

## **CHARACTERS**

DAVE FLINDERS, a Perth advertising executive

PROFESSOR KATE MORTON, his wife, an archaeologist

SAPPHO MORTON-FLINDERS, their 17-year-old daughter

LAURA MAGELLAN, a Canadian writer and publisher of travel guides

BIRD ROSSITOR, a Sydney small-business person

NIKOS NOMIKOS, a Greek-born investigative journalist working in  
London

JASPER BRAVNIČAR, a Slovenian entrepreneur

All adults are in their early fifties.

This play went to press before the end of rehearsals, and may differ from the play as performed.

## ACT ONE

---

*Title sequence:*

*Greek music plays throughout.*

*The following text appears on the back wall in running script:*

*'I have no defence against affection.*

*I could be bribed by a sardine.'*

*—St Teresa of Avila*

*Spotlight on KATE on her mobile.*

*Slide: 'Tunis'.*

KATE: Dave, I think I'm having a heart attack.

*Spotlight on DAVE. It is the middle of the night in Perth.*

*Slide: 'Perth'.*

DAVE: What time is it?

KATE: Ten p.m. I'm at the airport in Tunisia.

DAVE: What are the symptoms?

KATE: I have a pain in my neck, palpitations and unexplained anxiety.

DAVE: Who are you flying with?

KATE: Tunis Air.

DAVE: Uh huh. [*Beat.*] When are you coming home?

KATE: It's on the fridge. I fly to Ljubljana for the conference, then London and then home on Sunday. My heart is really beating, Dave. You sure it's nothing?

DAVE: Positive. Have you written your paper?

KATE: Sort of. How are the kids? Don't forget Sappho's got orchestra on Friday and it's our turn to take Tiffany and Shannon, also, Dave, Chloe's got a party on Saturday afternoon, the present's on the hall table, *please* wrap it properly, don't just shove it in a paper bag which I know you did last time, and don't let Sappho talk you into sleeping over at Sahara's: she's got to come home and finish her essay on *Pride and Prejudice*, and can you *please* persuade her to actually open the novel; oh and, Dave, Mum's invited you all for dinner on Tuesday night, *please* don't fall asleep on the couch. She hates that.

DAVE: Hunter's been pinged for drink driving.

KATE: No!

DAVE: Blood alcohol of point-one-three.

KATE: What happened?

DAVE: Kicked out of his flat.

KATE: Why?

DAVE: All I know is that I have to go and collect his stuff and bring it all back home.

*A 17-year-old Goth enters.*

Oh and Sappho's not Sappho anymore. She's changed her name.

KATE: To what?

*Light goes out on KATE.*

DAVE: Bat?

SAPPHO: From now on, if you call me Sappho, I won't answer.

DAVE: Can I have special dispensation?

SAPPHO: Sappho is stupid and pretentious.

DAVE: There was a girl in my class at primary school called Leanne Batt. She used to pick the scabs off her knees and eat them. Even now, it produces a very bad feeling.

SAPPHO *shrugs*.

So what is it about the name, Bat? I mean what statement are you trying to make here?

SAPPHO: I'm not making a statement, Dad.

DAVE: Yes you are. You are named after the greatest lyric poet of all time.

Sappho is a glorious name. Bat is...

SAPPHO: Bat is cool.

DAVE: Bat is bogan.

SAPPHO: Bat is ironic.

*Lights up on KATE. Lights out on SAPPHO.*

KATE: How come this always happens, every time I go away on a conference?

DAVE: Sorry, professor. We'll do better next time.



*Spotlight on JASPER.*

*Slide: 'Ljubljana'.*

JASPER: Turning fifty is not such a big deal. Some people really carry on.

*His mobile rings.*

*Prosim?*

KATE: Jasper?

JASPER: Yes.

KATE: I don't know if you'll remember me? Kate Morton?

JASPER: Kate Morton. I have been waiting for this call for twenty-five years.

