

La Comédiathèque

**BACKSTAGE
COMeDY**

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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Backstage Comedy

A comedy by Jean-Pierre Martinez

Just before the opening curtain of the premiere, the actors go through one final rehearsal. However, an unforeseen incident jeopardizes the start of the show.
A cheerful farce about the small world of the theatre...

Characters

Michael Delamare: Actor
Nancy Simpson: Actress
Christopher Swindlemore: Stage director
Doris Night: Theatre director
Agatha Ripper: Critic
Christine: Usher
Ramirez: Detective
Sanchez: Lieutenant
Kevin: Spectator
Wendy: Spectator
Alan Dobbledick: President of the Assisted Theatre Writers
Mrs. Marlowe: President of the Authors and Impostors Dramatic Society
Gary Curtain: Author

*Most roles can be played by male or female performers.
The same actor can play multiple roles (spectators and presidents on one hand,
director and author on the other hand, can be portrayed by the same person).
Possible number of actors and actresses: 10 to 13.*

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Michael and Nancy stand on stage, with Michael at the forefront and Nancy slightly behind, weighed down by the twists of fate.

Nancy (*emphatically*) – What do you see through the window, Dimitri?

Michael turns towards the audience, pretending to grasp the bars of an imaginary window to look outside.

Michael – I see nothing anymore, Natacha. The sun vanished behind the hill. Yet, in this deep darkness, I feel the stirrings of ghosts getting ready to haunt us.

Nancy – Do you know what time it is now?

Michael – I have no idea... My watch called it quits this morning.

Nancy – May it not be an ill omen.

Michael – Let's not succumb to superstition, Natacha. It's likely just the battery.

Nancy – I'm feeling a bit jittery, forgive me. I have a tendency to read too much into everything...

Michael (*sighing*) – Who could blame you, Natacha? Night descends upon the remnants of this unfamiliar city. And it's true, the assurance of witnessing a new day's dawn eludes us.

Silence.

Nancy – What if we stuck to the original plan and went back home, Dimitri? We're not obligated to be heroes. There's still a chance to escape...

Michael – I'm not sure anymore, Natacha. I can't ask you to make such a sacrifice. But how could we face ourselves in the mirror tomorrow, while shaving, after such an act of cowardice?

Nancy – You're right, Dimitri, as always... I'll find strength, I promise you...

Michael – I feel fear too, Natacha, you know...

Nancy – You?

Michael – I'm only human after all. But how can we turn our backs on these orphans who have no parents, robbed even of the faintest memories of their unhappy childhood by a cruel disease?

Nancy – It's cruel to say, Dimitri, but since they've lost their memory, if we abandoned them to bleak sad fate, they would quickly forget us...

Michael – Yes, Natacha. But we wouldn't forget them. The shadow of that betrayal would haunt us endlessly.

Nancy – Of course, it's our duty to stand by them until the end, but the thought of what might befall us sends shivers down my spine... Will we ever set eyes on our humble loft in Soho again?

Michael – To leave or to stay... What a agonizing dilemma! And Soho is so enchanting in autumn...

Nancy – It's still time to change our minds, Dimitri. Don't we already have our boarding passes?

Michael takes a boarding pass from his pocket and gazes at it with a weary expression.

Michael – Yes, I printed them this morning, Natacha. How trivial it all seems now...
(*Reading*) Easyjet, Terminal 2B.

Nancy – Two B... Two B, as they say in the language of Shakespeare...

Michael – Two B... or not to be. That is the question...

Christopher, the stage director, interrupts them by applauding from backstage before stepping onto the stage.

Christopher – Bravo! You've fully embraced your characters!

Nancy – Really?

Christopher – I'd go so far as to say you embody your characters!

Michael – Thank you, Christopher!

Christopher – You're going to triumph tonight, I'm sure!

Nancy – Thanks to you, Christopher...

Michael – Thank you for entrusting us with this play.

Nancy – Being directed by Christopher Swindlemore, the most trendy and highest-paid director in today's contemporary stage... I could never have imagined it, not even in my wildest dreams.

Christopher – But... if I chose you, it's because of your talent. (*After a pause*) Just one little thing... And this is a note for both of you, actually... What's the title of this play?

Michael – The day just before the night...

Christopher – Exactly... So, the title of the play isn't "The night just before the day," but "The day just before the night"... Are you following me?

Nancy – I'm trying, Christopher... I'm trying...

Christopher – If it were called "The night just before the day", it would be an optimistic play! Like... After the rain comes sunshine... Every cloud has a silver lining... That kind of nonsense, you get it? But no!

Michael – Okay... So here, it would be more like... after the sunshine comes the rain...

Nancy – Or... the calm before the storm.

Christopher – Exactly! The entire dramatic dimension of this play is captured in its title: The day just before the night! Your performance should convey that bleak perspective on existence, a hallmark of the Russian soul. (*Growing agitated*) It's a tragedy, for heaven's sake!

Nancy – Of course...

Christopher – We're not in a boulevard comedy!

Michael – Obviously...

Christopher – Despite being a tragedy, it's laced with a good deal of humour, as I'm sure you've noticed.

Michael – Absolutely...

Christopher – And it's crucial not to miss the irony in the lines. We should find moments to laugh too!

Nancy – Understood...

Christopher – Alright, I'll wrap it up. I wouldn't want to disturb you just moments before the premiere...

Nancy – Thank you for your advice, Christopher.

Michael – It will surely help us a lot...

Christopher – You'll be amazing, I have no doubt. You have to be! By the way, Gary Curtain, the author, will be in the audience tonight... and so will Agatha Ripper...

Nancy – The famous Teledrama critic!

Christopher – Like you know, she's the puppet master of the city stage. A favourable write-up in *Télédrama*, and the play's triumph is a done deal. On the flip side, if she tears us apart, it's a flop... So, let's give our best shot!

Christopher exits. The two actors look at each other.

Michael – Were you aware the author would be at the premiere?

Nancy – No...

Michael – Up until now, I wasn't too nervous, but suddenly I feel the pressure is starting to rise... Do you?

Nancy – Because the author is in the audience? No...

Michael – It's because you didn't sleep with him to get this role.

Nancy – Oh, I see... So that's why he rejected my advances... It reassures me about my sex appeal...

Michael – Speaking of that, I really struggle with this line, don't you?

Nancy – Which line?

Michael – I tell you my watch stopped, you say it's a bad omen, and I reply that it must be the battery! Is it supposed to be a joke or what...

Nancy – What's your take on it?

Michael – Honestly, I don't sense anything about it... What if I just didn't mention it? I could play it off as a memory lapse.....

Nancy – If we skip lines we don't feel in this play, the whole show would be over in fifteen minutes...

