

Ripper

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Characters – 3W, 3M

GILLIAN SPENDER: Female. Twenties or thirties.

WOMAN 1 (Lizzie, Mrs. Lusk, Girl): Female. Twenties or thirties.

WOMAN 2 (Mary, Susan): Female. Twenties or thirties.

JACK: Male. Any age.

MAN 1 (Leather Apron, James, Detective Aberline): Male. Twenties or thirties.

MAN 2 (Beggar, John Spender, Mr. Lusk, Policeman): Male. Twenties or thirties.

Setting

1888 London. The play takes place in three locations: a street corner in Whitechapel; the private office of John, a newspaper publisher; and an interior room, alternately the Lusks' house and Mary's house. The set should be simple and suggestive. Perhaps the street corner is the only full set and the other settings are evoked by a few walls and pieces of furniture so that we can feel how uneasily this world rests on top of the slums.

Accents

This play should be performed in full period accents. Characters generally break down into three groups of accents: the high class (Gillian, John, James), the middle or lower-middle class (Susan, Jack, the Lusks, Detective Aberline, Policeman), and the lower class (Mary, Lizzie, Girl, Leather Apron, Beggar). There is variation to be found within each class, particularly the middle class, but modulating between those three general classes should do the majority of the work.

Punctuation

Punctuation follows speech patterns over grammatical convention. Additionally, the following punctuations have the following specific meanings:

A dash (—) indicates an interruption by either the speaker themselves or by a new speaker.

A slash (/) indicates the point of interruption if it is not at the end of the line.

An ellipsis (...) indicates a slow trailing off, either on purpose or accidental.

A dash-ellipsis (—...) signifies a sudden stop and then a silent continuation of thought.

Style

There is an inherent camp to any horror story, particularly a period piece, but actors should avoid playing into it. This is deadly serious business, even when that business is pleasure, and while the characters employ irony to deal with their situations, they are stuck in those situations (except perhaps Jack, who is a figure of pure id and sensuality.) On the other hand, while they are serious, they must avoid being solemn. This is a world with the sort of laughter and hope clung to for fear of what else lies out there, waiting.

Prologue

(A London street, 1888. The characters lounge as the audience enters. Night has fallen and the dregs of society claim their city. A beggar asks for change. One of the women propositions an audience member. Suddenly, a loud bell tolls. The characters snap to attention.)

WOMAN 2

Jack be nimble.

MAN 1

Jack be quick.

WOMAN 1

Jack chop ‘em all up into tiny little bits.

MAN 2

Jack Sprat would eat no fat. And his wife would eat no lean.

WOMAN 1

Cuz she’s a whore, dead as a door.

WOMAN 2

And he’s munching on her spleen.

GILLIAN

Jack and Jill ran to Whitechapel,

MAN 2

To find themselves a story.

JACK

But madman’s desire can catch like a fire.

WOMAN 1

And things are bound to get gory.

ALL

(Repeating and overlapping, like a round)

Yes, things are bound to get gory. Things are bound to get gory.

(They stop. Pause. Then, in perfect unison.)

ALL

Things are bound to get fun.

(Blackout.)

Scene 1

(A street corner in Whitechapel. The buildings are poor and dirty. Gas lamps lend an ominous glow. Two women, dressed revealingly for the time, stand talking. They are pretty but dirty and worn down by life.)

LIZZIE

I hear he's fair, with a yellow mustache that curves like a gentleman's.

MARY

I heard that one too.

LIZZIE

Or dark with a black beard and a scar over one eye. Might be that.

MARY

I hear he's purple with three-foot horns.

LIZZIE

You did?

MARY

If they knew what he looked like, they'd have him in the clink by now.

LIZZIE

If I had my way, I'd only be going with redheads now.

MARY

Redheads?

LIZZIE

They've said he was blonde. And they've said he was dark. But nobody's been pointing fingers at no ginger fellas.

MARY

Ain't nobody safe. Not even redheads. The world's gone mad.

(A blonde man enters, refined and upper class. He sees the women.)

