

La Comédiathèque

The Performance
is not cancelled

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Translation by the author

The performers of a struggling theatre company are just minutes away from taking the stage to perform a play about Molière's final hours. However, nothing is ready, and more problems keep arising. To add to the chaos, the box office takings suddenly disappear. Now faced with a critical decision, should they cancel the performance, delivering the final blow to their theatre company already on the verge of bankruptcy? Or should they persevere and carry on with the play, no matter the challenges?

Characters

Director 1

Director 2

Actor

Actress

Spectator 1

Spectator 2

Inspector 1

Inspector 2

Apart from the actor and actress, all the roles are equally male or female.
In this version, the Director 2, the Spectator 2 and the Inspector 2 are female.

Possible casting: 1M/7W, 2M/6W, 3M/5W, 4M/4W, 5M/3W, 7M/1W

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The stage is sparsely decorated, with only Molière's armchair as the sole set for the play. Spectator 1 and Spectator 2, who are actually actors, are discreetly setting up somewhere in the auditorium. As the audience starts to fill in, Director 2 is already present, wearing overalls, and busy adjusting the lights with the stage manager, who will remain mostly silent and unseen. Perched on a stepladder at the back of the stage, facing away from the audience and focused on the ceiling, Director 2 fails to notice the first spectators entering the auditorium to take their seats.

Director 2 (*calling out to the stage manager*) – Mike? Oh, Mike! There's a burnt-out bulb here. You could have checked, you know... I can't do everything myself. Never mind, we'll manage without it, we don't have time to change it anyway. Besides, I doubt we have any spare bulbs left. It's the recession, my friend... The till was empty; there was not a penny to spare for replacements. We might end up using candles, just like in Molière's time. (*She finally notices the audience*) Oh, they're already here...? Why did we let them in? It's not time yet, is it? Well... Since you're already here, we won't ask you to leave and come back later. But we need to wrap things up. So, ladies and gentlemen, if you would kindly excuse us for a moment...

She continues to inspect the spotlights, shifting her stepladder to another position for further adjustments. Working in silence for a while, she focuses on her task. As the audience settles into their seats, she descends from the stepladder, takes a quick look around the stage, and repositions the chair slightly towards the centre of the stage.

Director 2 – Shed some light on Molière's armchair, just to check... (*The stage manager illuminates the armchair, and she sits on it*) It looks fine, doesn't it? (*She stands up and walks to the front of the stage*) Now, let's dim the auditorium lights, so we can see how it feels... (*The room fades to black*) Yes... (*She seems to hesitate again*) Can you add more light on stage right? That's where Molière's ghost will deliver his monologue at the end, just before he throws a bucket of water on the audience in the front row? (*To the audience in the front row, probably worried*) Don't worry, this is the theatre. It won't be water that gets you wet. We'll replace the water with... I'm not sure, actually... (*To the stage manager*) Mike, what can we use to replace the water so that it doesn't get wet? Any idea? (*The stage manager doesn't answer*) At the same time, at least water doesn't stain. (*To the stage manager*) Alright, and what about the downpour I requested? Mike, are you napping or something? (*To the audience*) No need to worry; it's not real water either. It's just a light that will shine vertically above the actor's head. Unfortunately, that's often the only shower they get during performances... Yes, it's quite a job, you know? We have our own theatre jargon too. (*The stage manager turns on the downpour illuminator at the front of the stage, stage right, which illuminates Director 2*) Wait, I think the downpour angle is a bit off. Turn it off, and I'll adjust it. Oh, I swear, you have to do

everything yourself in this place... I'm already the manager and the stage director. Now, I'm the electrician and lighting technician too...

The stage manager turns off the spotlight while Director 2 places the stepladder at the front of the stage and climbs on. Director 1 enters, likely the partner and spouse of Director 2. He is dressed in slightly old-fashioned elegance, holding a metal box with lock, containing the box office takings, in his hand.

Director 1 – Ah, there you are! I've been searching everywhere for you.

Director 2 – Yes, I'm here. Where else would I be? I'm working, you see... The show's about to start, and there's nothing is working... No...? Don't tell me the show's been cancelled again?

Director 1 – No, no, don't worry, the show hasn't been cancelled. At least not for the moment...

Director 2 – I hope so... We've already cancelled three times this week, and the audience is going to lose interest... Not many people come to the theatre any more.

Director 1 – Yes... What can you expect...? With these health protocols changing all the time. Now you have to undergo a complete check-up before attending a show.

Director 2 – If anyone had told us that one day there would be security guards at the theatres doors, just like at the entrances to nightclubs... But tell me, by the way... why are the spectators already here?

Director 1 – Yes, you've noticed... they're arriving earlier and earlier, aren't they? And yet they know that a show never starts on time.

Director 2 – You should have waited a bit before letting them in. We're not ready yet...

Director 1 – Well, with all the recent cancellations... we might as well get them in straight away. In case we have to cancel again at the last minute, at least they'll already have paid.

Director 2 – And we'll always find a good reason not to have to refund them.

Director 1 – Exactly... Just calmly finish your adjustments, and let's pretend they're not there.

Director 2 – That's it... *(To the audience)* And you, please pretend we're not here either.

Director 1 *(to the audience)* – Don't worry, we'll let you know when the show has truly begun...

Director 2 – And after it's over... the bucket of water will wake up anyone who's fallen asleep during the show.

Director 1 – A bucket of water?

Director 2 – I'll explain... It's a bit avant-garde, you'll see.

Director 1 – I thought it was a play about Molière.

Director 2 – Well, Molière was also avant-garde in his time!

Director 1 – In any case, t's quite a busy production, isn't it?

Director 2 – Yes... There's a lot of potential for income...

Director 1 (*showing the box*) – It's all in here. (*To the audience*) Thank you all for your generosity.

Director 2 – How much is in there?

Director 1 – I haven't counted yet, but the box is full.

Director 2 – So we'll finally be able to pay the actors.

Director 1 – Yes, well, if there's anything left over after we've paid everyone.

Director 2 – Everyone?

Director 1 – Yes, the security guard, the cashier, the technicians, the stage manager...

Director 2 – Wait, the stage manager gets paid?

Director 1 – Of course, he's a technician, not an artist. He doesn't do it for pleasure...

Director 2 – In that case, I'd like to be paid too... As a technician, then. Because remember, I'm a director. I'm not supposed to be standing on a stepladder.

Director 1 – Don't worry, I have a feeling the tide will turn. Audiences will come back to the theatre, you'll see.

Director 2 – It's about time, because we're on the verge of bankruptcy... We don't even have enough money to buy new bulbs for the projectors...

Director 1 – With what's in the till, we'll manage, don't worry. We might even be able to pay the actors.

Director 2 – In the meantime, do me a favour... Can you hand me that screwdriver on the chair?

