

# **PAVED WITH GOLD**

A Play in Two Acts

*Adapted from Henry Mayhew's  
"London Labour and the London Poor"*

by

**Gerald Kelsey  
&  
Jean McConnell**

**SchoolPlay Productions Ltd**

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**"London Labour and the London Poor"**

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## CHARACTERS

<b>Jimmy Shaw</b>	<i>a publican</i>
<b>Billy</b>	<i>a young rat-catcher</i>
<b>Mary</b>	<i>an old crossing sweeper</i>
<b>Daisy</b>	<i>a ribbons and tapes seller</i>
<b>First Patterer</b>	<i>a news vendor</i>
<b>Second Patterer</b>	<i>a news vendor</i>
<b>An ex-Convict</b>	<i>back from Australia</i>
<b>Meg</b>	<i>a cournty girl</i>
<b>Bob</b>	<i>a young pickpocket</i>
<b>Alfie</b>	<i>a chimney sweep's boy</i>
<b>Nellie</b>	<i>a flower girl</i>
<b>Peg</b>	<i>Nellie's sister</i>
<b>A photographer</b>	
<b>Sam</b>	<i>the photographer's assistant</i>
<b>Lizzie</b>	<i>a prostitute</i>
<b>Old Stock</b>	<i>Lizzie's minder</i>
<b>Dottie</b>	<i>a prostitute</i>
<b>Poll</b>	<i>Dottie's mother</i>
<b>The showman</b>	<i>manager of a fit-up theatre</i>
<b>Barney</b>	<i>an actor</i>
<b>Sarah</b>	<i>an actress</i>
<b>Young Man</b>	<i>a would-be actor</i>

### **Other members of the fit-up theatre**

*All the parts can be doubled if necessary*

*The play is set in a courtyard in Victorian London*



# PAVED WITH GOLD

Adapted from Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*

Dramatised by Gerald Kelsey & Jean McConnell

## ACT 1

*(A court yard in the backstreets of Victorian London. Entrance to Pub Right, entrance to house Left. Entrance from streets Upstage Right and Left and Downstage Right and Left. Horsetrough Upstage Left. Pub table with two stools on it Centre. Two barrels by Pub door, one with a beer jug and two tankards on it. A hurdy-gurdy is heard passing Offstage.)*

*JIMMY SHAW, the Publican, is sweeping the yard and taking an occasional swig of beer. He fetches a pail of water from trough and throws some around. He sweeps behind a barrel, gives a yell and chases a 'rat' downstage.)*

**Shaw:** Git out of it! Go on y' filthy beast. Go on!

*(SHAW turns out front and addresses an imaginary 'GENTLEMAN')*

**Shaw:** Watch out there sir! Don't let him run up the leg of y' trousers.... Ah, no worry 'e's gorn dahn the drain. You all right, sir? Don't expect to see a gentleman like you 'ere so early..... Me? Jimmy Shaw's me name sir. I'm the proprietor of this 'ere establishment - one of the best sporting public houses in London. Why don't you have a seat, sir? I'll get you a reviver.

*(He leads the 'GENT' to a table and puts the stools down. He gets the jug and a tankard and purs him a drink)*

**Shaw:** 'Ere y'are sir. *(puts down tankard and goes on with his work)*

Yes, I'm celebrated for me weekly rat matches. I'm the oldest caterer in rat-killing in the metropolis..... Eh? ..... Oh I began as a lad, sir, and I've kept at it ever since. It's big business! I should think I buy, in the course of a year, from three hundred to seven hundred rats a week. Taking five hundred as a weekly average it's a yearly purchase of twenty-six thousand live rats. Your health, sir! *(he drains his tankard)*

Y' know some first class chaps come here to try out their dogs. They'll say, 'Jimmy, give the dog a hundred'. After he's polished them off they'll say 'Hang it, give him another hundred' and that's a sight to see!.... Great characters, they are, sir, and liberal friends. Very liberal!.. What? Oh, that's very kind sir.. *(he sits Upstage of the table and refills his own tankard)* Yourself?.... No?.... Where do they all come from? Oh, the poor people that supply me with rats are what you might call the barn-door labouring poor. Huh! I tells you, they are the most ignorant people I ever came near. Talk about Latin and Greek, sir. Why English is Latin to them! Now when the harvest is got in, y' see, they go hunting for them in the hedges and ditches. Once, farmers had to pay tuppence a head - nailed them up against the wall - but now the rat-catchers can get thruppence each by bringing the vermin up to town.

*(BILLY, a rough lad, enters carrying a sack tied at the neck. He has a crippled leg and a sly whine. He hovers Upstage)*

**Shaw:** What sir? *(he sees the lad and waves him away)* No, no Billy, I don't want none of them.

**Billy:** *(approaching)* Real fresh and lively, Mr Shaw.

**Shaw:** Huh! I know you, Billy. You've got sewer-rats there haven't you?

**Billy:** No, Mr Shaw. No, they're -

**Shaw:** *(to 'GENT')* Sewer-rats he's got. I'd bet a sovereign.

**Billy:** God's truth!

**Shaw:** Bad for dogs, sewer-rats. Their coats is poisonous and their bite very dangerous! Very dangerous indeed! Live of filth, you see.

**Billy:** They's barn-rats, Mr Shaw. I've bin up Pitsea to me aunt's. Got a baker's dozen for you. Only six shillin', Mr Shaw. *(he holds out the sack. SHAW gives the sack a poke)*

**Shaw:** Only six shillin'! Take 'em away!

**Billy:** Five shillin'?

**Shaw:** Barn-rats?

**Billy:** Yeah, yeah. Let you 'ave them cheap. Four and sixpence?

**Shaw:** Give it here. Let's have a butcher's! *(SHAW rises, puts the sack on the table and unties it)*

**Shaw:** *(to 'GENT')* Yer barn-rat, see, is a plump fellow. He lives on the best of everything. He's well-off. There is as much difference between the barn and sewer-rat as between a brewer's 'orse and costermonger's. *(he takes a quick look into the sack, snorts and quickly closes the neck again)*

**Shaw:** *(scornfully)* Barn rats! Git 'em out of 'ere!

**Billy:** Aw right, warehouse rats, Mr Shaw. You saw for yourself.

**Shaw:** *(to 'GENT')* He's been paid for catching them in some warehouse. Now he wants to sell them to me. Make a good thing of it, these fellows.

**Billy:** Three bob?

**Shaw:** Done.

*(SHAW takes coins from his pocket as BILLY reties the sack watching for the money)*

**Shaw:** *(to 'GENT')* What's that sir?... Well, let me see, the largest quantity of rats I've ever had from one man was thirty-five dozen at thruppence a head, and that's a load for an 'orse! I've 'ad as many as two thousand rats in this house at one time..... Hungry? They'll scoff a sack of barley-meal a week. And if you don't give the brutes good stuff they'll eat one another, hang 'em!..... Oh yes, they're hungry all right. Thirsty too, I don't doubt. It's thirsty weather..... Oh well yes, I will sir. Thank you very much. Can I get another for...? .....The boy? Well, yes if you say so, sir.

*(SHAW fills his tankard and pours beer into 'GENT's tankard and gives it to BILLY)*

**Shaw:** Ah, you're noticing me scars, sir? *(he shows his wrists)*

I know what you'r gonna ask. Have I ever bin bit?..... Hundreds of times!..... Now some people will say, rub y'self over with caraway and stuff, and rats won't bite you. I give you my word of honour, sir, it's all nonsense. Bless you, there's nothing a rat won't bite through.

*(BILLY emerges from behind his tankard)*

**Billy:** Nothing!

**Shaw:** I've seen my lads standing in the pit with rats running all around them, and if they haven't taken the precaution to tie their trousers round with bits of string at the bottoms they'd have as many as five or six rats run up their legs. And believe me, sir, a bite up the trouser leg can be very nasty! Very nasty indeed, if y' takes my meaning! *(moves right and picks up sack)*

Oh, no, no sir, there 'ere are safe in the sack. But would you believe it, my lads enjoy it? They'll deliberately take off their clothes and pick 'em out from their shirts and breeches. Some people's amused; others is 'orror-struck..... Ah, I can see as 'ow you're one who's 'orror-struck! *(he throws sack off stage right)* On you way then, Billy.

**Billy:** Three bob Mr Shaw. *(he holds out his hand. Two fingers are bound with rag)*

**Shaw:** (to 'GENT') Yer know a rat's bite is very singular, sir. It's three-cornered, like a leech's. 'Ere, show 'im Billy. (*he snatches off the rag and holds BILLY's hand out for the 'GENT' to see, BILLY cries out in pain*)

**Shaw:** It's deeper, of course, and will bleed for ever such a time. (*he throws rag to BILLY who wraps it round his fingers again, whimpering*)

**Shaw:** My boys have sometimes had their fingers go dreadfully bad from rat-bites. They've turned all black and putrid! Aye, as black as my 'orse-hair sofa! People 'as said to me, 'You ought to send the lad to 'ospital and have 'is finger took off', yes, 'ave it took right off, they've said. (*turns to BILLY*) 'Ere, Billy let me 'ave another squint at those fingers. Don't like the look of -

**Billy:** No! No! Never you mind it, Mr Shaw. It'll get right by and by.

(*BILLY moves away*)

**Shaw:** In case you ever need it, sir, the best thing for rat-bites is the thick bottoms of porter-casks put on as a poultice. That'll actually take thorns out of 'orses 'oofs after steeple-chasing. Draws the poison, y' see. Sucks it out..... Oh, you all right there, sir? Gone a little pale. Drop of brandy is what you need. Billy!

(*BILLY fetches a bottle and glass from the pub and pours it for the 'GENT'*)

**Shaw:** That'll put the colour back in y' cheeks, sir. Thing is, rats want a great deal of sorting. Y' can't put your sewer and your barn-rat together. It's like putting a Rooshian and a Turk under the same roof. There's six or seven different kinds of rats and if we don't sort them they tear one another to pieces. When I have a number of rats in the house, I'm a lucky man if I don't find a dozen dead when I go to them in the morning. Oh yes, I'd lose money on them, if it wasn't for gentlemen like yourself..... Oh, thank you very much, sir.

(*SHAW pours himself a drink*)

One time I bred rats but nowadays I leaves that fancy to me boys. I've as much as I can do to serve my worthy patrons - and worthy I mean, sir. Bless you, I've had noble and titled ladies come here to see the sport. (*he leers*) Yes, ladies, ho, ho - on the quiet, y' know!.... Two or three years since, my boys took into their heads the idea of skinning the rats for the fur.

(*He goes Upstage to a barrel as he speaks and takes out several items, finally producing a dead rat*)

They did about three hundred of them and their skins was very promising.... 'Ere, see for y'self.

(*he brings the dead rat to the table and holds it out for close inspection,*

*stroking the fur)*

My wife didn't like the notion, though, so I said 'Throw 'em away.' But the skins are a beautiful grey, and soft and warm. Here, have a feel sir.

*(He shrugs as the offer is refused. He rubs the rat gently against his chin, frowns and sniffs it, then tosses the rat to BILLY)*

Phew! Here Billy!

