
BINGO!

by Shimon Tzabar

Scene 1

(In the middle of the stage is a big bath. Somebody is having a bubble bath brushing himself and whistling a tune from an opera. Suddenly, the man in the bath, JOHN MORTIMER, stops whistling. One or two minutes of dead silence.)

MORTIMER: *(shouts) Eureka!,
(Jumps out of the bath, completely naked, dancing and splashing water and bubbles all over the place. He goes on jumping, shouting 'Eureka!' with great excitement. Starts to sing.)*
I have discovered! I have discovered! I have discovered! That's great!
Life! I must put on something before I catch pneumonia. I must test
this wonderful idea in the lab, but as I see it, it cannot fail. I got the
world in my pocket.

Curtain

Scene 2

(The lab. MORTIMER is rushing from one corner to another, mixing chemicals; rushing to look in the microscope, again at chemicals, back to the microscope. Somebody is trying to get in. The door is locked. That somebody starts to bang on the door. It's the LABMAN.)

LABMAN: Who is in?
MORTIMER: It's me.
LABMAN: Why have you locked yourself?
MORTIMER: I'm conducting an experiment and I don't want to be disturbed.
LABMAN: How long will it last?
MORTIMER: Not much longer. Come back later.
(MORTIMER continues with the experiment. He checks again and again until he is satisfied. Somebody again is trying to get in and finds the door locked.)
SOMEBODY: Who the hell has locked that door from the inside?
MORTIMER: It's me.
SOMEBODY: Why?
MORTIMER: I'm conducting an experiment.
SOMEBODY: Are you crazy? Since when are we conducting experiments in secrecy?
MORTIMER: It's something I want to keep to myself.
SOMEBODY: Keep it to yourself then, but you could, at least, leave us a note outside.
(This SOMEBODY goes but after a short while someone else is trying to get in. MORTIMER had finished his experiment and unlocks the door.)
LABMAN: *(puts his head in and looks around)* What are you cooking there, far away from prying eyes?
MORTIMER: It is an experiment.
LABMAN: Experiment of what?
MORTIMER: I can't tell you.
LABMAN: What is this secrecy about?
MORTIMER: I can't tell you. Not at the moment anyway.
LABMAN: Something happen to you, John. You were not used to be like that.
MORTIMER: I discovered something important and I'm entitled to keep it for myself.
LABMAN: We worked together for many years and you never kept secrets from me.
MORTIMER: True. But this time it's different.
LABMAN: Don't tell me you got something patentable.
MORTIMER: May be I have.
LABMAN: If it is something we were working on together, you can't cut me out like this.

MORTIMER: It has nothing to do with what we were working on together. It is a completely new idea that came to my mind recently.

LABMAN: I can't force you, that's for sure. Are you really taking out a patent?

MORTIMER: I am not sure yet, but I might.

Curtain

Scene 3

(Patent office waiting room. Two people are sitting in a row of chairs arranged along the wall. One is playing with a pendulum. Next to him sits MORTIMER clinching a portfolio. Opposite is a door on which is written: PATENT OFFICE. In another corner there is another door. Someone knocks on the door. Since nobody answers, the door opens and an elegant woman walks in. She looks around. Her eyes spot MORTIMER.)

WOMAN: Look who is here! Professor MORTIMER!
MORTIMER: And what are you doing here, doctor Leeman or shall I call you Lizzy?
LEEMAN: I prefer you stick to my surname and my title. The past cannot be reclaimed.
MORTIMER: If that's what you prefer...
LEEMAN: Yes. That's what I prefer. And as for your question: business. Business is what brought me here. I assume it's a similar kind of business that brought you there.
MORTIMER: I can't see how it could be the same. You are in pathology, aren't you? You deal with the dead, not with the living. What kind of patent can you possibly ask for? How to remove a body from a morgue to the crematorium without being noticed?
LEEMAN: Ha ha, very funny indeed.
(Door of the Patent Office opens. Somebody with a very complicated machine comes out and heads to the exit door.)
A VOICE FROM THE PATENT OFFICE: Next!
(The man with the pendulum goes to the office and shuts the door behind him. MORTIMER moves forward to his chair and Leeman sits in the chair of MORTIMER.)
LEEMAN: You seem very arrogant today, Professor Mortimer, or, are you still angry with me? It has been a long time since our brief and unsuccessful encounter.
MORTIMER: Unsuccessful? That is how you saw it?
LEEMAN: You are married; you have two kids; Why should you look backwards to the old days. If at all, it's me who should carry a grudge *(turns her eyes from MORTIMER and looks at the Patent Office door)* I hope it won't take too long.
(as she says this, the door opens and the man with the pendulum is kicked out and the pendulum is thrown out after him)
VOICE FROM PATENT OFFICE: Next!
(MORTIMER walks into the office)

