

La Comédiathèque

PENTIMENT©

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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Pentimento

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Robin, a seemingly unremarkable employee at a rapidly growing tech company, is retiring tonight. Determined to bid farewell to his young boss, he insists on a final meeting. What begins as a simple courtesy soon escalates into a heated confrontation. But in this virtual game of cat and mouse, who really holds the mouse?

Characters:

Alex
Robin

In this version, both characters are male. However, the genders are interchangeable.

Possible casting options:
2M, 1M/1F, 2F.

The CEO's office of the Biodatech IT company. On the wall, a portrait of the company's deceased founder. Alex Kendall, his son, in his thirties with a casual elegance, is typing on his computer. On his desk sits a photo of a child. In one corner, there's a rolling table with some bottles and glasses. In another corner, a fishing rod. The phone rings, and Alex answers.

Alex – Yes, Vanessa... Who? Oh, right, I'd forgotten about that pest. Yes, yes, send him in straight away. And the leaving do, what time is that? Fine, I'll try to pop in. Can you prepare a little speech for me? Something like a eulogy. Because honestly, I can't remember what he was still doing here. What I do know is how much he was costing the company... Well, he was an old friend of my father's. I promised to keep him on until his retirement. At least by tomorrow, we'll be rid of him. Oh, Vanessa, have you prepared the copies of the contract I'm signing in New York on Monday? OK... And you've got my plane tickets sorted? Perfect. Yes, yes, send him in... (*He hangs up the phone.*) The sooner he's gone, the better... With the money we'll save, we could hire two junior engineers...

He resumes typing on his computer. Enter Robin Mariani, a man in his sixties, wearing a traditional, outdated suit and tie, which contrasts sharply with Alex's youthful, trendy look. Robin appears affable and reserved. Alex looks up from his screen.

Alex – Ah, good morning, Mr Martini...

Robin – Mariani. Robin Mariani.

Alex stands to shake his hand.

Alex – Of course... Good morning, Mr Mariani.

Robin – Please, call me Robin.

Alex – Can I offer you a coffee...? Or perhaps you'd like to try this excellent whisky you gave me for your departure. And thank you very much, by the way.

Robin – I hope you found it to your liking...

Alex – I haven't had the chance to try it yet... But you shouldn't have... Usually, it's the boss and colleagues who give a gift to the one who's leaving, you know...

Robin – Shall we have some whisky, then? You'll join me, I hope?

Alex – Just a small glass, then.

Alex pours two glasses and hands one to Robin.

Robin – Thank you.

They clink glasses.

Alex – To a well-deserved retirement!

Robin – To Biodatech—its glorious past and its promising future...

Alex – It really is excellent...

Robin – It's a Scottish whisky. They say it's good for the arteries...

Alex – If it's good for the arteries... Shall I pour you another?

Robin – No, thank you. If I turn up tipsy to my leaving do... I wouldn't want to leave a bad impression, you see?

Alex – Oh yes... (*Ironically*) Especially since you were quite a discreet employee... It would be a shame to stand out now...

Robin – Anyway, I won't take up too much of your time. You must be very busy with that new contract.

Robin sits down uninvited, and Alex's expression tightens with annoyance.

Alex – Indeed... (*Ironically*) By all means, make yourself at home.

Robin – Some might call it the deal of the century, wouldn't they?

Alex sits back in his chair.

Alex – It's a turning point in Biodatech's history, that's for sure. This time we're really stepping into the big leagues.

Robin – Bank of America is no small client...

Alex – Our turnover will double and we'll have to hire! (*Still ironic*) Especially with your departure, Mr Martini...

Robin – Mariani...

Alex – Sorry, must be the whisky... Honestly, I'm not much of a drinker. And so, you're already leaving us...

Robin – Yes... Some leave, others arrive—it's the great cycle of life. (*Pauses*) Sorry, I didn't mean anything about your father. His passing affected me deeply. It affected all of us.

Alex – Yes... You knew my father well, didn't you? I believe you were already here when he founded the company. Even though we've hardly had the chance to get to know each other! It seems your retirement is what finally brought us together for a proper chat.

Robin – That's right. When I met your father, the company had only two employees—him and me.

Alex – And now, it's grown to two thousand...

Robin – We shared the same office in a small space that was more like an attic.