Michael – I'm not saying Gary Curtin's play isn't interesting, but... it's the very issue the director highlighted earlier. Is it a drama or a comedy?

Nancy – Can we really stage a comedy in Chechnya, in an orphanage with kids dealing with an early form of Alzheimer's?

Michael – Fair point, looking at it that way...

Nancy – Even with a hefty dose of irony, as Christopher suggested.

Michael – That bleak perspective on existence, a hallmark of the Russian soul... *(Ironic)* I had no clue Gary Curtin had Russian roots.

Nancy – Maybe it's in his ancestry...

Michael looks at her puzzled with a puzzled expression.

Michael – Who did you sleep with to get the role?

Nancy – The director...

Michael – Christopher... I attempted that approach initially, but it didn't work... Now I see why...

Christine, the cashier, arrives with a coffee in hand.

Christine *(pleasantly)* – Here's your coffee, Michael. Two sugars, just as you like.

Michael – Thank you, my dear. You're an angel.

Nancy – Well, I could use a little coffee too... Could you get me one, Christine? Without sugar, please.

Christine *(smiling)* – Rather die, you bitch.

Christine walks away.

Michael – I sense a bit of tension between you two... Any specific reason?

Nancy – She managed to sleep with both the stage director and the author...

Michael – Hat's off...

Nancy – Yet, I snagged the lead female role, and all she got was an usher's gig.

Michael – Not very flattering for her ego, I suppose...

Nancy – Still, she's the one raking the tips...

Michael – When you mention both the director and the author, do you mean... simultaneously or one after the other?

Nancy prefers not to answer.

Nancy – And this critic, Agatha Ripper, does she have a reputation for being scathing?

Michael – Agatha Ripper, what do you think?

Nancy – So it's a nickname, isn't it?

Michael – I'm not even sure about that.

Nancy pauses to consider the information.

Nancy – Ready for one final run-through?

Michael – Sure .

Nancy delivers the same lines as before but very quickly, without any intonation and without moving.

Nancy (*emphatically*) – What do you see through the window, Dimitri?

Michael – I see nothing anymore, Natacha. The sun vanished behind the hill. Yet, in this deep darkness, I feel the stirrings of ghosts getting ready to haunt us.

Nancy – Do you know what time it is now?

Michael – I have no idea... My watch called it quits this morning.

Nancy – May it not be an ill omen.

Michael – Let's not succumb to superstition, Natacha. It's likely just the battery. (*Interrupting himself*) No, I really struggle with this line...

Doris, the theatre director, enters with the critic Agatha Ripper.

Doris – The author isn't with you? I've been searching for him everywhere for the past fifteen minutes...

Nancy – Sorry, we haven't seen him...

Doris – Have you met Agatha Ripper, the famous critic from Teledrama?

Michael – Who doesn't know Miss Ripper's sharp sense of criticism...

Agatha sneezes.

Agatha – What a dusty place. Have you ever consider giving it a good sweep?

Doris – Ah... When you're allergic to dust, it's probably wise not to be a theatre critic.

Agatha – Especially not for contemporary theatre.. It's paradoxical, dear friend, but the great classical authors often don't smell as much like mothballs as today's writers... Take Shakespeare, for instance. It's always incredibly modern! But will we still be performing Gary Curtain's plays in five hundred years?

Doris – Mrs Ripper wanted to interview the playwright before the show...

Michael (*to the critic*) – Michael Delamare... I portray Dimitri in the play...

Agatha – Mr Delamare... Pleasure to meet you. I only knew you from that unfortunate soap on TV... What was it called again? Jam and Flies?

Michael – Honey and Bees.

Agatha – On TV, you seemed taller...

Michael – And here is my partner, who portrays Natacha...

Nancy – Nancy Simpson, very honoured, Mrs Ripper...

Agatha – Your face seems familiar, Miss Simpson, but I can't quite recall...

Nancy – Really... I thought I was unforgettable...

Agatha – I must have seen you on television... In a cartoon, perhaps...

Nancy – You might have seen me in a commercial...

Agatha – Of course! It's coming back to me now... For toilet paper!

Nancy – I'm flattered that you've been following my artistic career so closely...

Agatha – So, you've traded toilet paper for contemporary theatre texts? Well, sometimes one wonders if we wouldn't be better off publishing them on that kind of paper...

Nancy – I wanted to face more inspiring challenges...

Agatha – I'm impressed, Miss. You speak like a business executive who just accepted a position in Mexico to export ice to Alaska.

Nancy – A true artist must take risks, don't you think? Always questioning oneself. With this play, I feel like I'm fully dedicating myself to the cause of contemporary theatre, contributing to enlightening the working masses that capitalist society is trying to further numb through television.

Agatha – Well, why not you? After all, everyone is doing theatre now. Even retired footballers.

Doris – True, it's more challenging for a retired actor to start a professional football career...

Agatha – And on top of that, they dare to preach to us! Earning indecent salaries in their preferred foreign football clubs for years, continuing to line their pockets with commercials for insurers and banks, and acting in plays that denounce the flaws of the capitalist system...

Doris – Old age is a shipwreck... If Che Guevara were still alive today, who knows if he might star in commercials for aftershave...

Agatha – You've hit rock bottom, my dear Doris.

Doris – Pardon?

Agatha – I mean, you've really hit the core issue. It's the true tragedy of the human condition, my dear friend! People live for far too long. Medicine is constantly trying to eke out a few more months every year. After hitting thirty, it's just a cycle of repetition or turning into a caricature. Honestly, all true artists should have met their end by thirty, trust me. Not to mention the others...

Christine, the usher, returns looking horrified.

Christine – It's awful, Madam Director... There's been a terrible accident.

Agatha – This girl, on the other hand, acts exceptionally well. I foresee a promising career for her. In which play is she performing now?

Doris – She's the usher, Agatha. She once dreamt of being an actress but couldn't quite make it through the casting tests. What's bothering you, my dear? Don't hesitate to speak openly!

Christine – Gary Curtain!

Doris – The author? Well, what's the issue, my dear?

Christine – I just found him.

Doris – Ah, at last!

Christine – He was locked in the bathroom.

Michael – Stage fright, perhaps... I tend to vomit quite frequently before a premiere.

Agatha – Considering the plays you've been a part of, my young friend, that's not too surprising.

Christine – No, you don't get it... Mr Curtain is dead!

Doris – Dead? What do you mean by dead exactly?

Christine – I just found him hanging in the bathroom.

Doris – Curtain? Hanging!

Christine – He hanged himself with the toilet flush cord, Madam Director! Believe me, it's a horrifying sight...

Agatha – And yet, as a theatre usher, you must have seen a lot.

Doris – A lot of authors hanging in the bathrooms?

Agatha – No, just a lot of horrifying shows!

Doris – Ah, yes, of course...

