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Christmas Eve at the Police Station

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Translation by the author

On Christmas Eve, two police officers are stuck on duty, keeping company with a collection of festive-season casualties. Then the Interior Minister arrives unexpectedly to honour the dedication of the police.
Needless to say, nothing goes according to plan…

Characters:
Chief of Police
Cop 1
Cop 2
Cop 3
Minister's Chief of Staff
Snitch
Bum
Compulsive Liar
Cross-dresser
Conspiracy Theorist

For 6 to 10 performers
All roles may be played by women or men.
The last five roles may be doubled by one or more performers.

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A grim office in a police station that seems to belong to no particular time or place. In a corner stands a miserable Christmas tree, making a hopeless attempt to cheer up a set straight out of a cheap police drama. Two scruffy cops, each wearing a holstered gun, are finishing a game of poker on a desk. Cop 1 lays down the cards.

Cop 1 *(confidently)* – Pair of queens.

Cop 2 – Pair of kings.

Cop 1 – Oh, for God's sake…

Cop 1 removes a belt and hands it to Cop 2.

Cop 1 – I'm out. I'm not betting my trousers as well.

Cop 2 – Good call. If the Chief walked in and caught you in your underwear, he might get the wrong idea.

They put away the cards.

Cop 1 – What time is it?

Cop 2 – You already asked me that five minutes ago. It was five to ten.

Cop 1 – So what? What time is it now?

Cop 2 *(pointing to their forehead)* – Do you see a clock on my face?

Cop 1 – You won my watch. The least you can do is tell me the time!

Cop 2 – Won it fair and square. Three aces.

Cop 1 – Fair and square? That's debatable. And why do you need a watch on each wrist?

Annoyed, Cop 2 removes one of the watches.

Cop 2 – You're pathetic. *(Tossing the watch.)* Here. Have your precious watch back.

Cop 1 misses the catch. The watch falls to the floor. Cop 1 picks it up and listens for ticking.

Cop 1 – Great. Now it's stopped.

Cop 2 – Time of death?

Cop 1 *(checking the watch)* – Ten o'clock.

Cop 2 – There you are, then. Now you know the time.

A pause.

Cop 1 – It's quiet, isn't it?

Cop 2 – It's always quiet this time of year...

Cop 1 – The Christmas truce, they call it.

Cop 2 – Even serial killers respect tradition. They're probably carving the turkey right now.

Cop 1 – Why did it have to be us again this year?

Cop 2 – We drew straws with the others. But you have a point. Three Christmas Eves in a row we've ended up on duty. It's suspicious.

Cop 1 – Do you think they cheated?

Cop 2 – Next year, we'll settle it over poker.

Cop 1 – How can anyone cheat at drawing straws?

Cop 2 – Look on the bright side. You could be at home opening oysters for your in-laws. Their favourite Christmas tradition.

Cop 1 – I don't even like oysters.

Cop 2 – Nobody does. And they're dangerous.

Cop 1 – I've never heard of anyone reporting an oyster for assault.

Cop 2 – According to official figures, more police officers are injured opening oysters at Christmas than cleaning their service weapons.

Cop 1 – Oh, really...?

Cop 2 – Christmas is boring everywhere. People stay home risking their lives opening shellfish they hate, for guests who hate them too.

Cop 1 – You're right, we're better off here.

Cop 2 – We've no choice anyway. We're on duty till eight tomorrow morning.

Cop 1 – Somebody has to protect the law-abiding citizens getting drunk with their families.

Cop 2 – We're superheroes. Comes with the job.

Cop 1 – Yet nobody appreciates our sacrifice.

Cop 2 – Soldiers serving abroad get a Christmas visit from the head of state. Helicopter, champagne, fancy food, strippers in the sack. The works.

Cop 1 – The strippers, you reckon?

Cop 2 – We soldiers on the home front don't even get the mayor dropping by with a bottle of cheap sparkling wine.

Cop 1 – And I'll bet more cars go up in flames around here on Christmas Eve than in half the world's war zones.

Cop 2 – Cops are human too, you know. Christmas Eve gives us the creeps.

Cop 1 – We've got plenty of those. Creepy-crawlies, I mean. *(Cop 1 takes off a shoe and squashes something.)* Cockroaches everywhere. Can't get rid of them.

Cop 3 enters, a woman or a man with an exuberant, theatrical manner.

Cop 3 – You have a visitor...

Cop 1 – A visitor?

Cop 3 – Even prisoners get visitors at Christmas. Looks as though your annual Christmas parcel has arrived.

A visitor enters behind Cop 3, carrying a bottle.

Cop 1 – Oh, no. Not him.

Cop 2 – Good evening, Mr Martin. How lovely to see you.

Snitch – Good evening, officers! Just dropping by to wish you a merry Christmas. I'm not disturbing you, am I?

Cop 2 – You never disturb us, Mr Martin.

Cop 1 – We were just talking about you. Well, about cockroaches in general.

Cop 2 – Thank goodness for public-spirited citizens like you, helping the police with our noble work.

Cop 3 – With more people like Mr Martin, the city could save a fortune on surveillance cameras.

Cop 2 – So whom are you reporting today, Mr Martin? A suspected bigamist? A benefits cheat? An orphan without the right papers?

