

La Comédiathèque

The Jackpot

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The Jackpot

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Translation by the author

Following a hearse accident, the arrival in a typical French café of a coffin, which turns out to contain a winning lottery ticket, provides the pretext for a highly spirited comedy.

Cast

Robert: The crossword-loving owner
Jessica: The single cook
Martin: The philosophical undertaker
Justin: The down-to-earth undertaker
Nathalie: The hyperactive heiress
Charlotte: The disillusioned high school student
Anthony: The overwhelmed professor
Jesus: The lucky plumber
Blanche: The not-so-crazy old lady
Tom: The postman who never rings twice

The gender of the owner, the cook, the undertakers and the postman can be either male or female. The undertakers can be reduced to a single character. The postman and/or the plumber can be played by the actor who portrays the professor.

7 actors : 1M/6W, 2M/5W, 3M/4W, 4M/3W
8 actors : 1M/7W, 2M/6W, 3M/5W, 4M/4W, 5M/3W
9 actors : 2M/7W, 3M/6W, 4M/5W, 5M/4W, 6M/3W
10 actors : 2M/8W, 3M/7W, 4M/6W, 5M/5W, 6M/4W, 7M/3W

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The scene takes place in a French café, "Café des Sports." Behind the bar, Robert, the owner, is solving a crossword puzzle from the French newspaper "Aujourd'hui en France". Jessica, the maid, is mopping the floor. Tom, an old-fashioned postman, arrives to deliver mail.

Robert (*Pondering*) – It's an illusion and yet it's a reality... Seven letters...

Jessica pauses to think along with him.

Jessica – Marriage...?

Robert looks at her, surprised by this sudden burst of genius. He counts on his fingers up to seven, and his face lights up. He leans over his crossword grid, but disappointment sets in.

Robert – Damn, it starts with a 't'...

Tom, an old-fashioned postman arrives (wearing a uniform, cap, satchel and bike clips). It's worth noting that the postman will be played by the same actor who later portrays the plumber (who will arrive in work overalls). Since they'll be wearing very different outfits, there's no need to disguise them to tell them apart, but a fake moustache can be added to the postman, who otherwise resembles the village idiot. Robert looks up from his crossword grid.

Robert – Hi Tom...

Postman – Hi Robert. You've got a lot of letters, today...

Jessica – Must be your fans who are writing to you...

The postman places a package of letters on the bar. Robert has a look at the envelopes.

Robert – Fans, my ass. Bill, taxes, membership fee reminders, more bills... (*He puts the mail away.*) A small dry white, as usual?

Postman – Oh no, white wine doesn't agree with me too well at the moment... Pour me a small red instead.

Robert serves him.

Robert – There you go.

The postman downs his drink in one gulp.

Postman – Thank you, Robert. By the way... Mrs. Plonk, does that name mean anything to you?

Robert – Plonk?

The postman pulls out a registered letter.

Postman – Mrs. Plonk. She lives in the building next door, number 13.

Robert – Oh, yeah...

Postman – But I didn't see her name on the mailboxes.

Robert – Doesn't surprise me...

Postman – Which floor does she live on?

Robert – Seventh. But she passed away about two weeks ago.

Postman – Ah, damn... So, in other words... she moved, so to speak...

Robert – You could say that, yeah... She moved to the cemetery.

Postman – No, because I have a registered letter for her.

Robert – Ah, yeah... That's unfortunate...

Postman – So, what should I do?

Robert – I don't know, really...

Postman – She didn't leave you an address, by any chance?

Robert – She's dead, I tell you.

Postman – Ah, yeah... That's annoying... But who's going to sign for my registered letter?

Robert – That...

Postman – So, she's not coming back...

Robert – It's highly unlikely.

Postman – That's not convenient for me.

Robert – In every profession, it's the same, you know... There are always troublemakers who only think about complicating your life...

Postman – Well, I don't know... Couldn't you sign on her behalf?

Robert – Why would I do that?

Postman – As neighbours, we can do each other small favours... It would save me from coming back.

Robert – Coming back? For what?

Postman – To deliver this registered letter to her!

Robert – But I'm telling you she's dead! Deceased, you understand? And there's at least one advantage to being dead, which is that you become permanently inaccessible to all kinds of registered mail!

Postman – I understand.

Robert – Just leave her a notice of delivery.

Postman – You think so?

Robert – What kind of registered letter is it? Tax notice? Eviction notice? Termination notice?

Postman – It's from the National Lottery.

Robert – The National Lottery?

Postman – It can't be bad news.

Robert – Do you really think that when you're dead, you can still tell the difference between good and bad news?

Postman – Well... the National Lottery...

Robert – Let me see... (*Takes the letter from the postman's hand*) Oh yeah, the National Lottery, indeed...

Postman – Was she playing the lottery?

Robert – I don't know... We bumped into each other from time to time... She had a little dog... A female dog...

Postman – And what happened, then?

Robert – She's dead, I'm telling you!

Postman – The dog too?

Robert – Not the dog, her!

Postman – And what happened to the dog?

Robert – I don't know...

Postman – It's sad, a dog left all alone in life like that... I don't understand all these people who take an animal and then abandon it. Taking care of an animal is a responsibility. People don't realize...

Robert – Do you think she could have won the jackpot?

Postman – If that's the case, she shouldn't delay in coming forward. Because there's a deadline, after all. If you don't claim your check before then, you lose everything. And the amount is put back into the game...

Robert – It would certainly be unfortunate...

Postman – So, what do we do?

Robert – We?

Postman – Like you said, it would be unfortunate...

Robert – Okay. I'll sign.

Postman – That way, I won't have to come back.

Robert signs the receipt handed to him by the postman, eagerly opens the envelope, and reads.

Postman – So, what is it?

Robert – It's a termination letter...

Postman – It's not a check?

Robert (*reading*) – She was employed at the National Lottery. On a fixed-term contract. It's just a notice of contract termination.

Postman – Ah, damn... So not only did she not win the lottery, but she also lost her job, huh?

Robert – Yeah...

Postman – Oh yeah, that's tough... Because finding a job these days...

Robert – Especially when you're dead.

Postman – And obviously, it's never people like us who win the lottery, right? Those who really need it.

Robert – No...

Postman – You know, I read an article in the newspaper yesterday: a guy wins 60 million in the lottery, and he continues to live exactly the same as before... Let me tell you, there are people who don't deserve to win!

Robert – That's for sure...

Postman – Well, that's all for me, I need to continue my rounds.

He prepares to leave. Robert waves the letter.

Robert – What am I supposed to do with this?

Postman – That's up to you, you know... As long as you've signed the receipt...

The postman leaves. Robert looks at the letter again, perplexed, before setting it aside. Anthony enters, holding a briefcase, lost in his thoughts.

Anthony – Ladies and gentlemen. A coffee please...

Robert serves him his coffee and takes a bottle from a shelf behind him.

Robert – A little calvados, to go with that?

Anthony (*surprised*) – To go with what?

Robert – Well, your coffee...

Anthony – Ah, uh... No, thank you... I have a class in fifteen minutes...

Robert, tempting, with the bottle in hand.

Robert – Come on... They won't make you blow into the breathalyser...!

Anthony – Well, after all, why not...

While Robert serves him a calvados and takes one for himself, Anthony glances at Le Monde newspaper he just took out of his pocket.

