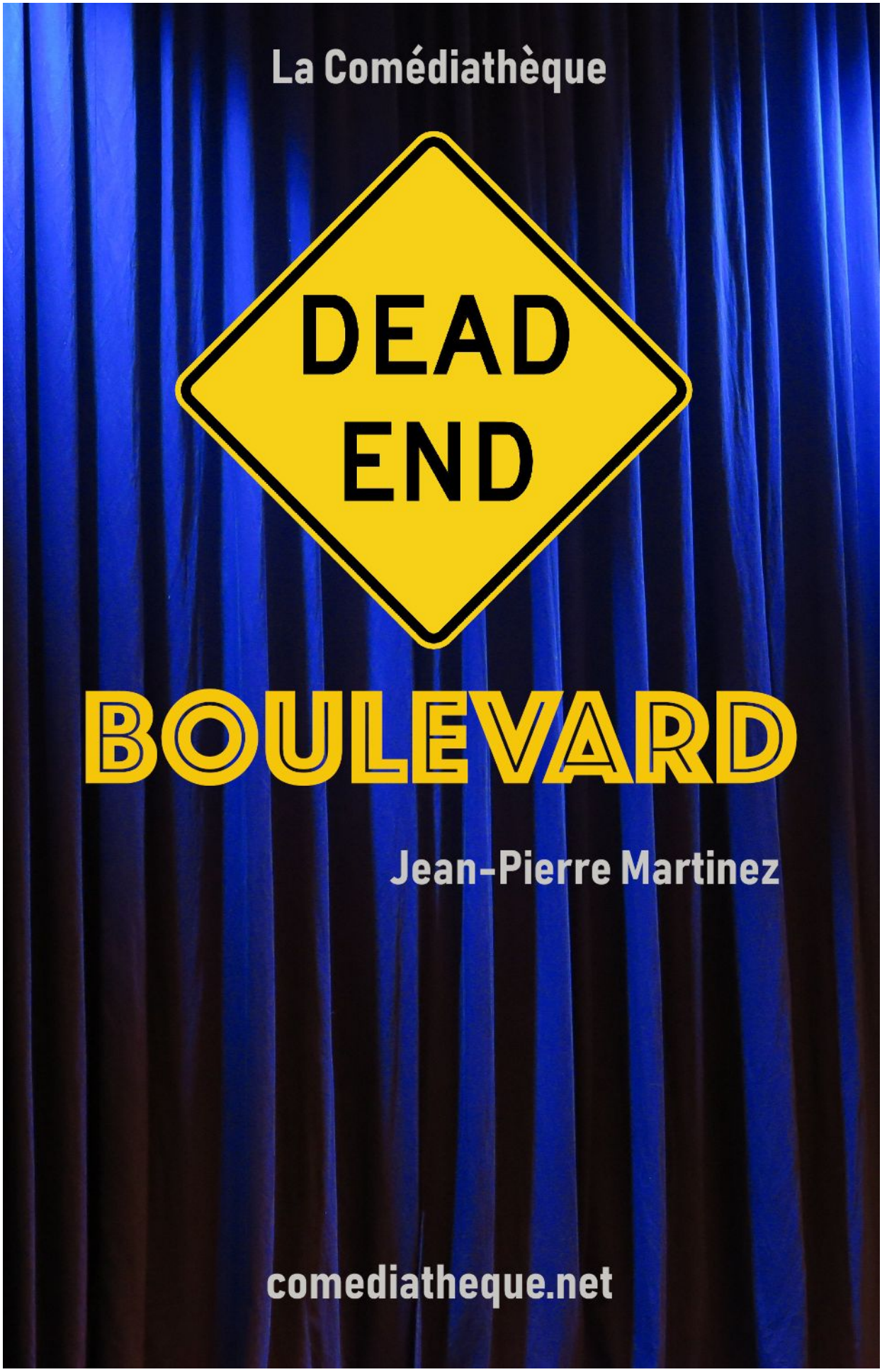
La Comédiathèque
DEAD
END
BOULEVARD
Jean-Pierre Martinez
comediatheque.net

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Dead End Boulevard

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Robert and Caroline Blanc are determined to marry their daughter Victoria to Stanislas de Coursensac, the son of the town's long-serving mayor, who expects to win yet another election.
But in this comedy of social ambition, family secrets and a grand new boulevard, every road seems to lead to a dead end...

Characters:
Robert Blanc
Caroline Blanc
Victoria Blanc
Alexandra (or Alexandre) de Coursensac
Stanislas de Coursensac
Inspector Ice (male or female)

6 characters – Possible casts
4M/2F
3M/3F
2M/4F

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In a small town, the living room of a well-to-do family home. Victoria, a young woman in her twenties, comes in wearing pyjamas, drops onto the sofa and switches on the television. She changes channels until she finds a news report on rising sea levels caused by global warming. Caroline, her mother, rushes in, looking horrified.

Caroline – It's a disaster!

Victoria mutes the TV.

Victoria – What? Climate change?

Caroline – For now, the rising water is in our bathroom! The toilet's overflowing into the hallway. Haven't you noticed?

Victoria – No...

Caroline – At this rate, we'll need a gondola to get around the house!

Victoria – That'll remind you of your honeymoon.

Caroline – Yes... Your father took me to a little hotel in the countryside. There was a leaking tap there, too.

Victoria – Where's Dad?

Caroline – Shut in his study with his urologist.

Victoria – You know we mustn't disturb him when he's shut in his study with his urologist. But I thought you went to Venice for your honeymoon...

Caroline – That's his version. According to him, I also wore a white dress and got married in church.

Victoria – That's not true?

Caroline – The truth, darling, is that your father got me pregnant, and then... Oh, I'll have to do it myself again.

Victoria – Fix the leak?

Caroline – Call the plumber!

Caroline exits.

Victoria *(to the audience, smiling affectionately)* – When I think of my parents, the first thing that comes to mind is... *(Her smile vanishes.)* How can two people be so stupid?

She unmutes the TV. A mobile phone rings. She mutes the TV again and answers.