Curtain

Scene 4

(JOHN, with his back to the audience, sits opposite the patent OFFICER on whose desk is the portfolio MORTIMER was clutching. The OFFICER holds a sheet of paper and reads it silently with his eyes focused on it. He lifts his eyes and looks at JOHN.)

OFFICER: Do you want to get a patent on life?
JOHN: Yes.
OFFICER: Sounds too grandiose to me. How can you justify it?
JOHN: I can create life.
OFFICER: Don't be ridiculous. Everyone can.
JOHN: But I can do it in the lab.
OFFICER: Everyone can do it in the lab.
JOHN: I beg your pardon! Do you think I am that vulgar or that I came here to make jokes? If I say I can create life, I mean that I can create life out of simpler compounds like amino acids and they can be reproduced by a simple chemical process. This is the way I can create life. Nobody has done it before. I don't have to tell you that creating DNA molecule in the lab is a breakthrough in biological sciences. I think that I deserve a patent for the discovery to enable me to continue with my work. You will find the technical details in the portfolio.
OFFICER: I will look at it and check if something similar has not been submitted before, here, or in any other patent office. This search will cost about. Meanwhile it will be a patent pending period. It will take at least two years. Would you like us to go on with it?
JOHN: Of course.
OFFICER: Fill up this form and pay at the cashier.
(JOHN takes the form handed to him. Leaves his portfolio on the table and walks out.)

Curtain

Scene 5

(MORTIMER in an office of an Independent Financial Adviser.)

MORTIMER: Here is my patent number 4528790 regarding file. It took me a lot of money to acquire it. I spent all my life-saving on it. You think I can recuperate the money?
ADVISER: Depends on your patent.

MORTIMER: My patent is on life.
ADVISER: What do you mean on life? Is it not specific?
MORTIMER: Of course it is specific. Specific on life.
ADVISER: It cannot be!
MORTIMER: Look it up yourself. *(Hands him a piece of paper. The Financial Adviser reads it with astonishment.)*
ADVISER: Unbelievable!!!
MORTIMER: Do you think I will be able to recuperate the few thousand pounds that I invested to secure the world rights? I am completely skint.
ADVISER: Don't be ridiculous! You are talking about a few thousand pounds, but this discovery of yours is worth millions.
MORTIMER: What do you mean by millions? All I want is to clear the mortgage.
ADVISER: Your naivety is astonishing. Your patent is a bombshell. It can make you a millionaire in no time at all.
MORTIMER: Are you sure?
ADVISER: Of course I am sure! Even new websites that are hot potatoes at the moment are no match to genetic discoveries and exploitation. I am the financial adviser. I ought to know!
MORTIMER: I knew it is important. I knew that I can sell it to some bio-genetic company. But I know nothing about how much and how to get in touch with them. I have no experience in these matters. How much can I get? What company to approach? Or is there a better way to exploit it? That's why I came to you.
ADVISER: Let me make a few calls before I can answer your questions. Meanwhile, what would you prefer: tea or coffee?
MORTIMER: White coffee please, with two sugars.
(ADVISER picks up the telephone, gives instructions to the secretary. Retires to a corner in the office and phones quietly without us hearing a word. The secretary brings coffee and MORTIMER picks up a magazine and browses in it. The ADVISER is still talking. He finishes the conversation and returns.)
ADVISER: I talked with one company, the Genetco. They are very interested. They are ready to pay you ten million and some shares, of course. However, while talking to them, I had a better idea. You can make much more, very much more money, if you do it on your own.
MORTIMER: What do you mean?
ADVISER: You have a patent on life. That means that every living creature has to pay you royalties. We can ignore plants and animals that have no money, you are still left with 5 billion people. If you will charge each of them a sum. A small sum, let us say no more than ten pounds, you will make fifty billion and that is more than any company can or will pay.
MORTIMER: But if people refuse to pay?
ADVISER: If they refuse to pay, sue them. You have only to sue one of them. If you win your first case, and you ought to win, because your patent is rock solid and backed by the law of the land, it will be a precedent and