BLONDE MAN

Good evening, ladies.

MARY

And you, sir.

LIZZIE

Sorry sir, closed for business we are.

Pardon?

BLONDE MAN

(*Whispering to Lizzie*)
What are you doing, you idiot?

MARY

(*Whispering back*)
He's blonde.

LIZZIE

MARY
What kind of stupid—? Pay her no mind, sir. Perhaps we could walk about the Chapel?

LIZZIE
She's got the pox, sir. The French disease.

MARY
Liar. I'm clean as a whistle. God's honest.

LIZZIE
And she's planning to roll you once you're done.

MARY
You dirty rat.

BLONDE MAN
Perhaps I had best find other companionship this evening.

(*He starts to exit.*)

MARY
Wait! Come back, sir. She was only coddling.

BLONDE MAN
Good night.

(*He exits. Mary turns on Lizzie.*)

MARY
You simpering toad. You witless, spineless excuse for a whore.

LIZZIE
Just saved your life and that's the thanks I get?

MARY
He wasn't even really blonde. Practically brunette.

LIZZIE
Too close. And he was suspicious.

MARY

If you're only going with johns that ain't suspicious, you won't need a murderer. Starve in a fortnight, you will.

LIZZIE

Not me. I'm leaving the Chapel.

MARY

I heard that song before. Ain't no place else to go.

LIZZIE

I've got an Auntie out in Effingham. Stayed with her when me family moved to England.

MARY

What Auntie's gonna want a tart gallumping through her house?

(Another woman enters; it's Gillian. She is also dressed as a prostitute, but lacks the worn look of the other two. There is a fire in her that has never faced the dousing of the world. She sees the women and moves closer to eavesdrop. They take no notice.)

LIZZIE

I won't tell her none of that.

MARY

She's bound to notice you ain't got no husband.

LIZZIE

I'll tell her... I'll tell her I been a nun.

(Mary laughs.)

MARY

A nun? You? Well, you have slept with your share of the clergy.

LIZZIE

I'll say what I have to say to get outta this place. It was one thing when he got Polly. Never liked her. But Annie was a good sport. Did you hear he draped her body in her own intestine?

MARY

Another rumor, don't mean nothing.

LIZZIE

It's the truth. Like Christmas holly.

(Gillian, now close enough to hear fully, jumps into the conversation.)

GILLIAN

And cut out her uterus too, they say. For sporting.

(Mary turns to Gillian.)

MARY

Who are you now?

(Gillian offers her hand for a shake.)

GILLIAN

Jane Dalworth to my friends. And you are?

(Mary does not move, but Lizzie takes it.)

LIZZIE

I'm Lizzie and this—

MARY

Quiet, Liz. Names ain't something goes for nothing in Whitechapel. Why ain't I seen you around?

GILLIAN

I just took up the game. Mister beat me something terrible. Figure it's be better being a dolly than a ragdoll.

LIZZIE

Ain't much differ these days.

MARY

And where you kenning, Jane?

GILLIAN

Dorset Street. Near Broadstone.

MARY

Aye. Nasty place that. You must know Ned the Butcher.

GILLIAN

Course. Everybody knows Ned.

MARY

Everybody knows he's a baker.

GILLIAN

I, uhh... Well...

LIZZIE

Maybe she's the killer.

MARY

Shut up, Lizzie. She ain't no killer. Too stupid.

GILLIAN

(Abandoning her accent)

Stupid? How dare you?

LIZZIE

Oy, how'd you get all posh?

GILLIAN

I did not matriculate from Oxford to be called stupid by some two-bit tart.

LIZZIE

Oxford? They don't let women into no Oxford.

GILLIAN

I will have you know I was a member of the inaugural class of Somerville College. The greatest women's college at Oxford.

MARY

Only one probably.

GILLIAN

No. There are two. But everyone knows a Somerville woman is vastly superior in intellect and charm to those Lady Margaret Hall sluts.

LIZZIE

I hate sluts. Giving it away for free. Ruins the business.