Victoria – National Left Front headquarters, how can I help?... Oh, hi, Sabrina. Yes, don't worry, I've printed the flyers... All right, the leaflets, if you prefer. Have you heard from Karim? He's supposed to be heading our list for the town election. I've left him several messages, but... *(Her expression freezes.)* No... No, it can't be... Him too? What happened? That's awful...

Caroline returns.

Caroline – All sorted. I've called, and they're sending someone within the hour.

Victoria – Sorry, Sabrina, I'll call you back.

Victoria puts her phone away.

Caroline – What's wrong? You look upset.

Victoria – It was Sabrina. Karim, my boyfriend, was killed in a car crash last night.

Caroline – You gave me a fright. I thought you were pregnant again, or something serious.

Victoria – He was a very close friend, Mum.

Caroline – I always thought he wasn't the right boy for you.

Victoria – Why's that?

Caroline – First of all, he was shorter than you! Can you imagine spending your whole life unable to wear high heels?

Victoria – Right... And more importantly, his father was a dustman.

Caroline – And not particularly religious, either, if you ask me... Shouldn't you get dressed?

Victoria – For what?

Caroline – To receive the mayor's son!

Victoria – Sorry, I forgot. I'm really not in the mood for this right now.

Caroline – Well, now that you don't have a boyfriend anymore, you're free as a bird!

Victoria – Stanislas de Coursensac? Why's he coming here? I hardly know him.

Caroline – You were in school together for years, don't you remember?

Victoria – Oh, yes.

Caroline – He's just come back from studying abroad. I probably wouldn't recognise him if I passed him in the street.

Victoria – Then I suppose he's changed quite a bit.

Caroline – He barely knows anyone here now. I thought... He comes from a very good family, you know. The de Coursensacs are somebody in this town.

Victoria – Really? Who?

Caroline – Certainly more important than the people you spend your time with. He'll be here any moment. You can't meet him looking like that!

Victoria – Fine, Mum, I'll go get changed.

Victoria exits. Caroline sighs.

Caroline *(to the audience)* – Children... You know how it is. Thank goodness we're here to look after their future. Karim... If I hadn't tampered with that little thug's brakes before he got my daughter pregnant... *(Confidentially.)* Believe me, getting rid of unsuitable boyfriends is the most reliable form of contraception. And the Church hasn't actually forbidden it.

Robert enters, buttoning up his trousers.

Robert – Hello, my dear.

Caroline – Oh, Robert! I called someone about that leak.

Robert – That's kind, but it wasn't necessary. My urologist just examined me.

Caroline – I was talking about the toilet leak.

Robert – Oh, right...

Robert – Why do you ask?

Caroline – She doesn't look much like a doctor to me. More like a masseuse.

Robert – She practises alternative medicine.

Caroline – Is that why she wanders around in a dressing gown? Anyway, I've called someone.

Robert – Called who?

Caroline – The plumber!

Robert – Of course...

Caroline's mobile phone rings.

Caroline – I hope that's not the plumber calling to cancel. Hello, Mrs de Coursensac! What a pleasure to hear from you. Not at all, it's a delight. Stanislas? Of course, we're expecting him any moment. Do join us for tea! Unless the election campaign is keeping you too busy, naturally. Very well, coffee it is. See you soon, Mrs de Coursensac. Yes, of course... Alexandra. *(She ends the call.)* That was Mrs de Coursensac. She insists I call her Alexandra. She's coming for coffee.

Robert – Excellent, Caroline. In a town this size, it pays to keep on good terms with the mayor. Is Victoria up? I know she's on holiday, but still. As my mother used to say, the early bird gets up before noon.

Caroline – I sent her to get dressed. Young de Coursensac should be here soon. I invited him over to spend some time with Victoria.

Robert – Stanislas, that's right. How old is he again?

Caroline – About 25.

Robert – Ah, yes... I imagine he's changed a lot since school.

Caroline – I just hope the plumber gets here before Stanislas does.

Robert – Or let's hope young Stanislas doesn't need to use the toilet...

Caroline – You have to admit, they'd make a perfect match, wouldn't they?

Robert – The name de Coursensac carries weight around here.

Caroline – He is the mayor's son, after all.

Robert – For now, anyway... We're in the middle of an election campaign.

Caroline – The de Coursensacs have run this town for so many generations, no one remembers an election they lost.

Robert – And our family has been making smoking pipes since 1824.

Caroline – I don't see why that would ever change.

Robert – And why should it? The incumbent mayor's campaign message is as clear as it gets. Look at this.

He holds out an election flyer for her to read.

Caroline – *"Vote for de Coursensac."* That's it?

Robert – Don't you find it convincing?

Caroline – *"Vote for de Coursensac"...* It does have a nice ring to it.

Robert – More impressive than "Vote Blanc", at any rate. That's one reason I decided not to stand for election.

Caroline – And one day, Stanislas will take over his mother's seat at the town hall.

Robert – And if Victoria marries him, she'll be the mayor's wife one day. Automatically.

Caroline – Do you know what the butcher told me the other day?

Robert – What?

Caroline – Apparently, since he got back from his studies abroad, his son has become vegetarian.

Robert – The butcher's son is a vegetarian?

Caroline – The mayor's son!

Robert – No!

Caroline – They call it vegan now, apparently.

Robert – Vegan... Sounds like a sect. Or an alien civilisation...

Caroline – He used to do theatre when he was little... His mother is very devout, you know. That must annoy her.

Robert – You mean the theatre?

Caroline – No, that he's vegan!

Robert – As long as he's not a terrorist. Or homosexual.

Caroline – Or both at once.

Robert – Can you even be both a terrorist and homosexual?

Caroline – I don't know; I've never thought about it. No, probably not.

Robert – What about being a vegetarian terrorist?

Caroline – No, probably not.

A pneumatic drill and the noise of heavy construction interrupt them.

Caroline – What on earth is that noise?

Robert – It's the construction for the new boulevard. I must've left a window open.

He steps out briefly.

Caroline – A boulevard? In our little town? Extraordinary!

The noise stops. Robert returns with a painting.

Robert – A boulevard! Imagine that! Right here, on our doorstep!

Caroline – No one can call this a mere village anymore.

Robert – Exactly. Name one village you've ever heard of with a boulevard!