people will not argue with you. Nobody wants to go to court and lose. There are, of course, poor people who cannot pay. They could easily be means tested. People who are on social security, for example, or prisoners, won't have to pay. This will give you a very positive PR image. Nobody could accuse you of being greedy or avaricious.

(The doorbell rings. The secretary goes to the door and opens it. The man in the door wears a boiler suit and carries a heavy bag, it's the gasman. He looks at a paper in his hand and reads out.)

GASMAN: Is this the office of Mister Gusko, the Independent Financial Adviser?

ADVISER: Yes, it's me.

GASMAN: Have you reported a gas leak?

ADVISER: Yes, I did.

GASMAN: Can I have a look at the boiler?

(The secretary shows him the boiler room. The gasman looks at it, manipulates some screws or levers and comes out again.)

GASMAN: The pump is completely worn out. You need a new pump. I don't have it on me. I'll have to come back with a new pump. Probably next week.

MORTIMER: *(to gasman)* Before you go, have a look at this. *(hands him the patent letter he had just shown to the adviser)*

GASMAN: What is it?

MORTIMER: It's my patent on your life.

GASMAN: What does it mean?

MORTIMER: You have to pay me royalties.

GASMAN: What does it mean?

SECRETARY: You have to pay him ten quid.

GASMAN: What for?

MORTIMER: I have a patent on your life.

GASMAN: So what?

SECRETARY: You have to pay him ten quid.

GASMAN: You must be joking.

MORTIMER: No joke. I showed you the patent license. It's all according to law. Is ten quid too much for you?

GASMAN: Ten quid my foot! If it's not a joke, you must be mad. Why shall I pay you ten quid or even one penny for that matter? I came here to fix the boiler and you are trying to rob me of ten quid. I will be back with the pump in a week or so.

MORTIMER: Can I have your name and address?

GASMAN: Certainly not. You can ask the gas board. They sent me. *(goes out angrily, tricking the door behind him)*

ADVISER: If you sue that guy and you win, everybody will pay. No arguments.

Curtain

Scene 6

(The curtain opens. We are in the Old Baily. Professor Mortimer is there. There is also a barrister who represents the defendant. There are about ten jurors waiting to be sworn in.)

OFFICIAL: All rise.
(All rise. The judge enters and sits. All sit.)

JUDGE: *(bugs caved)* Let the case begin.
(reads aloud from a list) David Martin Castle.
(somebody from the jury group comes forward)

OFFICIAL: Are you David Martin Castle?
DAVID MARTIN CASTLE: Yes, my honour.

OFFICIAL: You are to be sworn as a juror...
MORTIMER: I object!
JUDGE: *(whispers into official ear)* Who is he?
OFFICIAL: *(to judge)* It's the plaintiff.
JUDGE: *(to official)* What's his name?
OFFICIAL: *(whispering)* Professor John Mortimer.
JUDGE: *(bangs gavel)* Silence! Professor Mortimer, I understood you were to be represented by leading counsel?
MORTIMER: Yes, your honour.
JUDGE: Then, where is your counsel?
MORTIMER: I fired him.
JUDGE: Fired him?
MORTIMER: Yes, your honour.
JUDGE: May I ask why?
MORTIMER: He refused to pay royalties on my patent. I sued him. My previous counsel is actually the present defendant.
JUDGE: I see...
MORTIMER: Since I have no counsel, I represent myself.
JUDGE: You have complete right to represent yourself. I heard that you lodged an objection. Can you enlighten me what your objection was about?
MORTIMER: I objected to the juror.
JUDGE: On what grounds?
MORTIMER: The juror will soon realise that if he votes for me and I'm vindicated, he will have to pay me ten pounds. People are against paying money. That makes him biased. That's my objection.
JUDGE: Fair enough. But this is true for all jurors. Will you object to all of them?
MORTIMER: Yes, m' lord.
JUDGE: And what about me? Will you object to me running your case? I'm also alive and well.