Director 1 – Of course... When you're willing to lend a hand... (*Director 1 puts the box on the chair, picks up the screwdriver and passes it to Director 2*) But that's a lot of spotlights, isn't it? Do you really need all them? I can't even imagine the electricity bill...

Director 2 – If you prefer, we can play in the dark to save costs... It'll be even more avant-garde.

Director 1 – Well, if it's absolutely necessary...

Director 2 – We've already scaled down the set to keep expenses low. Originally, it was supposed to be at the Palace of Versailles, but now it'll take place in Molière's dressing room. We've kept only one armchair!

Director 1 – When the actors are good, you forget about the scenery, don't you?

Director 2 – Speaking of actors... The play was originally written for seventeen of them, and now we're supposed to do it with just three... I even have to play three or four characters, and I'm not even an actress.

Director 1 – If we want to do the play at the Edinburg Festival, we can't go with seventeen people! Or we'd need a coach... We have to be reasonable too...

Director 2 – You're right... I think if I rework the text a bit more, I can turn it into a one-man show.

Director 1 – What is this play about, anyway, I didn't quite understand.

Director 2 – The performance is cancelled.

Director 1 – Are you sure the show has been cancelled? Why?

Director 2 – No, no, that's the title of the play - "The Performance Is Cancelled."

Director 1 – Oh, I see... What a peculiar title.

Director 2 – It can be confusing, I admit. But at the same time, it's very much in tune with the times, isn't it?

Director 1 – Well, at least the audience showed up. That's the main thing.

Director 2 – Yes... They really need to be motivated...

Director 1 – But they seem a bit apprehensive, don't they?

Director 2 – Perhaps they're right to be wary.

Director 1 – When you voluntarily go to see a play titled "The Performance Is Cancelled," you can't really ask for a refund if it turns out to be true.

Director 2 – That's clear.

Director 1 – So, what exactly is this masterpiece about?

Director 2 – This is the story of Molière's final hours, just before his death. The troupe is about to go on stage, but Molière feels unwell. He's uncertain about whether to proceed with the play or cancel the performance.

Director 1 – So what's the twist?

Director 2 – Well, they're on the verge of bankruptcy, just like us. They have to perform at all costs, so they don't have to refund the audience.

Director 1 – Ah, it's a play about theatre.

Director 2 – Exactly. A play that explores the greatness and servitude of the life of a traveling actor.

Director 1 – Well, that's not all, but we should get going.

Director 2 – Right, because a play called "the performance is cancelled"... we can't cancel it.

Director 1 – Yes, what would we tell the audience?

Director 2 – Nobody would believe us. They'd think it's a stunt...

Director 1 – Come on! Break a leg, everyone!

Director 2 – Thanks! You too, break a leg!

Director 1 – Hang on to the screwdriver and I'll take down the stepladder.

Director 2 – Very funny.

Director 1 – Yes, I should have been a comedian too...

Director 1 leaves, forgetting the box on the chair. Director 2 steps down from the stepladder.

Director 2 – Mike? Turn the downpour on again, just to check... *(The stage manager turns the downpour back on)* OK, that'll do. We're not at the Comédie-Française, after all...

The Actor and Actress of the play enter wearing tracksuits. The Actor has the script of the play titled "The Performance Is Cancelled" in his hand.

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

Director 2 – He just left. Why are you still dressed like that? The play is set in the 17th century. You're playing Jean-Baptiste Poquelin and Armande Béjart. Aren't you in costume yet?

Actress – We've come to announce our strike action.

Director 2 – A strike? You must be joking... Comedians going on strike? We've never seen that before!

Actor – We haven't received our payment for a month. If this is a joke, it's not funny at all..

Director 2 – Well, you see... all the performances have been cancelled! No shows, no income, and no income means no fees...

Actress – And soon enough, they'll put the blame on us.

Actor – And you know what the director had the audacity to say?

Director 2 – What?

Actor – When you're in a profession like yours, you should be grateful just to have work!

Director 2 – I know... For him, theatre is like love. When you do it for pleasure, you shouldn't expect to get paid.

Actress – Well, this time we want to be paid in advance, like the prostitutes. Otherwise, we won't perform.

Director 2 – Don't worry. We've made good money today. Look, the theater is full.

The Actor and Actress finally notice the audience.

Actor – Really? The audience is here already?

Actress – What if we decide not to perform?

Director 2 – Now that they're here...

Actor – You intentionally let them in early to pressure us, didn't you?

Director 2 – You'll be paid, I assure you.

Actress – Performing for free, what's next?

Actor – Do you think we're amateurs?

Actress – If only it was for a masterpiece, a successful play that could boost our careers. But now...

Actor – By the way, who wrote this play exactly?

Director 2 – Oh damn, that reminds me, I forgot to put the author's name on the poster. I hope he doesn't notice. These authors can be so touchy...

Actress – Oh yes, if you invited him to the premiere, he'll be delighted to see his name isn't even on the poster. Especially if he's not getting paid either...

Director 2 – And thank you... I forgot to invite him too... Anyway, I've rewritten his play so many times. I'm not sure anyone can still say it's his...

The Actor glances at the text of the play in his hand.

Actor – "The performance is cancelled"... With all the successive versions you've given us, we're not quite sure which is the right one.

Actress – Yes... It's so crossed out... It's barely legible.

Director 2 – Reassure me... do you even know your lines?

Actor – Yeah, yeah, don't worry...

Actress – Well, we know the story. Basically...

Director 2 – Story?

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

Director 2 – Did I say that?

Actress – I think the term *Nouvelle Vague* was even used.

Director 2 – No, when I talked about improvising, it was in addition to the text. Not instead. This is a theatre stage, not a film set with multiple takes.

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

Actor – Yeah, we're professionals. And that's why we're so keen to get paid, you know.

Director 2 – Alright, now, I implore you, go and get dressed! Because if we're early, we're going to be late.

Actress – What if we played like this?

Director 2 – Like this?

Actor – I don't know... In casual clothes... Wouldn't that be more modern?

Director 2 – You don't have your costumes either...

Actress – Of course! At last... we're going to find them.

Actor – Probably...

Actress (to Director 2) – Weren't you the one who had to pick them up from the dry cleaners?

Director 2 – Dry cleaning... Where do you think you are? In a subsidised theatre? Your costumes are in your dressing rooms, at least I think so... Now get out of here before I do something I'll regret...

The two actors leave.

Director 2 – Ah, I swear... Sometimes I think I should have stuck with cartoons. At least then I wouldn't have to worry about managing actors' moods. (*She glances towards the control room*) Mike, can you join me backstage for a moment? I need to talk to you about the soundtrack.

Stage manager – Oh, because there's a soundtrack?

Director 2 (*half-jokingly*) – No, that's the thing. You'll have to handle the sound effects from the control room. I'll explain it to you...

