Mr. Bondar's Smile

by

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Cast

JAMES BONDAR	Movie-star handsome secret agent. Late forties.
ROSA	An ugly 30-something woman.
PENNYROYAL/ELENA	W's secretary/Yussef's teenage daughter.
YUSSEF	Big and brutish.

Setting

Bare stage with a desk/table and two chairs.

Mr. Bondar's Smile

(Lights up. MS. PENNYROYAL is at her desk, keyboarding, when JAMES BONDAR comes in. She looks up.)

PENNYROYAL

You're looking very morose today, James.

BONDAR

I've just been given the most appalling assignment!

PENNYROYAL

You poor dear! What is it this time?

BONDAR

I'm to go to Podolia.

PENNYROYAL

Oh, no! Not Podolia again!

BONDAR

Yes, W insists.

PENNYROYAL

But it's so terribly dangerous!

BONDAR

A hotbed of intrigue—

PENNYROYAL

Full of shiftless foreigners with unpronounceable names and no manners.

BONDAR

Each man an assassin.

PENNYROYAL

Each house an arsenal.

BONDAR

If all I had to do was kill someone, I could manage, but this time... Oh, Pennyroyal!

PENNYROYAL

What? What is it, James?!

BONDAR

I have to...I have to make love to an ugly woman!

PENNYROYAL

No!

BONDAR

Yes. Rosa X. She's our most valuable contact in Spit. But it seems she's tired of being paid in gold. She wants excitement. She wants romance.

PENNYROYAL

She wants you.

BONDAR

Yes!

PENNYROYAL

You poor dear!

BONDAR

This is the most difficult assignment of my life. I don't know if I can handle it.

PENNYROYAL

Queen and country, James! Queen and country!

(BONDAR mops his brow with a British flag hankie and sinks into a chair. PENNYROYAL packs up her laptop, tosses a tablecloth over the desk, and exits.)

Scene 2

(ROSA, a scraggly-haired woman with a red bulbous nose and no fashion sense, enters. Her eyes light up when she sees BONDAR, who rises to greet her.)

ROSA

(Foreign accent)

Mr. Bondar! Or may I call you—James! At last W has sent you to me!

(She gives him a hearty embrace and double-kisses his cheeks. He lets her, but doesn’t return the favour.)

ROSA

You don’t look happy to see me.

JAMES

I'm...delighted. Finally we meet.

ROSA

I've heard so much about you—your way with women, your charm, your prowess...And now, at last, you're mine! Though I have to say—

(Looking at him critically)

You look younger in your movies. How old are you?

JAMES

Thirty-nine.

ROSA

And holding, eh, Mr. Bondar? Well, never mind that you're older than me. I like older men.

(She ruffles his hair affectionately. He looks pained.)

JAMES

Before we... Before we... Do you think I might have a drink?

ROSA

Of course, my dear!

(Pushing him into a chair.)

Sit down, sit down.

JAMES

I'd like a martini, stirred, not shaken, with a twist of lemon.

(ROSA throws back her head and laughs.)

ROSA

Real men don't drink martinis, James! Let me give you a real drink.

(Calling out)

Yussef!

(YUSSEF, a thugish-looking man, appears.)

YUSSEF

Yes, madame?

ROSA

Bring us something to drink.

(He nods; goes out.)

JAMES

Who's he?

ROSA

My henchperson, Yussef. I saved his life once. There is nothing he wouldn't do for me.

(YUSSEF enters with a bottle and two shot glasses. He pours for them, then exits. BONDAR looks at the drink suspiciously.)

JAMES

What is it?

ROSA

Slivovitz. I made it myself.

(Raising her glass)

Now what is that you say in English--sheers?

JAMES

Cheers.

ROSA

Cheers!

(They clink glasses, drink. He reels back in his chair, clutching his throat and gasping.)

ROSA

What's the matter, James—too strong for you?

JAMES

Of course not!

(He glares at her defiantly, throws back his glass and slams it on the table. She downs hers without blinking an eye and slams it down, too.)

ROSA

That's better. I was getting worried. I thought you might not be the man for me.

(He looks at her, closing first one eye, then the other. When he speaks, his voice is slightly slurred.)

JAMES

For which of you?

ROSA

For me, Rosa!

JAMES

I see two of you. Which is the one I'm supposed to...to...to satisfy?