Anthony (*reading*) – At the risk of his own life, an undocumented young man saves a senator from drowning on a beach in Pas-de-Calais...

Robert – And they'll probably give him the Legion of Honour for that...

Robert places a calvados in front of Anthony and prepares to down his own.

Anthony – Don't you think he deserves it?

Robert – If it had been a child, I wouldn't say anything... but a senator! What's the point of a senator, anyway?

Anthony – I must admit, I don't know.

Robert – No, I'm in favour of abolishing the Senate.

Anthony – You might not be wrong. But we can't just drown them all...

Robert – But to rescue them when they accidentally fall into the water. Well, I'm just saying. As for me, I only use water to dilute my pastis.

Robert downs his calvados in one gulp.

Robert (*appreciative*) – Ah...

But his satisfied smile immediately freezes.

Robert – This calvados tastes strange... Don't you think?

Anthony raises his glass to his lips and grimaces.

Anthony – You can really taste the apple flavour...

As Robert puts the bottle back on the shelf, he weighs it and checks the level.

Robert – This can't be! It was almost full just yesterday. It's not me who drank all this!

He takes a pencil and makes a mark on the label. Jessica, who has finished mopping the floor, walks away towards the kitchen. Anthony is about to empty his glass. He chokes when he sees Nathalie, dressed in black, and her daughter Charlotte approaching. Anthony and Charlotte exchange an embarrassed glance. Anthony hides behind Le Monde newspaper while Charlotte and her mother take a seat.

Nathalie (*looking around*) – It's filthy, isn't it?

Charlotte – It's a popular place...

Nathalie – Yeah... That's what I'm saying... It's filthy...

Charlotte – It's the only café in front of the cemetery... Obviously, it doesn't attract as many people as a high school...

Nathalie glances at the owner who comes over to take their order.

Robert – What can I get you, ladies?

Nathalie – A tea with... (*She hesitates, with a disgusted look*) Just a tea.

Charlotte – A lemonade.

The owner walks away. Nathalie looks at the sign above the bar.

Nathalie – Sport's Café... What a name for a bar like that. I wonder what sport they can possibly practice. There isn't even a foosball table...

Charlotte takes out a cigarette and prepares to light it.

Nathalie – You're not going to smoke?

Charlotte – Why not...? Just a reminder, when you were pregnant with me, you smoked two packs a day... They say it's the best way to have mentally challenged children...

Nathalie – Yeah, well, back then we didn't know... Why did you say when you were pregnant?

Robert, bringing their drinks, diverts the conversation.

Robert – If you want to smoke, you'll have to go outside...

Charlotte puts away her cigarette with a sigh. Robert leaves.

Nathalie – So, in the end, it wasn't appendicitis...

Charlotte – Appendicitis! At seventy-five years old! Confusing liver cirrhosis with a childhood disease! That doctor wasn't a diagnostic genius...

Nathalie – He was just an intern. They're so poorly paid. Well, it was incurable anyway. It's strange, I can't quite grasp the fact that your grandfather is dead.

Charlotte – Before being my grandfather, he was a bit like your father, wasn't he...?

Nathalie – Yes... I always had a hard time connecting with him.

Charlotte – Well, it's not going to improve now...

Nathalie – I have a friend who spent fifteen years in therapy trying to reconnect with her father. Fifteen years, can you imagine?

Charlotte – So what...?

Nathalie – After fifteen years, her father was dead...

Unbeknownst to her mother, Charlotte exchanges a few embarrassed glances with Anthony.

Charlotte – And Grandma?

Nathalie – She didn't even remember that she was married, let alone telling her now that she's a widow... *(Sighs)* It's not very cheerful, all of this...

Charlotte – Funerals are rarely cheerful...

Robert has immersed himself in reading his newspaper.

Robert *(reading)* – Suicide is the leading cause of death among teenagers... Well, at sixteen, it's rare to die of old age, right?

Charlotte – Did you know that Grandpa had a funeral plan?

Nathalie – No...

Charlotte – It's quite something, isn't it? I can't imagine choosing in advance if I want oak or fir, golden or silver handles, cotton candy pink or apple green upholstery...

Nathalie – Well, it's convenient. That way, we don't have to worry about anything.

Charlotte *(sarcastically)* – And we don't have to pay anything...

Nathalie takes out a mirror from her bag and examines herself.

Nathalie – Oh my, if I ran into myself on the street, I wouldn't recognize myself! I'll freshen up my makeup a bit, otherwise people will think it's me they're burying...

Nathalie heads towards the restroom and comes across Anthony, who is doing everything possible to go unnoticed, hiding behind a book by Kant. After hesitating, she approaches him with a big smile.

Nathalie – Anthony? It's Nathalie! Remember? We were in high school together.

Anthony *(feigning enthusiasm)* – Ah, Nathalie...!

Nathalie – So, what have you been up to?

Anthony – Well, I'm still in high school...

Nathalie – As a teacher?

Anthony – Student, then a monitor, now a teacher. It was the last option to avoid being kicked out of school... And you?

Nathalie – Oh, me... I got married... And then I got divorced...

Robert *(sententiously)* – Sometimes, a good divorce is better than a bad marriage...

Nathalie gives him a piercing look.

Nathalie (*amused, to Anthony*) – Are you still writing plays...?

Charlotte seems surprised.

Anthony – No... (*Seeing Nathalie's disappointed expression, he corrects himself.*)
Now I mostly write novels...

Nathalie – A writer? Fantastic! You'll have to dedicate one of your books to me.

Anthony (*embarrassed*) – Yes, well...

Nathalie – And by the way, are you married? Do you have children?

Anthony – Uh... No, I'm still single...

Nathalie – It's funny, my daughter is almost the same age as your students now. It makes us feel old... (*Pointing to Charlotte*) Speaking of her, there she is!

Anthony exchanges an embarrassed glance with Charlotte.

Anthony – Charlotte...? Oh, it's funny, she's one of my students... I didn't know she was your daughter...

Nathalie – She carries her father's name... It's all he left her when he walked away... You're her gym teacher, right? She talks about you all the time...

Anthony – No... I teach philosophy...

Nathalie – Ah, yes, that's right! You have rather the physique of a philosophy teacher... By the way, it doesn't seem like there's much love between my daughter and Kant, huh? Do you think she'll finally pass that high school diploma? It's already the third time... I wonder if there wasn't a little misorientation. She's always had a more practical mindset. And between us, philosophy doesn't lead anywhere...

Anthony – Well, no...

Nathalie – Anyway, if it doesn't work out this year, I'll enroll her in a business school! You know, the kind of prestigious school where you can get in without a diploma. I've already found one. It's expensive, but well... When you want something good for your kids.

Charlotte (*exasperated*) – Mum...!

Nathalie – Oh, my... It's not easy for a single woman to raise a child, believe me... By the way, do you know what Freud says about raising children? Do whatever you want, it will be wrong anyway. Well, excuse me, I have a funeral to attend...

Nathalie continues her way to the restroom.

Charlotte – I didn't know you knew my mother.

Anthony – Neither did I...

Charlotte – We absolutely have to meet tonight... Shall we meet at your place?

Anthony – Listen, Charlotte, it would be better if we stop, both of us. We're on the wrong path...

Charlotte – The wrong path?