Snitch – No one, for once. I'm here as a neighbour to pay tribute to the men and women who defend this country against its enemies within.

Cop 1 – And I see you've come bearing gifts.

Snitch – I know what it's like to spend Christmas without your family. Mine refuse to see me. So if I can bring a little comfort to our brave defenders of law and order… Here. You'll thank me later.

Martin puts the bottle on a desk.

Cop 1 – Homemade, is it? The label's handwritten, like a jar of jam from somebody's granny.

Cop 2 *(reading over Cop 1's shoulder)* – Chestnut liqueur.

Cop 3 – I didn't know you could make booze out of chestnuts.

Snitch – You can make booze out of anything. During the war, Grandad even used potato peelings and old leather shoe soles.

Cop 3 – Fifty-three per cent alcohol! Well, it'll kill something. Germs, for a start.

Snitch – Grandad left me a few bottles before they executed him after the war for being on the wrong side. This one was distilled before any of you were born.

Cop 2 – You do realise unlicensed distilling is a serious offence, Mr Martin? We could arrest you for breaking the laws on alcohol production.

Mr Martin looks worried.

Cop 3 – My colleague's joking, of course.

Cop 1 – And I'm sure the statute of limitations has run out. Sadly, we can't share a drink with you. Never on duty. Strict rule.

Snitch – Have one for me on New Year's Eve, then. Unless you're on duty again. Well, I must leave you to it. You've probably got people to lock up.

Cop 3 – Oh, we do a roaring trade over the holidays. Full house most nights. Shall I show you out, Mr Martin?

Snitch – I do know the way, but how kind.

Cop 2 – You're practically one of us by now.

Cop 1 – And thanks for the bottle!

Martin turns to go, then remembers something.

Snitch – Oh, one more thing. My neighbour hasn't renewed his parking permit. Want his registration number?

Cop 2 – We're a little understaffed at the moment. Do come back in the new year with your report.

Snitch – You can count on it. Merry Christmas, anyway!

Martin goes out, followed by Cop 3.

Cop 1 – And people say nobody likes the police.

Cop 2 – We complain about being unpopular, but anyone who likes the police that much has to be a bit suspicious.

Cop 1 – Good thing we didn't drink with him. He'd have reported us to Internal Affairs for drinking on duty.

Cop 1 uncorks the bottle as Cop 2 produces two glasses. They pour and clink glasses.

Cop 1 – Well… Merry Christmas.

Cop 2 – Same to you.

They empty their glasses in one go.

Cop 1 – Wow. That packs a punch.

Cop 2 – Fifty-three per cent.

Cop 1 – You can feel it cleaning you from the inside.

Cop 2 – We ought to ask him for the recipe.

Cop 1 – There's more than chestnuts in that.

Cop 2 – Maybe Grandad added a splash of drain cleaner to bring out the delicate fruit notes.

Cop 1 – This stuff's older than we are.

Cop 2 – He probably brewed it in his cellar during the wartime curfew, using anything he could get his hands on.

Cop 1 – His own little contribution to the resistance.

Cop 2 – Another round. Better us than the enemy.

Cop 1 refills the two glasses, and they empty them again.

Cop 1 – I don't know about drain cleaner, but it certainly clears the pipes.

Cop 3 returns, dragging in a drunken vagrant. Cop 1 and Cop 2 hurriedly hide the bottle and glasses.

Cop 3 – Caught this one mooning the public right outside the station.

Cop 1 – Haven't we seen enough atrocities already?

Bum – Death to the pigs!

Cop 2 – 'Pigs'? Very retro. Which old police series did you get that from?

Cop 3 – You've got to admire a classic insult.

Cop 2 – What do we do with him?

Cop 1 – Show some respect for our elders.

Cop 2 – Anyone who hates the police this much can't be all bad. Let him off. It's Christmas.

Cop 1 – Maybe he isn't all bad. But he certainly smells bad.

Cop 3 – He's a weapon of mass destruction all by himself. You could win a war just by parachuting him behind enemy lines.

Bum – Insulting an officer! You can't let me go! I know my rights!

Cop 1 – Another fellow who'd rather spend Christmas in a cell than freeze on the streets.

Cop 2 *(to Cop 3)* – Find him a cell to himself. We don't want the other prisoners accusing us of chemical warfare.

Bum – Bless you, my lords. Heaven will reward you!

Cop 3 starts leading the Bum away, but Cop 1 calls out.

Cop 1 – Just a minute. Your belt, please.

Bum – My belt? What for?

Cop 1 – You're in custody. Regulations.

The Bum reluctantly hands over the belt.

Bum – Want my shoelaces too?

Cop 1 – No, thanks. That'll do.

Cop 3 escorts the Bum out. Having lost a belt at poker, Cop 1 puts on the Bum's belt.

Cop 1 – Well, at least I've got a belt again.

Cop 1 brings out the bottle and glasses, and they drink again.

Cop 1 – Funny… I've just remembered something from years ago.

Cop 2 – Don't let me stop you keeping it to yourself.

Cop 1 – I was about five. My father owned a toy shop. Called 'Children's Paradise'.

Cop 2 – Thank goodness. For a moment I thought this was going to be a story about your unhappy childhood.

