

## ACT 1, SCENE 1

*Paris. Spring. The time is now. A stylish bedroom with a double bed and adjoining dressing-room alcove. JACQUES is asleep in bed. He snores loudly once and turns over.*

*Enter BRETT, in joyful, rugged, muscular form, naked and wet from the shower. He's drying his hair with one end of a towel, while casually covering his private parts with the other.*

BRETT. You say something?

JACQUES *(emerges from under the covers, sees BRETT, and groans. )* Oh my God!

BRETT *(shrugs. JACQUES sits up, his chest naked. BRETT is searching for something.)* Excuse me?

JACQUES. I was dreaming you were a bad dream. Didn't I?... Weren't you?... What are you doing in *here*?

BRETT *(matter-of-fact)*. Can't find my underpants.

JACQUES *(grunts, reflects, then feels with his feet, and reaches down inside the bed. He retrieves the underpants and sheepishly tosses them over.)* *(sarcastic)*. Recognise these?

*(BRETT pulls on the underpants behind a chair. )*

BRETT. Perfect. *(Adjusting himself.)* Well, did you feel properly "conquered," sir?

JACQUES. What!?

BRETT. Last night.

JACQUES *(sits bolt upright. He locates and puts on his pyjama jacket, leaving it unbuttoned. )* Brett, isn't it? Where did you sleep?

BRETT. Well, I went to bed in the guest room, as you called it...

JACQUES. Ah yes, I remember that.

BRETT. Right. Till I had to go to the bathroom. *(Laughs.)* Couldn't find my way back. This place of yours is enormous. And so dark.

JACQUES. Most apartments are at night.

BRETT. But I found *this* room. The bed is so big. Did you really feel conquered? That *was* your word for you-know-what.

*JACQUES claps his hand to his head.*

JACQUES (*aside*). The past is a fertile field.

BRETT. Huh? Well, that's what you said, but you seemed to like it ... So did I.

*JACQUES, embarrassed, harrumphs and steps out of bed. He winces as he discreetly feels his bottom while hastily adjusting his pyjamas.*

JACQUES (*grunts*). Let's move on, shall we? ... Though you will be moving out.

BRETT (*interrupts, proudly thrusting his pelvis forward*). Wham slam, man, yair! Bonzer feeling, ain't it?

JACQUES. Huh? Now, now, now, what's on the program for you?

BRETT. First off, I've gotta go see my mother. Urgent! That's the move-on I've gotta get.

*BRETT begins to exit.*

JACQUES (*calls*). No, no! There's time. See who? Come back here. But put something decent on first.

*(Pause.)*

*BRETT re-enters zipping up form-fitting jeans. Nothing on top. He sits coolly on the bed.*

BRETT. Covering the utensils.

JACQUES. You mean essentials.

BRETT (*grins*). You sure thought so last night.

JACQUES (*buttoning up his pyjama jacket and moving about nervously*). Is that all you remember? Tell me all the same. Last night. There are bits that are blank to me.

BRETT. No, sorry, I gotta go. My mum, all alone in the hotel.

JACQUES (*confused*). Wait! Just make a couple of things clear.

BRETT. You remember. You gave me the guest room but you poured two whiskies.

JACQUES (*slightly dazed*). I did, didn't I?

BRETT. That you did, Mr Jacques.

JACQUES. Well, strange things happen in the middle of the night.

BRETT (*smiling*). Strange? You sure can change your tune.

JACQUES. Look, be serious. I'm a happily married man – or was until my wife passed away.

BRETT. Oh.

JACQUES. Six months ago.

BRETT. So we're both on our own ... I reckon a lot of people are.

JACQUES. God, how did all this begin? Oh yes, the corner café.

BRETT. You helped me order. I was starving.

JACQUES. How did you say it – a badgette? No wonder the waiter didn't understand you.

BRETT. And a café. I can say that.

JACQUES. So the waiter brought you what you ordered – a stick of plain bread one meter long.

BRETT. And the tiniest cup of coffee I've ever seen in my life.

(*They laugh together.*)

JACQUES. This isn't Sydney, you know. But you'll soon catch on.

BRETT. How come you speak English so good?

JACQUES. Ah! I was born here in Paris. But my mother was English. Same as my wife. And I had a long career in international banking. It all helps.

BRETT. My mother was born in England. Went to Australia as a little girl. Perhaps I'll introduce you.

JACQUES *(laughs)*. I've no travel plans right now.

BRETT. She's here! At the hotel. Been trying to tell you.

JACQUES. Ah!

BRETT. Totally shagged out from the trip, be sure of that.

*(JACQUES sits down facing BRETT.)*

JACQUES. Mmm, so what are your plans?

*(BRETT starts doing push-ups on the bed.)*

BRETT. I do fifty of these every morning. Religious. That's how I keep in shape.

JACQUES. How old are you, son?