Caroline – And it's our mayor who initiated the project. It'll put her name in the history books, for sure.

Robert – Yes... Especially if the boulevard bears her name.

Caroline – de Coursensac Boulevard?

Robert – Why else would they build it?

Caroline – Just imagine! If our daughter married a de Coursensac... She'd be called Victoria de Coursensac!

Robert – You're right...

Caroline – She could even have a boulevard named after her someday!

Robert – Our last chance to achieve immortality, Caroline. By marriage.

Caroline – And a Blanc Boulevard is hardly likely to happen any time soon...

Robert – Hard to see why they'd name a boulevard after someone who spent their life making pipes.

Caroline – Unless he died a hero's death.

Robert – And yet, my poor mother won't see her granddaughter's wedding...

Caroline – Ah yes... God rest her soul...

Robert – Then again, we're not even sure she's dead. Her body was never found.

Caroline – After all this time... She'd lost her mind. She must have fallen into the river and drowned.

Robert – Still... People don't just vanish like that... And that river's not exactly big. They would have found her body.

Caroline – Or maybe she ran away...

Robert – Ran away? At 92?

Caroline – I don't know... Maybe she met someone...

Robert – None of this makes any sense... By the way, I've got something to show you.

He shows her a reproduction of Magritte's painting of a smoking pipe, bearing the words "This is not a pipe".

Caroline – What's that?

Robert – *This is not a pipe.*

Caroline – It certainly looks like one...

Robert – Yes... It's unsettling, isn't it? I mean, it really makes you think.

Caroline – Think? About what?

He gazes at the painting thoughtfully, under the slightly worried watch of his wife.

Robert – About all sorts of things, Caroline! For example... Have you noticed? When you see something a second time, it makes less sense than the first?

Caroline – Less sense?

Robert – The third time even less than the second, and so on, until it doesn't make sense at all.

Caroline – Now that you mention it... I've looked at you every day for over thirty years, and you make less sense to me than ever.

Robert – You see, Caroline, I've spent my life making pipes... Miles and miles of them. But have I ever made anything that really mattered?

Caroline – Well, there's nothing like a good pipe between your lips after a hard day.

Robert – I never thought I'd hear you say that, Caroline.

Caroline – If you want to give your life meaning, donate to a charity. At least you'll get a tax deduction.

Robert – I was thinking of something more radical. I want to leave a legacy, you understand?

Caroline – More radical? You're scaring me, Robert. You're not planning to blow yourself up, are you?

Robert – Blow myself up?

Caroline – A suicide attack? Or some other madness!

Robert – To start with, I've decided to change my life. This doesn't make sense to me anymore, Caroline. I'm selling...

Caroline – You want to sell the family jewels? The Pipe House? The pride of our town?

Robert – I want something different now, you see. As I approach the end of my miserable existence, I intend to do something unforgettable. Something that will make the whole world remember the name Robert Blanc long after I'm dead.

Caroline – And what are you going to do?

Robert – I'm going to write my memoirs.

Caroline – Have you lost your mind?

Robert – I take it you're not in favour of this noble idea.

Caroline – In favour? I'd rather you blow yourself up instead...

Robert – As for selling the Pipe House, nothing's decided yet, don't worry...

Caroline – You can say that again. Over my dead body, Robert!

Robert hesitates at this prospect.

Robert – And about this painting... Maybe we could hang it there, on the back wall? What do you think?

Caroline – On the back wall? Robert, are you serious? Alexandra de Coursensac is coming for coffee any minute now!

The doorbell rings.

Robert – It can't be her already.

Caroline – I'll get it. Hide that monstrosity immediately.

She exits. Robert looks again at the painting.

Robert *(to himself)* – The more familiar things become, the less sense they make... *(To the audience.)* My wife's different. The more I see her, the more I want to kill her. I should have listened to my mother. And, come to think of it, I've never been entirely convinced Caroline had nothing to do with Mum's disappearance...

He exits, taking the painting with him. Caroline returns with Stanislas. He's wearing overalls that look somewhat childish or feminine but could also pass as workwear to someone as inattentive as Caroline.

Caroline – Thank you for coming so quickly. Do come in. It's in the toilet.

Stan – In the toilet?

Caroline – Every time we flush, it's like a waterfall in there. But... you didn't bring your tools?

Stan – No... It's just that... I didn't realise you called me for...

Caroline – You don't seem particularly capable, young man. Are you an apprentice? Or did your company send you along because they couldn't find anyone qualified?

Stan – No...

Caroline – Don't tell me you've just come out of prison. Did you murder someone?

Stan – Not yet...

Caroline – Well, I've no choice. I'm expecting people. Start by looking down the toilet and see what's wrong.

Stan – The seat?

Caroline – The toilet seat! What did they teach you in school, for heaven's sake?

Stan – Sorry. Plumbing wasn't part of my business degree.

Caroline *(distracted)* – My husband must have left a wrench somewhere. Come on, follow me.

Stan – I'm trying...

Caroline exits, followed by Stan. Victoria enters, now dressed, in a rather sexy outfit.

Victoria – I thought I heard the doorbell... I thought it was Stan... He just texted me asking for the address. Mum!

She exits. Stanislas returns, carrying a toolbox. He bumps into Robert, who enters.

Robert – Ah, you're here...

Stan – Yes, well...

Robert – Wait a minute—that's my toolbox!

Stan – Your wife gave it to me...

Robert – My mother always said: "A good workman always has his tools."

Stan – Yes, but...

Robert – So, the plumber? How's business these days?

Stan – My goodness... It's rather quiet.

Robert – Quiet? Not with all that drilling outside. And I need peace and quiet to write!

Stan – What works?

Robert – For the new boulevard! Do you know where this boulevard is supposed to lead, by the way?

Stan – I have no idea.

Robert – A grand boulevard is all very well for a place like ours, but I wonder if that woman is building it just to put her name on it.

Stan – The mayor wouldn't stoop to that...

Robert – Well, better to have your name on a street sign than on a war memorial, don't you think?

Stan – Of course... Could you tell me where the toilet is? I believe your wife...

