

Scene 1

The scene is a vet's waiting room. There are two vets but in this scene we only hear their voices. The entrance to CHRIS' consulting room is front right. The entrance to FABIA's consulting room is back right. The receptionist, SARAH, sits on a chair left. She has an imaginary computer in front of her. She does not interact with the clients unless they approach her. There is a row of four chairs centre. Chair 1 (nearest Sarah) is empty. AUNTIE MARJE sits in chair 2. She wears a red jacket and holds a cardboard box on her lap. MRS VANE sits in chair 3 with a cat travelling box at her feet. As the play opens, AUNTIE MARJE and MRS VANE are watching a display screen in front of them, above the audience. Their heads are perfectly synchronised as they follow the words moving from left to right. Enter MAURICE JOHNSON.

SARAH Name?

MAURICE Tiger Johnson.

SARAH Mr T. Johnson. *(Searches on computer)* No. No Mr T Johnson. What address is it?

MAURICE 121 The Avenue.

SARAH No. Are you *sure* you're with us? I've got no Mr T Johnson. There's a Mr M Johnson.

MAURICE That's me. My name's Maurice. This is Tiger.

SARAH *(sighs crossly)* Mr Maurice Johnson. Okay. Yes, 6.30 with Chris. Take a seat.

MAURICE Thank you.

MAURICE sits on chair 1, next to AUNTIE MARJE and instantly joins in their synchronised watching of the screen.

AUNTIE M Can't stop watching it, can you? And I haven't even *got* a dog or a cat to worm.

MRS VANE We wormed ours yesterday.

MAURICE I can't get Tiger to take pills.

All three characters stop watching the screen to talk to each other.

MRS VANE We use the squirty stuff on the neck. Gave up on pills.

AUNTIE M You're Denise's husband, aren't you?

MAURICE That's right.

AUNTIE M How *is* she?

MAURICE She's very well, thank you. Much better now she's got her new hip. She's running about like a gazebo.

AUNTIE M Oh....good! *AUNTIE MARJE and MRS VANE exchange glances.*

MRS VANE Yes, we gave up on pills.

AUNTIE M The squirt on the neck's easier.

MRS VANE We did try with the pills. Wrapped her up in a towel like she said. *(Nods her head in the direction of the vet right)* 'Gently pinch the mouth open,' she says, 'and pop the pill in'. My husband tried – my God! little Fluff's head spun round like the gun turret of a tank. Jack said he'd *rather* face a tank than that cat. So we do the neck squirt now.

AUNTIE M Nice little dog! *TIGER retreats under MAURICE's chair.* What sort is he?

MAURICE He's a Shi Tsu crossed with a miniature boxer.

MRS VANE I suppose they call that a shitter. *(Looks at AUNTIE MARJE and laughs)*

MAURICE I don't think so. *(Pause. The three of them start watching the announcement board again)* Poor little thing!

MRS VANE What?

MAURICE That little creature.

MRS VANE It's a tick.

MAURICE Oh.

AUNTIE M. What's wrong with...Tiger is it?

MAURICE He gets a bit er..over-excited..with - er - lady dogs.

AUNTIE M. Oh dear! That can be a bit embarrassing, can't it?

MAURICE I was going to ask the vet if I ought to have him, you know, casseroleed.

AUNTIE M. Castrated?

MAURICE That's it. I'm afraid my words come out funny when I'm a bit nervous.

AUNTIE M. There's nothing to be nervous about here, though. Chris is awfully nice.

MRS VANE Yes, I've heard he's good. We always see Fabia though because she's used to little Fluff.

MAURICE Is that your cat? *(Leans down to look into box. TIGER comes forward to investigate too. There is an explosion of spitting and yowling from inside the box and TIGER retreats at speed towards CHRIS' consulting room front right, dragging MAURICE after him, just as CHRIS the vet's voice is heard off stage, calling MAURICE into the consulting room.*

CHRIS Mr Johnson? Oh ...he's keen, isn't he?

Enter ANN GROSVENOR, from FABIA's consulting room back right, carrying cat travelling box, approaches SARAH, and stands waiting for her to look up from her computer.

SARAH Yes?

ANN Something to pay? Grosvenor?

SARAH It's not through yet. Take a seat.

FABIA *off* Mrs Vane?

MRS VANE gets up and carries cat box back stage right. Exits.

FABIA *off* And how's little Fluff today? I've got the gloves ready.

ANN GROSVENOR sits down on chair 1, puts down cat box and takes out handkerchief.

AUNTIE M Bad news?

ANN No, not really – at least I don't think so. I thought it might be cancer, you know, with her losing so much weight, but it's diabetes apparently. I'll have to give her injections every day, Fabia says.

AUNTIE M Oh, I had a cat with diabetes. It's much easier than you think. The injections, I mean. My Eric used to purr when I did it.

ANN Really?

AUNTIE M I used to feed him directly afterwards, you see, and I think he connected the two things.

ANN Perhaps *I'll* try that.

AUNTIE M How old is she?

ANN Sixteen. I remember my husband bringing her home in his pocket. She was *that* tiny.

AUNTIE M Ahh!

ANN He got her from one of his clients – the mother cat had got run over so of course the kittens needed homes. We had to feed this one every few hours with an eye dropper.

AUNTIE M I bet you didn't get much sleep for a while.