She folds the stepladder and carries it with her. A brief silence follows.

Voice-over – And while you wait for the show to begin, here's a message from our sponsors: "The performance is canceled."

The ads that follow adopt the old-fashioned style and outrageous tone of 1950s advertising.

Voice-over – Do you love horses but don't know where to go to indulge your passion? Turn to a specialist. Saddle House, your horse butcher from father to son for over a century. Saddle, a butcher who's all about quality. You don't have the time to go shopping or you want to remain anonymous? We also offer a home delivery service. Discreetly and at full gallop.

Transitional music.

Voice-over – A dripping tap, a leak under the sink, a blocked drain... or simply the desire to meet new people? Call Plumbing and Company without delay. Our specialists will listen to your every need and desire. Plumbing and Company, the ultimate solution for all your plumbing problems, with professionals who truly understand and satisfy you. Plumbing and Company, a TrustMark and Gay Friendly certified company.

As the music ends with the second ad, the stage fades to half-light, and a figure draped in a white sheet, resembling a ghost, enters. The figure glances around, picks up a crate left on the armchair, and exits.

The lights come back on and Director 2 returns, now dressed in street clothes after taking off her overalls.

Director 2 – Thank you all for your patience... Since everyone in the room has a clean criminal record and an up-to-date vaccination certificate, the play can begin. Before we start, I'd like to express our gratitude to all our generous sponsors. Also, a special acknowledgment to the mayor of this charming town, who, despite currently being incarcerated for misappropriation of public funds, is taking advantage of a leave of absence to grace us with his presence this evening. Now, for everyone's peace of mind, please switch off your mobile phones and refrain from kissing, coughing, blowing your nose, spitting, or... (*Director 1 appears on stage*) Mister Director, did you want to say something?

Director 1 (*aside*) – Did you see the till?

Director 2 – Sorry?

Director 1 – My money box! I left it there, on the armchair. Didn't you take it?

Director 2 – Come on now, don't accuse me of theft too.

Director 1 walks around the stage in a panic, reciting the first few sentences of his monologue from The Miser.

Director 1 – To thief! To the thief! To the murderer! Justice, merciful heaven! I'm lost, I've been murdered. (*Back to Director 2*) They've cut my throat: they've taken my money...

Director 2 – Relax! It wasn't me, I promise. And remember, we're being watched...

Director 1 – Well, if it wasn't you, then who?

Director 2 – You say you left her on the stage?

Director 1 – Yes, I must have forgotten it there. I placed it on that chair, when you asked me for the screwdriver, and then...

Director 2 – I was only gone for a few minutes with the stage manager before...

Director 1 – And I was busy talking to the actors. It was right when I wanted to pay them with what was in the till that I realised...

Director 2 – So who could have stolen your money box?

They both look suspiciously at the audience.

Director 1 – Do you think so?

Director 2 – Who else?

Director 1 – I don't know...

Director 2 – Well, what do we do now? Are we going to continue with the play or not?

Director 1 – We can't just pretend nothing's happened and let them walk away with the cash!

Director 2 – Even though it's basically their money.

Director 1 – OK, so what do we do? The performance is cancelled...?

Director 2 – In any case, the actors will refuse to perform unless they are paid in advance.

Director 1 – What do you want me to pay them with now? The takings have been stolen from us! *(To the audience)* So we're not going to be able to pay you back either.

Director 2 – Well, no...

Director 1 – I would still ask you to remain seated until the police arrive...

Director 2 – Have you called the police yet?

Director 1 – They're on their way. They should be here any minute...

Director 2 – Ah yes... I think I can hear the siren...

From the control room, the stage manager triggers an approximate police siren sound.

Director 1 – A hold-up... In a theatre, can you believe it?

Director 2 – A hold-up is perhaps a bit of an exaggeration...

Director 1 – It's all the same, isn't it? Our money box has been stolen...

Director 2 – It's true that... this is the mercy blow.

Director 1 – Yes... This time, it's bankruptcy...

Director 2 – It has to be said that theatre has always been a risky business. The theatre's business model is bankruptcy. Theatre has been dying ever since it was born.

Director 1 – The theatre in general, perhaps, but for ours in particular, I think it's really the end. If we don't find that money, we're out of business.

Director 2 – How did it come to this?

Director 1 – If we'd offered the public more mainstream plays, that is. What brings people to the theatre are good comedies.

Director 2 – If we knew the magic formula for good comedy, that's all we'd do. *(Turning to the armchair)* You'd have to ask Monsieur Molière for the recipe...

Director 1 – This time, I think there's no other solution. We have to sell this theatre. *(He takes out his mobile phone)* I'm going to put an ad on line...

Director 2 – There may be a buyer in the room... We could auction it off!

Director 1 – Why not? Let's start at 200,000 euros. Anyone willing to go higher? No takers? How about 100,000 then? 50,000...?

Director 2 – It's true that looking to buy a theatre right now...

Inspector 1 and Inspector 2 arrive on stage, either from backstage or from the auditorium. Inspector 1 resembles Columbo, and Inspector 2 looks like his female clone. Inspector 1 glances around the stage, while Inspector 2 sniffs the air like a police dog.

Inspector 1 (*showing his card*) – Inspector Columbo. And this is my assistant, Martinez...

Inspector 2 – Ramirez.

Inspector 1 – Excuse me?

Inspector 2 – Ramirez. My name is Ramirez, not Martinez.

Inspector 1 – Martinez, Ramirez... It's all a bit the same, isn't it?

Inspector 2 – The fact remains that my name is Ramirez. We've been working together for three years now, I think you'd remember, wouldn't you?

Inspector 1 (*to Director 1*) – Those Portuguese, they're so touchy...

Inspector 2 – Spanish!

Inspector 1 – What? What did I just say?

Inspector 2 – I'm of Spanish origin, not Portuguese.

Inspector 1 – Alright, Martinez... Let's not dwell on it. We've got a case to deal with here!

Director 1 – In any case, thank you for coming so quickly.

Inspector 2 – Ramirez, it's not that complicated...

Inspector 1 glances towards the stage, and the spotlights that dazzle him, while Inspector 2 sniffs at Director 1 and Director 2.

Inspector 1 – What is this place? A peep show?

Director 2 – It's a theatre, Inspector... It's a bit like that, except the actresses are dressed. Usually...

Inspector 2 – So if understand correctly, someone has stolen... your money box.

Director 1 – Yes, Inspector.

Inspector 1 – This isn't a joke, is it? Because, you know, we've got better things to do than play the clown...

Director 1 – Trust me, this is no joke. It's more like a tragedy.

Inspector 2 – But when you say a money box, you don't mean your piggy bank, right...?

Director 1 – I mean the theatre's takings.

Inspector 1 – Oh, right... So someone stole the takings from you. The takings from the theatre...