Cop 1 – Unfortunately, he was incredibly mean with money.

Cop 2 – Ah...

Cop 1 – One Christmas Eve, my mother gave me a huge teddy bear from the shop window.

Cop 2 – I have a feeling this doesn't end well.

Cop 1 – My father went berserk. He hit my mother, snatched the bear out of my arms and put it back in the window.

Cop 2 – Mmm...

Cop 1 – I wonder if that's why Christmas has depressed me ever since.

Cop 2 – There you go. Ten years of therapy saved. And I've charged you nothing for listening to this nonsense, apart from what I won from you at poker.

An uncomfortable silence. Cop 1 looks thoroughly miserable.

Cop 2 – Maybe I should confiscate that belt too. You're not going to hang yourself from the coat rack when I'm not looking, are you?

Cop 3 returns with a sex worker whose gender presentation is deliberately ambiguous: a masculine-looking woman or a man in drag.

Cop 1 – What's this, then?

Cop 3 – Flexible casting. Like in the theatre.

Cop 1 – I never go to the theatre. Sends me to sleep. What does that mean?

Cop 2 – It means nobody knows what she's got under the costume.

Cross-dresser – Want a closer look?

Cop 1 – We'll call you Madam, then. Just to be safe.

Cross-dresser – Miss, if you don't mind.

Cop 1 – All right. Why have you brought Miss in?

Cop 3 – Soliciting outside a synagogue.

Cop 1 – Have you no shame?

Cop 2 – She might not even be circumcised.

Cross-dresser – Would you rather I worked outside midnight mass?

Cop 3 – What are we supposed to charge her with? Religious intolerance?

Cross-dresser – Do you know what a famous actress said when people accused her of sleeping with the enemy during the war?

Cop 2 – Do enlighten us.

Cop 3 *(answering for the Cross-dresser)* – 'My heart belongs to my country. My backside is international.'

Cross-dresser – Well, mine's ecumenical.

Cop 1 – Ecume-what?

Cop 2 – Never mind. Sounds filthy.

Cop 1 – Fine. We'll let her out after midnight mass.

Cross-dresser – On what charge are you holding me?

Cop 2 – Disturbing the biblical peace. Will that do?

Cop 1 – Put Miss in the presidential suite. Make sure she wants for nothing.

Cross-dresser – You'll regret this! You don't know who you're dealing with. I have connections, and not just with ministers of religion.

Cop 2 – If you happen to have the Interior Minister in your bed, could you mention that we're short-staffed?

Cross-dresser – Up yours, you bastards!

Cop 1 – Merry Christmas to you too. *(Cop 3 leads the Cross-dresser away.)* Prostitutes have such filthy mouths these days.

Cop 2 – No upbringing whatsoever.

The two cops continue to drink.

Cop 1 – That's odd. I've just remembered something else.

Cop 2 looks anxiously at the bottle's label.

Cop 2 – What the hell has that man given us? Truth serum? Maybe you should stop drinking it.

Cop 1 – It was another Christmas. I was about ten. My father had just died. Under rather mysterious circumstances, as it happens.

Cop 2 – No, now I'm the one who's going to hang myself.

Cop 1 – I still believed in Santa Claus. My mother said he'd come at midnight, so I stayed awake to see him.

Cop 2 – And of course you never did.

Cop 1 – Oh, I did. I woke up around midnight, went to see what he'd left me, and there he was… in bed with my mother.

Cop 2 – And you wonder why you don't like oysters.

Cop 1 – I went back to bed. But if I'd had a gun like I have now, I'd have shot Santa Claus on the spot. I think that's why I joined the police. So I could have a big one.

Cop 2 – A big what?

Cop 1 – A big gun! To shoot Santa Claus!

Cop 2 – Maybe you should see a therapist after all. Even if it costs you half your wages.

The Chief of Police enters. Cop 1 and Cop 2, slumped in their chairs, straighten up but cannot hide the bottle in time.

Cop 1 – Chief…

Chief of Police – I see you've started celebrating the birth of our Lord.

Cop 2 – A Christmas present from one of our more enthusiastic informants, Chief.

Cop 1 – We couldn't refuse a toast. It would have been rude.

Chief of Police – Naturally. What have we got in the cells?

Cop 1 – Same as every Christmas, Chief. A few festive casualties. A vagrant, a prostitute, an exhibitionist, a voyeur…

Chief of Police – Add an ox and a donkey and you've got yourself a living Nativity scene.

Cop 2 – We're still waiting for the three wise men.

Chief of Police – Put the exhibitionist and the voyeur in the same cell. At least those two should have a happy Christmas. Anything else?

Cop 3 arrives with another visitor.

Cop 3 – This might interest you, Chief. The gentleman walked in and insisted on confessing to a murder. He's come to give himself up.

Chief of Police – Confessing voluntarily? That's no good. Takes all the fun out of police work. And with the budget cuts, we've already lost half our staff. So, what have you done? Stabbed your partner with the carving knife because the roast was burnt? Don't laugh. Happened here last Christmas.

Compulsive Liar – Not exactly.

Chief of Police – Common assault, then? Some people insist on giving their spouse a good stuffing before serving the Christmas turkey.

Compulsive Liar – My crime is far more significant than that, Chief.

