

“ONLY WHEN I DREAM”

ACT I

Scene 1

The Scene opens on an untidy kitchenette – empty beer cans etc. – and a young man slumped across the table breathing heavily. A buzzer is heard loud and insistent. The young man stirs and then slumps down again – the buzzer carries on. The young man looks up in a confused way.

Seb Shut up for God’s sake! (*Buzz Buzz*) Sling your hook! (*Buzz Buzz*) Alright – I’m coming! (*He moves away from the table and we can now see he is in a wheelchair. He goes to a bellpush by a speaker and presses it. He makes his way back to the table*). Who the bloody hell can that be? It’s only 9 – o’clock. (*He fishes through the cans on the table until he find one with some dregs in it. He drinks with some relish*). Ah – that’s better. Ooo my head. Oh – no fags! (*He crumples up an empty cigarette packet. He goes through the ashtray until he finds a reasonable dog-end. He lights it up with a cough. There is a brisk knock on the door and instantly a girl in a nurses uniform enters. She looks around brightly*).

Pet I thought you were still in bed – but there you are up, dressed, bright eyed and bushy tailed.....

Seb Sod off!

Pet And good morning to you too – not in the best of humours obviously. Never mind I shall soon cheer you up.

Seb I said sod off!

Pet (*Looking at some papers she has taken from her bag*) Now let me see – you are Sebastian Llewelyn-Brown.

Seb Get lost!

Pet Shall I take that as an affirmative?

Seb Take it how you like.

Pet (*Reading*) Paralysed from the waist down.

Seb Hoo-rah Mrs Bloody Sherlock Holmes.

Pet Crushed vertebrae in the lower lumbar region. Now how did you do that?

Seb Shelling peanuts.

Pet We are in a mood aren’t we?

- Seb** Well I can't speak for you. I was fine until you started ringing that thing. I was having a dream – a beautiful dream. I can run and jump you know – and turn cartwheels – but only when I dream.
- Pet** Yes I see. Have you been in that chair all night?
- Seb** What's it to you?
- Pet** In fact have you been in that chair all of yesterday and all night?
- Seb** If that fierce look is supposed to frighten me you are failing miserably. What's it to you if I've been in here for the past fortnight?
- Pet** I'll tell you what. If you keep your weight on your buttocks for hours and hours without changing your position you'll get sores – nasty, smelly, runny sores. Come on – let's go through to the bedroom, get you on the bed and I'll massage your behind – get the circulation going.
- Seb** Why bother? If I get sores I won't feel them. You could cut my bloody legs off and I wouldn't feel it. Go on – stick a knife in them I would even flinch. (*He picks up a half empty can*).
- Pet** (*Snatching the can from his hand*) Right! I've had enough of your bugging about. First of all I shall make some coffee and tidy this pig-sty up – give you chance to sober up.
- Seb** Don't you tell me what to do. Just because my legs don't work there's nothing wrong with my head you can't.....
- Pet** Shut up! I'm fed up with your wingeing, self-pitying crap. Pass me that ash-tray. (*He passes the ash-tray and she starts to tidy up*)
- Seb** Am I entitled to ask.....
- Pet** No you're not – shut up! Do you take milk and sugar in your coffee. No – looking at you – you'd better have it black and strong.
- Seb** (*Sarcastically*) Thank you.
- Pet** That's better - a few more “pleases” and “thankyou's” and we shall get on far more amicably.
What's your name – Sebastian? Your parents must have a sense of humour.
Llewelyn-Brown – I bet your Mum was a Llewelyn.
- Seb** How did you know?
- Pet** Didn't fancy being plain Mrs Brown did she?
- Seb** (*Smiling for the first time*) You're right there. She made my Dad change his name. Now you know about my family perhaps I might be allowed to know who you are.

Pet Oh sorry – most remiss of me. It says in the hand-book I’m supposed to announce my name, rank and qualifications as soon as I meet a client. I’m Nurse Sober and before you make a joke – I’ve heard them all many, many times before.

Seb That means nothing to me. To what do I owe the dubious pleasure of this early morning, uninvited visit?

Pet A very fair question. I am your friendly (and some say sexy) physiotherapist from EMIS.

Seb Who?

