

THE VICTORIAN LADIES' DETECTIVE COLLECTIVE

Written by
Patricia Milton

in the Central Works Writers Workshop

Workshopped with Gary Graves, Chelsea Bearce,
Alan Coyne, Stacy Ross, Gregory Scharpen, and Jan Zvaifler

1584 Geary Road, Walnut Creek, CA
510-614-5775
2playwrights@gmail.com

CAST LIST

POLICE CONSTABLE HENRY CRANE*, a London police constable and ordinary man. Shows deference but can become hostile if provoked. Not thoughtful.

LOVEDAY FORTESCUE, a former actress and governess. A proto-feminist, who is intellectual, philosophical, and dramatic. Once, literally gaslighted, which nearly finished her. Victorian era expectations of women infuriate and preoccupy her. Always wears elbow-length gloves.

VALERIA HUNTER, a widow, cat lady and Loveday's sister, who owns and operates the Hunter Lodging House. Would be locked in an attic as "mad," were she married. Less concerned about the plight of women than her own vanishing fortune. Anxious, eager to obtain the latest formula of opium tinctures. Suspicious of the police.

KATHERINE (KATIE) SMALLS, a biracial (white and black) American ex-patriot and entertainer at The St. James Theatre. Born in Virginia, later moved to become an actress in New York. Badass American, determined, matter-of-fact.

JASPER WARHAM-WYNN*, a theatrical producer and founding member of the Battersea Vigilance Committee. Smarmy, veneer of politeness. Upper class poser.

TODDY, THE CAT'S MEAT MAN,* a Cockney whose shop is in the alley streets away from the Lodging House, a misogynist with no filter.

*NOTE: these three roles are played by the same actor

LOCATION

The Parlor of the Hunter Lodging House, in the Battersea area of London. Chairs, a settee, a collection of newspaper clippings, scissors, paste, a London map, scrapbooks, chalkboard: Loveday's command center. TIME: Tuesday & Wednesday, Fall, 1893.

Please note:

/ indicates the next line of dialogue begins, while current dialogue continues

- indicates a cut off at the end of a line of dialogue

... is a trail off at the end of a line of dialogue

CRANE, VALERIA, and LOVEDAY have middle-class London accents. KATIE has a slight (Virginia) drawl; TODDY has a Cockney accent and uses Cockney rhyming slang.

ACT I, SCENE I.

The Parlor of the Hunter Lodging House.
LOVEDAY, PC CRANE, and VALERIA.
VALERIA sits with her elderly cat on her lap,
perhaps in its basket or on a cushion.

CRANE

Surely you don't mean to insinuate we don't care about the victims-

LOVEDAY

I don't mean to insinuate it. I mean to state it as a bald fact. London recoils from the shock of women's bodies, found strewn from Clapham Common to Nine Elms-

CRANE

Miss Fortescue, more than two hundred members of the Metropolitan Police are working day and night to catch this monster.

LOVEDAY

But you haven't caught him, have you? Instead you stand idly by, in our parlor, calm as a toad in the sun. It's a travesty.

CRANE

We have our methods, Miss. We cannot fail.

LOVEDAY

I marvel at your cockiness: that it blossoms, somehow, in the rocky soil of your ineptitude.

CRANE

Is that you being stroppy, Miss?

VALERIA

(to her cat) Hear that, puss? Constable Crane says she's "stroppy."

VALERIA chuckles, and pets her cat.
LOVEDAY displays a scrapbook she has made
with clippings from the many London
newspapers. She finds a page.

LOVEDAY

PC Crane, I have studied the coroner's photograph that appeared in the Gazette, /and-

CRANE

We have many more photographs than that. You'll not learn anything helpful from the newspapers. The Metropolitan Police have everything under control.

VALERIA

Four dead women would disagree, Constable.

LOVEDAY

It's been a full fortnight since the first corpse was discovered. Which brings me to the matter of my letter. (stony silence) You need my services. I am an actress.

VALERIA

No, you're not.

LOVEDAY

As a former actress, I have knowledge of London theatres and theatre folk.

VALERIA

(to the cat) Been a lo-o-ong time since Loveday was an actress-

LOVEDAY

My sister is resentful and envious of my illustrious career-

VALERIA

Not envious of a governess!

LOVEDAY

(to CRANE) I was forced to find employment as a governess, and dismissed when they discovered I'd been an actress. Scandal seems to plague this family.

VALERIA

Don't drag me into this!

LOVEDAY

And Valeria knows perfectly well why I may not find employment on the stage!

CRANE

Would you two like me to step out?

VALERIA

Yes!

LOVEDAY

No.

VALERIA

Her puffed-up pride is not becoming-

LOVEDAY

And my retirement had nothing to do with my considerable talent!

CRANE

Ladies! Ladies! Returnin', Miss Fortescue, to your offer of ... services. It's not a good idea. The risk involved-

VALERIA

We have a boarding house full of actresses, Constable: the very women upon whom this murderer preys. Four victims killed, and one unsuccessful attempt, in just two weeks' time. If the police cannot stop this criminal, can you fault Loveday, here, for stepping up?

CRANE

Quite aside from the peril, ladies are entirely unsuitable to detective work.

LOVEDAY

Women as well as men commit crimes. How, then, are women not just as suited to solving them?

CRANE

Ladies are ... the weaker sex, and lack the mental acuity... That is to say, cats are smaller than dogs, and, precisely as in the animal kingdom-

VALERIA

Bollocks.

CRANE

Missus Hunter, surely you realise that detective work is the realm of men. Men who possess logic, experience, and deductive reasoning.

VALERIA

If that were so, why is the Battersea Butcher not in your logical, experienced, and reasonable custody? (beat) My sister can be of substantial assistance to you. She bears many of the attributes of Mister Sherlock Holmes.

CRANE

Sneers at the police, for example?

VALERIA

Assembles scrapbooks. Never married. A moody, untidy, self-indulgent atheist. Has exactly one friend.

LOVEDAY

Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character.

CRANE

I must point out that while men may be detectives, it is proper that women cook, clean, look after their husbands, raise children... in short, remain fully devoted to the domestic sphere.

LOVEDAY

I have played breeches roles!

VALERIA

(to the cat) Good lord, puss-puss.

CRANE

I recall that, Miss. I saw you as Portia in that Shakespeare play -

LOVEDAY

I also portrayed Viola in Twelfth Night. Viola, who becomes Cesario-

CRANE

I b'lieve I saw that one, too.

LOVEDAY

And what did you think of my performances?

VALERIA

(chuckles) You should have seen her Falstaff!

LOVEDAY

(to VALERIA) Resentment, like a great weight, crushes the soul. (to CRANE) My older sister mistakes jibes for pleasantries.

CRANE

Any lady ... even a breeches-wearing lady, lacks the / necessary -

LOVEDAY

I have common sense. I hold the keen understanding of human nature an actress must, in order to practice her craft. Stage cosmetics skills! I could go in disguise on the streets of London-

VALERIA

And do what?

LOVEDAY

(to VALERIA) Please pet John Benn, and let the constable and me pursue the substance of my letter!

CRANE

"John Benn." You have named your cat after a dangerous Socialist?

VALERIA

After a stouthearted dock strike organiser. (to the cat) And he is a sweetie-heart.

LOVEDAY

That cat is old, quite deaf, and doubtless puzzled that you flap your mouth at him.

CRANE

(to LOVEDAY) We appreciate the offer of your services, Miss Fortescue. And although your letter afforded a good deal of merriment amongst the lads down at the station, I am afraid the answer is no.

LOVEDAY

This refusal is baffling. You deny the Metropolitan Police's appalling record? You never caught Jack the Ripper, and that's been four years!

CRANE

Five years, Miss.

LOVEDAY

It's not five. The Bishopsgate torso was found in eighty-nine: Poor, dead woman with no arms, no legs, no head.

VALERIA

Hence: a "torso."

CRANE

We determined that murder was not the work of the Ripper. Entirely different district. Besides, the Ripper ripped them-

LOVEDAY

He cut her up!

CRANE

It doesn't pass muster as "ripping." It's more (beat) "chopping."

LOVEDAY

What about the Pinchin Street torso?

CRANE

The Pinchin Street Torso, likewise, was never the work of Jack. The newspapers wrote "Jack's Back!" merely to sensationalise the case.

LOVEDAY

Torsos scattered about the streets are not sufficiently "sensational" for the press?

CRANE

Apparently, no.

LOVEDAY

Then, there was the Tottenham torso, last spring! Found floating in the moat at Bruce Castle, unnerving the swans.

The women glare at CRANE.

CRANE

If I may point out, it's a mere (counts silently) three torsos, Miss.

LOVEDAY

It's a quarter of a dozen torsos!

CRANE

Not eviscerated. No guts pulled from the bodies. Therefore: not the work of the Ripper!

LOVEDAY

Constable, you have just admitted these torsos were the work of a third savage killer ... whom you have failed to identify and bring to justice! You should be begging for my assistance!

VALERIA

(to the cat) Ooooh, the man said "no," now, didn't he?

CRANE

In police work, forbearance is indeed a virtue, ladies.

VALERIA

You can afford forbearance. You're not the one being stalked.

CRANE

Begging your indulgence, but the Butcher is not stalking you two. He's killing actresses, who are generally, er, ... young. Not such seasoned ladies as yourselves.

LOVEDAY

Since he has attacked five women so far, one of whom was fully forty-two, I think it impertinent of you to insinuate my sister and I are not being stalked!

VALERIA

It is not something to be wished for, Loveday.

CRANE

Missus, I must inform you that I will interview your lodgers with regard to the / recent-

LOVEDAY

With regard to the grotesque and brutal murder of Amanda Burns?

CRANE

(to VALERIA) I'll need the use of one of your parlors.

LOVEDAY

He needs our help, Valeria. Constable Crane, did you know that I can conduct interviews in every class of accent ... and that other actresses will be willing to confide in me?

CRANE

No.

LOVEDAY

Authority on your side and social subordination on ours prevents any woman from telling you her complete and utter truth.

CRANE

I take my chances. (to VALERIA) I'll use the lodgers' parlor, missus. To conduct my questioning. Please comment.

VALERIA

A Sergeant, or an Inspector, may conduct such enquiries at the police station.

CRANE

It's my beat, Missus; my responsibility. I take the killings personally. If I bring the ladies down to the station, they won't like it. (beat) You complain that we aren't doing enough, yet you two are obstructing my investigation!

LOVEDAY

PC Crane, you say you have police photographs that remain unpublished.

CRANE

Yes.

LOVEDAY

Give me copies.

CRANE

Impossible.

LOVEDAY

Lend me copies, and I will persuade Valeria, here, to let you use the lodgers' parlor.

VALERIA

You'll do what?

LOVEDAY

Indulge me, sister.

CRANE

You haven't been respectful.

VALERIA

(to the cat) She is never respectful.

LOVEDAY

(to CRANE) And you have been obstinate. (to VALERIA) Both of you.

VALERIA

It is my parlor!

CRANE

Here's my advice; Stay in your house. Don't meddle. (beat) I'll return after my rounds, Missus. To interview the lodgers. (to LOVEDAY) Bringing you exactly one photograph.

LOVEDAY

Five!

CRANE

Three. It is as far as I will bend, Miss, and to be frank, your stomach will scarcely contain your breakfast when you see them. Good day to you both.

CRANE takes his hat and exits.

LOVEDAY

Asinine mutton shunter!

VALERIA

He made some fair points. Your offer is not altogether respectable.

LOVEDAY

Your combativeness is wearying, Valeria.

VALERIA

And your powers of deduction may be overvalued. By you.

LOVEDAY

It's nonsense. You and I, at our "seasoned" ages, may move about the streets completely unnoticed, observing what we like. It's as if we are invisible. That's an attribute any detective can use to her advantage.

VALERIA

The police can intimidate; that's their advantage.

LOVEDAY

Women have the wisdom accumulated over years of observing men: their traits, their habits, their peculiarities-

VALERIA

They'll never admit that they have peculiarities. Nor that we have wisdom. (beat) I don't like Crane. He had the nerve to question me about a burglary last month ... as if I would know anything about such a crime! Why did you tell this insolent constable that he may use my parlor?

LOVEDAY paces.

LOVEDAY

I need clues, Valeria. (disapproving silence) If the Battersea Butcher is not brought into custody, and soon, more women will die. And those who live will be in a state of paralysing panic. It will be Jack the Ripper all over again!