Anthony – In a week, you'll have your high school diploma. Next year, you'll go to college. I'll repeat my senior year, as I do every year.

Charlotte – My high school diploma? I've failed it twice just to stay in your class. But this year, it would suit you if I pass, right? So that in September, you can find someone else to give private lessons...

Anthony gently gestures for Charlotte to lower her voice.

Anthony – I could be your father!

Charlotte (*threatening*) – Exactly. I could file a complaint for corruption of a minor...

Anthony – You're 21 years old...

Charlotte – Fine, then I'll go with sexual harassment.

Anthony (*feigning detachment*) – Do as you wish. In any case, it might actually do me a favour to get expelled from the Education System.

Charlotte (*rising, contemptuous*) – Poor guy!

Nathalie comes out of the restroom.

Nathalie (*charmingly, to Anthony*) – Drop by the house one of these evenings. We'll have a little dinner as single people... (*Whispering mischievously in his ear*) Who knows? Maybe we'll reignite the flame...

Anthony, embarrassed, responds with a smile.

Nathalie – Are you coming, Charlotte? (*To Anthony*) Don't overwork her too much, okay?

Nathalie and Charlotte leave. Anthony remains there, not proud of himself but relieved. Robert didn't miss the conversation but pretends not to have heard.

Anthony – The risks of the job... Um... Can I ask you to be discreet about this? I'm playing my position here...

Robert (*assertively*) – Don't worry... A café is like a confessional. And I am bound by the seal of confession.

Suddenly, Charlotte returns for a moment and puts something in Anthony's hand.

Charlotte – Here, it's the first exam I've ever passed. And this time, it's really thanks to you... I'll leave you the diploma as a keepsake!

Charlotte leaves. Anthony looks at the object incredulously. It's a pregnancy test.

Robert – When there are two lines, it means it's twins...

Anthony panics and leaves. Robert sighs and goes back to his crossword puzzle. Jessica emerges from the kitchen with a magazine. Seizing the opportunity while Robert is distracted, she sneaks a glass of calvados, downs it in one gulp, and then proceeds to pour mineral water into the calvados bottle using a funnel. As she tidies up, Robert turns to her, suspicious. She opens "Le Chasseur Français" and flashes an innocent smile.

Robert – You're reading hunting magazines now?

Jessica – No! It's for the classifieds... (*Robert looks surprised*) The matrimonial ads!

Robert – And...?

Jessica – Well, you know, it's like with cars, right? You have to do comparative tests...

Robert – And have you found the model you want?

Jessica – Not yet. Unfortunately, at my age, I have to stick to the second-hand market...

A mobile phone rings.

Jessica – It must be mine... I got a new one for Christmas. You have to keep up with the times...

She answers the call clumsily, clearly not used to this type of device.

Jessica (*irritated*) – Damn, how does this work again...

Robert looks at her, perplexed.

Jessica (*with forced friendliness*) – Hello, yes! Yes, it's me... Yes, hello... Yes, in my forties, that's right...

She realizes that Robert is listening.

Jessica – Well, closer to forty than fifty, anyway... Yes, I came across your ad by chance in a magazine about hunting and... Uh, no, I don't hunt. I probably flipped through it at the hairdresser's... No, my hairdresser doesn't hunt either, why...? Divorced, right...? (*Freezing*) Ah... And how did she die...? If it's not indiscreet, of course... Oh my goodness... She must have suffered... I think in cases like that, they should put them down... (*Robert looks at her, astonished.*) Yes, it must have left a void for you... No, I don't have any pets... Just a 17-year-old son... (*Laughing*) But they do dirty things too, you know...! Do you like children...? No, I think it's a bit late for that, right...? At our age, it certainly wouldn't be normal... Listen, I'm not alone right now. Does Café des Sports work for you? No, not across from the stadium, across from the cemetery... That's right. (*Coquettishly*) See you later...

Jessica hangs up and puts her phone on the bar. Robert, skeptical, is checking the mark he made with a pencil on the calvados bottle.

Jessica – Have you seen Albert?

Robert – He hasn't shown up to play the lottery for three days... Must be under the weather.

Jessica – He's been playing his social security number for so long... It would be a shame if he won right when he validated it on a reimbursement form...

Robert goes back to reading "Aujourd'hui en France". He turns a page of his newspaper and suddenly startles.

Robert – Hey, speaking of the lottery, check this out!

Jessica – What is it?

Robert – The super jackpot! The winning number was played here!

Jessica – No way?

Robert (*pointing at the newspaper*) – Look! 75 millions euros!

Jessica – Unbelievable...

Robert – Can you imagine all the things you can do with that much money! It could be someone we know...

Jessica – Maybe he's single...

Robert – Who knows... Some winners prefer to remain anonymous...

Robert pours himself a calvados.

Jessica – Yes, just like alcoholics...

Robert gulps down his calvados, grimaces, and clutches his stomach.

Robert – I don't know what's wrong with me. I've had a stomachache for some time...

Jessica – It's stress, that's what it is. You'll see, when you retire, the stomachaches will disappear.

Robert – Sure... And when I'm six feet under, I won't feel any pain anywhere...

He marks another line on the calvados bottle with a pencil.

Jessica – Well, I'm off to the grocery store.

She leaves, forgetting her mobile phone on the bar. It starts ringing.

Robert – She forgot her phone! Oh, damn it... (*After fumbling for a moment, he manages to answer the call.*) Hello! No, this isn't Jessica, it's Robert! Who's calling...? Jesus...! The ad? What ad? Oh, yes, in "Le Chasseur Français"... No, hang on, let me explain! This isn't my phone... The guy hung up, what a twit! (*He puts the phone back on the bar.*) Jesus... It couldn't have been the Jehovah's Witnesses, could it?

Two undertakers enter, dressed in black suits and sunglasses.

Robert – Well, look who's here, the Blues Brothers! How's business?

Martin – Traditions are fading. People are late even for funerals. In the meantime, let's have a drink... (*He looks outside through the window.*) But I need to keep an eye on my hearse.

Justin – Can't risk anyone stealing it, with all the goods inside. You hear about all sorts of crazy things these days. Did you hear about those Belgians smuggling cigarettes hidden in a funeral van?

Robert – Well, with the new laws now... With the skull and crossbones they have to put on the packages... Soon, tobacco delivery vans will look like hearses... (*Pause*) What can I get you?

Martin – The usual. Hey, don't change a winning team...!

Robert pours them a drink with a bit of a sulk.

Martin (*insistent, ironic*) – Did you watch the match on TV last night?

Robert – Yeah, well... The second one wasn't there...

Martin (*outraged*) – What do you mean, he wasn't there?

Robert – Offside...

Martin (*choking*) – Offside?

Jessica returns with a large plastic bag marked Casino and immediately gets caught up in the conversation.

Robert – The second one wasn't offside, right?

Jessica – Ever since referees started wearing advertising... (*The undertakers look at her, puzzled.*) What was written on the referee's shirt?

She points to her plastic bag.

Martin (*reading*) – Casino...? So what?

Jessica – And what do you need to put on the table to play at a casino?

Justin – Money?

Jessica – You're right... The referee was bought, I'm telling you...

Martin – Ridiculous...

Robert returns to his crossword puzzle. Jessica heads towards the kitchen with her groceries.