Pet Executive Medical Insurance Service (UK) Limited. Don’t forget the “(UK) Limited” because we’d treat you much better if you were a Yank.

Seb That still doesn’t explain why you disturbed my well-earned rest.

Pet *(Referring to the papers)* You are account number 172829 and are entitled to our Platinum Service.

Seb Gawd – if you’re the Platinum Service I’d hate to see what the Standard one looks like.

Pet Oh very cutting – still in a nasty mood aren’t we? Well that’s cleared up most of the debris. Come on – on the bed and off with those trousers.

Seb Let me have my coffee first.

Pet Right – I’ll start with the legs and feet first then. *(She dives down and pulls up one of his legs on to her lap)* How can you afford our Platinum Service? It’s only for the rich.

Seb I am rich.

Pet Are you? That must be nice.

Seb I’d sooner walk.

Pet True – but if you can’t walk you might as well sit around in comfort.

Seb Fat lot of comfort – sitting in this all day!

Pet *(Pulling off his sock and casting it aside with disdain)* Don’t you go out?

Seb I used to, but people kept staring at me so I don’t bother any more.

Pet You don’t bother to change your socks either do you?

Seb There doesn’t seem much point.

Pet Oh there is. How long have you been out of hospital.

Seb Nearly a week.

Pet Did they not explain to you that even though your feet don't work they still sweat?

Seb Not that I remember.

Pet Well they do! Your feet smell like old cheese.

Seb I'm sorry – I never thought.

Pet Never thought what?

Seb I never thought anyone would be messing about with my feet.

Pet Messing about? Messing about? I'll have you know I am an expert. I've got not end of certificates for this "messing about". These – my old China – are healing hands. Poooh – at the moment somewhat smelly healing hands. She squirts some oil on to her hands and sniffs. Ah that's better – mimosa.

Seb The kettle's boiled.

Pet Right coffees all round. I deserve a cup after your feet! *(She gets up and starts making the coffee).*

Seb Oh for goodness sake stop going on! I'm supposed to be the one bemoaning my fate.

Pet Ah yes – struck down in the bloom of youth eh?

Seb You might say that – if you were a callous, unthinking cow – you might say that!

Pet Sorry. But it's true isn't it? How did you do it?

Seb Playing rugby.

Pet Ah – a self-inflicted wound eh?

Seb Hardly. I was the hooker – the scrum collapsed on top of me and everybody else dived on top of that – including the referee I think – they all got up – I didn't!

Pet I see. So what's the prognosis? *(He looks at her blankly)* What did the medical experts say about your future prospects in the dancing field that is?

Seb I'm buggered from the waist down.

Pet Ah yes – I'm sure that's the medical term they used. But they must have told you how they expect you to progress.

Seb No they didn't.

Pet But your spinal cord isn't severed is it?

Seb No.

Pet So there must be some hope of improvement – no matter how small. What did they say?

Seb Oh I see. Yes they were very definite. Words like “possibly”, “some time”, “never”, “partial”, “somewhere over the rainbow if I follow the yellow-brick road”. I think it was so manged up they don't have must hope. Shall I say I am not optimistic. I have given my rugby boots away.

Pet Well you never know. Where's there's a spinal chord, no matter how “manged up” there is hope. Shall I minister to your legs with these healing hands in case one day they decide to work? *(She gives him his coffee and sits down)*

Seb Very noble of you I'm sure, but I'm afraid your efforts will be in vain.

Pet There's nothing noble about it I can assure you. I'm paid very handsomely by the hour for my Florrie Nightingale efforts on your behalf.

Seb How many hours?

Pet Two hours every other day – eight hours a week – aren't you a lucky boy?

Seb I wouldn't have said so.

Pet Oh dear – still feeling sorry for yourself eh?

Seb Wouldn't you?

Pet Too true – I'd be an absolute brat. Couldn't you live with you family?

Seb You must be joking. Dear Mama lives in the backwoods of the Loire Valley in France with an ageing hippy and dutiful Daddy is making a fortune on the markets of the Far East with a barbie doll mostly consisting of silicone. Both their new partners don't like me and I might add that the feeling is mutual.

Pet So that's why you're rich.

