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SF PERUSALS

A Dog's Life

A Play in One Act

Pam Valentine

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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www.SamuelFrench.com
www.SamuelFrench-London.co.uk

FOR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

UNITED STATES AND CANADA
Info@SamuelFrench.com
1-866-598-8449

UNITED KINGDOM AND EUROPE
Theatre@SamuelFrench-London.co.uk
020-7255-4302

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CHARACTERS

The Dogs

Ben, a battered old mongrel. Male
Fritz, a German Shepherd. Tough and rough. Male
Fifi, an overweight poodle. Female
Ginger, a bouncy and excitable young pup. Male or female

The Humans

The **Warden**
The **Woman** Visitor

The play is set in an animal shelter
Time —The present

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Costumes

The costumes suggest the lives of the dogs. There is no attempt to portray them as animals. Ben has a scarf round his neck, old trousers tied with string and a collarless shirt or T- shirt. Fritz wears an army combat shirt and trousers. Fifi has a black leotard with frills on the wrists and ankles. Ginger, who can be played by either sex, wears a suitably coloured leotard.None of the dogs wears shoes and they either sit or remain on all fours throughout.

Pam Valentine

Dedicated to my dog
Woof

Also by Pam Valentine,
published by Samuel French Ltd

Day of Reckoning

A DOG'S LIFE

An animal shelter

This play can be most effectively set against a black backdrop or curtains. A metal structure suggests four cages, each of which has a blanket bed in the corner. In the cages, from L *to* R, *are Fifi, Fritz, Ben and Ginger. Ben is asleep; Ginger is chewing a rubber toy*

There is a sudden noise of loud barking, off. Fifi looks pained. Fritz is instantly alert. Ben opens one eye, sighs, then closes his eye. Ginger tosses whatever he is chewing into the air

Fifi (*who has a faint French accent*) Oh ... This noise — I simply cannot stand it!
Ben Every time I drop off ...
Ginger What is it? What's happening? Is it food? Is it? Is it?
Fritz (*irritably*) Food is at five. You should know that by now. (*He puts his head on one side and listens*) I think it is the quarantine block ... Yes. It is.
Ginger Quarantine? What's quarantine? Is it food? Is it? Is it?
Fritz Sh! (*He listens*) Ah! A new arrival. He thinks he is there for ever. Must be his first time. (*He listens again*) Ah — they are telling him ...

The barking slowly fades to silence

Ginger Ben! Ben! What's quarantine?
Ben (*after a yawn*) Quarantine is where they put you when you've been abroad, Ginger.
Ginger Abroad? What's abroad? Is it food? Is it? Is it?

Fritz I am going to kill that pup.
Ginger Tell me! What's abroad?
Ben (*who doesn't know*) Well now, it's — er — it's sort of ... It's ... It's ... Fritz?
Fritz Abroad. (*He thinks*) Abroad is — there. It is not here. So it must be there.
Fifi Typical German logic.
Fritz What would an overweight French hearthrug know about logic?
Fifi How dare you! I have won prizes.
Ben Not again ...
Fritz Prizes? With that fat belly?

Fritz and Fifi snarl at each other

Ben Stop it! The pair of you. Fine example you both are for a young pup with his life in front of him. If he picks up aggressive tendencies from you two he's never going to get himself adopted.
Ginger What's adopted? Is it food? Is it? Is it?
Fritz He should be in the puppy block. He should not be here with us.
Ben They're full to bursting in the puppy block. When Brown Coat took me to see White Coat I heard them talking. Every August it's the same, they said. Then it's like it again in January.
Fritz I know about this August. Humans call it the "Holiday Season." They put their pups into kennels and do not take them out. I have heard them: "See you in a fortnight," they say. And that is that.
Fifi This is because they chew. Humans do not like chewy puppies.
Ginger Am I a chewy puppy? Am I? Am I?
Ben Well, now let's think. You had a rubber bone this morning ... Where is it now?
Ginger (*going from place to place*) There's — one bit here and — another bit here and — another bit ... (*He snuffles all round his cage*)
Fifi My humans always took me on holiday with them. First, I went to the beauty parlour. I was shampooed and clipped and made to look truly exquisite ...

Fritz Typically stupid human behaviour.
Fifi We went to the best hotels. And everyone used to say "Oh, look at Fifi! Isn't she sweet?" I was adored ...
Fritz Adored.
Fifi Yes! Adored.
Fritz Then why are you here? If you were so adored?

Fifi looks at him then sinks into a disconsolate heap

Ben That's quite enough of that. No need to upset her. No need at all.
Ginger Shall I tell you why I'm here, Fritz? Shall I? Shall I?
Fritz No.
Ginger I'm here because ——
Fritz I said 'No'.