MORTIMER: Judges are different. Judges are above suspicion. They are fair and objective. Even if they can be bribed, which I don't believe could ever be the case in this country, they will never do it for such a trifle sum as ten quid.

JUDGE: If you object to jurors, we can do away with them. A judge is enough.

MORTIMER: Not in this case. I insist on trial by jury. I want to make the verdict a very strong one to discourage other people to refuse payment.

JUDGE: But you reject all juries!

MORTIMER: Only to live juries.

JUDGE: But that is nonsense. You cannot have a dead jury.

MORTIMER: Why not? I read the law and it talks about a jury of twelve people but there is no stipulation anywhere that they have to be alive.

JUDGE: (*scratching his head*) You have a point there, I must admit. But how are you going to get a verdict? Dead people don't talk.

MORTIMER: Mere technically, m' lord. Dead people have been heard talking on many occasions. There are a lot of societies dedicated to communication with the departed. Mozart wrote an opera on one such occasion. There are a lot of mediums and spiritual people who will verify that fact, even under oath.

JUDGE: If that is so...

DEFENDANT: I object, m' lord.

JUDGE: On what grounds?

DEFENDANT: It's ridiculous. Whoever heard of a dead jury? It makes no sense.

MORTIMER: What sense has to do with it? We are talking about law. If the lawgivers were against dead juries, they would have said so. If they have not said so, it means not only that it's legal, it also means that it makes sense, at least in law terms...

DEFENDANT: We can easily have live juries if you will grant them redemption of paying royalties.

MORTIMER: Do you want me to commit the criminal offence of bribing juries? This, surely, will land me in jail.

JUDGE: You have a point there. Let us have a dead jury.

DEFENDANT: I still object.

MORTIMER: I object to his objection.

JUDGE: Sustained.

Curtain

Scene 7

(The curtain opens. On the floor of the courtyard lie 12 corpses in 12 coffins. A label is attached to the toe of each corpse. Mortimer reads the labels.)

MORTIMER: Something very odd here.
JUDGE: What's odd?
MORTIMER: They are all middle-aged or old and males, they all died from cardiac arrest on a Monday and they all come from the same hospital morgue.
JUDGE: What's wrong with that?
MORTIMER: The idea of trial by jury is that the jurors are picked up at random to avoid bias. There is nothing random here. They are all of the same age and gender, they all died in similar circumstances from the same disease and in the same hospital. It sounds too regimented, almost manipulated. It could be a good excuse for an appeal that I would like to avoid.
JUDGE: What do you suggest then?
MORTIMER: Different ages, but not children of course, different genders, different ethnic groups, different diseases and different morgues in different hospitals.
JUDGE: *(to the defendant)* Any objection?
LAWYER: I still think that dead juries don't make sense...
JUDGE: We have already dealt with it. Don't you have any new argument?
DEFENDANT: Not at the moment, m' lord.
JUDGE: Case adjourned.

Curtain

Scene 8

(Same court. 12 corpses of different appearance sitting in their proper place.)

