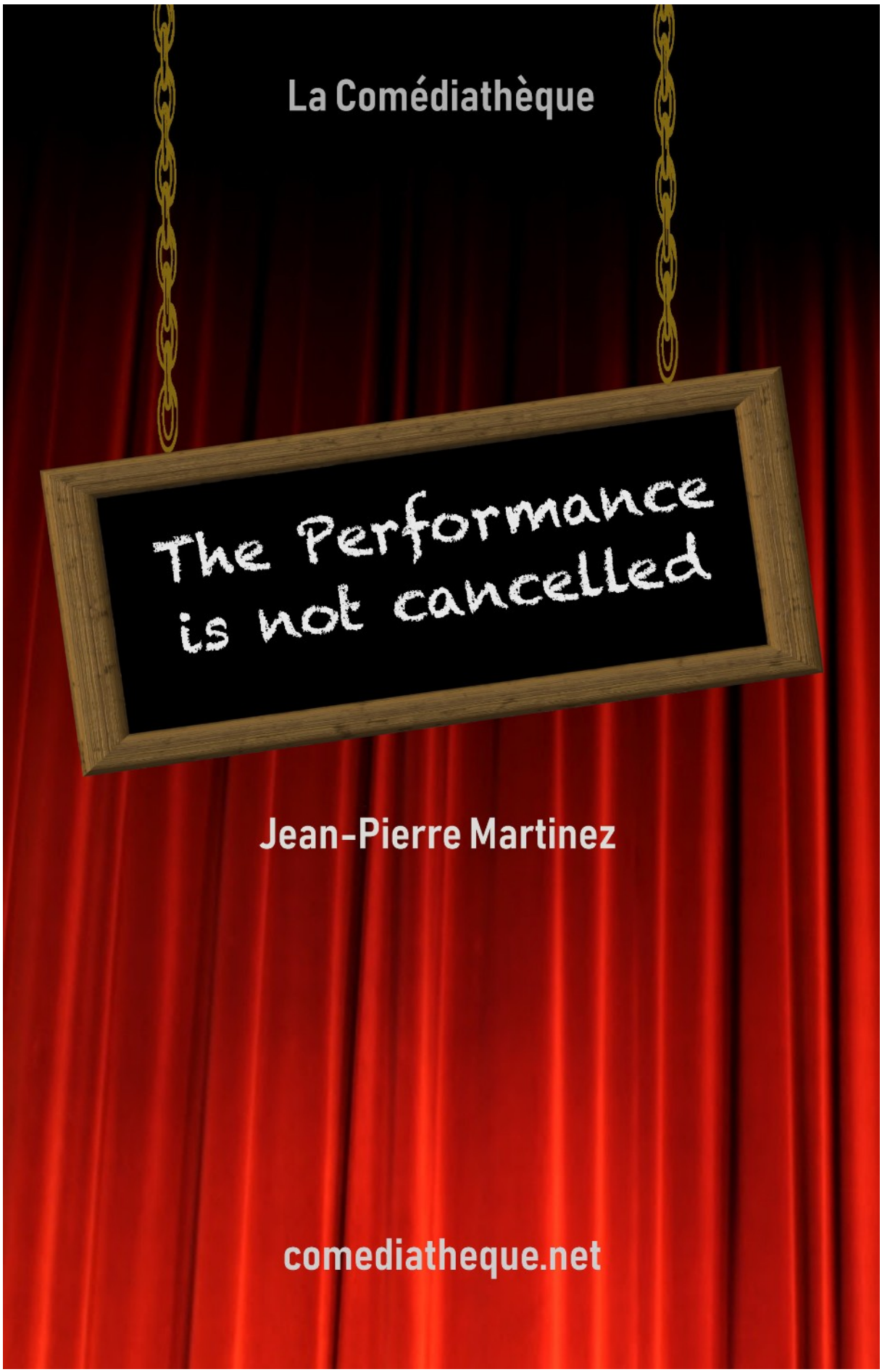

La Comédiathèque
The Performance is not cancelled
Jean-Pierre Martinez
comediatheque.net

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The Performance is not cancelled

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Translation by the author

A theatre company is about to take the stage with a play about the final hours of Molière's life. Nothing is ready, and one difficulty follows another, until the day's box-office takings are stolen. Should they cancel the performance and bring down a theatre already on the verge of bankruptcy, or go on at all costs?

Characters

The Manager

The Artistic Director

The Actor

The Actress

The Male Spectator

The Female Spectator

The Detective

The Female Detective

Except for the Actor and the Actress, all parts may be played by performers of any gender. The pronouns in the text reflect one possible casting.

Possible casts: 1 man/7 women, 2 men/6 women, 3 men/5 women, 4 men/4 women, 5 men/3 women, 6 men/2 women, or 7 men/1 woman.

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The stage is bare except for Molière's armchair, the play's only piece of scenery. A man and a woman, apparently ordinary audience members but in fact actors, are taking their seats in the auditorium. As the audience comes in, the artistic director is already onstage in overalls, adjusting the lights with the stage technician, who remains unseen in the control booth and speaks very little. Standing on a stepladder at the back of the stage with her back to the auditorium, she is looking up at the ceiling and fails to notice the first spectators entering. They either fail to notice her or assume she is a technician making last-minute adjustments.

Artistic Director *(calling to the technician)* – Sam? Sam! That bulb has blown. You could have checked it... I can't do everything myself. Never mind, we'll manage without it. There's no time to change it. And I don't think we have any spares. That's the financial crisis for you... There wasn't a penny left to buy more bulbs. Soon we'll be performing by candlelight, just like in Molière's day. *(Finally noticing the audience)* Good grief, they're here already? Why did we let them in? Surely it isn't time? Well... Now you're here, we won't ask you to go outside again. But we do need to finish our work. So, ladies and gentlemen, if you'll excuse us for another moment...

She continues inspecting the lights, moving her stepladder to make another adjustment. She works silently for a moment. Once the audience is seated, she climbs down, looks at the stage and moves the armchair into the centre.

Artistic Director – Put a little light on Molière's armchair, will you? *(The technician lights the chair and she sits in it.)* Looks all right, doesn't it? *(Getting up and moving downstage)* Now take the house lights down, so we can see the effect... *(The auditorium goes dark.)* Yes... *(Still hesitating)* Could you give me a bit more light downstage left? That's where Molière's ghost gives his final monologue, just before throwing a bucket of water over the front row... *(To the alarmed audience)* Don't worry, it's theatre. It won't be the sort of water that makes you wet. We'll replace it with... Actually, I haven't decided. *(To the technician)* Sam, what could we use instead of water that wouldn't get people wet? Any ideas? *(No reply.)* Then again, at least water doesn't stain. *(To the technician)* Sam, are you asleep? Where's that shower downstage? *(To the audience)* Don't panic, it isn't a real shower either. In theatre, a 'shower' is a spotlight shining straight down on an actor's head. Sadly, that's often the only shower actors ever take... We have our own professional jargon, you know. *(The technician switches on a vertical spotlight downstage left.)* Hang on, isn't it shining at an angle? Turn it off. I'll adjust it myself. Honestly, you have to do everything yourself in this place... I'm already the artistic director and the stage director. Now I have to be the electrician and lighting designer as well...