Robert (*counting on his fingers*) – Shit! It still doesn't start with a t...

Martin tries to get the boss's attention on his empty glass.

Martin – Hey, your socks look pretty good. Do they make them for men too?

The boss shrugs and pours another round for the undertakers. As he serves Justin, Justin signals him to stop, but the glass is already overflowing.

Justin – Whoa, whoa, whoa... Easy on the pour, huh? There are enough deaths on the roads as it is.

Martin – Oh, nothing can happen to our customers anymore. *(He sips his drink.)* Although... You know, last month we cremated Mrs. Plonk...

Robert – Who's that?

Martin – Mrs. Plonk! Her husband ran the prank and joke shop! She died of a heart attack...

Robert – Ah, yes...

Martin – By the way, her husband didn't stay widowed for very long...

Robert – He remarried already?

Martin – Oh, you're not aware of it either? Pancreatic cancer. He passed away fifteen days later. And he was younger than you...

Robert – Life isn't fair...

Justin *(sighing, philosophically)* – Well, that's the way it is...

Martin – Anyway, the husband forgot to inform us before the cremation that his wife had a pacemaker. Right in the middle of the ceremony, boom! The lithium battery exploded due to the heat, I tell you... The oven door was hurled against the wall!

Justin – Luckily, no one was in front of it.

Martin – I won't even tell you about the state of the family. Not to mention Mrs. Plonk, of course. Well, there were no injuries, that's the main thing... But the damage is significant, you know... By chance, we're insured...

Justin – A device like that costs more than a pizza oven, I'm telling you.

Robert – Well... You have a dangerous job... *(Pause)* You know, I'm surprised we haven't seen Albert yet...? It's his lottery day...

Martin – Albert? He's parked right across the street, in a nice car.

Robert *(excited)* – Did he win the jackpot?

Martin – If you can call it that... He's dead. He's in our hearse!

Robert – No kidding?

Justin – Liver cirrhosis.

Robert – That's a shock... Poor Albert... I saw him three days ago. He played his lottery ticket, as usual... And to think he could have won. (*Proudly*) The winning ticket was sold here!

Jessica comes out of the kitchen.

Jessica – Hey, maybe it's him...

Robert – Him, what?

Jessica – The winner! He hasn't come forward. He had a good reason not to...

Robert – Well, it's easy to check, since he played with his Social Security number... (*He looks for the lottery results in the newspaper.*) 1 25 12 37 39 16 and the complementary number 14... But what was Albert's Social Security number?

The others display their ignorance.

Jessica – That would be quite lucky!

Martin – I'd rather be in my own shoes than in his...

Robert – It's mostly the heirs who would be happy. Because otherwise, Albert probably didn't leave them much.

Jessica – Except for empty bottles...

Justin – What would you do, Robert, if you won the lottery?

Robert – I'd buy you all a round... Unfortunately, I don't play.

Jessica – If I won the jackpot, I would treat myself to a trip to space. (*The others look at her, bewildered.*) Haven't you read it in the newspaper? Now billionaires can take a ride in a rocket!

Justin – That reminds me of something my father used to say to me all the time: "When they send idiots into orbit, you won't stop spinning."

Martin – Come on, serve us a drink to celebrate.

Robert – To celebrate what?

Martin gestures that it doesn't matter. Robert serves them. Blanche enters, wearing a headscarf, pretending to be a deaf-mute and selling figurines. She places her collection on the bar. The others look at her, unsure how to react. Blanche puts a piece of paper on the bar. Jessica leans over to read.

Robert – What does it say?

Jessica – If we buy six, the seventh one is free...

Martin (*considering the figurines*) – What are these?

Justin – Aren't these the seven dwarfs...?

Jessica – There are only five!

Robert – And they're small for dwarfs. You better mow your lawn every week, or you won't find them anymore...

Justin (*sympathetic*) – If we each take two...

Robert – What are we going to do with two dwarfs each?

Jessica – Yes. Especially since there are only five...

Robert (*loudly*) – No, thanks, we have what we need!

Jessica – There's no need to shout like that, she's deaf.

Blanche packs up without insisting, but she looks displeased.

Robert – I'm not shouting, I'm articulating. So she can read my lips...

Blanche leaves. Before she reaches the door, she turns around.

Blanche – Bunch of dwarfs!

She exits. The others look at each other, bewildered.

Martin – It seems like she found her voice again...

Robert – And to think we almost felt sorry for her.

Jessica (*dreamily*) – It reminds me of a story...

Robert – Snow White?

Jessica – No, it's from a book I just read.

She takes out a Harlequin-type book and places it on the counter.

Jessica – It's called "A Woman is a Woman". It takes place in Florida. It's the story of a young, deaf-mute American billionaire who falls in love with a French seminarian on a mission in Miami... She's troubled because she doesn't know how to confess her love to him...

Robert – Because he's a seminarian?

Jessica – Yes... And especially because she's mute. On his part, he's also in love but doesn't know how to make her understand...

Justin – He's shy...

Jessica – Yes... And besides, she's deaf.

Robert – Couldn't she read his lips...?

Jessica – Yes... The problem is that he only speaks French, and she, well, she only understands English since she's American...

Martin (*a bit lost*) – Ah, I see...

Jessica – Secretly, he learns sign language...

Robert – And English...

Jessica – On Valentine's Day, he invites her to a restaurant and confesses his love!

Martin (*amazed*) – And then?

Jessica – Overwhelmed by emotions, she regains her speech and hearing.

Robert – So, he learned sign language for nothing...

Jessica – No! Because together, they decide to open a school for the deaf and mute...

Justin (*worried*) – But they still get married, right?

Jessica – Of course.

Robert – I thought he was a Catholic seminarian...?

Jessica – In the end, he decides to convert to Protestantism to marry her...

Silence, as they digest the symbolic significance of this story.

Jessica – Well, that's all nice, but I have to go cook...

Robert – Sure, go ahead.

Jessica leaves. The undertakers sip their drinks in silence. Robert immerses himself in "Aujourd'hui en France" newspaper.

Robert (*reading*) – Cigarettes also kill non-smokers... Well, might as well smoke then...

Martin – Speaking of dead bodies, you know what my daughter asked me this morning while I was taking her to preschool in my hearse?

Robert – You take your daughter to school in a hearse?

Martin – Well, what's wrong with that? It's a company car. That or the Frozen Food Mart... (*Getting annoyed*) Anyway, do you know what she asked me?

Robert – No.

Martin – Where do we go when we die...?

Robert – And what did you answer?

Martin – What do you think?

Robert – I don't know.

Martin – Yes. That's exactly what I told her.

Robert – And then?

Martin – She said, But Dad, when we die, we go to the cemetery!

Robert – Well, naturally, she must have been surprised that with the job you do, you're not aware of it yet...

Justin – Where do we go when we die... We don't even know where we're going when we're alive... Alright, serve us a little white wine, that'll wash down the beer.

Robert refills their glasses, emptying the last drop from the bottle into Martin's glass.

Robert – Married within the year... I'll go get a case of white wine downstairs. With all that you're drinking from me.

Justin (*glancing at "Aujourd'hui en France"*) – Raped by her stepfather on her wedding day, she throws herself under the train that was supposed to take her on her honeymoon and causes a terrible derailment...

Martin – Looks like business is picking up...