VALERIA

You have changed, Loveday, with your lack of employment.

LOVEDAY

You've changed, as well. Awfully temperamental, lately. Have you stopped taking your Doctor Tattersall's Tincture for Toothache?

VALERIA

Infernal company weakened the formula!

LOVEDAY

Reduced the laudanum, you mean. Be honest: you haven't had a toothache since 1885.

VALERIA

I need assistance to sleep. I intend to inquire at the apothecary for something stronger.

LOVEDAY

Doctor Tattersall's made your knees buckle, and you cannot endure a stronger formula. I will have a word with that apothecary.

VALERIA

You do not have the authority to limit my medicine! What is the matter with you? You have grown restless. You are argumentative. You are chatty with the police. You've stopped attending the Ortheno- the Orno- the Arnothe- Oh! You know I cannot pronounce it! The Bird Club.

LOVEDAY

The "Ornithological Society." That is because I received an epiphany: Birds are tedious. Green-billed this and scarlet-chested that. All those genuses.

VALERIA

(to the cat) But birds are tasty, aren't they, puss? (To LOVEDAY) You've also abandoned the Suffrage Association, and the Rational Dress League-

LOVEDAY

Do you see me wearing either corset or bustle?

VALERIA

No, but we must fight on, as long as they deny us pockets! What has come over you?

LOVEDAY

My former employers shunned newspapers. Thus I was shielded from the daily drumbeat of murder, murder, murder! Since I began reading the Gazette, my conscience has been stirred.

VALERIA

This constant rush of bad news is an assault on the soul.

LOVEDAY

I cannot help but think of the two little girls I taught.

VALERIA

Surely, being a governess is not a radicalising profession.

LOVEDAY

If you knew. (beat) When you see your charges being made submissive, reduced ... dwindled into unquestioning obedience before they grow into young women. Do you realize the moral of every fairy story is: "Girls, be compliant. Girls, do not leave your houses!" Yet Red Riding Hood's granny, who follows that admonition? Killed and devoured, in her own bed!

VALERIA

Sister. It pains me to have Constable Crane in the lodgers parlor. (musing) Perhaps I can charge him a small fee.

LOVEDAY

As long as you don't interfere with my obtaining the photographs.

VALERIA

(to the cat) Setting herself up for disappointment, isn't that right, John Benn? (to LOVEDAY) I maintain, it is not your duty, / nor-

LOVEDAY

Duty or not, Sister, I have dispatched a second letter offering my services as a detective. Not to the police, this time.

VALERIA

You are not a detective. (to the cat) Isn't she a silly one? A mad cranky, this one! (to LOVEDAY) They don't want you prying. Take care inserting yourself where these men don't want you. This bloody terror may come 'round for you.

BLACKOUT. END SCENE.

ACT I, SCENE II.

Later. KATIE waits. She is drawn to and begins looking through the desk. LOVEDAY enters.

LOVEDAY

What are you doing?

KATIE crosses away, tucking a clipping up her sleeve. LOVEDAY examines her things.

KATIE

I- I- Good day. I am Miss Katie Smalls, one of the lodgers. I've just been waitin' here to speak with Missus Hunter. I / need-

LOVEDAY

I am Missus Hunter's sister, Loveday Fortescue. You were not "waiting." You were inspecting various items on my desk.

KATIE

Please, forgive my curiosity. I was way too forward.

LOVEDAY

(checking) You have moved yesterday's copy of the Echo. I left it on top.

KATIE

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that. I wanted to know if The Butcher had struck again, and when I saw all your newspapers ... the temptation was too great. I only came in here because my life is in danger, and I need to talk / to-

LOVEDAY

Pardon me. Your life is in danger?

KATIE

You've collected every newspaper in London-

LOVEDAY

For my work.

KATIE

You must read about the Battersea Butcher. He's killin' us actresses. Ones from the St. James, where I perform, and from the Victoria Palace.

LOVEDAY

Then you are a profoundly imperiled party. Miss Smalls, do you wish to engage a detective?

KATIE

What I wish, is to soften the heart of Missus Hunter, who intends to evict me out of this lodgin' house. Whereupon I will be without a home, with no way back to America, and an easy mark for the Butcher. I need to talk to your sister.

LOVEDAY

She is out, and may be for some time. She is likely having a row with an apothecary.

KATIE

Miss Fortescue, you hold the power to grant me a life-saving favor. If I had my druthers, I wouldn't do this-

LOVEDAY

"Your druthers?"

KATIE

It's an American expression, meanin' "preference." Please, intercede for me. I mean, you're Missus Hunter's beloved sister. She wouldn't refuse you.

LOVEDAY

If her rent were past due, Valeria would roust Queen Victoria.

KATIE

It's not my fault! On account of these murders, our houses are half-full. They've reduced my wages, and ... The day after the second murder, I went out and spent my whole life's savings on a bicycle.

LOVEDAY

So that you could flee more speedily your own macabre, terrifying, and grisly death.

KATIE

(a look) That was my plan, and I did it, and now I can't pay for my room. I asked for an advance of my salary, but these producers haven't the decency God gave Cain.

LOVEDAY

I am familiar with the character flaws of theatrical producers. (thinks) You obviously need my assistance. I am sure you have heard of me: Loveday Fortescue, noted actress, famous for her breeches roles. Retired from the stage. Now, I am a detective.

KATIE

A what- a detective. With Scotland Yard?

LOVEDAY

The Metropolitan Police failed to appreciate my audition, but I have other possibilities pending. Miss Smalls, given the right clues, I can prevent your gruesome demise. You work at a theatre from which the killer has selected his victims. What can you tell me?

LOVEDAY gets notebook and pencil, writes.

KATIE

Uh, well ... Every night, I stand onstage and gaze out into the darkness ... and I'm wonderin' if that's him sittin' there ... watchin' me say my lines, while he fingers the knife in his pocket. And I'm askin' myself if I'm the next one-

LOVEDAY

To be viciously, brutally impaled.

KATIE

(a look) Then, on my way home, I'm hearin' footfalls behind me on the cobblestones-

LOVEDAY

Doubtless feeling the icy chill of your own mortality. Imagining his honed blade, swiftly-

KATIE

Ok, that kinda talk's gotta stop.

LOVEDAY

My apologies. You have clearly described your plight, but have you anything useful.

KATIE

(thinks) Oh! My dear friend Iris was the first of the Butcher's victims.

LOVEDAY

(makes notes) Miss Iris Johnstone? I know Iris well. She is a brave and resourceful woman, to have survived his attack.

KATIE

I glimpsed Iris by the stage door the night he ... cut her. I know, now, the man I saw standin' next to her was the Butcher.

LOVEDAY

Kindly describe him.

KATIE

I could see that that he wore ... a tall hat.

LOVEDAY

Like every other man in London? Your skills of observation seem somewhat inexpert.

KATIE

There was no moon, a dense fog, it was rainin', and I was up on the corner. With just one street lamp, he was barely visible. (beat) I've told you what I know. Now are you gonna talk to your sister?

LOVEDAY

Valeria often yields to me, but she is of a ... changeable temperament. Her fear of becoming financially destitute makes her hold every penny dear. I cannot give you a guarantee.

KATIE

(thinks) How about if you and I were ... takin' on the task together. Surely she would not evict your crime-solving partner!

LOVEDAY

I'm afraid I don't understand.

KATIE

I don't see why I have to be your "client," just because I'm in danger. I would like to catch the killer, and I am highly motivated. Why can't I be a detective?

LOVEDAY

Do you have any experience in actual detective work?

KATIE

Do you?

LOVEDAY

Excellent point.

KATIE

Police often patrol in pairs. Two sets of eyes are always better than one. Miss Fortescue, I can defend myself in fightin' situations. I flirt like a whole bowl of sugar. If I am dressed in a ... certain way, men will just blurt out all kinds of confidences, in an attempt to impress me.

LOVEDAY

I have no doubt.

KATIE

You must consider me. I will pursue the Butcher with pitiless determination... I have common sense, book knowledge, and superior intellectual abilities.

LOVEDAY

Unusual ... in an American. Unfortunately, these attributes are redundant with my own.

KATIE

Wait. If you unite with me, we can use my new bicycle to do our investigating! Hansom cabs are expensive.

LOVEDAY

And the train stations are quite far apart. Hmm.

KATIE

Please, let's join forces. Beg Missus Hunter to let me stay, and I'll put my bike at your disposal.

LOVEDAY

It is ... somewhat appealing.

KATIE

I have shown bold initiative! Like a true detective, I investigated your desk while you were out of the room. I looked through your newspapers-

LOVEDAY

You left them askew! (beat) And you still have one of my clippings on your person.

KATIE produces the hidden clipping.

KATIE

I used sleight-of-hand. I didn't think you noticed. (reads the clipping) "The police have no one in custody."

KATIE puts the clipping back in its place.

LOVEDAY

How on earth would one use sleight-of-hand to defeat the Butcher? (thinks) You will pick his pocket, because that is where he hides his weapon?

KATIE

Miss Fortescue, I am not a thief.

LOVEDAY

No, no of course not.

KATIE

If I disarm him, I'll do it honestly. I have hand-to-hand combat skills. You know, my daddy's gymnasium in New York attracted sailors from all over the world ... and I trained in a dozen of the fightin' arts.

LOVEDAY

You trained? With sailors? In fisticuffs? In a men's gymnasium?

KATIE

It may sound scandalous, but ... I had to. After we moved up from Virginia, I was ridin' the horse-drawn trolley every day to my theatre. And every single day, there was this very same man standin' in the trolley. (meaningfully) A man ... given to puttin' himself out there. Into the open air. Into the public eye.

LOVEDAY

You are speaking of a man with unbuttoned trousers. We have such men on the London railways.

KATIE

I suspect every city's got 'em.

LOVEDAY

I recall a summer Sunday on the Brighton Line. I travelled all the way from London Bridge to Wivelsfield without catching one single glimpse of a man's tally wag. I shall never forget it.

KATIE

Well, in my case ... One day I had had enough. Miss Fortescue, I have heard that a woman is supposed to yell "Fire!" when somethin' shameful is happenin,' but that seems so roundabout. So I pointed. I pointed right at it, and I shouted, at the top of my voice!

LOVEDAY

Jigglestick? Hanging doodle?

KATIE

I couldn't wait for folks to figure out some polite turn of phrase. I yelled "Penis! Penis!"

LOVEDAY

This frank and ... descriptive outcry: did it dissuade the man?

KATIE

He tucked it back in, sure. But my yellin' attracted a pair of police officers, who proceeded to interrogate me for my "indecent" behavior ... for simply namin' what I saw!

LOVEDAY

Inequitable and unjust.

KATIE

When I informed my father, he told me, at once: I must learn, and practice, every means of self defense, includin' shin kickin', bare-knuckle boxin,' and fan fightin'. From the Far East.

LOVEDAY

Fan fighting. This opens up heretofore unimagined areas of detective work, Miss Smalls. Will you demonstrate?

KATIE

Well, I just met you. I don't wanna kill you.

KATIE makes a few poses, snaps open her folding fan. It startles LOVEDAY.

KATIE (CONT'D)

It's got metal spokes.

LOVEDAY

Proceed slowly. Prudently! And with great care.

KATIE

Of course. (preps some more) Now, if a man attacks me ... Go ahead, Miss Fortescue, you may come at me. (LOVEDAY doesn't.) Come at me!

LOVEDAY gingerly circles KATIE.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Okay! Here you come, and I execute a swift, merciless fan strike to the windpipe!

LOVEDAY recoils.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I'll show you, very safely. (demonstrating, a slow strike) It's there, in the front of the throat. A hard thrust with my fan, like this! Will render him senseless. Another solid point of contact: the carotid artery, on the side of the neck. And not a gentle warning tap, either: I send in the full freight-train.

KATIE feints a carotid artery strike on LOVEDAY. Hands the fan to LOVEDAY, who practices.

KATIE (CONT'D)

If I can get in a low blow on him, that's also very effective. I strike at the throat, like this, and then I grab and crush his ... um, well, the American term-

LOVEDAY

Twiddle-diddles?

KATIE

So, in New York, we call 'em slappers. Now, this particular move can be done with the hand, the knee, the fan ... or, using the foot, with a swift kick. It has a three-fold effect: there's the element of surprise, the blow to his masculine pride, and, of course, agony. It leaves him squirming on the ground, tormented, and completely unable to harm me. Go ahead, now. Act devastated.