Director 2 – If we don't find it, it'll be a disaster. We'll have to cancel the show...

Inspector 2 – And where was this money box?

Director 1 – There it was, resting on Molière's armchair.

Inspector 1 – You leave your money on a chair for everyone to see, and you're surprised when someone steals it?

Director 1 – I thought we were people you could trust.

Director 2 – You know, theatre is a big family.

Inspector 2 – Are there any witnesses?

Director 1 – Witnesses? Oh yes, there are quite a few...

Inspector 1 – And where are these witnesses?

Director 2 – You're looking at them.

Inspector 1 and Inspector 2 discover the presence of the public.

Inspector 2 – I hadn't seen them... What are they doing here?

Director 2 – It's the audience! I've told you, this is a theatre.

Inspector 1 – Well. If only someone had told me that one day I'd find myself on a theatre stage, in front of an audience. Right, Martinez?

Director 1 – It's never too late to start a career in acting, Inspector Columbine.

Inspector 1 – Columbo. Inspector Columbo.

Inspector 2 (*ironic*) – Oh... Columbo, Columbine... They're a bit similar, aren't they?

Inspector 1 – So... the robbery happened before their very eyes.

Inspector 2 goes down into the room, sniffs the air and sniffs some of the spectators.

Director 2 – Yes.

Inspector 2 – And of course, nobody saw anything...

Director 1 – That... you'll have to ask them.

Inspector 1 – What about the stage manager over there? Did he see anything either?

Director 2 – He was with me backstage just before the play started.

Silence during which Inspector 1 walks suspiciously around the stage, glancing backstage. While Inspector 2 walks around the auditorium, observing the spectators, all the way to the control room. On the way back, she stops in front of the fake spectator and sniffs him.

Inspector 2 – Do you have your vaccination certificate?

Spectator 1 – Of course...

Spectator 1 shows a document to Inspector 2, who seems satisfied with it. Inspector 2 returns to the stage.

Inspector 1 – Wouldn't that be more of a scam?

Director 1 – A scam?

Inspector 1 – We know the trick, you know. You stash the money somewhere, report it stolen, and get reimbursed by the insurance company.

Director 2 – I can assure you, Inspector, that...

Inspector 2 – So, to sum up, who are the suspects? *(To Director 1)* You...

Director 1 – But... I'm the victim here! I'm innocent!

Inspector 1 – Every innocent man is a guilty man who doesn't know it. Who else was in the theatre at the time of the robbery?

Director 1 – Well... there were the actors in the play, of course.

Inspector 2 – And where are they?

Director 2 – They're probably in their dressing rooms, I suppose, waiting to be told whether the show has been cancelled or not.

Inspector 1 – Well, what are you waiting for? Go and get them!

Director 2 – I'm off.

Director 2 exits.

Inspector 2 – Do you have any reason to suspect anyone in particular?

Director 1 – No... This is the first time something like this has happened in this honourable establishment, I can assure you.

Inspector 1 – Indeed, it's not often that we're called out to a theft from a theatre. Isn't that right, Martinez?

Director 1 – It has to be said that, more often than not, there's not much to steal. Except for the takings... which are generally far too meagre to interest the robbers.

Inspector 2 – What about your actors? Do you think any of them could have committed this theft...?

Director 1 – I don't know... It's true that they haven't been paid for weeks and they're starting to get hungry. As you know, we're all going through a difficult period...

Inspector 1 glances around the room.

Inspector 1 – And those... They're well fed, but they all seem to have something to reproach themselves for...

Director 1 – You know, so few people go to the theatre these days... We can't afford to sort the clientele. We have to let anyone in.

Inspector 2 – We'll interview them later.

Director 2 returns with the actress.

Director 2 – This is the actress who was to play Armande.

Inspector 1 – Armande?

Director 2 – Armande Béjart. Molière's wife.

Inspector 2 (*pointing to the chair*) – Sit there, Armande. (*She sits down*). OK, first name, surname, age, job title...

Actress – Béjart, Armande, Poquelin's wife, actress, born at an uncertain date and place, and therefore of an uncertain age.

Inspector 1 – Some pedigree you've got... So, Madame Béjart...

Actress – Mademoiselle.

Inspector 2 – You've just told me that you're married.

Actress – You should know that an actress never gives her age, and that she is always called Mademoiselle, even if she is married.

Inspector 1 – Well... And what do you know about this theft... Miss?

Actress – Nothing.

Inspector 2 – That's strange, I'd have been surprised if you hadn't.

Director 2 – Since she tells you she doesn't know anything... She doesn't even know her lines... Perhaps that's why it suits her that the performance has been cancelled...

Actress – What are you trying to say?

Director 2 – Didn't you steal the money box? Just to save you the trouble of having to learn your lines.

Actress – In any case, I don't need to sleep with the director to get a part.

Director 2 – Say that again, just to see?

They are about to come to blows. Director 1 steps in.

Director 1 – Ladies, let's keep it civil... *(To the policemen)* I told you, the theatre is one big family. And like all families, we sometimes bicker a bit...

Inspector 1 – And where's the rest of the family? I imagine it wasn't a one-man show...

Director 2 – Yes, there's another actor.

Inspector 2 – Why isn't he here, then?

Director 2 – That's right, he wasn't in his dressing room, where is he?

Actress – I don't know.

Inspector 1 – The curtain is about to rise, and you don't know where your partner is?

Actress – I'm not his mother, am I? And besides, why are you looking for him? Do you want to offer him a role?

Inspector 2 – Why not the culprit's? If he's disappeared, maybe he took the cash with him.

Inspector 1 – We'll put out a wanted notice on him *(To Director 2)* Do you have a description of this guy?

Director 2 – I've got more than that, Inspector 1. I've got his book...

Director 2 goes backstage for a moment.

Inspector 1 – His book?

Director 1 – His acting portfolio. You'll see, it's much more accurate than a sketch.

Director 2 returns with a book, which she hands to Inspector 1.

Director 2 – Here you go, inspector.

Inspector 1 – All right, that's all for now. We'll let you wash your dirty linen in public.

Inspector 2 – We're going to inspect the premises. But until further notice, no one leaves here.

Inspector 1 and Inspector 2 leave.

Actress – Can I go too, or do you still have questions for me?

Director 1 – You can go, but did you hear the Inspector? No one is to leave here until we've found the culprit...

She goes out.

Director 2 (to the audience) – I'm sorry about all these little unforeseen problems. With a bit of luck, we'll be able to sort things out very quickly and the show will be back on soon.

Director 1 – In a good atmosphere, I hope...

Director 2 – OK, but we're going to have to keep them busy in the meantime...

A spectator, who is actually an actor, appears in the auditorium.

Spectator 1 – Excuse me...

Director 1 and Director 2, astonished, turn to him.

Director 1 – Yes...

Spectator 1 – Do you mind?

