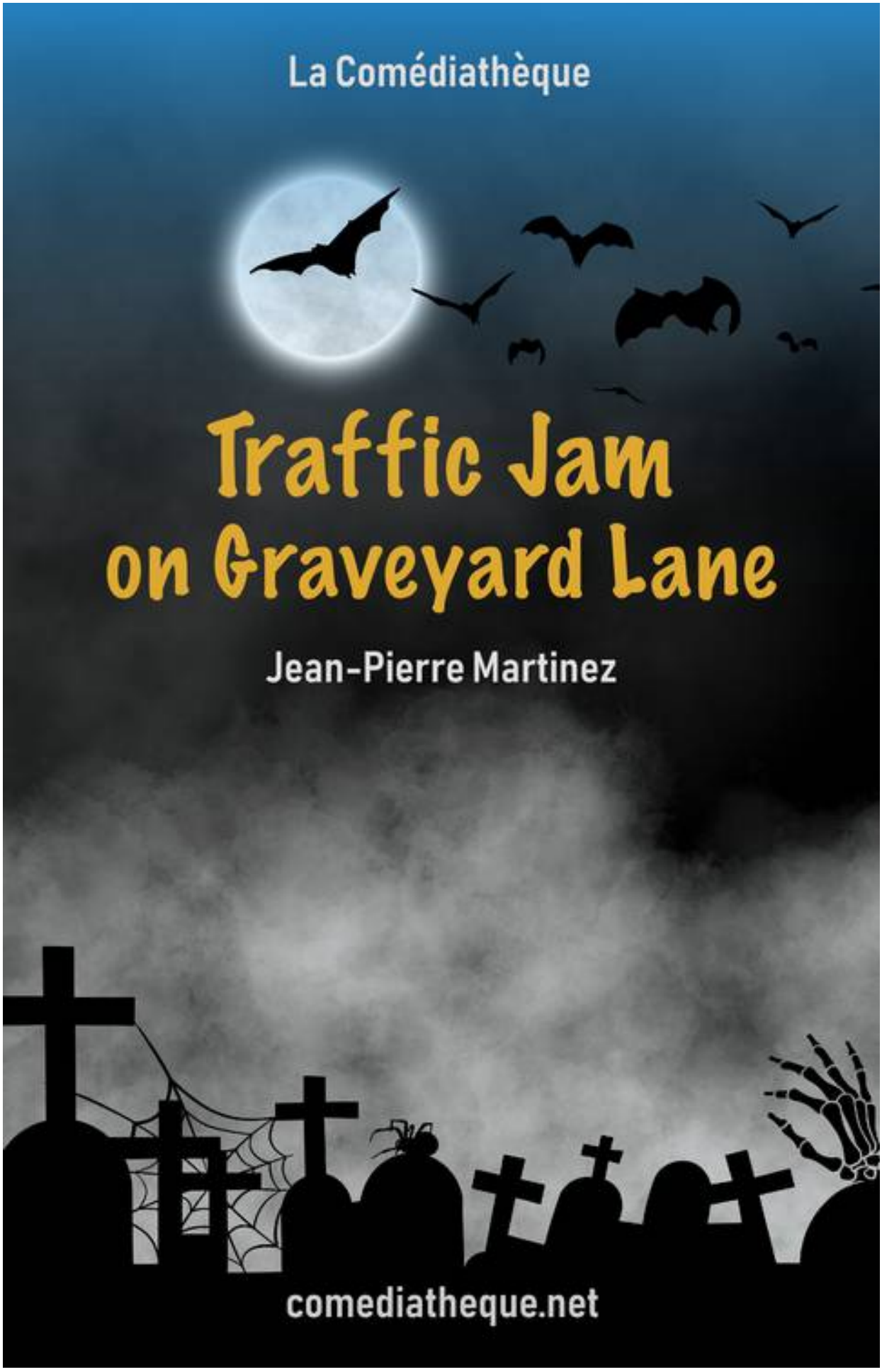

La Comédiathèque
Traffic Jam
on Graveyard Lane
Jean-Pierre Martinez
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# Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

## Jean-Pierre Martinez

***Translation by the author***

The cemetery of Beaucon-le-Château is fully occupied. To accommodate new deceased, an extension would be required. However, the owner of the adjacent park stubbornly refuses to give up even the smallest plot. Faced with this urgent situation, the mayor takes a radical step: from now on, dying will be strictly forbidden within the town's limits, under penalty of prosecution...

**Characters**

Simone (or Simon): owner of the village café
Victor (or Victorine): the village's oldest resident
Louise (or Louis): the village's other centenarian
Jacques (or Jacqueline): the mayor
Charline (or Charles): the baroness, owner of the château
Francis: the village priest

*Possible Casts*
1M/5F, 2M/4F, 3M/3F, 4M/2F, 5M/1F

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*The Café de l'Avenir — the Café of the Future — in Beaucon, a picturesque French village dominated by an old château. Behind the counter, Simone, the owner, polishes glasses. Victor, the village's oldest resident, sits at the bar over a small glass of white wine, flicking through the local paper. He lays it down with a sigh.*

**Victor** – Why do I keep reading this rag? It's nothing but bad news.

**Simone** – That's yesterday's paper. Try today's, it might be better.

*Victor dismisses the newspaper Simone holds out.*

**Victor** – Or worse.

*Victor drains his glass in one gulp.*

**Simone** – A newspaper full of good news wouldn't sell.

**Victor** – I only read the obituaries anyway.

**Simone** – Oh, well then...

**Victor** – What can I say... It's the only section where I still more or less know who they're talking about. And even then, less and less... All the old folks I knew are already dead. Now they're starting to bury the young ones.

**Simone** – The young ones? What do you call young?

**Victor** – I don't know... Eighty, eighty-five... People who could be my children, you know.

**Simone** – Good news... You won't find any in the obituaries.

**Victor** – Actually, it depends...

**Simone** – Oh yeah? On what?

**Victor** – Well... on who's died.

**Simone** – Yeah...

**Victor** – Imagine buying a house on a special deal: you pay the seller a monthly pension for as long as they live.

**Simone** – You bought a house like that? At a hundred and two?

**Victor** – No, no. I was the one who sold my house.

**Simone** – How long ago?

**Victor** – It'll be thirty-two years today. I was already seventy back then. So I can tell you, if my buyer's daughter saw my name in the obituaries, it would be pretty good news for her.

**Simone** – His daughter?

**Victor** – My buyer died about ten years ago. Apparently, he was in poor health. His daughter's the one who keeps paying me the annuity.

**Simone** – What an inheritance... And how's your health?

**Victor** – Not bad. Go on, pour me another glass of white. They say alcohol preserves you.

*Simone refills his glass. Louise, another village elder around Victor's age, enters.*

**Louise** – Good day, ladies and gentlemen.

**Victor** – Our grand old lady!

**Louise** – It's not very gentlemanly to remind me.

**Victor** – At our age, gallantry... What can we still hope for, apart from a place in the record books?

**Louise** – And I'll remind you that you're older than me.

**Victor** – Older? You were born two days after me!

**Louise** – Even so... You're the real elder here.

**Simone** – What can I get you, Louise? A coffee with brandy, as usual?

**Louise** – My stomach's a bit off this morning. Maybe I overdid the champagne last night. I'll have a gin and tonic instead.

**Victor** – Champagne?

**Louise** – As it happens, I was celebrating my 102nd birthday.

**Victor** – With family, I imagine.

**Louise** – Family, yes. Or what's left of it... I buried my husband twenty years ago and my only son last year.

**Victor** – That's one of the many downsides of being a centenarian. Our address book boils down to a few names carved in marble along the cemetery paths.

