

Le Commissaire est bon enfant (The Chief is a Nice Fellow)

Information about the original French version upon which the translation is based

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by Georges Courteline (Wikipedia [FREN](#))

Jules Lévy, collaborator.

Gymnase, 16 December 1899; Antoine Theatre, 9 February 1900.

Cast

Cast at the Gymnase

The police chief, *Matrat*.

Floche, *Munié*.

Breloc, *G. Dubosc*.

A man, *Frédal*.

Constable Lagrenaille, *Boudier*.

Constable Garrigou, *Lebégenski*.

Mr. Punèz, *Moreau*.

Mrs. Floche, *MartheAllex*.

Cast at the Antoine Theatre

The police chief, *Janvier*.

Floche, *Gémier*.

Breloc, *Antoine*.

A man, *Jarrier*.

Constable Lagrenaille, *Saverne*.

Constable Garrigou, *Noizeux*.

Mr. Punèz, *Verse*.

Mrs. Floche, *Ellen Andrée*.

The scene is at an office of a chief of police. At the right, a window that can be opened. At the left, a small door leading to a darkened office with heating supplies for winter. At the back, a set of double doors. Also at the back, a little to the left, a fireplace with a fire burning.

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Scene I

The police chief, a man

The police chief, *sitting at his desk*. Don't insist, damn it! You're not the only one I have to listen to.

A man. You could give me authorisation to carry a weapon.

The police chief. No.

A man. What does it matter to you?

The police chief. I just don't want to.

A man. The district is not safe. It's infested with pimps who fight all night long and attack passersby to rob them. Besides, my profession forces me to work late.

The police chief. Find another one.

A man. I'm quite willing. You find me one.

The police chief. You're joking, I imagine. Do you think we're an employment agency?

A man .And supposing someone attacks me tonight?

The police chief. You'll come and tell me tomorrow.

A man. And then?

The police chief. Then, but only then, I shall authorise you to carry a revolver on your person.

A man. In other words, I'll be entitled to defend myself after someone has killed me.

The police chief. That's it.

A man. Charming.

The police chief. That's enough. I am here to apply the laws of the government I have the honour to serve and not, as you seem to think, to discuss their wisdom. If you don't like our institutions, change them.

A man. If it only depended on me!...

The police chief. Eh? What?... One more word and I'll have you arrested! Have you ever seen such a character who comes to create trouble and play the revolutionary in the very precincts of the police station!... You're lucky I'm a nice fellow. (*The gentleman wants to speak*). That's enough, I tell you! Get out, and be quick; otherwise, I'll show you what I'm made of. Out, out!

Rapid and exasperated exit of the man.

The police chief, alone. I'll keep an eye on that anarchist.

The police chief retakes the position at his table that he occupied at the start of the play, slides over a pile of documents that constitute the morning mail, and, rapidly, with brief glance, he brushes up on the nature of the matters submitted for his adjudication. — Finally, an impatient gesture. He rings. A constable appears.

The police chief. Ask Mr. Punèz to come in to speak to me.

The guard leaves and Mr. Punèz appears almost immediately. He is a man, fifty years of age, puny, timid, with unkempt hair. He removes the cloth toque that was covering his head, and advances with multiple and humble greetings.

