

Players: Male upper class gentleman well-spoken.
Female Prostitute. Broad South London Accent

ACT I

SCENE ONE

(INTERIOR. Male and female enter through bar. Man evidently drunk and carrying empty wine bottle. Woman leads.)

WOMAN

Don't be shy, Love. I won't bite.

(SHE GOES TO POKE THE FIRE. HE REMAINS STANDING UNSTEADY ON HIS FEET, LOOKS AWKWARD, EVIDENTLY UNCOMFORTABLE AT BEING HERE)
Park yerself. I've had the chair fumigated in case Prince Albert should pop in for tea.
(LAUGHS) You won't catch nuffink. Honest.

MAN

(slurred speech) You ought not to say such things.

WOMAN

What?

MAN

(drunkenly) Prince Albert. He's a fine fellow.

WOMAN

(amused) I'm sure he is dearie. But he'll have to pay the same as everyone else if he shows his snout round 'ere (laughs)

MAN

That's – that's disrespectful that is.

WOMAN

Never mind old Maggie dearie. I'm just teasing. I'll fetch us both a nice snifter of gin and we can toast the health of both of them. Dear old Albert and jolly old Vickie. God bless all who sail in them.

MAN

(very tipsy) I don't hold with that sort of family...famil...familiarity.

WOMAN

You don't hold your liquor too well, that's your trouble my lad.

(SHE HELPS HIM TO TAKE OFF HIS HAT AND COAT AND PUTS THEM OVER THE BACK OF THE CHAIR. PUSHES HIM INTO THE SEAT).

Now I know I had a clean glass around here the other night.

(LOOKS FOR TWO GLASSES, WIPES THEM OUT WITH HER SLEEVE AND POURS THEM BOTH A DRINK)

So who are we drinking to again?

MAN

It's not right.

WOMAN

What's not right? (PAUSE) Cat got yer tongue, dearie?

MAN

I- I shouldn't stay. I mean I really shouldn't be here.

WOMAN

Course you should. Can't have you wandering the streets in that state. You might fall under a horse and cart, or trip over your own feet and topple into the Thames. Now, that wouldn't do, would it?

MAN

I don't know why I drink. I know I can't take it, but sometimes it's the only thing that will help.

WOMAN

Well, you know what they say, 'some drink to forget and others just drink because they like it!'

MAN

Sometimes I just can't help myself.

WOMAN

Listen, love. No need to confess your sins to ol' Maggie. I've had all types, I have. Fine upstanding gents like yourself, soldiers, sailors, a judge or two I'll bet (laughs). I'm not particular! (laughs bawdily)

(SHE COMES OVER WITH THE GLASSES AND SITS ON HIS LAP)

MAN

(Nervously) I'm really not sure I should – I mean -

WOMAN

(Laughing) Go on, get that down yer. Bring a bloom to those pale cheeks.

MAN (unsteadily)

I don't feel too clever.

WOMAN

You ought to get out more, ducks. Stir your stumps. When I was a scullery maid in one of them fine houses off Notting Hill Gate I didn't see the sun all summer and by Christmas I looked like a corpse.

MAN

Really?

WOMAN

On the one afternoon off they gave me every now and then I just lay on me bed and dreamed of the day some young toff would see me taking the leavings out, recognise me as his long lost sister and carry me off 'ome to his country estate. (PAUSE FOR REACTION)

MAN

How dreadful. I had no idea.

WOMAN

(LOUD CACKLE) I'm pulling your leg, you soft thing. Good 'eavens, you are a serious one and no mistake. You don't think the likes of me ever saw the inside of one of them fine houses do yer? Brought up in a workhouse I was. Had 'original sin' beaten out of me six days a week and on the seventh they rested to get their strength back. They learned me to be grateful for what little I had and if I wasn't grateful enough - (THOUGHTFUL PAUSE. THEN SNAPS OUT OF HER REVERIE) Drink up and if you're good I'll give you another. And if you're not good I'll give yer another anyway (LAUGHS CRUDELY AGAIN)

MAN

I'm afraid I'm not very good company tonight.

WOMAN

Oh dear. Poorly are we? I thought you looked a bit iffy on yer pins when you was coming out of the Black Horse. I thought to meself. Maggie, there's a gent who's not used to drink. Needs a bit of neighbourly assistance. Drowning your sorrows was ye, ducks?

MAN

I don't know what I was doing in there.

WOMAN

You and me both, dearie. Nobody feels quite right these days, if you ask me. Something rotten in the air, I dare say.