Robert goes down to the cellar through the trapdoor behind the bar. Jessica returns to wipe the counter.

Martin (*to Jessica*) – So, how's your son doing?

Jessica – He's fine. He's currently doing a three-month internship with his business school.

Martin – Oh really? Where's he interning?

Jessica – At Burger King... In Los Angeles.

Martin – In Los Angeles! And what's he doing there? Is he in marketing?

Jessica – No, no, he's in sales. The American philosophy in business is to start from the bottom and work your way up.

Martin – At Burger King...?

Jessica – In Los Angeles! They don't just hire anyone, you know!... Imagine serving hamburgers to Americans...

Jessica doesn't have time to respond.

Robert – Oh, for God's sake!

Robert comes back up.

Robert – I have a meter of water in my cellar!

Justin (*horrified*) – Water...!

Robert – I need to shut off the main valve.

He goes to shut off the valve.

Jessica – Well, how am I supposed to do the dishes now...

Robert – Well, in any case, you won't be getting any white wine...

Justin – Who cares about the bottle? As long as we get a good buzz, right? Red wine will do just fine...

Robert looks at Martin to ask him what he wants.

Martin – Same for me...

Robert – Well, I could use a drink to lift my spirits. (*Robert fills the glasses with a sigh.*) It looks like a pipe burst down there. It's a complete disaster. Only the empty bottles are floating on the surface.

Justin – It would have been better if they were full...

Jessica – But why do you keep all these empty bottles? You can't get a refund on them anymore...

Justin – When I was a kid, we used to take them to the corner store to earn some pocket money and buy cigarettes. The old lady would stack them up in her backyard. Since her wall faced our garden, we would use a step stool to retrieve the bottles and sell them back to the store. She was nice, but we couldn't resist playing tricks on her... They say children are angels. Ha! Not true. Kids can be quite mischievous...

Jessica – Well, that's all charming, but how am I supposed to cook now? We're out of water...

Robert – Relax, I'll call the plumber.

Robert searches through the phone book. Martin opens "Aujourd'hui en France".

Robert (*reading the phone book*) – Da Silva, Dos Santos, Da Costa... Well, at least we have options...

Justin (*reading the newspaper*) – The French make love once every three days... Isn't that bizarre?...

Robert (*dialing the number*) – So, 01...

Jessica – Well? When is your plumber going to show up?

Robert – I have no idea. He's not answering...

Jessica – Fine, I'll take the opportunity to go to the bakery then...

Justin – Did you know that the French make love once every three days?

Jessica (*sarcastically*) – And what about French women?

Justin (*looking at the newspaper*) – It doesn't say.

Robert – Damn it! I'll try his mobile...

Jessica – Once every three days! Maybe only in their dreams...

Jessica leaves for the bakery.

Robert (*dialing the number*) – 06...

Justin – It's an average.

Robert – Considering how often it happens to you, it's about time others start putting in some effort. (*Finally getting a response on the phone.*) Ah... Hello! I can barely hear you... Are you in a car, by any chance...? Well, you still have five minutes! We've got a leak in a cellar... Yes, Café des Sports... No, not across from the stadium! It's across from the cemetery... Can you see it...? No, the other way! (*Louder*) Across! Hello...! Hello...!

At that very moment, screeching tires and a loud crash can be heard. The undertakers all look outside.

Martin – Oh, for God's sake!

Robert (*hangs up the phone*) – Damn it, we got disconnected...

Justin – First time I've seen a coffin take flight...

The undertakers rush outside, while Robert looks through the café window.

Robert – Oh, my... He crashed head-on into your hearse. Poor Albert... At least he was already dead...

Jesus enters, wearing overalls, holding Blanche's arm. The old lady no longer has a headscarf, and Robert doesn't recognize her.

Blanche – Couldn't you watch where you were going?

Jesus – You threw yourself under my wheels! (*To Robert*) Did you see what happened? She crossed the road like a maniac.

Robert pretends he didn't see anything and doesn't want to get involved.

Blanche – He ran me over, and now, he's calling me crazy!

Robert – Maybe you should sit down for a while.

Jesus – Could you give her a little pick-me-up, maybe?

Robert complies. He brings Blanche a small glass of calvados, which she downs in one gulp.

Blanche – This is water, your stuff!

Understanding the message, Robert refills the glass and hands it to her. She downs it again in one gulp. The old lady extends her glass.

Blanche – I still feel a bit weak...

Robert refuses to comply.

Robert – Oh, no, that's enough!

Jesus – She's fine. I didn't even touch her. My car, on the other hand...

Blanche – I almost died, and he's worried about his pile of scrap metal...

Jesus – Yeah, well, before it turned into a pile of scrap metal, it was a brand new van... *(To Robert)* Sorting out the paperwork won't be simple. Do you know where the undertakers are?

Robert is concerned about the old lady.

Robert – So, how are you doing, Granny?

Blanche *(offended)* – I'm not your Granny...

Robert – We should inform someone from her family to come and pick her up. *(To Blanche)* Would you like us to call your children?

Blanche *(looking at him)* – Children? I'm not quite sure if I have any.

Robert – You're not sure?

Blanche – If I ever had any, I can't remember what I did with them.

Robert – What's your name then?

Blanche – What does it matter to you? Are you a policeman?

Robert – Are you married?

Blanche – Of course, I was going to meet my husband at the cemetery when that reckless driver ran me over.

Robert – And where is your husband?

Blanche – Well, he's dead!

Robert – In the accident?

Blanche – No, not in the accident!

Jesus – Since she's fine, maybe I should go...

Robert – Wait, you brought her here after running her over, you can't just leave like that. Unless you take her with you. I already have a leak in the basement, this isn't a soup kitchen!

Jesus – Alright, but what do we do now?

Robert *(to Blanche)* – What's written on your husband's tombstone?

Blanche – Oh well... Rest in peace, I think.

Robert – No, I mean what name is written? *(Blanche shrugs.)* Must be the shock... Let's wait a bit, it'll probably come back to her... *(To Blanche)* Think hard. What letter does your name start with? And how many letters?

Blanche – Why are you asking? Am I some clue in your crossword puzzle?

Robert – She's starting to get on my nerves.

Jesus – She seems a bit... out of sorts. Maybe she escaped from a mental hospital...

Blanche makes a face, pretending to act crazy. The other two exchange concerned glances.

Robert (to Jesus) – What do you think?

Jesus – Isn't she a bit tipsy, perhaps?

Robert – Tipsy?

Jesus – You did give her two schnapps...

Robert – Now it's my fault! (*Suspicious*) Besides, usually it's not the victims who are asked to blow into the breathalyser... Do you want me to call the police for the paperwork?

Jesus – Oh, maybe there's no need to bother them... Let her recover a bit. I'll go check if my van will start again, otherwise I'll have to call a tow truck...

Jesus exits. The undertakers return with the coffin on their shoulders.

Robert – What are you doing...?

Martin – Poor Albert, we couldn't leave him in his box in the middle of the road...

Blanche turns towards the coffin.

Blanche (*intrigued*) – Albert...?

The undertakers place the coffin on the bar. Martin notices Jessica's forgotten cellphone on the bar.

Martin (*taking the phone, to Robert*) – Do you mind if I make a call to the funeral parlour?