Scene II

The police chief, Mr. Punèz

The police chief. Hello, Mr. Punèz. Tell me, Mr. Punèz, do you realize that your work is deficient, and if it continues, I shall be obliged to ask the prefect to fire or re-assign you? A hundred times, Mr. Punèz, a hundred times, I have directed you each morning to go through a process of elimination so as to simplify my work and to declutter, at a stroke, my workload, my table and my state of mind. But, nooo! I could have sung Mary had a little lamb to the tune of Air on a G-String, and the result would have been the same. Take a look instead at my mail! (*He takes a random piece of mail in his hand.*) “ by a servant against her master who tried to abuse her.” What would I see in that? No follow-up required. Remove it! (*Taking another.*) And this!... “Complaint by an individual against the driver of a handsome cab who treated him poorly!” I don't care; is it any concern of mine?... Remove it! (*Taking another.*) Good! here is one about a concierge who is hard of hearing and a tenant who is complaining that he waited two hours at the concierge's door in the rain!... He should take it up with the owner. Is he hoping that I will pull the bell pull for him)?... Remove it! (*Taking another.*) And this cook who is seeking eight days of wages! Something for a justice of the peace. Remove it as well! And this one too! And this one again! — In truth, Mr. Punèz, I think you are either preoccupied with love or I have overestimated your intelligence. We must put an end to this. Silence! I would like to be a nice fellow, but will not stand for being duped. Let this serve as a lesson! And by the way, it is the last you will receive from me; you can take that as given. Good day, Mr. Punèz.

M. Punèz, with humility and smiling. I am of Spanish origin. My name is pronounced Pougnez.

He bows low and leaves.

Scene III

The police chief, then a constable, then a woman

The police chief turns back to his work for a moment, then speaks once again. The constable who was seen before returns again.

The police chief. Next.

The constable leaves.

The police chief, rising. This stove gives no heat. It's like Siberia here.

He goes to the cupboard at the left, takes a lump of charcoal and puts it in the stove. At this moment, a woman enters.

The woman. The station chief ?

The police chief, a shovel in his hand. I am.

The woman. I have a complaint to make...

The police chief, very firmly. About your husband.

The woman. Exactly.

The police chief. You see that I guessed right. Well, Madame, I can do nothing for you. I'm sorry to have to tell you, but I also have the duty to do so.

The woman. Monsieur...

She goes to take a chair.

The police chief. Don't sit down, Madame; it's pointless. You're going to be wasting your time and make me waste mine. Strange this preconceived idea among most women that the station chief is a fixer of broken homes! Madame, little misunderstandings between man and wife do not fall within the competence of the station chief. Aside from the obvious cases of adultery, the station chief must not, cannot intervene except if a concubine is being kept in the couple's home. Is that the case with your husband?

The woman. Monsieur...

The police chief. Oh! Don't waste words, please! Is it yes or no?

The woman. But...

The police chief. If it's yes, you must lodge a complaint with the prosecutor who will give me his instructions. If it's no, the steps you're taking are entirely null and void, and you may go.

The woman. My husband is not unfaithful.

The police chief. Then what? Does he beat you? In that case, Madame, have some witnesses confirm the fact, sue for a divorce, and the judges will decide in your favour. I'm telling you once more that women have this habit of getting hold of the chief of police for all kinds of purposes. Good Heavens! Be reasonable! If I had to intervene with an olive branch in my hand in all homes where people come to blows, I'd need sixty day months and forty hour days.

The woman. Come, Monsieur; that's not the problem; my husband doesn't beat me, nor is he unfaithful.

The police chief. No? I bet he's mad.

The woman. That's true.

The police chief, *smiling*. You'll admit that I rather look like a man who knows what he's talking about.

The woman. How could you guess?...

The police chief. I'm so used to these kinds of things!... But, my dear lady, I know your story from A to Z, and I get up to ten visits such as yours a day! Shall I give you a piece of advice?... a good one? Go home quietly to prepare your lunch. Your husband is no madder than I am.

The woman. He is fit to be tied.

The police chief. No.

The woman. Yes.

The police chief. No. Does your husband drink?

The woman. He doesn't.

The police chief. Do you know if he ever had typhoid fever or got sunstroke?

The woman. I don't recall.

The police chief. Does he come from a family of alcoholics, epileptics or lunatics.

The woman. I don't think so.

The police chief. Well!

The woman. Well, what? Because there's no lunatic in his home, is that a reason why there shouldn't be one in mine?

The police chief. Just a moment!