GILLIAN

Not to worry, I have little doubt you have met their husbands regardless.

LIZZIE

How'd you end up a whore then, if you're so educated?

MARY

She's not a whore.

GILLIAN

No. I'm... shall we say a curious citizen?

MARY

Ain't no posh birds curious about the likes of us, 'cept when they find their husband's been stepping out.

GILLIAN

You are safe on that account. I have no husband and if I did I should rather he step out than bother me with his nonsense.

LIZZIE

You're an odd sort. Fancy lady talking so honest.

GILLIAN

One has little need of society's banal niceties as a reporter.

MARY

Ain't no such thing as a woman reporter.

GILLIAN

Yet.

MARY

Well, if there ain't one yet, how can you be one then?

GILLIAN

Well, I'm not exactly... It's complicated. But I work for a newspaper.

MARY

What's your name? The real one.

GILLIAN

Like you said, names do not go for nothing in Whitechapel. What matters is that I am here to learn about the Whitechapel murders and their victims. You said you knew Annie Chapman and Polly Nichols?

MARY

Why should we help you?

GILLIAN

Until the people of London know the truth, this monster will tear through every whore in Whitechapel, yourselves included.

LIZZIE

Not me. Moving to Effingham, I am.

GILLIAN

Where did Annie spend her time? Where could someone have picked her up?

LIZZIE

Round the Hoop.

GILLIAN

I'm sorry?

MARY

The Hoop and Grapes. On Aldgate. Won't do you no good now. Nobody'll be seen near it after Annie. Better off checking where they found her.

GILLIAN

You know where they found the body? The police have refused to disclose it.

(And old beggar wanders on. He is cloaked in stinking tatters, and walks hunched from hunger and weakness. He approaches the women.)

BEGGAR

Alms. Alms for the poor. Spare a cent to save a life.

MARY

Sorry, old man, ain't got nothing for ourselves. Murder's bad for business.

LIZZIE

Beggars is too.

BEGGAR

Please, miss, pity a poor man.

LIZZIE

(Looking offstage)
Bloody hell.

GILLIAN

What?

LIZZIE

It's him.

(Leather Apron enters, wearing his namesake. He looks strong and mean.)

LEATHER APRON

Oy! Bugger off, you old mumper.

(The beggar tries to shuffle off but not fast enough. Leather Apron kicks him offstage. Gillian steps back into the shadows.)

LEATHER APRON

Now, what are my two favorite dollies doing chattering with some old shake ain't got tuppence to rub together?

LIZZIE

We was trying to get rid of him, sir.

LEATHER APRON

Wouldn't have to get rid of him if you was on a job. Don'tcha want a nice warm bed to curl up in?

MARY

Ain't nobody coming to Whitechapel since the murders.

LEATHER APRON

I just saw a toff man not two blocks back.

LIZZIE

He was blonde.

MARY

Shut it. He wasn't interested in our wares, sir.

LEATHER APRON

Two beauties like you? You got your ways to get men's urges going.

MARY

He had urges alright, but of the rougher sort. He was looking for a bullring camp.

LEATHER APRON

Goddamned sodomites. How's anybody s'posed to make a living if men are gonna go about with each other? Still, I don't pay you to lounge on no street corners.

MARY

You don't pay us at all.

LEATHER APRON

Whatchou say, girl?

MARY

Nothing, sir.

LEATHER APRON

I pay you something more valuable than money. It's a scary world out there and a girl's bound to get hurt. Especially a girl with a smart mouth like you. Bound to get real hurt.

MARY

I didn't mean nothing by it, sir. You know we couldn't do no business without you.

LEATHER APRON

Then do the business and stop sitting around chirping like geese.

GILLIAN

(Emerging from the shadows)
Geese don't chirp.

LEATHER APRON

Excuse me?

GILLIAN

Geese. They squawk. Loud but harmless. Rather like bullies.

LEATHER APRON

Look girl, I don't know who you think you are with your fancy accent and your intimate

bleeding knowledge of geese but I don't take lip from no tart. You keep smarting off, you'll find out what how things work in the Chapel real fast.