Agatha – Still... An author committing suicide just minutes before the curtain rises for his premiere... What panache! A true artist!

Christine – Unfortunately, I'm not sure it's a suicide...

Agatha – And what do you would lean towards? A domestic accident?

Christine – Mr Curtain's hands are tied behind his back with tape.

Doris – Oh, well, that certainly changes things...

Agatha – Do you think it could be murder? Better and better... It's like one of those melodramas from the last century...

Michael – Murder! That's dreadful!

Nancy – The killer might still be among us... We should call the police!

Doris – I'll handle it...

Michael (*handing her his phone*) – Here, take my smartphone. I know you don't have one...

Agatha (*to Doris*) – Why not use the old dial telephone in your dusty office? It'll add some drama when you call the police to report a crime.

Doris – Good point...

Doris exits, followed by Christine. Christopher enters.

Christopher – Ah, Mrs Ripper, I hope you're not here to assassinate us...

Agatha – As for the playwright, my dear Christopher, it seems someone else has taken care of that for me..

Christopher – What on earth are you talking about, Ripper? And you seem so troubled... What's going on? We're about to raise the curtain...

Michael – Exactly... The usher just discovered Gary Curtain hanging in the toilet.

Christopher – Is this some kind of prank?

Nancy – Unfortunately, Christopher, it's no joke...

Christopher – So that's why the restroom was occupied for such a long time. I needed to go and was wondering who could possibly... Gary Curtain committed suicide?

Agatha – Apparently, it might be more of a murder...

Nancy – Even though the possibility of a workplace accident isn't entirely ruled out yet...

Michael (*skeptical*) – Hung on the toilet flush cord with his hands tied behind his back with tape?

Christopher – I was also wondering where my roll of tape had gone... But it's dreadful! So, we have no choice but to cancel the performance...

Nancy – We're not going to play?

Christopher – How can you perform a play when its author is still swinging from the toilet flush cord he used to hang himself?

Michael – Or was hanged...

Agatha – Oh no, you can't possibly cancel! I had already written my review to get a head start...

Christopher – Apparently, it seems you wrote it for nothing.

Agatha – That'll teach me to be so conscientious...

Christopher – I hope at least the review wasn't too harsh...

Agatha – Don't worry, the director is good friends with a deputy who can secure me the Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters... I won't criticize the plays performed in her theater.

Christopher – I was also surprised that you came in person... We know that critics rarely attend the shows they write about.

Agatha – You won't catch me again... For once, I was writing a praising review, and now I won't be able to publish it!

Michael – Don't worry, Mrs Ripper... If you publish a review of a show that didn't happen, I doubt anyone will notice...

Nancy – And if it's a positive review, nobody will complain.

Christopher – Anyway, people don't go to the theatre anymore.

Agatha – Especially not the Teledrama readers... They gave up on live theatre a long time ago.

Christopher – Let them go hang themselves too, with their toilet flush rope during the commercial break...

Agatha – My dear Gonzague, do you know why mentioning the word "rope" is taboo, and why whistling is strictly forbidden in a theatre?

Christopher – I was unaware until now, but I'm starting to catch on...

Agatha – Well, there are several theories about the origin of this superstition... The first is that the strolling players of the past were often starving...

Christopher – That hasn't changed much for many of them...

Agatha – They would frequently resort to stealing a chicken.

Christopher – Even today, it's often the chicks that feed them...

Agatha – So, after gracing the stage of a theatre, it wasn't unusual for actors of that time to find themselves walking the boards of a scaffold... with a rope around their necks. The second supposed origin of this superstition is more closely tied to...

Christine returns.

Christine – The audience is already here... What should we do?

Michael – We can't just go ahead with the premiere as if nothing happened. There's been a death!

Christopher – Or we could pay tribute to him just before raising the curtain... I can improvise a short speech...

Agatha – Were you close friends?

Christopher – I said I could improvise...

Agatha – Well, then, I'll get started on his obituary as well. I'll make sure it's published alongside the glowing review for the premiere of his play, which I haven't even seen yet.

Christopher and Agatha exit.

Nancy – And here I was, supposed to make my debut as the young leading lady on stage tonight... What a promising start to a theatrical career...

Michael – Let's try to see the bright side. At least we won't have to perform in this depressing play. Honestly, if it weren't for the need to pay my rent, I'd almost consider it a relief.

Nancy – The worst part is that I would have slept with the director for nothing.

Michael – Was he at least good in bed?

Nancy – Honestly, I can't say. I fell asleep before he finished... Anyway, we can't just linger here.

Michael – Agreed. Let's head back to the dressing-room and wait to hear what's going on.

They are about to exit.

Nancy – And was the author any good in bed?

Michael – Absolutely phenomenal...

Nancy – That's not what the usher said.

Michael – Maybe she didn't know how to handle him...

Nancy – That's probably why she stuck to being an usher...

Nancy and Michael both exit. Doris, the theatre director, and Christine, the usher, enter.

Doris – You haven't removed it, have you?

Christine – Remove what?

Doris – The hanged one! You know in these situations, you're not supposed to touch anything until the police arrive! At least, that's what they always say in police series on TV...

Christine – I left it untouched, don't worry... But if you happen to need the restroom...

Doris – Well, you'll have to hold it, dear! Or go to the cinema next door. There are toilets in the lobby... Where's Ripper?

Christine – Last I saw, she was eyeing the actors in the dressing rooms...

Detective Ramirez and his assistant Lieutenant Sanchez arrive (Ramirez and Sanchez can be either male or female).

Doris – What are you doing here? Did you sneak in through the back door?

Christine *(to herself)* – I wonder if that's what I should have done at this motel to get the lead role in this play...

Ramirez presents his police card.

Ramirez – No need to worry, we're in the showbiz too... We love detective movies... I'm Detective Ramirez, and this is Lieutenant Sanchez...

Doris – I'm sincerely sorry, Detective. I thought you were lost spectators. There's a porn cinema right next door, and some patrons mistakenly come through our entrance. They actually make up a significant part of our audience. *(Extending her hand to the Detective)* I'm Doris Night, the director of this theatre.

Ramirez *(shaking her hand)* – Ah yes, one can immediately sense that you're a strong-handed woman, Miss Night.

Doris – I apologize for this misunderstanding... It's clear you're not the type of gentlemen who frequent porn cinemas.

Ramirez looks around.

Ramirez – So, this is the theatre of the crime... Have you been to the theatre before, Sanchez?

Sanchez – Theatre? You mean... musicals, that kind of things...?

Ramirez – No, not musicals, Sanchez! I mean the theatre, the real one! William Shakespeare! Molière! Martinez!

Doris – Detective, we haven't disturbed anything. Detective. The body is in the toilet. If you would be so kind...