Robert – I'd like to leave my mark on the world, too. But I haven't got an aristocratic name, so I've decided to write a book.

Stan – Really?

Robert – Would you like to read the first chapter?

Stan – Why not, but...

Robert – I mean, if a plumber likes it, it could be a popular success, right?

Stan – Yes, I guess... It depends on what it's about.

Robert – Well, it's... my reflections on the world today.

Stan – Oh, I see...

Robert – For example, my young friend, I've discovered a truth that few people realise.

Stan – I'd be curious to hear it...

Robert – Politicians on the left and the right keep talking about "the People". The People want this, the People refuse that. But who exactly are "the People"?

Stan – Yes... What is it?

Robert – My dear boy, the people don't exist!

Stan – They don't?

Robert – The people... it's you, it's me.

Stan – Of course...

Robert – "The People" are just all those idiots out in the street. And on the roads, behind the wheel.

Stan – Really?

Robert – Naturally! I've met hundreds of idiots in my time, but I've never once met "the People". That's the discovery I want to share with my readers.

Stan – Yes, it's just that...

Robert – I'm at an age where I want to pass on what life has taught me to the younger generation. To share my experience, you understand?

Victoria enters and notices Stan.

Victoria – Stan? What are you doing with that toolbox?

Stan – I'm not entirely sure... Your mother...

Robert – Stan? You know this young man, Victoria?

Caroline enters.

Caroline – Stanislas, I'm terribly sorry... I mistook you for the plumber... It must have been the overalls. My daughter just told me...

Stan – No, it's fine. Should I take a look at the toilet anyway?

Caroline – Oh, absolutely not! Robert, for heaven's sake, put that toolbox away...

Robert – Right now... Just think about what I said, young man.

Robert exits with the toolbox.

Caroline – I'm so sorry about the mix-up. Would you like something to drink, Stanislas? Orange juice? Lemonade? Sparkling water?

Stan – No, thank you.

Caroline – In that case, my dears... I'll let you two catch up. I'm sure you have plenty to talk about... after all this time.

Stan – Yes, it's been almost fifteen years, hasn't it?

Caroline – I'll leave you to it...

Caroline exits. An awkward silence follows.

Stan – Sorry... My mother insisted I come.

Victoria – The last time I saw you, you were wearing a dress.

Stan – Oh, really?

Victoria – It was at the school play. Romeo and Juliet. We were short on girls, so you played Juliet. Did you keep it up?

Stan – Well, no. My mum would have liked me in a cassock, but I ended up opting for overalls. Life is all about compromise...

Victoria – I meant the theatre.

Stan – Oh, no, I gave that up too. For now.

Victoria – So you did a business degree abroad.

Stan – My mother was pleased. She was already disappointed enough when I didn't go into the priesthood. What about you?

Victoria – I'm studying law. But really, I'm training for the national anti-capitalist and ecological revolution.

Stan – Oh, that's good too.

Caroline enters, carrying a tray with two glasses, a bottle, and a plate.

Caroline – Here you are, my dears, some cold sausage. I mean... You've been away so long, Stanislas. You must have missed it.

Stan – Indeed...

Caroline *(with a knowing look)* – I'll leave you to it...

Another awkward silence.

Victoria – Sorry about her.

Stan – No, no, it's very kind of her.

Victoria – Go ahead, don't be shy. Dig into the sausage.

Stan – Thanks, but... I'm actually vegetarian.

Victoria stares at him wide-eyed.

Victoria – Wait... Are you gay?

Stan – There are straight vegetarians, you know.

Victoria – Not the ones who wear dresses, go off to business school and come back in overalls.

Stan – That's why I was confused when your mother insisted I court you.

Victoria – They're even dumber than I thought.

Stan – So, what do we do now?

Victoria – It doesn't look as if we'll be getting engaged, then. Probably just as well for you. My boyfriends keep dying violent deaths. I've lost four in a month: Djamel, Kevin, Carlos and now Karim...

Stan – That sounds like the start of a football team. How did your international line-up meet its end?

Victoria – Poisoning, electrocution, car accident, scorpion sting... I'm starting to think I'm a femme fatale.

Stan – One more reason for me to keep my distance. But I guess I'll stick around for a while. Your mother wouldn't understand if I left too soon.

Victoria – Come up to my room and we can play something. Chess, Monopoly, Snakes and Ladders? I won't suggest a game of hearts...

Stan – Do you have Scrabble?

They exit. Caroline enters.

Caroline – They've already gone to the bedroom... That's a promising start. I imagine that in the de Coursensac family, when a boy gets a girl pregnant, he has the decency to marry her...

The doorbell rings.

Caroline – At last, the plumber! I'd better let him in...

She exits and returns with Inspector Ice, who is holding a case with a handle.

Caroline – This way... Shall I show you the toilet?

Ice – The toilet? Perhaps later. Inspector Ice, local criminal investigations.

Caroline – Inspector?

Ice – I'm here to ask you a few questions regarding an investigation...

Caroline – Oh, I'm so sorry, Inspector. I took you for the plumber, because of that case. Would you like some coffee?

Ice – Thank you, but I never drink coffee on duty. A whisky would be nice, though.

Caroline – Whisky? Of course, Inspector.

Ice – No ice, please.

Caroline – I'll bring it right away.

She exits. Ice takes the opportunity to inspect the room suspiciously.

Ice *(looking around)* – This respectable middle-class home doesn't inspire confidence. I'm always suspicious of the middle classes. You find more serial killers among them than among either millionaires or people on benefits. Apparently, killing for pleasure is a hobby for those who can afford a little leisure, but not enough to know what to do with it. Now, let's see what their whisky is like...

Caroline comes back with a glass and hands it to him.

Caroline – There you are, Inspector. No ice.

Ice – Ice.

Caroline – Yes. No ice, as you requested.

Ice – No, my name is Ice. Inspector Ice.

Caroline – Oh. Well, there's no ice in it, Inspector Ice.

Ice – Thank you.

He downs the glass in one gulp and grimaces.

Caroline – Would you like another glass, Inspector?

Ice – No, thank you. Perhaps coffee would have been wiser. Is your coffee any good?

Caroline – It's my grandmother's special blend.