LOVEDAY gingerly lies down and rolls.

LOVEDAY

Like this?

KATIE

More on your side. More torment. Good. This is where I get a few minutes to run away. But if I don't ... He may try to rise. He gets up on all fours, and BOOM! I respond with a well-placed kick to his windpipe, or full in the face.

LOVEDAY

Dear me. Americans.

VALERIA enters. She carries her purse and a wrapped, bloody package.

VALERIA

What on earth? (stern) Miss Smalls! What are you doing?

LOVEDAY

(scrambling up) Valeria, there you are!

VALERIA

I expected you to have vacated your room yesterday! (to LOVEDAY) And you! What were you doing lying about on the floor? Did this woman assault you?

LOVEDAY

Certainly not.

VALERIA

Miss Smalls, to find you still on premises-

KATIE

I know you told me to get out, but-

LOVEDAY

Miss Smalls' paycheck has been slenderised on account of the Butcher.

VALERIA

I have heard that excuse. I am skeptical.

KATIE

It's the truth!

LOVEDAY

I will vouch for her rent.

KATIE

Thank you. Partner.

VALERIA

Loveday, why would you promise such a thing ... when you have no money?

LOVEDAY

Because I did not receive police sanction to investigate the Butcher. Miss Smalls, here, is willing to assist me in that pursuit. Unlike you. (beat) Incidentally what is in that package?

VALERIA

It's from the Cat's Meat Man.

VALERIA exits to the kitchen.

LOVEDAY

Well, have him place the wrapped meat in a sack!

KATIE

(horrified) It's ... "cat's meat?"

LOVEDAY

(to VALERIA) These men could not capture the Ripper, and it is unlikely this Butcher will be stopped by them, either.

VALERIA re-enters, wiping her hands.

KATIE

It's the flesh of dead cats?

LOVEDAY

Certainly not by the Metropolitan Police Force.

KATIE

But I liked your little puss!

VALERIA

(to KATIE) The Cat's Meat Man does not chop up cats. His meat is FOR cats, not OF cats. Generally, ground up horses, or meat that may be "on the turn" and therefore unsuitable, even for pies. John Benn is in excellent health, and is sleeping in his / basket-

LOVEDAY

What I am seeking to articulate, if you will ever stop talking, Valeria, is that Miss Smalls and I have now donned the mantle of detective!

VALERIA

The mantle of lunatic, you mean.

KATIE

Nope. "Detective."

LOVEDAY

We have complementary skills. Miss Smalls is in possession of a bicycle. She is an excellent flirt, according to her own testimony, and understands the anatomy of the human, male ... throat. As a likely victim, she is highly enthusiastic. I have, of course, my innate brilliance. You, sister, have the money to fund the operation-

VALERIA

Is that what you think of me? A source of money?

LOVEDAY

You are valuable, dear lady. We each are. I propose we band together, three unstoppable lady detectives, to end these crimes before another soul is lost.

VALERIA

Certainly not.

KATIE

Missus Hunter, if you can, it's your duty to save the lives of innocent women.

LOVEDAY sweeps her hand at KATIE. "See?"

VALERIA

This is a foolishness I can ill afford.

LOVEDAY

The mission of the detective is to restore order.

KATIE

Hidin' from evil doesn't make it go away. In fact, it just inspires more evil.

LOVEDAY

You have acted the detective, before, Valeria. (silence) Fine. Miss Smalls, your first assignment is to purchase a book.

LOVEDAY searches her table, finds a news clipping (an ad), which she hands to KATIE. She looks pointedly at VALERIA.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

Sister. Two sovereigns for our lodger, please. It is the virtuous thing to do.

VALERIA

I do not let virtue interfere with my day-to-day decision making.

LOVEDAY

No white knights are available, Valeria. We must rescue ourselves. (silence. Angry) You will not be this unfeeling when Miss Smalls, here, is found spread-out, her throat ripped, soaked in her own blood, lifeless in the street!

KATIE

(to LOVEDAY) We've discussed this.

LOVEDAY

If Miss Smalls, here, potentially becomes ... deceased... you'll regret it.

VALERIA hands coins to LOVEDAY, gives them to KATIE.

VALERIA

You must repay every penny of this folly.

KATIE

I'm to ask for a copy of a book called ... "Psychopathia Sexualis?"

LOVEDAY

By Herr Krafft-Ebing. It may help us discern the Butcher's motives.

KATIE

"Psychopathia Sexualis." They may look at me funny.

KATIE stows the clipping.

LOVEDAY

Then you will grab them by their twiddle-diddles. Now. Ride your bicycle to Holy well Street.

VALERIA

That street is a foul sink of iniquity! Pornography shops / from-

KATIE

If this book can help us understand the killer? Why he's so reckless and brazen? It's worth the trip.

LOVEDAY

Exactly, and "specialist" book shops hold nothing to fear. (to KATIE) Carry your head high. Have a discreet word with the bookseller. Ensure you buy the English translation; I cannot read the original German. And don't worry what people will think. It's a medical book, and Krafft-Ebing is a scientist. Besides, Londoners expect Americans to display a certain amount of ... common depravity.

KATIE

I am keepin' the change.

KATIE exits.

VALERIA

Holywell Street is a scandalous destination for any young woman!

LOVEDAY

It is broad daylight, and that young woman can take care of herself.

VALERIA

I am out two sovereigns. I now have a policeman traipsing about my upstairs parlor, quaffing inordinate amounts of my tea-

LOVEDAY

I agree, it's a bother. But PC Crane gave me copies of the photographs! And I have a meeting shortly, regarding my ... second letter.

VALERIA

(sensing trouble) Tell me about this "second letter."

LOVEDAY

I have offered my private enquiry services to the Battersea Vigilance Committee. This was, obviously, prior to my agreement to form a partnership with Miss Smalls, but what's done is done.

VALERIA

Loveday, Jasper Warham-Wynn is a founding member of that committee!

LOVEDAY

So he is. But so are five other Battersea area businessmen.

VALERIA

You have a meeting-?

LOVEDAY

A boy came 'round earlier with a note. Mister Warham-Wynn will be calling on me to discuss my offer.

VALERIA

Oh, dear. That is distressing.

LOVEDAY

I thought a different Vigilance member would respond! I did not expect... Will you stay?

VALERIA

I will not enjoy being in the same room with him!

LOVEDAY

You needn't do anything, nor even speak. (silence) This is not earnest engagement in detective work. It is sitting in your chair, unresponsive to the world, as you are customarily! Simply be here, with me.

VALERIA picks up her needlework, nods.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

I thank you.

VALERIA

You must attempt, or at least feign courtesy, if you are to be hired.

LOVEDAY

I will carry myself with the grim self-possession natural to my character.

VALERIA

How will you speak to him?

LOVEDAY

As an accomplished actress, who will not reveal her true emotions.

VALERIA

What if your emotions betray you, and you cannot rein them in? Shall we make a signal?

LOVEDAY

Good thinking.

VALERIA

If I note you going off the beam, as it were, I will discreetly pat my cheek, like this.

LOVEDAY

(re the needlework) Perfect; just don't stab yourself. And should I notice my own logic and diplomacy becoming overwhelmed, I will carefully tap your hand, as a sign for you to intervene. (beat) It is not as if we don't deal with men like this every day of our lives.

VALERIA

Warham-Wynn is a singular case.

LOVEDAY

If there is a man in my acquaintance who could be the Battersea Butcher, that man would be Jasper.

VALERIA

My dear sister, you believe all men to be muck-snipes. It is something of a guiding principle for you.

LOVEDAY

As a pragmatic rule, it is uncannily spot-on. Besides, I despise only those men who would control me, misuse me, or treat me as a piece of property!

VALERIA

As do I. But that is the injunction of our society. Not all men are bad souls. For example, there is ... (she thinks) Huh. (pause) There was Father.

LOVEDAY

Father was engineer to a mining company in the south of Africa. I think we can both agree he considered people to be pieces of property.

A knock on the door.

VALERIA

Come!

JASPER enters, advances on LOVEDAY.

JASPER

Miss Fortescue!

LOVEDAY

Mister Warham-Wynn.

JASPER

It has been years since we last laid eyes on each other, yet you are as lovely now as you were then.

LOVEDAY maintains grim self-possession.

LOVEDAY

I have heard that flattery is like perfume: something to be smelled, not swallowed.

JASPER

(Sits.) May I? I was delighted to receive your letter. The fact that you should write to me, after so long a silence-

LOVEDAY

I did not write to you. My letter was addressed to the entire Vigilance Committee.

JASPER

True, but since I have figured prominently in the newspaper accounts of our organisation ... well, surely you supposed the favor you asked was mine to grant.

VALERIA

It is not a "favor."

LOVEDAY

You remember my dear sister, Missus Valeria Hunter.

JASPER

I am sorry, I have no memory of you. (to LOVEDAY) She had not left an impression, no.

LOVEDAY

Valeria is the ... financial patron of the investigation we wish to pursue on behalf of your committee. To determine the identity of the Battersea Butcher, and to deliver him to justice.

JASPER

Of course we are concerned about the Butcher, and the four women he has-

LOVEDAY

Five. Four murdered. One escaped, still confined to hospital.

JASPER

Five women, then. Actresses, and may I say the entire escapade is quite bad for business. Makes the performers nervous and the audiences stay home. Terrible situation, just terrible.

LOVEDAY

The loss of life, or your loss of revenue?

JASPER

Both, surely.

LOVEDAY

The Vigilants seem more vigilant about bolstering their businesses than capturing the Butcher.

JASPER

As a woman, you wouldn't understand.

LOVEDAY

Given the police have failed to capture any of the various murderers terrorising London since Jack the Ripper, I assume you would be eager to enlist such intrepid investigators as / myself-

JASPER

We men of the committee have been in contact with the press, as you know, and the police. That we would need additional help is dubious. That you could provide such help is even more doubtful.

VALERIA

My sister's services are offered in seriousness. She will investigate thoroughly, and let the evidence speak for itself.

JASPER

(annoyed at VALERIA's interruption) I am eager, Loveday, to speak with you privately.

LOVEDAY

Valeria has my ear in any matter.

JASPER

(beat) Did you think that you could attempt to smear my reputation, and then evade me, forever? I hope you will not be averse to a ... pleasant conversation about the past.

LOVEDAY

"A pleasant conversation?" With you!

VALERIA pats her cheek.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

When I dispatched the letter, I hoped you would not be the one to respond. Instead, that your president, Mr. Holpe-Regis, would haul his gout-ridden prat over here and assent to my proposition.

JASPER

He wanted to come. I insisted on being the committee's emissary.

LOVEDAY

Why?

JASPER

Why have you avoided me? All this time.

LOVEDAY

Your rank indecency. (silence) Your bullying. The aggressive way you- (stops) The harshness of my treatment at your hands, and your / deplorable-

JASPER

This reaction is most strange. Your memory must be playing tricks on you.

VALERIA

(patting her cheek) I am interested in hearing the committee's reaction to the letter!

LOVEDAY

My memory of you is not in error! I note every day the power placed in the hands of men who have proven, repeatedly, they will abuse it.

JASPER

How does this far-reaching judgment apply to me?

LOVEDAY

It applies to your habit of ruining young women.

JASPER

My dear Loveday-

LOVEDAY

I am not your "dear" anything! Have you forgotten what you did to me?

VALERIA

(thwacking her cheek) Loveday.

LOVEDAY

(to VALERIA) I am calm!

JASPER

Why does your sister slap her cheek like that? To achieve a rosy look?

LOVEDAY

I asked you a question, sir.

JASPER

(beat) I was very young.

LOVEDAY

As was I. Youth is not an excuse.

JASPER

You are, as you were then: overwrought, and beset by nervous disorders. It appears to run in the family.

VALERIA

Do you find it odd that women are "overwrought," given what we must endure from men like you?

JASPER

Pray, stay out of our conversation!

LOVEDAY

You are so used to having your way with the women who work on your stages that you cannot hear a clear "No" when it is bellowed in your ear! Although, perhaps I am being too charitable. You hear "no," yet continue your vile conduct, because you have the power, and because you can.

JASPER

It is widely understood that actresses are cheap, debauched, vulgar, and, as a rule, quite ready to surrender with little or no urging. In fact, you were dismissed from a governess position, when it was discovered you'd been on the stage.