**Billy:** Phew!

**Shaw:** There's nothing turns so quickly as dead rats. Chuck it away, Billy! And here's your two bob.

*(BILLY accepts the rat and the coin unenthusiastically and exits)*

**Shaw:** Yeah, dead rats is off 'afore you can turn round. *(sniffs his fingers)* Phew!....

Now, how about a bite to eat, sir? Got a nice ripe Stilton if you're..... No?

*(he rises)* Oh, off already, sir? Well, hope I see you some Wednesday. Tell you what, y'self a little dog, sir. We'll throw him in and give him a score.

Test his mettle. Good sport, sir, eh? *(he shows the 'GENT' Downstage)*

An honour to talk to you, sir.

*(OLD MARY, the crossing sweeper enters. She wears a straw bonnet, plaid cloak and apron with a pocket. She has a shade over her weak eyes and her head is bandaged. She carries a besom and an old sack)*

**Shaw:** Get along with you there, woman! Don't get under the gentleman's feet!

*(he shoos her away, then turns Downstage to the 'GENT')*

What's that, sir?.... Her, sir?... Oh, you don't want anything to do with her. I can get you something fresher..... No, no, of course not, sir. If that's your fancy..... What?... No, no. Just my little joke, sir. No offence meant.

*(he calls)* Mary! Gentleman 'ere would like a word with you.

*(SHAW busies himself with his work. MARY follows him anxiously. She speaks with a slight Welsh accent)*

**Mary:** I done nothing!

**Shaw:** *(whispers to her)* No, it's on the up and up. Might do y'self a bit of good.

**Mary:** What's he want to talk to me for?

**Shaw:** Nosey bugger. *(turns back to the 'GENT')* No harm intended is there, sir?

*(SHAW goes Upstage, MARY comes Downstage)*

**Mary:** I don't know where you're from sir, but I swear I do as good a job as others. Here I am any day of the week between eight in the morning and seven in the evening. I bought my crossing here with my own money and I keep it clean as a pin for my people. Mr Shaw will tell you.

**Shaw:** No complaints, Mary.

**Mary:** No, sir? You're sure sir?

**Shaw:** Very satisfied, Mary.

**Mary:** Then I expect you'll be wanting to pay me my sixpence for the last three weeks?

**Shaw:** (*paying her*) And you can whisk around the yard, Mary.

(*SHAW goes back to his work and in due course exits*)

**Mary:** (*pocketing coins*) There's nice for you. Half the rent in one go.... What's that, sir? Shilling a week rent I pays. I shares with old Daisy. Sells tapes, does Daisy. Indeed, here she comes now, sir. Ah poor woman, she has a hard time of it. Listen to her coughing, will you. Keeps me awake all night, she does..... What, sir?... well, where else would I go for a shilling? It's what we all come to, don't we?... Oh no, not you sir, of course not.

(*MARY works as she talks, sweeping and picking up oddments. Some go in her sack. Some she pockets. DAISY enters. She carries a tray of bits of ribbon and tapes, which she settles aside to arrange. She has a coughing bout which she smothers in her apron.*)

**Mary:** (*to 'GENT'*) See what I mean, sir? It'll carry her off, it will, that cough.... What's that, sir? No I've not been here all my life. Oh no. Welsh Wales is where I come from. My father was a journeyman shoemaker. He was killed, but I can't remember how. I was too young..... Mother? I can't recollect her either, sir? I was brought up by my uncle and aunt, I was, until I was old enough to go into service. Daisy here was in service too, sir. Tell the gentleman about when you were in service, Daisy. Go on!

(*DAISY looks towards the 'GENT'*)

**Daisy:** That's right, sir. I was in service, like Mary says..... What age did I start sir? Oh, when I was about five. I used to mind the children, under a nurse. I was in service until I got married. In a great many situations, of course. I had to keep in a place because I had nowhere else to go..... Bless you, no, I was never in nobleman's families. Only tradespeople. Service was very hard, sir.

Maid-of-all-work I was.... My husband? He was a seafaring man. But after we married he started selling memorandum-almanack books in the streets. Did very bad at it. Then over-exertion with want of nourishment brought on a paralytic stroke. He had his first fit about two years before he had his second. The third fit which was his last was on the Sunday. No. I tell a lie, 'twas the Monday. And he died on the Wednesday..... Children, sir? Two still living. Thanks be.

*(MARY comes downstage having spotted half an apple. She picks it up, wincing as she bends)*

**Mary:** What, sir? No I don't mind telling you my age. I'm fifty-five and I've been on the crossing fourteen years. But just now it's very poor work, it is. I have no regular customers at all. The only one I had left used to allow me tuppence a week. But he went mad and I don't get it now. Just look at this apple, Daisy. There's a wicked waste for you.

*(MARY puts it in her pocket)*

**Mary:** The winter time is best, sir, when the families is in town. So we get a few more ha'pence.... A shilling a day would be as much as I want, sir. But I've stood in the square all day for a ha'penny. And I've stood all day for nothing at all.

*(MARY plucks some loose twigs from her broom)*

**Mary:** This is going home. I can wear out three brooms in a week. I gave thruppence ha'penny for this. You can get tupp'ny-ha'penny brooms. But the handles come out.

*(MARY starts to sweep again. Then she turns to accept a coin from the 'GENT')*

**Mary:** For me, sir? Oh, thank you sir.

*(MARY spits on the coin and pockets it)*

**Daisy:** This neighbourhood is not what it used to be. Is it Mary?

**Mary:** The good families are all gone, sir. By their own removal or God's.

*(MARY crosses herself)*

**Mary:** My religion, sir? I go to Trinity Church in Gray's Inn Road on Sunday afternoon and evening. I can't go in the morning. I don't get away from my crossing in time.... Oh no I never omit a day in coming here unless I'm ill or the snow is too heavy.

**Daisy:** I go to see my children on Sundays. And after that I have a cup of tea and go to bed about nine o'clock. I've got this chest, you see sir.

*(DAISY accepts coins from the 'GENT')*

**Daisy:** That's very kind of you, sir. I'll buy a drop of mixture, to relieve the coughing. I have to make a few calls now, to the houses. The maidservants sometimes want some tapes. Or a pretty bit of ribbon for a bonnet.

*(DAISY prepares to leave. MARY leans on her broom with a sigh)*

**Mary:** It's very fatiguing, standing so many hours. It's my legs. Ache with pain they do. And swell so. Look, I'll show you, sir.... No? Very well. But I was once in the Middlesex Hospital sixteen weeks with my legs. Then there's my eyes. Have been weak since I was a child. And I've got this gathering in my head. This time twelve month I had a fever and laid seven weeks in hospital. I took diarrhoea after that and was for six weeks under the doctor's hand. There's the crossing for you.

**Daisy:** Still, if you were at home all the time, Mary, what would you do with yourself?

**Mary:** Get into mischief I shouldn't wonder!

*(The two women laugh. MARY accepts another coin from the 'GENT'. The women are about to exit when they here the running PATTERNERS approaching, calling out the news)*

**Daisy:** Oh what's that? What are they shouting about? 'Murder' Oh Mary, come on!

**Mary:** Oo there's exciting for you!

*(The PATTERNERS enter from Upstage calling the news. They carry satchels and wave pamphlets. They both gabble at once, emphasising the emotive words. 1ST PATTERNER calls off Right. 2ND PATTERNER calls Left. Halfway they cross to opposite sides still shouting.)*

**1st Patterer:** Read all about it!... Horrible murder! Welting in gore... Terrible

shock to poor mother... Out of house for provisions... Starving child!... Entry of rogue and vagabond... With evil intent... No one saw him... Committed black murder!... Constable shocked by fearful crime... Full details... Barbarous deed! Murder! Murder! Murder!

**2nd Patterer:** Mysterious figure! Seen leaving house. Young woman in great distress.... Dreadful ordeal!... Man in black... Terrifying threats of death!

*(1ST PATERER sells pamphlets to MARY and DAISY, who hurry off, excitedly, to read them)*

**2nd Patterer:** Murder, Murder!... Vicious brute! Merciless embrace!... Screams for help! Further victims!... Murder!... Murder!... Murder!

*(They both reach downstage Centre at the same time. On final words the 1ST PATERER offers pamphlet to the 'GENT')*

**1st Patterer:** 'Ere y'are sir. Read all about it.

**2nd Patterer:** Hang on. Hang on. He's one of us. Seen you down the printers, haven't I, sir?... You don't want that! It's a 'cock'! Not a word of truth in it.

**1st Patterer:** People don't know the difference. Don't care so long as there's a bit of spice!

*(They both laugh. They hoist their bags off their shoulders and stretch themselves. In due course they pull stools to Centre and sit)*

**2nd Patterer:** That's true, sir. You can't beat a good 'cock'. Some will out-sell your very latest hideous crime.

**1st Patterer:** 'Cept your Chigwell Row murder.

**2nd Patterer:** Oh yes, your Chigwell Row murder....

**1st Patterer:** Chigwell Row's a trump to the present day. Why I'd go out now, sir, with a dozen Chigwell Rows and earn my supper in half an hour off them.

**2nd Patterer:** Saved me walking the streets all night many a time.

**1st Patterer:** Then there's the Scarborough Murder...

**2nd Patterer:** Don't s'pose you'll remember that, sir.

**1st Patterer:** It's about a rich and noble young naval officer seducing a poor clergyman's daughter. She's confined in a ditch and destroys the child. She's taken up for it, tried and executed.

**2nd Patterer:** Sells well round country places.

**1st Patterer:** Would sell now if we had it out.

**2nd Patterer:** It draws tears to the women's eyes to think that poor clergyman's

daughter who is remarkably beautiful....

**1st Patterer:** Remarkably beautiful!

**2nd Patterer:** .... should murder her own child. It's very touching to every feeling heart.

**1st Patterer:** What about the Liverpool tragedy - that's very attractive.

**2nd Patterer:** Yes, that's a mother murdering her own son for his gold.

**1st Patterer:** He'd been in the East Indies, see, and married a rich planter's daughter. He came back to England to see his parents after an absence of thirty years.

**2nd Patterer:** They kept a lodging house for sailors in Liverpool.

**1st Patterer:** The son went there to lodge and meant to tell his parents who he was in the morning. But his mother saw the gold he had in his boxes, and she cut his throat. Severed his head from his body...

**2nd Patterer:** With the old man - upwards of seventy years of age - holding the candle!

**1st Patterer:** They'd put a wash-tub under the bed to catch his blood.

**2nd Patterer:** Blood!

**1st Patterer:** The morning after the murder their daughter calls and enquires for the young man. The old man denies that they've had any such person in the house. Then - she reminds them that he had a mole on his arm.

**2nd Patterer:** In the shape of a strawberry.....

**1st Patterer:** So the old couple then go upstairs to examine the corpse. And there it is - the mole! They've murdered their own son!