Ice – I wouldn't take that as a recommendation. My grandmother's coffee could have dissolved concrete.

Caroline – What can I do for you, Inspector?

Ice – It concerns... a crime, madam.

Caroline – Oh, you've already heard about Karim?

Ice – Karim? No... Who's Karim?

Caroline – Sorry. His death has been on my mind all morning. But you said it was a crime... Who's dead, Inspector?

Robert enters and catches the last part of the conversation.

Robert – Someone's dead?

Ice – Indeed, dear Sir... Or rather, deceased, as we say in police jargon.

Robert – What's the difference?

Ice – Let's say *deceased* is more definitive than *dead*. More official, at least.

Caroline – Could you be a little more specific, Inspector?

Ice – Well, here's the thing. While digging the foundations for the new boulevard, the workers discovered a body.

Caroline – A body! Oh my God...

Ice – Or, to be precise... a corpse.

Robert – A corpse? You mean a dead body, right?

Caroline – So, a cadaver, in other words.

Ice – It's a bit more complicated than that, actually.

Caroline – What on earth are you talking about, Inspector?

Ice – Dear Madam, I'm talking about the void left when a deceased person disappears.

Robert – I know exactly what you mean, Inspector, believe me. My mother disappeared recently, and it's true she left a big void behind.

Caroline – So, did you find a corpse or not?

Ice – Let's just say... we found an imprint.

Robert – An imprint? How do you find an imprint during excavation work?

Caroline – And how do you deduce it's the imprint of a dead person?

Robert – It doesn't make sense!

Ice – In this case, it's a large imprint. Apparently it's that of a woman—a large woman, to be precise.

Caroline – And what makes you think it's a crime?

Ice – In my experience, people rarely commit suicide by sinking themselves into a block of concrete—with a screwdriver lodged between their shoulder blades.

Robert – Unbelievable... Someone buried in concrete, here in our little town! What is the world coming to, Inspector?

Caroline – And to think it used to be such a quiet little town...

Robert – I'm starting to wonder if building that boulevard was really such a good idea.

Caroline – And what's the identity of the victim, Inspector?

Ice – Our forensic team is still trying to identify the victim. That's why I'm here.

Caroline – Really?

A pause.

Ice – When was the last time you saw your mother, Mr. Blanc?

Robert – She disappeared a few years ago.

Caroline – On Mother's Day, to be precise. Robert had already bought her flowers, so he gave them to me instead. It's the only bunch of flowers he's ever given me.

Robert – We never found the body. We always assumed it was an accident. Drowning, perhaps...

Caroline – Or a voluntary disappearance.

Robert – Are you saying, Inspector, that... it's my mother you've found? Encased in a block of concrete with a screwdriver in her back?

Ice – It's difficult to say at this stage... Let me ask you something.

Caroline – We're more than willing to cooperate with the police, Inspector.

Robert – In our family, collaboration with the police has always been considered a sacred duty. Even in the most troubled periods of our history.

Ice – In addition to your mother's disappearance, Mr Blanc, have you noticed a screwdriver missing from your toolbox?

Robert – That depends. Are we talking about a crosshead screwdriver?

Ice – Affirmative.

Robert – Indeed, earlier, when I was putting away the toolbox my wife had given to the plumber – who, by the way, turned out to be the mayor's son – I noticed a screwdriver was missing. A crosshead screwdriver, to be exact.

Ice – I'm afraid that crosshead screwdriver may have performed your mother's last rites.

Caroline – Oh my God, how horrible! This is dreadful. My poor mother-in-law...

Ice – Did anyone have a reason to bear a grudge against your mother-in-law, madam?

Caroline – Inspector, this is just a family like any other. In this house, everyone feels like killing someone at least once a day. So a mother-in-law... Well, you can imagine.

Robert – Do you have a composite sketch of the victim?

Ice – I have something even better, believe me...

He opens his case and takes out a bust, with a screwdriver lodged in the back.

Caroline – What on earth is that?

Ice – A mould.

Robert – A mould?

Ice – Or rather a casting, as we say in police jargon.

Robert – A casting?

Ice – Let's say we've filled the void your mother left behind. Assuming, of course, that it is your mother...

Robert – A casting? Like the figures they made at Pompeii?

Ice – Except here, it wasn't lava but concrete that covered the body before it... grannified.

Caroline – You mean mummified, I suppose.

Ice – We poured plaster into the space the body left in the concrete. It's a smaller replica, of course.

Caroline – Well, I must say, bravo! It's very well done, isn't it, Robert?

Ice – Does this... statue seem familiar to you?

Robert – Hard to say... I've never seen a bust of my mother before.

Ice – No pressure—I understand this is emotional for you. I'll give you some time to think... And if your memory returns...

Caroline – You mean you're going to leave this horror with us?

Ice – Don't worry—it's not the only one. We've made several copies for the investigation.

Robert – If it really is Mum, at least we'll have something to remember her by, won't we, darling?

Ice – No need to see me out, I know the way.

He exits the opposite way he entered. Robert and Caroline stare at the bust in perplexity.

Robert – It does look a lot like my mother, doesn't it?

Caroline – You think so?

Robert – Have you seen? It's remarkable—it looks like she's watching us, like she wants to say something.

Ice reappears, returning from the opposite direction.

Ice – Pardon me, I believe the exit is this way... By the way, I've noticed something you might find interesting...

Robert – Yes?

Ice – You have a leak in your toilet.

He exits.

Robert – There's something... about the nose... Don't you see it?

Caroline – Yes, maybe...

Robert – It's strange... It's as if she's looking at you...

The doorbell rings.

Caroline – Let's hope it's the plumber this time.

Robert places the bust prominently on a piece of furniture and gazes at it.

Robert – Mum, are you trying to tell me something?

Caroline comes back with Alexandra de Coursensac (or Alexandre, if the part is played by a man).

Caroline – Robert? Mrs de Coursensac is here.

Robert – Madam Mayor! What a surprise—we weren't expecting you so early.

Alex – I have a busy afternoon, so I thought I'd pop in on my way back from the boulevard construction site.

Robert – You're very welcome in our modest home, Madam Mayor!