The woman. He doesn't drink!...What does that mean? Does that stop him from doing nothing like other people, from talking rubbish, and from behaving against all common sense.

The police chief. What kind of talk? What kind of behaviour?

The woman. What do you mean, what kind of behaviour! ...What about the nights, the sleepless nights I spend listening to him talking to himself, plan God knows what, threaten God knows whom, ruminating for hours on end!...and I'm not even talking about the times when he jumps out of bed, in his nightshirt,

with his revolver in his hand, shouting “ I’ll blow the brains out of the first man who lays a hand on my wife! ”Do you think that’s normal?

The police chief. He’s jealous.

The woman. Jealous.

The police chief. Yes.

The woman. That’s easy to say. I’d like to know if it’s out of jealousy that he shuts himself up in the toilet, sometimes for two or three hours on end to rail aloud against society, shout that the whole world has bats in the belfry, bedbugs in the head board and rats in the basement.

The police chief, *amused.* He says the whole world has rats in the basement?

The woman. Yes! He sees lunatics everywhere, Monsieur!... And on top of that, you can add that he doesn’t take one step without roaring: “ One, two! “ at the top of his voice, supposedly to develop his pectoral muscles. So much so that he’s become the laughing stock of the neighbourhood and that children chase after him screaming, creating havoc.

The police chief. You’re exaggerating.

The woman, *annoyed.* Not a jot.

The police chief, *shrugging.* Come, come! But if it were true, my men would have arrested him long ago and would have brought him to my station for disturbing the peace.

The woman. The police is only interested in giving tickets to street vendors.

The police chief. Policemen are good men, who perform their duties as best they can. If you have come here to show off your sarcastic turn of mind, you’re barking up the wrong tree. I’m kind enough to listen to your twaddle! Don’t think that I’ll also take your insults. To come back to your husband, you insist that he’s mad? You’re really determined that he’s mad? Well, all right; he is mad. What of it?

The woman. What of it?

The police chief. Yes; what of it? What do you expect me to do about it?

The woman. I thought...

The police chief. You were wrong. Am I a specialist in mental diseases and am I able to cure him? No. Then what?... Because we really must make up our minds to speak sensibly and to present things as they really are. Madame, your husband’s problem – since you say there is a problem- doesn’t fall within the province of the police but within that of Social Security; it is therefore not to me but to that body that you must describe your fears and address your petition. I hasten to add however that, barring an unlikely miracle, it will be of no avail.

The woman. Because?

The police chief. Only women can ask such questions! Because the Social Security system is not what silly people think and the funds which it has available are far, very far, from matching the crushing responsibilities which it has to assume.

The woman, rising. Well, Monsieur the police chief, there is one thing I must warn you about: at the moment, my husband presents a danger only to me; the moment when he will become dangerous for everyone is not far off.

The police chief. When that moment comes, Madame, we'll take steps. In the meantime, because the asylums are inundated both with residents and applications for admission, because I cannot automatically, after a single complaint, lock up a man whose mental problems probably exist only in his wife's imagination, finally because, with the best intentions in the world, I cannot afford to lose a whole morning repeating the same things without managing to make myself understood, you won't mind if we put an end to this conversation.

He stands up.

The woman. But Monsieur the police chief...

The police chief. Your conversation is charming, very interesting; unfortunately, duty calls me, as they say in operas. - Madame, I look forward to seeing you again. Recommend bromide, walking and hydrotherapy to your husband. I bid you good day.

Scene IV

The police chief, Breloc.

At the same moment as the woman is leaving.

A voice, from offstage. Monsieur the police chief!

The police chief. What do you want?

A voice. A meeting, a brief meeting.

The police chief. As brief as all that?

A voice. It will take one minute.

The police chief. No more than that?

A voice. Hardly anymore, Monsieur.

The police chief. In that case...

He disappears. Breloc appears in the doorway, enters and finds his way to the middle of the stage.

The police chief. Please explain yourself.