**Louise** – One shouldn't outlive their children, it's unnatural.

*Simone serves her gin and tonic.*

**Simone** – And a gin and tonic for the lady. If it doesn't finish you off, it'll set you right again. Just don't drive after.

**Louise** – Oh, I know I don't have much time left.

**Simone** – You've been saying that for twenty years, Louise. You'll outlive us all.

**Louise** – I'm not complaining, you know. I've had a good life. But what can I still hope for?

**Simone** – Who knows? You might become the oldest woman in France. Or even the oldest person in the world!

**Louise** – How old is the current record holder?

**Simone** – It's in today's paper, actually. She just died. She was 117 years old.

**Louise** – Fifteen more years to break the record... I'm not sure I have the patience...

**Simone** – So why not you, Victor?

**Victor** – Who knows which one of us will live the longest...

**Simone** – Place your bets...

**Victor** – Anyway, if you go before me, I'll make sure to get you a lovely wreath, I promise.

**Louise** – You've never given me flowers... not even for my birthday.

**Victor** – A fine wreath for a beautiful queen.

**Simone** – Are we still talking about funerals, or have we moved on to a royal coronation?

**Louise** – If you go first, I'll say a few kind words, don't worry. Even if I don't mean them...

**Victor** – Don't tell me you've already written my eulogy.

**Louise** – I'll read it to you if you like. It would be a shame if you were the only one not to hear it.

**Victor** – You're that sure I'll go before you?

**Louise** – Once you're past a hundred, living another day is about the only challenge left.

**Simone** – It's true, it's almost like a competition between you two now, isn't it?

**Victor** – Yes, there aren't many contenders left in the village apart from us. We're the two finalists, you might say.

**Louise** – You'll see, in a few years, after the Paralympics, they'll come up with Olympics for the over-100s.

**Victor** – Why not? There are more and more centenarians... and they're in great shape.

**Louise** – Sometimes I wonder if the Grim Reaper has forgotten about us...

**Victor** – She'll remember us eventually, don't worry.

*Jacques, the mayor, arrives.*

**Simone** – Good day, Mr Mayor.

**Jacques** – Good day, Simone... Dear Madam... Sir... How are our two distinguished village elders?

**Victor** – Ah, when the council starts caring about the wellbeing of the old, you know elections are near.

**Jacques** – You're being unfair, Victor. Remember, I turned the town square into a park, so our cherished seniors could sit peacefully on a bench, chat, and get some fresh air.

**Louise** – Yeah... It used to be a free parking area.

**Jacques** – Cars no longer belong in the village centre! A park is an improvement in everyone's quality of life, don't you think? Young mothers can enjoy it with their children after school as well.

**Louise** – Yeah, but... now we can't park!

**Jacques** – Don't tell me you're still driving, Louise! Especially since you don't seem to be running on lemonade...

**Louise** – I don't drive much anymore, that's true... But I'm thinking of others! And by the way, you didn't wish me a happy birthday...

**Jacques** – Your birthday...?

**Louise** – It was yesterday. The previous mayor always sent me a little note. And a gift basket...

**Jacques** – Sorry for the oversight, I've had some issues to deal with lately. But we'll fix that right away, won't we...? And... how old are you, exactly?

**Louise** – Exactly? A hundred and two.

**Jacques** – Ah, yes, that's something...

**Victor** – The mayor has a point, Louise. At our age, we don't need parking spaces anymore. Our next stop will be in an alley of the cemetery. There's always room there, no parking meters, and no risk of getting a ticket.

**Jacques** – Always room... If only...

**Simone** – Pardon?

**Jacques** – The housing crisis isn't just for the living, you know...

**Louise** – What exactly are you trying to say with your cryptic metaphors?

**Jacques** – Well... There's only one burial plot left in the village cemetery. That's what I mean.

**Victor** – Only one space? You're joking, right?

**Jacques** – I wouldn't dare joke about such a serious matter, believe me.

**Louise** – But how is such a thing even possible?

**Jacques** – How? When the cemetery becomes too small to accommodate new residents... without evicting the current ones.

**Victor** – Residents? I thought at least everyone owned their final resting place, even the poor.

**Louise** – Isn't a burial plot supposed to belong to you forever?

**Jacques** – You can believe in eternal life if you wish. But these days, even a perpetual burial plot isn't necessarily perpetual.

**Victor** – No more space in the cemetery... I can hardly believe it.

**Simone** – So what are you going to do? Start a waiting list?

**Jacques** – We need to expand, but...

**Victor** – They say governing is about planning ahead... We don't die every day in this village. You had time to make the necessary arrangements.

**Louise** – That's true. You could have extended the cemetery. Instead of building a park!

**Simone** – Come on, Louise. The mayor couldn't turn the parking area outside the town hall into a cemetery.

**Jacques** – Of course, this expansion project has been on the table for years. But...

**Simone** – But what?

**Jacques** – We still need to find land!

*Charline, the village's lady of the manor, arrives.*

**Charline** – Mr Mayor... Ladies and gentlemen... My respects...

**Jacques** – Ah... We were just talking about you, Baroness.

**Charline** – About me?

**Jacques** – Our citizens, rightly concerned as I am, were just asking why an extension of the cemetery hasn't been carried out yet to solve this issue.

**Charline** – And?

**Jacques** – I was just about to explain that the owner of the land next to the cemetery — the Baroness de Valmont, in other words, yourself — refuses to give even a small part of it to the village.

**Charline** – Give up my château grounds to extend the cemetery? I've converted the old stables into luxury guest rooms. They're the pride of the village! I won't have my distinguished guests looking out over a graveyard!

*Francis, the priest, arrives.*

**Simone** – Ah, Father, perhaps you can settle this quarrel between the aristocracy and the common people.

**Francis** – If I can offer the solace of religion... What's the matter, my child?

**Simone** – The Baroness refuses to sell a portion of her land to the council to expand the cemetery, which is now full.

**Francis** – Yes, I'm aware of this issue, unfortunately.

**Jacques** – The Baroness doesn't want her Airbnb guests to look out onto the graves of our dear departed.

**Francis** – For centuries, Beaucon's cemetery has surrounded our beautiful 12th-century church. The faithful walk through it every Sunday on their way to mass. The cemetery is part of the landscape, just as death is part of life.

**Charline** – Indeed. But nothing obliges me to sacrifice half my castle's grounds.

**Jacques** – Half? You exaggerate! At most, a tenth...

**Charline** – And when your new cemetery is full too! Are you planning to line graves all the way up to the windows of my castle?

**Jacques** – I'll return the question, Baroness. What will we do with you when you pass away, if there's no space left in the cemetery?

**Charline** – There's no rush for me, but it's your problem to solve. And if there's no room in the cemetery, I'll be buried on my estate, in my private chapel.

**Jacques** – That's just the kind of class disdain we've come to expect from privileged people like you.

**Francis** – Now, now, let's keep things civil, please. I'm sure with a bit of goodwill, we can find a solution that suits everyone. Especially for our dear future departed...

**Victor** – We're the most concerned, that's for sure. We're next on the list, right, Louise?

**Louise** – The question is, which of us will take the last spot.

**Simone** – Earlier, you were competing to live the longest and make the Guinness Book of Records. Don't tell me now it's a race to see who'll die first and get the last plot in the cemetery!

*Pause.*

**Victor** – And I suppose there's no way to make reservations...?

**Simone** – We're not talking about booking a spot at a campsite in August.

**Louise** – So, it's first come, first served? And the other will have to be buried elsewhere...

**Victor** – We were born in this village and have lived here all our lives. This is where we want to be buried!

**Simone** – Well yes, but until the cemetery is expanded...

**Victor** – People are already piling up on stretchers in hospital corridors waiting to be treated, and now the dead will have to wait to be buried too.

