

FRINGE QUARTET

ACT ONE

Prologue – Beginnings

Mags, Tez and Sooz are onstage. There are a couple of chairs and a table used variously throughout.

Tez is visibly pregnant. Sooz is sitting down. Mags is fiddling with a digital camera. They have glasses of wine.

SOOZ. Can you see us all?
MAGS. Tez, get in a bit.
TEZ. I thought I was going to be sitting down...
SOOZ. You're always sitting down.
TEZ. I am pregnant.
SOOZ. How could we forget?
MAGS. Both of you, hush. I'm trying to work this.
SOOZ. Make sure you can see our heads.
TEZ. Can't miss yours.
MAGS. Where's Penny?
TEZ. Penny! We're starting!
SOOZ. She'll be stuffing her face.
MAGS. Penny!
SOOZ. Forget her. Is it running?
MAGS. Yeh, go!
TEZ. What, now?
MAGS. Yes, go on, go on.
SOOZ. Who's starting it off? Tez, say something.
TEZ. Why me?
SOOZ. Just do it.
TEZ. Hi!
SOOZ. Hi?
TEZ. A good a start as any.
MAGS. You two... Hello, world!
SOOZ. Where are you broadcasting to? The solar system?
MAGS. Hello anyone who may be watching...
TEZ. Hello, mum!
MAGS. Well, here we are.
TEZ. They said it couldn't be done.
SOOZ. And it so nearly didn't!
MAGS. But now it's nearly here.
TEZ. Our first trip to the Edinburgh Fringe. And what a journey.
SOOZ. Of course, if we'd had any foresight, we would have filmed all this from the beginning...
TEZ. But we didn't know it was going to be the beginning of anything at the time...
MAGS. And besides, we only got the camera yesterday...

TEZ. Cheers for lending it us, Steve!
 SOOZ. **(raising a glass)** Steve!
 MAGS. Let's just make the most of it now we've got it. At least we can film the journey and the shows and backstage and the flat...
 SOOZ. Yes, OK, OK. So, here's to us... off to Edinburgh, and...
 TEZ. Fame and fortune....
 MAGS. And the start of the next adventure for the four of us...
 TEZ. Where is Penny?
 MAGS. Penny!
 SOOZ. Leave her.
 MAGS. She's never here for the good bits.
 TEZ. To the four of us...
 SOOZ/MAGS/TEZ. Cheers!
 MAGS. And to think when it did all start... almost a year ago.
 TEZ. That audition.
 SOOZ. THAT audition... Like so many others.
 TEZ. I was crap.
 SOOZ. I was furious.
 MAGS. And I was late....
 TEZ. I was also a little bit thinner...
 SOOZ. But still sitting down...

They set the scene for The Audition.

Scene One – The Audition

There is a sign which reads 'Robin G Mauker, Producer' Tez, not pregnant, is sitting, reading a script, every so often looking up, as if memorising lines. We hear a cry, off, urgent, a sort of 'Ughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh'. This turns out to be Mags, as she runs into the room)

MAGS. Sorry I'm late.
 TEZ. What?
 MAGS. I'm late, aren't I? Please don't tell me I'm too late. Am I too late?
 TEZ. Well...
 MAGS. Have I missed it? I've missed it, haven't I? Oh God, I'm too late and I've missed it.
 TEZ. You here for the audition?
 MAGS. **(between breaths)** Audition. Yes. Here. Yes. Me. Yes.
 TEZ. You're not too late and you haven't missed it.
 MAGS. Oh, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. If I had any breath, I'd kiss you.
 TEZ. That's OK...
 MAGS. I would slobber all over you.
 TEZ. Right...
 MAGS. I would eat you right up, every fatty morsel... I'm ready when you are.
 TEZ. No, I'm...
 MAGS. Where do you want me?
 TEZ. Look, I'm not...
 MAGS. Shall I just do it here?
 TEZ. I'm auditioning too.

MAGS. What?
TEZ. I'm here for the auditions as well. They're through there. They've got someone in with them.