Alex – They say Bill Gates founded Microsoft in a garage.

Robin – Naturally, that kind of setup forges strong bonds. Mr. Kendall and I were very close back then. I'd even dare to say he was a friend.

Alex – That's probably why he insisted on keeping you on until the very end. Before he passed, while planning his succession, he mentioned it to me briefly.

Robin – Your father was tough in business, but he was incredibly loyal in friendship.

A brief, awkward silence.

Alex – And now, you're leaving us, much like he did...

Robin – Well, I'm not quite dead yet.

Alex – Sorry, that's not what I meant.

Robin – In any case, like him, I can leave with peace of mind, right? With you at the helm, the future is in good hands. And with this new contract, everything's looking promising.

Alex doesn't seem keen to continue the subject and shifts gears.

Alex – So, what will you do with your free time, Mr. Mariani? Now that you won't have to get up for work... at least not for the office.

Robin – Well... I haven't given it much thought yet. Like most retirees, I suppose. A bit of sport to try and stay in shape. Maybe some travelling. And I've decided to get involved with a few associations. To feel somewhat useful...

Alex – That's commendable. What sort of associations, if I may ask?

Robin – Well... mainly SOS Suicide. For personal reasons, it's a cause very close to my heart.

Alex – Ah, yes... I wouldn't want to pry...

Robin – Well, if you must know...

Alex (*cutting him off*) – No, no, please don't feel you have to explain. In fact, I fear I won't have much time to chat, unfortunately. I'm heading to New York on Monday and...

Robin – Ah, yes... Off to conquer the West, as they say... (*He notices the portrait of Alex's father and stands to admire it.*) I remember when that photo was taken. We were celebrating the signing of our first major contract.

Alex (*impatiently*) – So, Mr. Mariani, you wanted to see me...?

Robin – Yes...

Alex – Was this just a courtesy visit to say goodbye in person? Or did you have a specific request? If there's anything I can do for you... perhaps a symbolic contribution to that association you care about? Our company owes you at least that much. (*Ironically*) A donation to SOS Suicide—perfect as a retirement gift, don't you think?

Robin sits back down, shifting uneasily in his chair.

Robin – Indeed, I did have... something to tell you, Mr. Kendall. In private...

Alex looks a little concerned.

Alex – I'm listening...

Robin – It's just that... it's not easy.

Alex, intrigued, tries to lighten the mood.

Alex – You're starting to scare me, Robin... Let me guess—you killed a colleague you couldn't stand, hid his body in a cupboard thirty years ago, and now you're worried his skeleton will be found after you leave?

Robin – Well... in a way, yes, there's some truth to that.

Alex freezes, visibly startled.

Alex – Tell me more...

Robin – It's a long story.

Alex – Hopefully not too long—I've got plenty to sort out before your farewell party tonight.

Robin – Let's just say... It's a matter of conscience.

Alex – A matter of conscience? Oh dear... I didn't even know IT specialists had a conscience... (*Robin doesn't seem amused by the joke.*) But please, go on.

Robin – As you know, Biodatech's reputation was built on the first biometric smart card patent, offering absolute security and countless additional services.

Alex – Yes, the patent my father filed—forty years ago.

Robin – From that initial success, the company thrived, becoming one of the country's leading IT service providers.

Alex – With this new contract, we even aim to become the top player.

Robin – It's no secret that Biodatech will go public next year.

Alex – It will greatly expand our investment capacity, especially in research. Because, as you know, innovation is in our company's DNA. If my father hadn't come up with that brilliant idea for the first biometric smart card forty years ago, neither of us would be here today.

Robin – Yes... especially you.

Alex is momentarily caught off guard by this unexpected irony.

Alex – It's true my father founded this company. But I've also worked hard to develop it. We've created thousands of jobs—including yours, Mr. Mariani... As you aptly mentioned earlier, building a commercial empire is a bit like conquering the Wild West. Of course, there are the glorious pioneers, but behind them, you need people willing to roll up their sleeves and plough the fields to ensure an abundant harvest.

Robin – And it's precisely those glorious pioneers I wanted to talk to you about, Mr. Kendall. The ones who cleared the land with their sweat, often risking their lives, but never tasted its fruits.