The technician switches off the light. The artistic director moves the stepladder downstage and climbs it. The theatre manager enters. He may be both her business partner and her husband. He is rather old-fashioned in his elegant clothes and carries a locked metal cashbox containing the ticket takings.

Manager – Ah, there you are! I've been looking everywhere for you.

Artistic Director – Yes, here I am. Where else would I be? I'm working... The show is about to start and nothing works. Don't tell me tonight's performance has been cancelled again.

Manager – No, no, don't worry. The performance isn't cancelled. Not yet, anyway...

Artistic Director – I hope not. We've had three cancellations this week. People will lose interest eventually... Hardly anyone comes to the theatre as it is.

Manager – What do you expect? The health regulations keep changing. These days you need a full medical examination just to get into a theatre.

Artistic Director – Who'd have thought we'd end up with security guards outside theatres, like outside nightclubs? But speaking of that, why's the audience here already?

Manager – You've noticed too? They're arriving earlier and earlier. Though surely they know a performance never starts on time.

Artistic Director – You should have made them wait before letting them in. We're not ready.

Manager – With all the cancellations we've had lately, we might as well let them in straight away. If we have to cancel at the last minute, at least they'll have paid.

Artistic Director – And we'll always find a good excuse not to refund them.

Manager – Anyway, carry on with your little adjustments and pretend they aren't here.

Artistic Director – Right... *(To the audience)* And you can pretend we aren't here either.

Manager *(to the audience)* – Don't worry. We'll tell you when the performance has actually started.

Artistic Director – And at the end, that bucket of water will wake up anyone who's fallen asleep.

Manager – Bucket of water?

Artistic Director – I'll explain. It's a rather avant-garde play, you'll see.

Manager – I thought it was a play about Molière.

Artistic Director – Molière was avant-garde in his day too!

Manager – Still, we've got a good crowd tonight, haven't we?

Artistic Director – Yes... A promising box office.

Manager *(showing the cashbox)* – It's all in here. *(To the audience)* Thank you for your generosity.

Artistic Director – How much?

Manager – I haven't counted it yet, but the box is full.

Artistic Director – So we'll finally be able to pay the actors.

Manager – Yes, if there's anything left after paying everyone else.

Artistic Director – Everyone else?

Manager – The security guard, the ticket clerk, the crew, the technician...

Artistic Director – What? The technician gets paid?

Manager – He's a technician, not an artist. He isn't doing it for fun.

Artistic Director – In that case, I'd like to be paid too. As a technician, I mean. I'm supposed to be directing this play, not climbing stepladders.

Manager – Don't worry. I can feel things turning around. Audiences will come back to the theatre.

Artistic Director – About time. We're on the brink of bankruptcy. We can't even afford replacement bulbs for the lights.

Manager – We can buy some with what's in this box. We might even have enough left to pay the actors.

Artistic Director – In the meantime, make yourself useful. Pass me the screwdriver on the chair, will you?

Manager – Of course. Always happy to help. *(He puts the cashbox on the armchair, picks up the screwdriver and hands it to her.)* That's an awful lot of spotlights. Do we really need them all? Think of the electricity bill...

Artistic Director – We could perform in total darkness if you'd prefer. It would be cheaper, and even more avant-garde.

Manager – Well, if they're absolutely necessary...

Artistic Director – We've already stripped the set down to nothing to save money. It was supposed to take place at the Palace of Versailles, but now it's set in Molière's dressing room. All we've kept is one armchair!

Manager – When the actors are good, you don't notice the scenery, do you?

Artistic Director – Speaking of actors... The play was written for seventeen performers, and we're supposed to do it with three. Even I have to play three or four parts, and I'm not even an actress.

Manager – If we're taking it to an international theatre festival, we can't travel with seventeen people! We'd need a coach. We have to be realistic.

Artistic Director – You're right. With a few more cuts, I could turn it into a one-person show.

Manager – What is this play about, anyway? I haven't quite understood.

Artistic Director – The Performance Is Cancelled.

Manager – The performance is cancelled? Are you sure? Why?

Artistic Director – 'The Performance Is Cancelled' is the title of the play.

Manager – Oh, right... What a stupid title.

Artistic Director – It could cause confusion. But it's very topical, wouldn't you say?

Manager – Anyway, the audience has turned up. That's what matters.

Artistic Director – They must be very determined...

Manager – They look a bit nervous, though.

Artistic Director – Perhaps they have good reason.

Manager – If you willingly buy a ticket to a play called 'The Performance Is Cancelled', you can't really demand a refund when it turns out to be true.

Artistic Director – Exactly.

Manager – So what's this masterpiece about?

Artistic Director – Molière's last hours, just before his death. His company is about to go onstage, but he falls ill. Should he carry on despite everything, or cancel the performance?

Manager – And?

Artistic Director – They're facing bankruptcy, just as we are. They have to perform at any cost, so they won't have to refund the audience.

Manager – So it's a play about theatre.

Artistic Director – Exactly. About the glory and indignities of an actor's life.

Manager – We'd better get started, then.

Artistic Director – Yes. A play called 'The Performance Is Cancelled' is the one play we can't cancel.

Manager – What would we tell the audience?

Artistic Director – Nobody would believe us. They'd think it was part of the show.

Manager – Break a leg!

Artistic Director – You too. And I mean it.

Manager – Hang on to that screwdriver. I'm taking away your stepladder.

Artistic Director – Very funny.

Manager – Perhaps I should have been a comedian myself.

The manager exits, forgetting the cashbox on the armchair. The artistic director climbs down from the stepladder.

Artistic Director – Sam? Switch that shower back on, will you? *(The technician restores the downlight.)* That'll do. We're not exactly the national theatre...

The actor and actress enter in tracksuits. The actor carries the script of a play entitled 'The Performance Is Cancelled'.

Actor – Where's the boss? We've been looking for him.

Artistic Director – He's just gone out. But why on earth are you still dressed like that? It's set in the seventeenth century. You're playing Jean-Baptiste Poquelin and Armande Béjart. Where are your costumes?

Actress – We've come to give notice of a strike.

Artistic Director – A strike? You're joking! Since when do actors go on strike?

Actor – We haven't been paid for a month. If that's a joke, we're not laughing.

Artistic Director – What do you expect? Every performance has been cancelled! No show means no takings, and no takings means no pay.

Actress – Next she'll be telling us it's our fault.

Actor – Do you know what the manager had the nerve to tell us?

Artistic Director – What?

Actor – 'In a profession like yours, you should be grateful you're still allowed to work!'

Artistic Director – I know. To him, theatre's like making love. If you enjoy it, you shouldn't expect payment.

