

Scene Six The Funeral Parlour

(A few days later. The undertaker's parlour. There is a single entrance/door. MONSIEUR ALPHONSE is counting out some money. There is a knock on the door and before he can hide the money, RENÉ and EDITH enter. MONSIEUR ALPHONSE greets EDITH, kissing her hand.)

ALPHONSE. Ah, Mademoiselle Edith, you are as beautiful as ever.

EDITH. Oh, Monsieur Alphonse, ever the true gentleman.

(EDITH casts a look at RENÉ, who studiously ignores it.)

ALPHONSE. And what can I do for you today, Madam?

RENÉ. Much as it saddens me to admit it, we need your help.

ALPHONSE. Good. Tell me, who is the recently departed?
(He picks up his tape measure lovingly.)

RENÉ. No-one has died...yet...

ALPHONSE. Ah, it is expected soon is it? I will do a discount if it is money up front.

RENÉ. Oh, charming! And I suppose you get your money back if you don't die?

ALPHONSE. Certainly. After one hundred years I will issue a full refund.

EDITH. Monsieur Alphonse, no-one has died. It is on another matter we come. We are in need of some money and to that end we are putting on a variety night at the Café René, and we would...

ALPHONSE. Ah, Madam, you need say no more. You want me to play the spoons.

RENÉ. The spoons!

ALPHONSE. I was a spoonist in my youth and I carry them with me still, in case of emergency.

(ALPHONSE whips out a pair of spoons from his top pocket, and starts playing them, appallingly. He stops suddenly.)

It's a natural gift that I am blessed with. Few are chosen. This is *La Marseillaise* in case you didn't recognise it.

(ALPHONSE starts again...worse if that's possible.)

RENÉ. No, no, we don't want you to play the spoons...

ALPHONSE. Ah, the saw then. Let me get it.

(ALPHONSE starts to go.)

RENÉ. No, let me finish. Until we have the funds in from the variety night, we have no money, and well, we need some help.

(ALPHONSE begins to see what he is being asked for and folds his arms.)

ALPHONSE. Mmm?

EDITH. Monsieur Alphonse. It is known about the town that you are a charming, charitable...

(RENÉ snorts and EDITH kicks him quite hard.)

... And, might I say, handsome man and we knew we could rely on you.

ALPHONSE. Well, I am not a rich man you know.

RENÉ. Not a rich man? You bung together a box, shove someone in it, dig a hole, chuck them down it and charge one thousand francs a time. And in the middle of a world war!

EDITH. René, leave this to me. Monsieur Alphonse, we come to you in hope of a loan.

ALPHONSE. Well, I could loan you ten francs I suppose.

EDITH. Could you make it a little more Monsieur?

ALPHONSE. Well, how much were you looking at?

RENÉ. Fifty thousand francs.

(ALPHONSE clutches his heart. He staggers about dramatically.)

ALPHONSE. Oh, my dicky ticker!

RENÉ. Is there another undertaker we can call?

(ALPHONSE recovers to some extent.)

ALPHONSE. What do you need it for?

EDITH. It is to pay off General Von Klinkerhoffen, and the money will be paid back by the Resistance. We will pay it back within the week. *(She starts fluttering her eyelids.)*

ALPHONSE. Well, I suppose I could.

(ALPHONSE pulls a document and pen from his pocket. He writes on the document, leaning on the coffin and hands it to RENÉ.)

RENÉ. *(Reading the contract.)* "Fifty-thousand franc loan to René Artois, for the duration of one week. Seventy five thousand francs to be paid back by next Thursday... cash only..." do you realise how much that is on a daily interest rate?