Seb I suppose so. But the Rugby Club had insurance, I had insurance, my grandmother left me a fortune, so did my uncle, Mater and Pater are rolling in it and I earned quite a bit myself working on the Stock Market – so money is not an issue with me.

Pet Hence the Platinum Policy. Now let's get down to business. What do you want to be called?

Seb Petal?

Pet I shall ignore that. I can call you Mr. Llewelyn-Brown, Sebastian or Sir – take your pick.

Seb My friends call me Seb.

Pet I'd better call you Sir then.

Seb What about you?

Pet What about me?

Seb Well I can't call you Ms Sober can I?

Pet I don't see why not. Anyway it's Miss Sober, or you can call me Nurse, or you can call me Gorgeous if you wish.

Seb Why are you being so coy. You must have a christian name – everybody's got a christian name.

Pet Pet!

Seb What?

Pet Pet. It's short for Petula – my mother was a fan of some old singer. But I tell you this. If you call me Petula you most definitely won't walk again or breathe. Only my mum calls me Petula.

Seb Right – Pet it is then. So I suppose you hate your mother as well.

Pet No my mum's lovely. I ring her every day – talk to her for hours. You didn't drink all that beer did you?

Seb No I had some friends round last night.

Pet Did they bring the grass?

Seb What grass?

Pet Oh come off it – I don't use it myself but I know what it smells like. This place reeks of it.

Seb Ah the magic maruana. It helps me forget and it passes the time.

Pet It can also be the start of a slippery slope you know.

Seb I think that's my business.

Pet Quite right! But I don't think too much of your so-called friends – bringing you stuff like that.

Seb They're the only friends I've got left.

Pet What about your rugby buddies?

Seb Oh they all came to see me – once – but now the season's over they're conspicuous by their absence. The President of the Club of course rings me up for five minutes every week to get an update “don't you know”.

Pet Well what do you tell him?

Seb The last time I told him not to bother. He sounded bored and I know I was.

Pet (*Putting her cup down with a flourish*). Right – let's have a go at that other smelly foot. And then on to the bed. Can you get into the bath on your own?

Seb Is that a none-too-subtle hint?

Pet Yes – most definitely. Can you?

Seb Yes. I've got one with a little door that you can sit in. I told you all mod cons and I promise to use it before you come again.

Pet And perhaps you could spend your nights in bed and not on your poor, sore bum.

Seb I'll try – but you know what it's like – this gay, social whirl that I live in. I may have a few too many again.

Pet I see. Are your so-called friends coming round again tonight.

Seb Yes I expect so.

Pet Don't they have to get up for work?

Seb No. They're down on their luck at the moment – you know – between jobs.

Pet How long between jobs?

Seb Some time I think. Look I don't bloody-well know. What does it matter?

Pet There's no need to be so defensive.

Seb I'm not.

Pet Alright if you say so.

Seb I do bloody-well say so Miss Sober. You mind your own business!

Pet I'm sorry sir, I'll get on with my job sir. I will pull my forelock sir, or curtsy if you wish sir, after all you pay the bills sir.

Seb Yes I do and I think it would be a good idea if you remembered that. Have you finished with my useless, bloody legs?

Pet Most definitely. Now we will start on your bum and let's hope it's not as smelly as your feet sir. *(There is a silence)*.

Seb Give me ten minutes to have a bath.

Pet I've got work to do.

Seb Please. I'll pay if you go over your time.

Pet It's not the money – I've got another appointment in just over an hour. Come on let's get you into the bath.

Seb I can manage thank you.

Pet Surely you're not still shy after what you've been through.

Seb Not normally.

Pet But you are with me?

Seb Yes.

Pet Right. I want you on that bed and bathed in ten minutes.

Seb Yes Petula. *(They both laugh)*

Scene 2

The same day at about 9.00 p.m.

(Seb is sitting by the table. Priscilla - a rather cheap looking girl - is lying on the sofa with a beer can in her hand and Jason - a scruffy young man - is sitting backwards on a chair facing Seb. The air is full of smoke and the table is littered with cans and ashtrays.)

Seb *(Very drunk)* Any more beer? Anything to smoke?

Jason I couldn't get any more beer or grass old chum because as you know I haven't any cash and you only gave me ten quid last night.

