

Scene 1 – The village green of Spotty Bottom

Before the curtain lifts, sounds of the villagers enjoying a party begin to build, then DJ makes an announcement over his mike.

DJ: Mums and dads, lads and lasses, it's great to see you all here today on our village green enjoying Spotty Bottom's Silver Jubilee party, and to add to the excitement, we have, at enormous expense, 'The Village Minstrels' (or name your local band.) *If more practical, the band could mime to their own music. If not using a band, use a recording.*

The music kicks off and the curtains open on the band, the villagers and BRIDGET, dancing and enjoying the party. DJ is situated Upstage Right. A table with the remains of the party food is Upstage Left. WALTER WHEEL, followed by his timid cat, WUSS, enters Downstage Left. WUSS heads straight for the food table, and WALTER is about to follow him when he spots BRIDGET dancing. From then on, he has eyes only for her. He dances and manoeuvres his way next to her, and by the end of the musical number, she is beginning to enjoy his company. The band finishes playing and briefly accepts the applause before hurriedly exiting.

D.J: Weren't they fantastic? Thanks, lads. See you at the BAFTA'S. *(This last sentence is delivered to their departing backs.)* Where have they gone?

VILLAGER 1: Beer tent.

DJ: Ok. More from them later... perhaps. Meanwhile, let's hear it again for King Jonah, on his Silver Jubilee.

Everybody cheers, but BRIDGET anxiously checks her watch.

D.J: And let's wish him at least *another* twenty-five happy years on the throne of Sunnyland.

BRIDGET hurries off Down Right as everybody cheers so that when WALTER turns to her again, she is gone.

WALTER: Where is she? Where's that beautiful girl? Does anyone know her?

VILLAGER 2: Sorry, Walter, I've never seen her before today.

VILLAGER 3: She just appeared this afternoon and joined in the dancing.

WALTER: Why would she run off so suddenly? I don't even know her name.

VILLAGER 1: Perhaps it's Cinderella.

VILLAGER 2: Is there a glass slipper lying around?

VILLAGER 3: Any pumpkins over there?

WALTER: Not funny! I may never see her again.

VILLAGER 2: You can bet you won't, not the way you were dancing.

KATY WHEEL enters Downstage Left.

WALTER: I thought I was pretty cool.

KATY: So you think you're pretty cool do you, Walter Wheel?

WALTER: Hello, Mum.

KATY: I don't know why you're so pleased with yourself. Our mill has just about ground to a halt since your dear daddy went to that big windmill in the sky.

WALTER: But I'm not cut out to be a miller, Mother.

KATY: You were born to it, like your father, and *his* father, and *his* father before that, and *his* –

WALTER: - but it's not for me.

KATY: Oh yes it is.

WALTER: Oh no it's not.

KATY: Oh yes it is.

WALTER: Oh no it's not.

KATY: So what exactly *is* for you?

WALTER: I don't know yet, but when I do, I just know I'm going to be at the top of the tree.

KATY: So's Dutch Elm disease, and that's nothing to be proud of. I ask you, is it any wonder I find it hard to keep my temper with him? While he spends his time daydreaming and being cool, I don't know where the next penny's coming from.

DJ: Excuse me, Mrs. Wheel, but we're trying to celebrate King Jonah's Silver Jubilee here.

KATY: Well whoopee for King Jonah! Sorry for breathing I'm sure. Well go on then. Carry on celebrating. Don't let the likes of me, a poor widow woman, spoil your party.

The villagers start to drift off.

DJ: Where are you all going? Don't go. You'll miss the best bit. I'm going to do some card tricks next.

The villagers fight to clear the stage. WUSS is still munching.

D.J.: Well thanks a bunch Mrs. Wheel. End of celebrations!

There is the sound of heavy footsteps approaching.

KATY: Perhaps it's just as well. Ogre Bogey is heading this way.

DJ grabs as much of his equipment as he can carry and hurries off Right as BOGEY stomps in Left. WUSS scurries behind WALTER and clings to his leg.

BOGEY: Where's the party? I heard there was going to be a party here today.

KATY isn't fazed by BOGEY.

KATY: It's just finished.

BOGEY: Is there anything left to eat?

KATY: There's a few curled up sandwiches, if the cat hasn't had them all.

BOGEY: You can't run a body like mine on curled up sandwiches. *(He flexes his muscles.)* I'm sick of living off junk food. I need a cook. I must have four square meals a day.

KATY: Four! Most people manage on three. One in our case, if we're lucky. *(She looks witheringly at WALTER.)*

BOGEY: I'm only a light eater.