GILLIAN

By violence I suppose.

LEATHER APRON

Aye, girl, violence.

(He steps towards Gillian menacingly. She pulls out a small revolver from her purse and points it at his face. He stops cold.)

GILLIAN

Well, if that's what you value...

LEATHER APRON

Now, now. Ain't no need to make trouble, miss.

GILLIAN

Perhaps it is time for you to fly off and squawk somewhere else.

LEATHER APRON

Aye. Best be careful, though. There's a murderer about. Might teach you the lesson I'm too gentlemanly to give.

GILLIAN

I appreciate the warning, sir. Good night.

LEATHER APRON

Girls, I see you on this corner come sunlight, we'll have a reckoning. Murderer or no murderer, money's gotta get made.

(He exits. Mary and Lizzie are gleeful in Gillian's victory.)

LIZZIE

That was brilliant.

MARY

Aye. 'Cept we'll be in for it come morning.

LIZZIE

We're always in for it. No amount a beating's gonna take away the look on his face.

MARY

That's a nice barker. Cost a pretty penny, I imagine.

GILLIAN

My father's.

LIZZIE

Was he a general or something?

GILLIAN

More dangerous. News editor. Now, I believe you were about to show me where they found the body of Annie Chapman.

LIZZIE

You can't go there. The place is cursed now.

MARY

Curses don't mean nothing 'cept people tryna get you not to do stuff you wanna do.

GILLIAN

Then you'll show me?

MARY

Not sure it'll do you much good, but I s'ppose we owe you a favor now. And I don't go getting into no debts. You coming, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

Ain't nothin' short a hell get me to that godforsaken place. I'll stay here. If I can find me a john or two, it'll lessen the beatings come morning.

MARY

Just watch out for blondes. And purple-horned men.

LIZZIE

Stuff it.

GILLIAN

It was wonderful to meet you.

LIZZIE

Be careful with this one. She goes lookin' for trouble. Be sure it don't find you instead.

GILLIAN

I shall. Good night.

(They exit. Lizzie waits. After a few seconds, the beggar wanders back on.)

BEGGAR

Alms. Alms for the poor. Help a poor beggar get a bite.

LIZZIE

I already told you. I ain't got nothing.

(The beggar comes towards her ominously.)

BEGGAR

You got your life.

(The blonde man reenters.)

BLONDE MAN

Get away from her, you old lurker.

(The beggar hobbles off quickly.)

LIZZIE

Thank you, sir. Gave me a right fright, he did.

BLONDE MAN

Course he did. Never know what sort a madman could be hiding under that hood.

LIZZIE

Hey, what happened to your voice? It's not all plumby no more.

BLONDE MAN

(Switching to the high-class accent from before)

You mean this voice? I only bother with this when scouting. Seems rather unnecessary once the game's afoot.

LIZZIE

Game?

(A knife seems to appear by magic in his hand. This is Jack. He slits her throat in a single motion. Blood sprays. He holds her, almost gently, as she slips to the ground and her life puddles beneath them.)

BLONDE MAN (JACK)

Shh. Shh.

(Singing softly)

Hush little tart, don't you cry. Us poor folk, we all gotta die.

(Whispering)

There's a good girl.

(He lays her down on the ground, arranging her. He bends over her, about to start the mutilation, when Gillian runs back on.)

GILLIAN

I forgot to get your last name for the—

(She sees Jack over the body.)

Hello, miss.

JACK

Get away from her.

GILLIAN

And towards you?

JACK

(She fumbles in her purse for the gun. He stands. She pulls out the gun.)

I'm taking you to the police.

GILLIAN

Now, now. That's not how the game is played.

JACK

I care nothing for your games.

GILLIAN

Everyone cares for the game of death.

JACK

(He starts inching toward her.)

Stay back or I'll shoot.

GILLIAN

It's not that easy. Killing someone. Knowing your action will tear the life from their body. Do you really think you are ready to become that person?

