

PUSS IN BOOTS

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Act one - Scene One

Outside the Mill in the village of Great Grumbling on the Green.

(A windmill, with sails and a practical door, stands up stage right in front of a backcloth with open fields and hedges. A couple of empty corn sacks are stacked by the door, above which is a sign: Muggins and Mallone. Below it is a second sign, this one removable, Master Millers and Flour Graders of Distinction, and a third, a reversible open and closed sign, is set to closed. On the other side of the door is a flower pot with a plant in it. Gladys Goodenough's daughters and the village lads are on stage.)

SONG A: Zip-a-dee-doo-dah

(After the number the girls queue up at the mill door.)

Anxious Annie: Well would you believe it – it's closed.

2nd girl: Honestly! I don't know why Ma insists on buying her flour here – the service is appalling. *(There is a chorus of agreement.)*

3rd girl: I bet the lazy millers are still in bed.

4th girl: Go and knock Annie – see if you can wake them up. *(Anxious Annie raps on the door. Nothing happens.)*

2nd girl: Louder, Annie. *(She knocks again. Still nothing. 2nd girl comes forward and pushes her aside.)* Here, let me try! *(She raises her hand to knock but as she does so the door flies open and she finds herself knocking on Mallone's chest.)* Ooo-er!

Mallone: You need say Ooo-er!

2nd girl: Sorry, Mallone.

3rd girl: We've come to buy some flour for our Ma.

Mallone: Can't you read? We're closed.

4th girl: But she's right out and we've come all the way up the hill specially.

5th girl: She'll have our guts for garters if we go back without any!

Mallone: Well that's not my problem. *(He turns to go back inside. Anxious Annie tugs at his sleeve.)*

Anxious Annie: Oh please, Mallone – can't you just sell us a few ounces?

Girls: Pretty please, Mallone.

Mallone: Sorry girls, no can do. I just can't get hold of the corn these days. Look. *(He picks up the sacks, tips them up and shakes them.)* Not a grain of it! The bottom's fallen right out of the flour business since Warburton's opened that factory of theirs down the road. *(There are exclamations of shock and consternation, interrupted by the sound of a loud "eeyore!" offstage. Muggins enters, sobbing into a huge hanky and leading Neddy, who has an estate agent's board in the panniers on his back.)*

Muggins: Got it, Mallone. *(He bursts into tears.)*

Mallone: Oh pull yourself together, Muggins! *(He helps Muggins, who blows his nose, unload the sign.)* I've just been telling the Miss Goodenoughs here how Warburtons have cornered the flour market in Great Grumbling. *(Muggins lifts the For Sale sign onto his shoulder, Mallone ducks as it swings in his direction.)* Yes, there's trouble at t'mill all right, eh, Muggins? *(He ducks again as the sign swings*

back the other way.) And all the Miss Goodenoughs come up here special, to buy flour for their Ma. (The sign swings again and this time it knocks him flat.)

Muggins: Where do you want it, Mallone? *(He looks around, the sign swinging wildly)* Mallone? I say, where have you gone Mallone? *(He turns and knocks Mallone, who is getting to his feet, flat again. Mallone jumps up and grabs the sign.)*

Mallone: Oh give it 'ere. You're not safe to be let out Muggins. *(He puts the sign up by the mill. Stands back and admires it.)* Yes ladies, Mallone and Muggins' Mill is on the market, lock stock and barrel!

Muggins *(looking anxiously around):* But we don't have a barrel!

Mallone: It's a figure of speech, stupid! *(Muggins opens his mouth)* And yes, I know - we haven't got one of them either! *(He looks at the sign again and wipes a tear from his eye.)* It's a sad day for Mallone and Muggins, Muggins. *(Muggins, bursts into tears again, Mallone clasps him round the shoulders.)* There, there old chap.

Mallone'll see you right. *(There is a renewed burst of sobbing from Muggins.)*

Muggins: That's what I'm afraid of!

Mallone: Something will turn up, you'll see. *(The village lads have been conferring in a huddle and now they come forward.)*

Lad 1: And what about us, then?

Mallone: What about you?

Lad 2: We work here!

Mallone: Not any more you don't. I'm laying you off. I've got your P45s here. *(He hands them out.)*

Lad 1: What about our redundancy money?

Mallone: Sorry Lads. I haven't two ha'pennies to rub together. *(The lads huddle again, then start to march off.)* Hey, where are you going?

Lad 2: To get a job at Warburton's!

Lads: Yeah! *(Muggins starts to follow them off but Mallone hauls him back.)*

Mallone: Oh, no you don't - we're in this together.

Muggins: But - but - *(they are interrupted by a commotion offstage.)*

Gladys: You'll have to push harder than that, Oddjob! *(The girls are thrown into a flutter and Mallone and Muggins look suddenly scared.)*

Anxious Annie: Look out, it's Ma!

2nd girl: We're in for it now.