**Louise** – For goodness' sake... say something, Father!

**Francis** – You know the Church's position: Render unto God what is God's, and unto Caesar what is Caesar's... This matter falls under the town hall's responsibility. The Church hasn't managed cemeteries in quite some time.

**Charline** – Quite so. Ever since the Republic nationalised the property of the nobility and the clergy, right, Father?

**Jacques** – May I remind you, Baroness, that it's thanks to the Revolution that you're a lady of the manor today? It was around that time your family of slave traders acquired the estate you've inherited, wasn't it?

**Charline** – Say that again, I dare you...

**Jacques** – I took the liberty of tracing your family tree. In the 18th century, your ancestors were shipowners in the port of Bordeaux. Will you deny they were involved in the Atlantic slave trade?

**Charline** – If I were a man of your station, I'd have already hit you.

**Jacques** – If I were a man of your class, I'd have run you through with a sword.

*Francis steps in.*

**Francis** – Come now... Mr Mayor... Baroness... Calm down! Let's not resurrect old quarrels that no longer have any place today.

*Jacques and Charline make an effort to avoid coming to blows.*

**Charline** – If we hadn't let all these foreigners be buried here, our lovely cemetery wouldn't be overcrowded today...

**Jacques** – Foreigners?

**Charline** – Foreigners to the village, at the very least...

**Jacques** – Is that directed at me?

**Charline** – Your parents were Italian, I believe. And they're buried in our cemetery, aren't they?

**Jacques** – Your family hails from Bordeaux. That's where their ships left from for their despicable trade...

**Charline** – Bordeaux is still in France. And my family has been established in Beaucon for generations.

**Jacques** – My grandparents were Italian, indeed. My father was a mason, and I'm not ashamed of my origins. But you... Baroness though you may be, you've no reason to be proud of yours.

*A heavy silence falls.*

**Louise** – It's true that many tourists have been buried here in recent years.

**Jacques** – Those you call tourists own second homes in our village. They pay their taxes, and the mayor has no authority to deny them burial here.

**Francis** – Unfortunately, our charming cemetery cannot accommodate all the world's misery.

**Victor** – Misery? You must be joking... These Parisian yuppies drive up house prices and now clutter up our cemetery!

**Jacques** – Either way, if the popes hadn't opposed cremation for centuries, we wouldn't be in this mess...

**Simone** – We have to admit, on that point, as with so many others, the Church hasn't always been a champion of progress, have they, Father?

**Francis** – So now it's my fault, is it?

**Charline** – It's certainly not mine. Simone, darling, pour me a Fernet-Branca. This whole affair has given me a headache.

**Jacques** – Aren't you afraid of poisoning yourself? Fernet-Branca is an Italian drink, you know...

**Simone** – A Fernet-Branca for the Baroness. And for you, Father, what will it be? A little communion wine? I blessed it this morning...

**Francis** – A mint lemonade, please.

*Simone serves him the mint lemonade.*

**Simone** – And a mint lemonade for Father. Now, Father, how is that investigation coming along?

**Charline** – Investigation? What investigation?

**Simone** – The priest is on the hunt for a missing corpse...

**Francis** – As you know, our church is named after the patron saint of our village, the blessed Father Barnabas, whose relics were lost in the chaos of the Revolution.

**Jacques** – What you call the chaos of the Revolution, Father, is the people's rightful uprising against tyranny, which laid the foundations of our French Republic.

**Francis** – Either way, after the nationalisation of noble and clerical property, as the Baroness mentioned earlier, the castle and its abbey were sold to wealthy merchants...

**Charline** – All to fund Napoleon's disastrous military adventures.

**Jacques** – I wouldn't be cruel enough to remind you, Madam, that you owe your title of Baroness to Napoleon.

**Simone** – Oh, really?

**Jacques** – It was indeed Bonaparte from whom your family bought that Empire nobility title, wasn't it?

**Charline** – My, for an Italian, you seem very passionate about French history. The zeal of a new convert, no doubt...

**Jacques** – The Emperor's parents were of Italian origin. So, in a way, you owe this sham title to Italy.

*Francis prefers to continue his point.*

**Francis** – In any case, due to the successive changes of ownership and the looting of the abbey, we've lost track of the relics of Saint Barnabas, which were already venerated in the Middle Ages. Many atrocities were committed during the Revolution, alas.

**Charline** – Wouldn't it be better to let this holy man rest in peace, wherever his remains may be?

**Francis** – Perhaps... but can you imagine if we were to find those relics? Our village could become a pilgrimage site...

**Jacques** – If it boosts trade and creates jobs in our village, I'm even willing to believe in God and miracles!

*Pause.*

**Louise** – And what if I were to put down a deposit, Mr Mayor?

**Jacques** – A deposit?

**Louise** – For that one remaining grave. Is it at least in a good spot? Preferably not too close to the entrance, to avoid draughts...

**Victor** – And why should that last grave be reserved for you?

**Louise** – Surely chivalry should prompt you to give me precedence, no?

**Victor** – Absolutely not... It'll be first come, first served, and that's that.

**Simone** – Are you planning to go first, Victor...?

**Francis** – May I remind you that such intentions go against the principles of our Catholic faith!

**Simone** – Do you see how desperate things have become, Mr Mayor? These two old folks are ready to throw themselves under a train just to secure this last available spot in the cemetery. You've got to do something...

**Jacques** – Unfortunately, the train hasn't stopped in Beaucon for a long time. And anyway, you should direct that at the Baroness.

**Charline** – Couldn't we create another cemetery elsewhere? The council owns some land...

**Jacques** – It's next to the municipal waste site!

**Charline** – There or somewhere else...

**Jacques** – It doesn't matter to you; you've got a family vault. Your spot is already reserved! But what about the elderly? Would you like to be treated like rubbish?

**Louise** – How awful...

**Jacques** – A new cemetery next to a rubbish dump? Even the dead would be divided into first class and economy class!

**Simone** – Indeed... Even in death, we're not all equal. Clearly, the Revolution didn't abolish all privileges.

**Jacques** – No, I refuse to establish a cemetery between a scrapyard and the municipal waste tip! It's either an extension or nothing!

**Simone** – But that's impossible... We have to bury the dead somewhere!

*The sound of braking and a collision can be heard outside the café.*

**Charline** – What's happening?

*Simone moves towards the café window and looks outside.*

**Simone** – An accident, apparently.

**Jacques** – I'll go and see.

*Jacques exits.*

**Louise** – I've always said that pedestrian crossing was dangerous. Right on the bend.

**Victor** – And with that enormous plane tree blocking the drivers' view.

**Simone** – How many times have I asked the council to remove that plane tree?

**Louise** – Nowadays, with these eco-warriors, we're no longer allowed to cut down a tree.

**Victor** – I hope it's not too serious though.

**Francis** – Perhaps I should go and check as well, in case any of the victims need the last rites...

**Louise** – I think they'd rather see a doctor than a priest, wouldn't they?

**Simone** – I'll call the emergency services...

*Jacques returns.*

**Charline** – Well?

**Jacques** – It's Dr Pinot. He was coming back from his rounds — rather well lubricated, apparently. He knocked down a woman crossing the road without looking.