MAGS. You mean I ran all this way for nothing?
TEZ. Where did you run from?
MAGS. The ladies. They said it was just down the corridor. But they lied. It was miles away. And when I did find a cubicle, it was locked, so I tried another one, but that had a man in it. So I just panicked.

TEZ. Well, you're here now.
MAGS. Yeh, and dying for a poo.
(Tez has nothing to say to this so goes back to her script!)
You're very smart.

TEZ. What?
MAGS. You're dressed very smart.
TEZ. It's for the audition.
MAGS. Did we have to get dressed up?
TEZ. Well, no...
MAGS. We had to get dressed up, didn't we? I didn't get dressed up. I should have got dressed up. I always ruin it.
TEZ. Calm down. We didn't have to get dressed up.
MAGS. Oh. Right.
TEZ. Just the part is that of a high-flying, high-powered executive business woman, so I thought I'd come as, you know...

MAGS. What?
TEZ. A high-flying, high-powered executive business woman.
MAGS. Oh. I've no chance. I look like a whore.
TEZ. The part does have a certain sexual quality to it.
MAGS. Yeh, but not this much. I should have worn 'fancy dress' like you.
TEZ. Look, I shouldn't worry. It never works for me either. Whatever I go for, I'm always wrong. I once went for the part of a 34-year old dark-haired failed actress who couldn't get the parts she goes for. I didn't get it.

MAGS. How old were you?
TEZ. 34.
MAGS. Wow. That's quite old.
TEZ. I'm 36 now.
MAGS. That's even older.
TEZ. Have you learned it?
MAGS. What?
TEZ. The script they sent.
MAGS. They sent a script? I don't remember getting a script! I really have no chance now. They've probably given it to whoever's in there. It's probably all being cut, dried, signed, sealed and bloody delivered as we speak.
(At that moment, the audition door opens and Sooz enters, furiously and angrily shouting back to whoever's inside.)

SOOZ. Thank you, goodnight, and up yours! At least we know what the G in your name stands for. Gigantic Ginormous Gargantuan Git!!
MAGS. Did you get it?

SOOZ. It's a scam. It is, really. £55 train ticket from Manchester, £80 for a decent Hotel Room, £20 taxi fare to make sure I was here on time, not to mention god knows how much on a new outfit, make-up, wig...
(She removes wig)
They barely acknowledged my existence. What are you two gawping at?
(Mags and Tez look away)
You both here for this so-called "step right up, we'll see anyone" open audition?

TEZ. Yes.
SOOZ. They're not seeing anyone. They're giving the part to a man.
TEZ. The high-flying, high-powered executive business woman part?
SOOZ. Yes, apparently.
TEZ. Great. I really thought... I really ... That's just... great.
(She starts to cry)

MAGS. And you got dressed up specially? If it's any consolation, you do look great, doesn't she?

SOOZ. What? Oh yes.
MAGS. She looks great. But you – you look magnificent.
SOOZ. Just something I threw together.
MAGS. And you wore a wig! I'd never have done that!
SOOZ. Thought it'd make me feel different.
MAGS. And has it?
SOOZ. Yes, more angry I didn't get it!
TEZ. I'm sorry. Just thought this was the one.
SOOZ. Didn't we all?
TEZ. No, but really, I did.
SOOZ. Look, we all say that, every time.
TEZ. But this one, I was sort of, you know, banking on.
SOOZ. Hey, it's only a play.
TEZ. I really thought I could make a go of this one.
SOOZ. Yeh, me too, if I'm honest.
MAGS. I knew I never had a chance. I always get to play the comedy roles, the ditzy parts, and this one was as far removed from ditzy as it gets.

SOOZ. Whatever ditzy actually means.
TEZ. I'd learned it all. Every scene. Every speech. What a complete waste of time.
SOOZ. I'd learned it all too, but they didn't ask me to perform even one word.
MAGS. I hadn't learned any of it.
SOOZ. It's a crap script anyway.
(Throws it down)

TEZ. I've a good mind to...
SOOZ. What?
TEZ. Oh! Do something silly. Smash their water cooler. Break a window. Tear up their bloody script.
(She starts to tear Sooz's script)

SOOZ. Oi! Tear your own! I'm keeping mine for posterity. Or for my posterior at least.