ROSA

If what I've heard of you is true, both of us, all of us--what difference does it make?

(He begins to cry.)

JAMES

I can't!

ROSA

But you only had one drink!

JAMES

You're not beautiful!

ROSA

What does that matter? All cats look the same in the dark, James.

JAMES

You're not young!

ROSA

So what? Neither are you!

(She grabs him and tries to kiss him.)

JAMES

I can't! I won't!

(He struggles free.)

JAMES

Leave me alone!

ROSA

W promised!

JAMES

W can go to hell! You can go to hell!

(He crumples into the chair.)

JAMES
I'm going to sleep. I feel terrible. What did you put in that drink?

ROSA
Don't pretend, James. There was nothing in the brandy!

(He sprawls in the chair, eyes closed. She stands over him.)

ROSA
You're not getting out of here without giving me what I want!

(Silence.)

ROSA
You dare—you dare refuse me? Then beware, James, I will have my revenge! Yussef!

YUSSEF
(Entering)
Madame?

ROSA
Tie him down!

(YUSSEF does.)

YUSSEF
Slide knots, madame—the harder he struggles, the tighter they'll get.

ROSA
Good. We'll see what a little persuasion will do! Wake him up!

(YUSSEF shakes him.)

YUSSEF
Mr. Bondar!

(Nothing. YUSSEF slaps his face.)

YUSSEF
Mr. Bondar!

(Nothing. YUSSEF looks at ROSA, who comes and stands over JAMES.)

ROSA

I'm losing patience, James!

(No response.)

ROSA

Get some water.

(YUSSEF does. She nods; he throws it in JAMES' face. No response.)

ROSA

Don't try and make a fool of me!
(to YUSSEF)
Bring a poker from the stove.

(She watches JAMES' face intently.)

ROSA

Wake up, James. Wake up and do your duty, or you're going to be sorry!

(No response. YUSSEF comes in with a glowing poker. She nods; he rips open JAMES' shirt and touches the poker to his chest. No response.)

YUSSEF

Nobody could stand that without crying out! He's dead, madame!

ROSA

Drunk, maybe, but not dead!

(YUSSEF leans over and listens for a heartbeat.)

YUSSEF

I don't hear anything.

ROSA

It's a trick! Every agent knows how to slow his heartbeat. He's just pretending!

(YUSSEF moves JAMES' head.)

YUSSEF

Look at the way his head flops--I tell you, madame, he's dead!

ROSA

And I tell you--he's just pretending!

(She stands over him menacingly; she shakes him.)

ROSA

Stop playing the fool, James! I know you're alive!

(No response. She turns to YUSSEF.)

ROSA

Cut off his...little finger.

(YUSSEF takes out a knife and cuts off the little finger. No response.)

YUSSEF

That's it—he's dead! And I refuse to torture a corpse—there's no pleasure in it!

ROSA

I know what to do! I've seen all his movies and there's one thing James cannot resist! Call your daughter. Call the beautiful Elena!

YUSSEF

Elena! Elena, come here!

(Tinkling of heavy jewelry. ELENA enters, a girl in her late teens/early twenties, dressed provocatively.)

ELENA

Yes, father?

(He looks at ROSA.)

ROSA

You see this man?

ELENA

Yes. He looks shorter than in his movies.

ROSA

Kiss him.

(She looks at her father.)

YUSSEF

Go ahead.

(ELENA kisses JAMES. In spite of his best efforts, the corners of his mouth move. ROSA bends forward, watching him like a hawk.)

ROSA

Again.

(ELENA kisses him again. He struggles not to, but smiles.)

ROSA

I told you, Yussef! See—Mr. Bondar's smiling! Untie him.

(YUSSEF cuts the knots with his knife.)

ROSA

Now sit up straight, Mr. Bondar.

(He hesitates, then does so. ROSA tears off her wig and nose, lets fall her frumpy skirt, and is revealed as an attractive woman.)

BONDAR

Rosa! If I'd only known!

(He reaches for her. She pushes him back.)

ROSA

Who do you think I am? Some bimbo in the movies?

BONDAR

You could be, if you want. I could arrange it.

(ROSA rolls her eyes and sighs.)

ROSA

(To YUSSEF)

Take him to the airport, Yussef. Put him on a plane to London.

(To JAMES)

Give my regards to Ms. Moneypenney, James. Ask her to send me the specs on 008, will you?

Blackout. The End