**Simone** – Are there any injuries?

**Jacques** – The doctor's fine, but the poor woman...

**Simone** – I was just about to call the emergency services.

**Jacques** – Go ahead. But sadly, it's no longer an emergency.

**Louise** – And what about the victim?

**Jacques** – The doctor examined her, and he's certain. She died instantly.

**Victor** – My God...

**Louise** – Is she someone from the village?

**Jacques** – It's Josie Martin.

**Victor** – Josie?

**Simone** – Did you know her?

**Victor** – She's the one who's been paying me for my house since her father died.

**Simone** – Don't worry. Her heirs will take over...

**Victor** – Poor Josie... She won't get to enjoy my house either.

**Louise** – Yeah... But in a way, she's lucky in her misfortune.

**Jacques** – Oh?

**Louise** – She's the one who's going to inherit the last available grave in the cemetery...

**Victor** – And as for us...

**Louise** – We're off to the waste dump.

*Lights fade.*

*Behind the bar, Simone, the landlady, checks her phone. Francis arrives with a large folder under his arm.*

**Francis** – Good morning, Simone.

**Simone** – Have you heard of ChatGPT, Father?

**Francis** – Ah yes... Artificial intelligence... I've heard about it. Some say it's a diabolical invention...

**Simone** – Maybe, but you can ask it anything, and it answers you. More reliably than God, anyway... Here, for example... Do you know how many stars are in our galaxy?

**Francis** – I must confess, I don't...

**Simone** – Hundreds of billions.

**Francis** – Ah, I see...

**Simone** – And do you know how many galaxies are in the universe?

**Francis** – No...

**Simone** – Thousands of billions.

**Francis** – Ah, I see...

**Simone** – That makes billions upon billions of stars.

**Francis** – Yes.

**Simone** – And around each of those stars, there are dozens of planets.

**Francis** – Yes.

**Simone** – That's billions upon billions upon billions of planets.

**Francis** – Yes.

**Simone** – It would be rather strange if ours were the only one inhabited by intelligent beings, wouldn't it?

**Francis** – Well... only God knows.

**Simone** – No, it's statistically very unlikely. Practically impossible, even.

**Francis** – If you say so...

**Simone** – There's surely plenty of life out there, it's obvious.

**Francis** – Out there?

**Simone** – In the sky, above our heads!

**Francis** – Ah, I see...

**Simone** – So why would God choose to send His only Son to Earth rather than to one of those billions upon billions of planets?

**Francis** – I must admit, I've never considered that question.

**Simone** – Surely the existence of at least some extraterrestrials is far more probable than that of a single God.

**Francis** – Religion and science are two very different things, my child, and it's futile to try to pit them against each other.

**Simone** – Yet, a few centuries ago, the Church supported the idea that the Earth was flat and condemned anyone who claimed it was round to the stake.

**Francis** – Errare humanum est...

**Simone** – Perseverare diabolicum.

**Francis** – Can I get a coffee, please.

**Simone** – So, do you believe in God, Father?

**Francis** – That's quite an odd question to ask a priest...

**Simone** – Do you believe a woman can conceive a child through the Holy Spirit, that a dead person can come back to life, that water can be turned into wine and a blind person's sight restored with a mere blessing?

**Francis** – The mystery of faith is profound...

**Simone** – Still...

**Francis** – You do believe in extraterrestrials, don't you?

**Simone** – But that's not a matter of belief, Father. Nor of knowledge, for that matter. It's just a hypothesis based on scientifically established probabilities, bordering on certainty.

**Francis** – I think I'll have a decaf, after all...

**Simone** – And being convinced of the existence of extraterrestrial life somewhere in the cosmos doesn't mean believing that little green men have already visited us in their flying saucers.

**Francis** – Indeed.

**Simone** – Your belief is based on no reality and defies all common sense.

**Francis** – Faith is not based on probability, my child, but on revelation and conviction. And for the more sceptical, believing can also be a decision...

**Simone** – Oh really?

**Francis** – To believe is first and foremost to want to believe.

**Simone** – A bit like believing in Santa Claus, then. Out of fear that if you stop believing, he'll stop bringing you presents.

**Francis** – May I have my decaf, please?

*Simone serves him his decaf. Francis opens his folder.*

**Simone** – And what's in this big folder, Father? Evidence of God's existence?

**Francis** – Almost...

**Simone** – The parish accounts? Are you being audited?

*Francis suddenly seems very excited.*

**Francis** – I've just discovered a true treasure in a cache in the crypt of our church.

**Simone** – Precious stones?

**Francis** – No, not exactly.

**Simone** – Gold bars?

**Francis** – Not that either... It's documents of inestimable value.

**Simone** – Right...

**Francis** – Documents probably hidden there during the Revolution, which might lead us to the lost relics of Saint Barnabas.

**Simone** – Another corpse on the horizon... Do you really think this is the time? With our cemetery already full...

**Francis** – You're right... It's also urgent to find a solution to this thorny problem...

**Simone** – Why do you think the Baroness refuses to sell part of her land?

**Francis** – She's already explained her reasons to us...

**Simone** – Unless she has other reasons she'd rather not admit to.

**Francis** – Such as?

**Simone** – You know she's a widow.

**Francis** – Yes.

**Simone** – Her husband disappeared a few years ago. He supposedly drowned in the river that runs through their property, and his body was never found.

**Francis** – Like Saint Barnabas, in a way. Another body that won't find a resting place. May his soul rest in peace.

**Simone** – Rumour has it that she might have murdered him to inherit his fortune and buried him in the castle grounds. Perhaps she's afraid that by digging new graves there, her husband's body might be discovered...

**Francis** – Those are just rumours, my child. We shouldn't lend credence to such gossip.

**Simone** – Sometimes rumours turn out to be based on some reality. Isn't that the principle of religious faith?

**Francis** – Pardon?

**Simone** – Jesus dying on Friday and rising on Sunday, for instance... The earliest texts recounting this far-fetched story were written more than twenty years after Jesus's death. And yet you believe it...

**Francis** – Of course!

**Simone** – But it's just a fable! A rumour that's been circulating for over two thousand years. So why wouldn't the Baroness have sent the Baron to his end? It's much easier than bringing someone back to life, isn't it?

**Francis** – That... only God knows, my child.

**Simone** – God... and perhaps you. You're his confessor, aren't you?

**Francis** – Even if it were so, I am bound by the seal of confession...

*Charline arrives.*

**Charline** – What secret are you talking about?

**Simone** – I was referring to the odious rumour that you might have murdered Monsieur the Baron.

**Charline** – A rumour spread by the mayor to dissuade me from running against him in the upcoming elections. If you propagate it, I warn you, I will file a complaint against you as well.

**Simone** – Me, spread such gossip? I was just saying that I find it utterly intolerable to tarnish the reputation of honest people this way. Isn't that right, Father?

**Charline** – And now he wants me to cede part of my castle grounds to him. That's out of the question!

**Francis** – Even if it's for the benefit of the village... and the parish?

**Charline** – It's also a matter of principle. I'm not going to bow to his demands just to prove I haven't buried anyone on my property!

**Simone** – A pretty crude trick, I agree.

**Charline** – So you're on my side, Simone?

**Simone** – We'll see...

**Charline** – If I'm elected, would you be interested in being the deputy mayor?

**Simone** – It depends... Is it well-paid?

**Charline** – Let's say there are certain benefits.

**Simone** – Benefits?

**Charline** – For example, a grant to renovate the façade of the Café de l'Avenir. Would that interest you? After all, this establishment has long been a vital meeting place in our village. It's almost a historical monument. Nearly a public service...

**Simone** – Yes, that's not untrue.

**Charline** – And a deputy mayor can also more easily avoid certain troubles... especially if they're a business owner.

**Simone** – Troubles?

**Charline** – I believe you don't pay any tax to the village for your terrace, which is set up on public space... That's a favour whose legitimacy could be reexamined by a new mayor more concerned with bringing money into the village's coffers...