JUDGE: Is the spiritualist installed?
SPIRITUALIST: Yes, your honour.
JUDGE: *(to the spiritualist)* Can you contact the members of the jury and make sure that they follow the proceeding?
SPIRITUALIST: Can you turn off the light?
JUDGE: Turn off the light.
(Lights are turned out. Court in complete darkness. A white, soft and almost transparent figure (supposed to be a ghost) rises from the medium's head. All this can be achieved with a film projector.)
JUDGE: Ask them if they can follow the proceedings.
SPIRITUALIST: Can you follow the proceedings?
STRANGE, VERY DEEP BUT DISTORTED VOICES: *(all together)* Yes, your honour!
JUDGE: *(to spiritualist)* Tell them to chose a leader of the jury. I cannot deal with so many spirits all at once.
SPIRITUALIST: Chose a leader among yourselves. The Judge cannot deal with so many spirits altogether.
MURMUR OF THE SPIRITS: *(after a long murmur a voice said)* Yes, your honour. We have chosen our leader.
(light returns to court)
JUDGE: *(to the defendant)* Are you represented by a counsel?
DEFENDANT: No, since I'm a barrister, I can represent myself.
JUDGE: Are you the counsel who were supposed to represent the plaintiff but instead you were fired and sued?
DEFENDANT: Yes, m' lord.
JUDGE: Can you tell us how it came about?
DEFENDANT: The plaintiff has already explained. I refused to pay him royalties for his patent.
JUDGE: Why?
DEFENDANT: That is what I want to plead in my defence. Life cannot be subject to patent or copyright. Even my parents who gave me my life, even they cannot ask me to pay them royalties. The patent office was wrong to give him a patent on life. Life was there before professor Mortimer discovered how to make a DNA molecule from amino acids. That's my objection, and that is why I was not going to pay him ten pounds, though this really is a trifle sum. I would have been paid, to represent him in this court, much, much more than ten pounds.
JUDGE: *(to MORTIMER)* Would you like to cross examine him?

MORTIMER: Yes, m' lord. (*to the defendant*) Do you know, by and chance, who discovered America?

DEFENDANT: Christopher Columbus.

MORTIMER: Did this continent exist there before its discovery by Columbus?

DEFENDANT: I know what you are driving at. But Columbus never got, never even demanded a patent for his discovery.

MORTIMER: I know. I will even add that the notion of a patent in the fifteen century was unheard of. But we will come to the notion of patents very soon. You say that life cannot be a subject to a patent.

DEFENDANT: Yes, so I say.

MORTIMER: Is it because of moral, scientific or legal considerations?

DEFENDANT: I can't complain about legal considerations since you have a valid patent. I also assume that the scientific considerations are correct because the patent office is very particular in these matters. But morally and socially it was a grave mistake to grant you a patent on life.

MORTIMER: You sound as if you know what life is.

DEFENDANT: Of course I know.

MORTIMER: Can you tell us what it is?

DEFENDANT: Well...life is something that moves...

MORTIMER: Like water?

DEFENDANT: Of course not. Life also begets life; procreate something very similar to oneself...

MORTIMER: Like fire?

DEFENDANT: Of course not! Why are you confusing me with such silly interruptions?...

A CHILD VOICE: (*from the gallery*) I know what life is!

JUDGE: (*towards the gallery*) How old are you?

CHILD VOICE: Eight and three quarters!

JUDGE: Take the kid out. The court is not a children's playground. (*to MORTIMER*) Are you sure that your questions lead somewhere?

MORTIMER: I tried to lead him to admit that at the heart of life, at the heart of every living creature is a DNA molecule.

JUDGE: You can go on.

MORTIMER: (*to the defendant*) No more questions.

Curtain

Scene 9

(Same as act 8, but this time everyone, except the Judge, holds a handkerchief at his nose. Mortimer is now in the witness box and the defendant is now cross examining him. Since they talk through their handkerchiefs, their speech is clumsy and funny and no one can understand them.)

DEFENDANT: Do you have anything to do with Molly the sheep?

MORTIMER: Nothing whatsoever. I'm not interested in cloning.

DEFENDANT: What are you interested in?

MORTIMER: In creating life.

DEFENDANT: Why? Is it more profitable?

MORTIMER: Profit has nothing to do with it.

DEFENDANT: So why are you charging money?

MORTIMER: For future research...

(The court official walks to the Judge while holding his handkerchief close to his nose and whispers something into his ear. The Judge seems very surprised.)