KATY: You mean, as soon as it's light you start eating?

BOGEY waves a piece of paper.

BOGEY: Where can I stick my advert?

KATY: *(to the audience)* Ooh, I'm tempted to tell him, but I'm a lady.

BOGEY: It has to be somewhere where everybody will see it.

KATY: *(to the audience)* Not where I was thinking of then. *(She speaks to BOGEY.)* This cook's job, does it pay well?

BOGEY: Pay? What do you mean?

KATY: Rate per hour. Weekly wage. Money.

BOGEY: Ah... money!

KATY: Assuming we're talking about a six day week.

BOGEY: Seven. It'll be a live- in job.

KATY: Even with a live- in job, you won't get anybody to work seven days a week. Everybody needs a Sunday off.

BOGEY: No, no, not Sunday. That's roast, yorkshire and three veg, with pudding and custard day.

KATY: Then you'll have to have your Sunday dinner on a Saturday. A mother has to spend Sundays with her family, although I'm sure I don't know why, when some are such idle good for nothings. (*She treats WALTER to another withering look.*)

BOGEY: No, it has to be seven days.

KATY: Then I'm afraid, Ogre Bogey, that you are yodelling up an oak tree.

BOGEY: (*slyly*) I'm willing to pay five hundred pounds a week, plus bed and board.

KATY snatches the paper from BOGEY'S hand and sticks it down her bodice.

KATY: You've just got yourself a cook. Get the kettle on, big boy. I'll see you at Castle Hassle in half an hour.

BOGEY exits Left.

WALTER: Mum! What are you playing at? You can't go and live in Ogre Bogey's castle.

KATY: Five hundred smackers a week says I can.

WALTER: But nobody ever goes near his castle. He eats people.

KATY: Don't be stupid, Walter. How can he eat people when they never go near him? Just because he lives alone and makes Shrek look like George Clooney doesn't mean he's a cannibal. The villagers do spread a lot of silly nonsense sometimes.

WALTER: But I'll never see you if you have to work seven days a week.

KATY: You can come and visit me, can't you? And at five hundred pounds a week, it won't be for long, just until I've made enough to pay off our debts. One of us has to earn some money.

WALTER: What shall I do without you?

KATY: You could try being a miller, and while you're at it, show that useless fat cat how to earn its keep. The mill is crawling with mice. Ta ta, son! Make sure you come and visit me soon. (*She exits Left*)

WALTER calls after her.

WALTER: Mum! Come back... Mum! I'll be a good boy, I promise. I'll even have a go at running the mill. I will. (*He stares dejectedly after her, then comes slowly to FRONT.*) She means it. She's gone to live at Castle Hassle. How shall I cope without my mum?

WUSS: Fat! *Fat!* How dare she? I've never been in better shape.

WALTER, never dreaming it could be the cat, looks all round to see who has spoken.

WALTER: I'm starting to hear things. I'm falling apart already. Perhaps I'm losing my marbles. Oh Mum, I miss you.

WUSS: Oh for goodness sake, Walter, get a grip.

WALTER, startled, looks round again, finally looking at the cat.

WUSS: Yes, it's me.

WALTER: But you can't talk, Puss.

WUSS: Well, obviously I can. I've just never chosen to speak before, probably because I could never get a word in sideways because of your mum. Still, she's gone now and desperate times call for desperate actions.

WALTER: Oh Puss, and to think I always thought you were a bit of a scaredy-cat.

WUSS: That's just an act. Nobody ever expects too much of you if they think you're the timid sort, but now we urgently need a plan so I'm putting my mind to it.

WALTER: I'm feeling better already. My Puss cares about me and wants to help me.

WUSS: Well actually, I was thinking more about me... it's the mice thing. I have a bit of a phobia. I can't possibly touch them. Oh no! They freak me out. Squeaky, beady little things! Ugh, anything but the mice!

WALTER: There's one behind you.

WUSS yells and starts to bolt.

WALTER: Just joking! It's a joke.

WUSS: That's not funny.

WALTER: Sorry. I didn't realise you don't understand jokes.

WUSS: Of course I understand jokes. What do you call something with ten legs, red spots, and great big jaws?

WALTER: *(in jokey mode)* What do you call something with ten legs, red spots, and great big jaws? I've no idea. Why do you ask?

WUSS: Because one just crawled up your trouser leg.

WALTER yells and shakes his legs, until he sees WUSS laughing, and gets the joke

WALTER: Ok. Point taken. So do you have any suggestions about what we could do, Puss?

WUSS: Actually I think I might come up with something, but first, can I ask you not to call me Puss? It's such a girly sort of name.