**2nd Patterer:** They both put an end to their existence!

**1st Patterer:** It's a deeper tragedy than the Scarborough Murder.

*(He takes bread out of his bag, cuts it and eats some, sharing it with the 2ND PATERER)*

**2nd Patterer:** What's that, sir?.... Oh, some of the 'cocks' were in existence long before I was born or thought of.... I commenced me career with 'Last Dying Speech and Full Confession of William Corder', who did for that poor Maria Marten. I worked that one down at Bury where he was executed. Got a whole hatful of ha'pence.... Why, a servant came out and wanted half a dozen for the master and a free one for himself. Huh! I wouldn't let him have no such thing.

**1st Patterer:** After the Manning murder I sold ten papers at one go to the railway clerks at Norwich. Manning was a railway guard, you'll remember.

**2nd Patterer:** Those Mannings! Fancy a woman shooting her lover through the head...

**1st Patterer:** Then watching her husband bash his brains out with a ripping chisel....

**2nd Patterer:** Then going to rob his lodgings while her ol' man was burying the body under the kitchen floor....

**1st Patterer:** In quick lime.

**2nd Patterer:** Well, as Manning said in court, he never liked him very much!

**1st Patterer:** I did tremendous with them down Bermondsey where it happened. Bermondsey! That's a splendid quarter for working. Plenty of feelings there.

**2nd Patterer:** Some places they've hearts like paving stones. Wouldn't have the papers if you give them to 'em.

**1st Patterer:** Specially when they know you.

*(2ND PATERER enjoys the joke)*

**2nd Patterer:** Should have done better with that Mrs Manning. Every day I was looking for a confession. All I wanted was for her to clear her conscience afore she left this 'ere Vale of Tears. But when I read in the papers that her last words on the brink of eternity was 'I have nothing to say to you, Mr Rowe, except to thank you for your kindness' I gave her up entirely.

**2nd Patterer:** Greenacre didn't sell as well as you might have expected for a man who chopped up his fiancée.

**1st Patterer:** Came too close after Pegsworth.

**2nd Patterer:** Two murders together is never no good.

**1st Patterer:** To no one!

**2nd Patterer:** Now Daniel Good was first rate. Remember him sir? Murdered his wife in a stable and got caught down in Tonbridge.

**1st Patterer:** Been a lot better if it hadn't been for that Madam Toosow. *(He spits in disgust)*

**2nd Patterer:** She went and give two pound for the very clogs he wore to wash his master's carriage. So 'course, when the harristocracy could go and see the very identical clogs in 'er Chamber of 'Orrors - they just wouldn't look at our authentic portraits of the fiend in human form. Madam Toosow!

*(They both spit)*

**2nd Patterer:** There's nothing beats a stuning good murder. We lived off Rush for a month. When we started I was fourteen shillings in debt for rent. In less than a week I astonished the Wise Men in the East by paying my landlord all I owed him.

**1st Patterer:** On the morning og the execution, we beat all the regular newspapers

out of the field. We got a full report printed days afore it come off, see. Then I goes and stands ready with it, right under the drop. And blow me, if I wasn't turning away customers afore it happened.

**2nd Patterer:** Calcraft, the hangman, was pretty tidy browns.

**1st Patterer:** He was! Up for starving his mother.

**2nd Patterer:** Well, what else could you expect of an 'angman?

**1st Patterer:** Me and a mate worked him down Essex where his mother lives. Even sold HER one. A limping old body. I saw people looking at her and they told me after who she was. 'How much?' says she. 'A penny, Marm', says I. And she says, 'Sarves him right!'

**2nd Patterer:** Yeah, that was a good 'un. 'A Voice From the Gaol - or The Horrors of the Condemned Cell'. Go on, give him a bit of the patter.

*(1ST PATERER rises)*

**1st Patterer:** Yes. Listen, sir. You'll enjoy this. *(declaiming)* Let us look at William Calcraft. Born of humble parents in a little village in Essex, his infant ears often listened to the children of the Sunday School singing the well-known words of the beautiful Watts hymn - When 'ere I take my walks abroad how many poor I see. But alas, the poor farmer's boy never had the opportunity of going to that school to be taught how to shun the broad way leading to destruction. To seek a chance fortune he travelled up to London where his ignorance and forlorn condition enabled the Fell Demon that forever haunts the footsteps of the wretched to mark him for her own.

**2nd Patterer:** Isn't that stunning, sir? 'Mark him for her own!'

**1st Patterer:** Here's my favourite bit, sir. *(declaiming)* In vain he repents. His nervous system is fast breaking down, every day rendering him less able to endure the excruciating torments he is hourly suffering. He is haunted by remorse, heaped upon remorse. Every fresh victim he is required to strangle being so much additional fuel thrown upon the mental flame that is scorching him.

**2nd Patterer:** 'The mental flame', sir! And would you believe it, the author of that beautiful writing ain't even in Parliament! Just think of 'the mental flame', sir! Oh dear!

*(1ST PATERER sits down again)*

**1st Patterer:** 'Course we're doing very well with the Sloanes, sir. Couldn't have invented a 'cock' to equal them Sloanes. Oh, you should have heard what the women said about HIM. They was more savage against him than against her.

'Oh, that poor dear girl', says they. 'What she suffered!'

**2nd Patterer:** They had fifty deaths for him. Rolled in a barrel full of sharp nails down Primrose Hill!

**1st Patterer:** Turned out to the women on Kennington Common!

**2nd Patterer:** Boiled in oil!

**1st Patterer:** Hung over a slow fire!

**2nd Patterer:** And things like that... can't be mentioned!

**Patterers:** *(Together, shocked and pained at the thought)* Ooooooh! *(They rise and gather up their bags)*

**1st Patterer:** Trouble is, there's often too long a wait between the murder and the trial. Unless the fiend in human form keeps writing beautiful love letters the excitement can't be kept up.

**2nd Patterer:** 'Course we can always write the love letters for the fiend in human form ourselves.

**1st Patterer:** *(nodding)* One time we had a great pull over the newspaper in that way. But Lord love you, those reporters gets more and more into our line.

**2nd Patterer:** They tread in our footsteps, sir. They follow our bright example.

*(The hurdy-gurdy is heard in the distance)*

**1st Patterer:** Well, we must bid you good day, sir. Got to get rid of this lot afore there's a new 'orrible murder to take the beauty off them.

*(The PATTERNERS start back Upstage repeating their opening patter as they exit. The pass MEG who is entering. MEG's clothes are ragged and skimpy. She has a slight Somerset accent. She is singing the song played by the hurdy-gurdy. It fades in the distance but MEG goes on singing to herself as she strips off her blouse and washes at the trough. The CONVICT enters from the pub. He is grey-haired and has a tough, watchful face. His coat is hung over his shoulder. He is speaking to the 'GENT' as he comes)*

**Convict:** Oh, I've no objection to telling you me history, Sir, for what it's worth! Not with that mob in there, though. We can talk quiet here in the yard.... After what I've been through you gets to value your privacy. *(sees MEG)* Oh don't worry about her, sir. She don't count. Always on about going to Australia, she is. I couldn't wait to get back. *(he crosses to MEG)* You're all right, ain't you Meg? Come on, give us a kiss.

*(He grabs MEG and kisses her. She struggles free, splashing him.)*

**Meg:** You get off me!.... *(Then to 'GENT')*..... I could do well in Australia.

**Convict:** You'd do better at home.

*(CONVICT sits down and rolls a cigarette)*

**Meg:** *(to the 'GENT')* Can't go home, sir. It's my step-mother, see. She beat me ever since I was a little girl. Hot tempered, she was. Knocked me about like an' ol' rag doll. And my father - he wouldn't believe it when I tell him.

*(She continues washing)*

**Convict:** I had good parents. I've no excuse for what I did. Londoners they were. Respectable people. Gave me a good education. But I wanted to be a waterman. They wouldn't let me, so I ran off. Joined up with a gang of boys. Always was a bit of a rover. Finished up on the other side of the world.

**Meg:** I envy you!

**Convict:** She lives in a dream. Twelve I was when I went off with the boys. Met them at Bartlemy Fair. All got sent in chains to Van Dieman's Land, 'cept one. He went to Sydney. Mind you, we had a good time together first. Easy money! Like picking dirt off the streets. Could make three pounds a week just flaring handkerchiefs.

**Meg:** 'Til you got grabbed! *(she dries herself on her shawl)*

**Convict:** *(To 'GENT')* I was unlucky. Was going for a gent's pocket by St Pauls on Procession Day. Two months, that got me, in The Old Horse!

**Meg:** *(To 'GENT', explaining)* Bridewell.

**Convict:** Then a man I knew said, 'You want to cut out that game of smatter hauling....'

**Meg:** That's what they call the handkerchiefs.

**Convict:** ...and do a little soft.

**Meg:** Forged notes.

**Convict:** I used to go out real stylishly dressed with a gentleman's watch in my pocket. Made more money than ever before. Mind you, had a partner then. Nice girl. Fond of her, I was. Never wronged me in any way. Not like Meg. 'ere. She's anyone's for tuppence.

*(He pinches MEG teasingly. She pulls away offended)*

**Meg:** I never slept out of my father's house 'til I was fifteen - nor kept company with any young man! I'd have never left home, but I couldn't stand my step-mother no longer. I only took five shillings I'd saved. Nothing else! Just the

clothes I stood up in.

*(she realises she is half naked and puts on her blouse again)*

**Convict:** Well, time came when it was getting risky with dud notes. They hung 'em for it in those days, you'll remember, sir. I saw a good many hanged..... What sir? Oh, no the gallows had no terror for the people in my way of life. Anyway, I got out of London. Started working the gaming tables with another man and his wife. Good-looking woman she was so as to attract the men around us.

**Meg:** Didn't you take your woman?

**Convict:** We'd had words. Might not have gone at all if we hadn't.

*(MEG moves away from him and combs her hair)*

**Convict:** Went all round the country to race meetings throwing dice for the prizes marked on the table. But the dice were loaded so that no one could win.

**Meg:** What if folk wanted to look at them?

**Convict:** We had good dice ready. Don't keep butting in, Meg. I'm talking to the Gentleman. Well, sir, my mate and his wife told me we'd made sixty five pounds at Newmarket, but they rowed in the same boat. I knew they got a good deal more than that. And anyway I had to maintain the horse and cart out of my third share!..... Between race meetings, sir?... Oh we'd go out on the roads and if we met an old bloke we knocked him down and robbed him. We did good stakes that way. Lived like gents we did.

*(MEG opens her mouth to comment and thinks better of it)*

**Convict:** But they didn't use me right, those two, so at Braintree I paid a man twenty five pounds for his kit - horse, harness, tilt cart and table and I went it alone. Two good fivers and three bad ones, I gave him. Never threw away an opportunity! But the man got nailed passing a bad note and told them who he got it from.... So I got pinched and tried at the Old Bailey. 'Course I told them I didn't know the note had been forged or I should have been hanged. Luckily it was a favourable sessions. Thirty six were cast for death but only one was topped. I got sentenced to fourteen years transportation. Ten weeks they kept me waiting to go in the Bellerophon hulk at Sheerness.