**Simone** – I'll have to think about it.

**Charline** – And you, Father? What do you think? A general or a cleric always looks good on an electoral list. And I don't have any officers at hand...

**Francis** – My position prohibits me from participating in the political life of the village, as you know. But we certainly need to find a solution for our dearly departed...

*Louise and Victor arrive.*

**Simone** – Hello Louise... Hello Victor... We were just talking about you.

**Victor** – About us?

**Simone** – Well, about what we're going to do with you when...

**Louise** – I didn't sleep a wink last night. I dreamt that I was sent to the dump to be recycled, but even there they didn't want me because they couldn't find anything worth salvaging from my remains.

**Simone** – Oh dear, really...

**Victor** – Baroness, you're not going to let this happen?

**Charline** – As soon as I'm mayor of this village, we'll find a solution, don't worry.

**Louise** – Will you bury me in the castle grounds, with your husband?

**Charline** – We've been talking for a long time about closing the primary school, which now only has about ten students.

**Victor** – Indeed... That's where Louise and I met... nearly a century ago.

**Louise** – It's true. How time flies. It feels like it was yesterday.

**Victor** – I still remember you with your pigtails and your little pink apron.

**Louise** – I was quite a little pest back then.

**Victor** – And you haven't changed...

**Charline** – We could put the new cemetery there. There's a large yard...

**Victor** – Closing the school to expand the cemetery?

**Charline** – That way, at least, you'll stay together. If that's where you met...

**Francis** – But Baroness... Can you imagine the symbolism for our village, which is already on the path to depopulation? Burying former students in the schoolyard...

**Simone** – We'll have to find a place for all these corpses.

**Louise** – Only retirees come here to settle. So, naturally...

**Victor** – Closing classes won't attract young people. If you're elected, you should fight to keep the school open!

**Louise** – What I want is a place in the cemetery. And apparently, it's become harder to find than a spot in a nursery.

**Victor** – You're just a selfish old woman, Louise.

**Louise** – And you're an old wreck.

**Victor** – Even the dump won't want you! You said it yourself...

*Jacques arrives.*

**Jacques** – Ladies and gentlemen... Everything alright?

**Simone** – The usual. Two centenarians fighting for a cemetery spot.

**Jacques** – Baroness... I was actually looking for you...

**Charline** – If it's still about annexing part of my park, let me warn you, I haven't changed my mind.

**Jacques** – And today I understand why...

**Charline** – Pardon?

**Jacques** – I've just been informed about your project.

**Charline** – My project...?

**Jacques** – The one to create a golf course in your castle park.

**Charline** – That's still a confidential project... Who told you?

**Jacques** – I have friends everywhere, you know.

**Charline** – Friends? More like spies...

**Jacques** – So you're not denying it.

**Charline** – Having grand plans for our village isn't a crime. Why should I hide it?

**Jacques** – Golf courses have a catastrophic carbon footprint. They waste a resource like water, which is becoming increasingly scarce.

**Charline** – This project would create jobs in the village. And visitors would revitalise the increasingly moribund local commerce.

**Jacques** – Do you seriously think your wealthy clients would come to shop at the village grocery and have an aperitif at the Café de l'Avenir?

**Charline** – More than the dead you want to bury in my park, at any rate.

**Jacques** – So that's why you refuse to sell?

**Charline** – A golf course in Beaucon seems to have more future potential than a new cemetery, indeed.

**Jacques** – And is that also why you want to take my place at the town hall? To push through this project that otherwise has no chance of succeeding?

**Charline** – Because you'll oppose it... Out of revenge! It's an abuse of power, and you know it!

**Jacques** – I'll oppose it because the project breaks our local planning rules, and it's an ecological disaster. All to build a playground for the rich.

**Charline** – Golf is primarily a sport.

**Jacques** – So is pétanque.

**Charline** – My guests don't come to a château to throw metal balls around the village square, like you do.

*Moment of tension.*

**Simone** – Ah yes... Life is like a game of golf. And we all play the role of the ball. We know we'll end up in the hole, but we don't know in how many strokes.

**Victor** – And we also don't know who's hitting the ball...

**Simone** – Does God play golf, Father?

**Charline** – Golf or not, I will never sell my land!

**Jacques** – Very well, then... it will be forbidden to die within the municipal territory until further notice.

**Louise** – Forbidden?

**Jacques** – It's indeed forbidden to board a plane past the ninth month of pregnancy. So, one could say it's forbidden to be born on a plane. Why shouldn't I be able to forbid dying within my municipal area?

**Charline** – And how do you plan to prevent your residents from dying, Mr Mayor?

**Jacques** – I'll have the council pass a decree. That's all.

**Charline** – That's insane! No sensible councillor would vote for such a decree. And it's surely illegal, it's so absurd!

**Jacques** – We'll see about that...

*Blackout.*

*Simone polishes glasses. Victor and Louise examine an imaginary municipal notice posted on the café window, facing the audience.*

**Louise** – By order of the town council, it is forbidden to die within the village limits of Beaucon. Violators will be prosecuted.

**Victor** – This is incredible!

**Louise** – Prosecuted?

**Victor** – By whom?

**Louise** – How far would they chase you?

**Victor** – The advantage of being dead is that you're protected from prosecution, right?

**Louise** – That's what I thought until today...

**Simone** – As far as I know, there is no extradition treaty with the afterlife, but still...

**Victor** – A fine, then?

**Louise** – Maybe for the heirs.

**Victor** – That must be it. As long as the deceased remains dead without permission, the family has to keep paying a fine.

**Simone** – As long as the deceased stays dead...?

*Charline arrives.*

**Charline** – Ladies and gentlemen... What's going on? You all look as if you're at a funeral.

**Victor** – You could say that! Have a look, Baroness...

*Charline reads the decree.*

**Charline** – This man is a dangerous lunatic. It's clear we can't leave him in charge of the village!

**Simone** – You have to admit, it's rather bizarre.

**Charline** – Bizarre? He's completely out of his mind!

*Jacques arrives.*

**Victor** – So this is the solution you've come up with?

**Jacques** – I've done some research... Several municipalities have already banned dying on their territory... while waiting to expand their cemeteries to accommodate new deceased.

**Louise** – And how long will this last?

**Victor** – You don't care, you're still young! But what about us?

**Jacques** – It will last as long as necessary. The decree will be lifted when the Baroness agrees to cede part of her land to us.

**Charline** – I call that blackmail. By forbidding death, you're holding all the residents of this village hostage, starting with our dear elderly...

**Louise** – So we no longer have the right to die when we want?

**Victor** – What a world...!

**Louise** – And if we die anyway, what's the risk?

**Victor** – The thing about death is, when it takes you, it's not like needing to pee, you can't always hold it in.

**Louise** – Although at our age, even the need to pee... you can't always hold it in either.

**Jacques** – If you contravene this decree, you will be buried elsewhere. If another village is willing to take you in...

**Victor** – Elsewhere? And why not abroad, as well?

**Simone** – France already exports its toxic waste to Africa, now we'll export our dead too.

**Jacques** – Yes... While Africans risk their lives coming here, to avoid dying of hunger in their own countries.

**Louise** – But we want to be buried here! In France! In our village!

*Francis arrives.*

**Francis** – Hello, my children... Is everything alright?

**Louise** – No, it isn't, Father! The mayor has forbidden us to die!

**Francis** – Pardon?

*Louise points to the decree, and Francis takes a look at it.*

**Victor** – Do something, Father!

**Francis** – Forbidding death? That's insane!

**Jacques** – I'm merely responding to an emergency situation for which I am not responsible.

**Francis** – Mr. Mayor, in my ministry, I have always adhered strictly to the principle of separation of Church and State... but by forbidding my parishioners from dying, you are encroaching on God's domain!