WALTER: Ok. So what do you want me to call you?

WUSS: Well, I don't know why, but all my friends call me Wuss.

WALTER: Ok. Wuss it is. What do you have in mind, Wuss?

WUSS: First, tell me what you want most in all the world - money, power, superstardom?

WALTER: What's the point?

WUSS: Because if you trust me, I'll get it for you. Go on, anything at all.

WALTER: That's easy. I want to meet that girl again, that beautiful girl who suddenly disappeared this afternoon.

WUSS begins to suck in through his teeth and make very doubtful noises, like a dealer when asked to make an offer on your second-hand car.

WALTER: You said anything at all. That's not much to ask for, is it?

WUSS: Not if she'd been any other girl, but *she* happens to be the Princess Bridget.

WALTER: Don't be daft! Did she look like a princess? She was dressed just like any other village girl.

WUSS: Of course she was, because now and again she feels the need to *be* just like any other village girl. Life's not all free and easy up at King Jonah's palace, you know. He expects only the highest standards from his daughter. He'd be furious if he knew she was mixing with the commoners because he has plans for her to marry one of the nobility.

WALTER: No!

WUSS: Afraid so. In fact, he's arranged for her to choose a husband tomorrow from a line up of suitable candidates.

WALTER: No! How do you know this?

WUSS: Because I've been up at the Palace many times. I have several feline acquaintances who live there.

WALTER: Don't give me that! You never leave the mill. You're asleep in your basket all day.

WUSS: But you don't know where I get to at night do you, after you've put me out with the milk bottles? I get about a bit then, and I don't mix with any old riff raff. No, I'm afraid the Princess Bridget's not for you, Walter. You're punching well above your weight there. You'll have to forget her.

WALTER: I don't think I can. Even though I've only met her once... I think I love her, Wuss.

Suggested place for a song from WALTER.

He sits with his head in his hands. WUSS approaches him and puts an arm round his shoulders.

WUSS: Cheer up, Walter. The germ of an idea is beginning to form. Can you get me a big bag, a good pair of boots, and a great big beef dripping sandwich?

WALTER: I suppose so, but why?

WUSS: And if, at any time, I refer to you as the Marquis of Carabas, you won't contradict me, will you?

WALTER: I suppose not, but why?

WUSS: Because I have to look smart if I'm going to catch a present to take to King Jonah, from my rich young master, the Marquis of Carabas.

WALTER: Is that me?

WUSS: Yes.

WALTER: Wuss, you can call me the Marquis of Carabas if you like, but you can't call me rich because I'm not.

WUSS: Not yet, but I'm working on it.

WALTER: What are you going to do with the beef dripping sandwich?

WUSS: Eat it of course. I'm starving.

Curtain

Scene 2

Front of Curtain. The next day. On the road to King Jonah's palace.

WUSS totters on Right. He wears high heeled ladies' boots, a big ornate ladies' hat, and carries a huge, garish tote bag. He responds to the laughter.

WUSS: Oh don't! I feel bad enough as it is, and these boots are crippling me. I know I must look ridiculous. They're Mrs. Wheel's Sunday best. Walter couldn't afford new ones, not even second hand from a charity shop. Mind you, the prices some of these charity shops ask aren't very second hand, are they? Poor Walter! Bless him, he means well, so I hadn't the heart to remind him I'm a boy. Then just as I'm leaving the house, he plonks this on my head and says, "You know what they say, Wuss, if you can't fight wear a big hat", but if anything's guaranteed to get me *into* a fight, it's this.

JERRY enters Left. He wears powerful specs because he has terrible eyesight.

JERRY: Excuse me madam, but you shouldn't be here, This is private land belonging to King Jonah's royal park.

WUSS: And you are?

JERRY: Jerry Berry, King's Equerry. *(He picks up a small notebook and pencil, which is attached to his belt.)* I'm afraid I shall have to report you for trespassing. Name please.

WUSS: *(speaking in a feminine voice.)* Katherine Wheel, Sex Appeal.

JERRY: Oh, Mrs. Wheel! I'm so dreadfully sorry. Of course it's you. I should have recognised the hat. The times I've admired you in it!

WUSS: *(flirtatiously)* Yes, I've noticed your sidelong glances in church, you naughty man.

JERRY: Who could help themselves? You're a beautiful woman, Mrs. Wheel

WUSS: *(to audience)* Somebody should have gone to Specsavers. *(He speaks to JERRY.)* And you're a handsome man, Jerry. Maybe we could get together some time.

JERRY: That would be beyond my wildest, Mrs. Wheel.