Alex – I hope I'm not disturbing you?

Robert – Not at all! We invited you for tea. If it's too early for coffee, there's always something stronger.

Caroline – Robert, why don't you get us something to drink?

Alex – That's very kind, but I have a council meeting in an hour. If I show up with a drink or two in me...

Caroline – Please, have a seat! Surely you have five minutes to spare.

They sit.

Alex – I've wanted to get to know you properly for ages. We see each other at the market now and then, especially at election time, but we never seem to talk. You make pipes, I believe?

Caroline – Yes, well, it's mainly my husband.

Robert – The Blanc family have made smoking pipes, father to son, since 1824.

Alex – A family tradition, then.

Caroline – Our family slogan says it all: "The Blancs know their pipes. Just ask anyone who's had one."

Alex – How... memorable. My son Stanislas is here, isn't he?

Caroline – Yes, he's with my daughter. I think they're playing Scrabble.

Robert – He studied business, didn't he?

Alex – I always hoped he'd pursue the priesthood... He spoke about it when he was thirteen or fourteen. He was very close to our parish priest—just before that saintly man was abruptly transferred by the diocese.

Robert – One can dream of embracing the priesthood and end up embracing a priest instead...

Caroline glares at him.

Caroline – In any case, we're thrilled that Stanislas and Victoria are getting along so well.

Alex – Yes, so am I. Especially since we don't often see him with girls... Sometimes we even wonder if he's a little...

Caroline – Shy. Yes, that was my impression too. When he arrived, I mistook him for the plumber, and he didn't even dare to correct me.

Robert – By the way, congratulations on the construction of this boulevard, Madam Mayor. We didn't have one in our town yet.

Alex – Yes, indeed. It was long overdue. A boulevard, you see, is what separates a large village from a small town.

Robert – And as I understand it, since the boulevard will encroach a little on our garden, it'll also give us a new address?

Caroline – That's true! I'm curious—what will this prestigious new address be? Have you chosen a name for the boulevard, Madam Mayor?

Alex – Well... My deputy suggested: Alexandra de Coursensac Boulevard.

Caroline – Ah yes, that does have a nice ring to it for a boulevard, doesn't it?

Robert – To have a boulevard named after you, and while you're still alive... I'd be happy with a street.

Caroline – Or even a dead end. Robert Blanc Lane. It has a certain ring to it.

Alex – Elections are expensive. If you happened to support our campaign, perhaps the town could name a cul-de-sac after you. In recognition of your public spirit, of course.

Robert – You'd do that?

Alex – It all depends on the size of the cheque, naturally. How about an alley or a lane?

Robert – I didn't know we were building new ones in our town.

Alex – We could always rename a side street currently dedicated to some long-forgotten local hero. We must keep up with the times.

Robert – And what would a small square cost?

Alex – Well...

Robert's mobile rings.

Robert – Excuse me for a moment. Yes? Yes, this is the Pipe House...

Robert exits.

Caroline – I'm not sure if I should mention this now, but... I think my husband is about to make a huge mistake.

Alex – If money is tight, I can arrange a prestigious civic honour for less than ten thousand. Would that help?

Caroline – No, it's not that. Unfortunately, it's much more serious...

Alex – He's cheating on you?

Caroline – I suspect he's having an affair with his urologist. But that's not the threat I'm worried about.

Alex – I'm not sure I want to hear this... Why not confess to a priest instead? They love these salacious stories.

Caroline – Robert wants to sell *the Pipe House*!

Alex – No!

Caroline – I even suspect some foreign investors are behind it. They're buying up everything: airports, shops, farms... But they will not get their hands on the pride of this town: the Pipe House!

Alex – Such loyalty to local industry does you credit, Caroline, but what can we do?

Caroline – I don't know... Maybe notify the police... have him declared unfit, placed under guardianship... He's made a will in my favour, but what if he changes his mind?

Alex – Guardianship isn't so simple, you know.

Caroline – Widowhood would be simpler, then. Couldn't the authorities have him quietly eliminated in the public interest? The future of our local industry is at stake!

Alex – I'll mention it to the head of the Local Police, I promise.

Caroline – Thank you, Madam Mayor.

Alex – What an extraordinary statue... It looks as if its eyes follow you around the room. A relative of yours?

Caroline – My mother-in-law...

Alex – Really? It's quite rare to have a bust of one's mother-in-law at home, isn't it?

Caroline – Yes... I dream of having one of my husband too.

Robert returns.

Alex – We were just talking about you. Your wife tells me you may be closing the Pipe House. What a loss to the town! Your pipes are famous far beyond our borders.

Robert – Sadly, business isn't what it used to be.

Alex – Have you found a buyer?

Robert – Not yet. Handmade pipes aren't exactly what investors are looking for these days.

Alex – Even with new technology, it's hard to sell a family pipe factory as a start-up.

Robert – Smoking pipes aren't fashionable any more, and anything involving tobacco is bad publicity. If you have an idea to improve sales, I'm listening.

Alex – I don't know... Maybe a vape shaped like a pipe?

Caroline – Ah, now that's an idea! Don't you think, Robert?

Alex – I really should be going...

Robert – Already? I wanted to show you my private collection.

Alex – A collection of paintings?

Robert – My pipe collection!

Alex – You can show me your pipes another time, Mr Blanc. I mustn't keep the council waiting. But do think about my little offer.

Caroline – We'll see you out...

They exit. Stan and Victoria return.

Victoria – So, what do you plan to do now with your business degree? Selling your soul to Big Capital?

Stan – No. I've decided it's time to finally embrace who I really am.

Victoria – Are you coming out?

Stan – I'm going to drama school.

Victoria – Oh wow...

Stan – I wonder how my mother will take it.

Victoria – How did she take it when you told her you were vegetarian?

Stan – I haven't dared to tell her yet.

Victoria – Well, you've convinced me—I'm done with meat forever.

Stan – Slaughterhouses are extermination camps run by a species that thinks it's superior to all others. Meat-eaters are the new fascists.

Victoria – You're right...

Stan – If you're interested, I'm part of a group that takes action against animal abusers.

Victoria – You mean... violent actions?