Breloc. Monsieur the police chief, it's very simple. I am placing in your hands a watch which I found tonight at the corner of Saint-Michel Boulevard and Monsieur-le-Prince Street.

The police chief. A watch?

Breloc. A watch.

The police chief. Let's see.

Breloc. Here it is.

He pulls his job and gives the chief a watch, which the chief examines a while. After which:

The police chief. It's indeed a watch.

Breloc. Oh! there is no doubt.

The police chief. Thank you.

He goes to his desk, opens a drawer, into which he places Breloc's watch.

Breloc. May I go?

The police chief, *stopping him with a gesture.* Not yet.

Breloc. I'm a little pressed for time.

The police chief. I'm sorry.

Breloc. Some people are waiting for me.

The police chief, *curtly.* They'll wait.

Breloc, *a little surprised.* Ah?

The police chief. Yes.

Breloc. But...

The police chief. All right. One moment. You don't suppose, I imagine, that I'm going to take this watch from your hands without your having told me how it got there.

Breloc. I had the honour to explain to you just now that I had found it last night, at the corner of Saint-Michel Boulevard and Monsieur-le-Prince Street.

The police chief. I understand, but where?

Breloc. Where? On the ground.

The police chief. On the sidewalk?

Breloc. On the sidewalk.

The police chief, with suspicion. That's strange. The sidewalk is not a place to put a watch.

Breloc. I shall point out to you...

The police chief. Keep your remarks to yourself. I can claim to know my job. Instead of giving me advice, give me your particulars.

Breloc, his voice starting to get impatient. My name is Breloc (Jean-Eustache). I was born in Pontoise, on December 29, 1861, Father Pierre-Timoléon-Alphonse-Jean-Jacques-Alfred-Oscar Breloc, mother, Céleste Moucherol, his wife.

The police chief. Where do you live?

Breloc. 47, Pétréle Street, on the second floor.

The police chief, after making a note. What private means do you have?

Breloc, his tone rising bit by bit. I have an income of twenty-five thousand francs, a farm in Touraine, private hunting grounds in Beauce, six dogs, three cats, one donkey, eleven rabbits and one guinea pig.

The police chief. Enough! – What time was it when you found that watch?

Breloc. 3 a.m.

The police chief, with irony. No later?

Breloc. No.

The police chief. You give me the impression of leading a very strange life.

Breloc. I lead the life that I choose.

The police chief. Maybe; only I'm entitled to ask myself what someone who *says* he lives at 47, Pétréle Street, could have been doing at 3 a.m. at the corner of Monsieur-le-Prince Street and Saint-Michel Boulevard.

Breloc. What do you mean, I *say!*

The police chief. Yes, you say so.

Breloc. I say so because it's true.

The police chief. That's what we'll have to see. In the meantime, be kind enough to answer with courtesy the questions which my duty forces me to ask you. I'm asking you what you were doing, so late at night, in a neighbourhood where you don't live.

Breloc. I had just left my mistress.

The police chief. What does your mistress do?

Breloc. She's a married woman.

The police chief. To whom is she married?

Breloc. To a pharmacist.

The police chief. Whose name is?

Breloc. That's none of your business.

The police chief. Are you talking to me?

Breloc. I think so.

The police chief. Oh! But I say, young man, you're going to change your tune. I don't like your tone, and your face reminds me of something.

Breloc. Really!

The police chief. Yes, a vague recollection. Have you never been sentenced?

Breloc, *astonished.* How about you?

The police chief, *pouncing.* You're an insolent fellow.

Breloc. You're a damned fool.

The police chief. Take back what you said.

Breloc. What do you take me for? Do you think I'm a crook?

The next two lines have to be said at the same time.

Breloc. And then I'm fed up to the teeth now; your questioning is getting on my nerves. Can you imagine such a thing? I find a watch in the street; I go out of my way to bring it to you, and that's the welcome I get! Anyway, it serves me right, it will teach me to help others and to behave as an honest citizen.