BRETT. 23. Great age, eh? *(Jumps off the bed.)* I'll get my shirt. Better go check on the old lady. *(Exits.)*

JACQUES *(calls)*. Hold on, not saying goodbye?

BRETT *(calls)*. Be enough time for that.

*(Front door bell rings.)*

I'll get it, you're not dressed. *(Pause. Calls to JACQUES)*. There's a lady here. *Beaujour!*

ELODIE *(off)*. Bonjour.

*(Enter ELODIE alone. Kisses JACQUES.)*

ELODIE. Hello, Papa. *(Points.)* There's a young man out there. Half naked! Who is he? What's he doing?

JACQUES *(mock blithely)*. Oh, that must be Brett. An Australian student. He's doing some ... odd jobs for me.

ELODIE *(consults her watch)*. He comes early.

JACQUES. He's young. They do at his age.

*(ELODIE tidies up her father's bedroom, including the bed. Re-enter BRETT carrying his shirt and eyeing ELODIE.)*

JACQUES. Still here, young man?

BRETT. Excuse me, I'm just going. Just wanted to say, I hope I didn't startle the young lady.

JACQUES. I don't think so. This is my daughter, Elodie. Well, off you go. Put your shirt on first. This isn't Bondi Beach.

BRETT. I will, except it's horrible. Been wearing it three days. Since I left home. *(Taps his wrist watch. Addresses ELODIE.)* Hi!

ELODIE. Beaujour again. *(Laughs.)* I'm Madame Texier, Jacques' daughter. I understand you're handy. I might have something for you myself.

BRETT *(interested)*. Oh?

*(ELODIE checks BRETT'S physique.)*

ELODIE. Yes, you're obviously in good working condition.

JACQUES. I'll get dressed while you're chatting.

*(JACQUES goes into the dressing-room alcove. BRETT begins to put his shirt on.)*

ELODIE. I can help with that shirt.

BRETT *(confused)*. Huh? I'm putting it on!

ELODIE. I mean have it washed and ironed.

BRETT. I prefer T-shirts at home. Down under. Except for the flies and mozzies.

ELODIE: Mozzies?

BRETT. Mosquitoes. Bleed you to death in a flash, they can. *(Slaps imaginary mosquitoes.)*

ELODIE. Mmm! Not many young men like you around here. The lifestyle is so different. Too easy.

BRETT. The conquering hero, that's what I call myself. *(Laughs.)*

JACQUES (off). Son, you keep your exploits to yourself.

ELODIE. I'm sure there's some odd jobs at my place. You might like to look around, anyway.

BRETT. Look?

ELODIE. At my apartment. But it's not as big as this.

BRETT. Ah!

ELODIE. Mmm, *l'Australie*, my dream country. All that sunshine and space and the friendliest people in the world.

BRETT. I reckon.

ELODIE. I've heard all about you beach boys. They say you've got it all. Mind if I check your strength?

*(BRETT extends an arm. ELODIE squeezes his fist.)*

BRETT *(laughs)*. Ouch! Be careful.

ELODIE *( marvels)*. You could drive nails in with that.

JACQUES (off). Elodie, for chrissakes! What are you playing at? That boy is no toy. *(Re-enters dressed smartly.)*

*(ELODIE runs her hands playfully over BRETT'S chest. BRETT pulls away.)*

ELODIE. Yes, Papa. But a young strong Australian has always been my ideal in a man.

JACQUES. Ideal? Obsession would be more like it.

BRETT *( admiring JACQUES)*. Smart gear.

JACQUES. Sorry?

BRETT. Your clothes!

ELODIE. He is cute though, Papa, isn't he?

JACQUES. I've no idea about that.

ELODIE     *(laughs)*. But, of course, my generation is too old for him.

JACQUES   *(sighs)*. You never fail to disappoint me.

ELODIE.    Well, Papa, I'd better be going, I can see you're in good hands. My father's retired, you know, Brett. So I've got to keep an eye on him.

BRETT.     A married lady, are you, Madam Tex...?

ELODIE.    Texier. That was my young husband's name. *(Pause.)* His family didn't think we were suited.

BRETT.     Oh?

ELODIE.    Madame, his mother, wasn't all that much older than me.

JACQUES.   The only person who suited Jean-Philippe was himself.

ELODIE.    Now don't start that again. Before you go, Mr Australian, do tell me about the sharks. I've heard they can give a really bad bite.

BRETT.     Bite? And the rest! *(His chest swells.)* Big Whites are the bad bastards to watch out for.

ELODIE.    You've already had an encounter?

BRETT.     Me? Funny thing is, humans aren't their favourite food. They confuse us with seals and dolphins.

ELODIE.    In all that water, I understand.

JACQUES.   Brett, isn't your mother waiting?

BRETT.     The trick is never to panic.

ELODIE.    No?

BRETT.     Splash about for all you're worth, it slows them down. But stay calm, stay cool. Let the monster get in real close, then punch it hard in the eye. Hard as you can. They hate that and nearly always swim away.