**Victor** – And on our individual freedoms!

**Jacques** – You are centenarians! Surely you can wait a little longer.

**Francis** – Wait for what?

**Jacques** – For the Baroness to show some civic responsibility.

**Simone** – Perhaps it's time for a gesture, Baroness...

**Charline** – Not a chance! I won't give in to pressure!

*Pause, then Victor and Louise begin a side conversation which the others watch with astonishment.*

**Victor** *(to Louise)* – This stubbornness is rather suspicious, don't you think?

**Louise** – If she killed her husband and buried him in the park...

**Victor** – In that case, a golf course is definitely better.

**Louise** – At least the holes are a lot smaller.

**Victor** – What holes...?

**Louise** – On the golf course! Compared with graves!

**Victor** – Ah, right... It's less likely to accidentally unearth a corpse, that's for sure.

**Louise** – Like her husband's, for example.

*Charline decides to intervene.*

**Charline** – You might both be deaf, but I can hear you, you know.

**Simone** – In the meantime, what do you propose for the cemetery?

*Heavy silence.*

**Charline** – We could target the graves that are no longer maintained. To make some space...

**Jacques** – Expelling the most destitute dead from the cemetery, in other words?

**Charline** – If the family hasn't paid to renew the burial rights...

**Jacques** – In any case, it will take time. There's a procedure to follow.

**Simone** – It won't resolve the problem completely, that's for sure. But it would at least address an emergency...

**Charline** – Father, you who are well-versed in the matter...

**Francis** – There is an abandoned grave at the entrance of the cemetery...

**Charline** – Do you know whose it is?

**Francis** – No... I didn't conduct the ceremony. Besides, I'm not sure the deceased was Catholic...

**Jacques** – And why is that?

**Francis** – It's a foreign name, I believe.

**Victor** – Foreign?

**Francis** – North African... or African.

**Jacques** – So, should we evict this poor man to make room for the 'real' French? Some sort of post-mortem national preference, in a way...

**Charline** – If that's the only way to avoid a mass grave for our fellow citizens.

**Jacques** – I remind you that many French people have foreign names and are not Catholic... Like me, in fact.

**Simone** – You, Mr Mayor, are Muslim? In addition to being Italian and communist...

**Jacques** – I said I wasn't Catholic. I didn't say I was Muslim.

**Simone** – Don't tell me you're...?

**Jacques** – I'm an atheist. And anti-clerical. With all due respect, Father, I don't believe in superstitions and I have faith only in rationality. And damn it, if we can't expand the cemetery because the nobility refuses to cede a piece of land and the clergy washes its hands of it, then you might as well donate your bodies to science!

*The others seem horrified. Francis makes the sign of the cross.*

**Francis** – Jesus, Mary, Joseph...

*Fade to black.*

*Simone is checking her phone behind the bar. Charline is reading a golf magazine. Victor and Louise sit at separate tables.*

**Simone** – It’s crazy, really... Homo sapiens isn’t the only intelligent species that has ever lived on Earth.

**Victor** – By intelligent, you mean a species capable of rendering its own planet uninhabitable in just a few decades?

**Simone** – There were the Neanderthals, for one.

**Louise** – Neanderthals? Are they from the Netherlands?

**Simone** – And then there were the Denisovans.

**Victor** – The Denisovans?

**Simone** *(reading)* – Some populations in Asia still carry traces of this ancient human species in their DNA.

**Louise** – And where did you find all that out?

**Simone** – ChatGPT.

**Louise** – Chatty? Well, you certainly are.

**Victor** – I think she's finally gone mad.

**Simone** – If several human species evolved on this planet, why couldn't intelligent life have evolved elsewhere in the universe?

**Victor** – As long as they don’t come here to bother us.

**Louise** – It could liven things up a bit. Because, let’s face it, Beaucon is pretty dead. Especially in winter...

**Victor** – Liven things up, you say... Men already spend their time killing each other. Can you imagine if aliens showed up here?

**Simone** – They could teach us a lot, couldn’t they?

**Victor** – Like the Spaniards or the English with the Native Americans, you mean?

**Simone** – There’s one more question...

**Louise** – What now?

**Simone** – Why did primates develop intelligence in a relatively short time while so many other species never did?

**Victor** – So?

**Simone** – I’m asking ChatGPT... *(She types on her phone)* According to it, intelligence isn’t always the best adaptation to one’s environment.

**Louise** – What?

**Simone** – Well, intelligence isn't always the best way to survive in a hostile environment.

**Victor** – So according to you, if Louise and I have managed to live to a ripe old age, it's because we have pea-brains?

**Simone** *(continuing to read)* – Instead of intelligence, for example, some species bet everything on massive reproduction.

**Louise** – It's a fact that idiots tend to have a lot of children.

**Victor** – That would explain why they're not an endangered species. Idiots even tend to become the majority.

**Simone** – And most importantly, intelligence is a very energy-intensive mode of adaptation.

**Louise** – It's true that to read, you often need to turn on the light.

**Simone** – In humans, the brain represents about 2% of body mass but consumes around 20% of the body's total energy.

**Victor** – So conserving neurons is like saving energy? By that logic, all idiots are eco-friendly.

**Louise** – And vice versa...

**Simone** *(reading)* – For some species, developing a larger and more complex brain wasn't a viable option due to the scarcity of food and energy resources.

*Victor hands his empty glass to Simone.*

**Victor** – Here, fill this up. With all your nonsense, my brain is overheating, and a refill will cool it down a bit.

*Simone serves him.*

**Simone** – And you, Baroness, what are you reading?

**Charline** – Golf Magazine...

**Simone** – Ah yes, that's good too.

*Jacques arrives.*

**Jacques** – Ladies and gentlemen...

**Charline** – So, Mr Mayor? Have you managed to expel that illegal foreigner from our cemetery?

**Jacques** – I did look into the matter.

**Simone** – And?

**Jacques** – That 'foreigner', as you call him, was a soldier who died fighting for France in the First World War.

**Charline** – A hero?

**Jacques** – His name is on our war memorial! We're not going to throw the liberators of France into a common grave!

**Louise** – The First World War? That was rather a long time ago, wasn't it?

**Victor** – Even we weren't born yet.

**Louise** – And you didn't fight in the Second World War either, did you?

**Victor** – I was turned down. Flat feet.

**Jacques** – In any case, during my term, we will let war heroes rest in peace.

**Simone** – Back to square one, then...

**Victor** – We're all going to have to give a little ground...

**Louise** – Yes. Preferably a few square metres each, for eternity.

*Francis arrives.*

**Francis** – Good morning, everyone.

**Jacques** – Father, I hope you haven't been administering too many last rites lately.

**Francis** – No, rest assured. I even performed a baptism this morning. It's become so rare in our village.

**Jacques** – A future pupil for our primary school...

**Simone** – That said, Mr. Mayor, I notice that since your decree, no one has died in Beaucon.

**Victor** – That's true... It's quite odd.

**Charline** – Do you think God wouldn't dare defy your ban by calling his children to Him? What do you think, Father?

**Francis** – Let's not blaspheme, Baroness. God does not obey municipal authorities. No offence, Mr. Mayor.

*Simone looks at the newspaper.*

**Simone** – No...? Look, it's in the paper! Your decree is front page news!

*Jacques takes the newspaper and reads.*

**Jacques** – It is forbidden to die in Beaucon. Any transgressor will be prosecuted.

**Charline** – Truly, I tell you... We're going to be the laughing stock of the entire country!

*Blackout.*

*Simone looks at her phone screen behind the counter. Victor and Louise are seated at separate tables.*

**Simone** – Do you know how many human beings have died since the dawn of humanity?

**Louise** – Is she going to keep pissing us off with her artificial intelligence...?

**Simone** – Over 100 billion.

**Victor** – I think I preferred her natural stupidity.

**Simone** – Can you imagine? That means there are ten times more dead on Earth than living people.

**Louise** – No wonder cemeteries are starting to overflow.

**Simone** *(reading)* – If the graves of all these deceased had been preserved, it would create a cemetery the size of Italy.