Chief of Police – I'm listening.

Compulsive Liar – I killed President Kennedy.

A stunned silence.

Cop 3 – Told you this one might be interesting.

Chief of Police – Really? And while you were at it, did you assassinate Julius Caesar? We could charge you as a repeat offender.

Compulsive Liar – I knew you wouldn't believe me.

Cop 3 – To be fair, Chief, the Kennedy assassination has never been fully explained.

Chief of Police – Thank you, Sherlock Holmes. If I need help cracking the case, I'll call you.

Cop 3 – Of course, Chief.

Chief of Police – Here's what we'll do. My officers will give you a pen and paper. Write down your full confession. We'll take a look tomorrow when we've all got clearer heads. Agreed?

Compulsive Liar – Of course. Thank you for hearing me out, Chief.

Cop 1 hands the Compulsive Liar a notepad and pen.

Chief of Police *(to Cop 3)* – Take the gentleman to his cell, please.

Compulsive Liar – Would it be possible to have some coffee? I may be writing for quite a while.

The others roll their eyes.

Cop 3 – How many sugars?

Cop 3 leads the Compulsive Liar away.

Chief of Police – Next we'll have someone confessing to the murder of Alexander the Great.

Cop 2 – At least the statute of limitations will have run out on that one.

Chief of Police – Another person with nowhere to spend Christmas.

Cop 2 – Holidays can be cruel to people on their own.

Cop 1 – This isn't a homeless shelter, though. If too many guests turn up without booking, we'll have to start turning them away.

Chief of Police – Well, some of us do have families waiting. I'll leave you in charge of the place, shall I?

Cop 1 – You can count on us, Chief.

Chief of Police – I'll keep my phone on in case of an emergency. Oh, and one more thing. It's very unlikely to happen to you, but…

Cop 1 – That's what they said about our Christmas shifts. Three years running.

Chief of Police – No, I mean the new Interior Minister. He's decided to make an unannounced Christmas visit to a police station chosen at random, to thank the officers on duty.

Cop 1 – Really?

Chief of Police – He's borrowed the idea from the army: a Christmas Eve visit to the front line, a heroic photo opportunity in a rough neighbourhood.

Cop 2 – We'd be deeply moved by the honour, Chief.

Chief of Police – Just try to look presentable. And go easy on that bottle.

Cop 2 – You could have one before you go, Chief. It is Christmas.

Chief of Police – Just one, then.

Cop 1 pours three glasses. The Chief studies the label on the bottle.

Chief of Police – What is this stuff?

Cop 1 – A local speciality.

Chief of Police – Local to where?

Cop 2 – Somewhere with very relaxed health regulations. You'll see.

The Chief takes a sip and winces. The other two laugh.

Chief of Police – Good heavens!

Cop 1 – Fifty-three per cent.

Chief of Police – Don't smoke anywhere near this stuff.

They all take another sip.

Cop 1 – Funny. It reminds me of something…

Chief of Police *(cutting in)* – Tell me another time. I'm already late.

Cop 2 – Aren't you dressing as Santa Claus this year, Chief, to bring us presents under the tree?

Chief of Police – Only if you've been good. Good luck tonight.

Cop 1 – Merry Christmas, Chief!

The Chief departs, passing Cop 3, who ushers in a wildly agitated visitor.

Cop 1 – What have we got now?

Cop 3 – Nothing too serious. Apparently the world ends on 31 December. This gentleman will explain.

Conspiracy Theorist – I'll be brief. Time is running out. I'm an amateur astronomer.

Cop 2 – This should be good.

Conspiracy Theorist – For weeks I've been observing an object approaching Earth through my telescope. It's travelling at the speed of light.

Cop 2 – Right…

Conspiracy Theorist – By my calculations, it will strike the city at precisely midnight on 31 December.

Cop 2 – And what exactly are the police supposed to do about that?

Cop 1 – Meteorites fall to Earth all the time, don't they?

Cop 3 – Here's the difficult part. According to this gentleman, it's the size of a small island.

Conspiracy Theorist – And, strangely enough, it has the exact shape of a Christmas tree.

Cop 2 – Well, isn't that festive.

Conspiracy Theorist – Of course the government and the media know. They're keeping it quiet to avoid panic.

Cop 2 – Typical. Nobody tells the people anything.

Cop 1 – Still, a small island isn't enormous. And this city could do with some redevelopment. It's hardly the end of the world.

Conspiracy Theorist – Are you insane? An object that size, travelling at the speed of light, would release the energy of millions of nuclear bombs!

Cop 1 – Ah. That's a bit more serious.

Cop 2 – And all these years we've been wasting money on New Year's Eve fireworks.

Conspiracy Theorist – Fireworks? The entire planet will shatter on impact! Then comes a nuclear winter lasting millions of years. We'll all be extinct, like the dinosaurs. At best, a few cockroaches might survive.

Cop 2 – Damn. We still won't be rid of them.

Cop 1 – Tough little things. We've tried everything.

Cop 2 *(to Cop 3)* – Why have you brought us Nostradamus here? Does he want to press charges against God?

Cop 3 – Attempted suicide.

Cop 2 – Sorry?

Cop 3 – He jumped from a bridge over the river.