Robert – Go ahead, it's Jessica's cellphone...

Martin dials a number.

Martin – Ah! No one's picking up. (*Putting the phone back on the bar*) They've probably gone to grab a bite, damn it!

Martin – We still have to do this somewhere, right? The casket took a hit. We need to fix it up.

Justin – It's in the contract...

Robert – Here?

Martin – Well, it would avoid postponing the ceremony. The family is at the florist... It'll take about fifteen minutes, at most... Just enough time to get a new lid. I'm sure he would have been happy to spend a final moment here with you... Where can we put him so he's not in the way...?

Robert – The basement is flooded, so apart from the kitchen, I don't see...

The undertakers take it as a suggestion and carry the coffin into the kitchen. Robert watches them with a puzzled look.

Blanche – Could that be my husband?

The undertakers disappear into the kitchen followed by Robert, looking overwhelmed. Blanche is about to follow them when she's interrupted by Jessica's cellphone ringing. She answers the call.

Blanche – Hello, yes...? If you can call me Jessica...? Well... Yes, if it pleases you... Um, no, rather a widow... Actually, I was about to bury my husband. He's in the kitchen. (*Coquettishly*) My age...? Let's say closer to eighty than twenty... You have nothing against older people...? (*Blanche's smile freezes.*) He hung up, the rascal!

Blanche continues on her way to the kitchen with the cellphone. The undertakers and Robert return without the coffin and without Blanche. Nathalie and Charlotte arrive, panicked, with a wreath bearing the mention "Died in the service of France".

Nathalie – What happened to Dad?

Martin – He had... a little road accident.

Charlotte – I thought it was cirrhosis...

Martin – I'll explain. You'll see, everything will work out...

The undertakers lead Nathalie outside, speaking to her in hushed tones. Anthony returns, looking for Charlotte, who follows her mother. He tries to hold her back.

Anthony – Have you already told your mother...?

Charlotte – I'm trying to bury my grandfather here. I wonder if it's really the right time to tell my mother that I'm pregnant with her ex.

Robert – Well, you see... Some go, others come. It's the great cycle of life...

Anthony – You should have been a philosophy teacher...

Robert – Well, after all... It might not be too late...

Anthony turns to Charlotte again.

Anthony – But I don't know... How did it happen?

Charlotte – Do you have any idea...?

Anthony – I'm sorry, I...

Anthony looks completely devastated. Charlotte is torn between dismay and pity.

Charlotte – Don't bother, it was a joke.

Anthony – A joke?

Charlotte – The test! I took one, yes, but it's negative...

Anthony takes the test out of his pocket and looks at it, perplexed. Robert leans over and confirms.

Robert – Oh yeah... (*Explaining to Anthony*) You see, there should be a...

Anthony interrupts him, giving him a stern look.

Charlotte – It's time for you to grow up a little, Anthony...

Charlotte leaves.

Anthony – I think I'll have another schnapps... (*Robert pours him one, and he drinks it in one go.*) Tastes like water, though...

Anthony heads towards the restroom and crosses paths with Blanche, who comes out of the kitchen with a conspiratorial look. Robert gives her a suspicious glance.

Blanche (*to herself*) – Didn't I have a phone in my hand earlier...?

Jesus returns.

Jesus – We'll never manage to fill out that paperwork! Where did they go this time... I have a boiler to install...

Robert widens his eyes.

Robert – You're a plumber?

Jesus – Well, yeah...

Robert – What's your name?

Jesus – Jesus...

Robert – Then you're the one I was waiting for! (*Points to the trapdoor*) It's down there...

Jesus (*not very enthusiastic*) – What do we have?

Robert – A burst pipe. A real haemorrhage...

The plumber approaches, places a set of keys on the counter, and goes down a few steps.

Jesus – Oh, for God's sake!

Robert – Will you still be able to fix it?

Jesus (*coming back up*) – I'm a plumber, not a frogman...

Robert – Well, what should I do then?

Jesus – Well... you can wait for it to evaporate.

Robert – But I don't have any water left!

Jesus (*sarcastic*) – You have plenty of water in your basement... (*Seeing that Robert is not in the mood for jokes*) Fine, I'll shut off the supply down below, so you can reopen the meter.

The plumber starts working behind the bar.

Robert – It always has to happen to me...

Jesus – Oh, it's not just you. When there's a water leak at other people's places, it bothers you less, that's all.

Anthony comes out of the restroom.

Anthony – There is a dead body on the kitchen table, is that normal?

Robert – Don't worry, it's just temporary...

The plumber stands up and returns to the front of the bar.

Robert – Are you already done?

Jesus – Yes, yes. You can use the faucet now. Let me know when there's no more water in the basement for the repair.

Robert – Alright, how much do I owe you?

Jesus – 200 euros.

Robert (*astonished*) – 200 euros for 5 minutes of work!

Jesus – It's a fixed rate. Do you want to see the price list?

Robert – I would have liked to see it beforehand... (*Robert takes out some bills from his cash register and reluctantly hands them to the plumber.*) And to think a doctor charges you four times less than that for a home visit...

Jesus (*pocketing the bills*) – Well, next time you have a leak, call a doctor. (*Pause*) Do you have something to eat...?

Robert – The kitchen is out of order... We only have cold cuts...

Jesus (*leaving*) – Alright then, I really have to go now. I'll leave you my card for the paperwork.

The plumber who is leaving crosses paths with Jessica, who returns with bread under her arm.

Jessica (*relieved*) – Did he fix the leak?

Robert – Well, we have water at least.

Jessica – It's about time... I'm running late because of all this.

Jessica disappears into the kitchen. Moments later, a loud scream is heard.

Robert – I forgot to tell her about Albert...

Blanche (*intrigued*) – Albert...?

Robert goes into the kitchen and comes out holding Jessica by the arm.

Robert – They said a quarter of an hour. They shouldn't be long. Just have a seat and wait...

Robert, returning to the bar, sees that the plumber has forgotten his set of keys on the bar.

Robert (*gleefully*) – He forgot his keys, the bastard!

Jessica (*absentmindedly*) – Who?

Robert – The plumber! Well, he can call a locksmith, the scoundrel.

Jessica – I wonder what he could have done with it...

Robert – I just told you, he forgot them! On the bar!

Jessica – No, Albert! What did he do with his lottery ticket...?

Robert – Can you imagine? The super jackpot...

Jessica – Maybe he still has it on him...

They both look towards the kitchen. Blanche does too. Silence. The plumber returns, looking concerned.

Jesus – I'm in trouble, I don't know what I did with my keys. You haven't found them, by any chance?

Robert – Ah, I don't know... What kind of keys were they?

Jesus – Well, they were the keys to my car, my house, my safe...

Robert (*slyly*) – Do you want me to call a locksmith? They can give you a fixed rate...

Jesus (*humbled*) – Maybe we'll find them...

Robert turns around and grabs the keys from a shelf.

Robert (*showing the keys*) – Aren't these the ones, by any chance?

Jesus – Yes!

Robert pretends to accidentally drop the key ring into the water-filled basement.

Robert – Darn it! They fell into the basement! (*The plumber looks crestfallen*) Oh... There's always a meter of water in there, we'll have to wait for it to drain on its own...

Jesus – There must be a way to fix this. I have a pump in my van.