TEZ. **(letting off steam)** Aaarrgh!
SOOZ. Feel better now?

TEZ. Not really.
SOOZ. Try this.
(She changes the M of Mauker to a W and the U to an N)
Childish, I know. But, he is, isn't he?
TEZ. How about this?
(Tez changes the B and R of Robin.)
SOOZ. Nice. Understated.
MAGS. My turn.
(Mags removes the U and C of Producer)
SOOZ. Well, I think that's exhausted that little game.
TEZ. You two want to grab a coffee?
SOOZ. I've no other plans....
MAGS. Me neither.
TEZ. Come on then... Let's leave him to it.
MAGS. Ha! Yes. The prodder!
(The girls laugh and become narrators again)

SOOZ. So we went for a coffee.
TEZ. Are you filming all this?
MAGS. Yeh, why not? It's interesting.
SOOZ. Our first encounter.
MAGS. Penny's missing it all.
SOOZ. She missed it all then too...
TEZ. Never mind, it's fun remembering. When was it? September time?
SOOZ. Must have been yes, they'd just taken all the 'Back to School' stuff out of the shops and replaced it was Christmas.
TEZ. Christmas...
SOOZ. That's still to come, Teresa, you'll get your bit.
MAGS. So, in the coffee bar...

Scene Two – Coffee

(They set up the coffee bar. Sooz has some designer clothes bags with her – she is showing off a new top. Tez is sugaring and stirring her drink)
SOOZ. Couldn't resist it!
TEZ. I could never wear anything like that. I'd be afraid of getting noticed.
SOOZ. Oh, you only live once. Anyway, cheers!
MAGS. I don't normally drink coffee. Gets me too excitable. But I'm excited enough already.
TEZ. What are you excited about?
MAGS. I don't know. Drinking coffee I suppose. I'm Mags by the way. Short for Margaret.
SOOZ. Sooz. Horrid name for Suzanne, but it stuck.
TEZ. Teresa. Tez.
SOOZ. Hello Tez and Mags.
TEZ/MAGS. Hello Sooz!
TEZ. So how long have you both been acting?

MAGS. Oh God, like, always. The first time was a bit of an accident really, as the girl who was originally playing my part died so they were like, you know, a bit short.

SOOZ. I've done it for ages, mainly amateur stuff. Only been trying to make a living out of it seriously for the last couple of years. Since... Well, since I realised there were other things out there. What about you?

TEZ. Got the bug when I was 7. I was in *The Sound of Music*. One of the children. I'd only ever seen the film, though, and thought they were going to do the bit where they all fall in the water. I was scared to death of getting soaked every night.

MAGS. Have you both got agents?

TEZ/SOOZ. **(wearily)** Yes!

MAGS. They're not great then?

TEZ. The only work I've had I've got myself, and still had to pay them.

SOOZ. Mine keeps putting me up for parts that are blatantly wrong. Judi Dench's mother. *Teletubbies* On Ice. *The Elephant Man*.

MAGS. You are funny.

SOOZ. I'm not joking.

TEZ. I was in a commercial once. I mean, you couldn't see my face, but you'd know those pointy fingers anywhere.

MAGS. What were you pointing at?

TEZ. A new range of panty liners.

MAGS. Nice.

SOOZ. Why on earth were you pointing at them?

TEZ. Because they looked so lovely and fresh apparently.

MAGS. My claim to fame is understudy to Betty Davis.

SOOZ. The American film star? No!

MAGS. No, sorry, I meant Betty Turpin. She was supposed to open a supermarket, and I was dressed as a carrot, and they said if she didn't show up, I could cut the ribbon.

TEZ. And did she turn up?

MAGS. Yes. The cow.

TEZ. When I was at drama school, I always used to get the male parts. You know, the ones they had to make into a woman because there were always more female actors. People still think they went to college with a bloke called Terry. I want to do something feminine.

MAGS. What have you got planned next?

TEZ. More CVs and photos. More auditions. More rejections.

SOOZ. Looks like I'll have to get a proper job. I promised myself I wouldn't, but I may have no choice.