He gets up and walks on stage without waiting for permission.

Director 1 – Please...

Spectator 1 – I'm sorry to barge in on your debate like this and to come on stage uninvited, but if I could help you a little in my own way...

Director 2 – We're listening...

Spectator 1 – Here you go. I've always been a friend of the theatre. In fact, I do a bit of it myself, as an amateur. And without any pretensions, of course...

Director 1 – Very well... but as you may have guessed, at the moment we're not really in a position to offer you a role.

Spectator 1 – Of course... I wouldn't have dared ask you. You're professionals and I'm... just a Sunday actor, as they say.

Director 2 – In that case, if you don't mind me asking, how could you help us?

Spectator 1 – Well... financially, perhaps.

The other two were speechless for a moment.

Director 1 – Can you see that...?

Spectator 1 – I understand you're having some temporary cash flow problems.

Director 2 – You could even say that this theatre has been in permanent suspension of payments since its creation.

Spectator 1 – It so happens that, although I'm not a billionaire, I do have a few savings that I don't know what to do with.

Director 1 – Really...?

Spectator 1 – You know how it is at the moment, with inflation coming back, it's better not to let your savings sit in the bank.

Director 2 – Unfortunately, I do not have to worry about this.

Spectator 1 – Believe me, you might as well keep a few ingots under your mattress.

Director 2 – Which must be pretty uncomfortable...

Director 1 – And so you thought that investing in theatre could be an overlooked option to grow your savings and diversify your investments.

Director 2 – Indeed, it's quite a strange idea.

Spectator 1 – I'm not really thinking about making money, you know. But while I'm at it, I might as well support the artists. And since you're so nice to me, I thought... But excuse me, I don't know what came over me. I'm not in the business and... Sorry again for bothering you...

To the astonishment of the other two, he was about to return to his seat, but Director 1 stopped him.

Director 1 – Not at all... Please, stay with us...

Director 2 – Here, sit down here.

He takes his place in the armchair with obvious satisfaction.

Actor 1 – That's Molière's chair, isn't it?

Director 1 – Yes, well... only on this stage, I suppose.

Director 2 – Nevertheless, the antique dealer who sold it to me assured me that it was authentic to the period. So, we can dream that Molière himself honoured it with his illustrious posterior.

Director 1 – So, you're suggesting... taking out a loan.

Director 2 – Or perhaps a donation, who knows...

Spectator 1 – I was thinking more along the lines of a rental investment.

Director 1 – Look at that...

Director 2 – Could you be more specific? I'm not entirely sure that...

Spectator 1 – You need money and I have it. I'll buy the premises from you, so you can continue your noble work. I won't ask for much rent.

Director 1 – Well... modest rent for an activity that is equally modest... Seems fitting.

Spectator 1 – Of course, I don't have much to offer you, but it seems like you don't have many options either.

Director 2 – You're kind to remind us of that.

Director 1 – And when you say "not much," how much are we talking about, more or less?

Spectator 1 – I'm almost hesitant to say. I'd rather write it down...

Spectator 1 takes out a business card and a pencil, writes down a number and hands the card to Director 1. Director 1 looks at the sum written on the paper.

Director 1 – Ah yes... Now I see why you mentioned a modest rent. Considering the amount you're offering for this purchase.

He passes the business card back to Director 2.

Director 2 – Are you sure you haven't forgotten a zero?

Spectator 1 – You see, the value of an asset is measured by the return you can expect from it. And in the case of a theatre, this return is practically zero. Sometimes, even negative.

Director 2 – From that perspective, it's quite obvious...

Spectator 1 – Regardless, this isn't about making a deal, is it? It's about supporting the performing arts, which are currently in dire straits. Think of it as patronage.

Director 1 – You've caught me by surprise but... I promise I'll consider it and get back to you as soon as possible.

Spectator 1 – You have my number on that business card.

Director 2 gives the business card back to Director 1.

Director 1 – Francis Pigeon, Philanthropist...

Director 2 – I never knew philanthropy could be a profession...

Spectator 1 – It's more like a vocation, not to mention a priesthood.

Spectator 1 gets up to leave the stage.

Director 2 – Well, thank you for your generosity, Mr. Pigeon... Molière had Louis XIV as his patron, but with pimps like you, contemporary theatre still has a bright future.

Spectator 1 – Mind if I took a look backstage? I'm curious, you know... and I might invest in this business soon.

Director 1 – Of course, make yourself at home. When you buy a restaurant, you have the right to inspect the kitchens...

Spectator 1 disappears backstage.

Director 1 – It's not an amazing offer, but it could save us, right?

Director 2 – Saving us? By selling our theatre to a stranger?

Director 1 – You heard him. He only wants to help.

Director 2 – That's exactly why I'm suspicious. I tend to see every philanthropist as a potential crook.

Director 1 – But do we have any other choice?

Director 2 – Who knows, maybe we'll find the money...

Inspector 1 and Inspector 2 return with the actor in handcuffs.

Inspector 2 – At least we've already caught the thief.

Inspector 1 – He was in the local bistro, completely drunk.

Actor – Drunk? Not at all!

Inspector 2 – You'll talk when we question you. For now, sit here.

They push the actor to sit down in the armchair.

Director 1 – Did he confess?

Inspector 1 – Not yet. But he will, don't worry. Spontaneous confessions are our speciality.

Director 2 – We're not even sure it's him yet.

Inspector 2 – With a guilty face like his, wouldn't that be a shame?

Director 1 – Let him at least explain.

Inspector 1 – OK, so last name, first name, age, qualifications...

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

Inspector 2 – Well, Jean-Baptiste, did you steal this money box, yes or no?

Actor – I had nothing to do with it. And I'd like to see my lawyer.

Inspector 1 – His lawyer... Martinez , did you hear that? Too much TV, man. Why not his agent while we're at it?

The actress returns.

Actress – What's going on? What did you do to him?

Inspector 1 – He's the primary suspect in this case.

Actress – And why is that?

Inspector 2 – We caught him at the tobacco shop trying to escape.

Actress – I sent him there to get cigarettes for me!

Inspector 1 – You're giving him with an alibi, that's understandable. But your testimony is not credible. You're his wife.

Actress – Well, I'm only his stage wife, not his real one! Did you really think my name was Armande Béjart and his Jean-Baptiste Poquelin?

Inspector 2 – And you're making it worse for yourself! Identity theft, do you know how serious that is?

Actress – We're actors. Identity theft is our trade.

Inspector 1 – We searched him. He didn't have a packet of cigarettes on him.

Actor – You handcuffed me before I had the chance to buy them!

Inspector 2 – No more than that famous money box, it seems.

Actor – In that case, you have no evidence against me.

Inspector 2 – We'll find witnesses, don't worry. *(To the audience)* Is this the man you saw leaving with the money box?