JUDGE: *(sniffs the air)* Rubbish. Smells OK to me.

OFFICIAL: Putrid smell. The jury must be dismissed!

JUDGE: Before the verdict? Impossible!

OFFICIAL: But you have no choice!

JUDGE: Don't tell me what choices I have. I'm the Judge here and I know my duty. You cannot dismiss a jury before they gave their verdict or couldn't agree on a verdict.

OFFICIAL: But the court stinks!

JUDGE: What did you say?

OFFICIAL: The court stinks.

JUDGE: *(to official)* I never heard you talking like this before. Two hundred pounds fine for contempt of court.

OFFICIAL: But the court really stinks!

JUDGE: Three month imprisonment for contempt of court. *(to policeman)* Take him away.

(The policeman, stuffing his nose with one hand and takes away the Official with the other. Turns to the Defendant.)

JUDGE: Continue with your cross examination.

THE WHOLE COURT: *(in unison)* but the court stinks!

COURT:

JUDGE: I don't smell anything.

THE WHOLE COURT: *(in unison)* But the court stinks!

COURT:

(Makes great efforts to sniff, but we understand from his body

language that he hasn't found anything strange or out of the ordinary in the air. Although he doesn't have a clue what it's all about, because he doesn't smell anything, he gives away, however, to what he heard from the audience in court.)

JUDGE:

Case adjourned. (to *MORTIMER and the DEFENDANT*) Come to my chambers. We have something to discuss.

Curtain

Scene 10

(The Judge, the plaintiff and the defendant sitting in chambers.)

JUDGE: We cannot go on. It's the craziest case I even came upon. We must stop it. The only way to do it, is for you two to compromise. If you two come to any agreement, I can stop litigation and cancel the case.

MORTIMER: I'm most willing to compromise, but I am not giving up my right to collect royalties.

DEFENDANT: I'm also willing to compromise, but I am not paying him a penny.

JUDGE: That's nice. You both agreed to compromise and you, the plaintiff, is ready to drop litigation.

MORTIMER: I never said it!

JUDGE: If you agreed to compromise, you must drop your litigation.

MORTIMER: Do I really have to?

JUDGE: Yes, you have to.

MORTIMER: Well... If I have no choice...

JUDGE: Since you agreed we can drop the litigation and I can discharged the jury and send them back to the morgues from where they came.

DEFENDANT: I'm not going to pay him a penny!

JUDGE: *(to MORTIMER)* Don't you worry. I'll pay you ten pounds from my own pocket.

MORTIMER: Do as you wish, but I'm not going to relinquish my rights.

Curtain

Scene 11

(Back again at the office of the Independent Financial Adviser)

MORTIMER: It did not work. I wasn't able to guarantee it with a court case. I'll have to go back to the company that offered me ten million and some shares. What were they called: Genetco or Genesco? I will take up their offer.

(The Independent Financial Adviser goes to the corner, makes his telephone call while his secretary brings a cup of coffee to MORTIMER who browses through journals as he did on the previous occasion. Adviser returns.)

ADVISER: They are not interested any more...

MORTIMER: Why?

ADVISER: Since your litigation case proved that you cannot enforce the patent, they can't make any money on it and therefore they are not interested.

MORTIMER: Will anyone else be interested?

ADVISER: I doubt it very much. For the same reasons, of course.

MORTIMER: So I have no choice but to launch an appeal...

ADVISER: A very good idea. It's your legitimate patent, and you must win the case.

(Suddenly a loud shot pierces the air. All light are turned off. Complete darkness.)

Curtain

Scene 12

(Light restored. In the middle of the stage stands Dr. Leeman from scene 3. Her extended hand holds a smoking gun. Smoke must be seen coming out of the barrel. Police whistle all around. A policeman approaches Dr. Leeman and puts a hand on her shoulder.)

POLICEMAN: You killed professor Mortimer. You are under arrest!
DR. LEEMAN: No I am not! I have just received my patent for death. Here it is.
(Dr. Leeman hands the policeman a sheet of paper)

All light go out

End of play