MAGS. I've been temping. At least there's always an end in sight.

SOOZ. It would be nice to be able to do a bit of proper theatre. Show these narrow-minded "prodders" what they're missing.

TEZ. I always fancied taking a play to Edinburgh. You know, to the fringe. So much commitment though. Not to mention time and money.

SOOZ. One thing I've got a lot of.

TEZ. Money?

SOOZ. Unfortunately not. Time. And commitment I suppose.

TEZ. We should do it.

SOOZ. Ha! Yes, we should. Are there many good plays for 3 women?

MAGS. My friend Penny writes plays.
TEZ. Are they any good?
MAGS. No, but she could work on them.
SOOZ. Has she had any performed?
MAGS. No, but she's very keen.
TEZ. Are they full-length?
MAGS. No, she's never actually finished any of them.
TEZ. It's not sounding too promising, is it?
MAGS. She's writing one – "2 women, 1 Suitcase" – that sounds to have a bit more potential.
SOOZ. Tell you what – here's my phone number. If we're not working, or not famous – even by a little bit – in 6 months' time, phone me, and we'll get together and put a play on at the Edinburgh Fringe.
TEZ. You make it sound so easy.
SOOZ. Loads do it every year, why not us?
MAGS. What if we're in something, but not famous?
SOOZ. Well, ring if you fancy it.
MAGS. What if we're famous, but resting?
SOOZ. That counts too.
MAGS. What if we're resting, but famous?
SOOZ. Just ring if you want to do a bloody play. That will give us time to get organised. In the meantime, ask your friend to work on a play for 3 women. We'll take the Festival by storm.
TEZ. Yes!
SOOZ. We can be called Minge on the Fringe!
TEZ. What?
SOOZ. We'll think of something. Well, Mags and Tez. See you in 6 months.
TEZ. Minge on the Fringe. We can't be called that!
SOOZ. At least they'll know you're a woman. Cheers!

The women become narrators.

MAGS. I still can't get over you suggesting that.
SOOZ. Why not? It stuck, didn't it? I didn't know you two would be such prudes.
TEZ. We're not, it just seemed...
MAGS. Inappropriate.
TEZ. Rude.
MAGS. Tacky.
TEZ. Bloody funny.

They laugh. Penny enters.

PENNY. Why do people always laugh when I come on?
MAGS. Penny!
SOOZ. Take your time, why don't you?
PENNY. Have you started?
TEZ. Just.
PENNY. Shift up, fatty. It's my turn. Where you up to?
MAGS. Probably your first entrance.

PENNY. I could always time it to perfection.
TEZ. Of course there were lots of things we didn't know about each other then.
SOOZ. LOTS of things...
MAGS. But that's what's so good. Getting to know people.
SOOZ. If you say so...
PENNY. So, remind me again how it all started to come together.
MAGS. You were probably writing...
TEZ/SOOZ. As always...
MAGS. And I'd just met the others and wanted to tell you.
PENNY. In your own sweet way.

They set up the next scene.

Scene Three – Domestic Bliss

(Penny sits at a laptop, eating a large sandwich. She starts to write, with a real force. The phone rings. She ignores it)
PENNY. No. Not now.
(The phone immediately stops. Penny writes. The phone rings again for several seconds before she locates it and answers it)
Go away, I'm busy.
(She hangs up – goes back to work. The phone rings again. Penny answers)
Unless you're from the National or the RSC, I don't want to know.
What's that, darling? Am I happy with my waste disposal? Yes, I bloody love it, thank you!
MAGS. **(off)** Penny! It's only me.
(Mags enters)
PENNY. Stay there.
(Mags freezes in the doorway. Penny types)
"Like a frozen statue, I saw Maureen and was rooted to the spot. And although her eyes said – stay back stay back – every other inch of her cried out – Go on go on. So on I went" – you may move – "into the unknown, into the void, into the house of the only person I had ever really loved."
MAGS. **(applauding)** That's great.
PENNY. I know, darling.
MAGS. Except for one thing.
PENNY. Go on.
MAGS. The name. Maureen. Doesn't really work for me. Never has.
PENNY. Maureen is the essence, darling. It is Maureen. Without Maureen there is nothing else.
MAGS. But why Maureen?
PENNY. Have you come to criticise or to impart knowledge?
MAGS. I was wondering... how's your latest play coming along?
PENNY. Which one, darling?
MAGS. There's more than one?