Alex (*irritated*) – Enough with the metaphors, Mr. Mariani... I don't have all night, so stop beating around the bush and tell me why you're here.

Robin – What if I told you this extraordinary success was built on fraud?

Alex – Excuse me...? What are you talking about?

Robin – When your father created his first company forty years ago, it was a classic IT services firm with no specific innovative product. It was only after filing the patent for the biometric smart card that he created Biodatech.

Alex – My father was a visionary. A genius inventor. And how exactly does that make him a fraud?

Robin – Because, Mr. Kendall, your father was not the inventor of that revolutionary product, though he filed the patent under his name and the company's.

Alex processes this revelation.

Alex – That's a serious accusation, Mr. Mariani—completely unfounded unless you have proof. I'm also curious why you waited until your retirement day to bring this up. So, who, in your opinion, is the true inventor of this product?

Robin – A young engineer from that time. He came to present his invention to your father, unable to financially develop or market it on his own.

Alex – Why didn't he just file the patent himself?

Robin – You're aware that protecting an invention is a complex and very costly process, especially internationally. Let's just say this young man was a bit naive. He placed his trust in your father. He needed him to develop the product, and Mr. Kendall lured him in with promises of a partnership.

Alex – That doesn't explain how my father could have stolen his invention.

Robin – By hiring him, quite simply. That way, the card could be considered developed under an employment contract, making it patentable by your father's company, not the young engineer who truly invented it.

Alex – But you're telling me this invention predated his hiring by Biodatech.

Robin – That's why I call it fraud, Mr. Kendall. To deprive this young genius of his invention, your father had his employment contract deliberately backdated by several months.

Alex – And how do you know this?

Robin – Because I was the one who falsified that contract—on your father's orders.

Alex – So, that makes you complicit in this so-called fraud.

Robin – I won't deny it.

Alex – Let's say I believe you. What then?

Robin – Then, instead of being made a partner as promised, this young engineer was fired for professional misconduct he didn't commit... Accused of disclosing strategic information about the patent itself. The ultimate cynicism, wouldn't you agree?

Alex takes a moment to process before counterattacking.

Alex – I don't understand, Mr. Martini...

Robin – Mariani.

Alex – You've worked for Biodatech for forty years. You claim to have been my father's friend, yet he generously kept you employed until retirement, paying you far more than your questionable contributions warranted. And now, just hours before your farewell party, you accuse your former employer of patent theft, in which you yourself were complicit. Why? And more importantly, why now?

Robin – I told you—I can no longer live with this on my conscience.

Alex – You seemed perfectly fine living with it all these years. So why the sudden moral awakening now?

Pause

Robin – Because I learned a few weeks ago that this poor young man took his own life.

Alex – Forty years later, because of a stolen invention?

Robin – No... just a few years later. But I only found out last month, by chance—I met his son at a trade fair. And as you can imagine, this news deeply shook me.

Alex – You know, people have their reasons for taking their own lives... Nothing proves that this story, even if it's true, was the cause of that tragic ending.

Robin – No, I assure you... I did my research. That young man never recovered from being robbed of his invention. He had just married, and his wife was expecting their first child. After being fired by your father, he fell into a downward spiral. He worked odd jobs. He started drinking. He sank into depression... until finally, he did the unthinkable.

Alex – Are you trying to make me feel guilty? None of this is on me. But you..

Robin – I'm not denying my responsibility, Mr. Kendall. I'm talking about a life destroyed. A widow. An orphan.

Alex's phone rings. He picks up.

Alex – Yes, Vanessa? No, I won't take much longer... The CEO of Bank of America? Yes, I know it's urgent... Let him know I'll call back in fifteen minutes, alright? Thanks, Vanessa... (*He hangs up.*) This is all very touching, Mr. Mariani, even if your account seems a bit melodramatic to me. But these are unsubstantiated allegations about alleged wrongdoings from over forty years ago. Likely long past the statute of limitations.

Robin – The pain of being robbed of part of one's soul never fades.

Alex – You've just told me he's dead.

Robin – Indeed, but wouldn't it be just to at least restore his memory?

Alex – Do you always speak in such a pompous tone, or is this your way of mocking me, Mr. Mariani?