Cop 1 – Why kill yourself a week before the end of the world?

Cop 3 – Perhaps it was a last assertion of free will. An attempt to control his own fate, despite the certainty of death. Have you read what Nietzsche said about suicide?

Cop 2 – Whatever happened to the right to take your own life? It's not a crime.

Cop 3 – The trouble is, a tourist boat was passing underneath. He landed on a woman on the upper deck. Fortunately for him, she was rather well padded. It broke his fall. Unfortunately, she's in hospital, and she's made a complaint.

Cop 1 – I suppose she really thought the sky was falling on her.

Cop 2 – Fine. Put him in a cell till tomorrow. We'll sort it out with the Chief.

Conspiracy Theorist – The world ends in a week! Repent while you still can!

Cop 3 takes the visitor away.

Cop 2 – A Christmas-tree-shaped asteroid coming down on this city. That's a new one.

Cop 1 – It could happen, though. Asteroids have hit Earth before. Why not on New Year's Eve?

Cop 2 – I'll make one prediction of my own: on New Year's Eve, the year will end.

Cop 1 – What would you do if the world were ending in a week?

Cop 2 – I wouldn't be wasting my life here listening to you for a miserable salary. That's what ruins people's lives, you know.

Cop 1 – What does?

Cop 2 – The future. From childhood we're taught to give up our dreams for the sake of a secure future. Maybe that nutcase is right. We should all live as if the world were ending next week.

Cop 1 – It certainly inspired him to jump off a bridge.

Cop 2 – Onto a woman. Maybe that's his idea of romance. If I thought the end was near, I'd throw myself at the first woman I met. Or failing that… perhaps at you.

Cop 1 eyes the colleague nervously, then refills their glasses.

Cop 1 – Why did you become a cop?

Cop 2 – When I was a kid playing cowboys and Indians, I always wanted to be the Indian. Then they told me to think about my career. So I became the cowboy.

Cop 1 – And we've never had the chance to draw our guns except at the firing range.

Cop 2 – Luckily for the general public. You couldn't hit a barn door from inside the barn.

Cop 1 – I shoot better than you.

Cop 2 – Is that a challenge?

Cop 1 – We could use the cockroaches for target practice. Look, one on that wall. Bet I can put a bullet between its eyes from here.

Cop 1 releases the safety catch and takes aim.

Cop 2 – You're actually going to do it, you idiot! Put that away before you kill somebody!

Cop 1 pretends to fire, laughs, and puts the weapon back in its holster.

Cop 1 *(raising a glass)* – To the cockroaches!

Cop 2 – Right. Once we're gone, they'll be the ones rebuilding civilisation.

They drink.

Cop 2 – I'm going to the toilet to empty my magazine. That stuff really does flush out the plumbing.

Cop 2 exits. Cop 1, rather drunk, nods off in the chair, sinks lower and lower, and finally falls onto the floor. A figure dressed as Santa Claus enters with a sack. Seeing nobody, Santa pauses. Cop 1 hauls themself up from behind the desk, dazed and still half asleep, and spots the figure.

Santa Claus *(voice muffled by the false beard)* – Merry Christmas!

Cop 1 – What the hell? Santa Claus! *(Drawing the gun.)* I've waited years to get my hands on you!

Santa Claus raises both hands in alarm.

Santa Claus – But…

Cop 1 – Shut up and don't move! Not so jolly now, are you, Santa? I ought to… *(The gun goes off.)* Damn! I forgot to put the safety back on.

Santa Claus drops to the floor. Cop 2 returns from the toilet and sees the figure lying there.

Cop 2 – What the hell happened?

Cop 1 – I've just shot Santa Claus.

Cop 2 – Well, that's a public-relations disaster. On 24 December of all days. Think how many children you've disappointed.

Cop 1 – It went off by accident!

Cop 2 – Tell that to Internal Affairs. Accidental homicide.

Cop 1 – Do you think he's dead?

Cop 2 finally realises this is serious.

Cop 2 – Wait. You really shot him? Who the hell is he?

Cop 1 – I swear I don't know. He just appeared out of nowhere.

Cop 2 – If he were the real Santa Claus, we might manage to cover it up.

Cop 1 – Really?

Cop 2 – Come on. You know Santa Claus isn't real. The last one you saw was in bed with your mother.

Cop 1 – Then who…? The Chief! He said he might dress up as Santa Claus and bring us presents. I thought he was joking!

Cop 2 bends over the motionless figure.

Cop 2 – Let's pull off the hood and that beard and see who it is.

Before Cop 2 can do so, the Chief of Police bursts in, visibly flustered.

Chief of Police – We're in serious trouble!

Cop 1 – You don't say.

Cop 2 – What's happened, Chief?

Chief of Police – The minister! They've just announced his arrival!

Cop 1 – Which minister?

Chief of Police – The Interior Minister! He's chosen our station for his Christmas visit!

Cop 2 – You're joking!

Chief of Police – I could be at home with my family. But if we impress him, we might finally get the extra staff we've been asking for.

Cop 1 – We'll do you proud, Chief!

The Chief notices Santa Claus sprawled on the floor.

Chief of Police – What's that doing here?