The police chief. So that's the way it goes? Well wait, my boy, I'm going to teach you to speak to me with the respect that I deserve! There's a rascal! Do I know you? Do I know who you are? You say you live on Pétrelle Street, nothing proves to me that you do! You say your name is Breloc, I don't know. And then, besides, it's quite simple. The problem will be solved.

The police chief hastens to the door which he opens.

The police chief. Take this man away and throw him in clink.

Breloc. That, my word, is the last straw.

L'agent. Go on! Go on! To jail! And no arguing!

Breloc, *led away almost by force.* Well, just let me find another one!...Just let me find another watch!

He disappears.

Scene V

The police chief, then Floche and two constables

The police chief. Breloc! Breloc! Do I know whether that man is called Breloc! At a pinch, I, too, might be called Breloc! If you were to believe them, they'd all be called Breloc! Goodness, there's such a draft coming through this window

At this moment, a noise comes from the wings. The door opens violently, giving way to Floche, who struggles between the two guardians of the peace.

Floche. The chief! Where's the chief? I want to speak to the chief.

The police chief, *to the constables.* What's the matter?

Floche. You're in charge?

The police chief. Oh! not so much noise, if you please. You will speak when I ask you. What is the problem, Lagrenaille?

Constable Lagrenaille. It was this gentleman who was making a scene at the corner of Dunkerque Road and the Poissonnière neighbourhood, running down the Republic. As all passersby, gathering together, were creating havoc everywhere on the street, my colleague and I quickened our step and tried to persuade Monsieur to conform willingly to the laws regulating traffic. Since we met with a refusal, we gently took his arm and brought him to the station.

The police chief. Did he rebel?

Constable Lagrenaille. No, chief.

The police chief. Did he insult you?

Constable Lagrenaille. Not at all.

Floche. I had no reason to be rude with polite policemen. As for rebelling, I have too much love for authority not to respect it.

The police chief. That's a principle on which you should have modelled your conduct earlier.

Floche. What do you mean?

The police chief. When the policemen asked you to move...

Floche, *discreetly, but with irony.* Oh that!

The police chief. What do you mean, oh that?

Floche. I say: oh that!...Everybody has the right to say “oh that!”

The police chief. Yes, but nobody has the right to indulge, as you have done, in public demonstrations and to make seditious remarks aloud.

Floche. The Republic disgusts me.

The police chief. That’s not a good enough reason for you to try to make it disgusting to others.

Floche, *short and sweet.* That, again!...

He laughs.

The police chief. What do you mean, that again?

Floche. I’m saying: “That, again”. Does that shock you?

The police chief. Yes, that shocks me; and since that’s your attitude, the landscape is going to change. Thank you.

The constables leave. After a while.

The police chief, *between his teeth.* “That again.” *Shrugs his shoulders. He takes a piece of paper, dips his quill in ink, and prepares to write.* What’s your name?

Floche. Floche.

The police chief. With or without an S?

Floche. Without.

The police chief. Your first names?

Floche. Jean-Édouard, Address : 129, Vieilles Haudriettes Street

The police chief. Your profession?

Floche. I haven’t got one. I have a small fortune which provides for me.

The police chief. You’ve been decorated?

Floche. Who? I? No.

The police chief. Then, what’s that? *He points at a large red ribbon that adorns Floche’s button hole.*

Floche. That? That's an aide-mémoire. *He laughs.* I'll tell you, I have a very unreliable memory. It has a tendency to go wandering, so that I am compelled to keep it in check with a halter. Hence this ribbon which reminds it, when necessary, of its duty. It's new and ingenious, much better than a knot in one's handkerchief, which ceases to be effective if one suffers from a head cold, much better than a pin on one's sleeve which makes you the laughing stock of fools as it exposes you as a scatterbrain.

