frédérique** – You can say that again...

*But Jeff is talking about something else.*

**Jeff** – Look what I found while digging in the garden to bury the garbage!

*He shows a bone.*

**Josiane** – What's this?

**Pierre** – It looks suspiciously like a femur...

**Frédérique** – You mean... human remains?

**Pierre** (*to Jeff*) – Was the whole skeleton there?

**Jeff** – I didn't keep digging. I don't know what you put in that garbage bag, but it didn't smell like roses. I tossed everything in the hole and covered it up quickly.

**Josiane** – We could notify the police, but... Can you imagine? A corpse buried in our garden! We could get into trouble...

*Frédérique looks a bit embarrassed.*

**Frédérique** – If it's really a dead body, who could it possibly be?

*A pause.*

**Pierre** – It might be dad...

*The others look at him, shocked that he could make such a joke. But Pierre isn't joking.*

**Pierre** – The last time mom came here, it was with him. And after that, we never saw him again. Who's to say he really went back to the Amazon after...?

**Josiane** (*to Pierre*) – Oh my... Thank goodness your gay friend bought this house. At least, it stays in the family!

**Jeff** (*confused*) – Who's gay...?

**Josiane** – Pierre!

**Frédérique** (*not very sure of anything anymore*) – At least a sympathiser..

*Jeff processes this information. Pierre remains impassive, either not wanting to deny it or not having heard the last remark, absorbed as he is in contemplating the presumed femur.*

**Frédérique** – Well, let's not get carried away. It could be a cow bone, for all we know.

**Pierre** – Still looks suspiciously like a femur...

**Frédérique** – You're an expert on femurs, now?

**Pierre** – My friend is a physiotherapist... I helped him study for his exams...

**Jeff** – And why would they bury a cow in our garden?

**Josiane** – Or maybe the neighbour is a serial killer, burying his victims here to avoid detection...

**Pierre** – If we have to spend vacations here again, I'd rather mom killed dad... Less risky than a psychopathic neighbour...

**Frédérique** – Well, we're not settling this now... I suggest we get out of here. We'll take the bone to Paris, and we'll see.

*Everyone agrees. To distract themselves, they get moving again for the final preparations before departure. Each goes to get their luggage. Josiane comes back with an extra large bag in addition to the suitcase she had on arrival.*

**Pierre** (*suspicious*) – Didn't you just have one suitcase when you arrived?

**Josiane** – I'm taking back a few souvenirs! At least the termites won't eat those...

**Jeff** (*to Pierre*) – Did you turn off the electricity?

**Pierre** – Yes... (*After a hesitation*) I'll double-check.

*Pierre disappears for a moment to check.*

**Pierre** – All set, we can go.

*The four siblings are about to leave the house, their bags in hand.*

**Jeff** (*with a final glance around*) – Did we forget anything?

**Pierre** – I'm taking the femur... I'll show it to William...

**Jeff** – Who's William?

**Frédérique** – We'll explain later...

**Josiane** – To think we came here to settle inheritance issues... I feel like we're not out of the woods...

*Jeff, Frédérique, and Josiane exit. Pierre is the last one. Holding a small bag, he goes to take the family portrait on the mantelpiece and looks at it for a moment with a bitter smile.*

**Pierre** – Memories... They don't take up much space, but they're heavy to carry.

*He's called from outside.*

**Frédérique** (*off*) – Pierre?

**Jeff** (*off*) – Are you coming?

**Josiane** (*off*) – What's he doing?

*Pierre puts the portrait back in its place.*

**Pierre** – I'm coming! (*He picks up the bone on the table*) Almost forgot dad's femur! (*To himself*) Now the family is finally reunited... (*Looking at the bone*) Well, it's a start...

*Pierre leaves.*

**Fade out.**

**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 brief moment of eternity*  
*A Cuckoo's nest*  
*A Hell of a Night*  
*A simple business dinner*  
*All's well that starts badly*  
*An innocent little murder*  
*Back in the spotlight*  
*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 13<sup>th</sup>*  
*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*  
*Just like a Christmas movie*  
*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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Avignon – January 2024  
© La Comédiathèque – ISBN 978-2-38602-126-8  
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Play available for free download