Cop 1 – Well, it's a long story…

Cop 2 – Drunk and disorderly, Chief. We picked this one up outside a department store, exposing himself to the Christmas shoppers…

Chief of Police – Spare me the details. Get him out of here. Now!

Cop 1 – Straight to the sobering-up cell, Chief.

Chief of Police – And hide that blasted bottle! The Chief of Staff is parking the ministerial car, but the minister's already somewhere in the building. I'm off to find him.

The Chief goes out. The cops look down at Santa Claus.

Cop 2 – Well, it wasn't the Chief.

Cop 1 – Who the hell is it, then?

Cop 2 – What matters is hiding the body before the minister arrives. Santa Claus shot by the police on Christmas Eve? Doesn't look great in the annual report.

Cop 1 – The single cells are full. We can't put him with the other prisoners. They'll ask questions.

Cop 2 – No time to worry about that. Behind the desk for now. The minister could walk in any second.

They drag Santa Claus behind the desk and hide the body. The Minister's Chief of Staff enters.

Chief of Staff – Good evening, officers! Merry Christmas!

Cop 1 – Minister!

Chief of Staff – No, just the Chief of Staff. I was hoping to find him here. I've been trying to park the official car.

Cop 2 – The official car?

Chief of Staff – A tiny little hatchback. Budget cuts. And I have to drive it myself. You'd be amazed how hard it is to park in this neighbourhood.

Cop 2 – Apparently even the poor can still afford cars.

Chief of Staff – Often better ones than ours. I've had to leave it double-parked. And in this snow!

Cop 1 – Don't worry. If anyone gives you a ticket, we'll make it disappear.

Chief of Staff – Absolutely not! Our government stands for the highest standards of integrity.

Cop 2 – Naturally.

Chief of Staff – I don't understand. We agreed to meet here. He arrived by sleigh.

Cop 1 – By sleigh?

Chief of Staff – Reindeer were beyond our budget, so we used police dogs. Now, have you seen him?

Cop 2 – The sleigh?

Chief of Staff – The minister! You couldn't have missed him. He's dressed as Santa Claus.

Cop 1 – Santa Claus?!

Chief of Staff – A little childish, perhaps, but a powerful symbol. The police are one big family, and the minister is the father who rewards his children. Provided they've been good, of course. Now, have you seen him?

Cop 2 – Perhaps he's in one of the other offices.

Chief of Staff – I'll take a look. And we'll be back to pay you a proper visit shortly.

Cop 2 – Of course.

Chief of Staff – Please don't change a thing on our account. Pretend we're not here.

The Chief of Staff leaves. The two cops are devastated. Slowly, they turn towards the place where they hid Santa Claus.

Cop 1 – The Interior Minister…

Cop 2 – Looks as though a cabinet reshuffle's coming. A permanent one.

Cop 1 – Oh, no…

Cop 2 – As police blunders go, this one's hard to beat.

Cop 1 – What do we do?

Cop 2 – We'll think of something.

Cop 1 – You really think so?

Cop 2 – No. I just thought you needed cheering up.

Cop 1 – We can't leave him there. That man's coming back any minute.

Cop 2 – Then we put him in a cell.

They haul Santa Claus from behind the desk and begin to drag the body away. Cop 3 returns.

Cop 3 – Need a hand?

Cop 1 – We're fine, thanks.

Cop 3 – What's wrong with Santa? Something that didn't agree with him?

Cop 2 – That's one way of putting it.

Cop 3 – Christmas does encourage excess.

Cop 2 – And then you live to regret it. *(To Cop 1.)* Don't you?

Cop 3 – Santa Claus of all people. What a dreadful example to the children.

Cop 3 leaves.

Cop 2 – Put him in with the compulsive liar.

Cop 1 – Why?

Cop 2 – If the fellow says he saw the minister's corpse, who'll believe him?

Cop 1 – There are advantages to having a compulsive liar around.

Cop 2 – I'll stay and distract the Chief of Staff.

Cop 1 drags Santa Claus out by the feet. The Chief of Staff returns with the Chief of Police, who is trying to remain cheerful.

Chief of Police – You won't believe this, but we've lost the minister. He hasn't been through here, has he?

Cop 2 – Haven't seen a soul.

Chief of Staff – I do hope nothing's happened to him.

Chief of Police *(joking)* – What could possibly happen to an Interior Minister inside a police station?

Chief of Staff – Quite right.

Chief of Police – Perhaps he's in the bathroom. Even ministers have to answer the call of nature.

Chief of Staff – Indeed.

Chief of Police – Still, you'd expect a Chief of Staff to know when his minister's having a private sitting.

Chief of Staff – Very amusing. A sense of humour is important in your line of work.

Chief of Police – Let me show you around while we wait. As you'll see, the place is in a dreadful state. 'In need of refreshing', as the estate agents say when they mean 'falling down'. Perhaps you could mention that to the minister, once we've found him.

The Chief leads the Chief of Staff out. Cop 1 returns.

Cop 2 – Well?

Cop 1 – I told the liar it was the Interior Minister dressed as Santa Claus, and that I'd shot him in the stomach.

Cop 2 – And he believed you?

Cop 1 – That's the thing about compulsive liars. They'll believe anything.

Cop 2 – At least that gives us some breathing space.