Actress – Well, this time we want payment in advance, like sex workers. Otherwise, we won't go on.

Artistic Director – Don't worry. We've had a good box office today. Look, the house is full.

The actor and actress finally notice the audience.

Actor – What? They're here already?

Actress – And what if we refuse to perform?

Artistic Director – Now they're here...

Actor – You let them in early to force our hand, didn't you?

Artistic Director – You'll be paid. I'm telling you.

Actress – Working for nothing? What next?

Actor – Do you take us for amateurs?

Actress – If it were a masterpiece, at least... A hit that could revive our careers. But this...

Actor – Who wrote this play, anyway?

Artistic Director – Damn, that reminds me, I forgot the author's name on the poster. I hope he doesn't notice. Writers are so touchy...

Actress – If you've invited him to the premiere, he'll be delighted to discover his name isn't even on the poster. Especially if he hasn't been paid either.

Artistic Director – Damn it again. I forgot to invite him too. Still, I've rewritten his play so thoroughly that I'm not sure you could call it his any more.

The actor glances at the script in his hand.

Actor – 'The Performance Is Cancelled'... With all the successive drafts you've given us, we don't even know which version is the right one.

Actress – There are so many crossings-out, it's barely legible.

Artistic Director – Tell me you at least know your lines.

Actor – Yes, yes, don't worry.

Actress – We know the story, anyway. More or less.

Artistic Director – The story?

Actor – You said we could improvise, didn't you?

Artistic Director – Did I?

Actress – I think someone even mentioned the cinematic New Wave.

Artistic Director – When I said you could improvise a little, I meant on top of the script, not instead of it. New Wave, my foot! This is a stage, not a film set. We don't get endless takes.

Actress – Don't worry, we'll manage. We're professionals, aren't we?

Actor – Yes, professionals. That's precisely why we'd like to get paid.

Artistic Director – For heaven's sake, go and get dressed! At this rate, we'll be late despite being early.

Actress – Why don't we perform like this?

Artistic Director – Like that?

Actor – In casual clothes. It would be more modern, wouldn't it?

Artistic Director – Don't tell me you haven't got your costumes either...

Artistic Director – Honestly, I should have gone into animation. At least cartoon characters don't have moods to manage. *(Calling to the booth one last time)* Sam, can you come backstage for a minute? I need to talk about the soundtrack.

Actor – Probably.

Actress *(to the artistic director)* – Weren't you supposed to collect them from the dry cleaner's?

Artistic Director – The dry cleaner's? What sort of place do you think this is, a lavishly funded theatre? Your costumes are in the dressing rooms. I think. Now get out before I do something I'll regret.

The two performers leave.

Artistic Director – Honestly, I should have gone into animation. At least cartoon characters don't have moods to manage. *(Calling to the booth one last time)* Sam, can you come backstage for a minute? I need to talk about the soundtrack.

Technician – We have a soundtrack?

Artistic Director *(perhaps joking, perhaps not)* – No, that's the point. You'll be making the sound effects yourself from the booth. I'll explain.

She folds up the stepladder and takes it away. Silence.

Voice-over – *And while you wait for tonight's performance of 'The Performance Is Cancelled', a word from our sponsors.*

The advertisements that follow should sound extravagantly old-fashioned, like commercials from the 1950s.

Voice-over – *Love horses, but can't find a place to indulge your passion? Call the specialists at Gallop & Sons, horse butchers for over a century! Gallop & Sons: quality you can always bet on. Too busy to visit us? Prefer to remain anonymous? We offer discreet home delivery, at a full gallop. If you can't come to Gallop, Gallop will come to you!*

Transition music.

Voice-over – *Dripping tap? Leaking sink? Blocked pipe? Or just looking for a new acquaintance? Call Pipes & Partners, specialists in satisfying every need and every desire. Pipes & Partners: we've got the right connections for all your plumbing problems. Our friendly professionals are ready to listen, understand and satisfy you. Pipes & Partners: fully certified, and proudly gay-friendly!*

During the closing music of the second advertisement, as the lights dim, a figure enters covered from head to foot in a white sheet, like a ghost's shroud. The figure looks left and right, takes the cashbox from the armchair and leaves.

The lights come up again. The artistic director enters, now wearing ordinary clothes instead of overalls.

Artistic Director – Thank you all for your patience. Since everyone in the auditorium has a clean criminal record and an up-to-date vaccination certificate, we can finally begin. First, let me thank our generous sponsors, as well as the mayor of this delightful town, who, despite currently serving a prison sentence for misusing public funds, has been granted temporary leave to honour us with his presence this evening. For everyone's comfort, please switch off your mobile phones and, during the performance, refrain from kissing, coughing, blowing your nose, spitting or... *(She breaks off as the manager appears.)* Mr Manager, did you wish to say a few words?

Manager *(aside)* – Have you seen the cashbox?

Artistic Director – Sorry?

Manager – My cashbox! I left it on the armchair. You haven't taken it, have you?

Artistic Director – Oh, of course, accuse me of being a thief!

The manager rushes around the stage in a panic, reciting the opening lines of Harpagon's famous monologue in Molière's 'The Miser'.

Manager – Stop, thief! Stop, thief! Murder! Assassin! Justice! Merciful heavens! I'm ruined, I'm murdered! *(Returning to her)* They've cut my throat! They've stolen my money!

Artistic Director – Calm down! I told you it wasn't me! And remember, people are watching us.

Manager – If it wasn't you, then who was it?

Artistic Director – You say you left it on the stage?

Manager – I forgot it! I put it on that armchair when you asked me to hand you the screwdriver, and then...

Artistic Director – I only went backstage with the technician for a few minutes before...

Manager – And I was talking to the actors. It was when I went to pay them out of the cashbox that I noticed...

Artistic Director – So who could have stolen it?

They turn and look suspiciously at the audience.

Manager – You don't think...?

Artistic Director – Who else?

Manager – I don't know...

Artistic Director – Well? Are we performing or not?

Manager – We can't just pretend nothing happened and let them leave with our money!

Artistic Director – Although, in a sense, it is their money.

Manager – So what now? Is the performance cancelled?

Artistic Director – The actors won't go on unless they're paid in advance.

Manager – With what? Someone's stolen all the takings! *(To the audience)* Which means we won't be able to refund your tickets either.

Artistic Director – Afraid not.

Manager – I'd ask you all to remain in your seats until the police arrive.

Artistic Director – You've called the police already?

Manager – They're on their way. Shouldn't be long.

Artistic Director – Oh yes... I think I can hear the siren.

The technician can produce an approximate imitation of a police siren from the sound booth.

Manager – A robbery! In a theatre! Can you imagine?

Artistic Director – 'Robbery' might be putting it a bit strongly.

Manager – Same difference, isn't it? Our cashbox has been stolen.

Artistic Director – That's true. This really is the final blow.

Manager – Yes... This time we're bankrupt.