ANN It was flipping awful. I was cursing my husband at the time. "What do we want with a kitten?" I said, when he turned up with it. "As if we haven't got enough on our hands!" He was working up the business then, you see – out all hours.

AUNTIE M You get attached, though, don't you?

ANN You do. She's company. (*pause*) My husband died last year.

AUNTIE M Oh, I'm sorry, love.

ANN Sometimes, when I'm sitting on my own, I look at Perdy, all curled up in front of the fire, and I can see Peter's hand stroking her fur. And then I hear his voice, "You've got the best place, haven't you, Perdy?" When I thought I was going to lose her....

AUNTIE M Ah, she'll be with you a while yet.

ANN I'm being silly. Sorry.

AUNTIE M No, you're not.

ANN She's a sort of a lifeline.

AUNTIE M I know. But when she does go on - hopefully not for ages yet -your Peter will still be here with you. As long as you keep remembering, you'll never lose him.

ANN I suppose so.

AUNTIE M. Keep remembering those endearing parts of him – his ear lobes, his knees, his elbows. (*naughtily*) Remember ALL the bits you loved. (*ANN smiles and looks embarrassed*) Picture his hands on the steering wheel. Now feel his hands in your hair. (*ANN closes her eyes*) That's it! Now his voice - remember the irritation in his voice when his boiled egg was too hard in the morning. Now he's talking about something that interests him – holding forth, you used to say –

watch him twirl his glasses as he talks. Feel the warmth of his shoulder through his jumper as you rest your cheek there. His arms are holding you. Now, look into his eyes. (*Ann smiles, eyes still closed*) He's very close, isn't he? (*Ann nods*)

AUNTIE M. Remember what he used to call you?

SARAH Mrs Grosvenor?

ANN opens her eyes.

ANN How did you know all that...how *could* you?

AUNTIE MARJE says nothing, just smiles.

SARAH (*louder, and crossly*) Mrs Grosvenor!

ANN gets up quickly and goes over to SARAH to pay. Enter MAURICE JOHNSON and TIGER from CHRIS' consulting room front right.

CHRIS (*off*) So just book up to come in any time in the next couple of weeks, Mr Johnson.

MAURICE Thank you very much.

TIGER drags MAURICE across the stage. As he passes SARAH, he calls out...

MAURICE I'll ring in to make an apostrophe....

SARAH (*calling after him*) All payments must be made at the time of....I don't know why I bother.

ANN GROSVENOR, having settled her bill, looks back to the waiting room as if she wants to say something to AUNTIE MARJE but doesn't seem to see her, although she is sitting there still. Exits.

Enter LUCY with matchbox.

SARAH Well?

LUCY He's lost a leg.

SARAH Er..what is it?

LUCY It's a spider.

SARAH Well, I'm sorry but both our vets are very busy this evening.

Telephone rings. SARAH answers it. LUCY stands facing the audience, looking down at her matchbox sadly.

AUNTIE M Did you say it was a spider? Can I see? *Lucy comes and sits on chair 1, next to AUNTIE MARJE.* Oh, isn't she lovely? What's her name?

LUCY William. She's a boy.

AUNTIE M Actually, I think she's probably a girl. She's a garden spider.

LUCY But she lives indoors. She's been on my bedroom window all winter.

AUNTIE M I expect she thought it was nice and warm. I think she'd like to be out in the garden now though.

LUCY But she's mine.

AUNTIE M Have you got a bicycle?

LUCY Yes.

AUNTIE M Where do you ride it? In the house?

LUCY laughs.

LUCY 'Course not. I ride it in the garden – and I'm allowed on the pavement if Tim's with me.

AUNTIE M You wouldn't like to only be able to ride it in the house, would you?

LUCY No, I s'pose not. *(looks inside matchbox)* Do you think she'd be happy in the garden?

AUNTIE M I do.

LUCY But she's lost a leg.

AUNTIE M I had a dog once who lost a leg.

LUCY How?

AUNTIE M He got run over. But he managed fine on three legs. If he could manage alright on three, I'm sure your William could manage on seven.

LUCY Okay. I'll go and put her in the garden then. Bye.

AUNTIE M Goodbye, love. Good luck, William.

Enter EMMA WILSON and HARRY with tortoise.

SARAH Name?

HARRY Wilson.

EMMA With Daisy.

SARAH Wilson. You're with Fabia. 6.45. Take a seat.

Emma sits in chair 3, Harry in chair 4.

HARRY *(in a low voice)* Chatty, isn't she?

EMMA Shhh!

AUNTIE M. How old is she?

AUNTIE MARJE is looking at the tortoise but HARRY is still watching SARAH.

HARRY I've no idea. Why? Do you think she might mellow with age?

AUNTIE M. I don't know. Do they?

HARRY Do who?

AUNTIE M. Tortoises.

HARRY Oh – sorry. I thought you meant *her*.

AUNTIE M. Sarah's alright really. It's just her manner.

EMMA I would have thought having a good manner was quite important as a receptionist.

AUNTIE M. She never wanted to be a receptionist. She trained as a tightrope walker.

HARRY You're having us on.

AUNTIE M. No, really. She comes from a circus family. Her grandfather was a lion tamer.

EMMA How horrid! I think that's so cruel. I suppose she's working for a vet because she feels guilty.

AUNTIE M. No, actually it was the bunions. It got so that she couldn't walk the tightrope. So she just took the first job that came up after that.