Seb I thought I gave you fifty pounds.

Jason I wish you had mate – don't we Pris?

Pris *(Disinterestedly)* I wish. We haven't had fifty quid for ages have we Jase?

Seb *(Pulling his wallet out)* Look I had two hundred quid on Monday and now I've only got fifty.

Jason Well we haven't had it mate.

Seb Well someone has.

Pris I hope you're not accusing us Seb.

Jason If you are we can soon sod off. We won't stay where we're not trusted will we Pris?

Pris There's plenty of places we'd be welcome.

Seb Look – all I said was that I had two hundred pounds three days ago that's all.

Jason Right that's it Pris – let's go.

Pris You wanna remember who your friends are. Who is it who comes round every night and looks after you – has a laugh and a drink. I don't see anyone else rushing round to keep you company.

Seb Look I'm not accusing you – perhaps I gave it to someone else.

Jason No – we'd better go if that's the way you feel.

Seb Look – I'm sorry – you're my mates – I didn't mean to offend you. Take this other fifty and get some more grass for tomorrow. *(He gives the money to Priscilla)*

Pris We won't get much for fifty quid – not these days – will we Jase?

Jason I'm afraid not – grass is a bit expensive at the moment. We really need at least a ton to score for a week or so. We have to take the risk of buying it and we don't want to do it every night.

Seb Well that's all the cash I've got I'm afraid.

Jason You've got a cash card – we could soon get some more.

Seb I'm not exactly mobile – or hadn't you noticed?

Pris We can deal with all that – just give us your PIN number and we'll go and get some.

Seb I don't think so.

Jason You see – you don't trust us do you?

Pris Oh yes – you think just because we're broke we'd rob you rotten. Well I'll tell you this – some of us have standards.

Jason Oh don't bother to talk to him Pris – he's showing his true face now – a bloody rich git! Don't trust the likes of us.

Pris I don't believe it – after all we've done for you. Stay on your own then – your toffee-nosed friends soon dropped you didn't they? Come on Jase let's go out and have some fun.

Seb Oh take the bloody card – I don't care!

Pris Well what's the PIN number?

Seb 7949. Now come on – let's have a drink and have a laugh.

Pris I think we ought to go and get the money now – then we can score tonight and have a smoke.

Seb No – I've got plenty of booze – we'll get the grass tomorrow.

Pris (*Whining*) Oh – I was looking forward to having a smoke tonight.

Seb No – we'll have some wine – I've got some in the fridge in the other room.

Pris (*Making for the door with the card*) No – come on let's go and get some cash.....

Jason Now Pris – don't be a nuisance we can get the gear tomorrow. I'll go and fetch the wine. (*He exits to the kitchen*)

Pris (*Sitting close to Seb*) What you could do with is a holiday – somewhere in the sun so you could relax, chill out – it would do you the world of good.

Seb That would be a bit difficult in my case. I can't see my trotting up the aircraft steps.

Pris Oh you'd be surprised how they cater for the handicapped these days. They've got ramps and lifts on the flights and in the hotels. I'm sure Jason would come with us – the three of us could have a great time. We could look after you. (*Jason returns with a bottle*) Jase – Seb was saying we ought to go on holiday with him. We could go to Florida – I've always wanted to go to Disneyland.

Jason Florida? Oh that's a great idea Seb – when?

Seb What?

Jason When shall we go to Florida?

Seb Whose going to Florida?

Pris We are you silly boy.

Seb Who said so?

Pris You did.

Seb I did? When?

Pris Just now – don't you remember? (*Seb slumps forward*) He's bloody-well passed out. Oi! Seb! Seb! (*She pushes him*)

Jason Leave him – let's go.

Pris Do you remember the number? It's 7949 we'll go now and get some cash.

Jason He's got half a dozen bottles of wine in the other room – posh looking stuff. We'll take them. He won't know how many we've drunk. What's all this about Florida?

Pris Well it's worth a try isn't it?

Jason Too true – anything we can get out of the pathetic git.

Pris Look in his wallet – see if he's got anything else worth nicking.

Jason Nah – come on – we've done well tonight – he'll still be here tomorrow.