**Louise** – Italy?

**Simone** – More than half the size of France... Luckily, we don't keep all these graves forever.

**Victor** – And what's the lifespan of a grave, then?

**Simone** – If you're not a celebrity, no more than 50 years. After that, the bones are placed in an ossuary. To make room for newcomers.

**Victor** – 50 years? So ultimately, eternal rest lasts even less than real life.

**Louise** – Until everyone has forgotten you...

*Francis arrives with a newspaper.*

**Francis** – Beaucon is still in the news!

**Victor** – Oh really?

**Francis** – Listen to this... *(Reading)* Following the mayor's ban on dying in his village, no deaths have been recorded in Beaucon. Some are even calling it a miracle...

**Louise** – A miracle?

**Francis** – A secular miracle, then. I've never seen Mr. Mayor at Sunday mass, and he makes no secret of his atheism.

**Victor** – Do you think that by imposing this ban on dying within his village, the mayor might have actually prevented deaths from occurring?

**Simone** – Some saints have been beatified for less than that.

**Louise** – By the way, Father, what miracle did our Saint Barnabas perform to be canonised?

**Francis** – The few historical documents we still have are sometimes contradictory on this point, but... he is said to have restored sight to a paralytic.

**Victor** – That's a rather odd sort of miracle: restoring a paralysed man's sight...

**Louise** – But originally, was the man also blind or... ?

**Francis** – It's in Latin, and the writing is not very legible... But apparently, the poor man remained paralysed until his death.

**Louise** – Ah yes, that's a bit thin as miracles go. If only this paraplegic had won a medal at the Paralympics.

**Victor** – So is it really worth turning the whole village upside down to find your Saint Barnabas's relics?

**Simone** – Our Mayor stopping the Grim Reaper with a simple municipal decree is quite something else. He's the one we should be canonising!

**Francis** – Let's not fall into superstition...

**Victor** – It's curious how that phrase sounds oddly out of place coming from a priest.

**Francis** – It's probably just a coincidence. People don't die every day in Beaucon...

**Simone** – If this keeps up, the undertakers won't thank him. They'll all end up bankrupt.

**Louise** – Anyway, according to my doctor, I'm in perfect health... for a centenarian.

**Victor** – Yes, me too.

**Simone** – Who's your doctor?

**Louise** – Dr Pinot.

**Simone** – Pinot? Well, give him credit: even when he's completely drunk, he can still tell when someone is dead.

**Francis** – Especially when he's the one who ran her over while driving drunk.

**Louise** – Poor Josie...

*Charline arrives.*

**Victor** – Should we thank the Mayor for giving us a new lease of life?

**Louise** – If he promises us eternal life, I might vote for him after all.

**Charline** – You shouldn't believe all the nonsense you read in the paper!

**Simone** – You can't stop rumours from spreading. Besides, I doubled my turnover this morning. Curious people coming to see the village where no one dies.

**Victor** – If it's good for business, then...

**Louise** – And for real estate.

**Simone** – It's not the best place to buy on a life annuity, that's for sure...

**Victor** – Since we haven't found Saint Barnabas's relics, we'll have to settle for a secular and anti-clerical saint!

**Simone** – Anyway, a place of pilgrimage is more beneficial for small businesses than a golf course.

**Louise** – And your guest rooms, Baroness? They must be fully booked, right?

**Simone** – Wasn't it you who alerted the press about this village where the inhabitants live eternally?

**Charline** – I had nothing to do with those fake stories, believe me...

*Jacques arrives.*

**Jacques** – Ladies and gentlemen.

**Charline** – Unlike some who spread rumours about me, making me out to be a criminal.

**Jacques** – And why would I do such a thing, pray tell?

**Charline** – To prevent me from running against you in the next elections, for example.

**Simone** – It's true that a mayor who promises his voters eternal life... It's going to be tough for the other candidates!

**Jacques** – Come now, I don't have such power. You know that well...

**Francis** – It's really time to put an end to all this disorder.

**Victor** – Certainly... If no one dies by simple decree, it's the end of Christianity!

**Louise** – What's the point of promising a one-way ticket to paradise if no one makes the journey?

**Victor** – And the same goes for hell...

**Jacques** – What do you intend to do, Father?

**Francis** – I'm going to say a mass to implore the help of Saint Barnabas.

**Jacques** – The one who restores sight to paralytics? Well, that's reassuring...

**Simone** – That was in the Middle Ages. At least none of his victims can come forward now, unlike those of some more recent clergymen.

*Blackout.*

*Simone is checking her phone behind the counter. Louise is sitting at a table. Jacques is at the bar.*

**Simone** – Listen to this... *(Reading)* In 1907, an American doctor conducted experiments on six terminally ill patients. He claimed to have measured a weight loss of about 21 grams at the moment of their passing. This led him to conclude that the soul weighs 21 grams.

**Louise** – 21 grams... That doesn't sound very heavy...

**Jacques** – And I think some of our fellow citizens' souls weigh even less than that...

**Louise** – Are you thinking of anyone in particular?

*Francis arrives.*

**Simone** – Ah, Father, a question for you. How much does a soul weigh?

**Francis** – I beg your pardon?

**Simone** – I'm just teasing you... However, it seems that Saint Barnabas has heard your prayer, Father...

**Francis** – Oh yes?

**Simone** – Victor passed away last night.

**Francis** – No? Poor man. The Lord must have called him to Himself.

*Louise doesn't seem to have heard clearly.*

**Louise** – Who's died?

**Simone** – Victor. It's Victor who's died, Louise.

**Louise** – Victor...? That's surprising.

**Jacques** – Oh really? And why is that? He was 102 years old, after all.

**Louise** – During the war, he was more the type to collaborate with the occupiers. So to defy a municipal decree like that...

**Simone** – A last-minute Resistance fighter, in short.

**Louise** – Still, it's upsetting.

**Francis** – I wouldn't have even been able to administer the last rites. Peace to his soul...

**Louise** – His soul probably didn't weigh much either... But what happened to him?

**Jacques** – After a hundred years, that question loses much of its significance.

**Simone** – Anyway, the spell is broken. The newspapers won't be able to claim that no one dies in Beaucon anymore.

**Jacques** – Goodbye tourists, goodbye pilgrims. Our village won't become famous for miracles after all.

**Simone** – It remains, Mr Mayor, that by dying within the municipality, the deceased has contravened your municipal decree. What sanctions have you planned for him?

**Jacques** – The priority now is to figure out what to do with the body...

*Victor arrives. The others are obviously stunned.*

**Simone** – Victor? But we thought you were dead!

**Victor** – Apparently, the Good Lord didn't want me. Probably because I didn't have the Mayor's permission.

**Louise** – But what happened?

**Victor** – I called Dr Pinot last night because I wasn't feeling well. After that, I don't remember anything. Except that I woke up in the morgue.