Artistic Director – Theatre has always been a precarious business. Bankruptcy is its business model. Theatre has been dying ever since it was born.

Manager – Theatre in general, perhaps. But ours really will be finished if we don't recover that money. We'll have to close for good.

Artistic Director – How did we get into this mess?

Manager – We should have staged more popular plays. What brings people into theatres is good comedy.

Artistic Director – If we knew the secret recipe for a good comedy, we'd do nothing else. *(Turning towards the armchair)* We should ask Monsieur Molière for his recipe...

Manager – A recipe? What I need is a recipe for getting today's box-office takings back! Someone's stolen them! This time, I don't see any other solution. We have to sell the theatre. *(Taking out his phone)* I'll put it on an online marketplace.

Artistic Director – Maybe there's a buyer in the audience. We could auction it!

Manager – Why not? Starting bid: two hundred thousand! Any advance? No? A hundred thousand? Fifty thousand...?

Artistic Director – Anyone thinking of buying a theatre these days must have spent the last ten years in a coma.

The detective and his female colleague enter, either from backstage or through the auditorium. He resembles the television detective Columbo; she looks like his female double. He surveys the stage while she sniffs the air like a police dog.

Detective *(showing his badge)* – Detective Columbo. And this is my assistant, Martinez...

Female Detective – Ramirez.

Detective – Pardon?

Female Detective – Ramirez. My name's Ramirez, not Martinez.

Detective – Martinez, Ramirez... Much the same, isn't it?

Female Detective – Except that my name is Ramirez. We've worked together for three years. You'd think you'd remember it by now.

Detective *(to the manager)* – These Portuguese are so sensitive...

Female Detective – Spanish!

Detective – What now? What did I say?

Female Detective – My family is Spanish, not Portuguese.

Detective – All right, Martinez, we haven't got all day. We've got a case to solve!

Manager – Anyway, thank you for coming so quickly.

Female Detective – Ramirez. It really isn't difficult...

The detective looks around the stage, blinking in the glare of the spotlights, while his colleague sniffs the manager and the artistic director.

Detective – What's this place? A peep show?

Artistic Director – It's a theatre, Detective. Much the same, except the actresses usually keep their clothes on.

Female Detective – So, as I understand it, someone has stolen... your little box.

Manager – Yes, Detective.

Detective – This isn't a joke, is it? We've got better things to do than play the fool.

Manager – Believe me, it's no joke. More of a tragedy.

Female Detective – But when you say 'box', what exactly do you mean?

Manager – The theatre's takings.

Detective – Oh, I see. Someone stole the takings. The theatre's takings...

Artistic Director – If we don't find them, it'll be a disaster. We're already going to have to cancel the performance.

Female Detective – And where was the box?

Manager – Right there, on Molière's armchair.

Detective – You leave cash on a chair in full view of everyone, and you're surprised when it's stolen?

Manager – I thought we were among trustworthy people.

Artistic Director – Theatre is one big family, you know.

Female Detective – Any witnesses?

Manager – Witnesses? Oh yes, quite a few.

Detective – Where are they, then?

Artistic Director – Right in front of you.

The detective and his colleague suddenly notice the audience.

Female Detective – I didn't see that lot. What are they doing here?

Artistic Director – They're the audience! I told you, this is a theatre.

Detective – Well, well. Who'd have thought I'd end up on a theatre stage, in front of an audience? Eh, Martinez?

Manager – It's never too late to start an acting career, Detective Columbine.

Detective – Columbo. Detective Columbo.

Female Detective *(ironically)* – Oh, Columbo, Columbine... Much the same, isn't it?

Detective – So the theft took place right under their noses.

The female detective goes into the auditorium, sniffing the air and several members of the audience.

Artistic Director – Yes.

Female Detective – And of course nobody saw a thing.

Manager – You'll have to ask them.

Detective – And the technician up there? Didn't he see anything?

Artistic Director – He was backstage with me just before the show was supposed to start.

A silence. The detective prowls suspiciously around the stage and peers into the wings. His colleague walks through the auditorium, studying the audience and going as far as the control booth. On her way back she stops in front of the planted male spectator and sniffs him.

Female Detective – Have you got your vaccination certificate?

Male Spectator – Of course.

The male spectator shows her a document. Satisfied, she returns to the stage.

Detective – What if it's an insurance scam?

Manager – An insurance scam?

Detective – We know the trick. Hide the money, report it stolen and let the insurance company pay out.

Artistic Director – I assure you, Detective...

Female Detective – Let's sum up. Who are the suspects? *(To the manager)* You, for a start.

Manager – But I'm the victim! I'm innocent!

Detective – Every innocent man is a guilty man who hasn't realised it yet. Who else was here when the money went missing?

Manager – The performers in the play, of course.

Female Detective – Where are they?

Artistic Director – In their dressing rooms, I suppose, waiting to find out whether the show is cancelled.

Detective – Well, what are you waiting for? Fetch them!

Artistic Director – I'll go.

She exits.

Female Detective – Is there anyone you particularly suspect?

Manager – No. Nothing like this has ever happened in our respectable establishment, I assure you.

Detective – We don't often get called to a theft at a theatre. Do we, Martinez?

Manager – Usually there isn't much to steal. Except the takings, and they're generally too small to attract serious thieves.

Female Detective – What about your actors? Could one of them have committed the theft?

Manager – I don't know. They haven't been paid for weeks and they're beginning to go hungry. Times are hard for everyone.

The detective looks out into the auditorium.

Detective – And that lot... They look well fed, but every one of them seems to have something on their conscience.

Manager – So few people come to the theatre nowadays, we can't afford to be choosy about our customers. We have to let anybody in, so long as they're vaccinated.

Female Detective – We'll question them later.

The artistic director returns with the actress.

Artistic Director – This is the actress who was supposed to play Armande.

Detective – Armande?

Artistic Director – Armande Béjart. Molière's wife.

Female Detective *(indicating the armchair)* – Sit there, Armande. *(The actress sits.)* Right. Surname, first name, age, occupation...

Actress – Béjart, Armande. Married to Poquelin. Actress. Born at an uncertain date in an uncertain place, and consequently of an uncertain age.

Detective – Quite a pedigree... Now then, Mrs Béjart...

Actress – Miss.

Female Detective – You just told us you're married.

Actress – An actress never reveals her age, and she's always 'Miss', even when she's married.

Detective – Very well. And what do you know about the theft, Miss?

Actress – Nothing.

Female Detective – How strange. I'd have been surprised if she'd said otherwise.

Artistic Director – She says she knows nothing. She doesn't even know her lines. Perhaps that's why she's so pleased the performance might be cancelled.

Actress – What's that supposed to mean?

Artistic Director – Perhaps you stole the cashbox so you wouldn't have to learn your part.

Actress – At least I don't have to sleep with the manager to get a role.

Artistic Director – Say that again!

The two women look ready to fight. The manager steps between them.

Manager – Ladies, please, let's be civil. *(To the detectives)* I told you, theatre's one big family. And like all families, we have our little squabbles.