Ramirez – Sanchez, go check it out. And see if the victim actually flushed before tying their hands behind their back with tape and using the toilet flush cord for hanging.

Sanchez – And if not, Chief?

Ramirez – Well, you send the stools to the lab! (*To Doris*) You've got to walk them through everything...

Doris – The usher will show you the way...

Ramirez – And Sanchez, don't forget the tip!

Sanchez – I'm not sure if I have change...

Christine – Right this way, please...

Christine exits, followed by Sanchez. Ramirez chuckles.

Ramirez – Poor Sanchez... He's just starting out in the job, we need to give him a bit of hazing... But it's all in good fun, you know...

Doris – I assume you want to question the various players in this drama...

Ramirez – Oh, because it's a drama? I must admit, I lean towards comedy. Given my line of work, if I stumble upon corpses when out on a Saturday night with my wife...

Doris – I was talking about the murder, Detective.

Ramirez – Of course...

Doris – Well, if it really is a murder...

Ramirez – Hmm... You didn't kill him, did you, Doris?

Doris – Me, Detective?

Ramirez – Doris, with a name like yours, you're practically catching the attention of justice. We often discuss the idea of looking guilty, but names, like yours, can also raise red flags for our services.

Doris – My name?

Ramirez – Oh, you'd be surprised how many Dorises have crossed my path in my career—serial killers, exhibitionists, you name it.

Doris – Really?

Ramirez – It's a pattern, Dorises usually turn out to be narcissistic perverts. It's a rule with very few exceptions, believe me, based on my experience.

Doris – Detective, I can assure you that my criminal record is clean. Just like me, by the way.

Ramirez – But I'm joking, Doris!

Doris – You got me there, Detective...

Ramirez – Well, perhaps you'll lose a bit of that confidence once my assistant Sanchez gives you a rough time. Ever been smacked with a phone book, Miss Night?

Doris – I thought those methods were outdated in the police force...

Ramirez – Personally, I tend to favour a more gentle and psychological approach. However, in every profession, there are those who stick to the old ways... even among our new recruits. The enthusiasm of the freshly converted!

Doris – But I swear, Detective, I...

Ramirez – I'm kidding, Doris! For someone from the theatre, you don't seem to have much of a sense of humour. It's crucial, you know, especially in your line of work. Mine too, as a matter of fact...

Doris – Excuse me, I'm still a bit shaken from everything that just happened...

Ramirez – And the critic, any chance she's not involved?

Doris – Why would she do such a thing?

Ramirez – Critics are known for assassinating authors, aren't they? (*Doris is unsettled once more*) Ah, got you again, Doris... So, where are the comedians?

Doris – The comedians?

Ramirez – The actors!

Doris – I'll send them to you right away, Detective. Would you like some coffee, or maybe a little pick-me-up?

Ramirez – How about a line of coke instead? I hear it's a showbiz staple. I did my time in narcotics; that's where I picked up this bad habit. Trying to quit, you know how it goes...

Doris (*smiling*) – Oh no, Detective, this time you won't catch me...

Ramirez – Excuse me?

Doris – You're joking, right?

Ramirez (*very serious*) – Do I appear to be joking, Doris?

Doris – I'll find out, but no promises...

Doris exits. Ramirez laughs.

Ramirez – Doris...

Left alone, Ramirez moves to the front of the stage, striking theatrical poses.

Ramirez (*theatrical*) – To be... or not to be?

Michael enters from behind.

Michael – You know the play, Detective?

Ramirez turns around surprised and a bit embarrassed.

Ramirez – Who doesn't know it?

Michael – Gary Curtain was a great author. His passing leaves us all orphaned...

Ramirez – Gary?

Michael – The author of the play we were about to perform tonight! And who was just found hanging from the toilet flush cord.

Ramirez – Gary, of course...

Michael – Detective, you're here to investigate the tragedy, right?

Ramirez – Indeed, and I'm committed to solving this case swiftly, my friend. Detective Ramirez is a friend of the theatre and a foe of the underworld. So, you're an actor?

Michael – Yes, Detective.

Ramirez – But is theatre your main profession, or do you have a real job on the side?

Michael – Theatre is above all a passion, you know...

Ramirez – I dabbled in drama back in high school, you know. Surprisingly, it's proven quite useful in my line of work. Well, I'm just an amateur...

Michael – No, no, but... Your stage presence is really impressive.

Ramirez – Do you think so?

Michael – Absolutely. And I must say, your diction is excellent.

Ramirez – Ah, diction! Very important, diction. (*Overarticulating*) The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

Michael – How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

Ramirez – Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

Michael – How much ground would a groundhog hog if a groundhog could hog ground? A groundhog would hog all the ground he could hog if a groundhog could hog ground?

Ramirez, impressed, is about to continue before giving up.

Ramirez – Yes, well, let's get back to business... Name, first name, marital status, profession...

Michael – Delamare Michael, single, actor.

Ramirez – So, Mr. Delamare, what can you tell me about the victim? He was a playwright, correct?

Michael – An truly great playwright, Detective.

Ramirez – Do you know if Mr Curtain led a scandalous life, like most of his fellow playwrights?

Michael – Not to my knowledge, Detective.

Ramirez – Any specific addictions? Heroin, cocaine, Coca-Cola-ine...

Michael – I don't think so...

Ramirez – Extramarital affairs? A betrayed spouse seeking revenge for his infidelities?

Michael – I can confidently state that Gary Curtain was not a womanizer.

Ramirez – And why do you believe this gentleman was not inclined towards that, Delamare?

Michael – I didn't say Gary Curtain was not inclined towards that, Detective. I said he wasn't chasing after skirts.

Ramirez – Don't try to confuse me, huh? Were you the third wheel, perhaps?

Michael – Yes, you could say that...

Ramirez – When and where did you last see the victim?

Michael – Well... I think it was during the initial reading of his play. At the Paradise Motel. About a month ago, around two in the morning.

Ramirez – So, you're not the last person who saw Gary Curtain alive.

Michael – At least, I might be the last person to have seen him in his underwear...

Ramirez – One final question, Mr. Delamare. And I would appreciate a direct answer this time...

Michael – I'm all ears, Detective.

Ramirez – Did Mr. Gary Curtain have a good life insurance, as far as you know?

Michael – I'm not sure, Detective. Are you suggesting that could be a motive for the crime?

Ramirez – What a strange idea... No, I'm just contemplating how to invest a small inheritance, whether in real estate or a savings product... Any thoughts on that?

Michael – Real estate is generally considered the best long-term investment, Detective.

Ramirez – You're right, especially the tombstone... I think in the end, I'll invest in a family vault. Thank you for your assistance, Mr. Delamare. That will be all for now. Could you get your partner?

Michael – I'll get together with her right away, Detective.. I mean... I'll get her to you right away.