*(MEG comes back and sits beside him sympathetically holdiong his arm)*

**Meg:** I've been to Sheerness. Came up to London in a boat.... *(To the 'GENT')* Oh, no sir, my home was in Somerset. I ran away to Bridgwater town. I was really shocked that first night in the lodging house. Men, women and boys all sleeping in the same room. Didn't like that at all. But I couldn't humble myself and go back to that step-mother. Didn't sleep all night. Then a young man wanted me to live with him, but he was a beggar! He followed me to Bristol, all the time teasing me to live with him but I wouldn't. I lived on my money as long as I could then I had to sleep in a union. 'Twas awful! The rats run over my head while I slept. I used to pray for daylight. *(CONVICT laughs)* I used to pray then! *(Sadly)* Don't now. At last I got to London, and I met some Irish folk who took me off to Watford, haymaking. The girls all took up with a mate so I did too. In a few days he'd ruined me. He told the master I belonged to him but he never called me his wife. We went a-hopping together in Kent. He was kind enough but we was passionate - fire against fire - and sometimes we fought. But he never beat me. Well, only once - for contradicting him. No, sir, he wasn't jealous. He had no reason to be. I would have gone through any trouble for him but he ran away from me. He couldn't have really loved me or he wouldn't have run away, would he sir?

*(She snivels. The CONVICT offers her his red spotted handkerchief. She looks at it then wipes her nose on her sleeve)*

**Meg:** So I come back up to London with the other hoppers and lived on the fifteen shillings I'd saved. I lodged in the Dials and went drinking with the other women. Got a liking for the beer and gin, I did. But when all my money was gone I had to look out for my living.... the other way.

**Convict:** She means the streets, sir.

**Meg:** Well, what else can I do? Many a night I never get a farthing. Out there perishing! But I never picked pockets like the other girls.

**Convict:** You'll never make yer fortune, girl.

**Meg:** *(Bridling)* I once had a sovereign in my pocket! But I likes treating the other women so it weren't there a day. I knows I'm nothing much. The common fellows in the street are always jeering at me for my lack of clothes, but I don't care about them! And the missionaries are always on at me, but I tells 'em - 'You mind yourself and I'll mind myself. What's it to you where I go when I die?' I don't steal and I won't beg. But I do swear. I swear truly hard.

**Convict:** She ought to go into the Magdalen. They'd take care of her there, wouldn't they sir? Look at her... Beat out!

**Meg:** I'd like best to go to Australia where no one would know me. I could behave myself there. There's no hope for me here. Everyone who knows me

despises me. In Sydney I could take service. I could get rid of my swearing and I'd give up the drink. No girl can carry on the life I do without drink, sir. No girl's feelings would let her. *(She sniffs tearfully)* Oh, I'm sick of this idle life. I haven't a friend in the world. Australia is the best wish I have. I'm young and healthy. I could take a hard place with country work in Australia!

*(She goes into a reverie)*

**Convict:** Australia! I'll tell you about Australia. I hate the place! Hobart Town is where I landed up. Sixty of us lay four days in an old church. Then the settlers came from all parts to pick their men. I got a very bad master. He put me to harvest work I'd never even seen done before. And I had care of pigs that was like wild boars. At last he sent me back to Launceston. I worked in potato fields and charcoal works. Then in watering boats taking government officers to George Town. That was hard! Really hard! Out all night with the boats. No beds. And no clothes half the time. That's where I got my first flogging.

**Meg:** Flogging?

**Convict:** *(quietly)* Twenty-five lashes for picking up a capful of flour when a bag burst. Then I got fifty for taking a hat in a joke when I'd had a few. There was a soldier in the hospital who'd had three hundred lashes same morning. When he saw my back he said I'd had it twice as bad as he had. But the doctor told him, 'Ten times as bad! He's been flogged. You've only had a child's whipping!' ..... Yes, you've got it, sir. The cat! Take a look! *(he pulls down his shirt to show the weals on his back)*

**Meg:** *(Fearfully)* The cat o' nine tails!

*(MEG touches the scars tenderly. The sound of intermittent flogging starts Offstage and continues throughout the scene. MEG reacts at each lash)*

**Convict:** I had half minute lashes. A quick lashing would have been certain death. One convict had seventy five lashes. I was mustered there and saw it all. The military surgeon kapt on saying, 'Go on, do your duty.' When the man was taken down from the triangle, they asked him if he'd like some tea. But he was dead!

**Meg:** I don't know how you could bear it.

**Convict:** You bore it. You bore it like a stone. The other convicts always ask, 'Did he sing?' But I was a pebble! I knew if I'd showed pain they'd have doped me out and given me a crack on the head that would have laid me straight... That first flogging made me ripe. I said to myself, 'I can take it like a

bullock!' But I tell you, sir, when you're tied to that triangle you could gladly take the flogger's life.... Eight hundred and seventy five lashes I had in all. Used to boast of it! I used to say, 'I can take it! I can take it 'til they see me backbone.' And they often could! Afterwards I'd rub my back against a wall just to show them! It squeezed the congealed blood out of it, see. Once I wouldn't let them dress my back. For that I got another twenty five lashes.... Well, as you might expect, sir, in the end I bolted. Took to the bush..... Oh yes, I got caught, but the Magistrate I was up before had been a convict himself - from the Irish rebellion - so he only ordered me fifty and sent me back to Launceston. There I was up before the bench and they gave me another hundred.... Still want to go to Australia, Meg?

*(MEG bursts into tears and goes Upstage for her shawl. Offstage sound of flogging stops)*

**Convict:** Severe, sir? You could say that without a lie. A man thought little of giving someone a knock on the head with an axe to get himself hanged and out of it all.

*(He rises and pulls up his shirt. Upstage BOB the PICKPOCKET enters. He is a ragged but perky lad. He takes a drink from the trough. Then he spots the CONVICT's coat and saunters towards it)*

**Convict:** Well, that's me storry, sir. I'm forty three and glad to be back in England. I never want to see Australia again! But I've still got a bit of life left in me. I'll be all right now I'm back home. Yes, indeed I will.

*(CONVICT turns and sees BOB fingering his coat. BOB immediately helps him on with it, smiling ingratiatingly as he steals his spotted handkerchief)*

**Bob:** Spare a farthing for a poor boy, mister?

**Convict:** Get off with you!

**Bob:** No offence mister.

*(BOB starts off. CONVICT grabs him and retrieves his handkerchief and knocks BOB to the ground. CONVICT exits. MEG, who has not seen the theft, runs to the aid of the boy who begins to moan piteously)*

**Meg:** You all right? What 'e do that for?

**Bob:** 'e's broke me bones.

**Meg:** Which ones?

**Bob:** All over.

**Meg:** I 'spect it's just bruises.

*(MEG feels in her pocket and takes out her purse. BOB groans louder. She gives him a coin)*

**Meg:** Here you are. Cheer up now!

**Bob:** Oh, thank you, missis. You're a gem. You're a real pearl.

*(BOB kisses her hand gratefully)*

**Meg:** You take care of yourself

*(MEG exits. As soon as she has gone BOB comes Downstage cheerfully with MEG's purse in his hand. He opens it to count the contents, then starts guiltily as he realises the 'GENT' is watching him)*

**Bob:** You're only guessing, sir. You didn't see me nick it! She didn't see me nick it! And she didn't feel me nick it! So you're only guessing... Anyways, what's a boy like me to do to keep his head above water?..... Eh?.... Oh, I started out all right. I was a climbing boy..... No, no one didn't make me. I wanted to be a sweep. I saw the boys with lots of money a tossin' and gambling and I wanted money too. See, yer got tuppence or thruppence a day for sweeping chimneys and sometimes sixpence from the people of the house. Mind you there's some bad masters, who'd light straw under yer feet to make yer climb faster... What's it like up a chimney? *(calling)* Alfie! Come out 'ere and tell the gentleman what it's like up a chimney.

*(ALFIE, a chimney sweep, enters from the pub. He is a slight boy and his clothes and face are sooty.)*

**Alfie:** What yer say?

**Bob:** Up a chimney. Tell 'im, Alfie. You can't see 'cos yer eyes is full of soot.

**Alfie:** And yer can't breathe 'cos yer nose is full of soot.

**Bob:** And if you opens yer mouth to yell when yer bash yer 'ead yer gets a mouthful of soot. Ain't that right, Alfie?

**Alfie:** But it ain't as bad as people would 'ave yer believe.

**Bob:** ..... What's that, sir? Gentleman says did you ever get stuck, Alfie.

**Alfie:** Stuck? 'Course I been stuck. Hundreds of times. Once, I was sure they'd

take me out dead, like some boys I knew. Died of fright. Not me though! Worse time I got stuck it was me own fault. It was a nine inch flue, see. The master takes one look and he says 'You'll never get up there'. So we goes on the roof and takes the chimney off. It was a bit wider then and I thought I could get down. 'You'll 'ave to buff it Alfie' he tells me.... 'Spose you knoe what that means, sir? But I kept me trousers on. Next thing I'm halfway down with me trousers all rucked up and I can't move noways, up nor down. So there I was tight as a bung in a bottle. I heard the master tell the people of the house, 'My boy's stuck!' And they all gets terribly fretted. 'Just leave it to me.' he says. 'Don't say a word, good or bad.' Then 'e locks the door, strips off and buffs it. Inch by inch he forces his way up that flue 'til he gets his hand under me foot so he can prize me loose out of the top. Well then, as you can guess sir, he was stuck himself! I could hear him swearing and groaning. Then nothing! All quiet and still. Not an ounce of soot falling on the hearth. I kept shouting but he didn't answer. I thought he was a gonner, I really did. But he was only resting and puzzling out which way to turn, see. After about an hour, he struggles out, with the skin all torn off his back and arms and legs. Looking like he'd been near flayed to death. I was lucky, no mistake. If it had been another master I'd never have come out of that flue alive. Good master. Couldn't treat me better if I was his own son.

*(ALFIE picks up pebbles and plays 'fivestones')*

**Bob:** My trouble was I growed too stout for the climbing. I went to work in a pottery in Lambeth. Wasn't there long though. I broke three bottles. Accident it was. But the foreman says 'I shan't want you no more,' so I thought I was discharged. Found out later he didn't mean that, but it was too late then. But I was well off. Had two shilling and a suit of clothes so I goes off to Smithfield Fair. Had a right old time. Then I fell asleep in one of the sheep pens and had me shoes stolen off me feet! A fellow called Gyp found me crying, and said if I give him me stockings to sell, he's find me somewhere to sleep. So I did. And he took me with him to Saint Olave's Workhouse. Next day he said he'd got a job sweeping out the pens. Couldn't do it without a shirt, so he borrowed mine. He went into a pub for a beer, and out the back door. I never saw him after that for six months. Never did see me shirt again.

**Alfie:** Well, that's how yer gets treated 'til you learns a trick or two.

**Bob:** Oh, I don't get done no more. Not me.

**Alfie:** One time, I fell in with some boys who taught me how to steal fish in Billingsgate Market. Then I'd sell it to them for a penny and they'd sell it to

costermongers for thruppence. Might go back to it, if I grows bigger.