LOVEDAY

My employers were cupboard-headed prudes, who cheated me of a month's pay, and their opinion of me-! (stops herself) In my experience, it is the theatrical producer who is the degenerate.

JASPER

You aimed to get something out of it, just as I did.

LOVEDAY

Let us focus on facts. You entered my dressing room, without permission, shortly before I was to go onstage-

JASPER

It was my company.

LOVEDAY

It's still your company. Despite the many girls and women you've coerced, or worse. You are unworthy, and did not have any right to touch me.

JASPER

Of course I had that right! I perceive you feel a need to preserve your reputation, but ... you, Loveday, were amenable. You can't deny -

VALERIA

(patting both cheeks) Sister-

LOVEDAY

I do deny I was "amenable!"

JASPER

You exhibited flirtacious and provocative behavior, encouraging me-

LOVEDAY

I hoped I could charm you into leaving!

JASPER

I remember the way you were dressed, in a gossamer ... almost a dressing gown, so as to incite me-

LOVEDAY

I was wearing my costume! I did not dress to please myself. Certainly not you.

JASPER

You repeatedly smiled at me!

LOVEDAY

To obtain time enough to move about the room and try the door. Which you had locked!

JASPER

You admit you smiled. You can see how I might have misconstrued your affections.

LOVEDAY

Do not all of the women in your employ smile at you? Flatter you? We are like chameleons, hiding our fear and revulsion with the camouflage of grins and fawning. Hoping you will not dismiss us, nor force us into a corner, clap your hand over our mouths, and take your pleasure ... as you tried to do with me!

JASPER

This is the mischief of shame.

VALERIA

(pats cheek) Bid him leave, Loveday-

LOVEDAY

You dare to talk of shame, who should be overcome by it. You ripped my costume and did not let me go free ... until the stage manager came rapping at the door to bid me go onstage. For my "mad scene." Something of an irony.

JASPER

(beat) Actually, Loveday, what you experienced-

LOVEDAY

Do not explain to me what happened to me! My performance suffered from the indignity you visited on my person; from your- from your attempt to physically assault me. I was left brutalised and distracted. You know the result.

JASPER

Although it may be true I locked the door, you craved my attentions so desperately-

LOVEDAY whacks VALERIA's hand, hard.

VALERIA

Ow!

LOVEDAY

(to JASPER) Get out!

JASPER

You are quite deranged. I see I have not wasted my time. I am satisfied that any personal testimony you give to the police will be disregarded.

VALERIA

Have the police questioned you?

LOVEDAY

Do they have cause to believe you may be the Butcher? I will speak out / against you!

JASPER

The point is ... Say what you will. You will never be believed. A constable will recognise the ravings of an hysterical woman, just as easily as I can. This is for you.

JASPER hands LOVEDAY a letter.

LOVEDAY

(reading) Dear Miss Fortescue, The Battersea Vigilance Committee appreciates your offer of investigative help ... and regretfully urges you to find another hobby. Yours truly.

The door opens and KATIE enters with a book.
JASPER takes an interest.

JASPER

Ah! A good day to you, miss.

VALERIA

Mr. Warham-Wynn was just on his way out.

KATIE

(wary, looking at his hat) Good day, sir.

LOVEDAY

He is leaving. Immediately.

JASPER sweeps his hat, bows to KATIE.

JASPER

It's a true pleasure. Perhaps I will stay a moment longer. (to KATIE) Your name?

KATIE

(unsure what's going on) It's ... Miss Katherine Smalls.

JASPER

Sweet Katie. And I saw you at- the St. James! You are very talented. Acting, and singing-

KATIE

That's what an actress and singer does, sir.

JASPER

All the way from America, exotic as a rare jewel.

KATIE

"Exotic" is a poorly -worded compliment, sir.

JASPER

Don't be so sensitive. Are you a lodger here, in this house of hysterics?

VALERIA

Do not answer him! There are more than a few weapons available to us in this room, sir.
To defend ourselves if necessary.

LOVEDAY

Numerous weapons at hand. My scissors! The curtain sash.

VALERIA

My embroidery needle. My letter opener!

LOVEDAY

We might bash your brains out with the sturdy oar that hangs above the fireplace-

VALERIA

Shut up, Loveday.

KATIE, having caught on, snaps her fan.
JASPER looks at them, these crazy women.

JASPER

Good day. (to KATIE) Miss.

JASPER exits.

KATIE

Who was that? That man's smile twinkles like the silver nameplate on a casket.

VALERIA

Jasper Warham-Wynn.

LOVEDAY

Rude, uncouth zounderkite! Did I not tell you he could be the Butcher?

VALERIA

You did.

KATIE

The butcher!?

LOVEDAY

I hope the police will interrogate him. He should be among the primary suspects!

VALERIA

Calm down, Loveday.

LOVEDAY

Do not tell me to / calm down!

VALERIA

You should never have spoken / to him-

LOVEDAY

A probable killer! That man is the cause of my leaving the stage forever! His sordid violation- his utter contempt-! (to KATIE) Warham-Wynn is the jagged spit upon which my artistic life was shipwrecked. With all hands lost.

VALERIA

Loveday was portraying Ophelia / at the-

LOVEDAY

No one asked you!

KATIE

But I envy you; I have always wanted to play Ophelia.

LOVEDAY

Do not wish for such a role: a passive mop who kills herself after the men in her life have failed her utterly ... A woman whose corpse serves as a pathetic prize, contested between lover and brother. (beat) When it was time for the mad scene- (starts over) You have to understand, Miss Smalls, before I stepped onstage, Mr. Warham-Wynn ripped my costume-

KATIE

He ... tore your dress?

VALERIA

He attempted to assault / her.

LOVEDAY

He was, and remains, a selfish rogue with no respect for women. And at that time, we played on a stage lit by gas lamp footlights: lamps with no screens, unprotected! Open flames rimming the stage. I was preoccupied and upset; thus failing to hit my marks precisely. (As Ophelia) "Good night, sweet ladies. Good night, good night."

As I turned for my exit, a gas jet shot out its tiny blue-and-white tongue. The flame touched a trailing bit of the fabric of my gown, which dragged behind me, as it never had before. I had strayed too near. The rest of my cast mates were rooted, as if made into marble statues, as I was wrapped in sudden flames. They stood and gaped as my costume blazed.

KATIE

The fire buckets?

LOVEDAY

In the wings. Empty. (beat) I flung myself onto the floor and rolled my body to smother the fire, as someone brought down the curtain, and the rest of the actors scattered, afraid they'd be consumed as I had been. (indicates her gloves) My hands and arms were badly burned; I was disfigured. I spent six weeks in hospital... And left the profession thereafter. Had I been playing a breeches role, it / is nearly certain-

VALERIA

Your and your breeches-

LOVEDAY

I have valid motivation to favor them!

VALERIA

(to KATIE) We have since become active in the Rational Dress League.

KATIE

It's horrible. But, your face wasn't affected. I'm sure you might have continued to work as an actress-

LOVEDAY

My hands and arms are badly scarred. I was unwilling to test my hypotheses: that audiences would either, on the one hand, refuse to buy tickets to see such a flawed specimen ... or, on the other, pack the theatre to gawk at me. Besides, Warham-Wynn took care to damage my reputation with the other theatre managers of the West End. I was branded a troublemaker. (beat) Please, do not pity me.

KATIE

Accept my high regard, instead. I'm sorry he did this to you.

LOVEDAY

If he is the Butcher, we'll trip him up. (beat) You found the book?

KATIE

(Gives LOVEDAY the book.) In the first shop I visited. I whispered the name "Psychopathia Sexualis" in a low voice, leaned over the counter, and cast my eyes downward so the clerk could inspect my ... eyelashes.

VALERIA

You flirted with a pornographer?

KATIE

I saved sixpence.

VALERIA

(thinks) Well done, then.

LOVEDAY

And did you peek inside the book?

KATIE

I do enjoy ridin' my bike while readin' a book, especially one that could save my life.

LOVEDAY

Initiative is to be encouraged.

VALERIA

Krafft-Ebing studied Germans! You will only learn about crazed Germans from that book.

LOVEDAY

Krafft-Ebing is Viennese. I am vexed by your lack of scientific curiosity, Valeria. (to KATIE) And you learned?

KATIE

There's a Table of Contents, and see? A chapter devoted entirely to the crime of "lust murder." Some men need to inflict pain, or even kill, in order to feel pleasure. Or, in some, to relieve a kinda demented pressure on the brain. Such men may appear ... ordinary, even quiet, and friendly. There are pages of examples. Jack the Ripper was not the first of his kind. Nor the worst. Men such as he are ... if not commonplace-

LOVEDAY

Yes. Common enough. If there have been these types of killers before, and will be in the future, what does that lead you to deduce? (Silence) It brings me to understand one thing: If these men are not singular; if there is some method behind the ghastly acts in which they indulge-

KATIE

Yes! Then, if we know how to look at it ... they can be found out.

LOVEDAY

And the Battersea Butcher is not invincible, not at all.

KATIE

We can outwit him, if we can detect his pattern.

VALERIA

Constable Crane said this man is not the Ripper, nor the Torso killer.

LOVEDAY

I wonder. He is the particular type of killer who would punish women. So ... what is the pattern?

LOVEDAY looks through her clipping book.

KATIE

One man, not many. Goin' after actresses; from the St. James and the Victoria Palace. None of 'em had money, so his motive isn't robbery.

LOVEDAY

He swiftly renders them senseless, somehow, to prevent them crying out.

VALERIA

Might he not apply ether to a handkerchief ... and then, place that over their noses?

LOVEDAY and KATIE stare at VALERIA.

VALERIA (CONT'D)

I am not detecting! I am merely wondering aloud.

LOVEDAY

In each case, her throat was cut.

KATIE

The coroner believes the murder weapon is a folding knife, hidden on his person.

LOVEDAY

It is only the quick-witted Miss Iris Johnstone who has, so far, survived his attack.

KATIE

Somehow, he instills trust.

LOVEDAY

What do you mean?

KATIE

Iris left the stage door with that man, and was attacked three streets away. She walked with him. She must have known him.

LOVEDAY

Not necessarily. (to VALERIA) He may have something they want. If it is Jasper, he may lure them with the promise of a plum role in one of his productions.

KATIE

Iris is the only one who can identify him, for sure. She is in Royal London Hospital. They have turned me away every day from visitin' her. And she's refusin' to receive the police.

LOVEDAY

I attempted to call on her as well, last Thursday. You must try again. Or, I will.

KATIE

You don't mix with the lodgers. How do you know Iris?

LOVEDAY

We have a ... casual, bird-based friendship. I have sat with her often at the Ornithological Society. Iris presented a talk, once, on common birds of Europe, and distributed the most beautiful, carefully written notes. We would watch swallows, of a morning, from the roof.

LOVEDAY lays out the photographs.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

Come along, Miss Smalls, we must examine each photograph, and note where there is a sameness. You too, Valeria.

KATIE

(reacts to the photos) These are ... hard to look at.

VALERIA

I don't want to look at photographs. I am not a detective.

LOVEDAY

Summon your courage.

VALERIA

No. They are unbearable, I am sure.

LOVEDAY

We must face them, as these women faced him.

VALERIA

You are quite obsessed.

KATIE

If you saw these women ... you'd know why.

LOVEDAY

These murdered ladies: they are scapegoats. Their deaths are meant to purge the city, all of us, of our moldering sins.

VALERIA

Twaddle. What sins have we committed that deserve such a cruel response?

LOVEDAY

Why, we've transgressed our place: the sphere of domesticity. We've demanded things, like our human rights.

KATIE

He resents actresses ... because we're independent where money's concerned, and we express ourselves in public. So our punishment is death?

VALERIA

Do not heed my sister. She brims with a mad philosophy.

LOVEDAY

What did Constable Crane tell us?

VALERIA

(beat) "Don't leave the house."

LOVEDAY

Exactly. Our society trembles with the fear of change. Anxiety as foreigners flood the city. The terror of Fenian bombs. Organised workers, who strike, and issue demands of their employers. Most petrifying of all: the New Woman, who would maintain her independence apart from men.

VALERIA

You are making up theories about a consciousness where none exists! This killer has nothing "in mind," save savagery and an urge to kill!

KATIE

He is a lone man. A "lust killer" who murders for pleasure.

VALERIA

And "society" cannot impart a death decree.