Robin – I assure you, I'm not in the mood for jokes. *(He pulls a photo from his pocket and hands it to Alex.)* Here's his picture... taken when he was twenty-five, just a few months before he ended his life. He'd be my age now.

Alex, visibly uncomfortable, glances briefly at the photo.

Alex – As I said, even if these claims were true, they'd be long past the statute of limitations.

Robin – Not if the harm is ongoing, as it is with the patent's exploitation.

Alex – That patent entered the public domain over ten years ago.

Robin – But the derivative products from that patent still generate significant profits today.

Alex – That's your opinion. A highly debatable one.

Robin – In principle, the statute of limitations starts when the infraction is revealed—which is happening now.

Alex – You seem remarkably well-informed for someone claiming to simply want to ease their conscience... Anyone else in your position would've just confessed at church. The priest would've given you absolution, and it'd all be over.

Robin – Sadly, I'm not a believer.

Alex – Either way, I won't give in to blackmail. As you can imagine, this wouldn't be our first lawsuit. And we can afford the best lawyers.

Robin – True, but even if the company weren't condemned, its reputation would still take a serious hit.

Alex – And let's not forget, Mr. Mariani, we're also talking about my father's reputation—a man who can't defend himself.

Robin – The dead can't be absolved of their wrongs, even if they're our parents.

Alex – At the start of this conversation, you said my father considered you a friend, Mr. Mariani. So this is how you treat your friends, Mr. Mariani?

Robin – This isn't about us, Mr. Kendall. It's about setting things right.

Alex – What exactly do you want from me?

A pause.

Robin – You know what? I think I'll take that whisky after all.

Alex hesitates, then pours him a glass.

Alex – You'll excuse me if I don't join you—I'm not retired yet, and I've got plenty to do.

Robin – Including calling that big client you're meeting in New York to finalise that contract on Monday...

Alex – That's none of your business, Mr. Mariani. You were just another obscure employee among the two thousand at Biodatech. And in a few hours, you won't even be part of this company anymore...

Robin – I'll drink to forget such a bleak prospect... Are you sure you won't join me for another toast?

Alex – Positive.

Robin takes a sip of whisky and savours it.

Robin – You're missing out; the second glass is even better than the first. Fifteen years old—you can really taste the oak it matured in.

Alex – Would you like a cigar too?

Robin – No, thank you. I quit smoking. If I plan to enjoy my retirement...

Alex – I'm listening, Mr. Mariani. And please, be brief.

Robin – As I mentioned, my first goal was to unburden my conscience.

Alex – Well, there you go. Mission accomplished. Feeling any lighter?

Robin – And secondly, as much as possible, to repair what can still be repaired.

Alex – Repair? The genius you're talking about is dead, isn't he?

Robin – To clear his name.

Alex – And ruin my father's in the process?

Robin – And, of course, to compensate his widow and orphan.

Alex – I must admit, I'm impressed, Mr. Mariani. I've barely exchanged two words with you before, and now, just hours before your retirement, you plan to destroy everything my father spent his life building. Not to mention how my father ensured you a well-paid position here for life.

Robin – This isn't about me; it's about that man whose life was shattered. I know you're an honourable man, Mr. Kendall. Believe me, now that you know, you won't be able to live with this on your conscience either.

Alex – Look, Mr. Mariani, I don't doubt your sincerity, but you need to understand the situation. Regardless of the outcome of any potential lawsuit, the revelation of this matter would severely tarnish the company's reputation. In the short term, it could even jeopardise the major contract I'm set to finalise in New York on Monday.

Robin – Believe me, I'm fully aware of that.

Alex – Biodatech would have to scrap its planned hires and growth initiatives. We might even face layoffs. And there's even the risk of bankruptcy. Is that really the parting gift you want to leave to the company that has provided for you all these years?

Robin – Now you're the one tugging at my heartstrings, Alex...

Alex – If you don't mind, I'd prefer you kept calling me Mr. Kendall.

Robin – I understand your point of view, rest assured. But try seeing it from my perspective!

Alex – I think I'll stick to mine, thanks...

Robin – For me, this is the last opportunity to set the record straight. I was even considering raising the issue in my speech...

Alex – Your speech? What speech?

Robin – My farewell speech, of course. At my retirement party later today.

Alex – A public confession? In front of all the company's executives gathered for the occasion...?