Detective – Where's the rest of the family? I assume it isn't a one-person show.

Artistic Director – There's another actor.

Female Detective – Then why isn't he here?

Artistic Director – Good question. He wasn't in his dressing room. Where's he gone?

Actress – I don't know.

Detective – The curtain's about to go up, and you don't know where your acting partner is?

Actress – I'm not his mother! And why are you looking for him? Want to offer him a part?

Female Detective – Perhaps the part of the thief. If he's disappeared, he may have taken the money.

Detective – We'll issue a wanted notice. *(To the artistic director)* Can you describe him?

Artistic Director – Better than that. I've got his portfolio.

She disappears backstage for a moment.

Detective – His portfolio?

Manager – His acting portfolio. Much better than a police sketch.

The artistic director returns with a portfolio, which she hands to the detective.

Artistic Director – Here you are.

Detective – Fine. That'll do for now. We'll leave you to wash your dirty laundry in private.

Female Detective – We'll search the building. Until further notice, nobody leaves.

The detectives exit.

Actress – Can I go too, or do you have more questions?

Manager – You can go, but you heard the detective. No one leaves until we've found the culprit.

She exits.

Artistic Director *(to the audience)* – I'm sorry about these unexpected little difficulties. With luck, we'll sort everything out and the show can begin soon.

Manager – In a cheerful atmosphere, I hope.

Artistic Director – We'd better find something to keep them entertained in the meantime.

A male spectator, actually an actor planted in the auditorium, raises his hand.

Male Spectator – Excuse me...

The manager and artistic director turn to him in surprise.

Manager – Yes?

Male Spectator – May I?

Without waiting for permission, he stands and climbs onto the stage.

Manager – By all means.

Male Spectator – I'm sorry to interrupt your discussion and come onstage uninvited, but perhaps I could help you, in my own modest way.

Artistic Director – We're listening.

Male Spectator – You see, I've always loved the theatre. I even do a little acting myself, as an amateur. Nothing ambitious, of course.

Manager – Very good. But as you've probably gathered, we aren't exactly in a position to offer you a part at present.

Male Spectator – Of course not! I wouldn't dream of asking. You're professionals and I'm just a weekend amateur, as they say.

Artistic Director – In that case, if you don't mind my asking, how could you help us?

Male Spectator – Financially, perhaps.

The other two are speechless for a moment.

Manager – Well, well...

Male Spectator – I gather you're having a little temporary cash-flow problem.

Artistic Director – You could say this theatre has been permanently insolvent ever since it opened.

Male Spectator – I'm no billionaire, but I do have some savings I don't know what to do with. With inflation returning, it isn't wise to leave your money sitting in the bank. Savings accounts pay so little you might as well keep a few gold bars under your mattress.

Artistic Director – Which can't be terribly comfortable.

Manager – So you thought that, to make your savings grow and diversify your investments, theatre might be an opportunity worth exploring.

Artistic Director – A rather eccentric idea, I must say.

Male Spectator – I'm not really interested in making a profit. I'd rather support the arts. And since you both seem such nice people, I thought... But forgive me, I don't know what came over me. I know nothing about this business. Sorry to have disturbed you.

Seeing their stunned expressions, he prepares to return to his seat, but the manager stops him.

Manager – Not at all! Please, stay with us.

Artistic Director – Here, why don't you sit down?

He sits in the armchair, clearly pleased.

Male Spectator – This is Molière's armchair, isn't it?

Manager – Well... in the play, certainly.

Artistic Director – Though the antiques dealer assured me it dates from the right period, so nothing stops us imagining that Molière once honoured it with his illustrious backside.

Manager – So you'd consider... lending us some money?

Artistic Director – Or perhaps making a donation. Who knows?

Male Spectator – I was thinking of an investment in rental property, actually.

Manager – Really?

Artistic Director – Could you be more specific? I'm not sure I follow.

Male Spectator – You need money; I have some. I'll buy the building, and you can carry on with your noble activity, paying me a nominal rent.

Manager – Well, a laughably low rent for an equally laughable business... That sounds about right.

Male Spectator – I can't offer you very much, of course. But as I understand it, you don't have a great deal of choice.

Artistic Director – How considerate of you to remind us.

Manager – And by 'not very much', what sort of sum did you have in mind?

Male Spectator – I'm almost embarrassed to say it. Perhaps I'd better write it down.

He takes out a business card and a pencil, writes down a figure and passes the card to the manager. The manager looks at it.

Manager – Ah. Now I see why you mentioned a nominal rent, considering what you're offering for the purchase.

He passes the card to the artistic director.

Artistic Director – Are you sure you haven't left off a zero?

Male Spectator – Property is valued by the income it can generate. With a theatre, that's almost nothing. Sometimes less than nothing.

Artistic Director – Put like that...

Male Spectator – But the point isn't to strike a bargain, is it? It's to rescue the performing arts, which have hardly ever been less alive. Think of it as patronage.

Manager – You've caught me unprepared, but I promise I'll give it some thought and let you know soon.

Male Spectator – My telephone number's on the card.

The artistic director returns the card to the manager.

Manager – Francis Pigeon. Philanthropist...

Artistic Director – I didn't know 'philanthropist' was an occupation.

Male Spectator – More of a calling. Almost a sacred duty.

The spectator gets up to leave the stage.

Artistic Director – Thank you for your generosity, Mr Pigeon. Molière had King Louis XIV as his patron, but with pimps like you, today's theatre may yet have a glorious future.

Male Spectator – Would you mind if I had a look backstage? I'm curious, you understand... Particularly if I'm going to invest in this place.

Manager – Please, make yourself at home. If you buy a restaurant, you're entitled to inspect the kitchens.

The spectator disappears backstage.

Manager – It's not a wonderful offer, but it could save us, couldn't it?

Artistic Director – Save us? By selling our theatre to a complete stranger?

Manager – You heard him. He wants to help us.

Artistic Director – That's precisely why I don't trust him. I tend to regard every philanthropist as a potential suspect.

Manager – But do we really have a choice?

Artistic Director – Besides, we might still find the money.

The two detectives return, bringing the actor in handcuffs.

Female Detective – We've already found the thief, anyway.

Detective – He was in the bar round the corner, completely drunk.

Actor – Drunk? Absolutely not!

Female Detective – You'll speak when you're questioned. Meanwhile, sit there.

They force the actor into the armchair.

Manager – Has he confessed?

Detective – Not yet. But he will. Getting spontaneous confessions is our speciality.

Artistic Director – We don't even know if he did it.

Female Detective – With such a splendidly guilty face, wouldn't it be a shame if he didn't?

Manager – At least let him explain himself.

Detective – Right then. Surname, first name, age, occupation...

Actor – Poquelin, Jean-Baptiste. Date of birth unknown, but baptised in Paris on 15 January 1622. Actor and playwright. Married to Miss Armande Béjart, also an actress.