Cop 1 – Hiding a corpse in a police station… It's not exactly the first place the police would look, but still.

Cop 2 – We can't just carry it out. There are police everywhere. And when they officially report a missing minister, we'll have every security agency and special operations team in the country here.

Cop 1 – We need a plan. Fast.

Cop 2 – If we can't get rid of the body, we need a perfectly natural explanation for his death.

Cop 1 – Natural? With a bullet in his stomach?

Cop 2 – Then we need somebody else to take the blame.

Cop 1 – I take it you're not volunteering.

Cop 2 – The compulsive liar!

Cop 1 – What?

Cop 2's mobile phone rings.

Cop 2 – Go and get him. I'll explain.

Cop 1 – On my way.

Cop 1 exits. Cop 2 answers the phone.

Cop 2 – Hello? Oh, hi, Mum… Yes, I know. I'd much rather be there eating oysters with you… No, it's very quiet here. Christmas Eve, you know… Look, I have to go. I've got a little problem to sort out… Nothing serious! Save me a slice of Christmas cake, will you? Merry Christmas, Mum.

Cop 1 returns with the Compulsive Liar.

Cop 2 – Well, how are your memoirs from beyond the grave coming along?

Compulsive Liar – Very well, thank you. But I've barely started, so if you'll excuse me…

Cop 1 – You can spare five minutes.

Compulsive Liar – Five minutes, then.

Cop 2 – Have a seat. Something to drink? A little chestnut liqueur? It's a traditional local poison.

Compulsive Liar – No, thank you. I don't drink.

Cop 2 – My colleague and I have a proposal for you. A rather exciting one, as it happens.

Cop 1 looks at Cop 2, wondering what the plan might be.

Compulsive Liar *(suspiciously)* – You're not going to start on the statute of limitations again, are you?

Cop 2 – Quite the opposite. With a president assassinated last century, the problem is that you risk having your crime dismissed as ancient history.

Cop 1 *(beginning to understand)* – Even with a very good lawyer.

Compulsive Liar – What are you suggesting?

Cop 2 – How about being the assassin of the Interior Minister instead? Only appointed last week. Very current.

Compulsive Liar – But he's dead. His body's in my cell.

Cop 2 – True. But that was an accident. What we're offering you is a proper, premeditated assassination.

Compulsive Liar – I can't kill him. He's already dead.

Cop 2 – Exactly! You get all the glory without having to lift a finger.

Cop 1 – And you'd be doing us a small favour.

Compulsive Liar – I'm sorry, but I really couldn't.

Cop 1 – A minister! A president! Does it make that much difference?

Compulsive Liar – A President of the United States, though!

Cop 1 – Oh, don’t be so fussy.

The Compulsive Liar stands up.

Compulsive Liar – I'd love to help, but I really can't.

Cop 2 – Why on earth not?

Compulsive Liar – Because I don't want to tell a lie!

Cop 3 passes by.

Cop 3 – Have you heard? We've lost the Interior Minister! The Chief's beside himself!

Compulsive Liar – The Interior Minister? He's dead in my cell. But I swear I didn't murder him.

Cop 3 – Of course. And he's dressed as Santa Claus, no doubt.

Compulsive Liar – Exactly.

Cop 3 rolls their eyes.

Cop 1 – Would you put our guest back in his cell, please?

Cop 3 leads the Compulsive Liar away.

Cop 1 – Of all the compulsive liars, we had to get one who refuses to lie.

Cop 2 – Trouble with compulsive liars is, they always think they're telling the truth.

Cop 1 – We could try blaming the prostitute, but how?

Cop 2 – I wouldn't be surprised if Santa Claus was one of her customers.

Cop 1 – He was sleeping with my mother, after all.

Cop 2 – I mean the minister!

Cop 1 – Oh, right. Sorry.

They think.

Cop 2 – The bum! Passed out in his cell, dead drunk.

Cop 1 – So?

Cop 2 – Come with me. I think I've got it.

They leave. The Chief of Police and the Chief of Staff enter.

Chief of Police – I really don't understand where he could have got to.

Chief of Staff – If he doesn't appear in five minutes, I'll have to tell the President. Losing an Interior Minister inside a police station is a very serious matter. I shouldn't expect it to do much for your promotion prospects.

Chief of Police – Dressed as Santa Claus, you say? Well, that's a wonderfully precise description. He should be easy to find.

The two cops enter, supporting a limp Santa Claus, hood pulled low and fake beard covering the face.

Cop 1 – Found him!

Chief of Police – Hallelujah!

Chief of Staff – What's wrong with him? He looks dreadful.

Cop 2 – Apparently he combined his tour of police stations with a tour of the local bars.

Chief of Police – Haven't I seen this Santa Claus before?

Cop 2 – You have, Chief. A simple case of mistaken identity.

Cop 1 – He came in dead drunk…

Cop 2 – And wearing that Santa suit…

Cop 1 – We mistook him for a vagrant and put him in the sobering-up cell.

Chief of Staff – Goodness, he does smell dreadful. I apologise. This isn't like him at all. Thank you for taking care of him, and I trust you'll be discreet about this little incident.

Cop 2 – You can trust us. We'll be as silent as the grave.

Chief of Staff – I'll get him home and into bed. He'll be fine in the morning.