**Bob:** (to ALFIE) Well, yer not going to grow smaller, are yer? Nobody does. (to 'GENT') What, sir? How did I get into me present game? Well, I met this very uncommon clever pickpocket and he tells me I've got the right sort of long fingers, so people won't feel, see? Well, we went off round the country through Footscray and soon I could do as well as he done. I flared two handkerchiefs in Maidstone. I wore one round me neck and the lodging house keeper pawned the other one for me. But I was nailed next morning and got three months.

(ALFIE spots a coin down a grating)

**Alfie:** 'Ere, Bob, I can see a joey down there.

**Bob:** Where? (Seeing it too) Oh yeah!

(ALFIE finds a stick and pokes around to reach the coin)

**Bob:** What, sir? No, I didn't mind prison. Bin in a lot since then. Yer gets hardened to it, don't yer..... Me best pickings? Purses. But I don't get that many. Not dressed well enough to get near ladies. 'Tush, tush!,' they say. 'Go away ragged boy.' But I'd rather rob them than the poor. They misses it less.... That woman called Meg, sir? Well, yes, she was poor but... No! I'm not sorry I took her purse, I got to look after meself.... Begging? No I would not. Nor would Alfie, would you Alfie?

**Alfie:** The boys all laugh at you if you go a-begging. Call you a cadger.

**Bob:** You got yer character to think of, haven't you Alfie?

(BOB takes the stick from ALFIE and tries to get the coin)

**Alfie:** (to 'GENT') Go to sea, sir? You mean sailors? Me and Bob? But what if you gets a bad captain? He can do what he likes with you at sea, can't he?

**Bob:** No no, sir, we'll make our way.

(BOB gets the coin out of the grating)

**Alfie:** See, I told yer!

**Bob:** (pocketing coin) Now I'm alright. Shan't waste it on drink. No, spend it on pudding. Fill up on pudding that's what I likes to do..... Where do I live, sir? In a lodging house. Don't like it much. People all in together. But I have to say I've learnt a few good tricks there.

**Alfie:** I'll tell you this, sir, if an innocent boy gets into a lodging house he'll not be innocent for long. *(To BOB)* What happened to that little boy you said come in last night, Bob? The one that had run away?

**Bob:** Couldn't find 'im this morning. I'll look out for 'im.

**Alfie:** Get 'im back home afore it's too late.

**Bob:** Yeah, I will. Maybe.

**Alfie:** Well, I'm orf. Watch yer step, Bob.

*(ALFIE exits. BOB starts to follow then turns back)*

**Bob:** *(to 'GENT')*... What will become of me? Oh, transportation. I 'spect that's what it'll come to in the end. Don't care! Still might manage a few more years, 'cos I'm good at the pockets. Very good. As you can see for yourself! Only the very best silk for you, sir, eh?

*(Grinning broadly he waves a coloured handkerchief at the 'GENT'. Then skips off triumphantly Upstage.)*

## END OF ACT ONE

## ACT 2

*(Offstage the hurdy-gurdy passes. Downstage NELLIE, a flower girl, is kneeling with her basket. She divides the flowers into bunches and ties them with rushes. She looks up, sees 'GENT' and accepts a coin from him.)*

**Nellie:** Flowers, sir? I can make up a bunch in a minute. Just got them from Covent Garden, see? ... Oh yes, this is my living. Ever since mother died. Look at these violets, sir. Pretty ain't they? And sweet. Sells best when they're sweet. Wallflowers and stovks and roses... When did mother die? It was Guy Fawkes Day when I was eight years old. My My sister and brother are younger than me so I had to take charge.... Father? Oh no. We're all mother's children, sir. Look, I've got pinks and carnations and lilies of the valley. *(Smells them)* Mm. Lovely! Gentlemen are the best customers. They but them to give to their ladies.... What sir? Oh no. Ever since God took Mother I've got my sister and brother a bit of bread. And I put them

both to the ragged school. Here's sister now, sir. Sit down here, Peg.

*(PEG enters, also carrying some flowers. She joins NELLIE)*

**Nellie:** Yes, we all of us can read. And brother can write too. And I pray to God he'll do well with it.

*(PEG takes a book from her pocket)*

**Peg:** *(To 'GENT')* I've got a book called 'The Garden of Heaven'. I'll read you a bit if you like. Will you let me read to you?

**Nellie:** You help me here first, Peg.

**Peg:** All right, Nellie.

**Nellie:** *(To 'GENT')* Moss roses is the best. Young moss roses. We do best of all on them.

**Peg:** Primroses are good, too. 'cos people say 'Well, here's spring again to a certainty'. We sell them for a penny a bunch, but there's been ladies who've said to me 'Here poor girl, take three-ha'pence.' Or even give me tuppence. People are nice. I've never had a rude word in my life. ... We live up the alley, sir, don't we Nellie? Me and brother and Nellie sleep in a big bed together. Our landlady sleeps with her husband in the other bed, behind the curtain.... Oh yes, it's a big room.

**Nellie:** *(To 'GENT')* We pay two shillings a week and she does our washing and mending for us. We've been with her four years. She's moved three times, but we just followed her. She's good to us but she's very poor. Still none of us have ever troubled the parish and that's a fact.

*(NELLIE rises and takes some flowers up to the trough and dips them in it. PEG goes on tying bunches, and talking to the 'GENT')*

**Peg:** We gets the rush to tie these for nothing. We put their own leaves round the violets. The paper for a dozen costs less than a penny. We doesn't make less than sixpence a day unless it's very ill luck. But Nellie says God will support us and we mustn't complain. We do better with Oranges in March or April. Can even make a shilling a day on oranges. Wish they were in all the year, I do.

*(PEG rises and takes a bunch of flowers to the trough. NELLIE returns.)*

**Nellie:** *(To 'GENT')* Yes, sir, I always keep a shilling stock money if I can. But if

it's bad weather, so bad that we can't sell flowers at all, and we've had to spend our stock money for a bit of bread, then landlady lends us a shilling if she has one. And if she hasn't she borrows one off a neighbour. And if the neighbour hasn't got one, then she borrows at the dollyshop.... Oh no, no, sir, that's not a pawnshop. None of us have ever had anything good enough to pawn! No, the dollyshop will just take in the rug off our bed. But it's hard weather we must take it out again at night or we'd be starved with cold. It sometimes has to be put back again next morning. Then there's tuppence to pay for it for the day. We have to pay tuppence a week for a shilling at the dolly... Illegal, sir? Is it? Well don't you go telling, sir. Or what'll we do?

*(PEG returns)*

**Nellie:** Mostly we make enough for living and our rent. And sister and me are always indoors by six.

**Peg:** Brother works fro a costermonger. They give him his meals sometimes as well as two shillings a week.

**Nellie:** But we're all indoors by six. I see to that!

**Peg:** There's some flowergirls round here as stay out very late. Like poor Aggie. Her parents don't give her no supper unless she brings home money enough. She went to prison last winter for selling combs 'cos there weren't no flowers.

**Nellie:** Aggie, sir? About thirteen, sir. Two weeks she was in prison. And the night she came home, her father sent her straight out again. She used to be out ever so late getting money. I don't know how she sold flowers so late. But she didn't bring money enough and her father turned her out. I haven't seen her lately.

**Peg:** She heaved a shoe at the Lord Mayor, so as she could get a comfortable lodging in prison, she said. 'Cos she was tired of being in the streets. Poor Aggie.

**Nellie:** Said she was sick and tired of life. Poor Aggie.

*(The girls have finished their bunches and now rise)*

**Peg:** *(holding out a bunch)* There, sir, ain't they nice.

**Nellie:** We must go and sit on the corner now.

*(PEG takes a coin from the 'GENT')*

**Peg:** Oh, thank you sir!

**Nellie:** Thank you sir.

*(The FLOWERGIRLS exit, calling their wares 'Vi'lets! Sweet Vi'lets! Penny a bunch! Nice carnation for your buttinhole, sir! Lovely roses, lady!)*

*(The PHOTOGRAPHER enters carrying camera, tripod and his bag of photographic plates and specimen photographs. He sets them down then fetches a stool and carefully positions it measuring a distance to his camera. He throws a black cloth over the camera and ducks underneath to focus. After a moment he comes out and brightens as he sees the 'GENT')*

**Photographer:** Excuse me being so bold, sir. Can I interest you in a Wonderful Photographic Portrait?..... Only sixpence or a shilling large size. By the miracle os science a genuine correct likeness of your handsome... Oh no! Now I comes to look at you, sir I can see you'd be one for the half guinea portraits in one of the posh shops up the West End... What?... Oh no this is a very good camera, sir... Cost me five guineas at Gordon Flemming's in Oxford Street..... Saved up for it! A shilling a week, I did!.... Ah well, you see sir, when photography first came up I could see it would turn into something.... No, I didn't know nothing about it. I was a busker! Worked with my mate, Sam. Both blacked up, singing and dancing; me with a banjo, him with a tambo. But I always had a hankling after science.... How did I learn to take portraits?..... Ah ha! You might well ask! - I'd had some cards printed and put them in the window and blow me if I didn't have a customer before I'd even tried the camera out. So I tried it out on him.... *(laughs)* Just as you'd expect, sir. Black as a bag! That first Sunday I took one pound five shilling and sixpence. Customers came pouring in! The pictures?.... Black and spotty but I told 'em they'd be all right when they dried. Next week they brought them all back! Trouble was, y' see sir, when I bought the camera they took a portrait of me to show me how to use it. But it was a dull afternoon. Took him ninety seconds to produce the picture so I thought I had to do the same. And hang me if I didn't, rain or shine. Then I noticed as the evening grew darker they came out better and I formed an idea that I'd made a miscalculation. So I invested in a sixpenny book of instructions and, of course, saw my mistake. Now I can take a tidy picture.... Oh yes, it's better than busking. More professional. I tell you, some Sundays I've taken eighty!.. Round here Sunday's the best day 'cos people's got their wages in their pockets and I reckon they gets a fair sixpennyworth. The glass costs us tu'ppence a dozen and you have to give two with every picture; then the chemicals will cost quite a ha'penny, and varnish and and frame and fittings. Then there's the adverts and my partner to pay. *(beckons Right)* Oi Sam!

Come here. (*Then to 'GENT'*) He's been off trying to drum up trade in the tavern, sir.

(*SAM enters from Pub*)

**Photographer:** Just telling the gentleman, there's precious little profit in this game, is there, Sam?

**Sam:** That's true, sir, we...

**Photographer:** We have to get up to all sorts of dodges to make sixpenny portraits pay. What d'you reckon's our best dodge, Sam?

**Sam:** Well, I'd say...

**Photographer:** Our American Air-Preserver is best, sir. As a matter of fact, I'm the original inventor of the Patent American Air-Preserver. I used to call them London Air-Preservers but they've gone better since they've been American!.... What are they sir?

(*SAM opens his mouth to speak*)

**Photographer:** No, Sam that's what we calls a trade secret. Oh but since you're not gonner be a customer... Go on, you can tell him, Sam.

**Sam:** It's nothing more than a bit of card; old benefit tickets, brown paper, soap wrappings, anything we can get hold of, just varnished on one side.