Ramirez – Ah, you still need to work on your diction, dear friend. The great Greek grape growers grow great Greek grapes.

Michael – Amidst the mists and coldest frosts, with stoutest wrists and loudest boasts, he thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts...

Ramirez (*interrupting*) – Alright, let's get serious...

Michael exits. Sanchez returns.

Sanchez – I took down the hanged man, Chief.

Ramirez – Before the forensic team arrived?

Sanchez – It might not be the most professional move, but at least we can use the toilet...

Ramirez – Fair point. Hanging oneself in a spot like this is quite bizarre, too... So, what did you do with the body?

Sanchez – I placed it in the dressing rooms, on a hanger along with the costumes for the play. Do you still lean towards the suicide theory, Chief? Despite the fact that the victim's hands were tied behind his back?

Ramirez – I once knew a contortionist who managed to strangle himself with his toes while handcuffed to the radiator in my office.

Sanchez – Trying to make it seem like a police blunder, I suppose...

Ramirez – Beware of appearances, Sanchez. It's the basics of our job. Behind every contortionist, there might be a leftist ready to do anything to discredit the police's honour.

Sanchez – You're spot on, Chief...

Ramirez – So, what's your take on this, Sanchez?

Sanchez – I share your perspective, Chief. It's disheartening that despite risking our lives daily for the safety of the community, there's so much resentment towards us...

Ramirez – I was referring to the victim, Sanchez. What are your findings?

Sanchez – It seems the cause of death is hanging. I mean, Curtain was alive before hanging himself.

Ramirez – Or being hanged, Sanchez. Let's be cautious before drawing conclusions.

Sanchez – The strange part is, the man didn't seem to put up much of a fight. Surprisingly, the adhesive tape used to bind his hands held up remarkably well. I'd like to know the brand to get the same for the office.

Ramirez – Why don't you send a sample of that tape to the lab? They can help identify the brand for us. Good adhesive tape is becoming quite a rarity these days.

Sanchez – Another noteworthy detail, Chief: the cord Curtain used to hang himself is blue...

Ramirez – And what conclusion do you draw from this, Sanchez?

Sanchez – None, Chief.

Ramirez – Anything else, Sanchez?

Sanchez – Well, there is one more thing. Curtain had his trousers down to his knees. Quite odd, don't you think?

Ramirez – Don't you lower your trousers when you go to the toilet, Sanchez?

Sanchez – Sure... But not when I'm going to the toilet to commit suicide.

Ramirez looks at him, intrigued.

Ramirez – And how many times have you failed, Sanchez?

Sanchez – What do you mean, Chief?

Ramirez – You know, if you have personal problems, you can talk to me. I'm your boss, sure, but I'm also your friend. More like your father, actually...

Sanchez – Oh, no, what I meant was, if I ever considered something like that and went to the toilet, lowering my trousers wouldn't be part of the plan...

Ramirez – You're easing my mind, Sanchez...

Sanchez – Besides, if I wanted to commit suicide, I'd go for the classic service weapon, like the colleagues. It's much more manly, isn't it, Chief? Hanging is more of a girly thing, isn't it?

Nancy arrives.

Ramirez – Go hang yourself elsewhere, Sanchez. I have to deal with Miss. Use this time to get Mr. Delamare's statement; I just finished questioning him. But be cautious, this guy doesn't seem very straightforward. Friendly advice, Sanchez, never turn your back on him...

Sanchez exits.

Ramirez – It's just you and me, Nancy. May I call you Nancy?

Nancy – Of course, Detective.

Ramirez – First things first, a quick question about your name. Something's caught my interest. Nancy... does it have any ties to the city?

Nancy – The city?

Ramirez – The city of Nancy! In France ! See, I happen to hail from there too. That would already give us something in common...

Nancy – You, Detective Ramirez, are originally from Nancy?

Ramirez – I lost the French accent, I know... But I left Nancy at eighteen to join the army... That's also when I adopted this new name, Ramirez, to throw off the scent... My real name is Roberta Zimmerman. Well, that's another story. And you?

Nancy – I'm of English origin, Detective, quite simply...

Ramirez – Nancy Simpson, of course...

Nancy – Nancy is a common name in England...

Ramirez – Strange, considering there's no city named Nancy in Great Britain... Anyway, let's focus on the matter at hand. Did you know the victim personally?

Nancy – I met him once or twice...

Ramirez – Maybe at the Paradise Motel...

Nancy – Hold on, I don't frequent motels. What do you take me for, Detective?

Ramirez – Come on! We're aware that the entertainment industry has a relaxed moral atmosphere, and actresses frequently contend with rumours of promiscuity. Are you implying you're the only one who has never slept around to secure a role?

Nancy – I said no motels, Detective. I didn't mention luxury hotels.

Ramirez – So you confirm that you were never Mr. Curtain's mistress.

Nancy – If I may, Detective, I was far beyond his means... Before my theatre career, I was a screen star...

Ramirez – I remember you from that toilet paper commercial. By the way, if you don't mind, as a little trade... (*Pulling out a pen*) Can I request your autograph? It's for my mother. She never skips that commercial on TV.

Nancy – Certainly...

Sanchez interrupts once more.

Ramirez – Yes, Sanchez?

Sanchez – Chief, I'll keep it brief, but I stumbled upon something interesting.

Sanchez hands a roll of toilet paper to Ramirez.

Ramirez – What's this?

Sanchez – Toilet paper... The same kind found in the toilet where Gary Curtain was discovered hanging...

Ramirez – Sanchez, what do you expect me to do with this? Can't you see I'm occupied with this young lady...

Sanchez – When we discovered Gary Curtain's lifeless body, he had a wad of toilet paper in his mouth. Presumably used to muffle any screams...

Ramirez – And?

Sanchez – Well... The toilet paper used to silence the victim is the exact brand that Miss advertised on TV about ten years ago...

Nancy – A bit less than that, anyway... I was practically a kid back then...

Ramirez – And what are you making of this, Sanchez?

Sanchez – Not drawing any conclusions... Just thought this detail might catch your attention, Chief. You've always emphasized the importance of not overlooking any details in an investigation...

Ramirez – But I am interested, Sanchez, I am... Thank you, you can go now...

Sanchez exits.

Nancy – It's perfectly normal to find that brand of toilet paper in the theatre restroom, Detective. The manufacturer is our show's official sponsor.

Ramirez – How generous of them to support contemporary theatre in such a unique way.

Nancy – Indeed. To thank them, we prominently feature their products, if I may put it that way. Just like the books from Paper Roll Editions, the publisher of Gary Curtain's play. The author was scheduled to sign copies after the show...

Ramirez – That's incredible, my friend. Would you consider autographing this paper for me? I plan to gift the roll to my mother for Christmas; it's the perfect present I could offer her.