Robin – Yes... It will likely be painful for everyone, I admit. Painful, but necessary. Maybe somewhat cleansing.

Alex – So you couldn't care less about this company's future. You've been paid handsomely for doing next to nothing all these years..., and now that you're retiring, you want to cheaply absolve yourself of guilt for a patent theft you actively participated in?

Robin – I can imagine how this feels for you. It must be hard learning your father wasn't the hero you believed he was...

Alex – And now you're mocking me?

Robin – Not at all! (*He looks at a photo on the desk.*) That's your son, isn't it?

Alex – Don't bring my son into this.

Robin – One day, he'll take over Biodatech.

Alex – He's five years old.

Robin – Yes... But his future is already secure. Even if he becomes an actor or an art collector, he'll leave the company in others' hands and live off dividends from his shares. And so will his children after him...

Alex – A company isn't some petty kingdom passed from father to son forever. Biodatech isn't Monaco. Scandals don't help maintain prosperity. A company's future depends on its reputation, Mr. Mariani. Sometimes companies go bankrupt, employees lose their jobs, and even CEOs end up unemployed

Robin – True, wealthy children sometimes fare worse than their parents, but they rarely fall into real poverty. The same goes for the working class. Some climb a few rungs on the social ladder, but it's rare for them to reach the top and attain true wealth. Rarer still is staying there long enough to establish a dynasty.

Alex – My father built this company from the ground up. He was a self-made man.

Robin – That's the story you like to tell... A fairy tale the media eagerly helped popularise. The truth is, your grandfather was a banker. Your father studied at Stanford, and you went to Harvard. That so-called “attic” where Biodatech began was actually in your family's private mansion.

Alex – And what about you, Mr. Mariani? Where did you study to land such an enviable position in our company?

Robin – Unfortunately, I never had the chance to pursue higher education. But since I haven't achieved much in life beyond being your father's fixer, I wouldn't call myself a self-made man either.

Alex – So it was just through this vile blackmail that my father kept you on all these years? By the way, I've always wondered—what exactly did you do for this company, Mr. Mariani?

Robin – As I said, at the beginning, I was your father's only employee. I did a bit of everything—accounting, secretarial work, driving, bodyguarding...

Alex – At the beginning... And at the end...?

Robin – Let's say I was your father's... jack-of-all-trades.

Alex – His jack-of-all-trades... So since his death, you've done nothing.

Robin – I admit, sitting in my office surrounded by skeletons was getting tedious. Luckily, I'm retiring today...

Alex – If my father's actions bothered you so much, you could've resigned years ago.

Robin – You're right. I should've acted sooner, but I was a coward.

Alex – And what made you change your mind?

Robin – I didn't want to tarnish your father's reputation. But now that he's gone...

Alex – And it doesn't bother you to sully his memory...?

Robin – That young engineer's death is on us!

Alex – Us? I wasn't even born yet!

Robin – I mean your father, myself... Biodatech!

Alex – But I had nothing to do with it!

Robin – You're still enjoying the wealth, aren't you?

Alex – I see... You're jealous of my success, aren't you? Or is it my father's success you envy? All these years, you were content to take your salary in exchange for your silence. And now you want your share of the pie?

Robin – Not for me. For that man's widow. For his son.

Alex – Specifically?

Robin – We could consider... a symbolic compensation.

Alex – Symbolic?

Robin – Fine, substantial then.

Alex – I could think about it... on the condition that you promise not to spread this story. And especially not to mention it in your farewell speech tonight...

Robin – If we want that unsung genius recognized as the true inventor, it'll be hard to avoid involving the press.

Alex – That's out of the question.

Robin – So your solution is to bury the story with a few million euros?

Alex – Excuse me? You're delusional! I never mentioned millions...

Robin – That patent has earned you over a billion in the last forty years.

Alex suddenly stands.

Alex – That's enough! Do you have any proof to back up these claims? If not, I'll ask you to leave my office immediately.

Very calmly, Robin remains seated and pulls his phone from his pocket.

Robin – I took care to record the conversation I had with your father back then. He gave me instructions for falsifying the employment contract that allowed him to fraudulently claim that patent.

Alex – A forty-year-old recording?

Robin – It wasn't the Stone Age, you know. Tape recorders were very much a thing.