The police chief. All right! But if this ribbon doesn't make you the butt of fools, it can make you the butt of judges and earn you six months jail. Take that off! All right. *Floche removes the ribbon.* Your age?

Floche, sitting down. Can you imagine a poet composing a tragedy in a room where a piano teacher would be practising scales from morning till night? No, you can't, of course. Well, my memory is like that poet: it is housed in a brain in which genius is creating too much music.

The police chief. You're a trouble-maker. I advise you to keep to yourself your highfalutin sentences for which I have no use, and to answer my questions. I ask you how old you are.

Floche. Twenty-five.

The police chief. I beg your pardon?

Floche. Twenty-five.

The police chief. What do you mean, twenty-five!...You're twenty-five?

Floche. Yes.

The police chief, clarifying. You once were twenty-five.

Floche. That's why I still am.

The police chief. That's a peculiar way of thinking!

Floche. Peculiar in what way? It's as logical as an algebra demonstration, as luminous as moonlight and as simple as a child's soul. I was once twenty-five! Yes, by Heaven! Only, on the day I became twenty-five, I told myself: "Nice age! Let's keep it!" I therefore kept it, I continue to keep it, and with your permission, I shall continue to keep it until death.

Silence.

The police chief. Just one word. We're clear that you're not making fun of me?

Floche. I see nothing in my behaviour, in my dress or in my language which might give you cause to suppose such a thing.

The police chief. The fact is that precisely...

Floche. I expected this objection. It was unavoidable at a time when, with reason walking about the streets with her head down and her legs up in the air, we have gradually come to the point of being

unable to distinguish clearly between truth and falsehood, then of taking falsehood for truth, darkness for light, the sun for the moon and common sense for dementia. For instance, my wife, who has become mad through living in an atmosphere saturated with lunacy, is making plans to have me locked up.

He brightens.

The police chief, feigning surprise. Is it possible!...Has she, by any chance, bedbugs in the headboard.

Floche. And rats in the basement.

The police chief, aside. Now I know. *Loudly.* Monsieur.

Floche. The case of that unfortunate woman, which is, more or less, the same as that of the whole of humanity, was bound to prove interesting to the logical and analytical mind of a well-balanced moralist. And so, I had the idea to study it in detail, with its causes and effects, in a work entitled: *Mental Blindness...*

The police chief. Monsieur...

Floche. ...a work of great philosophical impact...

The police chief. No doubt, but...

Floche. ... the fruit of my ruminations, themselves daughters of my sleepless nights...

The police chief. Goodness...

Floche. ... and of which I shall now expound the main points to you. Monsieur... Excuse me.

He stands up and goes offstage.

The police chief, vaguely worried, aside. Oh! That man is annoying me! – Really! he’s closing the door!

He hurries, but Floche has reappeared on stage, a smile on his lips.

Floche. You see: I’m making myself at home.

The police chief. I see, and that’s where you’re wrong. – My key.

Floche. Your key?

The police chief. Yes; my key!

Floche. What key?

The police chief. The key to that lock.

Floche. Well?

The police chief. Give it back to me.

Floche, *very quietly.* No.

The police chief. No?

Floche. No.

The police chief. Why?

Floche. Because I'd rather keep it in my pocket. You have nothing to gain from keeping this door open and I have much to gain from its being closed. I am willing to confide important secrets to you as a state magistrate, but to trust those secrets to the chance of a door opening silently, to feed them to the indiscrete ear of any rascal passing by, that's another kettle of fish. – Monsieur, the wind of madness which blows from all directions was born from a misunderstanding: the misunderstanding which took place between Nature which gives the orders and Man who does not obey; between the firm designs of the one and the misinterpretations of the other.

The police chief, *in desperation.* If you don't give me back my key this very minute, I'm calling for help, I'm breaking the door down, and I have you dispatched immediately to the Station infirmary, rolled up like a salami. Do you understand?