Nancy signs her name on the roll of toilet paper.

Nancy – And there you have it, Detective...

Ramirez – Thank you, Nancy... I won't bother you any longer with my questions...

Nancy – Appreciate it, Detective.

Ramirez – May I escort you to your dressing room? I assume you'd want to change, given the canceled show.

Nancy – With pleasure, Detective.

Ramirez – I'll use this chance to explore the area a bit.

Nancy – I can be your guide. Where do you want to begin the tour?

Ramirez – how about starting with the toilet? It's just become vacant.

Nancy – Sure, follow me, Detective...

They exit. Sanchez arrives and runs into Christine, who also arrives, very worried.

Christine – It's a disaster. The audience is already here. If we have to cancel the performance, what are we going to tell them? It'll be chaos.

Sanchez – Should I call a couple of police buses to disperse them?

Christine – I don't think that will be necessary, at least not yet. Have you seen the Detective?

Sanchez – That's exactly what I'm looking for.

Christine – I believe he wanted to interview the audience. They're in the adjacent room.

Sanchez – All of them?

Christine – Yes. Should I let them in?

Sanchez – Yes, go ahead, I'll handle it.

Christine – Right this way, please.

Kevin and Wendy arrive, appearing quite relaxed.

Sanchez – Just the two of them?

Christine – It's subsidised theatre, you know... The audience is a rare breed.

Sanchez – They look like a couple. Should we consider putting them in a cage at the police station to see if they can reproduce in captivity?

Christine – There are two more, but I figured you'd want to begin by questioning the paying audience. They're the primary suspects, aren't they?

Sanchez – Ah, yes, and why is that?

Christine – Let's be honest, who'd willingly shell out money to watch such a play?

Sanchez – What's the title again?

Christine – "The Day Just Before Night."

Sanchez – It's true, not very catchy...

Christine – I'll leave them to you...

Christine exits. Sanchez eyes the two spectators.

Sanchez – And you expect me believe that you're into contemporary theatre?

Kevin – No, why?

Sanchez – What do you mean, no? You're here to watch a play called "The Day Just Before Night," aren't you?

Wendy – Not at all! We actually came to the cinema to see a film called "The Magic Flute".

Kevin – Must've ended up in the wrong room, huh, Wendy?

Wendy – But what's with the play happening in this theatre then?

Kevin – Is it a comedy?

Wendy – Because, the complicated plays...

Sanchez – Well, I don't know if you'll hear the Magic Flute, but in any case, you won't see the curtain rise... The show is canceled due to murder.

Kevin – Well, but now we've missed the start of the movie.

Wendy – We won't grasp anything anymore.

Sanchez – Just leave before I lose my patience. I'll guide you to the exit to ensure you don't pick the wrong door again.

Wendy – Can I use the restroom before leaving?

Sanchez – If you want, but I wouldn't recommend it. The last person who used it didn't make it out alive.

Kevin and Wendy leave, escorted by Sanchez. Doris and Christopher arrive.

Doris – I had a bad feeling about this play... I don't know why, but something felt off.

Christopher – For once, we were performing a contemporary repertoire text...

Doris – You're right. Maybe we should stick to plays by deceased authors...

Christopher – At least, they won't drop dead just before the curtain rises...

Doris – Well, if we try to look on the bright side, it might bring some attention to the show...

Christopher – You mean the fact that it's canceled?

Doris – The death of the author! It could generate some buzz around the play. Otherwise, you'll admit...

Christopher – What?

Doris – I attended a few rehearsals... This play is quite dull, isn't it? By the way, I didn't quite get it – is it a drama or a comedy?

Christopher – You're right... If there's a murder involved, it could add a touch of scandal to the whole thing... Maybe even turn it into a hit.

Doris – Well, we don't have to specify either that we found Curtain in the toilet with his pants down, gagged with toilet paper – not the most glamorous scene.

Christopher – We could ask Ripper to write an article about it in Teledrama... Do you think she would accept?

Doris – She can't refuse me anything... With my ties in the Parliament, she's getting knighted by the Order of Arts and Letters next month.

Christopher – Ripper? All she does is bash shows she hasn't even watched. Do you think she could get us the cover of Teledrama?

Doris – She owes me that much.

They exit. Ramirez returns with Sanchez.

Ramirez – So, Sanchez, how's the investigation going?

Sanchez – We're stuck, Chief... I just interviewed the two paying spectators, but it turns out they wandered into the wrong room. They were actually headed to watch an art film in the cinema next door...

Ramirez – Let's see how it pans out with the guests... Anything else?

Sanchez – I also questioned the theatre director. A strange woman. She doesn't have a mobile, but she might have a motive...

Ramirez – Interesting...

Sanchez – Indeed, Chief. Every theatre in town is on the verge of bankruptcy these days. And, you know, deceased authors come at a lower cost...

Ramirez – Lower cost than what?

Sanchez – Lower than living ones!

Ramirez – Well, Sanchez, that's news to me.

Sanchez – You always reminded me, Chief, to start an investigation by asking this question...

Ramirez – Who stands to gain from the crime?

Sanchez – Well, in this case, it's crystal clear: Gary Curtain's demise means no more author royalties to shell out...

Ramirez – In other words, a good author is above all a dead author...

Sanchez – Consider, under these circumstances, it might be quite tempting for a theatre director to invite the author to the premiere and hang him in the toilet, attempting to pass his death off as suicide.

Ramirez – Sanchez, I didn't have a very high opinion of you, but it seems I might have underestimated you. You're headed for a promising career in the police.

Sanchez – Thank you, Chief. Your words mean a lot to me.

Christine arrives, trailed by Mrs Marlowe, a sophisticated older woman, and Mr Dobbledick, adorned with more medals on his jacket lapel than a general in a banana republic.

Christine – I apologize for the interruption, Detective...

Ramirez – Who are these two clowns? Are they part of the play too?

Christine – Those are the two tax-free spectators, Detective... I thought you might want to question them as well.

Christine leaves.

Marlowe – Good morning, Detective. I am Mrs Marlowe, President of the Authors and Impostors Dramatic Society...

Ramirez – Marlowe? Any relation to...

Marlowe – He's my direct ancestor, indeed.

Ramirez – Well, congratulations... That does lend you some credibility to speak for contemporary playwrights.

Marlowe – I was invited to the premiere of Mr Gary Curtain's play. You should know that the author won the Grand Boulevard Prize to write this play.

Ramirez – A prize that rewards a boulevard comedy, then...

Marlowe – No, the Grand Boulevard in the city. The jury for the competition meets at number 13 to deliberate independently.

Ramirez – So, you say the author received the prize to write the play? I always thought awards were for works already penned. Is the Nobel Prize also given in anticipation of an author's future genius?