JACQUES    *(fascinated)*. Is that what you do?

BRETT. Me? I live out in the mulga. The outback. No damn sharks out there! (*Laughs.*)

(*ELODIE and JACQUES look disappointed. BRETT starts checking his pockets.*)

ELODIE. You need something?

BRETT. Our hotel. I hope I can find it. I had the card somewhere. (*Finds the card.*) Ah, here it is.

ELODIE (*sweetly*). If I can help...

JACQUES (*snatches the card*). Show me that. ... It's close by! Near the café. You can walk. Two minutes. Anyone'll show you.

BRETT. Well, I'll be off then. Nice to meet you, Madam Tex. I'm going walkabout.

ELODIE (*producing her own visiting card*). Here! My address. Put it in your pocket. Just in case.

BRETT. Hmm? Tah. Well, bye and thanks for everything. (*Nods to ELODIE and JACQUES.*)

JACQUES. You did a good job. Enjoy yourself.

(*BRETT takes the card and exits. ELODIE begins to gather up her coat and other belongings.*)

ELODIE (*studies her father*). Wow! I haven't seen you looking this smart and youthful for years.

JACQUES. Please shut up! A friendly tourist comes in to help an old man, and what do you do? He's hardly here five minutes and you're running your hands all over him. As if he were a prize bull in an agricultural show.

ELODIE (*shocked*). Only to be welcoming.

JACQUES. Welcoming! You walk in and practically throw yourself at him. When that fails, you force your address on him.

ELODIE. He was here for odd jobs, wasn't he?

JACQUES (*pouts*). I found him. You find your own odd-job man.

ELODIE. He's coming back then? Whatever for?

JACQUES. Look, I don't know if he's coming back or not. For all I know, you've frightened him away.

ELODIE. A bold young man like that? Whatever are you talking about? Anyway, what are you organizing, a Franco-Australian Friendship Society? I'm sorry, but I imagine there's already a thing like that.

JACQUES. All right, you want the full story, do you? Will that satisfy you? I was in the café on the corner, and the boy asked me for help with the menu.

ELODIE. A classic opening line, if ever I heard one.

JACQUES (*angrily*). An opening line for what?

ELODIE. Are we sure he's not a criminal?

JACQUES. We, a what!? I was a 60-year-old gentleman sitting alone minding his own business.

ELODIE. All the more reason.

JACQUES. Talk sense, young lady. A 35-year-old woman sitting alone minding her own business would be a far easier target.

ELODIE. Ah, of course you're right. ... So maybe I still have a chance.

JACQUES. Whatever are you talking about? Can't you see he's confused? Like all boys from provincial farms the world over. The closest they get to a female is one that goes *moo* or goes *baaaaah*.

*(The door chimes sound.)*

JACQUES (*consults his watch*). Would you open it? The housekeeper.

*(ELODIE goes to the door. Brief muffled voices.)*

*(Re-enter ELODIE accompanied by MADGE.)*

MADGE (*boisterously, with note in hand*). Well, excuse me but hello and hi! I'm Madge, Brett's mother. He left this note at reception – in a rush, he was – saying he was here.

JACQUES *(rising, confused, takes the note)*. Hmm? Well, yes, he was. But was is not now. You are Mrs ...?

MADGE. Rumbel. Madge Rumbel of Oodnadatta. Manageress of the Oodnadatta Pink Palace. But I don't imagine you've heard of it.

JACQUES. I don't think so. My name is Jacques Bonnefoy, and this is my daughter, Madame Texier. Look, we really should be in the living-room.

ELODIE *(brightly)*. Hello.

*(MADGE thrusts out a confident hand to both, then plops down comfortably in an armchair. JACQUES and ELODIE remain standing.)*

MADGE. Oh, it's fine here. I'm at home everywhere.

JACQUES *(glancing at ELODIE)*. Brett, you say. He was helping me with a few odd jobs.

MADGE. Oh! Plumbing is his speciality. Anything to do with pipes, plugs and passages. Loves 'em all. He's a marvel.

ELODIE. Haven't you just arrived? I must say you Rumbels don't waste time.

MADGE. Flew in Qantas yesterday. A 24-hour trip. Passed out immediately I got here. Just woke up.

ELODIE. Oh!

MADGE. Mmm. So we've seen nothing yet, and I know there's plenty of spots. Wouldn't I be right, Jack?

JACQUES. It's Jacques. Yes, a few more spots than Oo-dun-a-datta, didn't you say?

MADGE. Oodnadatta. Aborigine word. Means mulga flower. Nice, eh?

ELODIE. I imagine your son is out sightseeing.

MADGE. That's his style. Sticks his nose in everywhere.

JACQUES. Mrs Bumble...

MADGE. Rumbel.

JACQUES. Sorry. Did you say you run a ... pink palace?