Ginger snuffles around his cage again

Ben (*to Fritz*) You're all heart, you are. (*To Ginger*) All right then, young pup, why are you here? I said — why are you here?

Ginger snuffles more frantically

Hey! I'm talking to you!
Ginger Biscuit. I can smell biscuit. Biscuit! Biscuit! Biscuit! (*He follows the scent into a corner, pulls a blanket from his bed and finds a piece of biscuit*)

Ben watches Ginger with affectionate amusement

Ben They're always hungry at that age.
Fifi I have been hungry since I arrived. Still, I must think positively. By the time I am adopted I will be down to my target weight.

Fritz shakes with laughter

What is so funny?
Fritz By the time anyone adopts you you will have disappeared altogether.

Fifi (*hysterically*) I will be adopted. I will. I am still young. And once I have been to the beauty parlour ——

Fritz rolls on his back with laughter. Fifi looks at him. She has an idea, narrows her eyes, straightens her shoulders and sings "La Marseillaise." Fritz is outraged. He springs to his feet and loudly sings "Deutchland Uber Alles". The noise is deafening

Ben They'll be the death of me, those two.
Ginger What are they doing?
Ben Trying to kill me, that's what they're doing. Shut up, both of you.

Fritz and Fifi sing loudly. Ginger runs round and round in circles shouting "Shut up"

The Warden enters L. *He wears a brown overall*

Warden What the hell's going on in here? It's worse than the quarantine block. That's enough. Quiet! (*Very loudly*) Quiet!

Slowly the dogs subside. Only Ginger still circles madly

(*Moving to Ginger's cage*) OK, calm down, calm down. Teaching him bad ways, you lot are. Come on! Good boy! (*He takes a chocolate button from his pocket and offers it to Ginger*)

Ginger bounces up and tries to take the button

Warden Hey! Just a minute. What did I teach you yesterday?
Fritz Oh no ... Not the sit routine ...
Warden Sit!

Ginger looks at the Warden, puzzled

Fritz Why? Why do they do this?
Warden Sit!

Ben Makes 'em feel powerful.
Warden I said "Sit"!
Ben *(quietly)* Sit down, Ginger, there's a good pup.

Ginger sits

Warden Good boy! Very good. And the paw? What do we do with our paw?

Behind the Warden's back, Ben, Fritz, and Fifi, with bored expressions, all hold up a paw. Ginger puts his head on one side and looks at the Warden

Come on! Where's that paw? Like this! Remember? (*He holds one hand up like a paw*)

The other dogs shake with laughter

Fritz Have they no idea how stupid they look?
Warden Don't you want a little treat?
Ginger Is it food? Is it? Is it?
Warden It's no good you squeaking at me. Where's your paw?
Ben Ginge!

Ginger looks at Ben. Ben holds up a paw. Ginger copies him

Warden Well done. You see? You can do it.

The Warden gives Ginger a chocolate button. Ginger is ecstatic

Fritz All that for one doggie choc. What do they think we are ... ?
Ben Whatever they want us to be ... ?

The Warden goes to Ben's cage

Warden Hallo, Ben, old boy! Too tired to move, are we? (*He looks at Ben and thinks for a moment*) How long have you been with us now ... ? (*He takes a notebook from his pocket*)

Fritz As if he could understand the answer ...
Warden (*looking in his notebook*) A lot longer than you should have been ... (*He looks sadly at Ben, then moves on to Fritz*) And how are you, Fritz? You feeling any friendlier today?

Fritz growls

Please yourself. (*He moves on to Fifi who holds up a paw*)
Warden Nice try, Fifi, but I don't think so. In fact ... (*He looks at her*) I think we'll cut down on your biscuit for a few days. (*He writes in the notebook*)
Fifi (*outraged*) Cut down my ... Is he mad? All I need is a good trim.
Fritz And ten miles round the park every day.

Fifi moves to the bars that separate her from Fritz

Fifi If I ever get my teeth through these bars ...
Fritz What? What will you do?

Fifi and Fritz snarl at each other

Ben Don't fight in front of a human - looks bad . . .
Warden Now then! Behave yourselves. You've got a visitor coming round in a minute.
Fifi Visitor? At this time?
Ginger Visitor? What's a visitor? Is it food? Is it? Is it?
Warden Play your cards right, look appealing, don't jump up, and one of you could be on the way to a new home.

The Warden puts his notebook back in his pocket, walks back past the cages, pausing to look at Ben, and exits

Ben watches the Warden go, wondering

Fifi (*longingly*) Titbits ...
Fritz (*fiercely*) Something to guard!

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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