Female Detective – Well, Jean-Baptiste? Did you steal that cashbox or not?

Actor – I had nothing to do with it. And I want to see my lawyer.

Detective – His lawyer! Hear that, Martinez? You've been watching too much television. Why not ask for your agent while you're at it?

The actress returns.

Actress – What's going on? You can't do this! What have you done to him?

Detective – He's our prime suspect.

Actress – Why?

Female Detective – We caught him at the newsagent's, trying to escape.

Actress – I sent him out to buy me cigarettes!

Detective – Naturally you'd give him an alibi. But your testimony is unreliable. You're his wife.

Actress – Only onstage, not in real life! Do you seriously think I'm called Armande Béjart and he's Jean-Baptiste Poquelin?

Female Detective – You're only making things worse! Identity theft. Know how serious that is?

Actress – We're actors. Assuming other people's identities is our job.

Detective – We searched him. He didn't have any cigarettes.

Actor – You handcuffed me before I could buy them!

Female Detective – Nor did he have the missing cashbox.

Actor – Then you have no evidence against me.

Female Detective – We'll find witnesses, don't worry. *(To the audience)* Is this the man you saw leave with the cashbox?

The planted female spectator speaks up from the auditorium.

Female Spectator – It's difficult to say, Detective. It was a ghost.

Detective *(to the manager)* – A ghost? Who's that madwoman?

Manager – A member of the audience. We don't know all of them, you know.

Female Detective – We're listening, madam. You were saying?

Female Spectator – He had a sheet over his head.

Detective – A sheet?

Female Spectator – Yes, a sheet. Like a ghost. At first we thought it was part of the play.

Artistic Director – Molière's ghost is supposed to appear at the end, just before...

Detective – Right. Somebody fetch me a sheet.

The artistic director exits.

Female Detective – A ghost...

Detective – Do you believe in ghosts, Martinez?

Female Detective – No.

Detective – Neither do I.

The artistic director returns with several sheets and gives one to the female detective.

Female Detective *(to the actor)* – Stand up.

He stands. She covers his head and body with the sheet.

Detective – Walk forwards.

The detective guides him downstage.

Female Detective *(to the audience)* – Ladies and gentlemen, is this the man you saw steal the cashbox?

Female Spectator – Yes, he looked exactly like that. But if he was under a sheet, how could anyone know whether it's really him?

Detective – You're right. Martinez, let's hold an identity parade.

They cover the actress and artistic director with the other two sheets. The three ghosts are lined up downstage and made to swap places several times.

Manager – What is this, a shell game?

Detective *(to the audience)* – Well? Which one is it now?

Allow a little improvisation if the audience responds. They make the three ghosts change places again, still in a line.

Detective – And now?

The female detective checks her phone.

Female Detective – I've had the results of the background checks on our suspects.

Detective – Well? What do they say?

Female Detective – Mr Manager, I'm afraid it doesn't look good for you.

The actor, actress and artistic director remove their sheets.

Manager – I beg your pardon?

Female Detective – You neglected to mention your criminal record.

Manager – A murky case involving the exploitation of sex workers. It was never really cleared up. They gave me the benefit of the doubt... and convicted me.

Female Detective – Usually, when you're given the benefit of the doubt, you get acquitted.

Detective – What have you got to say for yourself, Mr Manager? You told me this was a respectable establishment.

Manager – Detective, in Molière's day, the Church considered every actor morally depraved, no better than a prostitute. You could almost say every theatre manager is a potential pimp.

Female Detective – If the Church distrusted actors so much, there must have been a reason. There's no smoke without fire.

Artistic Director – The real reason for that persecution was that theatre competed with the Church. A church is a theatre too, only the show is always the same. The clergy saw us as rivals to eliminate.

The detective seizes the actor.

Detective – Right, we'll take this one down to the station. A few blows to the head with the complete works of Molière might loosen his tongue.

The actress steps between them dramatically.

Actress – Over my dead body!

Detective – No promises, Miss Béjart. Meanwhile, you're coming too, for giving false testimony.

The detectives lead the actor and actress away.

Manager – We still haven't recovered the money. We can't refund the audience.

Artistic Director – Why refund them? We're putting on a show, aren't we?

Manager – Probably a lot less boring than the one we'd planned. Between ourselves, Molière's final hours...

Artistic Director – If we can keep this going another half an hour, we can say they've had their money's worth.

Manager – Another half an hour? We're running on empty. The plot's already beginning to go round in circles.

Artistic Director – What we need is another twist.

Manager – We haven't even got any actors. The police have taken them away!

Artistic Director – Then we'd better find some replacements.

Manager – Maybe someone in the audience fancies a spot of acting. Unpaid, naturally.

Improvised: the manager and artistic director ask several spectators whether they'd like to act. They reject a few for various reasons, then select the female spectator who spoke earlier and the planted male spectator, who has returned to his seat. Alternatively, a genuine audience member may be chosen. They bring the volunteers onstage.

Artistic Director – Have you ever acted before?

Female Spectator – No...

Allow improvisation if the other spectator answers.

Artistic Director – Let's give them a little improvisation exercise.

Manager – All right.

Artistic Director – Here's the situation. You come home one evening and discover your husband has turned into a pigeon.

Female Spectator – A pigeon?

Artistic Director – A big fat pigeon.

Female Spectator – Right.

Manager *(to the male spectator)* – You're the pigeon.

Female Spectator – He doesn't look much like a pigeon.

Manager – This is theatre. Use your imagination.

Female Spectator – Oh. Right.

Manager *(to the female spectator)* – You go backstage, then make your entrance.

She exits and returns.

Female Spectator – Hello, darling. Had a nice day?

The male spectator will probably say yes.

Female Spectator – So... what's for dinner?

Artistic Director – What's for dinner?

Female Spectator – Yes...

Artistic Director – Your husband has turned into a pigeon and all you can think to ask is what's for dinner?

Female Spectator – Well, yes.

Artistic Director – Surely you should be surprised!

Female Spectator – But you've already told me. So I'm not surprised. And between ourselves, he doesn't look remotely like a pigeon. That doesn't help.

Artistic Director – Right. Let's try again. *(To the female spectator)* Go out. *(To the male spectator)* And you make an effort too. Try to act like a pigeon.

Manager – Just say: 'I don't know what's happening to me. Look, I've turned into a pigeon.'

The female spectator exits and returns.

Female Spectator – Hello, darling. Had a nice day?

The male spectator takes a few steps, attempting to imitate a pigeon.

Male Spectator – Yes, but I don't know what's happening to me. Look, I've turned into a pigeon.

Female Spectator – Goodness me. Well, I never. Anyway... what's for dinner?

Artistic Director – You're not married, are you?

Female Spectator – No.

Manager – Right...

Artistic Director – Go back to your seats. We'll be in touch.

The two spectators return to the auditorium. The planted male spectator may take this opportunity to slip away.

Manager – No money in the box, the actors in police custody...