The fake Spectator 2, in the room, speaks up.

Spectator 2 – It's hard to say, Inspector... It was a ghost.

Inspector 1 *(to Director 1)* – A ghost... Who's this crazy woman?

Director 1 – A spectator, I guess... We don't know them all, you know.

Inspector 2 – We're listening, dear lady. You were saying?

Spectator 2 – I'm telling you, he had a sheet over his head.

Inspector 1 – A sheet?

Spectator 2 – Yes, a sheet. Like a ghost, you know. At first, we thought it was part of the room...

Director 2 – It's true that Molière's ghost is supposed to appear at the end, just before...

Inspector 1 – Right... Go and fetch me a sheet.

Director 2 exits.

Inspector 2 – A ghost...

Inspector 1 – Do you believe in ghosts, Martinez?

Inspector 2 – Nah, not really.

Inspector 1 – Me neither.

Director 2 returns with several sheets. She hands one to Inspector 2.

Inspector 2 (to the actor) – Stand up.

The actor gets up and she pulls the sheet over his head and body.

Inspector 1 – Step forward.

Inspector 1 guides him to the front of the stage.

Inspector 2 (to the audience) – Ladies and gentlemen, is this the man you saw stealing the tape?

Spectator 2 – Yes, he looked exactly like that. But, you know, with him hidden under the sheet, it's hard to be certain...

Inspector 1 – You have a point... Martinez, let's line them up.

They take the other two sheets and cover the actress and Director 2 with them. The three ghosts are then lined up at the front of the stage, and they switch places several times.

Director 1 – What are we playing here? Tricks of the trade?

Inspector 1 (to the audience) – And now? Which one is it?

A little improvisation if the audience reacts. The three ghosts change places again, still in a line.

Inspector 1 – And about now?

Inspector 2 consults his mobile.

Inspector 2 – I've just received the information on the suspects we requested..

Inspector 1 – Well, what's the verdict?

Inspector 2 – It's not looking good, Mister Director, not at all...

The actor, actress and director 2 remove the sheets covering them.

Director 1 – What on earth are you talking about?

Inspector 2 – You never mentioned our colourful past!

Director 1 – Oh, just an old case of pimping that never got properly resolved. I was sentenced with a bit of doubt lingering...

Inspector 2 – Usually, when there's doubt, you're set free...

Inspector 1 – So, what's your explanation? You told me this place was respectable!

Director 1 – You see, Inspector, in Molière's era, all actors were deemed sinful by the Church. They considered them no better than prostitutes. So, in a way, every theatre director was a potential pimp.

Inspector 2 – If the Church had such suspicions about actors, there must have been some truth to it. Where there's smoke, there's fire...

Director 2 – Actually, the real reason behind the persecution was that the theatre posed a threat to the Church. The church might be a theatre, but it's always the same show, which gets boring. So the priests saw us as rivals and wanted us eliminated.

Inspector 1 grabs the actor.

Inspector 1 – Alright, let's take this one to the station. Maybe a few hits on the head with Molière's complete works will make him talk more.

The actress intervenes dramatically.

Actress – Hold on, you will have to go through me.

Inspector 1 – I can't make any promises, Béjart, but for now, we're also taking you in for perjure.

Inspector 1 and Inspector 2 leave, taking the actor and actress with them.

Director 1 – With all this chaos, we couldn't find the cash register, so we couldn't reimburse the audience...

Director 2 – Why bother refunding them? We provided them with a show, didn't we?

Director 1 – Probably a lot less dull than the play we had originally planned... I mean, let's be honest, Molière's last hours...

Director 2 – If we can keep this going for another half-hour, they'll surely feel they got their money's worth.

Director 1 – Half an hour? We're reaching the end of our tether here. This whole thing is starting to spiral out of control.

Director 2 – We need a fresh twist.

Director 1 – We don't even have any actors left! The police took them away.

Director 2 – We'll have to think about finding replacements.

Director 1 – Perhaps some people in the audience might want to try their hand at theatre... as long as they're willing to do it for free, of course.

In an improvisation, Director 1 and the director ask some audience members if they would like to participate. They reject several of them for various reasons. Finally, they settle on Spectator 2, who had come forward earlier, and the fake Spectator 1, who has now returned to the auditorium. For improvisation, they can also choose a real spectator from the audience. They bring them up on stage.

Director 2 – Have either of you ever performed in the theatre before?

Spectator 2 – No, never...

Improvisation if the other spectator responds...

Director 2 – Let's have a little improv session, just for fun.

Director 1 – Alright.

Director 2 – Here's the scene: You come home one night, and your husband has transformed into a pigeon.

Spectator 2 – As a pigeon?

Director 2 – A big pigeon.

Spectator 2 – OK.

Director 1 (to the spectator 2) – You're the patsy.

Spectator 2 – He doesn't look much like a pigeon.

Director 1 – This is the theatre. Juste use your imagination...

Spectator 2 – Ah, got it.

Director 1 (to Spectator 2) – Now, go backstage and make an entrance.

She goes out and comes back in.

Spectator 2 – Hello darling. Did you have a good day?

The spectator probably respond with a "yes".

Spectator 2 – Great! So, what's for dinner tonight?

Director 2 – What's for dinner tonight?

Spectator 2 – Yes...

Director 2 – Your partner turns into a pigeon, and all you can think about is what's for dinner tonight?

Spectator 2 – Well, yes.

Director 2 – Come on, I expected more surprise from you.

Spectator 2 – You already spoiled it for me, so there's no surprise left. And to be honest, he doesn't really look like a pigeon at all, which doesn't help either.

Director 2 – Alright, let's try again. (*To Spectator 2*) You, go out... (*To the spectator 1*) And you, put some effort into it! Try to act like a pigeon.

Director 1 – Just say: "I don't know what's happened to me, look, I've turned into a pigeon."

Spectator 2 exits and re-enters.

Spectator 2 – Hello darling. Did you have a good day?

Spectator 1 takes a few steps, trying to imitate a pigeon.

Spectator 1 – Yes, but I don't know what's happening to me. Look, I've turned into a pigeon.

Spectator 2 – Oh, wow. Impressive. So... what's for dinner tonight?

Director 2 – Wait, you're not married?

Spectator 2 – No.

Director 1 – Oh, okay...

Director 2 – Just go back to your seat. We'll call you back if needed.

Spectator 1 and Spectator 2 return to their seats. The fake spectator can take advantage of this to slip away.

Director 1 – No money left in the till, actors in custody...

Director 2 – An audience that's terrible as actors!

Director 1 – This show is in a real trouble.

Director 2 – And it had such potential. Molière's last hours.

Director 1 – I'm starting to think that the title itself jinxed us. "The performance is cancelled"...

The actor and actress return.

Director 2 – Did they release you?