Alex – I see... A tiny tape recorder, straight out of a 1960s spy movie... (*Ironically*) You were very well-prepared for someone allegedly motivated solely by moral concerns.

Robin – Let's just say I thought it wise to take precautions, just in case...

He plugs an earbud into his phone and hands it to Alex, who places it in his ear. Robin presses a button on the phone, and Alex listens carefully before abruptly removing the earbud.

Alex – I've heard enough...

Robin – I understand. Hearing that voice from beyond the grave must be hard, especially when it's the voice of a con artist.

Alex – So you trapped my father to guarantee yourself a comfortable retirement...

Robin – You know your father... He could be ruthless. That recording was my insurance.

Alex – Our insurance...? So, according to you, my father might have had you eliminated to erase the evidence of his wrongdoing. Wonderful. Now you're accusing him of being a potential murderer, too?

Robin – If you only knew all the things I had to do for him... Believe me, it's better they stay buried—because if they ever came to light... But that's not today's topic.

Alex – Then what is today's topic? What do you want from me, exactly?

Robin – If you don't want this matter to go public, we'll need to come to a financial arrangement.

Alex – What's next, stock options?

Robin – I was getting to that...

Alex – So this is blackmail.

Robin – You merely inherited your father's company. You created nothing. And as for your father, he wasn't the genius inventor he pretended to be. He was an impostor. A thief. Maybe just a thief of ideas, but a thief all the same. Yes, I despise the arrogance that comes with your privilege.

Alex – So, you're playing vigilante now?

Robin – When I was a kid, I used to pretend to be Robin Hood.

Alex – Let's cut to the chase. How much do you want?

Robin – Shares in the company you're about to take public. It won't really cost you anything—it's just a bit of paperwork for you. It won't impact Biodatech's cash flow.

Alex – So we're no longer talking about the widow and the orphan...?

Robin – If we want to avoid this becoming public, with the disastrous consequences you yourself mentioned, it's better this stays between us, isn't it?

Alex – Robin Hood stole from the rich to give to the poor, not to line his own pockets... You're a thief, too. And a blackmailer on top of it.

Robin – Is stealing from a thief still stealing?

Alex – How much?

Robin – Let's say 5%. I'm not greedy—it won't even hurt Biodatech.

Alex – I thought you were here to right a wrong. You disappoint me, Mr. Mariani.

Robin – I'll handle my good deeds in my own way.

Alex – A foundation, perhaps...? Or a generous donation to SOS Suicide...

Robin – Why not? Consider it a parting gift for now.

Alex – A very expensive gift...

Robin – What were you planning to give me? A fishing rod?

Alex – How did you guess?

Robin – So...?

Alex – How do I know you don't have a copy of the recording?

Robin – I'll own 5% of the company. I have no interest in the company going bankrupt or losing value on the stock market.

Alex – So, who's the bigger scoundrel here, Mr. Mariani?

Robin – The one with the most shares—which, in this case, is you.

Robin places a document on the desk.

Alex – You thought of everything...

Robin – All you have to do is sign.

Alex – You know what? I'll take that whisky after all.

He pours himself a large glass and downs it in one go.

Robin – I don't mean to pressure you, but I do need time to revise my speech.

Alex hesitates again.

Alex – Hold on... Before I sign, I'd like to verify your claims. To confirm if this man is truly dead—and if he really took his own life. What was his name?

Robin – The name? Robin Mariani...

Alex – Excuse me?

Robin – That little IT genius? That was me.

Alex – So you lied.

Robin – Call it a metaphor... That young inventor is long gone. In a way, he agreed to disappear at the age of twenty-five by relinquishing his invention under pressure.

Alex – Really?

Robin – I was broke. I knowingly signed that backdated contract. Your father convinced me I'd never be able to protect my invention. At least he ensured the patent—and I—stayed with the company for life.

Alex – So now that you've had your cake, you want another slice.

Robin – I made a pact with the devil. The devil's dead. I'm free. I owe it to my family. To my children... and to my grandchildren.

Alex – Even so, it was my father who founded this company, who took all the risks...

Robin – That's true. I chose the easy path. Job security. At the cost of a pact that robbed me of my invention. Your father took all the credit and pocketed the profits, which you now inherit. In exchange, I was given the guarantee of a quiet, modest life without want.