JACK

I...

GILLIAN

(He backs away, as if retreating.)

Elizabeth Stride. The birdy's name. Since she can't sing no more.

JACK

(He ducks away and disappears. She tries to chase him, but he's gone. She returns to look at the body.)

Dear God.

GILLIAN

Scene 2

(John stands at his desk, talking into an archaic-looking telephone.)

JOHN

If I were to tell you how we find our stories, Cyril, you would attempt to steal it for your turgid rag of a paper. You will get nothing from me but my boot upon your face as The Central News Agency climbs past The Echo to number one in circulation.

(Susan enters with a stack of papers.)

SUSAN

I'm very sorry to bother you, sir. You'll need to sign these.

JOHN

I have other matters to attend to, Cyril. I'll see you at cricket. Say hello to the missus.

(He hangs up and starts signing the papers.)

JOHN

Thank you, Susan. The problem with this contraption is that you can only communicate with the sort of rich sophisticate who also owns a telephone, and who would wish to speak with them? Is James outside?

SUSAN

Yes, sir.

JOHN

Send him in, will you please?

SUSAN

Yes, sir.

(She exits. James enters. John immediately rises into a fury.)

JOHN

This article is rubbish. You are a dolt, a dunce, a pox upon our profession. Get me some real reporting and get out of my sight before I stuff this garbage back down the yawning maw of idiocy from which it emerged.

JAMES

Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.

(He exits. Susan reenters.)

SUSAN

Shall I have them remove the article from tomorrow's paper, sir?

JOHN

Don't be ridiculous, Susan. The article is perfectly acceptable.

SUSAN

As a reminder, I have you down for a meeting with the printer at two. And you have a meeting with James at three to discuss his request for a promotion.

JOHN

Wonderful. I imagine that shall go rather smoothly now.

(A commotion is heard. Gillian barges through the doors.)

GILLIAN

I saw him. I saw him.

SUSAN

Excuse me, miss, this is a private office.

JOHN

If you seek employment, I'm afraid we only hire individuals of the highest moral caliber. If one of my reporters neglected to pay for your services, Edith up front will sort it out.

GILLIAN

It's Gillian, you bloody idiot.

JOHN

Gillian? What in God's name? Susan, would you kindly give us a moment?

SUSAN

Of course, sir.

(Susan exits.)

JOHN

What are you doing storming through the newsroom dressed like that? Father would be rolling in his grave.

GILLIAN

Father would be wise enough to ask who it was I saw that sent me here without time spared for my attire.

JOHN

That is no excuse for— Who did you see?

GILLIAN

Him, John. The Whitechapel Murderer.

JOHN

Dear God. Are you alright? Did he hurt you?

GILLIAN

I'm fine, John. I caught him in the act.

JOHN

Which girl?

GILLIAN

What? The one last night. Have you not heard?

JOHN

Of course. But he killed two girls last night. Catherine Eddowes and... the other one. Elizabeth...

GILLIAN

Stride.

JOHN

Right. The one who wasn't mutilated.

GILLIAN

Because I caught him.

JOHN

Heavens. I had suspected he was interrupted, but I hardly imagined it was by my own sister. You're sure he did not harm you? This is no time for your mad bravery.

GILLIAN

I had Father's pistol.

JOHN

And you were alone?

GILLIAN

I went back to ask the girl a question and there he was, hunched over her like a vampire.

JOHN

What did he look like?

GILLIAN

He was... ordinary.

JOHN

Ordinary? What relevance is that? Was he fair? Was he dark? Did you notice anything of value?

GILLIAN

I was busy fearing for my life.

JOHN

You are a bloody reporter, Gillian. It is your job to notice when fearing for your life.

GILLIAN

Brown. His hair. I think. Or no, blonde. It was rather dark. And no beard. Or perhaps a small beard. Maybe a mustache.

JOHN

Well, that is unfortunate. And you're sure there was no one else who saw him?

GILLIAN

How can you quibble over details when I am telling you I have the first sighting of the most famous murderer since Richard the Third? Think of the circulation on this article.

