Between goodness and me, there’s a country road in front of an orchard. Wanting to be good is to reach for an apple from the other side of the road. Wanting to be good is inevitably followed by three observations…
1. There’s too much traffic.
2. I don’t have time to wait.
3. I can buy my own apples.

My name is Gilles Jean. I’m a lawyer. What I have isn’t a name, it’s just a sound. It’s a movie star’s name or an idiot’s. It’s a diction exercise—Gilles Jean or Jean Gilles, Jean Gilles or Gilles Jean.

When I was born, I already had three brothers, all of them phantoms. Jacques, Eugène, Jean. Jacques Jean, Eugène Jean, Jean Jean. Jean Jean was adopted. They wanted to make sure he knew where he belonged. Jacques Jean came first. A tiny thing, two months premature, who slept in the oven warmer drawer until he was baked. One day, between a batch of jams and pies, Jacques Jean didn’t stir, and was buried with Grandfather in the Bienveillance family plot… just behind the weeping willow.

Eugène Jean was the second. This time my mother didn’t take any chances and stayed in bed for nine months… her legs, fingers, and heart crossed… until 10-pound baby Eugène popped out with so much dark hair that people thought he was Inuit.

Eugène Jean smiled all the time, and ate and cried… so much so that he pulled my mother out of her grief, and she got back into her batches of jams, pies, and sourdough bread.

So much so that when he was three, everyone except my mother had forgotten about Jacques Jean, the frail one.

But one July evening Eugène Jean went down to the river behind the corner store…
…and never came back. He was buried with Grandfather and Jacques Jean in the Bienveillance family plot…
…just behind the weeping willow.
After that my mother closed shop.
It wasn’t even for sale, she’d say.
The shop is condemned. Folks in the area found it sad because an orphaned mother can make anyone cry, even the most heartless.
So when my father said he had a list of kids who were available for adoption, my mother slammed the bathroom door in his face…
…at least that’s what my mother claims.
But eventually that’s how Jean Jean, the third child, came to our family, blond-haired, with a scar on his cheek, and half of his ear torn off.
He was already 18 months old and running like the wind, singing in the bathtub; he had brought colour back to my mother’s cheeks.
Jean Jean was so much a Jean…
…that folks were attributing likenesses: father’s nose, mother’s smile, brother’s little frog-like toes.
But one rainy Sunday, Social Services knocked on the door and announced that the birth parents wanted him back.
My mother tried to cling to his tiny two-year-old body, even if it meant being dragged by the car on the gravel…
…but they didn’t let her do it.
He wasn’t buried, he wasn’t dead.
For my mother it was worse.
At least she knew where Jacques Jean and Eugène Jean were hanging out.
After Jean Jean left, my mother stayed in bed for 800 days and nights, never going out, never letting anyone in, except for her meals.
After 800 days, my father went into the room without asking permission…
…opened the curtains, pulled down the sheets, lay on top of her, and made love, in tears.
Then he pulled out a suitcase from under the bed, packed his clothes, and left for good.
-
I was born 39 weeks later.
French Pronunciation:

Not everyone can read IP -

There are a number of Schwa's in French and nasal sounds

For the actors: Try your best - we will go over them in the room first if you wish - don't let the words trip you up have fun with them

- Gilles: pronounced the the "geal" in Congeal : https://www.howtopronounce.com/french/gilles/

- Jean: (ge) as in Change and soft n : https://www.howtopronounce.com/french/jean/ gen

- Eugène - ou (as in you) / (ge) as in Change and n Ou/gen https://www.howtopronounce.com/french/eugene/ (accent on second syllable)

- Jaques - (ge) as in Change / ack geack https://www.howtopronounce.com/french/jaques/

- Bienviellance: Bee'n -/ vay-once (pronounced like once in sconce) : https://www.howtopronounce.com/french/bienveillance/ (accent on third syllable)