Stan – The real violence is what these fanatics inflict on our animal friends.

Victoria – I'll think about it. But I see the problems of the world more broadly. I'm active in the National Left Front.

Stan – The calves and chickens can't wait, Victoria—they need us.

Victoria – So do the people, Stan. They're sheep who keep voting for wolves.

Stan – If humans are ever to stop being wolves to one another, we must first end the violence we inflict on animals.

Victoria – Some dreadful dictators avoided meat. I'm not sure it made them any gentler.

Robert returns with Caroline.

Caroline – Stanislas! Your mother was just here. Don't tell me you're leaving already?

Stan – I'll be back, Madam... If only for a rematch.

Robert – A rematch?

Stan – Your daughter beat me at Scrabble. She's a real pro, you know.

Caroline – Stay for lunch! You and Robert can talk business afterwards. Man to man. He could use some new ideas to save the Pipe House.

Stan – That's very kind of you, but I wouldn't want to intrude.

Caroline – We keep things simple when the housekeeper has the day off. Today it's steak tartare for everyone!

Stanislas glances knowingly at Victoria.

Stan – Maybe another time.

Caroline – But I can cook it for you if you don't like raw meat.

Stan – Don't go to any trouble for me.

Caroline – A salad, then? Surely you eat salad!

Victoria – Mum...

Robert – I hope you had a nice time, at least?

Victoria – We talked. Stan convinced me to become vegan. His theory is very interesting: basically, he thinks anyone who eats meat is a fascist.

Caroline – Well, that's... an interesting point of view.

Victoria – I'll walk you out...

Stan and Victoria exit.

Robert – I'm starting to think that boy might not be the best influence on our daughter.

Caroline – Did you prefer Karim, then?

Robert – Of course not. We haven't seen him for a while, anyway.

Caroline – And you won't see him again, trust me... Did you know Victoria joined the National Left Front?

Robert – Don't worry. I went through a revolutionary phase myself at her age.

Caroline – You? A revolutionary?

Robert – I joined the Young Conservatives. I wanted to change the world without changing anything.

Caroline – Are you really set on shutting down the business?

Robert – I've even put a notice in the newspaper announcing that the Pipe House is closing, until I find a buyer. *(He hands her the paper.)* Here, read it.

Caroline *(reading)* – "THE PIPE HOUSE — CLOSING DOWN! FINAL BLOWOUT! LAST CHANCE FOR A GOOD PIPE. PRIVATE SERVICE. ABSOLUTE DISCRETION." Very tasteful...

Robert – It's the only way to avoid bankruptcy. And I'm not getting any younger. One day I might simply... go up in smoke.

Caroline – But if Victoria marries Stanislas... He has a business degree. He'll need a job, and he might know how to save the Pipe House.

Robert – You think so?

Caroline – Why else would I have arranged this marriage?

Robert – Arranged... It's not settled yet, is it?

Caroline – I don't know why, but I have a good feeling about this marriage.

Robert – Female intuition, no doubt... Right, I'll go see where I can hang this painting.

Robert leaves. Caroline comes face to face with the bust of her mother-in-law.

Caroline – Stop looking at me like that!

She drapes a scarf over the bust. Victoria returns.

Caroline – So, my dear, how did it go?

Victoria – What?

Caroline – With Stanislas! He's so well-mannered, isn't he? And rather handsome too.

Victoria – Yes... But he's gay.

Caroline – Gay? He looked rather gloomy to me. But surely a cheerful husband would be a good thing?

Victoria – Mum, I mean he's homosexual.

Caroline – Homosexual?

Victoria – Yes! He's attracted to men. Is that clear enough?

Caroline – Don't get carried away, my dear. I know you're disappointed, but... Nobody's perfect. So, he prefers boys—fine. That doesn't mean he doesn't like girls too, does it?

Victoria gives her mother a look that dashes any hope and exits.

Caroline – Oh my God... The mayor's son... Homosexual...

The doorbell rings. Caroline goes to answer it and returns with Ice.

Caroline – Inspector Ice! I didn't expect you back so soon. We're still not entirely sure this bust is my mother-in-law.

Ice – Alas, dear Madam, the experts have confirmed it. It is indeed your mother-in-law. You seem shaken by this news...

Caroline – No, no... I'm still in shock. The husband I had picked out for my daughter is gay, can you imagine? *(The phone rings.)* Excuse me... *(Answering.)* Yes... Yes, that's right... Of course... I don't understand it. The telephone hasn't stopped ringing. Everyone wants the address of the Pipe House. That was a football coach wanting to order a pipe for each player if they win the championship.

Ice – Business is booming, madam. A good pipe never goes out of fashion.

Caroline – If only you were right, Inspector. In recent years we've had little business except from dutiful wives buying a pipe for their husbands at Christmas. *(The doorbell rings.)* Excuse me again.

Caroline exits. Ice glances at the newspaper.

Ice *(reading)* – "THE PIPE HOUSE — CLOSING DOWN! FINAL BLOWOUT! LAST CHANCE FOR A GOOD PIPE. PRIVATE SERVICE. ABSOLUTE DISCRETION." No wonder the telephone's ringing.

Alex rushes in, followed by Caroline.

Alex – This is outrageous! How could you? And your husband claimed only minutes ago that he wanted to contribute to my election campaign!

Robert enters.

Robert – Madam Mayor? What's wrong? You seem upset...

Alex – What's wrong? You're asking what's wrong? I've just learned that your daughter is running against me in the local elections! That's what's wrong!

Caroline – Victoria? That's impossible! There must be some mistake...

Alex shoves an election leaflet under Caroline's nose.

Alex – Here, read this... Victoria Blanc, that's your daughter, isn't it?

Ice *(glancing at the leaflet)* – It's true. And now that four candidates ahead of her have died, she's at the top of the list.

Caroline – Oh my God, if I had known...

Ice *(reading)* – "Stop the outgoing mayor's backroom deals! Vote National Left Front: anti-capitalist, green and ready for change." They're casting a very wide net.

Caroline – This can't be true! We explicitly forbade her from getting involved in politics. I don't understand, I assure you.

Alex – And to think, only this morning, you were plotting to marry your wretched daughter to my son Stanislas.