JOHN

But without witnesses, they will demand to question the man who wrote it. What shall I tell them? That Tom Bullen is a fiction to hide my noble sister's slumming?

GILLIAN

Why not? That ridiculous pen name has long outlived necessity. Let me write a firsthand account. I shall counter any reproach, you shall have your story, and I shall no longer be forced to write poorly enough to be thought a man. Give me back my true name, Brother.

JOHN

Hmmm.

GILLIAN

Don't make that noise, John. Father always made that noise when was about to tell us we couldn't have any sweets.

JOHN

It's only... Who would trust a woman to write the news?

GILLIAN

You do.

JOHN

Of course. I am civilized. But the unwashed masses? Perhaps a woman writing of fashion or society, but not murder.

GILLIAN

The world is changing. Nelly Bly is writing about insane asylums.

JOHN

In New York. Not a real city. There are rules here.

GILLIAN

Rules that should be broken.

JOHN

Perhaps. But are we to break them for the sake of an unsubstantiated claim, without even a detailing of his features? The board of directors would laugh me out of London.

GILLIAN

Not if they knew how many of their articles, their best articles, were already written by a woman. I am the only reason you haven't gone out of business.

JOHN

Do not forget yourself, Sister. I have allowed you to participate for Father's sake and because you do have talent, but you are only one reporter. And should you find yourself out of employment, with nothing to fill your days, Mother may get ideas. I think we can both agree that you would not enjoy being the dotting wife to the next undersecretary of some such nonsense.

GILLIAN

You are a vicious little man.

JOHN

Write up the murders as Tom, with no account of your involvement. I shall need it for tomorrow's paper. The Echo is already ahead of us.

GILLIAN

I'll need to use your office. You know how Mother gets when I work in the house.

JOHN

Very well.

GILLIAN

If I had my own office...

JOHN

It would be suspicious that Tom Bullen never entered it. Your place is in the street, hunting down stories. I have meetings I must attend to. I shall expect your article by four.

GILLIAN

This conversation is not over.

JOHN

The most I ever hope for with you, dear sister, is a tactical retreat.

(Gillian exits.)

JOHN

Susan.

(Susan enters.)

JOHN

Please mention around the office over the next few days that a young woman heard of our excellent work and wished to offer a scoop on the recent spate of arrests in Clerkenwell. You remained in the office while I heard her testimony.

SUSAN

Of course, sir.

JOHN

And it might not hurt to mention that my sister was occupied with needlepoint today.

SUSAN

Needlepoint, sir? They have met Miss Gillian.

JOHN

Hmm, what is something women do that might be believable? Quilting?

SUSAN

Not to worry, sir. I'll take care of it.

JOHN

Thank you Susan.

SUSAN

She's right you know. The world is changing.

JOHN

And if Gillian has her way, she'll reshape it in her image.

SUSAN

There are worse images, sir.

JOHN

I know. Best not mention that in her hearing, however. Then there would be no reasoning with her.

Scene 3

(Night. Gillian sits at John's desk, writing at a typewriter. She speaks as she types.)

GILLIAN

The police insist they draw close to the Whitechapel Murderer, but with two dead on a single night, one sees little hope of justice with the current crop of detectives on the case.

(Jack appears at the window.)

JACK

So-called detectives.

GILLIAN

What? What are you—...?

(He steps into the room.)

JACK

Better turn of phrase. Current crop of so-called detectives.

(A pause as they size each other up. She breaks the pause, jumping towards the door,

but he blocks her. They scuffle. She breaks away and grabs the phone to call for help.)

JACK

Do you even know how to use that contraption?

GILLIAN

After a fashion.

(She swings it at his head. He ducks the phone. She swings it again. He dodges back and she gets stopped by the cord. He goes after her, but she manages to get the desk between them.)

JACK

Well done, dearie. I can't remember the last time I had this much fun without blood.

GILLIAN

You... How did you track me down?