LOVEDAY

(to VALERIA) You know well the choking strictures of society, as you know the urge to kill.

VALERIA

You overstep yourself!

VALERIA crosses to her purse, takes out laudanum stowed in her purse. LOVEDAY takes it away from her, reads the label.

LOVEDAY

This is not from the apothecary. Where did you get this, sister?

VALERIA

I ... I had it stowed in the linen cupboard. I'll only take a tiny drop. To soothe my unease! If you want me to continue throwing money at your folly ... let me have my medicine.

LOVEDAY looks her in the eye, gives it back.
VALERIA puts a few drops on her tongue.

VALERIA (CONT'D)

I do not like to think of death! Death alarms me. (re the vial) See? That is the last of it.

KATIE

Missus Hunter, we are, all of us, gonna die. The point is: what are you doin' with the hours you live? (beat) We could surely use your help.

VALERIA considers. Turns away.
BLACKOUT. END SCENE.

ACT I, SCENE III.

Very early the next morning. OFFICER
CRANE and KATIE. She holds the newspaper.

KATIE

Findin' a man in the parlor just before dawn? You scared me to within an inch of my life!
(collects herself) What I mean to say is: You're here awfully early in the mornin', PC
Crane.

CRANE

I have interrogations to conduct. Is Missus Hunter about?

KATIE

It's practically daybreak. She may be fixin' breakfast. That, or she's still in bed.

CRANE

I could do with a spot of tea, Miss.

KATIE

Well, don't expect me to fetch it. I'm not a parlor maid, and I don't make tea for guests.
(beat) You've been mentioned in the newspapers, Constable. By name.

CRANE

(concerned) I have? Let me look.

As CRANE takes the paper:

KATIE

"POLICE INCOMPETENT!" Appears you boys have gotten a bad review. Look:
they've even quoted you, third column over.

CRANE reads from the front page.

CRANE

Here I am. "PC Henry Crane informed the Gazette that the Metropolitan Police are
working together with the Vigilance Committee to ferret out possible suspects." (to
KATIE) There's nothing wrong or incompetent-

KATIE

Keep goin'.

CRANE

(reads) "PC Crane admitted, "We currently have four dead bodies, and no clue as to the killer." (horrified) I did not summarise in that fashion. It leaves the wrong impression!

KATIE

You didn't say it?

CRANE

Yes! But I- I would add, erm... The police have ... many ... different ... theories!

KATIE

Theories aren't much use against a madman. I know what it feels like to get my work criticized in the papers. Just never had it happen on Page One.

CRANE

I am dispatching my duties in a responsible fashion.

KATIE

Hm. The Butcher is killin' us actresses. Why would he be doing that: choosin' women in an artistic profession?

CRANE

Begging your indulgence ... He must believe actresses to be deceivers. Showing themselves off, in public. Play acting. Charlatans, for pay.

KATIE

An actress must be truthful, if she's to make a livin' at it. Do you have a guess at who it is, at least? (silence) Constable?

CRANE

I will not share confidential police information with a member of the public.

KATIE

Speakin' as a potential victim, I wish you would.

CRANE

You would simply gossip it away. We never share our theories. Except, of course, with the Vigilants.

KATIE

That committee of ordinary gentlemen wanderin' around, carryin' swords? They have said the Battersea area is "overrun with foreigners." I'm a foreigner. How is that mob goin' to make someone like me feel safe?

CRANE

You work at the St. James. I saw you perform. Your name and likeness appear on posters all over Battersea. Perhaps you should not feel "safe."

KATIE

What's that supposed to mean?

CRANE

It means that you should be grateful for the Vigilants. They are deputised.

KATIE

But we're the ones in danger. The police should arm us women, instead.

CRANE

That would make Scotland Yard a laughingstock. We cannot give weapons to women! For what can only be described as "obvious reasons."

KATIE

What's more important: the reputation of the police, or the lives of women?

CRANE

In what context? (beat) See here. The police are not as incompetent as we look.

KATIE

You couldn't be.

CRANE

I was incorrectly quoted!

KATIE

I don't want to believe these crimes are bein' done by an outwardly normal-lookin', everyday gentleman. But everyday gentlemen are capable of terrible violence. I know: I lived in New York City for almost three years.

CRANE

We will catch the Butcher, Miss.

KATIE

Constable, have you considered-? I know it's a brazen plan, but ... There was an idea to stop Jack the Ripper. ... In an editorial, the New York City Chief of Police urged that women volunteers take to the streets of Whitechapel. To tempt the Ripper, to bring him forward, and to trap him.

CRANE

You mean: use ladies as bait? It was a rash idea then, and remains so, Miss. You don't know how close we are to a successful capture. You'll be surprised at how swiftly we will identify a suspect.

KATIE

Sounds like you're gettin' set to railroad somebody.

CRANE

"Railroad?"

KATIE

It's an American expression, meaning "to convict, quickly and unjustly." And with my life at stake? PC Crane, that dog won't hunt.

From outside: A man yells MURDER!
MURDER! KATIE runs to the window.
CRANE exits through the courtyard door.
Commotion outside and another cry:
MURDER! KATIE looks after CRANE. End
of ACT ONE.

ACT II, SCENE I.

1:30 pm. KATIE discards a newspaper in disgust. TODDY enters from the courtyard. He is wearing a bloody apron, and holds a sack which may show some blood. KATIE rises quickly, holds her fan in strike position.

KATIE

Keep your distance!

TODDY

Afternoon, Miss. Don't nab the rust; It's just me, Toddy, Missus 'unter's cat's meat man. Sorry / I-

KATIE

What do you want?

TODDY

I mean no 'arm, Miss! I've got some ripe cat's meat for Missus Hunter, I do. Your rear gate's unlocked.

LOVEDAY enters from the hallway.

LOVEDAY

Toddy! Miss Smalls, what is going on here?

KATIE

He said he's the cat's meat man.

TODDY

That's right. (to LOVEDAY) You know it. I'm makin' me deliveries, Miss Fortescue, and this little bobtail treats me like I'm a bludger! (belligerent, to KATIE) 'alf-caste.

KATIE

You can keep your insults to yourself. (low, to LOVEDAY) The blood on his apron-

TODDY

You a laundress, Miss? 'ave at it!

LOVEDAY

Miss Smalls, you may stand down. Or, rather, stand by. This is Toddy; I do know him. The blood is disconcerting, I admit.

KATIE

He came in through this door; He says the rear gate's unlocked!

LOVEDAY

I have purchased a new padlock, as the old one was cut off by a person unknown. I'll secure it, and we'll be safe. It's all right. (to TODDY) In the sack, is it cat's meat?

TODDY

Yes, Miss.

LOVEDAY

I'll take it.

TODDY

Oh, no, that won't do at all! The Missus won't like it-

LOVEDAY

Why is that?

TODDY

Missus Hunter ... She'll throw a wobbly! She's been waitin' for hours 'cuz of the commotion round here, earlier this mornin'. The mob 'ampered me gettin' me cart down the street-

LOVEDAY

Mob? You mean the police checked you.

TODDY

Not just coppers, was it? There was a right push, with peelers, photographer, coroner's men, all huddled 'round outside your rear gate. Not to mention six or eight barrows-

LOVEDAY

Peddlers, on our street?

TODDY

Costermongers and 'awkers clear up to the curb. Enough to block me cart!

LOVEDAY looks to KATIE to confirm.

KATIE

There were a lot of carts-

LOVEDAY

But police had encircled the victim to prevent the public glimpsing her body. (to TODDY) Why would people have gathered, with no opportunity to peep at the dead?

KATIE

Because your sister figured out there was a clear overlook of the murder victim from my bedroom! Right after you left, she started sellin' tickets to the public. Chargin' sixpence, all morning, to go up to my room for a two-minute gawk!

LOVEDAY

To goggle at the corpse is a second defilement. And you did not stop her?

KATIE

I am livin' on her charity.

LOVEDAY

(to TODDY) Fine. So you are late. I'll take the meat-

TODDY

'e batty-fanged 'er, the Butcher did. Wish I'd 'ad a look at 'er. The dead 'ore, I mean.

LOVEDAY

Please refrain from calling that poor woman, or any woman, a "whore."

TODDY

These actresses. Sally, and Della, the lot of 'em. Bunch a' stuck-up teases. Nothin' but rubbish, litterin' the streets.

LOVEDAY

I will give the meat to my sister! Then you may leave, so she will not be angry with you to your face. Give me the sack. (He doesn't.)

TODDY

Er. Missus 'unter wants it delivered pers'nally. Placed in 'er own 'and, she informed me.

LOVEDAY

I am trustworthy.

TODDY

(thinking fast) I don't doubt it, Miss. But Missus 'unter She accused me of passin' off some cag-mag for her puss. Wants to inspect the meat 'erself. Adamant about it, she was.

LOVEDAY

How did she put it, that you cheated her: her words.

TODDY

(beat) Said I was diddlin' her, Miss.

LOVEDAY

I don't think so. You will wait here while I find Missus Hunter. (to KATIE) Where is Valeria?

KATIE

Don't you leave me in this room with him!

VALERIA enters from the kitchen.

TODDY

'ere's the Missus! I've got the meat for your puss, John Benn, may 'e eat it in good 'ealth. (re LOVEDAY) This one's fulla questions-

VALERIA

I'm sure that's true, Toddy, and you may disregard all of them. (Taking the sack.) Thank you.

VALERIA begins to return to the kitchen.

TODDY

(to VALERIA) I need me off, Missus.

VALERIA takes coins from her pocket and pays him. TODDY crosses to the door, while VALERIA exits to the kitchen with the sack.

KATIE

(sarcastic) Good day.

TODDY

(to KATIE) You'd betta watch y'rself. Careful you don't git nobbled like that tweak did in the street!

TODDY exits.

KATIE

He knows two of our lodgers' names! Sally and Della.

LOVEDAY

I noted it, Miss Smalls. Valeria dispatches them to his shop, sometimes, to buy for her. I do not know what to think.

KATIE

I say he's a suspect.

LOVEDAY

You are right about that. Can you tell me if the victim has been identified?

KATIE

I searched every mornin' edition. She hasn't been named, God rest her soul. And I checked on the lodgers. Cora, Sally, and Mary haven't been accounted for.

VALERIA re-enters.

LOVEDAY

(sardonic, to VALERIA) Is John Benn fed, then? (silence) I will speak with you about this.

VALERIA

Do not play detective with me.

LOVEDAY

I have learned of your ghoulish enterprise, earning money with the view from Miss Smalls' window! You, who claim to be too delicate to look at photographs? You were having me on!

VALERIA

I had to look. To see if it was someone from our house. Unfortunately, she couldn't be recognized. The Butcher had ... disfigured her.

KATIE

It's mentioned in Krafft-Ebbing's book. These men, these lust-killers... Their crimes get more and more savage.

LOVEDAY

You admitted newspapermen? (silence) You did, didn't you, and you know how I feel-

VALERIA

I cannot let some people look at the body, and refuse other people the very same view!

KATIE

It's not worth fightin' over. The newspapers have a job to do-

LOVEDAY

The newspapers are insufferable: making every headline, every bit of copy, about the murderer! In the most graphic and unsuitable terms: "Jack the Ripper Returns!" Between you and the newspapers, it is as if you wish to celebrate him! A murdered woman's body is not a spectacle for morbid public enjoyment.

VALERIA

Says the woman who maintains a scrapbook!

LOVEDAY

To aid my enquiry. Jack the Ripper should not be a celebrity. He was created to sell newspapers. He doesn't exist.

KATIE

He does; or who killed those women?

LOVEDAY

That's the point. We do not know. Whoever did it has been fictionalised into- into a gruesome hero, who eludes police and vigilants alike. Why this perverse fascination with a man who derives his murderous gratification at the expense of young women? Regardless, you chose to inflame it. For a petty sum!

VALERIA

Sister, I admit I have been stubborn in my reluctance to join you and Miss Smalls in your detective effort. I abhor the police. But, with a murder, now, a few feet outside our gate, I see that I must act. I am anxious to find the murderer, as well.

LOVEDAY

I don't understand.

VALERIA

I made the view available ... for the Butcher.

LOVEDAY

This was not just some scheme to earn money?

VALERIA

Of course not. I thought to myself, might not the Butcher wish to view the panic engendered by his crime? Surely he would pay sixpence to see his handiwork on display upon the street below.