Actor – It appears they've gone off on yet another tangent. They're combing through the theatre from top to bottom...

Actress – This inspector is poking his nose everywhere. A real police dog...

Actor – So, what's our move? Do we play or not?

Director 1 – Until we find the money, I can't pay you... But they've just made me an offer to sell this theatre.

Actor – Have you found anyone crazy enough to buy a theatre at the moment?

Director 2 – A certain Mister Pigeon.

Actress – A fitting name.

Director 2 – Yes, but this pigeon seems to me to be more of a bird of ill omen.

Actor – Pigeon, you say...? Francis Pigeon?

Director 1 – Yes.

Actor – That name rings a bell... *(He takes out his mobile phone)* Let me quickly Google it... There it is!

Director 1 – So what?

Actor – Francis Pigeon. He's the French representative of a sect that's expanding all over the world... and is based in the Bahamas.

Actress – A sect domiciled in a tax haven. Well, at least they have a sense of humour, along with business acumen.

Director 1 – And what is this sect?

Actor – The Church of Excrementology. The followers are called pigeons. And their guru claims to read the future in their own droppings.

Director 1 – But why would this Tartuffe want to buy our theatre?

Actor – He buys up all the struggling cinemas at a knock-down price and turns them into churches for his sect. They already have over a million followers in France.

Director 1 – If this continues, we won't be able to go to shows in this town.

Director 2 – There will be Excrementology temples on every street corner.

Director 1 – In Molière's day, the Church had already declared war on the theatre. We thought we had won the day, but today it looks like the empire is fighting back...

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

Director 1 – Do you have any other solutions?

Actress – We'll keep performing, regardless!

Director 1 – I've said it before, I still don't have the money to pay you.

Actress – No worries! We'll perform for free. We'll do whatever it takes to save this theatre and fight against the rise of excrementological obscurantism!

Director 2 – All right, let's do this.

Actor – I'll go get into costume.

Actress – Me too.

Director 1 – Let the show begin!

Inspector 1 and Inspector 2 return.

Director 2 – You can't just stand there, this is a theatre stage, not a crime scene. The play's about to start.

Inspector 1 – I'm not so sure about starting... We've received a complaint. It seems that your theatre does not comply with all the current safety standards.

Director 2 – Whistleblowing?

Director 1 – Someone's clearly out to get us.

Inspector 2 – Well, we'll have to check. Where are the emergency exits?

Director 2 – Right here... and here...

Inspector 1 quickly checks the emergency exits.

Inspector 1 – And... do you have your first aid certificate?

Director 1 – Of course. Here you go. I always carry it with me just in case.

Director 1 hands Inspector 1 a piece of paper, which he barely glances at.

Inspector 2 – Have you been vaccinated against rabies?

Director 1 – I think so... In any case, I've never bitten anyone... until today.

Inspector 1 – Well... *(Pointing to the audience)* And them... Can they all swim?

Director 2 – You'd have to ask them, but in a theatre it's rare for the boxes to overflow...

Inspector 1 – I was joking. You know, you can be inspector of the police force and still have a sense of humour... Anyway, I also noticed the fire extinguisher in the hall. Everything seems to be in order.

Director 1 – After a theft, a slanderous accusation... Someone is trying to harm us!

Inspector 1 – Is there anyone in particular you can think of?

Director 2 – You've heard of the Church of Scatology, Inspector Columbine...

Director 1 – I think it's the Church of Excrementology, Inspector Columbo.

Inspector 1 – You're going to explain all this to us.

Director 2 – In the meantime... time for theatre.

Director 1 – At last!

They come out. Three knocks. Molière arrives, coughing into a red-tinted handkerchief, and sits down in the armchair. Béjart enters in his turn.

Actress – How are you feeling, Jean-Baptiste?

Actor – Like my Imaginary Invalid, my dear Armande. Rather badly.

Actress – But you're coughing up blood, my friend... Your illness is anything but imaginary.

Actor – Unfortunately, it's not the first time. But, it'll pass in the end.

Actress – Unless you end up passing by. It would be wiser to cancel the performance...

Actor – The whole company is counting on me. If the show's cancelled, they'll all lose money they desperately need. Not to mention the audience who will have to be reimbursed...

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

Actor – Only in the theatre do I feel truly alive... And you must admit, dying on stage while playing The Imaginary Invalid... What panache! Do you think they'd dare refuse me a Christian funeral?

Actress – Why are you so insistent on a Christian funeral when you've always scoffed at the Church?

Actor – Of the Church, yes. But not of true faith, which lies in faith in humanity. Every performance of my plays is a mass in which I celebrate the love of life.

Actress – In the end, you are a moralist, my friend. Like all the great comic writers.

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

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

Actor – I've been denied entry to the Académie Française just because I'm an actor. At least they shouldn't deny me entry to the cemetery through the front door.

Actress – The future will do you justice, I'm sure. In a century or two, just as the English language is known as Shakespeare's language, the French language will be known as Molière's language.

Actor – I'm already being slandered while I'm alive. What will happen when I'm dead? They will say that someone else wrote my plays. They will say that I married my daughter...

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

Actor – 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 until the end of the show, I swear.

Actrice – So you'll be playing The Imaginary Invalid...

Actor – Usually it's a healthy man who pretends to be ill. This time it's a genuine moribund who pretends to be well to pretend to be ill.

Actrice – Isn't that the very essence of theatre? To create illusion in order to bring out the truth.

Actor – I feel better already.

Actress – I've sent for a doctor to examine you all the same. I'll leave you with him...

The actress goes out and spectator 2 comes in, as a doctor.

Spectator 2 – So, Monsieur Molière? Are you finally seeking help from the medicine that you ridicule in your plays?

Actor – I'm not making fun of medicine. I'm making fun of the doctors who make a mockery of it. Anyway, thank you for coming... Armande asked several of your colleagues to come, but they refused when we told them who the patient was.

Spectator 2 – I must confess that I was very hesitant myself. And what ails you today, Monsieur Molière?

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

Spectator 2 – Go on, always go for it...

Actor – The lung.

Spectator 2 – Is this another one of your bad jokes?

Actor – Unfortunately not, I assure you.

Spectator 2 – It's true that you don't look very well... Lean forward and take a deep breath. *(She puts her ear to the patient's back)* Unfortunately I'm afraid you're right. These lungs make a hell of a noise. The same hell that awaits you if you don't recant your satanic profession in time.

Actor – At least allow me to see this performance through to the end. Then I'll abjure what you want, I promise.

Spectator 2 – If you don't get some rest right away, this will be your last performance on stage, believe me.

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

Spectator 2 – You can barely stand up.

Actor – You didn't, by any chance, poison me, did you? To prevent me from discrediting all those Diafoirus again...

Molière starts coughing and seems to be taken ill.

Spectator 2 – Are you all right, old chap?

