

THE HEAD OFFICE By K Robert Keller, robert@gohook.com

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FADE IN:

EXT. GUILLOTINE ARENA - DAWN

JACQUES (51) leads PIERRE (19) up the wooden stairs to the killing platform two meters above the gathering spectators. The front row groundlings camped overnight in the front row, while late arrivals fill-in the rear.

Two uniformed kingsmen on horseback gossip at the entrance.

EXT. GUILLOTINE STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Jacques bellows as he steps onto his stage; he struts and blusters like a preacher, pumping and thumping.

JACQUES
(to the front row)
Time to get up, fellas. Show's starting.
(announcing)
Hear ye, hear ye, blah, blah, blah.
I recognize many of you, especially you morbid creeps in the front row.

HECKLER IN FRONT
Where's my coffee?

Jacques ignores him.

JACQUES
(louder)
Look, no need for elaborate explanations. I am your sky pilot. This is my head shop, my heavenly slice of decapitation. We all know how this works.

VOICE (O.C.)
I don't.

BACK ROW VOICE (O.C.)
You must be from Finland.

JACQUES
Fine, let me explain for the blue-eyed Laplander.
(MORE)

JACQUES (CONT'D)

(gesturing broadly)

Using this rope, I lift that blade way up there, our twin frauleins from Hamburg shove the criminal's head into this yoke, we lock the yoke, we have our countdown, and the blade plunges. Then after you cheer a bit, the Valkyries swoop down and fly our lifeless countrymen to Valhalla.

HECKLER IN FRONT ROW

I have a fiver.

JACQUES

Good, we have our first bid.

HECKLER IN FRONT ROW

I'm not bidding on the head, I still need my coffee.

JACQUES

Do we have any bids for the head? As you know, the winning bidder buys an orchestra-level seat right down here. We used to sell this space in advance, but had to stop because of--

HECKLER IN FRONT ROW

Not that joke again.

JACQUES

--because of scalpers.

(beat)

Any real bids?

Various O.C. SHOUTS of "seven", "eight", "nine", "fifteen."

JACQUES (CONT'D)

We have fifteen, do I hear twenty?

VOICE IN CROWD (O.C.)

Seventeen.

JACQUES

Anyone else?

(beat)

No? Sold.

We hear light golf CLAPS as the high bidder weaves his way to the cordoned-off front-and-center space.

VOICE IN CROWD/HIGH BIDDER
 Sorry, I don't have the exact
 amount.

Jacques frowns as he fishes out change.

JACQUES
 Ready? Bring up today's lucky
 contestant.

The two large-as-tree-trunk Nordic women wrestle a hooded
 victim up the stairs. He struggles mightily but the two
 women manhandle him toward the pillory.

JACQUES (CONT'D)
 Let's see what we have today.

Jacques grabs the front of the struggling man's trousers,
 peeks inside.

JACQUES (CONT'D)
 (gleefully)
 It's a man!

The soft CLAPPING is drown out by GROANS.

HECKLER IN FRONT
 I want my money back, Jack.

JACQUES
 It's Jacques.
 (to the uniforms)
 Are you two getting this? I'll pay
 you three sawbucks to haul this bum
 out of here.

The guards want no part of this farce.

HECKLER IN FRONT
 Gimme my cup o' coffee, and I'll be
 on my way.

JACQUES
 (to the twins)
 Insert the head.

VOICE (O.C.)
 Which one? The little head or the
 big head?

The colossal women shove the squirming man into position,
 lock the upper yoke with a flourish.

EXT. BELOW STAGE, FRONT - DAY

Jacques' assistant, Pierre, descends the steps, trots to the front corner of the platform, readies the curtain, which shields the splatter and horror from the crowd. Only the high bidder witnesses the beheading.

JACQUES (O.C.)
Are you kids ready?

EXT. GUILLOTINE STAGE - DAY

A pale dog trots up the stairs, crosses, lays in a far corner.

HECKLER IN FRONT
Who invited your mother?

Pierre raises the curtain.

EVERYONE
Five, four, three, two...

SCHWING-SNICK.

More crowd ROARS and WHOOPS.

EXT. BELOW STAGE, FRONT - DAY

Pierre drops the curtain.

The proud high bidder twirls the severed head by the hair, blood spewing, eyes wide open, lips flapping but no sound.

JACQUES
Just once, I wish the lungs were
attached, so we could hear the
words.
(to the head)
Penny for your thoughts?

EXT. GUILLOTINE STAIRWAY - DAY

The amazon twins drag the headless body off stage, feet and legs bouncing down the stairs.

EXT. BELOW STAGE, REAR - DAY

Pierre folds the curtain. The moment after it's stowed, he vomits in the bushes behind the platform.

JACQUES
(consoling)
Happened to me, too.

Jacques steps down to his apprentice.

JACQUES (CONT'D)

First day's always the worst. Why the hell would you sign-up for this gig?

PIERRE

I'm, the king's grandnephew and he caught me tooling his grandniece. I'm banished here for a year, then I may return to the castle.

JACQUES

Castles full of relatives are overrated. Let me buy you a replacement breakfast.

They depart the empty arena.

INT. RUSTIC RESTAURANT - MINUTES LATER

As Jacques and Pierre walk in, the foursome at the prime window table recognized Jacques and retreat abruptly.

PIERRE

Do they always do that?

JACQUES

Yes, this my table. If they don't fall in line, I just do this:

Jacques cups his hands around his mouth and shouts SCHWING, CLAPS his hands, then ROLLS an apple across the floor.

Silence.

JACQUES (CONT'D)

Works every time.