LOVEDAY

He might. Yes. You sought to trick him into showing himself. That is very clever.

KATIE

You invited the Butcher into my bedroom?

VALERIA

But I did not see anyone whom I would consider to be a feasible suspect.

KATIE

(to LOVEDAY) If she's gonna work with us, she's gonna need guidance. Shall I demonstrate my fan fightin'?

LOVEDAY

We will save that. A special treat for Sunday after supper. Now, we must review any new information we have regarding the latest murder. (To KATIE) Miss Smalls.

KATIE

Well, as you know, I was in this room, this mornin,' when the body was found.

LOVEDAY

With PC Crane.

KATIE

Yes, and later, it struck me ... Isn't that a fine coincidence? That the constable is right here, when the poor woman's body is found beside our rear gate? He said he was here to conduct interviews. At seven in the mornin'? Talkin' to actresses? I'm not so sure.

LOVEDAY

You suspect the peeler.

VALERIA

The Butcher cannot be PC Crane.

LOVEDAY

He has the means, Valeria.

KATIE

He owns a tall hat: his bobby's helmet.

VALERIA

It cannot be the constable. It is a given that there is only one Butcher. And PC Crane was here, with me, at the very date and time Amy Clarke was killed.

KATIE

You're his alibi? You hold the police in contempt.

VALERIA

Which doesn't stop them from bothering me. He insisted I answer questions about a burglary that had been carried out, around the corner.

LOVEDAY

Your recollection, dear older sister, doused as it is in laudanum: Can it be trusted?

VALERIA

Well, that is unkind. My memory is aided by the fact that the bells of St. Mary's rang during his visit. I practically had to shout over their clanging. (to KATIE) You may have noticed they ring out every Monday night.

LOVEDAY

And on no other weeknights. It was written up in the Gazette: the bells chimed precisely at the estimated time of Miss Clarke's murder. They found her, still warm.

KATIE

So, the constable's ruled out. Too bad. I think I could take him.

VALERIA

But I have something else; something solid. This morning, while I was selling tickets ... I believe I have uncovered something you, dear Loveday, have overlooked.

VALERIA takes a small chalkboard from
LOVEDAY's command post. Begins chalking.

LOVEDAY

A clue that I overlooked? Out of the question.

VALERIA

It is misguided to insist something is "out of the question," when you have neglected to ask the question in the first place.

LOVEDAY

Valeria, what are you doing?

VALERIA

Chalking up my deduction, that you may be enlightened.

KATIE

May we see? (silence) You are part of a three-person crew, Missus Hunter, and must share.

VALERIA

It is all of the Butcher's victims. You will see what I mean.

She finishes. VALERIA displays the list.

KATIE

(looking) Their first names. Nothin' more?

LOVEDAY

And from this list, you deduced?

VALERIA

(to LOVEDAY) It was you who insisted we "look for the pattern."

LOVEDAY

As would any detective who was generous enough to bestow her insights on others. Obviously, what you have chalked here, is ...

KATIE and VALERIA await her pronouncement.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

Is ... a list of the victim's names. (beat) But- (realizes) it's more than that.

KATIE

It's an acrostic!

VALERIA

As in some Greek poetry, where the first letters of the lines may form a message.

LOVEDAY

If we take each of the victim's given names... Iris, Amy, Maude. I-A-M. "I am."

KATIE

Julia, Amanda... J-A. "Jah?"

LOVEDAY

"I am ... Jasper!" The pattern of the first letter of their Christian names implicates, without question, that unscrupulous rouser, Jasper Warham-Wynn!

VALERIA

Lack of scruples aside, why would the man cast suspicion directly upon himself?

KATIE

Missus Hunter's right. He wouldn't point a finger in his own direction.

LOVEDAY

You underestimate both the extent of his vanity, and the depth of his love for cruel gamesmanship.

KATIE

But- If the Butcher's doin' this ... spellin' out, why haven't the police noticed?

VALERIA

The police do not read Greek poetry. Nor sit in a chair for hours, working a needle. They are not as insightful about pattern as I am.

KATIE

(to LOVEDAY) If this pattern is what you've guessed, the victim lay in' out there was our Sally. She's got the only "S" name among the lodgers.

VALERIA

Not Sally! She was always such a help to me, running errands to the bank, and to Toddy's shop-

KATIE

Toddy. (to LOVEDAY) You heard that Cat's Meat Man say "Sally". That's a clue. His apron was covered in blood, and he called the poor victim a "whore." He said all actresses are "rubbish."

LOVEDAY

The press reported that three of the victims were known to keep cats-

VALERIA

That is but half the victims, and this is a foolish line of enquiry!

LOVEDAY

You would reject Toddy as a suspect for your own selfish motives? (beat) I have not known him to make "home deliveries" before, Valeria.

A moment.

VALERIA

Oh, do not bedevil me! I am not feeling well, my dears.

LOVEDAY

You are such a dissembler!

KATIE attempts to alleviate the awkwardness.

KATIE

The mornin' ward nurses at Royal London Hospital go home soon. The next nurse to take charge is one my friend Kizzie says will happily take a bribe. I should be able to get in to see Iris. (beat) You two need to hug and make up! (silence. To VALERIA) I, for one, am glad you have cast in with us, Missus Hunter. You won't be sorry. I always say: at the end of your life, you'll only regret the things you didn't do, never the things you've done.

VALERIA

Nonsense.

KATIE

You mean you've done somethin' you regret? Like ...

KATIE gestures privately to LOVEDAY:
imitates VALERIA taking her elixir.

VALERIA

My dear Miss Smalls, the reason I take a physic may be laid at the feet of my husband. I will always regret-

LOVEDAY

Marrying that blasted Nigel? I'll be dashed; I should think so.

KATIE

Marry or don't marry: you're gonna live to regret it either way.

LOVEDAY

Yes, but Valeria's husband did not have her best interests at heart.

KATIE

Your husband, Nigel ... Is he why you drink laudanum?

LOVEDAY

Oh, this should be interesting.

VALERIA

You may safely assume he is my motivator, without fear of being in error. I developed a ... nervous disorder during my marriage. And acquired an awareness of the precariousness of life. It haunts me still.

LOVEDAY

You were ill-suited.

VALERIA

(to KATIE) You see, I was inexperienced. While Nigel / was a-

LOVEDAY

Was a despicable, craven, heartless scoundrel.

KATIE

Yet, Missus Hunter, you did marry him.

VALERIA

Of course I did; a marriage was expected!

KATIE

Your sister isn't married-

LOVEDAY

(to KATIE) Neither are you.

VALERIA

As an actress ... for her, the expectation was lifted. It was never lifted for me. (thinks) And I was beguiled by Nigel's charm, his legs. He had no money, and that made me very attractive to him. Our father's fortune, slight as it was, drew him to me. Outwardly, we seemed an ideal pair. Didn't we, Loveday?

LOVEDAY

Nigel was a cheap smolderer. Quite beneath you.

VALERIA

That's kind of you to say. And rather late. (to KATIE) Nevertheless, we did marry, in a modest ceremony, with Loveday as my maid of honor. She stole the spotlight, at my own wedding ... sweeping up the aisle, flashing brilliant pink underskirts.

LOVEDAY

Bitter, still?

VALERIA

Nigel's and my first months passed, not in what you would call "marital bliss," but rather, in bland, lackluster, routine good will.

KATIE

Was he an adequate husband. On ... intimate occasions?

VALERIA

Oh, he gave me pleasure. (thinks) Exactly once. Within that first year, Nigel took to going out almost every day, leaving me at home to embroider, or read. I found doing needlework calmed my natural anxiety at being left alone. It also dampened my curiosity about my husband's disappearances. I did, finally, get up the courage to enquire of him, "Where do you go, my dear?" He declared, "Valeria, it is unappealing for a woman to snoop on her spouse." Of course, at hearing these cruel words ... I began to snoop in earnest.

LOVEDAY

This is where my sister comes by her affinity for detective work.

VALERIA

I discovered that Nigel hired prostitutes ... from where they congregated at the Royal Aquarium in Westminster. But more disconcerting than that, of an afternoon, he would visit London's asylums for women. I followed him, at a seemly distance. I would peer through the glass and see him making enquiries of this or that mad-doctor within. My dear friend Vitruvia was shut away six years ago for "becoming lunatic" with supposed "mental exhaustion." She has not been seen since. Now, I confess to carrying a certain amount of ordinary disquietude, of day-to-day nervousness. But insane? I am all too rational, I assure you.

One Sunday I asked Nigel to take me for a boat ride on the Thames. I was determined to enquire about his thinking regarding the asylum for women, and planned to reason with him about my future. I felt that the open air and warmth from the sun, should it show its shining face, would keep the conversation untroubled.

Nigel was an inexperienced oarsman, but the waters were calm. There was no sign of trouble. Our boat shot over the water. We were ... engaged in conversation, when we seemed to strike a submerged hazard, and I toppled out of our small craft. I hope you will understand me when I say I did not experience the fall. I was, one instant, in the boat, and the next, under it.

I swam as best I could, my skirts pulling me down, and grabbed at the side of the boat. I saw Nigel, peering over the hull at me. It seemed clear to my eye he was weighing whether he should grab my arm, extend the oar for me to grasp, or ... let me drown. This expression of his fortified me. I felt no anxiety. No nervousness, for the first time in months. Merely: resolve. I clutched for the oar with strong grip. He let it go, but the boat rocked violently with his motion, and with a cry, he tumbled overboard! (beat) Nigel drowned with mediocre efficiency in six feet of water. At least, that is what the police concluded. They did not find his body. It was claimed by the Thames and funneled out to sea. I wonder he did not grab the reeds by the side of the riverbank, but perhaps he did not drift that far. Or perhaps ... something ... impeded him. Do you see it, behind you? I kept the oar. To remember him by.

A moment.

KATIE

Well, I- I don't doubt you might regret such a harrowing ... (to LOVEDAY) accident.

VALERIA

The coroner deemed it "death by misadventure." Not a murder, nor a suicide, nor an incident absent human cause. Rather, the deceased took an action deemed risky. Or profoundly stupid.

KATIE

So, his dyin' was ... his own fault.

LOVEDAY and VALERIA shrug.

VALERIA

The newspapers, my dear. Painted me the villain! The fact that Nigel went looking for an institution in which to confine me led to all kinds of speculation: that I was mad. That I had ... murdered him. I stated what had happened, but who believes a woman?

LOVEDAY

Enough people believed you, Valeria. (to KATIE) No authorities sought to lock her up.

VALERIA

There was talk. An editorial in the Echo. But with no body to be found, the Metropolitan Police had no case. (beat) Some still insist an asylum is where I belong.

LOVEDAY

Women are considered mad, who but attempt self-governance.

KATIE

I must go, to visit Iris. That second shift is comin' on duty. That means, Missus Hunter, I need a shilling to bribe the ward nurse. (expectantly) I said, I need a shilling to bribe the ward / nurse.

VALERIA

What happened to the sixpence you saved from the pornographer's shop?

KATIE

I gave it to Miss Fortescue.

LOVEDAY

I was forced to pay for horse trams this morning. I conducted four personal interviews with eyewitnesses quoted in the press. (beat) All of whom gave completely contradictory testimony.

VALERIA gives KATIE a shilling.

KATIE

Thank you. I want to be out of the house when PC Crane comes lookin' for me. He keeps sayin' he's gotta interview all the lodgers-

LOVEDAY

But, you must let him talk with you!

KATIE

I talked with him once already. I don't see why I would again. He's about as shrewd as a hot slice of mutton.

LOVEDAY

During his interrogation of you, he may provide us with clues, and guideposts for our enquiry.

VALERIA

Don't press her, Loveday. The constable's a common fozler. For my part, to have my home bristling with police gives me the cobble-wobbles!

LOVEDAY

It bristles with but a single constable, Valeria. Miss Smalls. Take this with you. (Hands KATIE a small notebook and pencil.) If Iris cannot speak, perhaps she can write.

KATIE

You'll get the newspapers? (LOVEDAY nods) I'll bring us back a full report from Iris.

KATIE exits. LOVEDAY turns on VALERIA.

LOVEDAY

Why was Toddy here this afternoon, frightening Miss Smalls?

VALERIA

I tell you, Loveday, if you have it in mind ... Toddy is not the Butcher.

LOVEDAY

He cuts, for a living. Why was he delivering to you today?

VALERIA

I asked him 'round.