(THEY TALK PAST EACH OTHER NOT ACKNOWLEDGING OR REACTING TO WHAT THE OTHER IS SAYING)

MAN

Headache. Hammering at me something awful.

WOMAN

All those fumes from the factories and the foundries. Gets so bad you swear you'll cough your lungs out one of these days.

MAN

Sometimes I lose track of where I've been and what I've done.

WOMAN

Some nights you can hear the animals in the slaughterhouse back of Dorset Street getting restless, fit to bust they are. As if they can sense they're gonna have their throats cut come morning. Turns yer stomach, so it does.

MAN

I just know I've done something terrible. But it wasn't me. It's like I'm two different people.

WOMAN

The smell of blood gets in yer clothes and no amount of scrubbing with carbolic is gonna get it out. It's no wonder people round here get all fired up and knock six bells out of each other whether they're in drink or not.

MAN

God forgive me. I'm damned and no mistake. I have to go –

WOMAN

(SEEING THAT HE IS LIKELY TO GET AWAY) Good heavens. There's me gabbing about such things and you so green about the gills. Have another snifter. I can spare it. We'll add tuppence to the bill, if you get my drift, to make things square between us. You can spare another tuppence can't you, Sir? (SHE PUTS HER ARMS ROUND HIS NECK) I'll make it worth yer while.

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MAN

(STAGGERING TO HIS FEET AND GENTLY PUSHING HER OFF HIM)
If I can just get some air.

WOMAN

Oh, don't you be going just yet. A fine gentleman like yerself needs a little relaxation. What's the saying? All work and no play -
(SHE EMBRACES HIM, TRIES TO KISS HIM AND HE ROUGHLY CASTS HER ASIDE)
There's no need for that now! I'm only being sociable. Don't you find me pleasing, dearie?

MAN

I don't like to be touched. Not like that.

WOMAN

Oh I see (REALISING WHAT HE IS) It's that way is it? (REPELLED) And I thought you was such a nice refined young gentleman.

MAN

Here let me pay you for your time.

(HE TAKES OUT HIS WALLET AND LOOKS FOR MONEY TO PAY HER)

WOMAN

I did pick a wrong 'un, didn't I. (SCOFFS)

MAN

I know if I stay, I'll regret it tomorrow.

WOMAN

Gawd 'elp us. I may be good but I'm not that good! I couldn't convert the heathen, if you get my drift. If you're not made like other men, there ain't much I can do about it, love.

MAN

I don't want you to do anything. Just let me be.

WOMAN

You think just because I'm a bangtail, a whore you can treat me like something you picked up on your shoe? There's them that sell more than their bodies, believe me. There's those who look the other way when a working girl gets gutted like a pig after a Gent has had his fun with her.

MAN

No man in his right mind would do that -.

WOMAN

Don't tell me the Peelers can't catch him if they really wanted to. I tell you, it suits them to leave him loose to go among the beasts and thin the herd, so to speak.

MAN

I can't listen to this.

WOMAN

And what about those toffs in Parliament who hold their noses when they have to come down here and look at the filth some of us have to live in. What a stinking load of hypocrites. I tell you, if there's a hell, it's not the work of God or the Devil. It's man made and we're living in it.

MAN

It's getting very late. I'll pay you for your time – (COUNTING OUT COINS ON THE TABLE)

WOMAN

I tell you, the Almighty got sick of seeing men preying on young girls who was selling themselves for a night's lodging and sent the angel of death down here to clean up the streets of Whitechapel. No one gave us a second look until he started carving them up.

MAN

(SOBERING UP) You've no idea what you're saying. No man would do to a woman what the papers say he done unless he's out of his mind.

WOMAN

God is ashamed of this wicked world and he ordered his servant to purge it of sinners – male and female - before the End of Days.

MAN

I feel sick. I need air. (GETS UP AND KNOCKS GLASSES AND BOTTLE OFF TABLE)

WOMAN

Ever wondered why no one ever saw the dark angel doing the deed?
(SHE COMES UP CLOSE AND PUTS HER HAND ON HIS ARM TO STOP HIM
PUTTING DOWN THE MONEY AND LEAVING)

Because the one what dunnit fades into the crowd. A cat among the pigeons, you might say.
His servant's here to rid the streets of them that sins and them that pays for sin.

(SHE STANDS BEHIND HIM WITH A BREAD KNIFE THAT CATCHES THE LIGHT.
SHE PUTS IT TO HIS THROAT)

The Whitechapel Murderer ain't a man, love. It's a woman!

(LIGHTS OUT. SHE CRIES OUT IN TRIUMPH AS HE SCREAMS)

ENDS