**Jacques** – In the morgue?

**Victor** – The Doctor had mistakenly declared me dead.

**Simone** – Dr Pinot... He must have still been drunk...

**Louise** – If I have a health scare, please call another doctor. I don't want to be buried alive!

*Blackout.*

*Simone is reading the newspaper behind the counter. Francis is sitting at a table, examining documents.*

**Francis** – Goddamnit, of course...

*Simone looks up from her newspaper.*

**Simone** – Did I just hear you swear, Father?

**Francis** – Forgive me, I got carried away by my enthusiasm. It's about Saint Barnabas's relics.

**Simone** – And... where is the body?

**Francis** – It's too early to say, but this time I'm on a lead... A very serious lead, even...

*Jacques arrives.*

**Simone** – Ah, Mr Mayor! *(Showing him a newspaper)* You've become a sensation. After that miraculous return from the dead, people are treating you like a new messiah. Look at this...

**Francis** – This is outrageous, Mr Mayor... This madness needs to stop!

**Jacques** – I must admit, I'm overwhelmed by this affair myself. That municipal decree was only a joke to force the Baroness to sell her land. I didn't think it would go this far!

*Charline arrives.*

**Simone** – Just in time. And she doesn't look happy...

**Charline** – I've just learned that my golf project has been invalidated by the town council.

**Jacques** – It wasn't a good project for our village. Nor for the planet, for that matter. The council agreed with my opinion.

**Charline** – You mean you pressured them.

**Jacques** – Anyway, it's one less reason to refuse to sell a few acres of your vast property to the village... Unless you really have something to hide...

**Charline** – You think I'll part with this land just to prove I didn't bury my husband there?

**Francis** – Don't be stubborn, Baroness... It's for the greater good.

**Simone** – For the upcoming elections, this sense of public duty could work in your favour.

**Francis** – And God will reward you...

**Jacques** – If the Church is asking, and God himself is promising to repay you...

*Charline hesitates before making her decision.*

**Charline** – Alright... But I warn you, I won't be selling it off cheaply.

**Jacques** – How much do you want?

**Charline** – Five hundred euros per square metre.

**Jacques** – That's the price for building land! And I remind you that this part of your park isn't zoned for construction.

**Charline** – It's for building final resting places, isn't it? So I'll consider it as a subdivision. Take it or leave it...

*Jacques remains sceptical. The others wait for his decision.*

*Blackout.*

*Simone is checking her phone behind the counter. Victor arrives.*

**Simone** – Listen to this... In the universe, the distances between galaxies are so vast and the time to traverse them so long that if extraterrestrials were to visit us, it would mean they have achieved the immortality necessary for such a journey...

*Victor doesn't seem to be listening.*

**Victor** – It's awfully quiet in here. Have they all died?

**Simone** – At least now we have space to accommodate them.

**Victor** – The extraterrestrials?

**Simone** – The dead! The mayor laid the foundation stone for the cemetery extension this morning. Were you there?

**Victor** – I wouldn't have missed it. When you're buying a place before it's built, you want to keep an eye on the builders.

**Simone** – Everything's back to normal, in a way. But now all the curious people have left too.

**Victor** – It does create a void.

**Simone** – I hope the priest will eventually find Saint Barnabas's relics; it would boost business a bit...

*Jacques arrives with Louise.*

**Jacques** – Ladies and gentlemen.

**Simone** – Mr Mayor. So? It seems you've lost your halo. Are miracles over?

**Jacques** – Don't mention it... Since I suspended that decree, the old folks are dropping like flies in the village...

**Victor** – By the way, we haven't seen the Baroness for a while...

**Simone** – She's not dead, is she?

**Jacques** – Haven't you heard? She's in custody...

**Victor** – No? Why?

**Jacques** – While excavating her land for the cemetery extension, human bones were discovered.

**Louise** – Her husband?

**Jacques** – Probably.

**Louise** – So those rumours were true...

**Victor** – And to think I'd have sworn she was a saint. A saint who wouldn't give away a single burial plot, of course.

**Louise** – I always thought she had the look of a serial killer.

**Simone** – Do you think she might have killed others, and that her park is already filled with bodies?

**Victor** – Let's hope not, because if that's the case... the new cemetery would already be full before it's even opened.

*Charline arrives.*

**Simone** – Baroness! Have they released you?

**Charline** – I've been the victim of a terrible miscarriage of justice!

**Jacques** – Another one...

**Charline** – After analysis, the bones found in my park turn out to be much older than we thought.

**Simone** – Much older? You mean... a Neanderthal or something like that?

**Charline** – Old enough that I'm not going to be accused of murder.

*Francis arrives, visibly excited, with his file under his arm.*

**Francis** – Have you heard?

**Jacques** – About these bones? Yes. The Baroness claims she has an alibi. She wasn't even born at the time the crime was committed...

**Francis** – These bones were discovered at the exact location of the old abbey destroyed during the Revolution.

**Victor** – Could they be the remains of Saint Barnabas?

**Francis** – That's a serious possibility, indeed. Which will need to be confirmed by further analysis.

**Jacques** – At least now we have space to accommodate your Saint.

**Francis** – Speaking of which...

**Jacques** – What now?

**Francis** – The documents I recently discovered in the crypt show that the Baroness's ancestors, who acquired the estate under the Empire along with their noble title, annexed part of the church cemetery to build stables.

**Jacques** – Really...

*Francis shows a document.*

**Francis** – Look... The outlines of the old cemetery, much larger at the time, are clearly visible in this engraving. And they include a large part of the current park of the castle.

*The mayor examines the documents Francis hands him.*

**Jacques** – In other words, this land will simply be returned to its original purpose. And judging by this engraving, the town hall could even claim a much larger extension.

**Francis** – Modern land records only go back as far as Napoleon...

**Jacques** – That explains why no one noticed this wild annexation of public land until now. Baroness?

**Charline** *(unconvincing)* – I assure you I wasn't aware...

**Jacques** – Then we will ask the courts to settle this dispute.

*Charline seems embarrassed.*

**Charline** – A compromise is better than a court case, isn't it? *(Reluctantly)* I'll donate that part of the grounds to the village — provided the council gives up any further claim to my property.

**Jacques** – Thank you for your spontaneous generosity, Baroness. In the spirit of conciliation, I gladly accept your proposal.

**Simone** – You can always build a mini-golf on the rest of your park... No permission is needed for that, right, Mr Mayor?

**Jacques** – In any case, we will soon have a larger cemetery. So, the prohibition on dying within the village's territory is no longer necessary.

*Simone turns to Victor and Louise, who now seem to have a closer relationship.*

**Simone** – Did you hear that, ancestors? You're allowed to die...

**Louise** – Is that an invitation?

**Victor** – At the same time, we're not in a hurry...

**Simone** – In any case, you won't have to compete for the last spot in the cemetery. But it seems the time for quarrelling between you has passed, hasn't it?

**Louise** – This ordeal has brought us closer together, hasn't it, Victor?

**Jacques** – Don't tell me you're planning to get married?

**Victor** – No, but we've decided to share a vault.

**Jacques** – Very sensible. For a young couple, nothing beats investing in property for the long term.

**Simone** – Drinks are on me! Let's celebrate the start of work on our new cemetery!

*Music. Simone fills the glasses. Victor invites Louise to dance. And Jacques invites Charline.*

*Fade to black.*

**The End.**

# About the author

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

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

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

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

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

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

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

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

https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/

## *Other plays by the same author translated in English:*

**Monologues**
Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

**Comedies for 2**
A Thwarted Vocation
EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

**Comedies for 3**
A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cards on the Table
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Horizons
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap backward for Mankind
The Ways of Chance

**Comedies for 4**
A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Hangover
Happy Hour
How to get rid of your best friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists
The Worst Best Man Ever

**Comedies for 5 to 6**
All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

**Comedies for 7 or more**
At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe ...
Neighbours' Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a lovely village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Most Beautiful Village in France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

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

***All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded free of charge from his websites:***

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

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