LOVEDAY

Because you suspected he was cheating you?

VALERIA

Because my puss ate everything I gave him, and I was certain I would not feel well enough today, to go out.

LOVEDAY

And why did you anticipate that? (silence) Where were you this morning, dear sister, at half-past-one o'clock? You were not in your bed.

VALERIA

What do you mean?

LOVEDAY

I could not sleep. The coroner's photographs swam in my mind, and so I knocked on your door. There was no answer.

VALERIA

I could not sleep, either.

LOVEDAY

So you ... wandered about?

VALERIA

I put out the cat. He was sleeping across my face, and attempting to steal my breath.

LOVEDAY

On the contrary, I opened your bedroom door and noted John Benn sleeping in his basket, as usual. Where were you?

VALERIA

I came right back. I saw you at my door.

LOVEDAY

As much as I resent the need to say it: the streets are not safe!

VALERIA

You do not probe my whereabouts for the sake of my- my safety-

LOVEDAY

Valeria, I have almost lost you, twice! First to the asylum doctor, and then to the tug of the Thames. You must know, if you ever were to ... If I were to lose you ... (She doesn't want to imagine this.) You must take more care.

VALERIA

We are fortunate. We have survived, so far, together.

LOVEDAY

Then, again I must ask you ... did you pop 'round to see Toddy in the wee hours?
(silence) Did you? That man's attitude toward actresses is barbaric-

VALERIA

He is a man. Who lives in London. They all think the very worst of your profession.

LOVEDAY

Yet, on several occasions, you sent lodgers to his shop to buy meat. Did you not dispatch Iris Johnstone on just such a mission, last month? It is like parading a fat house mouse past your pussycat! Toddy may have become obsessed with these women whilst they carried out your errands, hm?

VALERIA

He is admittedly of a lower class, sister. Is that why you suspect him?

LOVEDAY

(taken aback) I did not consider his class. I do not look down on anyone whose status may be compared unfavorably with mine. But that man is repellent.

VALERIA

It is your own broad brush paints him a murderer, Loveday.

LOVEDAY

Does he provide you with laudanum, Valeria, along with cat's meat? That's right. I have seen him pressing vials into the hands of women on Barlingsdon Road, in exchange for money. Be frank with me! That is why you would protect him.

VALERIA is silent.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

You realise this is a reason the victims might trust him to approach, at night. If he were supplying them with tincture of opium? It casts grave suspicion upon him. (beat) Your silence is informative, sister.

VALERIA

You live in my house.

LOVEDAY begins to exit.

VALERIA (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

LOVEDAY

I must padlock our iron gate. Then, I have enquiries to make ... at the police station.

VALERIA

You will leave me here, alone? What shall I say to Constable Crane?

LOVEDAY

He will be interviewing lodgers. But if he asks, do not mention to him where I have gone. Say I am ... out.

VALERIA

I do not like to deal with the police; they exasperate me!

LOVEDAY

Valeria, are you united with us to stop this killer? Or are you a witless, selfish, laudanum-swilling coward?

VALERIA

That is not charitable, sister!

LOVEDAY

Find out who has been murdered ... if she had any known enemies, or entanglements, or vices ... such as an opium habit. Discover the method of death as best you can. As many details as PC Crane will offer. If he will not offer, pull it out of him!

VALERIA

I will do my best.

LOVEDAY exits. VALERIA gets out a new vial of laudanum from her pocket. LOVEDAY reenters.

LOVEDAY

As I suspected.

LOVEDAY takes the vial from VALERIA, and crosses to the door.

VALERIA

You can't have that. It's mine!

LOVEDAY

(examines it) I have warned you, sister. (silence) You must be careful. The killer has visited our doorstep. Pray, keep your wits about you!

LOVEDAY exits. BLACKOUT. END SCENE.

ACT II, SCENE II.

That evening, 7:30 pm. VALERIA sits with her cat.

VALERIA

Will you not tell me what happened at the police station?

LOVEDAY

She should have been back an hour ago. Do you suppose she may have gone directly to the theatre from hospital?

VALERIA

Why would she do that? She does not have a performance tonight.

LOVEDAY

Perhaps she has stopped somewhere to dine.

VALERIA

She has no money for rent. How is she going to "stop somewhere to dine?"

LOVEDAY

I don't know, Valeria!

VALERIA

"Cora! Cora with a 'C.'" Imagine it! Jack the Ripper has returned. He is on the loose in Battersea and has murdered one of my lodgers.

LOVEDAY

Jack the Ripper is a fictional character.

VALERIA

I am in no mood for you to be quarrelsome. "I. Am. J-A-C." "C" for our poor Cora. What will we tell Miss Smalls? If we are to give credence to the pattern, she is the next victim! (to the cat) I'm in a state of the jim-jams today, aren't I, John Benn?

LOVEDAY

(re the chalkboard) No. He pretends that he is Jack, that is all ... because Jack still holds London in thrall, and because this killer craves publicity. It is performance, for the newspapers. Yet these so-called journalists are too stupid to see the pattern.

VALERIA

Someone will have to tell Miss Smalls that it was Cora who was murdered.

LOVEDAY

And that, in all likelihood, the next victim's name begins with a "K."

VALERIA

I won't do it. Unless you return my laudanum. My head is thumping, like a drum.

LOVEDAY

Valeria-

VALERIA

A tiny swallow won't hurt me. (silence) My nerves are quite on edge. PC Crane can deliver the bad news to Miss Smalls.

LOVEDAY

He is no good at it, is he? He's made every other lodger cry.

VALERIA

Your unkindness to me has nearly had the same effect. If I could just have a tiny drop, I'd be ever so grateful-

LOVEDAY

For pity's sake, sister.

VALERIA

What shall I do? My brain is overly talkative!

LOVEDAY

Let your cerebrum rattle on. But I beseech you, do not to repeat its ravings to me.

VALERIA

No screams. No screams at all, sister. Cora never screamed. None of them screamed. What do you make of that?

LOVEDAY picks up her scrapbook.

LOVEDAY

Each photograph: shows bruising on the victim's neck. He chokes his victim to cause her to swoon. This prevents her crying out. I believe it is a technique he developed after Iris' fortunate escape. And he ensures she is lying face down on the ground when he slits her throat, so he does not become sodden with her blood. He is quite... crafty.

JASPER WARHAM-WYNN enters. The women are startled.

VALERIA

What are you doing here? How did you get in?

JASPER

A kindly lodger bid me enter. I am, as you know, well-recognised in the London theatrical community.

LOVEDAY

You mean you are notorious. Get out at once.

JASPER

Good evening, Loveday. Missus Hunter.

LOVEDAY

"Miss Fortescue," if you please-

JASPER

I understand from the police you have paid a visit to the Battersea Police Station! I warned you-

VALERIA

Go away. It is none of your concern.

JASPER

Oh, but it is. (to LOVEDAY) I cautioned you, if you sought to wreck my reputation, or cast aspersions on my character, you would pay. Why did you visit the station, and what did you tell them?

LOVEDAY

Suspicion should fall on you, sir ... but what I discovered, in point of fact, is that the police are being misled by you Vigilants. That you have sought to instill in the police the notion that the Butcher is likely an immigrant.

JASPER

The police have come to that quite logical conclusion on their own. The character of these men is low. They are savages. Exactly the kind of person who would commit such crimes.

LOVEDAY

Based on the misguided belief that no "gentleman" could be the culprit: a ridiculous assumption. It is a theory that springs from a desire to protect yourself, and your friends, who wish to disrupt the dock workers union.

JASPER

You learned this from the police? (beat) Of course not. You may be relieved to know that we have identified a suspect, based upon Mr. Holpe-Regis' observation. A trustworthy witness.

LOVEDAY

Read the newspapers! Eyewitnesses have sworn the Butcher is tall, short, blonde, thin, fat ... for pity's sake, everything but a red-billed oxpecker! (beat) It's a type of bird.

JASPER

This breakthrough is a result of real detective work, with which you are unfamiliar. We conducted interrogations of those who assemble in the Socialist Hall.

LOVEDAY

Scotland Yard has not yet grasped that you Vigilants are empty-headed knackers, indifferent to loss of life, in a tizzy about the killer's effects on your business receipts.

VALERIA

We have our own suspicions as to the killer. And he is certainly not an immigrant.

JASPER

I don't know what you mean to imply by that remark.

LOVEDAY

This attention on the men of the docks is simply a way for you Vigilants to ensure your underpaid, abused laborers are well and badgered: to divide the men and fend off another strike. That last I did tell the police, so. All eyes on you.

JASPER

You gave them my name? (silence) Leave off visiting the police, Loveday! I've apprised the sergeant that the death of this lodger has induced a kind of insanity in you, and that, as a result, you are quite unable to distinguish the real from the imaginary. (regards her) Look at you. Friendless. Isolated. You have managed to put off all of those who were in a position to help you. The sergeant did not heed you, did he?

LOVEDAY

Of course, the sergeant heeded me. Truth is compelling. Although you would not know that from your personal experience. Best anticipate a call from the police, this evening. (beat) I have told you to get out.

JASPER

Good night.

JASPER exits.

LOVEDAY

Beef-witted tosser!

VALERIA

He is not wrong, sister. You have disaffected all of our protectors. We have been put in peril by your arrogance.

LOVEDAY

That man is not my protector! And I hold but normal self-regard.

VALERIA

Mark my words: your pridefulness will lead to some poor girl's doom. Did you really tell the police sergeant that Mr. Warham-Wynn is the Butcher? (silence) You must tell me what happened at the police station.

LOVEDAY

I ... I was brushed aside with unconcealed condescension.

VALERIA

You mean to say you left me alone, all that time ... for naught?

LOVEDAY

Not at all. I had the presence of mind to engage with an unfortunate just as she was released from one of the holding cells. The woman has a good ear, and a keen eye for her surroundings. She said she had observed the police bring in a suspect called ... Kozlovski. A Polish immigrant.

VALERIA

On what evidence?

LOVEDAY

You heard Warham-Wynn: on the testimony of these Vigilants! My informant said the interrogation was so vigorous, she heard his cries and moans through the brick walls. A surgeon was needed to attend to the suspect's broken arm! Yet, how can the man possibly confess? He does not speak our language.

VALERIA

Then they have found the Butcher, and he is in custody?

LOVEDAY

No, Valeria, that is not what it means.

KATIE enters, dressed as before.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

Miss Smalls!

VALERIA

There you are.

KATIE

I passed by Warham-Wynn on the steps. I've locked the door against his face.

VALERIA

You have been gone for hours! We feared for your safety-

KATIE

Ladies, I have news from the hospital. I've visited Miss Johnstone.

VALERIA, with her cat, crosses to the door.

VALERIA

(exiting) I will return shortly.

KATIE

Did I say somethin'?

LOVEDAY

You are not to blame. Valeria is a coward, and does not want to be the one to tell you: it is Cora Abbott who was murdered outside the rear gate this morning.

KATIE

Oh, no! Poor Cora. She dined with me on some evenings. I cannot / imagine-

LOVEDAY

Miss Smalls. I feel bound to remind you: As the first letters of the victim's names appear to form a kind of sentence-

KATIE

Yes. (thinks) If the latest victim is Cora; Cora, with a "C" ... Julia, Amanda, Cora ... That makes it "J. A. C."

LOVEDAY

We believe his mad point may be to spell out, "I am Jack the Ripper."

KATIE

"Jack?" My name is Katherine, with a "K." (thinks) Fuck me.

A moment.

LOVEDAY

We will foil him, Miss Smalls. What did you learn from Iris?

KATIE

She wanted to talk, but her voicebox is nicked. She can't make a sound, and tears wet her face when she tried.

LOVEDAY

This is very sad, but you must tell me what you gleaned. Was she strong enough to write?

VALERIA re-enters without her cat. KATIE takes out the notebook.

KATIE

What she gave me ... it's a note that means nothin'. I slipped her your notebook. Finally, when we were alone for a minute, she scribbled, and I took back the book. Then the nurse ran me out, sayin' the police wanted to meet with Iris.

LOVEDAY takes the notebook. VALERIA looks over her shoulder.

KATIE (CONT'D)

She wrote "G-R-U-S."

VALERIA

"Grus?" This is not even a word. Is it the Butcher's name?

KATIE

I was gonna ask her, but they rushed me outta her room so fast-

LOVEDAY

Short for "gruu-some?"