Caroline – But surely these accusations are ridiculous, aren't they, Inspector?

Ice reads the leaflet.

Ice *(reading)* – According to the opposition candidate, de Coursensac Boulevard leads nowhere...

Alex – The opposition... Until now, no one dared oppose the De Coursensac local dynasty. This isn't just opposition—it's rebellion.

Robert – Judging by the string of tragedies among your opponents, it doesn't seem wise to challenge you, dear Madam...

Alex – Are you accusing me of murder now? These are outrageous, slanderous claims, Inspector—crude attempts to smear my name and my family's reputation.

Ice – The trouble is, the boulevard ends at the river. And there isn't a bridge.

Alex – That's absurd! Does a boulevard necessarily have to lead somewhere?

Ice – Exactly, Madam Mayor. Must a masterpiece serve a purpose? Of course not! That's what makes it art.

Alex – You've taken the words right out of my mouth, Inspector Ice.

Ice – Don't worry, Madam Mayor. We'll launch an inquiry into public uselessness, and then close the case. If every boulevard led somewhere, where would we end up?

Alex – Thank you, Inspector. I trust in the justice of my country! And especially in my local police.

Robert – Still... A boulevard that ends in a river doesn't make sense... Funny, though —it reminds me that this river doesn't have a name either.

Alex – Excuse me?

Robert – The river that runs through this town doesn't even have a name. Everyone just calls it "the river". And no one knows where it goes.

Caroline – That's true. I don't think I've ever seen its source or its mouth on a map.

Alex – Now you're going to tell me the river leads nowhere, too?

Ice – I've heard of a river of no return. A river with no destination is a new one.

Caroline – Nobody's ever worked out which larger river it joins. For all we know, it might just be a canal.

Robert – A canal dug by an earlier council, run by one of your ancestors, to make this place look like a proper town.

Alex – Come on, Inspector, say something!

Ice – This matter is clearly complicated. At this point, I wonder if we shouldn't be calling it a conspiracy.

Alex – A conspiracy to destabilise me, obviously. To prevent another triumph of the De Coursensac family in the local elections. A boulevard with no way out... What nonsense!

Ice – As far as I'm concerned, Madam Mayor, it's the entire comedy that seems to be going nowhere. Do you know who wrote it?

Alex – Frankly, no...

Ice – I'll look into that, too. We can't have someone like that wandering about unchecked. Meanwhile, if we want this story to start moving again, you might like to read this newspaper notice.

Alex looks at the newspaper the inspector hands over.

Alex *(reading)* – "THE PIPE HOUSE — CLOSING DOWN! FINAL BLOWOUT! LAST CHANCE FOR A GOOD PIPE. PRIVATE SERVICE. ABSOLUTE DISCRETION." What? A house offering private services on my boulevard? A brothel?

Ice – Well, it's one more thing our oversized village needed to become a respectable small town.

Alex – And you two! Running a house of ill repute! What have you got to say for yourselves?

Caroline – This is another mystery I can't quite explain, Alexandra...

Alex – Call me Madam Mayor. I want nothing to do with people running a brothel. And on de Coursensac Boulevard!

Caroline – I'm truly sorry... This must be some kind of misunderstanding...

Alex – You'll be hearing from me, I assure you. And as for trying to lure my son into marrying your shameless daughter, let me make one thing clear: no de Coursensac will ever marry into a family that prides itself on giving everyone a good pipe!

Robert – Allow me to show you out, Madam.

Alex exits, followed by Robert.

Ice – Four of your daughter's boyfriends dead in suspicious circumstances, your mother-in-law found inside a block of concrete... Strange things seem to happen in this town, don't you think?

Caroline – Strange? I don't see it... Strange compared to what, Inspector?

Ice – We found your fingerprints at the crime scene.

Caroline – My fingerprints? On the screwdriver handle? But I wiped it thoroughly, just like in those crime films!

Ice – Not on the screwdriver. *(Showing her a photograph.)* We found these prints, the whole of your hand, in the concrete while it was still wet. A permanent impression. I'm surprised you didn't leave your signature, too.

Caroline – Are you going to arrest me, Inspector?

Ice – Don't worry, dear Madam. I've spent enough time in prison myself to know it's no place for a woman like you.

Caroline – You're a gentleman, Inspector. *(Leaning in suggestively.)* How can I possibly thank you?

Ice – Ten thousand in small, used banknotes would do nicely.

Caroline *(disappointed)* – Very well...

Ice – It isn't cheap, of course. But I hear that's the going rate for a prestigious public honour these days.

Caroline – For a little extra, could you arrange for my husband to pass away... naturally, of course?

Ice – Why not? I take on small jobs in my spare time. I'll give you a quote.

Caroline – It's always a relief to work with a professional.

Ice – I wasn't always a police officer. I'm retraining.

Caroline – I didn't know they let ex-convicts join the police.

Ice – The local force isn't too particular. You don't mind, I hope?

Caroline – That depends. What did you do to land in prison?

Ice – I was a plumber...

Caroline – That seems reason enough to lock someone up. As it happens, I have one more little job for you, Inspector. *(Calling offstage.)* Robert! Bring your tools!

Caroline exits with Ice. Victoria returns with Stanislas.

Stan – I think our marriage is definitely off. Now that my mother knows you're standing against her in the election, the Blancs and the de Coursensacs might as well be the Montagues and the Capulets.

Victoria – I see *Romeo and Juliet* still resonates with you... Did you tell your mother you want to pursue acting?

Stan – Yes.

Victoria – And what did she say?

Stan – That she would have preferred I were gay.

Victoria – So, it's not settled yet.

Stan – No...

Victoria – Well, well...

Stan – I wonder how this comedy is ever going to end.

Victoria – Yes, so do I.

Stan – We should ask the author.

Victoria – But I imagine he didn't dare come to see the performance.

Stan – We'd better leave. With luck, the members of "the People" sitting in this audience will realise the play is over.

Victoria – I knew it. This boulevard was going nowhere from the start.

They exit. Closing music.

Blackout.

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 the savage beasts
Neighbours' Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a lovely village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Most Beautiful Village in France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

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

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