Floche. Perfectly. *He puts his hand in his pocket, pulls out a revolver, and points it at the police chief.* Perfectly. If you utter one word, if you move one inch, if you stop looking into my eyes for one second, I'll fire six shots at you and I'll make your face burst like an overripe tomato!... Whoever invented such a raving madman?

The police chief. Ah, so I am the...?

Floche. Silence! Or things will go wrong. I am kind hearted, but I don't like madmen!

The police chief, *terrified.* That I can understand!

Floche. The madman is my natural enemy, do you understand?...I hate him, I resent him! The sight of a madman is enough to make me fly into a rage, and when I have a madman close to me, I no longer know, no, I no longer know, what I might be capable of!

The police chief, *aside.* Here comes the fit! I I'm in a fine pickle.

The two men look each other in the eyes. The police chief's life is visibly compromised. However, the instant he begins to commend his soul to God:

Floche, *letting go with a laugh.* Do you know that, considering you're a police chief, you're rather easily scared?

The police chief, *not understanding.* I?

Floche. You were scared stiff!

The police chief. I assure you...

Floche. Come, don't be modest. You're still shaking like calf jelly! What! Didn't you see that I was joking?...Do I look like a man who harbours evil intentions.

The police chief. No, certainly not! It's just that...

Floche. That what?

The police chief. That revolver. An accident is always prone to happen, as they say!

Floche. You're talking rubbish. A weapon is dangerous only in the hands of a clumsy individual, and I am master of mine as a good writer is master of his language. Just think that I put a bullet through an ace from a distance of twenty-five feet or that I knock off the bowl of a pipe in the time it takes to count to four.

The police chief, *feigning intense interest.* Really?

Floche. Really! – Besides, You're going to judge for yourself.

The police chief. What? What do you mean? What are you going to do?

Floche. You'll see. Don't move.

He backs away a few feet and points his revolver at the police chief who is filled with fear.

The police chief, *who wants nothing to do with it.* No! No!

Floche. Don't move, darn it! I tell you there's no danger. The bullet will just skim your left ear; you'll hear it whistle by; it's very strange. Careful!... One!... Two!...

The police chief, *jumping around like a goat.* I refuse! I refuse!

Floche, *returning without a transition from calmness to fury.* Damn the idiot! Fool! Animal! Just one second more and I would have pulled the trigger, and put a bullet through his skin. And you think it would not be better for society to destroy such creatures? Look, I don't know what is stopping me from nailing you to the wall like a bat with one foot of steel in your belly.

The police chief, *hiding behind his table.* It's starting again? After fire, steel?... Darn it! It's beginning to annoy me! One can't get a minute's peace with you!

Floche, *letting his epee fall.* Madman!

The police chief. Not really!

Floche. Empty bell! Cracked skull! Brainless head!

The police chief. I assure you you're making a mistake. Your judgement of my aptitudes is erroneous.

Floche. I know! You're the traditional, classic madman, the type who preaches and sells wisdom. But, you poor idiot, your whole being exhales and betrays madness!...from your ridiculous accoutrement to your indescribably absurd face.

The police chief. You're too kind!

Floche, who has come to the table. And then, what's all this stuff? It serves no purpose.

The police chief. Yes it does.

Floche. No, it doesn't. Your senses are deceiving you!

He shuffles through the cases and legal documents, etc., and spreads them out.

The police chief. Oh! Damn it!

Floche, who is now standing by the filing cabinet. And those files!...They're useless.

The police chief. Allow me!

Floche. Illusions!... Dreams!...

He said, and violently grabbed the cartons and threw them up into the air, and all the documents about open cases and those still under investigation tumbled forward onto the floor.

The police chief, dismayed. Ah! that's great!

Suddenly:

Floche, motioning towards the fire in the fireplace. And what's that!

The police chief. What do you mean that?

Floche, pointing at the hearth. That!

The police chief. It's a fire.