KATIE

That's no kinda clue.

LOVEDAY

I believe it must be written in code. Iris feared setting down a candid clue in straightforward fashion. "Grus" was a way to disguise her true meaning.

KATIE

And she must have believed we were smart enough to figure it out.

They ponder.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Was she wrong about that?

LOVEDAY

Coming from Iris, it will be simple yet elegant. "Grus." She does not speak another language.

KATIE

It's more likely to be English, mis-spelled.

LOVEDAY takes down the dictionary from the mantelpiece.

LOVEDAY

According to the dictionary, "Grus is a type of angular sand, or finely divided rock, generally found in an arid or semiarid region."

The three keep pondering. LOVEDAY takes the notebook, uses her magnifying glass.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

I am ... perplexed, I admit. "Grus" can have nothing to do with Jasper Warham-Wynn. I have been confounded by Miss Johnstone, my own friend.

VALERIA

Your only friend. Loveday, this is entirely due to you. We are in this predicament because of your hubris!

LOVEDAY

On the contrary, I should have been less humble. I asked for permission. From the police, from the Vigilants. Of course they would rebuff me.

VALERIA

That is not my point. You revealed scorn for them. You denounced the very men who could have aided us.

KATIE

(to VALERIA) Miss Fortescue's attitude is entirely reasonable. I don't trust 'em / either-

VALERIA

There was no need to antagonize the authorities. You have burned necessary bridges! Now, we cannot penetrate the blasted clue-

LOVEDAY

And we have no allies to which to turn, is that it?

KATIE

Warham-Wynn, an "ally?" He set your sister on fire!

LOVEDAY

You believe ... Had I played up to him, and the police ... that they would have sought to protect us?

VALERIA

You scoff, but it is true. You continually flout the norm, and this is where it lands us. (re: KATIE) Look where it has landed her, the next likely victim!

LOVEDAY

I ... I grasp your meaning. My elected strategy means that we are alone, we three. Without power, or connection to those in power. And you, Miss Smalls ... I am afraid that you ...

The sisters regard KATIE.

KATIE

It means ... I am in God's hands.

LOVEDAY

God is a fictional character. It means, rather, that I have ... that I may have, put your life in mortal danger.

VALERIA

We won't allow him to stab / you-

LOVEDAY

He wouldn't stab her: he slashes-

VALERIA

I believe "stabs" is the more accurate term.

LOVEDAY

A stab involves a quick, sharp, thrusting motion, while a slash is more of a sideways-

KATIE

Will you two quit arguin' about the angle of the blade? If we can't figure out the clue ... then we gotta muster our courage, and do this ourselves.

VALERIA

What are you saying?

KATIE

I'll do as the New York City Chief of Police suggested, to take care of Jack the Ripper. I'll take to the streets, at night. Entice the man, draw him out. Ensnare him.

LOVEDAY

"Entice" the Butcher? The idea seems ... fairly inadvisable.

KATIE

I'm a woman, and an actress. My Christian name begins with a "K." He'll come for me.

LOVEDAY

That is not in question. But we are detectives. This is entirely outside of the realm of our expertise.

KATIE

Yours, maybe. I've been trained in self defense. I have common sense, sharp instincts. I know fan fightin'!

VALERIA

Such a plan would lead to certain Death by Misadventure.

KATIE

I am finished patiently acceptin' these murders, and I am filled with resolve. (beat) Look at us. Cluckin' and peckin'. This Butcher's already got us blamin' each other-

VALERIA

I blame only Loveday.

KATIE

And he's got us givin' up on Iris' clue! He would like to smother the sense of determination in us. We can't let him do that. This situation calls for audacious action.

LOVEDAY

She is right. But we cannot let Miss Smalls take him on, alone, on some dark street. (to KATIE) We must take audacious action together.

VALERIA

Let her do it by herself!

LOVEDAY

I reject that. (to KATIE) You will walk in Battersea this evening, and I will follow, just out of sight. Accompanied by my sharpened scissors.

VALERIA

(scoffing) Follow her. Honestly. In breeches?

LOVEDAY

Envy eats nothing but its own heart, Valeria. (beat, re her breeches) I am prepared.

VALERIA

This scheme defies our purpose. You said, Loveday, the mission of the detective is "to restore order."

KATIE

To restore an "order" that's designed to keep us contained, silenced, and afraid? Restorin' such an order is not right.

LOVEDAY

Neither is giving him your one and only life, Miss Smalls. All of this simply brings us back round to Iris' clue. We must interpret it, obscure though it may appear at first reckoning.

VALERIA

I do not understand why you believe this young woman, Iris Johnstone, holds the key to the mystery. I know she is your friend, but the police, and even you, have interviewed many other eyewitnesses, who have provided lengthy descriptions-

KATIE

Which have gotten us nowhere!

LOVEDAY

She is his victim, who yet lives-

VALERIA

She has provided us with a single, inscrutable ... grouping of letters! It is ludicrous to put your trust in such a...

LOVEDAY and KATIE stare at VALERIA.

LOVEDAY

What, in the victim?

KATIE

Ludicrous to trust a woman, is that what you're sayin', Missus Hunter?

LOVEDAY

Would it have been "ludicrous" for the authorities to trust Miss Smalls, here, when she reported a man committing a lewd act before her on public transport? What about ... What about when I stated that Warham-Wynn assaulted me, would it have been "ludicrous" for the police to have interviewed him? Sister? And when you stood firm and said that you were not mad, that you are not mad, is it "ludicrous" for us to believe you?

VALERIA

You make a good case.

KATIE

We're never believed. That's the problem, right there.

LOVEDAY

Well, I believe Iris. And I believe the poor unfortunate I met at the station. The Metropolitan Police may or may not be incompetent. But they are surely corrupted, and less than keen on identifying the real Butcher. (beat) Therefore we must decipher the clue. Valeria? Your thoughts.

VALERIA

I am not thinking properly. My brain will not stop its chattering! It is quite inconvenient, when I am being asked to- to cogitate.

KATIE

Miss Fortescue? Why not give Missus Hunter her elixir. Her laudanum. (silence) Pray that it will lubricate her thinkin'.

LOVEDAY

I do not believe you understand how opium works. Though I suppose Coleridge and Shelley might disagree.

LOVEDAY accedes, hands the laudanum to
VALERIA, who takes some. Stows the vial.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

Any better?

VALERIA thinks she has an idea. She does not.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

I told you, it doesn't work like that.

KATIE

That's all right. It's not like we're in a hurry.

LOVEDAY

(thinks. To KATIE) Did you inform Iris you were bringing her information back to me?
(KATIE nods) Then, we must consider the idea that the clue is ornithological in nature.

LOVEDAY searches the books on the mantle.
Selects one.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

"London Tide Tables for the River Thames?" You have been mixing up your books with mine again, Valeria. (She re-shelves it, chooses another.) Here. "The Ornithological Society's Bird Species Directory, Ay through El." (looks in Index) Goose, Grosbeak, Ground-tyrant. Hunh. (leafs back, finds an entry)

LOVEDAY reads silently.

LOVEDAY (CONT'D)

(quiet) Iris. (to the others) It is quite the direct clue!

KATIE

I wonder / if-

LOVEDAY

My dear Miss Smalls, I am holding the book: pray do not upstage me. (returning to her pronouncement) "Grus" is the scientific name for a particular genus of tall, wading wildfowl. (reads) "Grus is the Latin word for the common shallow-water bird, the crane."

KATIE

"PC Henry Crane!" That is why our poor, injured Iris has refused to cooperate with the Metropolitan Police-

VALERIA

Nonsense. Are you saying there are two Battersea Butchers? Because the Constable was interviewing me at the moment Amy Clarke was killed!

LOVEDAY moves to her newspapers. Quickly looks through them.

LOVEDAY

What other man has such free rein to roam the streets at night, without being challenged? A lone woman would never trust a stranger to walk her home, or approach her in the street at night-

KATIE

But one would trust a bobby. Iris walked with him-

VALERIA

I tell you, it is not he!

KATIE

He told me to my face he despises the deception of actresses.

LOVEDAY finds a church announcement.

VALERIA

St. Mary's tolls the bells every Monday night. Miss Clarke was attacked while they chimed. PC Crane was talking to me. The Gazette reported they were ringing-

LOVEDAY

Without doubt. (refers to clipping) But on Tuesday night that same week, St. Mary's was celebrating "All Soul's Day:" a bizarre, and possibly barbaric, Christian ritual. It is one of the rare weekday ceremonies for which bells ring out. (to VALERIA) Add an uncertain dosage of laudanum to this annual anomaly and, presto! You, sister, mistook Tuesday for Monday, and bestowed upon the Butcher an alibi he failed to earn.

KATIE

Iris would not mislead us.

LOVEDAY

Nor abuse her knowledge of avian species. The Butcher is PC Henry Crane.

A moment as they ponder this.

KATIE

Ladies ... here's the thing.

KATIE crosses to look out the courtyard door.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Scotland Yard will never accept on my testimony that one of their "finest" is a lust-murderer of women. The result is, I must still ... venture out. Tonight. (She looks out at the courtyard) I see there is not much of a moon.

LOVEDAY

A woman stands at an open door. Through that door is a place she has never been, perhaps has never even imagined. She steps over the threshold and through the door and into a place where women are believed. Their rights and persons are valued. They have authority over their own lives. Across that threshold ... there is no dense fog, clouding her powers of observation. It is clear, and sunlit. What's on the other side is ... a deed she chooses. To endanger, but finally, perhaps ... to save her own life.

PC CRANE enters suddenly.

VALERIA

PC Crane!

CRANE

Miss Fortescue. Missus Hunter. (to KATIE) Miss Smalls. I have been looking for you all day.

KATIE

Forgive me, Constable, for bein' elusive-

LOVEDAY

Miss Smalls was calling on a friend.

CRANE

I know that. Iris Johnstone. At Royal London Hospital.

LOVEDAY

Pray, sit down.

CRANE won't sit.

CRANE

Miss Smalls, you must come with me, at once.

VALERIA

Go with you?

LOVEDAY

Under no circumstances!

CRANE

(to LOVEDAY) I'm done with you interfering with my investigation. (to KATIE) I will question you, Miss, on the matter of the murder of Iris Johnstone!

KATIE

Iris... Iris isn't dead! I've just come from visitin' her.

CRANE

You remained with the woman, alone, for more than three hours. I entered her room mere moments after you departed. Whereupon I found a lifeless corpse.

KATIE

No! No, / that's not-

CRANE

Iris Johnstone ... quite dead in her bed. Suffocated with her own pillow. Directly after you, Miss Smalls, left her sickroom!

LOVEDAY

You cannot mean to imply that Miss Smalls had anything to do with / this-

CRANE

(to KATIE) You will accompany me to the Battersea Police Station House, where I will interrogate you.

VALERIA

You may interview her in the upstairs parlor.

CRANE

She'll come with me. (to KATIE) Miss.

VALERIA

You cannot take her.

KATIE

Never mind, Missus Hunter. It is only a few streets away. (to CRANE) I will go.

KATIE touches her fan. Stands by the door.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Look: there is not much of a moon. (indicates the courtyard door) May we go out this way, through the rear gate, please? I don't want people seein' me, bein' escorted by a constable.

CRANE

If privacy is what you crave, you'll get it, Miss. I know a roundabout way: we'll be quite hidden from sight of prying passersby.

LOVEDAY and KATIE exchange urgent looks.

LOVEDAY

You cannot go out through that gate. I have padlocked it.

KATIE

Then ... you, Miss Fortescue, must fetch the key. You will unlock the gate, open it, and then we will ... walk by.

LOVEDAY

Yes. Then you may proceed, together, to the police station.

CRANE

Come along, Miss. It won't take long.

PC CRANE steps out the courtyard door.

KATIE pauses. Looks back at the sisters.

LOVEDAY

There you are: standing by the threshold. Good luck, Katie.

KATIE

See you on the other side, Loveday.

CRANE

(off) Let's go, Miss!

KATIE grasps her fan behind her back, and heads out the door. LOVEDAY unbuttons her skirt, drops it to the ground, revealing breeches. She grabs and brandishes her scissors, pauses at the courtyard door.

LOVEDAY

It's not too late, sister. Join us?

LOVEDAY exits. VALERIA takes the oar from the wall, and exits out the courtyard door.

SOUND CUE: Fan strike in the courtyard.

BLACKOUT. End of Play.