PENNY. Why yes. I have a number on the go at present. 'Shimmering Silvery Blue', the story of one lady athlete's love for another; 'Now's The Limit', one female schoolteacher's crush on a female pupil; 'Springs for Zebedee' all about forbidden love in a female concentration camp; '2 Women 1 Suitcase'...

MAGS. That's the one.

PENNY. I confess, I haven't worked on that for a few days. Why do you ask?

MAGS. I met these other two actresses at an audition today. We were talking about taking a play to Edinburgh.

PENNY. Edinburgh? The fringe festival? Oh, darling, I could tell you many a story about my days up there. And some of the nights!

MAGS. You've been?

PENNY. Many years ago – it's quite an experience.

MAGS. So I've heard.

PENNY. The crowds, the atmosphere, the sex... Sometimes all at the same time... Perhaps, perhaps, this could be the start of something big for you.

MAGS. I hope so. I really do.

PENNY. How was the audition?

MAGS. They didn't even see me.

PENNY. Bastards!

MAGS. I know.

PENNY. Still, they will know you one day. The world will soon recognise the talents and genius of Margaret D'Angelino.

MAGS. Who's that then?

PENNY. You! I thought of a new surname for you. You do like it, don't you, darling? Now leave me to write.

MAGS. And I need to learn that speech for the sketch show audition. Shall I put the kettle on?

(Penny is busy writing)
I'll put the kettle on.

(Mags exits. Penny writes.)
Sooz enters, different part of the stage, on phone)

SOOZ. Hey, it's me. Have there been any messages? Well, sometimes I forget which number I've given out... I know I don't need 3 phones, but this one's so swish... Anyway, I'm staying another night. Of course I can afford it. Well, it makes sense, in case I get another audition. Look, I'll have to go, I have a call waiting. Speak to you later.

(There is no call waiting. There is probably no audition either)
(Tez enters, in dowdy dressing gown, hair a mess, bleary-eyed, looking very down. She has a bowl of cereal. She goes to phone.)
(automated female voice) You have no messages.

PHONE. Really?

PHONE. You never have any messages.

TEZ. What?

PENNY. This really is amazing. I can feel it.

SOOZ/TEZ. Something's got to happen!
(Sooz, Tez and Penny exit)

Scene Four – Margaret D’Angelino Auditions

(Mags is auditioning. We don’t see who for)

MAGS. Margaret D’Angelino. D’Angelino. D-A-N-J... Call me Mags. Auditioning for the role of Ditzzy Fairy Liquid Girl for your new sketch show. In my own time, is it? Shall I just start then? Ok. Hope you like it. It’s not me, by the way, it’s just a, you know, character...Anyway, here goes...
Hi! Remember me? I was the little girl on the washing up liquid advert. No, not the good one, not the Fairy Liquid one, the other one, you know, the one that went out of business when they discovered traces of semen in one of the bottles.
Yes, that was me!
I’m resting at the moment because I don’t want to get typecast. I don’t want people thinking I can only do the one thing, you know, because I can actually smile, blow bubbles AND wash up.
I did have a washing-up job once. It was in a big restaurant in Oldham – they had a huge industrial-size sink to wash the pots in. Enormous taps, gigantic plug – ooh, you could wash up in there all day and get quite lost in the work.
Anyway, in the end, they fired me. They said what I was doing wasn’t hygienic. I said, I’ve studied cleanliness. What I don’t know about built-in gravy stains isn’t worth worrying about.
They just said I was barmy and not to go back, and could I kindly remove myself from the sink and put my clothes back on. They were very surly.
I’m glad I pissed in it now.
Was that all right? Will you let me know then? OK, thanks.
(she finishes the audition)
I take it by your rustling, whispering, coughing, talking, shuffling, snoring, scribbling and seat swapping, that’s a no, is it? Thought so. Thanks for your time. Thanks very much.

Blackout