Alex – You told me you didn't have any qualifications. So you're not an IT engineer.

Robin – That's right. Back then, I was just a self-taught prodigy. Which is also why I was so easily duped by your father. You see, in the end, I didn't entirely lie to you. Now, the old man I've become seeks to avenge the young man I betrayed.

Alex – Avenge yourself? On me? But I've done nothing!

Robin – No, like all heirs. You enjoy the privilege of being born on the winning side.

Alex – Without my father, and without me, that invention would never have generated so much money, and you know it. And if Biodatech hadn't taken the patent, someone else would have. That's life... That's how it goes...

Robin – Yes, indeed... As Shakespeare said, 'All the world's a stage.' And the business world is no exception. But just because a playwright doesn't act in their own play doesn't mean they're not entitled to royalties.

Alex signs the document and hands it to Robin, who takes it.

Alex – I wish you a happy retirement, Mr. Mariani. And do yourself a favour—never set foot here again if you want to enjoy your retirement. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to get back to work... for my shareholders.

Robin – You'll come to my farewell party, won't you?

Alex – My absence would certainly raise eyebrows...

Robin – No hard feelings then... You'll still give me that fishing rod, right?

Alex – Don't push your luck, Mr. Mariani...

Robin – This is usually where someone lights a cigar, isn't it?

Alex stands to signal Robin to leave.

Alex – But you've quit smoking, haven't you? Or was that just another lie? By the way, you seem quite good at making up stories. You call yourself a computer genius—didn't ask AI to make this one up for you, did you?

Robin – You heard the recording...

Alex – With today's tech, you can make anyone say anything—even the dead.

Robin – How do you know you haven't just signed your own pact with the devil?

Alex – Is that all?

Robin – Just one last thing I've always dreamed of doing before I leave...

Robin approaches the portrait of the company's founder and, with a marker, draws a small moustache and a lock of hair in the style of Adolf Hitler.

Alex – I'm not sure what's stopping me from knocking you out right now.

Robin – Maybe it's the fear you wouldn't win... Still, I know Biodatech is in good hands.

Alex – Here's to never crossing paths with you again, Mr. Mariani.

Robin – With 5% of the company's shares, I'm now its largest minority shareholder. I might just decide to take a seat on the board of directors.

Alex – Now I understand why my father wanted to kill you. Be careful—I might just hire someone to finish the job for him.

Robin – They say business is war by other means... but that would be a mistake. Because, if you're interested, I have an idea for another product that could revolutionise the market.

Alex – Really?

Robin – A new electronic card combining the power of quantum computing with a chip mimicking the function of human neurons. Believe me, the possibilities are staggering.

Alex – And you're not afraid of having your invention stolen again?

Robin – Thanks to the money you just handed me, I can patent it myself. Who knows? I might even start my own company to bring it to market... See you later, Mr. Kendall. I need to revise my speech.

Robin exits. Alex looks at the portrait of his father. Defeated, he pours himself a whisky and downs it in one gulp. He sits back down. The phone rings.

Alex – Yes, Vanessa...? The eulogy? Oh yes, my speech for Mr. Mariani's retirement... No, that won't be necessary. I think I've learned enough about the man... Oh, one question, Vanessa. He told me he had no qualifications, that he was self-taught. Can you check his CV? *(Pause)* A drama school graduate? Are you sure? No, no, never mind... *(He hangs up, takes the whisky bottle, and looks at it.)* Seems like the genie's back in the bottle... *(He pours another glass, drinks it, and grimaces.)* Something about this whisky tastes off...

Blackout.

The End

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez was first a drummer for several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then began a career writing television scripts before turning to theatre and writing plays. He has written close to a hundred scripts for television and as many plays, some of which have already become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). He is one of the most produced contemporary playwrights in France and in other francophone countries. Several of his plays are also available in Spanish and English, and are regularly produced in the United States and Latin America.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>). However, public productions are subject to SACD filing.

Other plays by the same author translated in English

Comedies for 2

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

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman,
one giant leap backward for
Mankind
The Way 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
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
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police
Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
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
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not
cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
For real and for fun
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lost time Chronicles
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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Avignon – January 2025
<https://comediatheque.net/>
Play available for free download
ISBN : 978-2-38602-307-1