**Photographer:** When a party comes into our shop for a portrait, I enquire which they'll have a shilling or a sixpenny one. If they prefer a sixpenny one I take it and then I show them the Air-Preservers. I tell them I make nothing out of them. Only tu'ppence, and costs us that much. That always makes them bite.

**Sam:** We've actually had folk come to us to have our Preservers put on other people's portraits, saying they've been everywhere and can't get them.

**Photographer:** Then we charge them thru'ppence. You'd scarcely believe it sir, but we've had other photographers come to us to buy our American Air-Preservers. 'Course we always tell them it's a secret process!

**Sam:** People won't use their eyes! Remember when you cut up an old band-box and varnished it and dried it on the hob right in front of a customer and she still fancied it came from America!

**Photographer:** But you have to remember, sir, it really is a useful thing. It does preserve the picture.

(*The two men confer*)

**Sam:** There's the brightening solution. That's a splendid dodge.

**Photographer:** Aqua distilled. Pure water. That's the brightening solution.

**Sam:** Tell him how we work it.

**Photographer:** Well, like this, sir. When we takes a portrait Sam hollers to me, 'Is it a bona?'

**Sam:** That's - is it a good 'un?

**Photographer:** When it is, I yell 'Say'.

**Sam:** That means 'Yes'.

**Photographer:** If not, I shout, 'Nanti!' Even so, Sam dries it and puts it in a frame.

**Sam:** Then I wrap it in a large piece of paper, so as it will take some time to unroll it. And I cry out, 'Take sixpence from the lady if you please.'

**Photographer:** Sometimes she asks to see it but I always answers 'Money first, if you please Ma'am then you can do what you like with it.'.... If she opens it and sees it's a black one I tell her, 'Don't fret. It'll come to your natural complexion when it dries off.' If she still grumbles, I say she can have it passed through the brightening solution.

**Sam:** Then we dip it in the water!

**Photographer:** I tell you, sir, the dodges we have to get up to to make an honest living!

**Sam:** Can't let business escape us, can we?

**Photographer:** We'd be fools to ourselves! Even when a party comes in when it's too dark we go through the process of taking the photo, but we don't put a plate in the camera, see? Then we tell 'em we'll have to keep it all night in a chemical bath to bring it out nice and clear.

**Sam:** We take their money as a deposit, of course.

**Photographer:** Of course! Then when they come for it we get them to sit again. Tell them it hasn't done justice to their features.

**Sam:** Gets a bit awkward if they send someone else to collect it! But we say the bath was too strong and ate the picture away.

**Photographer:** Or too weak and didn't bring it out properly.

**Sam:** Or he blows me up and pretends I upset the bath and ruined the picture. Sacks me on the spot.

*(They laugh)*

**Photographer:** If they complain the eyes can't be seen properly we take a pin and dot them. That brings them out a treat. They like that.

**Sam:** The hair too. If it's blurry you can use a pin to scratch them in a beautiful head of hair. (*indicates PHOTOGRAPHER*) He's a real artist with the hair. Should have been a barber.

**Photographer:** We had an old woman who wanted to be taken with her favourite

hen on her lap. But it turned out a very bad picture, when she saw it she asked, 'Where's the bird?' So I took a pin and scratched in the eye, and said, 'There it is, Ma'am - that's its eye just coming out!'

**Sam:** He made a line for the comb on its head, too, and she kept saying, 'Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful!'

**Photographer:** When we're not busy we take specemins for the window, so if anyone comes in and won't give us enough time Sam gets out one of those.

**Sam:** First one that comes to hand.

**Photographer:** Mind you, we've made some queer mistakes - like the widow, Sam.

**Sam:** Oh the widow! Oh dear me!

**Photographer:** Young lady came in and couldn't wait long so he grabbed a picture from the window. But as luck would have it is was a picture of a widow in her cap. Trouble was she insisted on opening the wrapping.

**Sam:** When she saw it she says, 'This isn't me, it's got a widow's cap and I never was married in all my life.' 'Why miss', I says, 'it's a beautiful picture and a correct likeness'. And so it was, and no lie.

**Photographer & Sam:** (*in unison*) But it wasn't of *her*!

**Photographer:** You'd have had to laugh sir if you'd seen him trying to humbug her. 'Why that isn't a cap it's the shadow of your hair,' he says. She had ringlets, you see. And she took it away positively believing that was the case. Even promised to send us other customers!

**Sam:** And she did!

(*They are in tears of laughter*)

**Photographer:** You're surprised we can get away with it, sir? The fact is, people don't know their own faces. most of them have never looked in a glass half a dozen times in their life. Directly they see a pair of eyes and a nose, they fancy they are their own and they're as happy as a pig in clover.

**Sam:** Especially when it's someone better looking!

**Photographer:** The only time we got caught was by an old woman who came in late in the day and caught us on the hop. We'd only one specimen left, see, and that was of a sailor man. We wrapped it up quick but she insisted on seeing it there and then. She puts on her spectacles and says, 'Eh?'... I said, 'Did you speak, Ma'am?' and she cries, 'Why this is a man! Here's the whiskers.'

**Sam:** I said, 'It's you, Ma'am. And a very excellent likeness I can assure you.'

**Photographer:** I couldn't stay there. I was bursting with laughter.

**Sam:** She kept on saying, 'Nonsense, I ain't a man!' And she just wouldn't have it.

**Sam:** Yes, you're right sir. That was a bit too strong.

**Sam:** But mostly our customers is well satisfied as you'd find out yourself if... Oh you've already asked him. We've other sidelines, sir.

*(They regard the 'GENT' hopefully)*

**Photographer:** I remove warts. Touch them with nitric acid, I do. My price is a penny a wart or a shilling for hands that's smothered with them. No? I dye hair, too...

**Sam:** Whiskers and moustaches for a shilling..... No?

**Photographer:** Trouble is, that nitrate of silver blacks the skin. One fellow with carrot hair came in and I was a bit clumsy and got it all over his cheeks. Next day he came back to have it all removed. I made him pay thru'ppence extra for that. I took it off with cyanide. That cleaned him up all right.

**Sam:** But he screamed blue murder!

**Photographer:** Still he paid good money.

**Sam:** Oh yeah.

**Photographer:** Come to think of it, the only bad money we ever took was from a Methodist clergyman. He gave us a bad sixpence. Still, I got my own back. Passed it off on a Rabbi who wanted portraits of his wife and three children.

**Sam:** We're gonner have to go now. I've got this fellow in the tavern waiting.

**Photographer:** Been a pleasure to talk to you, sir.

*(Both men raise their hats, collect their equipment and start off. LIZZIE and DOTTIE, two prostitutes enter. SAM turns to the PHOTOGRAPHER and points to the girls)*

**Photographer:** No, Sam, they're not customers. They're hoping we are.

*(They exit into the pub, chuckling. LIZZIE and DOTTIE stroll to the Centre. They are dressed in gaudy outfits and their faces are heavily painted. Upstage OLD STOCK and POLL, two old women in tawdry finery, enter and hover in the background, watching the girls. LIZZIE spots the 'GENT' and nudges DOTTIE, who moves Upstage. LIZZIE approaches the 'GENT')*

**Lizzie:** Hello, sir. Fancy a bit of company? *(she snorts)* Well, no need to glare at me like that! What are you hanging about here if you're not looking for... Hold on, you a dodger? Or one of them missionaries come to save my soul? 'Cos if you are, you can... Oh, you're not. Thank God. I can't stand that canting lot.

*(she eases her boot, flirtatiously displaying her ankle)*

**Lizzie:** Oh look, sir. I've worn 'ole in my stocking.

*(LIZZIE accepts defeat and starts to go. Then turns back.)*

**Lizzie:** What's that?... How did I come to be what I am?... Huh, there's a cheek! You're an inquisitive old party, aren't you! Look, if I employ my time talking to you, you'll have to pay me for my trouble. Time is money. Can't afford to lose one, or the other just talking..... Oh, well thank you, sir. Thank you. I don't really care to recall my past, but... oh well...

*(LIZZIE takes a coin from the 'GENT', furtively glances towards OLD STOCK then settles to tell her tale.)*

**Lizzie:** It may surprise you to know that I'm the daughter of a curate.... Gloucestershire, sir. A curate makes a poor living and my parents could ill afford to keep me at home, so I obtained a situation as a governess to the daughters of a family in town. I was very pretty and had many admirers. One of them the son of the house. Ah yes, my life would have been very different if that unfortunate attachment to me had not sprung up in the young man. And it was, I regret, reciprocated. He promised to marry me, and in an evil hour agreed to it. There was even a marriage ceremony. But afterwards I discovered the vicar was only his footman, dressed up. He took lodgings in Gower Street and we lived together as man and wife. Then he took me on the Continent. To Baden-Baden. We were staying at Baden-Baden when he heard his father died. He didn't even go home for the funeral. He had estranged himself from the family, you understand, by going off with me. Then he heard he was no longer to receive his allowance of five hundred pounds a year. All he'd been left was small sum of money to buy himself a commission in the army. Well, as you might imagine, sir, he was transported with rage, and wrote off immediately for his legacy. ... Oh yes, it did arrive, sir. But do you know what? He went that same night to the gaming tables and lost every farthing of it! Every farthing he had in the world. The next morning they found his corpse. He had blown his brains out. With a pistol! He left a farewell letter with our landlady, to be delivered to me in the event of his not returning in the morning! I was heartbroken. I truly loved him.

*(LIZZIE weeps. DOTTIE comforts her. LIZZIE wipes her nose, then goes on.)*

**Lizzie:** But at long last I realised my desolate position. I sold the better part of my wardrobe to pay my bills and returned to England. If only I had gone home then, I might have been forgiven. Or I could have appealed to my husband's mother who surely would have felt some sympathy for me. But several of my husband's friends came to console me.... And it was with one of them that I took my second fatal step.... Yes. After that it was too late to go home and so I was driven to a life of prostitution. Not because I had a liking for it, sir, but as a means of getting money to live on!

*(LIZZIE sighs. She notices OLD STOCK beckoning her.)*

**Lizzie:** I must go now, sir, or I'll get into trouble.

*(OLD STOCK waylays LIZZIE. They converse quickly, standing very close)*

**Old Stock:** What did 'e give you?

**Lizzie:** Didn't want me, did he?

**Old Stock:** He gave you something. I saw!

**Lizzie:** Prove it, then!

**Old Stock:** I'll take it off you!

**Lizzie:** You try!

**Old Stock:** Get on your way!

**Lizzie:** I'll go when I'm ready!

*(OLD STOCK grabs at LIZZIE and gives her a vicious pinch. LIZZIE yelps in pain and hurries off. OLD STOCK comes Downstage, smiling at the 'GENT'. She is a decrepit old body in her dirty finery.)*

**Old Stock:** *(to 'GENT')* Missed your chance there, sir. Shouldn't have let my Lizzie go. Gives the gentleman a very good time. I could call her back, if you..... No? Rather have me would you? *(she cackles)* Nothing like a bit of old stock. That's what they call me. 'Old Stock'. Makes them laugh, don't it? Bastards, all of them! What's that Lizzie been telling you? Sad story of her life? She got it out of a penny dreadful. Found on a rubbish heap was Lizzie. And I should know! *(she looks around)* Where's she got to know? Daren't let them out of your sight.