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

Actor 1 – But... that's in the play too, or are you improvising here?

Actor – No... This is the actor talking to you. You've got to help me, Doctor...

He coughs again.

Spectator 2 – It's just that I'm not really a doctor... Except in the theatre...

The actress arrives.

Actress – I heard you coughing, sir...

Spectator 2 – His condition has suddenly worsened.

Actress – But... is it Molière who's choking, or the actor playing him?

Spectator 2 – I have to tell you, I'm starting to get confused.

Director 1 and Director 2 arrive, looking worried.

Director 1 – What's going on?

Actress – Do something, you can see he's suffocating!

Director 1 – I've only got my first aid certificate. We'll need to call the ambulance.

Actress – I'll take care of it...

Spectator 2 and the actress take the actor backstage.

Director 1 – Ladies and gentlemen, we're very sorry, but we're back where we started... And the show has been cancelled...

Director 2 – Because of this invalid, who we no longer know is imaginary or not.

Spectator 1 returns.

Spectator 1 – Here we are, I've prepared the promise to sell, all you have to do is sign...

Director 2 – We know who you are, Mr Francis Pignon. You've been unmasked.

Spectator 1 – Pigeon. Francis Pigeon.

Director 2 – You want to turn this theatre into a church for your sect.

Spectator 1 – A sect... Right away, big words... You know, my friend, all religions are successful sects...

Director 2 – All the same, the Church of Excrementology... Reading the future in pigeon droppings.

Spectator 1 – It's absolutely scientific, I assure you.

Director 2 – You're not going to sell your soul to that devil of a man!

Director 1 – Alas, I have no choice... It's either that or ruin...

Director 2 – Think of Molière! He died on stage rather than cancel a performance.

Director 1 – What do you want? I started my career as a pimp. I became Director of a theatre... But let's face it, I'll never be Molière.

Director 1 signs.

Spectator 1 – Thank you... God will repay you... In the meantime, here's your cheque.

He goes out.

Director 2 – So this time it's all over. That was the last show...

Inspector 1 returns.

Director 1 – Inspector? You still haven't found the loot...

Inspector 1 – Not yet, but we're taking this matter very seriously. It seems that in recent months, several theatres have been targeted with intimidation attempts.

Director 1 – Intimidation attempts?

Director 2 – What if this guru from the Church of Excrementology also poisoned Jean-Baptiste to sabotage the performance, bankrupt us and force us to sell?

Inspector 1's mobile rings and he answers it.

Inspector 1 – Inspector Columbine speaking... Yes... Yes... Very well, thank you... *(He puts his mobile away)* Martinez just found the loot.

Director 2 – But... how?

Inspector 1 – Believe me, this woman has more flair than a German shepherd...

Director 1 – And I thought money had no smell...

Inspector 1 – But that's not the most surprising part of this case, believe me!

Director 1 – Really? So, where had the thief hidden the loot?

Inspector 2 arrives.

Inspector 2 – In a double-bottomed drawer in your desk, Director.

Director 1 – What?

Inspector 2 – You are under arrest for slander and attempted fraud.

Director 1 – I can assure you, Inspector, that I have no idea who hid that money. I didn't even know that this drawer had a double bottom.

Inspector 2 – Who else could have done this?

A moment of silence.

Director 2 – Alright, I admit it... I'm the one...

Director 1 – You stole the theatre's box office? But... why?

Director 2 – This show was doomed. Nothing was ready, you know that. It was all I could do to get the show cancelled at the last minute. And to improvise...

Director 1 – I'd say go live...

Inspector 1 – So to sum up, you sell these honest people tickets for a show that doesn't exist, and you steal the takings so that you don't have to perform it, without having to reimburse the spectators.

Inspector 2 – You have to admit, it's pretty twisted.

Director 1 – Having said that, we didn't fool anyone, since the play was called "the performance is cancelled".

Inspector 1 – One of the greatest tricks of all time is to expose lies to make them seem more real.

Director 2 – After all, theatre is a fraud. Audiences know that everything that happens on stage is an illusion, and yet they never ask for their money back at the end.

Spectator 1 returns.

Director 1 – If we're crooks, here's another one, Inspector! This is the Tartuffe who poisoned Molière!

Inspector 1 – What do you have to say, sir?

Spectator 1 – My answer is, if no one here is truly who they claim to be, then you can't possibly be the rightful owner of this room you've just sold me either...

Director 1 – Nor are you the actual buyer.

Director 2 – The good news is that the theatre hasn't really been sold, so it can continue to live on.

Inspector 2 – So we're actors too, Columbine?

Inspector 1 – Absolutely, Martinez. I even wonder if you're not the author of this comedy. I saw your name on the poster.

Inspector 2 – My name is Ramirez.

Director 1 – In any case, we agree on one point. Since everything here is fake, it's a real play! The performance did take place, and no one will be reimbursed.

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

The actor arrives as Molière's ghost, with a sheet over him and a bucket in his hand.

Actor – My name is Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, but you know me better as Molière... I've devoted my life to the theatre, a time when mocking your contemporaries, especially the powerful ones, was much riskier than it is today. Even more so when they wore a cassock. Although I didn't die on stage, as people often say, I served the theatre until my last breath. It was after the final performance of *The Imaginary Invalid* at the Théâtre du Palais Royal that I passed away. Since no priest agreed to administer the last rites, I couldn't recant my profession as an actor on my deathbed to be reintegrated into the Church community at the last minute. But King Louis XIV showed me mercy. He interceded on my behalf, and I was still able to avoid a mass grave. Saint Peter was kind to me as well, accepting me into paradise. (*Pauses*) I've just come from paradise, and believe me, heaven is a boring place. Why do you think Adam and Eve seized the first opportunity to escape from paradise on earth? The certainty of eternal happiness is a mortal bore, I assure you. Life isn't always fun either, of course. That's probably why, after inventing God, mankind invented the theatre. Alfred Hitchcock, who was nonetheless a man of the cinema, later said that "Drama is life with the dull bits cut out." That's why, as soon as I can, for the duration of a performance, I escape from paradise to haunt theatre stages once again. Keep fighting today to ensure that the show is not canceled. So that theatres don't become new churches. (*Pauses*) But now that the show is over, I have to return to where I came from. And you, you must go back to the reality you momentarily left behind when you entered this theatre. The dream is over. And to wake you up, as promised, there's nothing better than a bucket of water on your head...

He throws the contents of his bucket towards the audience, and a shower of stars bursts forth.

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 is well that's starts badly
An innocent little murder
Best and Breakfast
Casket for two
Cheaters
Check to the kings
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but stable
Euro Star
Four stars
Fragile, handle with care
Friday the 13th
Heads or Tails
Him and Her
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
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
One marriage out of two
Preliminaries
Quarantine
Running on Empty
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
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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<https://comediatheque.net/>
Play available for free download