The Chief of Staff tries to take Santa Claus's weight.

Chief of Staff – Could you help me get him into the sleigh? I mean, the car. He weighs a ton.

Chief of Police – My officers will take care of that.

Chief of Staff – Thank you. Just put him in the passenger seat. And make sure you fasten his seat belt!

The cops carry Santa Claus out. The Chief triumphantly holds up the bottle.

Chief of Police – Well! All's well that ends well. A celebratory drop?

Chief of Staff – Just a small one. Then I must be off. What a night!

Chief of Police – Cheers!

They take a sip.

Chief of Staff – Good grief! If that's what the minister's been drinking, no wonder he's in that state. Well, Chief, thank you for everything. On the minister's behalf, may I congratulate you on your dedication and efficiency.

Chief of Police – We're desperately short of staff, of course…

Chief of Staff – I'm afraid I can't promise you more officers. Tight budgets, you understand. But the minister will certainly appreciate your discretion. Once he's recovered, I'll suggest an official decoration. That, at least, doesn't cost anything.

Chief of Police – A medal? Really? What a wonderful Christmas present!

Chief of Staff – Well, I really must go.

Chief of Police – I'll walk you out. I'm expected at home too.

The Chief and the Chief of Staff leave. The two cops return.

Cop 1 – Phew. They've gone. We can breathe again.

Cop 2 – What do we do with the body?

Cop 1 – Dump it in the river. People drown there over the holidays all the time.

Cop 2 – Not many of them are ministers. And fewer still have bullet holes in their stomachs.

Cop 1 – An Interior Minister must have plenty of enemies.

Cop 2 – He'll probably get a state funeral.

Cop 1 – I'd pay good money to see the minister's wife's face tomorrow morning when she wakes up with a drunken bum in her bed.

The Chief of Staff rushes back in.

Chief of Staff – The fellow you put in my car has woken up. And he's not the minister!

Cop 1 – You don't say.

Chief of Staff – I thought there was something odd. The minister enjoys a drink, but he can normally hold his liquor. This one has vomited all over the official car.

Cop 2 – How extraordinary.

Cop 1 – There must have been a mix-up.

Chief of Staff – Fortunately, we've just found the minister!

Cop 1 – Really?

Chief of Staff – He's only just arrived. There was a traffic jam on the ring road, sleigh and all. He'll be here any minute.

Cop 2 – Will he now?

Chief of Staff – I'd better get back to the entrance to welcome him.

The Chief of Staff leaves.

Cop 1 – Oh, thank God. I haven't killed a minister!

Cop 2 – That's worth drinking to! *(They drink.)* Hang on. Who did you kill, then?

Cop 1 – We swapped the costumes in the dark. I never saw his face.

Cop 2 – We were so sure it was the minister, we didn't even bother to check.

Cop 1 – What if it was the real Santa Claus?

Cop 2 – Let's find out.

They exit and return dragging the body, now dressed in the Bum's clothes instead of the Santa suit.

Cop 2 – Oh, hell. It's Martin!

Cop 1 – He must have dressed as Santa Claus to surprise us.

Cop 2 – Well, he certainly managed that.

Cop 1 – To be fair, he was a nasty little snitch. Nobody will miss him.

Cop 2 – The one cockroach we actually managed to get rid of. What was in his sack?

Cop 1 *(looking inside)* – Oysters!

Cop 2 – Well, at least we won't feel guilty about wasting his present. We hate oysters.

Cop 1 – There's a note too.

Cop 2 – Christmas greetings, probably.

Cop 1 – His neighbour's registration number. The one with the expired parking permit. He's even drawn a picture of the suspect.

Cop 2 – Let's see. *(Examining the drawing.)* Not bad. He had a real talent for sketching.

Cop 1 – A true artist.

Cop 2 – Still, we've got to get rid of him.

They try to lift the heavy corpse.

Cop 1 – When we throw him in the river, those oyster shells should keep him on the bottom for quite a while.

They drag the body away. In an eerie light, another Santa Claus appears and speaks in an unearthly voice.

Santa Claus – Well, my children? Have you been good this year?

Cop 1 – Oh, for heaven's sake. Who's that now?

The End

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez first took to the stage as a drummer in several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then worked as a television screenwriter before returning to the stage as a playwright. He has written around a hundred scripts for television and 123 plays, some of which have become classics (*Friday the 13th, Strip Poker*). His plays have been performed in more than 100 countries and translated into around 50 languages.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his websites :

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the contact form on his websites.

Jean-Pierre Martinez recently returned to music, writing original songs inspired by his poems and plays.

With **Jean-Pierre Martinez Music**, he extends that creative universe through original songs: short stories in musical form, humorous or melancholy, in which each song sometimes becomes a miniature theatrical scene.

https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

Comedies for 2

A Thwarted Vocation
EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

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

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Hangover
Happy Hour
How to get rid of your best friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more

At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe the savage beasts
Neighbours' Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a lovely village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Most Beautiful Village in France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Blackouts
Don't panic!
Dramedies
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
Every Colour under the Sun
For real and for fun
Funny Stories
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
Memoirs of a Suitcase
No Sense Off Limits
Now and then
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Open Letters
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

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

free of charge from his websites:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

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