Muggins and Mallone: And so are we! *(They make a dash for the mill door, getting stuck as they try to squash through together. Mallone makes it, pushing Muggins aside and slamming the door in his face. Muggins hammers on it. Mallone opens up and yanks Muggins inside.)*

Neddy: Eeyore! *(The door flies open and Muggins dashes back out.)*

Muggins: Sorry Neddy! *(He bundles him towards the door and starts pushing him inside. There is a cry of outrage from Mallone.)*

Mallone *(offstage):* Hey, you can't bring that animal in here!

Muggins: Well I'm not leaving him out here when Gladys Goodenough's about! *(With a last heave he gets Neddy inside and catapults in after him. The door slams. Not a moment too soon.)*

Gladys: Put some effort into it, Oddjob!

Oddjob: I'm trying, Mrs Goodenough. I'm trying. *(They appear, Oddjob pushing Gladys along in a go-kart. His task is made all the more difficult as he is carrying a broom, post bag and other paraphernalia.)*

Gladys: Yes, very trying! Now come on Oddjob - one more shove should do it. *(Oddjob pushes the go-kart centre stage and straightens up. The go-kart continues*

and Gladys gives a scream.) The brake, Oddjob – put the brake on! *(He hurriedly stops the go-kart. Gladys gets out, straightening her clothes and patting her hair. Oddjob holds his hand out.)*

Oddjob: That'll be two bob, please, Mrs Goodenough.

Gladys: Two bob? TWO BOB! That's daylight robbery. It can't be more than half a mile!

Oddjob: But it's uphill all the way! And me encumbered with all the tools of my trade! I'm village caretaker, postman, AND part-time chamberlain at the Palace as well as taxi driver, you know!

Gladys: And I'm just a poor widow woman remember!

Oddjob (*resolute*): Two bob.

Gladys: Oh, all right! (*aside*) Ooh, he is hard! Look the other way, Oddjob. *(She retrieves her purse from a secret pocket in her bloomers, fumbles inside it, gradually counting out the money.)* There! Ninepence. A shilling. One and six. One and eleven. One and eleven-pence ha'penny. *(She gives him a look and reluctantly adds another coin.)* One and eleven-pence three farthings. And that's your lot. Look, nothing left. *(She shakes the purse. Oddjob taps his foot, his hand still held out.)* Ooh, he's so hard! *(She searches about her person and produces another coin.)* There you are, skinflint, two bob! I don't know how you sleep at night!

Oddjob: Well I have a living to earn same as everyone else, Mrs Goodenough. *(He pockets the money. Gladys's daughters now present themselves.)*

Girls: Hello Ma!

Gladys: So this is where you've all got to!

Anxious Annie: Well, you did send us out to buy the flour, Ma!

Gladys: Yes, and you've been gone so long I've had to trail up here to get it myself. And do you know how much it's cost me?

2nd girl: Two bob.

Gladys: Yes, two bob my girl! Well, have you got the flour?

Girls: No Ma.

Gladys: No? Whaddya mean, no?

3rd girl: The mill's closed.

Gladys: Closed! We'll soon see about that! I'll have the lazy beggars out of bed in no time. *(She heads resolutely to the mill door, rolling up her sleeves.)*

4th girl: No, Ma. It's closed for good.

5th girl (*pointing to For Sale sign*): Look, Muggins and Mallone have put the mill on the market.

Gladys (*stopping in her tracks*): Well, I'll be - ! Whoever heard of such a thing? Someone's gotta do something about this. I'll appeal to the public at large! *(She comes downstage)* Hello, public at large!

Audience: Hello!

Gladys: Don't you think it's dreadful – closing our mill down?

Audience: Yes!

Gladys: Well that makes *(she does a swift head count)* four hundred and ninety-six (**CAPACITY OF THEATRE OR HALL**) of us. I think we should get up a petition and send it to the council. Would you all sign a petition to keep our mill open?

Audience: Yes.

Gladys: Oh I'm so pleased. I had a feeling we were going to be great friends. Now, where's my pencil? Ah - just avert your eyes a mo! *(She rummages in her bloomers pocket and produces a pencil and a tiny scrap of paper.)* There, I'll start it at this end and you can all pass it around.

Anxious Annie: That's no use Ma!

2nd girl: They'll never get all their names on that!

3rd girl: Besides, it won't do any good. The mill's closing because of the new Warburton's factory.

Gladys (*crestfallen*): Oh! But what am I do about my flour? And after I've spent two bob on a taxi. Two bob! Aren't taxi fares dear?

Audience: Yes!

Oddjob: Well, you could have walked!

Gladys: What, and wear out good shoe leather? (*Oddjob shrugs*)

Oddjob: Suit yourself!

Gladys: Ooh, he is hard! Don't you think he's mean?

Audience: Yes!

Gladys: And me just a poor old widow woman!

Audience: Aww!

Gladys: It's a lot sadder than that!

Audience: AWWW!!

Gladys: Yes, I've had a troubled life! (*She dabs at her eyes with a hanky.*) You've heard of the Old Woman who Lived in a Shoe? Well that used to be me. Not that I was old, but I did have so many children I didn't know what to do. And then, I got evicted and had to bring them all up on a shoestring. And do you know – everyone of them's a girl. Not a son among 'em. Have you met my daughters? (*She indicates the girls.*) Come on girls, say how do you do nicely to all these people.

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