*Spotlight on NIKOS.*

*Slide: 'Paris'.*

NIKOS: I'm on the Eurostar. I've been covering a summit in Paris—for the *Guardian*. I was planning to stay on, but one of my colleagues has just died. Bob. Bob Duncan. Dropped dead in the gym at Russell Square. So his wife rings. Would I say a few words at his funeral? Christ.

We've worked together for, I don't know, twenty years. And I don't have any funny stories about him. No insights. He's just a chap I went to Afghanistan with for ten days in 2002. That's it. But his wife, his three children and his poor old mum want me to tell the world, for the last time, who this man was. Who Bob was.



*Spotlight on LAURA.*

*Slide: 'Toronto'.*

LAURA: You know some people say: 'Women are only powerful in the workplace when men want to see them naked.'

That's *so* not true. You should see my HR manager. She runs this place but believe me, nobody wants to see her naked. I don't even like it when she takes off her scarf.

We publish books, travel guides. We're looking for a new office manager. So we've just interviewed dozens of twenty-five-year-old MBAs.

God, I hate those people. I hate that whole generation. They're so goddamn ambitious.

And it's the parents' fault. They have allowed those children to think that everything they do is so astonishing. It starts in crèche. The kid makes a mark on the page and the parents go, I think we have a Picasso in the family—and now the rest of us have to pay the price because they actually think they *are* bloody Picasso.

But you should see their resumé's. Kids who apply to us. Most of them have climbed Mount Everest before they reached puberty.

When I was twenty-five I rode my motorbike the length of South America. But I wasn't thinking, 'This will look good on my resumé'.



*Spotlight on BIRD.*

*Slide: 'Sydney'.*

BIRD: My husband left me about two years ago. We had a business together. Mufflers. It's not exactly what you dream about in primary school: when I grow up I want to be in mufflers. Anyway, Dimitri got involved with this bitch I employed to do the accounts. After a couple of sniffs, he moved in with her. We were married twenty-one years. And then he goes and sets up a rival business in the same suburb. He and the bitch. That's when I got cancer. Mastectomy—I'm okay—

So just now, I was standing in Safeway, trying to choose some muesli and I must have felt happy—although that doesn't seem likely—but I found myself singing—quite loudly—'The Lord's Prayer'. The Sister Janet Mead version. [*Singing*] 'Our Father which art in Heaven, hallow-ed be Thy name—'

I turn around to put my muesli in the trolley and who should be standing there but my husband Dimitri (ex-husband) and his new—his new wife, Pamela. Pammie. I got such a fright I dropped

the muesli and when I lent down to pick it up, I thought, ‘You are a joke. You’re fifty. You’re fat. And you’re standing in Safeway singing “The Lord’s Prayer”.’ So I bolted. Down the aisle, through the checkout and onto the street. I ran the whole length of Union Road until I came to the internet café.

*As she speaks the following words, they are typed on the screen.  
Underscored by Greek music.*

Dave and Kate, Laura, Nikos, Jasper. Is it too late to go swimming again? In the dark?

*Spotlight on JASPER and KATE sitting opposite each other.*

*Slide: ‘Ljubljana’.*

JASPER: When I came back from Greece, I was a student here in Ljubljana. There was a bar where we used to drink by the river. It’s called The Three Bridges because it’s a place where three bridges meet: two for pedestrians, one for traffic. And we were having, let’s say, a lot of beer. And my friend he says, ‘We will make a competition. We come tomorrow at three o’clock and everyone must bring a girl. The one who bring the most beautiful girl is the winner.’ And my other friend, he say, ‘No. The winner must be the one who bring the most ugly girl.’

Under the bridges, there’s a public toilet. You know the kind where there’s an old lady who sits at the table and takes your money. And this old woman is really old and she look ugly. So at fifteen minutes to three, I go under the bridge and I say to this lady, ‘You sit here day after day and no-one give you nothing. Please. Come with me. Let me buy you a beer.’ So I take her up to the bar, and I’m certain, *certain*, that I will win. But then I see that my friend has come with a girl from our class—Dusca—and she’s really ugly. So he wins.

You know what’s terrible. Two weeks later, this girl, she finds out why she was there.

*JASPER makes a gesture like his hand has been scalded by hot water.*