Marlowe – It might be a bit perplexing for those not familiar, I admit, but...

Ramirez – Maybe Mr Curtain had some familial connections as well?

Marlowe – What family?

Ramirez – The one that runs this literary contest...

Marlowe – Not at all!

Ramirez – Alright, then, what's the drill to snag the Grand Boulevard Prize?

Marlowe – Well... The authors must apply anonymously, to avoid recognising their application file in case they end up on the jury themselves...

Ramirez – Your commitment to fairness is admirable, Madam.

Marlowe – And, of course, the candidate must outline the theme of the play they intend to write...

Ramirez – I see...

Marlowe – I won't deny that, at this point, we hold certain themes in higher regard than others, aligning with our vision of what contemporary theatre should embody.

Ramirez – Any specific themes, for instance?

Marlowe – Let's just say that by suggesting a play set in Chechnya, showcasing humanitarian doctors dedicating themselves to saving orphans with Parkinson's disease, Gary Curtain correctly anticipated that he stood a good chance of earning our approval...

Dobbedick – If I may interject, Madam President, it was Alzheimer's disease...

Marlowe – That's true, I had forgotten...

Ramirez – So, if I understand correctly, you prefer somewhat serious topics. Not to say completely tedious...

Marlowe – No, but we do entertain lighter themes as well, like unemployment among undocumented workers, incidents of gang rape in deprived neighborhoods, or drug addiction among freelancers in the entertainment industry. We're not devoid of a sense of humour either...

Ramirez – I see... One can laugh about everything, but among people who share the same sense of humour...

Marlowe – Let me introduce Mr. Dobbedick from the Union of Assisted Theatre Writers. He chairs the jury, and he can surely explain this better than I can.

Dobbedick – Allow me to introduce myself, Detective. Alan Dobbedick, Darts Vice City Champion of Stratford-upon-Avon, Holder of the Academic Palms, and the Agricultural Merit Medal. As the most performed playwright in my hometown and President of the Assisted Theatre Writers, I believe I can speak for all my fellow authors.

Sanchez – Hold on, I'm jotting this down...

Ramirez – Don't bother, Sanchez. Somehow, I doubt this testimony is going to shed much light on our investigation.

Dobbedick – I just got wind of the tragic disappearance of Mr. Gary Curtain, and I want to emphasize that when you take the life of a playwright, you're essentially killing the very essence of the theatre...

Ramirez – Cut to the chase, Dobbedick.

Dobbedick – Simply put, Detective, Gary Curtain was an exceptional writer, and his absence creates an immense void in the realm of contemporary theatre. Nay, a true black hole in the heart of our galaxy...

Ramirez – Did you have a personal connection with him?

Dobbedick (*in a lyrical tone*) – Gary Curtain emerged from a humble Irish family of the petite bourgeoisie. Armed with a modern literature degree, he ventured to London for drama courses. Yet, he soon discovered that his true passion lay in...

Ramirez – Dobbedick, not that I'm uninterested, but let's save the eloquence for the eulogy, shall we?

Dobbedick – I am ready to answer all your questions, Detective.

Ramirez – Dobbedick, what I'm trying to find out is if there's anything in the content of this play that might have offended the interests or beliefs of a political or religious group, potentially leading to the murder of its author...

Dobbedick – Good heavens, Detective, I highly doubt it. We're in the habit of pre-approving plays that don't ruffle any feathers and are solely designed to appease the generous donors who support us. It's worth mentioning, Detective, that I happen to be a staunch friend of the police myself.

Ramirez – But these plays still get performed occasionally, right?

Marlowe – Rarely, Detective. However, they go through numerous public readings, mostly attended by the jury members who selected them...

Agatha returns with Doris.

Agatha – Detective, I've stumbled upon a discovery that I'd describe as rather shocking.

Ramirez – Shocking? I have a feeling you're about to fill me in on the cocaine I found in the toilet, neatly wrapped in waterproof plastic?

Sanchez – You found cocaine in the toilet, Detective?

Ramirez – Since it likely has nothing to do with our investigation, I was thinking of keeping it for my personal use... However, I would've shared some with you to help grease the palms of your informants.

Sanchez – Thank you, Detective.

Agatha – But I'm not talking about cocaine!

Ramirez – Then what are you talking about, old crazy lady?

Agatha – Detective, this play is a forgery!

Marlowe – A forgery?

Agatha – I just remembered I wrote a critique for this disaster a decade ago! And people have the audacity to question my dedication to my job...

Ramirez – What disaster are you talking about?

Agatha – "The Day Just Before the Night"! It's the play we're supposed to stage in this theatre tonight!

Ramirez – No way...

Agatha – And here's the kicker: this dreadful play actually won the Grand Boulevard Prize back then. The forger merely tweaked the title. Originally, it was called "The Night Just Before the Day."

Sanchez – Well, I must say, that title does sound more cheerful, doesn't it, Detective? More optimistic...

Agatha – The initial play was written by a guy named Gary Curtain.

Ramirez – That's the same name as the victim!

Sanchez – The copycat probably shares the same name as the real author. A homonymy that surely made this identity theft easier...

Dobbedick – It's almost established today that William Shakespeare's plays weren't actually written by him but by a ghostwriter who happened to share the same name – William Shakespeare, too...

Doris – So, the writer we discovered in the toilet is actually an imposter...

Ramirez – Probably also hooked on cocaine and a bit of a sex maniac...

Sanchez – Why a sex maniac, Chief?

Ramirez – A guy in his underwear in the toilet, hands tied behind his back with tape, a gag in his mouth, and a nose dusted with coke... Come on, Sanchez, what does that sound like to you?

Sanchez – Good Lord, it's obvious... The initiation prank you pulled on me when I joined the force. Well done, Chief! Only you could unravel this mystery in the final five minutes of the show...

Ramirez – Easy there, Sanchez, let's not jump to conclusions! It could easily be a cunning setup by the killer to mislead us...

Sanchez – You're right, Chief...

Doris – We still need to confirm the true identity of the victim... Because, counterfeit play or not, there's a dead body in question.

Agatha – The plagiarist and the plagiarised could be related, perhaps father and son! Given that they bear the same name...

Doris – And the father murdered the son?

Agatha – It's quite Freudian... Although, typically, it's more the son killing the father, isn't it?

Doris – Some fathers consider their children as an extension of themselves... and others as dangerous metastases.

Sanchez – And what could be the motive for the crime?

Doris – The plagiarist may have wanted to eliminate the true author to claim his work...

Agatha – Unless it's the actual author seeking revenge on his plagiarist.

Ramirez – We need to determine if the body in the theatre's restroom is the plagiarist or the one plagiarized, the original or the copy.

Doris – Detective, I must admit, this all seems highly improbable.

Ramirez – And why do you think that?