Floche, raising his arms to heaven. A fire! *Breaking out in spasmodic laughter.* A fire in the month of January!

The police chief. Well?

Floche, to the audience. Is he stupid! Come now! You don't understand that unless you're crazy, you must light a fire only in very hot weather?

The police chief. Because?

Floche, *solemnly*. Because Nature, – which alone is always right, - demands that man be warm in summer, as she wants him to be cold in winter! – Put out that fire.

The police chief. No.

Floche, *in the tone of someone who never jokes*. You don't want to put it out?

The police chief, *persuaded*. Yes!

He stands up, and goes towards the fireplace. After a while.

Floche. And make it snappy!

The police chief hurries. There is a carafe on the mantle. He takes it, and splashes the contents all over the logs of the fire. During which:

Floche. Nature orders that in winter man be prone to die of congestion of the lungs, galloping tuberculosis, pleurisy, pneumonia and other diseases. Open that window.

The police chief. No.

Floche, *menacingly*. You don't want to open it?

The police chief. Yes!

The chief takes small steps towards the window.

Floche. And don't dilly-dally!

The police chief, horrified, reaches the window, which he throws open. Which prompts:

Floche. Finally, she wants and orders man to have his feet frozen in winter. Take off your shoes.

The police chief. Certainly not!

Floche, *the weapon pointed*. You don't want to take them off?

The police chief. Yes.

Action in silence. The police chief, resigned and broken, decides to take off his shoes. Mimed by Floche who waits. Finally, the shoes removed and placed side by side next to the newly liberated feet of their owner, the madman throws them haphazardly out the open window without a second thought. After which:

Floche, *motioning at the cupboard from which the police chief had taken a brick of charcoal at the start of the act*. What's that?

The police chief. The coal cellar.

Floche. Good. Get in.

The police chief. What are you saying?

Floche. I said "Get in!"

The police chief. But...

Floche, forcefully. Do you refuse?

The police chief, beaten, thus convinced. I agree to everything.

Like a condemned man, the poor police chief slowly goes to the cupboard, the door of which Floche holds open. Reaching it, a brief hesitation. Brusquely, in an irritated fashion, Floche takes him by the seat of his pants, pushes him inside, closes the door and locks it.

Then, he walks back across the stage to the chief's desk, takes his top hat and polishes and shapes it. He combs his hair. With a flick he removes a stray speck of dust from his cuff, then, swinging his arms automatically, he begins moving while shouting: hup, two, three, four. He opens the door, sees the two constables on guard, greets them politely, and leaves.

Scene VI

Two constables, The police chief

After a while... Suddenly, the door opens. The two constables who had brought in Floche appear.

The constable, after looking around. Lagrenaille! Lagrenaille!

Lagrenaille, who appears. What's happening?

The constable. Where's the boss?

Lagrenaille. I've no idea.

The constable. Well, that's really unbelievable.

Lagrenaille, who spies the chief's hat. Here's his hat.

The constable, who spots his coat. His coat!

Lagrenaille, pointing at the umbrella. His umbrella!

A silence.

The constable, as if paralyzed. Oh! Damn it!

Lagrenaille, abruptly. The window!

They rush over, lean out, and look right and left.

The constable. Nothing!

Lagrenaille. Nothing!

The constable. It gave me a shock.

The voice of the chief. Lagrenaille!

Lagrenaille. Just listen?

The voice of the chief. Garrigou!

The constable. Someone's calling me!

The voice of the chief. Help!

Lagrenaille. It's the boss!

The constable. God forgive me if he isn't he in the coal cellar?

He goes to the cupboard and opens it.

The police chief, *who leaps out like a jack-in-the-box, his faced blackened with charcoal.* Madman on the loose!... Madman on the loose!... Give me ropes!... leather straps!... chains!... Get the police van!... Phone the prefect! Tell him to call up the Fire Department and the Republican Army! The city is under siege!... Madman on the loose!

THE END