

Yvette: **(Aside to Mimi.)** I'm not sure, Mimi, but I can guarantee it won't be a piece of cake.

(The Colonel and Geering escort Yvette and Mimi upstairs, leaving Grüber to sit alone. Edith smiles at him.)

Edith: And now I must practise. This little number will bring the house down.

(Edith opens her mouth and draws her breath to sing. Blackout.)

ACT ONE 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 100 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 Cafe Artois, 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.)

Alphonse: 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.)

Edith: ...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 1000 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 10 francs I suppose.

Edith: Could you make it a little more Monsieur?

Alphonse: Well, how much were you looking at?

René: 50,000 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.)** “50,000 franc loan to René Artois, for the duration of 1 week. 75,000 francs to be paid back by next Thursday... cash only...” do you realise how much that is on a daily interest rate?

Alphonse: 1,369.86 per day.

René: But this is extortionate! You are a wealthy man...

Alphonse: Yes, and I intend to stay that way. Sign please, and then you may go outside and scream.

René: Edith, you sign.

Alphonse: How dare you attempt to impose such a burden on a beautiful lady!

René: I’m not. I just want my wife to sign it.

Alphonse: You are a bounder sir, and a cad.

Edith: Yes, he is. Sign it!

(René signs the contract.)

René: It is I who has the dicky ticker now. Now where is the money?

Alphonse: I will deliver it to you.

René: But I need it for Saturday night to give to the General.

Alphonse: I do not keep such vast amounts of money here. There are unscrupulous people around you know.

René: **(Pointedly.)** Yes, aren’t there just.

Alphonse: I will have it sent round to the café.

René: Make sure that you do!

Edith: Well, goodbye Monsieur Alphonse. Until the next time.

(They gaze at one another.)

Alphonse: Yes Mademoiselle. If 'twere one second, 'it would seem like a lifetime to me...

René: Oh shut up! Come on woman.

(René and Edith exit. Fade out on a happy looking Alphonse clutching his contract.)

ACT ONE SCENE SEVEN RENÉ'S CAFÉ

(The following Saturday night. Lights up on René who is busy cleaning behind the bar and looking worried. Various French peasants and Germans soldiers are already in the Café.)

René: **(Spotting the audience.)** It is now Saturday and in a few minutes time the Colonel and the General will be coming to the café for an evening of quality entertainment and to collect the money. **(Pause.)** I have a problem. Not only do we not yet have any quality entertainment, but I still do not have the money. Monsieur Alphonse has not delivered the promised cash, not that I am too upset since the interest is so high, but if the resistance do not supply the money as agreed I will have to rely on the old swindler. The serving girls have been very supportive and are doing their best to help. It has been a very busy week; we are now completely out of wet celery, and I will not be using the egg whisk to make soufflé any time soon! Even my wife has offered to help but the extra five centimes would not make a difference.

(Yvette and Mimi enter down the stairs escorting a German soldier. Both girls are wearing flying helmets The German soldier looks exhausted.)

Mimi: Goodbye!

Yvette: Come back again soon!

(The German soldier pays some cash to Yvette and goes and joins others at a table. Yvette hands the money to René who adds it to money which he takes from the till behind the bar and counts.)

Yvette: Do we have enough?

René: Sadly not. **(He continues to counts the cash.)**

(Mimi sighs.)