Doris – Plagiarizing such a play would require a disturbed mind.

Marlowe – Don't forget, this play won the Grand Boulevard Prize!

Doris – You might have the Medal of Labour, but you've never done anything worthwhile in your life.

Ramirez – Here's my hypothesis: Gary Curtain took credit for the Grand Boulevard Prize, lacking inspiration, he resorted to plagiarizing the play of another Gary Curtain, only changing the title.

Doris – Or perhaps both Gary Curtains are the same person. An author attempting to claim the Grand Boulevard Prize twice with the same play...

Ramirez – Mrs Marlowe, did you not notice anything?

Marlowe – I'm perplexed... It could be a glitch in our computer system. And Dobbledick, didn't you catch that this text was a forgery? You preside over the reading committee!

Dobbledick – Certainly, Madam President, but considering the committee decides on plays not yet written, you can understand the complications it may entail...

Marlowe – Dobbledick, you're an idiot!

Dobbledick – But, Madam President...

Marlowe – I apologize, Detective, but trust me, the Society of Authors and Impostors of the Theatre is in no way involved in this fraud. Our statutes explicitly state that we bear no responsibility...

Ramirez – Certainly, Madam...

Marlowe – It's high time we involve our legal services, Dobbledick...

Dobbledick – To expose this impostor?

Marlowe – No, you fool! To absolve us of responsibility in this matter!

Marlowe is about to leave.

Dobbledick – I'm coming, Madam President. (*Turning around one last time*) It's the theatre being murdered.

Doris – Allow me to accompany you, Madam President...

Mrs Marlowe and Mr. Dobbledick leave.

Sanchez – Chief, I'm completely lost. So, if Gary Curtain and Gary Curtain are the same person, who killed him?

Ramirez – We're here to find out, Sanchez... But the mystery only deepens as our investigation unfolds...

Gary Curtain enters, a toilet cord around his neck, in his underwear, hands tied with tape, and a ball of paper in his mouth.

Gary – Mmm...

Ramirez – Who's this one now?

Sanchez – What are you saying, my friend? Speak clearly! What's going on?

Agatha – I believe to understand, we might need to take the toilet paper out of his mouth.

Sanchez removes the paper from Gary's mouth.

Gary – Could someone untie my hands, please?

Sanchez cuts the tape binding Gary's wrists. Doris returns and sees Gary.

Doris – Oh, my God! But it's...

Gary – I am Gary Curtain.

Agatha – Oh no! So, I wrote his obituary for nothing!

Doris – He's the author, Detective. Now, we can finally get answers.

Agatha – We still need to confirm if this is the real Gary Curtain or an imposter who might have stolen his identity...

Ramirez – We'll check that right away... Your papers, Curtain!

Gary sighs but shows his papers to the Detective.

Gary – There you go, are you happy?

Ramirez hands the papers to his assistant.

Ramirez – Verify this individual's identity, Sanchez.

Sanchez examines Curtain's papers.

Sanchez – Chief, I'm pretty sure these papers are fake. It's evident at first glance. The imitation is quite crude...

Ramirez – So, there might indeed be two curtains...

Gary – Obviously, these are fake papers!

Ramirez – So, you admit to the facts? Good, that will save us some time...

Gary – Can I see your police badge, Detective?

Ramirez – Come one! Who do you think you are, Curtain?

Gary – The author of this play.

Ramirez – At least that's what you claim, but the fake papers you have prove that you're just a double of the author...

Sanchez – A double Curtain, so to speak.

Gary – Allow me to insist, Detective.

Ramirez – If it amuses you... Here you go...

He shows his badge. Gary hands the papers to Doris.

Gary – See for yourself, Madam Director...

Doris – But it's a fake police badge! The Detective is an impostor too!

Ramirez – Let's try to keep this civil, no need for hurtful remarks...

Gary – You're all impostors! You're all acting in a play!

Sanchez – We're not real policemen, Chief?

Ramirez – What is this comedy, Curtain?

Gary – Don't make a drama out of it...

Ramirez – Are you or are you not the real author of this unperformed play?

Gary – No, but I am the author of this farce we are currently performing!

Agatha – Theatre within theatre now. It has been done a lot already, hasn't it?

Sanchez looks at his own police badge.

Sanchez – Mine's a counterfeit too... Chief, what does this imply?

Ramirez – It means you're just a puppet, Sanchez... Just like me...

Sanchez crumbles.

Doris – Come on, is this comedy going to end soon, Curtain?

Gary – I don't know, I haven't penned the conclusion yet...

Doris – No conclusion written!

Gary – Actually, I'm contemplating a rewrite of the beginning... Hence the unexpected resurrection that might disturb your characters a bit, I confess...

Ramirez – Disturb? But Curtain, if there's no more murder, there's no more investigation! And if there's no more investigation, there's no more play...

Doris – It's unprofessional, Curtain! You've shattered this comedy into pieces!

Ramirez – You've landed us all in a mess, Curtain!

Sanchez still tries to believe.

Sanchez – I'll lock him up, Chief...

Ramirez – Come on, Sanchez... Have you ever seen Sherlock Holmes arrest Conan Doyle? Your gun is just a cork gun, like mine!

Sanchez – I won't let you stain the honour of the police, Chief. You'll see if my service weapon is a cork gun!

Sanchez takes out his gun and shoots Ramirez.

Ramirez – Help, it's a real water gun!

Ramirez is pursued by Sanchez, who shoots at him.

Doris – Look at this disaster, Curtain! What will the audience say? You're the one who led us into this mess... It's your job to get us out of it!

Christopher – Please, tell me this is just a nightmare and we'll wake up!

Agatha (*declaiming*) – "We are such stuff As dreams are made on, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep."

Doris – Shakespeare... Now, that was an author...

Gary – We've already flirted with plagiarism, so let's avoid the quotations...

Stopping his escape, Ramirez faces Sanchez.

Ramirez – You asked for it, Sanchez!

Ramirez takes out his gun and shoots at Sanchez with his cork gun. Sanchez retaliates with his water gun.

Gary – How am I supposed to focus on finding an ending in this chaos!

Doris – Curtain! Curtain!

Gary – What now?

Christopher – I'm not talking to you! I'm talking to the usher: Curtain!

Gary – Do you seriously think we can afford a curtain?

Ramirez and Sanchez continue shooting in a joyful mess.

Doris – Well, I don't know... How about a blackout, at least?

Blackout.

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:

Comedies for 2

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
Preliminaries
Running on empty
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Joker
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap
backward for Mankind

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
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
Quarantine
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The perfect Son-in-Law
The Smell of Money

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools

Comedies for 7 or more

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
Neighbours' Day
Open Hearts
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Him and Her
Lost time Chronicles
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stories to die for

Monologues

Like a fish in the air

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