WUSS: *(aside)* Get a life! *(He speaks to JERRY.)* Oh, please, do call me Katy.

JERRY: *(overcome)* You don't know how long I've dreamed of this moment. Ooh, kiss me, Katy.

He advances, with lips pursed and open arms.

WUSS: Really, Jerry! What sort of girl do you think I am? There'll be no kisses exchanged until the third date, and there won't be a first date until after I've seen King Jonah.

JERRY: Oh, I'm really not supposed to allow that. Is it important?

WUSS: I should say it is! I represent the people of Spotty Bottom. We've bought a twenty-fifth anniversary present for King Jonah, and I've been chosen to deliver it.

JERRY: Oh, in that case, go right ahead. He won't mind that. It's the complainers and petitioners he can't stand. Follow the path through the forest which will lead you into the palace gardens then take the drive right up to the front door. I'd accompany you myself, but I have to go and meet some of the aristocracy. There are foreigners amongst them so I'll have to teach them the rudiments of etiquette.

WUSS: Oh Jerry, you're so refined. So I'll see you later at the palace, shall I?

JERRY: You can count on it, Katy.

WUSS: Ta ta!

JERRY: Ta ta! *(He gives a coy wave as he exits Right)*

WUSS: Walter owes me, big time.

As WUSS checks that JERRY has gone, POACHER backs in Left, with a stout sack type bag over his shoulder, wearing smart masculine boots and a large gentleman's hat complete with feather. They both yelp and speak together as they collide mid stage.

WUSS: I've got permission from Jerry –

POACHER: I haven't been poaching, honest- *(He hides the bag behind his back.)*

WUSS: Excuse me, but I think it's quite obvious that you have been poaching. *(He nods at the hidden bag.)* And, apart from that, your face has gone red.

POACHER: Oh no, I never can tell a lie properly! I'm just a poor man. I can't afford to pay a fine. Please madam, don't report me to Jerry Berry the King's Equerry.

WUSS: I am not a madam.

POACHER: So why the ladies gear?... Oh, I get it -

WUSS: - no you don't.

POACHER: You're one of those –

WUSS: - no I'm not. It's a long story, but be assured, I don't make a habit of dressing in ladies' clothing. Come to that, why does a poacher dress in gentlemen's gear?

POACHER: I thought that if old Jerry spotted me from a distance he'd think I was one of the courtiers out hunting. I've only come to get a present for my old mum. It's her birthday tomorrow and I've got no money to buy her a nice gift or even take her out for fish and chips, so I thought I'd catch a rabbit and make her a rabbit pie. *(He opens the bag and WUSS looks inside.)*

WUSS: What a beauty!

POACHER: It's just beginner's luck.

WUSS: Another porky! You've gone all red again.

POACHER: I'm useless at fibbing, aren't I? It's just that I can't get a job and if I didn't come poaching we'd never be able to afford to buy meat.

WUSS: Listen mate, what would your mum say to a nice new hat with accessories to match, as a birthday present?

POACHER: She'd be thrilled to bits, but I couldn't afford them.

WUSS: But wouldn't they make a much better birthday present than a rabbit pie?

POACHER: I'd say!

WUSS: Then you take these, and I'll take those. Don't mention it to anybody, and I won't say a word about the poaching to my old friend, Jerry. Any chance of a brace of pheasants and a small wild boar in the next day or so?

POACHER: No problem.

WUSS: You're a gentleman, and seeing as you're basically an honest man and you know all about the ways of poachers, there may be a job going in the future, working as gamekeeper for my master, the Marquis of Carabas. Do we have a deal?

POACHER: I'd say! Deal! I'll have the pheasants ready tomorrow, and the boar the day after. Anything else I can get you?

WUSS: Not just at the moment, thanks.

They exchange hats, boots and bags.

POACHER: I feel a bit foolish. What if anybody sees me?

WUSS: Keep your head down. It's only until you get home. See you later.

WUSS exits Left, and as POACHER struggles to pull the boots on. WALTER enters Right. He taps POACHER on his shoulder.)

WALTER: Wuss! Wuss!

POACHER: Here, who are you calling a wuss? Do you want a thick ear lad?

WALTER: Sorry! I thought you were my cat. He was wearing exactly the same gear as you.

POACHER: I wouldn't know anything about that. *(He can't get away quickly enough, and hurries off Right, with the boots still only half on.)*

WALTER: *(calling)* Wuss! Wuss! Here, Wussy, Wussy, Wussy!

DJ enters Right, looking behind him Offstage. He carries a bag/case containing his microphone.

DJ: There's more than a few oddballs knocking about today.