PIERRE

When's our next assignment?

JACQUES

Well, the two "girls" have Monday, Wednesday and Fridays off, and I have custody of my mistress on the weekend, so we're booked most Tuesdays and Thursdays till Christmas when we get a week off. The king wants to appear generous with vacation time, but he's still an asshole.

PIERRE
 You're telling me.
 (beat)
 So if my math is right, two
 executions a week equals--

JACQUES
 Whoa, I'm gonna stop you right
 there, Pee, do math on your own
 time.

EXT. GUILLOTINE STAGE - DAWN

Two days later, Thursday.

The sentenced-to-death man is poised behind the guillotine.
 Pierre is at-the-ready to raise the curtain, while Jacques
 preaches.

JACQUES
 Today is our final performance in
 this parish.

The crowd HISSES and BOOS.

JACQUES (CONT'D)
 I know, I know. This month, I've
 made almost a hundred pieces in
 auction fees. Not your best--

PIERRE
 (interrupting)
 You've made one hundred and fifty-
 two.

JACQUES
 What did I tell you about math?

He pulls out a few bills, waves it at heckler's row.

JACQUES (CONT'D)
 Instead of coffee, take this money
 and get thee a shower.

The bills flutter and the groundlings tussle.

VOICE (O.C.)
 (to Heckler)
 Yeah, take a douche, you douche.

Jacques walks towards with the condemned criminal, face-to-
 hood, pulls open the pantaloons. Halts.

Jacques looks at the hood, looks down again. Jacques looks quizzically at the two women escorts.

They shrug.

JACQUES
(whispering to criminal)
What did you do?

WOMAN'S VOICE
I layed the king's grandnephew?

JACQUES
Pierre?

WOMANS VOICE
Yes.

Jacques spins around, looks at Pierre who's ready to raise the curtain.

JACQUES
(to the woman)
What's your name?

WOMAN'S VOICE
Juliette Antoinette.

JACQUES
(sotto)
Of course it is.

HECKLER (O.C.)
Well, is he circumcised?

JACQUES
No, but after we slice him, I'll
toss you his foreskin.
(to Juliette)
Do not fight me.

Jacques holds Juliette by the shoulders. She's apprehensive, but not struggling.

He dismisses the large women. They look puzzled, but the twin tree trunks lumber off stage when he insists.

The king's guards in b.g. shift in their saddles.

JACQUES (CONT'D)
(to crowd)
We have a special performance
today. I will execute this one
personally. I need the practice.

HECKLER (O.C.)

What, you haven't learned the ropes, yet? You only have the one. How bloody hard can it be, Friar Tuck?

JACQUES

(to Juliette)

Do exactly as I say.

(to Pierre)

Raise the curtain.

Hidden by the curtain. Jacques removes Juliette's hood, reveals the face of a eighteen-year-old nubile.

JACQUES (CONT'D)

And you expect me to set you free?

She nods.

After a beat, Jacques spies the sick dog in the corner, dismisses that notion.

JACQUES (CONT'D)

(sotto)

I can't kill a dog.

(low; to Juliette)

Jump down there, grab a bunch of branches--a big bunch.

Juliette pauses a moment. He shoots her a killer look.

She does as instructed, hands him up a large bundle of dead sticks.

As he gathers them, he whispers more orders.

JACQUES (CONT'D)

Now, cut open your arm on the guillotine blade.

JULIETTE

What?

JACQUES

Get up here, now. Do it.

Juliette scampers up, closes her eyes, lacerates her forearm. Blood spills onto the bale of branches.

EXT. GROUND LEVEL - DAY

HECKLER
Let's get this party started. I'm
late for breakfast.

JACQUES (O.C.)
Wanna come up here and test drive
my blade?

Heckler looks back at the mounted guards, who aren't smiling.

EXT. GUILLOTINE STAGE - DAY

JACQUES
(yelling)
Start the countdown.

CROWD
Five, four--

Jacques stuffs the branches inside the black hood, ties it
firmly at the neck.

Juliette is holding her arm, her face ashen.

JACQUES
Go! Run!

She bolts.

CROWD
--three, two--

Jacques lays the bundle under the blade. Stands.

CROWD (CONT'D)
...one!

SCHWING-CRUNCH. With his free hand, Jacques intercepts the
flying parcel like a football.

As the curtain drops, Jacques holds the black package aloft,
blood trickling out.

HIGH BIDDER
Hey, what's the deal?

Pierre runs up on stage, grabs the hood, peers inside. He's
confused.

JACQUES
That was Marie. I let her escape.

PIERRE
Which way did she go?

Jacques points. Pierre rushes down the stairs.

EXT. ARENA - DAY

The two men on horseback approach the stage.

EXT. GUILLOTINE STAGE - DAWN

One year later an execution is underway, Pierre's now running the head office, with a new female apprentice.

PIERRE
..and let's determine the gender of
today's contestant.

Pierre reaches for the condemned man's belt.

JACQUES
Pierre it's me, Jacques.

PIERRE
I know. Say nothing, I have a
plan.
(to amazons)
Help him assume the position.

The new apprentice raises the curtain as Jacques is locked in.

EVERYONE
Five, four, three, two, one.

SCHWING-SNICK.

EXT. ARENA - DAY

Jacques' head arcs like a hail Mary pass. The High Bidder makes a one handed grab, holds the un-hooded head aloft. The crowd ROARS. Spikes it.

Pierre picks up his former boss's head by the jug handles.

PIERRE
The king thought your were going
soft, didn't like your head games.
Oh, and Juliette change her name to
Marie and our son's doing fine.