Pris That's true we always know where to find him – he can't go far. (*They exit laughing. Seb mumbles, gets comfortable and sleeps.*)

Scene 3

Same as above – next morning at 9.00 a.m.

(The buzzer is sounding again. Seb jerks upright)

Seb Alright, alright, alright – I'm coming. *(He presses the switch to open the door and moves back to the table).* Oh my head – why do I do it? *(The door bursts open and Pet enters.)*

Pet I knew it! I knew it! You've been in that chair all night again haven't you?

Seb And good morning to you Petula – would you like a drink?

Pet Don't you Petula me you stupid fool! Didn't I tell you yesterday not to sleep in the chair all night?

Seb I hadn't intended to.

Pet Passed out did you?

Seb I suppose I must have done. I'll have a cup if you're making it.

Pet I'm not your maid you know. *(She switches on the kettle)* Get on the bed – now!

Seb Hang on a minute – you're supposed to come every other day aren't you? Unless I'm so hung over I've lost a day. I haven't have I?

Pet No you haven't. My next appointment isn't until ten and I pass here so I thought I'd pop in and see how you managed. Just as well I did. Come on - I'll give your back and behind a massage.

Seb Well let me drink my coffee first before you man-handle me.

Pet Why don't you have one too?

Pet I shouldn't. Let's clear that stuff off the table. *(She clears cans and bottles and throws them in the bin)* I see your friends were here again.

Seb You noticed.

Pet *(Sniffing)* At least you weren't smoking grass.

Seb No not last night – we had a quiet night drinking wine and the odd beer.

Pet How much did you drink?

Seb I don't know – who cares?

Pet Well you must know how much you started with.

Seb Does it matter?

Pet Yes it does.

Seb Alright – let me think if it’s so important. There were eight cans of lager in the fridge and a couple of bottles of white wine and half a dozen bottles of rather nice Burgundy in the spare room.

Pet (*Looking in the fridge*) Well this is empty of booze and anything else. Don’t you eat? (*She bustles offstage and shouts*) ...there’s no Burgundy in here....(*she returns*)

Seb It must have been some night if we drank eight bottles of wine and eight cans of lager between three of us.

Pet Don’t start patting your macho chest yet. There’s only six cans and two bottles in this bin.

Seb Don’t be daft – there should be another six bottles somewhere.

Pet Yes – I should think they took a walk with your friends. How many friends did you say there were?

Seb Just the two – Jason and Priscilla.

Pet So the three of you had eight cans of lager and two bottles of wine and by the looks of you I’d say you drank most of it and your friends took their’s home. Is this your wallet? (*Seb grabs for it and searches through it*). Anything missing?

Seb No – not really.

Pet What the hell does that mean? Either there’s something missing or there isn’t!

Seb Well – there was fifty quid in there I think – but I’m sure I gave it to Jason to get some more booze for tonight.

Pet And that’s all is it?

Seb Well more or less.

Pet Oh come on – you’re acting like a child – what else?

Seb My cash card’s gone – but it’s no use to anyone unless they have the PIN number.

Pet And they haven’t got the PIN number have they? (*No answer*) Sebastian? They haven’t got the PIN number have they?

Seb I’m not sure – I don’t think so.

Pet How can you not now if you told them?

Seb I was a bit confused last night. They said it was a question of trust and I didn’t want to offend them – they’ve been good to me.

Pet So you gave them your card – and the PIN number.

Seb Yes.

Pet Right – so to sum up last night’s little escapade. They got fifty pounds out of your wallet, six bottles of good Burgundy and the chance to empty your bank account.

Seb More or less.

Pet More or less nothing! That’s exactly what they’ve got.

Seb I did say I was confused.

Pet For “confused” substitute “legless” – er sorry.

Seb You’re forgiven. How I was confused is unimportant but confused I was. However I don’t remember numbers very well at the best of times so there’s a chance that when I’m “confused” I could easily get a number wrong couldn’t I?

Pet You crafty sod! You gave them the wrong number!

Seb Just slightly. When it comes to money that was my profession and even when I’m absolutely “confused”.....

Pet ..ratted..

Seb ... ratted my natural financial acumen remains sharp. *(They both laugh).*

Pet You lied!