Artistic Director – Spectators who can't act...

Manager – This show is well and truly doomed.

Artistic Director – It was such a promising subject, though. Molière's final hours.

Manager – Perhaps the title brought us bad luck. 'The Performance Is Cancelled'...

The actor and actress return.

Artistic Director – They've let you go?

Actor – Apparently they've found another lead. They're turning the theatre upside down.

Actress – The female detective's sticking her nose into everything. Like a bloodhound.

Actor – So what are we doing? Are we performing or not?

Manager – Until we find the money, I can't pay you. But someone's offered to buy the theatre.

Actor – You've found someone crazy enough to buy a theatre these days?

Artistic Director – A certain Mr Pigeon.

Actress – What an appropriate name.

Artistic Director – Yes, but that pigeon strikes me as a bird of ill omen.

Actor – Pigeon, did you say? Francis Pigeon?

Manager – Yes.

Actor – I've heard that name before... *(Taking out his phone)* A quick online search... There we are!

Manager – Well?

Actor – Francis Pigeon. He's the local representative of a cult that's spreading around the world, with its headquarters in the Bahamas.

Actress – A cult registered in a tax haven. At least they've got a sense of humour, as well as a head for business.

Manager – What sort of cult?

Actor – The Church of Scatentology. The members call themselves pigeons, and their guru claims he can read the future in their droppings.

Artistic Director – I told you he was a bird of ill omen.

Manager – But why would that sanctimonious Tartuffe want to buy our theatre?

Actor – He buys up struggling venues for next to nothing and turns them into temples for his cult. They already have over a million followers in this country.

Manager – At this rate, there won't be anywhere left to see a play in this town.

Artistic Director – But there'll be Scatentology churches on every corner.

Manager – The Church declared war on theatre in Molière's time. We thought we'd won, but now it seems the empire is striking back.

Actress – You're not going to sell him the theatre!

Manager – Do you have another solution?

Actress – Let's perform anyway!

Manager – I've told you, I still can't pay you.

Actress – Never mind! We'll perform for free. We'll do anything to save this theatre and fight the rising darkness of Scatentology!

Artistic Director – Right. Let's get on with it.

Actor – I'll put my costume on.

Actress – Me too.

The actor and actress leave to change.

Manager – Let the show begin!

The detectives return.

Artistic Director – You can't stay here. This is a theatre stage, not a crime scene. And the play's about to start.

Detective – I'm not so sure about that. I've received a complaint. Apparently your theatre doesn't meet all the current safety regulations.

Artistic Director – A complaint?

Manager – Someone's out to get us. That's obvious.

Female Detective – Either way, we have to check. Where are the emergency exits?

Artistic Director – Well... one is here... and another over there.

The detective makes a quick inspection of the emergency exits.

Detective – And have you got a first-aid certificate?

Manager – Of course. Here it is. I always carry it, just in case.

The manager hands over a document, which the detective barely glances at.

Female Detective – Have you been vaccinated against rabies?

Manager – I think so... At any rate, I've never bitten anyone. Not yet.

Detective – Right... *(Indicating the audience)* And can they all swim?

Artistic Director – We'd have to ask them, but it's unusual for a theatre auditorium to flood like a bathtub.

Detective – I was joking. A police detective can have a sense of humour, you know. And I saw the fire extinguisher by the entrance. Everything seems in order.

Manager – First a theft, now a malicious complaint. Somebody wants to ruin us!

Detective – Have you got anyone in mind?

Artistic Director – Have you heard of the Church of Scatology, Detective Columbine?

Manager – I think you mean the Church of Scatentology, Detective Columbo.

Detective – You'll have to explain all that to us.

Artistic Director – Meanwhile... it's time for theatre.

Manager – At last!

They leave. Three traditional stage knocks are heard. Molière enters, coughing into a handkerchief stained red, and sits in his armchair. Béjart follows.

Actress – How are you feeling, Jean-Baptiste?

Actor – Like the character in my play 'The Imaginary Invalid', dear Armande. Rather unwell.

Actress – But you're coughing up blood, my dear. There's nothing imaginary about your illness.

Actor – It's happened before, unfortunately. It'll pass.

Actress – Unless you're the one who passes away. It might be wiser to cancel the performance.

Actor – The whole company depends on me. If we cancel, everyone will lose the money they desperately need. And we'll have to refund the audience.

Actress – You've given so much to the theatre, Monsieur Molière. No one expects you to sacrifice your life for it.

Actor – The theatre is the only place I truly feel alive. Besides, imagine dying onstage while playing 'The Imaginary Invalid'. What a glorious exit! Do you think they'd dare refuse me a Christian burial?

Actress – Why do you care so much about a Christian burial when you've always mocked the Church?

Actor – The Church, yes. But not true faith: faith in humanity. Every performance of my plays is a kind of Mass celebrating the love of life.

Actress – Then you're a moralist after all, my dear. Like all great comic writers.

Actor – And like all comic writers, I'll be forgotten within a few years. Only the great tragedians will be remembered.

Actress – I'll throw myself at the king's feet if I must. You'll have your place in the cemetery.

Actor – They refused to admit me to the French Academy because I'm an actor. At least let them admit me to the cemetery through the front gate.

Actress – The future will do you justice, I'm certain. In a century or two, just as people call English the language of Shakespeare, they'll call French the language of Molière.

Actor – They're already spreading lies about me while I'm alive. What will they say when I'm dead? That someone else wrote my plays. That I married my own daughter...

Actress – But you'll be the most famous playwright of all time.

Actor – May God hear you. Then I can die in peace.

She makes a tender gesture towards him.

Actress – Promise me you'll never die.

Actor – Not before the end of the performance, I swear.

Actress – So you'll be playing 'The Imaginary Invalid' tonight...

Actor – Normally, a healthy man pretends to be ill. This time, a man who's genuinely dying will pretend to be healthy so that he can pretend to be ill.

Actress – Isn't that the very essence of theatre? Creating an illusion to reveal the truth.

Actor – I feel better already.

Actress – Even so, I've sent for a doctor to examine you. I'll leave you with her.

The actress exits and the female spectator enters, now playing a doctor.

Female Spectator – Well, Monsieur Molière? So now you're asking for help from the very medicine you ridicule in your plays?

Actor – I don't ridicule medicine. I ridicule the doctors who make a mockery of it. In any case, thank you for coming. Armande asked several of your colleagues, but they refused once they heard who the patient was.

Female Spectator – I admit I hesitated myself. Now, what seems to be troubling you today, Monsieur Molière?

Actor – I scarcely dare tell you, Doctor...

Female Spectator – Go on.

Actor – The lungs.

Female Spectator – Another of your practical jokes, is it?

Actor – I'm afraid not, I assure you.

Female Spectator – You certainly don't look well. Lean forward and take a deep breath. *(She presses her ear against his back.)* I'm afraid you may be right. Those lungs sound like hell itself. And hell is where you're going unless you renounce your satanic profession in time.