Robert – Ah, there you go! You see, when people cooperate... Anyway, now you know where your keys are! (*The plumber is about to leave.*) Uh, that's included in the fixed rate, of course?

The plumber nods and exits. Robert brandishes the keys that he actually kept in his hand.

Robert (*gleeful*) – Heh, heh...

Blanche starts snooping around the kitchen. Robert notices.

Robert (*bluntly*) – Are you looking for something?

Blanche – I'm going to get a scratch card...

Robert waits for the money before handing over the scratch card.

Robert – That'll be one euro.

Blanche pretends to search in her pockets. Anthony and Blanche's gazes meet. Anthony remains impassive, but Blanche's face lights up.

Blanche – No way! You recognize me, don't you?

Anthony – No...

Blanche – But you do!

Anthony – Oh, yes, maybe...

Blanche – What are you doing here?

Anthony – Well, nothing...

Blanche – Anyway, you haven't changed, have you?

Anthony – Thanks...

Blanche – Have you been back for a long time?

Anthony – From where?

Blanche – Well, from over there!

Anthony – Ah, um... Yes. Well, no.

Robert gets impatient, holding the scratch card in his hand.

Robert – Alright then? Are you taking this scratch card or not?

Blanche (*to Anthony*) – Could you lend me one euro? I don't know what I did with my wallet.

Anthony puts a coin on the bar. Robert takes it and gives the scratch card to Blanche.

Blanche – Well... Thanks, my little Paul!

Anthony – You're welcome.

She walks away, waving at him.

Anthony (*bewildered*) – Paul?

Jessica rummages on the bar.

Robert – Did you lose something too?

Jessica – My phone... Have you seen it by any chance?

Robert – It was on the bar five minutes ago! Where did that thing go again...?

He also searches. Blanche takes advantage of the diversion to sneak towards the kitchen.

Robert (*to Jessica*) – Oh, by the way, someone called you earlier...

Jessica (*horrified*) – And you answered?

Robert – Well, yes...

Jessica – And then...?

Robert – It was someone... Moses or Joseph.

Jessica – Jesus?

Robert – Ah, yes, that's it!

Jessica – And what did he say?

Robert – Well... He seemed quite surprised to come across me, naturally. And... he said that in the end, he wouldn't be able to make it to the meeting.

Jessica, furious, returns to reading her novel.

Robert (*sighing*) – Do people a favour...

Nathalie and Charlotte return with their "Mort pour la France" crown. Anthony, embarrassed, tries unsuccessfully to get Charlotte's attention, who pretends to ignore him.

Nathalie – It's truly unbelievable... Even the dead have accidents now... I bet he was still on the phone...

Charlotte – Grandpa?

Nathalie gives her daughter an exasperated look.

Nathalie – The plumber! The one who crashed into the hearse!

They sit down. Charlotte looks at the crown.

Charlotte – Died in the service of France... Isn't that a bit excessive...?

Nathalie – It's all that was left. (*Sighing*) Anyway, I'm warning you, if I die before you, I want to be buried with my cellphone.

Charlotte (*astonished*) – Excuse me?

Nathalie – Just in case I'm not really dead! It's my worst fear. Being buried alive. Don't you have that fear?

Charlotte – It probably doesn't happen very often.

Nathalie – It only takes once...

Nathalie notices Anthony's presence as he tries to discreetly leave while gesturing for Charlotte to call him.

Nathalie – By the way, Anthony, you being a philosophy teacher... Do you really believe there's life before death?

Anthony – You mean after...? Is it really something to be desired...? Like one of the characters in my latest novel says "Even if you're deaf and mute, once you're dead, it might be even worse...".

Alerted by this last line, Jessica looks at Anthony, wide-eyed.

Jessica (*amazed*) – But that's a line from "A woman is a woman"! It's what Michael shouts at Samantha just as she's about to jump off the cliff! Barbara Shetland, it's you!

Nathalie and Charlotte are stunned.

Anthony (*embarrassed*) – Um, sometimes, yes... But... I'd prefer if it didn't spread too much.

Jessica – I devoured your book in one night. Like all the others, actually... I was rereading it, in fact. Could you sign it for me?

Anthony (*complying, flattered nonetheless*) – Yes, of course...

Jessica (*overjoyed*) – Thank you! Your novels should be reimbursed by health insurance! It would probably reduce the consumption of antidepressants...

Anthony – I'm just trying to bring women the touch of romance they don't always find in their daily lives...

Robert glances at the cover, which is rather suggestive.

Robert – Ah yes, indeed...

Anthony – I first tried writing tragedies, but... Unfortunately, theatre is not part of the new economy. It wasn't even part of the old one...

Jessica – Have your plays been performed?

Anthony – Yes... Once... In a small village in Normandy...

Jessica – Your latest book takes place in Miami. That's far from Normandy...

Anthony – None of my readers have ever been to Florida. Neither have I, for that matter. We can fantasize a little. Whereas Normandy...

Robert – Yes, apart from the camembert...

Anthony (*to Robert*) – I'm not offering you a copy...

Robert – Given the effect it has on your readers, I'm starting to be tempted. After all, as you rightly say, a woman is a woman...

Anthony is about to discreetly leave, embarrassed.

Anthony – Well... I have to run. My students are waiting for me...

Charlotte calls out to him as he's about to leave.

Charlotte – Goodbye... Barbara...

Anthony exits, looking distraught. Robert returns to his crossword puzzle. Blanche sneaks back from the kitchen.

Robert (*doubtful*) – It's an illusion and yet it's a reality... It starts with a t...

Blanche – Theatre!

Robert (*irritated*) – I didn't ask you anything!

Blanche – It's an illusion and yet it's a reality... In the theatre. It starts with a t.

Robert checks in his newspaper. Nathalie and Charlotte discover Blanche, puzzled.

Robert – And it's seven letters!

Blanche – Like the Seven Dwarfs...

Robert – And like the seven lottery numbers!

Robert fills in his grid.

Nathalie (*approaching Blanche*) – Well, Mum, what are you doing here?

Blanche – Well, I came to the funeral, of course! (*To Robert*) Who's this one?

Robert (*to Nathalie*) – Is she your mother? We didn't know what to do with her... (*In a low voice*) She's missing a few screws, right?

Nathalie – Let's say she has selective memory... She knows her husband's social security number by heart...

Blanche – 1 25 12 37 039 016, and the key is 14...

Nathalie (*continuing*) – But most of the time she doesn't remember she has a husband. In this case, it's just as well, he's dead...

Intrigued, Robert takes out the newspaper again.

Robert (*to Blanche*) – What's your husband's social security number?

Blanche – 1 25 12 37 039 016.

Robert (*astonished*) – And the additional number is 14... (*Robert shows the lottery results, excited.*) He won!

Nathalie looks at Robert with a worried expression, starting to wonder if Blanche's madness is contagious. Robert looks at the lottery results again.

Robert (*shaking his head, incredulous*) – Amazing Albert!

The undertakers return with a new coffin lid.

Martin – Alright, we'll fix that right away.

Robert calls out to Martin and Justin.

Robert – Um... Can I have a word with you before you close the box...

He takes them aside and speaks to them in a low voice.

Martin – It's a bit embarrassing...

Justin – We're not supposed to go through their pockets...

Robert – We should ask the family for their opinion. It's the jackpot after all...