*(OLD STOCK hurries off after LIZZIE. POLL pushes DOTTIE down towards the 'GENT'.)*

**Dottie:** Poor Lizzie had a hard time, sir. But it's easy for a young girl to get deceived when she meets a nice gentleman and thinks she'd like to love him. Me?... Oh yes, sir, I met an army officer who I thought would marry me. He asked me to live with him and he made the prospect so fascinating that I yielded. He declared he would have married me with pleasure, but then he would have to forfeit a large sum of money, that he would inherit in a few years if he remained single. And it would be folly not to wait until then. Naturally, I told him we must wait. So I lived with him happily until that fateful day when his regiment was sent to Limerick. There, I fear, he must have met someone else for he wrote to me saying a separation must take place. For reasons he was not of liberty to apprise me of. He enclosed a cheque for fifty pounds. But when it was gone I could see no way but to resort to this way of life.... No sir, I have no family that I am aware of that's living.

*(DOTTIE accepts a coin from the 'GENT'. POLL comes Downstage.)*

**Poll:** On your way, now, Dottie. Go and stand with Lizzie. And don't wander off where I can't see you. *(to 'GENT')* You see, sir, that lovely frock and hat she's wearing belongs to the bloke as runs the bawdy-house we works from. Just a dress-lodger is Dottie. I've got to see she don't run away or waste her time drinking in public bars. Or take gentlemen to some other bawdy-house where the keeper charges her less. More than my life's worth to let her get away. I tell yer, one girl I was watching disappeared for two minutes and pawned everything. When I caught her she was wearing her own rags. No gentleman would have looked at her. Him as keeps our bawdy-house gave her a terrible beating. Me too! Black and blue I was.... No no, he don't often knock us about. Can't complain. He gives me me grub in return for which I looks after the house. I sweeps and does the place up and all that... Excuse me, sir, I must go and look out now for that girl Dottie.

*(OLD STOCK re-enters)*

**Old Stock:** It's all right, Poll, she's down the alley with Lizzie. Got a couple of swells nearly hooked! I needs a sip to warm me up.

*(POLL goes off to watch the girls. OLD STOCK brings a bottle from her pocket and takes a swig. She comes Downstage and talks to the 'GENT'.)*

**Old Stock:** They do say I'm a bit cracky, but that's all my eye. I'm a drunken old

bitch if you like nothing worser than that. I was once the swellest woman about town. You can believe it! But I've come down awful. And yet it ain't so awful. If I did think it awful I shouldn't be here now. The fact is life's sweet, and I don't care how you live. It's as sweet to the whore as it is to the hempress. And maybe it's as sweet to me as it is to you, sir.... Oh yes, I was once the swellest woman in town. Well-known years ago. I ain't got bad looks now, if it wasn't for the wrinkles on me skin. But that's all along of the drink. I gets nothing in money for following Lizzie around, barring a shilling or so for the liquor. Oh yes, I gets a bed too. Time was when I had a house of my own. And servants. And men sighing and dying for me. 'Course I was a fool not to make provision for myself. You don't think about it when you're young. Ought to have set up as a bawdy-house keeper myself. Wish to God I had! But I don't care now. I'm past that ever so long. And if you'll give me half-crown, or five bob, you'll make me jolly for a week.... 'Old on, I've lost sight of my Lizzie.

*(OLD STOCK takes a look offstage)*

**Old Stock:** No, I can still see her. Yes, time was when I'd take nothing but paper. Always tissue. Nothing under a flimsy. Ah, us women see some changes. Wonderful ups and downs. I can tell you. Lizzie and me's been out three hours, and what do you think we've done? We've taken three men home. And Lizzie, who's a clever little devil, got two pound five out of them. Which ain't bad at all. Mind you, we ain't always so lucky. Lizzie paints a bit too much for decent young fellows who've got lots of money. But they ain't our little game. We go in more for tradesmen, shop boys, commercial travellers and that sort. And men who are a little screwy. And er *(she lowers her voice)* we hooks a white choker now and then!... That's right, a parson on the loose from Exeter Hall.

*(POLL re-enters)*

**Old Stock:** Just telling the gent about our customers, Poll. About the parsons and that sort!

*(The two old women chuckle. Then OLD STOCK exits.)*

**Poll:** Like to hear anout Dottie, sir? Medical students are the ones who're sweet on Dottie. But we ain't in much favour with the bar..... What's that, sir? Oh yes, we can tell what a man is directly he opens his mouth. Knew right away

you're a gentleman. Aristocracy, I shouldn't wonder. But them medicals ain't good for much. They're larky young blokes, fond of dollymopping, but they've never much money.... I tell you though, lawyers are the fellows for dollymopping. Those chamber in the Inns of Court have been the ruins of many a girl! And they're so convenient for bilking! There ain't a woman in London who'd go with a man to the Temple. Not one! You say you're going to take her to the Temple, respectable though they might seem, and she'll cry off directly.

*(OLD STOCK re-enters)*

**Old Stock:** Poll, I think Dottie's got a bite.

*(POLL hurries Offstage. OLD STOCK comes down and holds out her hand to 'GENT')*

**Old Stock:** You were going to give me a little something, sir.... Oh, five bob. Thank you! I'll spend it well, sir. Drinking your health. That Lizzie's hooked the other fellow. Good for a guinea that one, if I know anything. I'll have to go, sir. But I can see as how you're a gentleman as likes to hear about young women being seduced and ruined. 'Tween you and me, I could tell you a lot of very rich stories, if you follows me drift. I'm around here most nights. Ask anyone. They all know Old Stock!

*(OLD STOCK starts off. She spots people coming.)*

**Old Stock:** Oh, look who's coming! Strolling players, sir. Huh! Dregs of humanity.

*(OLD STOCK exits. The SHOWMAN, actor BARNEY and actress SARAH enter. Other players enter in due course. All wear flashy, though shabby, clothes. During the following scene they erect a simple acting booth.)*

**Showman:** Here we are then! Allez! Allez! Let's waste no time. Get on with the fit-up, everybody. Set the booth right here. Or perhaps it might be better... er... *(he stops dead as he sees the 'GENT' and hisses to BARNEY)* Good Lord protect us, Barney, Look who's here!

*(The SHOWMAN moves down to speak to the 'GENT'.)*

**Showman:** Ah, good day to you, sir. Want to see our licence, do we? No trouble, sir. Got it here on our person, we have. Right here... or maybe here. No here.

*(SHOWMAN searches his pockets. The company melt away in alarm, except BARNEY who helps the SHOWMAN search. SHOWMAN finds licence and flourishes it at 'GENT'.)*

**Showman:** There, sir. You'll find it all in order.... What?... Oh you're not here to see our licence? Phew! That's a relief. Took years off my life, that did... Well, you see, sir, we never know but what the Clergy or some jumped up Jack-in-office is going to make trouble for us. Even when we've got the Mayor's own permission to perform.

*(The SHOWMAN goes Upstage and finds the rest of the company and sets them to go on with the booth. Meantime, BARNEY talks to the 'GENT'.)*

**Barney:** We've a right to be cautious, sir, after last month's turnabout. As I think you'd agree, sir. Clapped in jail we all were, for doing no more than trying to earn an honest living.... You're right, sir. It was a shameful injustice!... Beg pardon, sir?... Well, we'd been acting in Locks Field in Walworth. The 'Golden Farmer' the play was called. It was our version of 'Oliver Twist', that was making such a success in other theatres. Only instead of the Artful Dodger we called our character Jimmy Twitcher. And instead of... What's that, sir?

**Showman:** All right, thank you Barney! I'll explain to the gentleman.

*(BARNEY moves Upstage and helps others working on the booth.)*

**Showman:** ...What's that, sir? Robbery, you say? Oh, no no, please don't call it that, sir. Robbery, indeed! It was an imitation, that's all. And imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Right, sir?... Yes, well, we'd been playing in Locks Field for months and were doing very well. We'd treated the policeman, shilling a night and plenty of porter on top. You see we'd all got this nasty inkling something would happen. And it did! We're half-way through our second performance when we saw several police, in private clothes, rise up from the front seats and come towards the stage. Then they opened the side door and let in about forty more of them! The Inspector addresses the audience, as if it was his benefit night! 'Ladies and Gentlemen', he says. 'I forbid any of you to move, as I arrest these people for performing

without a licence.' Would you believe it! Three policemen took me like a common rogue, one on each arm and one by the scruff of the neck. They wouldn't even let us change our costumes. *(To BARNEY)* Would they Barney? Barney will tell you it's a fact.

*(BARNEY rejoins the SHOWMAN)*

**Barney:** No, they wouldn't that! I was dressed in a white swallow-tail coat with a chintz wasitcoat...

**Showman:** And I was wearing a Quakers hat and a big bushy wig and... What, sir? Oh yes, lucky we weren't playing 'Henry the Fifth' in a suit of armour.

**Barney:** Or 'Julius Caesar' in a sheet!

**Showman:** They marched us down to the Magistrates Court with all the people looking out of their windows and laughing. The police got pelted, I tell you. And I accidentally caught a severe blow on the head from a turnip! Took my wife too, they did. Though she was so far gone in her pregnancy the doctor ordered her pillows to sleep on.

**Barney:** We were all in an awful fright at being put in the cells. Some said we'd get twelve months! All we could wonder was what would our poor women and children do?

**Showman:** Well, in the morning the audience were fined one shilling a head or seven days. And we all got twenty shillings or fourteen days. We couldn't raise twenty shillings so we had to serve the time. All the while in our theatrical costume. Iniquitous!

**Barney:** They'd never have treated David Garrick like that! Just bread and water and a bit of gruel we had.

**Showman:** They had me picking oakum but they soon saw I was a decent sort of fellow and made me a deputy wardsman. Still I was pretty cut up, thinking of my wife so near her time. Believe me, sir, it was hard in prison. A nail in my coffin! In fact, one of our players did die...

**Barney:** He did that. An old man of a delicate constitution he was. And the cold laid hold of him.

**Showman:** It was dreadful severe for fellows of our life and animation to be shut up like that and not allowed to utter a word. But thank God it's in the past now. Right! Back to work, Barney.

*(BARNEY goes back Upstage)*

**Showman:** *(To 'GENT')* I trust you'll excuse my accosting you, sir, and I'll bid you good day.... I beg pardon, sir?... You want to watch? But we're only a Penny

Gaff, sir. Not what a gentleman like you'd be used to. And it's just a rehearsal. Of course if you're interested, you're very welcome. You wouldn't care to read in for one of the players? He's off being bled and... No? Just as you wish, sir.