Actor – At least let me finish tonight's performance. After that I'll renounce whatever you like, I promise.

Female Spectator – If you don't rest immediately, this may be your final appearance onstage.

Actor – I can't disappoint my audience. 'The show must go on,' as my colleague Shakespeare used to say.

Female Spectator – You can barely stand.

Actor – You wouldn't happen to have poisoned me, would you? To stop me exposing those quack doctors to ridicule once again...

Molière begins to cough and appears to be having an attack.

Female Spectator – Are you all right, old fellow?

Actor – No, I'm not all right at all... I don't know what's happening to me all of a sudden...

Male Spectator – But... is this still in the play, or are you improvising?

Actor – No... This is the actor speaking now. Help me, Doctor...

He coughs again.

Female Spectator – But I'm not a real doctor... Only onstage.

The actress enters.

Actress – I heard you coughing, Monsieur...

Female Spectator – His condition has suddenly got much worse.

Actress – But is Molière choking, or the actor playing him?

Female Spectator – Frankly, I'm beginning to lose track myself.

The manager and artistic director hurry in, looking worried.

Manager – What's happening?

Actress – Do something! Can't you see he's choking?

Manager – I've only got my first-aid certificate. Someone needs to call an ambulance.

Actress – I'll do it.

The female spectator and actress take the actor backstage.

Manager – Ladies and gentlemen, we're terribly sorry. We're right back where we started... And the performance is cancelled.

Artistic Director – Because of an invalid we can no longer tell is imaginary or real.

The male spectator returns.

Male Spectator – Here we are. I've prepared the agreement to sell the building. All you have to do is sign.

Artistic Director – We know who you are, Mr Francis Pidgin. Your cover's blown.

Male Spectator – Pigeon. Francis Pigeon.

Artistic Director – You want to turn this theatre into a church for your cult.

Male Spectator – A cult? Such a loaded word! All religions are simply cults that succeeded.

Artistic Director – The Church of Scatentology, for heaven's sake! Reading the future in pigeon droppings!

Male Spectator – It's perfectly scatentific, I assure you.

Artistic Director – You're not going to sell your soul to this devil!

Manager – Unfortunately, I have no choice. It's that or ruin.

Artistic Director – Think of Molière! He died for the theatre rather than cancel a performance.

Manager – What can I say? I began my career as a pimp. Then I became a theatre manager. But there's no getting around it: I'll never be Molière.

The manager signs.

Male Spectator – Thank you. God will reward you. Meanwhile, here's your cheque.

He exits.

Artistic Director – So this really is the end. Our final performance...

The detective returns.

Manager – Detective! You still haven't found the stolen money?

Detective – Not yet. But we're treating this case very seriously. Several theatres have apparently been subjected to intimidation recently.

Manager – Intimidation?

Artistic Director – What if that Scatentology guru also poisoned Jean-Baptiste, to sabotage the performance, drive us bankrupt and force us to sell?

The detective's phone rings and he answers.

Detective – Detective Columbine speaking... Yes... Yes... Very good, thank you. *(He puts his phone away.)* Martinez has found the loot.

Artistic Director – But how?

Detective – Believe me, that woman has a better nose than a police dog.

Manager – And I thought money had no smell...

Detective – But that's not the most surprising part of this case!

Manager – Really? Where did the thief hide it?

The female detective enters.

Female Detective – In a false-bottomed drawer in your desk, Mr Manager.

Manager – What?

Female Detective – You're under arrest for making a false report and attempted fraud.

Manager – I swear I don't know who hid it there. I didn't even know the drawer had a false bottom.

Female Detective – Who else could have done it?

A pause.

Artistic Director – All right, I confess. It was me.

Manager – You stole the theatre's takings? But why?

Artistic Director – The show was heading for disaster. Nothing was ready, and you know it. Stealing the cash was the only way I could think of to get the performance cancelled at the last minute... and then improvise something else.

Manager – I'd say the whole thing went off the rails.

Detective – So, to sum up: you sold these honest people tickets for a show that didn't exist, then stole the takings to avoid putting it on, without having to refund anyone.

Female Detective – You have to admit, that's quite a twisted scheme.

Manager – But we haven't deceived anybody! The play was called 'The Performance Is Cancelled'.

Detective – The cleverest swindlers tell their lies in plain sight, so they sound all the more convincing.

Artistic Director – After all, theatre is a swindle. The audience knows everything happening onstage is an illusion, yet nobody asks for their money back at the end.

The male spectator and actress return.

Manager – If we're fraudsters, here's another one, Detective! That Tartuffe of a hypocrite poisoned Molière!

Detective – What do you have to say to that, sir?

Male Spectator – I'd say that if nobody here is really who they pretend to be, then you aren't actually the owner of the theatre you just sold me.

Manager – And you aren't really the buyer, either.

Artistic Director – The good news is that the theatre hasn't really been sold, so it can carry on living.

Female Detective – So we're actors too, Columbine?

Detective – Absolutely, Martinez. I'm beginning to wonder if you might even be the author of this little farce. I saw your name on the poster.

Female Detective – My name is Ramirez.

Manager – At least we agree on one thing. If everything here is make-believe, then this really has been a play! The performance did take place, and nobody gets a refund.

Actress – All's well that ends well. And now for the monologue.

The actor enters as Molière's ghost, wearing a sheet and carrying a bucket.

Actor – My name is Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, though you know me better as Molière. I devoted my life to the theatre, at a time when mocking your contemporaries was far riskier than it is today, particularly when they were powerful. And more so when they wore clerical robes. Although I didn't actually die onstage, as people often say, I served the theatre until my last breath. It was after my final performance of 'The Imaginary Invalid' at the Palais-Royal theatre that I died. No priest would agree to give me the last rites, so I couldn't renounce my profession as an actor on my deathbed, as the Church required if I was to be readmitted at the last minute. But King Louis XIV took pity on me. He intervened on my behalf, and I was spared a common grave. Saint Peter wasn't too harsh with me either: he let me into Heaven. *(Pause.)* As it happens, I've just come from Heaven. And believe me, Heaven is terribly boring. Why do you think Adam and Eve seized the first opportunity to escape from the Garden of Eden? The certainty of eternal happiness is deadly dull, I

assure you. Life isn't always much fun either, of course. Perhaps that's why, after inventing God, humanity invented theatre. 'Drama is life with the dull bits cut out,' said Alfred Hitchcock later, even though he worked in cinema. That's why, whenever I can, I escape from Heaven for the duration of a performance and return to haunt the stage. Keep fighting to make sure the performance isn't cancelled. Don't let our theatres become new churches. *(Pause.)* But now that the show is over, I must go back where I came from. And you must return to the reality you temporarily left behind when you entered this auditorium. The dream is over. And to wake you up, as promised, nothing beats a good bucket of water over the head...

He flings the contents of his bucket towards the audience. A shower of stars bursts out.

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 ...
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

All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded

free of charge from his websites:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

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