Nathalie notices the huddle.

Nathalie (*concerned*) – What's going on now...?

A moment of hesitation.

Martin – It's a bit delicate...

Charlotte – Really...? Because speaking about delicacy...

Martin explains something to her in a hushed tone.

Nathalie – No, we didn't find anything...

Martin continues his explanations. Nathalie and Charlotte exchange surprised glances.

Charlotte – No way!

Nathalie (*excited*) – The jackpot?

Martin – Around 75 million... It won't hurt to check right away.

Justin – After that, it'll be more complicated...

Nathalie and Charlotte nod in agreement. The undertakers head towards the kitchen. Nathalie and Charlotte wait, filled with hope...

Charlotte – Did you know Grandpa played the lottery...?

Nathalie – No... This whole story is completely crazy!

The undertakers return, carrying the coffin.

Nathalie (*very excited*) – So...?

Charlotte gives her a disapproving look, gesturing towards the coffin to remind her of the solemnity of the situation.

Nathalie (*with a more appropriate expression*) – So...?

The undertakers place the coffin on the bar with a ceremonial air.

Nathalie – Did you search thoroughly? (*In a magician-like manner, Martin produces a ticket, and Nathalie grabs hold of it.*) The jackpot? (*To Robert*) I've never played the lottery. What do I need to do to claim the money?

Robert – For a sum like that, you have to go to the headquarters. You can imagine I don't have that kind of cash on hand... Can I see it? I'm the one who sold it to him...

Nathalie hands him the ticket as if passing on the Holy Sacrament.

Nathalie – Amazing Dad! We almost refused the inheritance...

Robert looks at the ticket, and his smile freezes.

Robert – Oh, bloody hell!

Nathalie (*concerned*) – What's wrong?

Robert – This isn't a lottery ticket!

Nathalie – Sorry?

Robert – It's a scratch card!

Charlotte – So what?

Robert scratches the ticket. Everyone awaits the verdict.

Robert (*enthusiastically*) – It's a winning ticket!

Nathalie – How much?

Robert (*looking at the ticket again*) – One euro... You can always buy another one...

Nathalie is devastated.

Nathalie – It was too good to be true...

Charlotte – Yeah, I couldn't really picture Granpa as a winner...

Robert – So where is his lottery ticket then? I sold him one!

Jessica – Do you think someone could have stolen it from him?

Robert – Robbing a corpse... I don't see who would do such a thing.

The looks first turn towards the undertakers, who look indignant. Then all eyes turn to Blanche, who puts on an innocent face.

Robert – What do you have in your hand...? (*Robert tries to make her let go.*) She won't let go, damn it...

Robert manages to snatch the ticket from her.

Nathalie – Well?

Robert looks at the ticket.

Robert – Ah, this time it's definitely a lottery ticket! (*His smile freezes.*) For God's sake!

Nathalie (*worried*) – What's wrong now?

Robert – It's not his social security number!

Nathalie (*not understanding*) – Sorry?

Robert – The idiot didn't play his social security number that day!

Charlotte – So what?

Robert – Well, he's not the winner...

Nathalie is devastated once again.

Charlotte – Well, I think it's time to conclude...

Jessica – What numbers did he play then?

Robert (*looking at the ticket*) – It looks like a phone number...

Jessica approaches, takes the ticket, and examines it.

Jessica – But it's mine! He must have come across it in "Le Chasseur Français"... (*To Robert*) By the way, my cellphone? Have you found it?

Robert – I haven't really had time to look, there (*Pointing to the bar's landline phone*). Just dial your number, then we'll find it...

Jessica, keeping the lottery ticket in sight, dials her number. They hear a ringing sound coming from inside the coffin. They all look at the coffin.

Robert – Who the hell put that in there...?

Jessica hangs up, and the ringing stops.

Jessica – Well, how am I supposed to get my phone back now? I'm expecting important calls...

The phone starts ringing again. Everyone looks at Jessica reproachfully.

Jessica – Oh no! This time it's not me!

Robert – She placed an ad in "Le Chasseur Français". The ringing down there won't cease

Martin – If I had anticipated this coming and going, I would have installed a saloon door on that coffin. Anything else you might have forgotten in there?

The phone keeps ringing.

Nathalie – We have to do something, though!

Justin – Cremation is clean, and there are never any complaints.

Reluctantly, Martin removes the lid again. An arm emerges from the coffin and hands him the phone. He takes it as if nothing happened.

Martin – Thanks.

He hands the phone to Jessica, who answers.

Jessica (*with forced politeness*) – Hello, yes...?

Jessica realizes that everyone is listening and walks away to continue her conversation. Justin puts the lid back on the coffin grumbling.

Robert – So if Albert isn't the winner, then who is?

Everyone looks at each other with doubtful expressions. Suddenly, the plumber bursts into the café, waving a lottery ticket triumphantly.

Jesus (*hysterically*) – It's me! They just announced the winning number on the radio. It's mine! I won!

Robert – Only the bastards have luck...

Jessica, now interested, cuts her phone call short and approaches the plumber.

Jessica (*coyly*) – Lucky at cards, unlucky in love... What's your name again?

Jesus – Jesus.

Jessica – Jesus? So you're the one I've been waiting for!

Jesus – Ah, you too...?

Jessica's cellphone starts ringing again. She answers.

Jessica – Alright, that's enough now! The hunt is over!

Jesus – Come on, boss, it's my round!

Robert serves the drinks directly on the coffin placed on the bar. The bar phone starts ringing.

Robert – Hello, Café des Sports, go ahead...

As the glasses clink and the noise rises, Robert attempts to communicate with the undertaker amid the hubbub.

Robert – It's the cemetery! The gravedigger...! (*He nods towards the crowded coffin adorned with glasses and bottles.*) Well... He's asking if it's for today or tomorrow...

Martin – Oh, come on...! We're not on a tight schedule... Tell him to join us for a drink...

At last, the plumber finally notices the coffin on the bar.

Jesus – What's this...?

Robert – Well, it's Albert! (*Checking his pockets*) Hey, by the way, what did I do with your keys...?

Robert glances at the coffin, worry crossing his face.

Martin – Oh no!

Robert – Alright, what can I get you?

Martin – A beer, with the foam at the bottom...

Robert is about to serve him.

Justin – Poor Albert. He really has no luck.

As Robert starts to serve him, Justin taps on the coffin to emphasize his words.

Justin – He won't even be able to clink glasses with us!

Suddenly, the lid of the coffin lifts and Albert's bust emerges (played by the actor who portrayed Anthony, disguised so he wouldn't be recognized).

Albert – Rest in peace, they said! Ha, what a joke!

Everyone freezes, their attention on Albert, as he offers a glass.

Albert – Come on, one last drink ! One for the road!

Fade out.

The end.

About the author

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

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

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

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

A Cuckoo's nest
A simple business dinner
All's well that starts badly
An innocent little murder
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Cheaters
Check to the Kings
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but stable
Four stars
Fragile, handle with care
Friday the 13th
Heads or Tails
Him and Her
In lieu of flowers
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Last chance encounter
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
Miracle at Saint Mary-Juana Abbey
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
One marriage out of two
Preliminaries
Quarantine
Running on Empty
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Joker
The Perfect Son-in-law
The Smell of Money
The Window across the courtyard
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!

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