*(The SHOWMAN goes to supervise operations. A YOUNG MAN enters carrying a large bundle. He hesitates a moment, then approaches SHOWMAN.)*

**Young Man:** Excuse me, sir.

**Showman:** Yes yes? What is it?

**Young Man:** Might you be in need of a player, sir?

**Showman:** What can you do?

**Young Man:** In truth, I've not trod the boards as yet sir, but...

**Showman:** Sing?

**Young Man:** A fair turn, sir.

**Showman:** You'd be called to sing two songs at each performance. Three performances a night and a sketch. Dance?

**Young Man:** Dance, sir?

**Showman:** About half a dozen quadrilles in the course of the day. Three times that at fairs.

**Young Man:** Yes, sir. But it's the acting, sir -

**Showman:** Oh, yes. Yes of course. *(To 'GENT with a sigh)* Of course! *(To YOUNG MAN)* D'you know 'The Floating Beacon' or 'The Wierd Woman of the Wreck'? It's just a mumming piece.

**Young Man:** No sir.

**Showman:** *(Regarding the YOUNG MAN thoughtfully)* Hmm. You might play Frederick, a Midshipman. It's the juvenile part. I shall be playing Jack Junk - that's the low comedy role. *(He assumes the character of Jack Junk, a British Seaman, chewing tobacco. He quotes his favourite lines)* 'What! Give the lie to an English sailor! I've had this quid for the last fourteen days and now I scud it with a full sail right into your lubberly eye.' *(He spits dramatically at the YOUNG MAN, who is startled but impressed)*

**Young Man:** Er - very good, sir.

**Showman:** Now here's the plot. You, Frederick, are in love with a girl called Evaline. Sarah! Come here and be Evaline.

*(The actress SARAH joins them, and drapes herself around the YOUNG MAN)*

**Showman:** That's right, Sarah. You know the business.

**Sarah:** *(Declaiming)* What! To part thus! Alas! Alas! Never to this moment have

I confessed I love you!

**Showman:** Yes, yes, all right. *(To the YOUNG MAN)* Now old Winslade, her father, is very fond of you. And very old. *(To BARNEY)* Give us Winslade, Barney, will you?

*(BARNEY, bent like and ancient, approaches the YOUNG MAN and warmly pumps his hand with affectionate mutterings)*

**Showman:** Now you, Frederick, get into the boat to row to your ship. But on the way you get wrecked. That's when you climb onto the Floating Beacon.

*(The SHOWMAN mimes all this. The YOUNG MAN copies as best he can)*

**Showman:** You are very faint. And stagger about. And do a back fall.

*(The YOUNG MAN looks worried as the SHOWMAN demonstrates. He copies, falling awkwardly)*

**Showman:** That's when you are picked up by the Wierd Woman, and have some dialogue with her. Sarah! Give us the Wierd Woman.

*(SARAH at once becomes a crone and helps the YOUNG MAN to his feet gibbering at him, kindly)*

**Showman:** The Wierd Woman takes you to her cave and puts you to bed. Then Frederick has a scene with the two smugglers, Ormaloff and Augerstoff. Barney!

*(The SHOWMAN and BARNEY take on the characters of the smugglers, very wicked and threatening)*

**Showman:** *(To YOUNG MAN)* Now while you're asleep, Frederick - Go on, you're asleep. Sleep!

*(The YOUNG MAN lies down with his hands under his cheek)*

**Showman:** While you are sleeping, you understand, the smugglers are planning to stab you.

*(The 'Smugglers' creep towards the YOUNG MAN brandishing knives)*

**Showman:** But just as they are about to kill you the Wierd Woman screams.

*(SARAH screams)*

**Showman:** No, no, no! Louder!

**Sarah:** Well, what *is* my part?

**Showman:** *(Takes her aside and describes it, fast)* You're kept a prisoner aboard the Beacon where your husband has been murdered. You have refused to become the wife of Ormaloff. Your child has been thrown overboard. You discover him in Frederick. And when they are about to stab him, you scream.

*(SARAH screams loudly now)*

**Showman:** And also as he's about to drink from the poison cup.

*(SARAH screams again. The SHOWMAN nods his approval)*

**Showman:** Make as much of it as you can, please, and don't stint the screams. Never stint the screams.

*(SARAH nods. SHOWMAN turns back to the YOUNG MAN. SARAH screams again)*

**Showman:** *(Wincing)* Yes, yes, very good. Now Frederick, after you awaken, Ormaloff pretends to be your friend and you begin drinking.

*(BARNEY and the YOUNG MAN squat down together drinking and clinking tankards and making friendly noises)*

**Showman:** You're very merry together.

*(BARNEY and the YOUNG MAN carouse more noisily)*

**Showman:** That's right. But Ormaloff has poisoned your cup. Now you see this and change cups. But Ormaloff spots it.

*(BARNEY and the YOUNG MAN go through the business of changing cups one to the other. Then just as the YOUNG MAN is accidentally about to drink the poisoned tankard, SARAH screams and points to it)*

**Showman:** Then there's more dialogue and you tackle Ormaloff.

*(BARNEY and the YOUNG MAN fight. The YOUNG MAN aims a weak blow at ORMALOFF who receives it as if it were a knock-out and staggers aside)*

**Showman:** Then you discover your mother, and embrace.

*(SARAH flings her arms around the YOUNG MAN, encouraging him to respond)*

**Showman:** Now Jack Junk comes searching for you. And Ormaloff tells me you are not aboard. But I know he gives the lie. That's when I cry: 'What! A dastardly lie to an English sailor! I've had this quid for the last fourteen days and now I scud it with a full sail into your lubberly eye!'

*(He spits vigorously at BARNEY who ducks. SHOWMAN and BARNEY exchange blows and 'ORMALOFF' staggers away mortally injured)*

**Showman:** Jolly Jack Junk has saved the day!

*(The SHOWMAN strikes a heroic attitude. SARAH and the YOUNG MAN shake his hand gratefully)*

**Showman:** Then you join with all the other players with Jack Junk over you, centre, to form a picture.

**Young Man:** A picture?

**Showman:** A picture! A picture!

*(At his cry all the players run to pose as if for a 'Curtain' pushing the YOUNG MAN into position. They hold it a moment and then disperse back to their tasks while the SHOWMAN regards the YOUNG MAN, shaking his head sadly)*

**Young Man:** What about the words, sir?

**Showman:** Words? I've given you your part. You've got to put it together and do the talk. Go on, try the piece where you declare your love for Evaline.

**Young Man:** *(Declaiming badly)* Ha! Evaline I love you. I love you, Evaline.

**Showman:** Try the part where you find your long lost mother.

**Young Man:** Er - Ha! Mother, I love you. I love you, Mother.

*(SHOWMAN casts a despairing look towards the 'GENT')*

**Showman:** And what about the encounter with Ormaloff?

**Young Man:** (*Adopting a pugilistic stance*) Ha! Hormaloff I defy thee! Ha ha! I smite thee!

*(He lunges at the SHOWMAN who ripostes, sending the YOUNG MAN reeling)*

**Showman:** Young man, I suspect you have not the gift of the gab, and without the gift of the gab you are no good at the booth.

**Young Man:** But sir, ...

**Showman:** Nor a memory for the plot.

**Young Man:** But sir, -

*(The SHOWMAN waves him away. The YOUNG MAN gathers up his belongings dejectedly, watching the others with longing. The SHOWMAN turns to the 'GENT')*

**Showman:** That's the trouble, sir, the lines. I've had one actor - didn't know a word of his part - seize me by the throat and cry, 'Caitiff! Dog! Be sure thou provest my wife unfaithful to me'. 'Oh, my Lord', I reply, playing along. 'You wrong your wife and torture me!' 'Give me the proof or thou hadst best ne'er been born,' says he. 'My Lord, have pity!' I plead. 'Forward arrant liar!,' he cries and he rushes me off the stage! But we were supposed to be playing 'Hamlet'.

*(SHOWMAN turns back to the YOUNG MAN)*

**Showman:** I doubt Frederick is for you, laddie. But tell Sarah where you lodge.

**Young Man:** May I watch a while, sir?

*(The SHOWMAN nods and turns back to the 'GENT')*

**Showman:** As you see, sir, the stage is a magnet to the young men. But then aren't we the flashest, most independent race a-going?

**Barney:** And the poorest!

**Showman:** Pay him no heed, sir..... What sir?... Our reward is the adulation of the crowd. The plaudits! We are not fishmongers! We are the spinners of dreams. The tellers of tales.

**Barney:** That's true enough.

**Showman:** What can compare with an audience still as death with tears in their

eyes. As I spoke my lines as Calcraft the Hangman in 'Groans from the Gallows' you could hear no sound but the bell tolling for Knightly, the prisoner. *(Re-enacting the play)*..... 'Have you any last request to make?' 'None' he says. 'Yet something here tells me I ought not to hang this man. He is innocent and I know it. I cannot and I will not take his life!' At that point a pardon arrives for Knightly. Then I say, 'Knightly, you are free! Live and be happy and I am...' But here the Sherrif adds, 'Doomed to the galleys for life!' Because I refused to kill the prisoner, you see. Then I exclaim: 'So be it! I shall be happy, knowing I have not taken this man's life! And be thus enabled to give up the office of executioner and its most horrid paraphernalia!' Then there's a great deal of blue fire and that's the end of the piece. I made a great hit in that part. The boys ran after me in the streets calling out 'Calcraft! Calcraft!'

*(He is brought back to earth by a call from the YOUNG MAN)*

**Young Man:** Sir!... Sir!

**Showman:** What now?.... I tell you there is no...

**Young Man:** I have a fine costume.

**Showman:** What? Let me see!

*(Everyone approaches as the YOUNG MAN opens the bundle and brings forth a broad-rimmed, feathered hat, rich cloak, colourful velvet doublet and other items of costume. The SHOWMAN commandeers the hat while the others ransack the bundle with cries of delight)*

**Showman:** Ah yes. Yes, indeed! *(He draws the YOUNG MAN aside)* Now, do you think you could find yourself russet boots, a set of fleshings, a ballet shirt and a wig or two?

**Young Man:** Yes, sir.

**Showman:** Perhaps I was a little hasty just now. Yes, I believe you may join us. Sarah can educate you. This hat will suit very well your part... or somebody.

*(The SHOWMAN puts the hat on his own head wearing it with a swagger. The YOUNG MAN puts it on and looks ridiculous but delightedly he joins the other players)*

**Showman:** *(To 'GENT')* Well, sir, costumes are more difficult to come by than actors. That'll do well for Fair Rosamond and..... What say sir?.... Oh Lord bless you, as long as it's good and showy it doesn't matter a jot about it

corresponding with the piece. Last spring we played Maria Marten in Cavalier costume. The audience didn't know the difference.

*(The SHOWMAN gives the 'GENT' a bow and turns to the players)*

**Showman:** Now! Are we all met? By your leave, kind sir, we must now begin the proper drama. Stay and watch if you so desire. You'll see we do nearly the whole play with just the difficult parts cut out. We go as far as memory will allow, but we're never lost for words, sir, not in the least. I beg you now excuse me. I must take my place upon the stage.

*(The SHOWMAN goes behind the booth. A few sad phrases are played upon a pipe. The SHOWMAN now appears on the stage. He is wearing the YOUNG MAN's hat and cloak. He takes centre stage one shoulder hunched)*

**Showman:** 'Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this son of York. And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house.....'

*(He continues the 'Richard the Third' speech as the Curtain falls)*