JACK

Had to be a reporter. I worked backwards. Tom Bullen don't even sound like a real name.

GILLIAN

My brother's joke. A pun on Marlowe's Tamburlaine. A bloodthirsty emperor hides amongst peasants until he may conquer the world.

JACK

A goal we share. Perhaps we might help each other.

GILLIAN

I would never help the likes of you.

JACK

But you already have. Your stories made me famous.

GILLIAN

That's... What do you want from me?

JACK

Sugar, spice, everything nice.

GILLIAN

What does that mean?

JACK

To see what you are made of, dearie.

GILLIAN

Well then I suppose I shall show you.

(She reaches into her bag confidently. A pause. She looks confused. She pushes around in it, looking more and more worried. He holds up her gun.)

JACK

You'll have to do better than that.

GILLIAN

Alright.

(She pulls out a large knife and lunges at him. They fight, her with the knife and him parrying with the gun. They go back and forth. She almost gets him several times but he always seems to get away. Finally, he manages to catch hold of her wrist and spin her around so that he's holding her knife to her own throat with him behind her.)

JACK

Now that's more like it, dearie. I think you've earned your present.

GILLIAN

Present? Like you gave those girls?

JACK

Death ain't a present. Death's a game.

GILLIAN

Not for the ones who die.

JACK

Every game must have losers.

GILLIAN

That's all they are to you?

JACK

Of course. They're nothing but stories to you. Is that really more noble?

GILLIAN

That is not true. They are human beings.

JACK

Then I suppose it's too bad you made me kill another.

GILLIAN

I did no such thing.

(He swings her around, releasing her but keeping the knife.)

JACK

If you hadn't interrupted me with little Lizzie, poor Catherine would still be prowling the Chapel, trusting as ever.

GILLIAN

I was... I was trying to stop you.

JACK

Why? How many papers have you sold on my deeds? You need me. And I need you. 'Cept we must change the name. Whitechapel Murderer is hardly the stuff of legend.

GILLIAN

And you imagine you are?

JACK

I imagine we are, dearie. I imagine we are.

GILLIAN

My only goal is to help the people of London end your terror.

JACK

I see. Then you shall have no interest in publishing the letters. How disappointing.

(He starts to walk to the window to exit.)

GILLIAN

Letters?

(He pulls out a letter and a postcard and throws them on the table. Gillian, keeping her eyes on Jack, picks up the letter. She reads silently, while he recites it.)

JACK

(Adopting a coarse, lower class accent)

"Dear Boss, I keep on hearing the police have caught me but they won't fix me just yet. I am down on whores and I shan't quit ripping them till I do get buckled."

GILLIAN

Buckled? It's... a voice. You're putting on a voice.

JACK

(Poshly)

A good murderer must be able to pass in any society.

GILLIAN

But why pretend to be low class?

JACK

People love when the lower class go murdering. Proves they deserve to be at the bottom.

(She returns to reading.)

JACK

“I love my work and want to start again. The next job I do, I shall clip the lady’s ears off. Yours truly, Jack the Ripper.”

(She looks up at him.)

GILLIAN

Jack?

JACK

Good a name as any.

GILLIAN

It has a postmark from three days ago.

JACK

Course it has. Had to get it in before I cut the girl’s ear off. For proof. That’s why I needed another girl. You should be thanking me for fixing your foolishness.

GILLIAN

You... You...

JACK

There’s another one, dearie.

(Gillian reads as Jack speaks. He moves over to the window and sits on the sill.)

JACK

“I was not coddling, dear old Boss, when I gave you the tip. Double event this time. Number one squealed a bit, couldn’t finish straight off. Had not got time to get ears off for police. Thanks for keeping last letter back till I got to work again. Jack the Ripper”

GILLIAN

This is going to be the biggest story we’ve ever had.

JACK

Yet.

GILLIAN

And if I refuse to play your games? Whatever trick you are playing. If I burn these here in this office?

JACK

Then you shall remain forever in the shadow of a famous brother and famous father while you watch another reporter, a man no doubt, write the story of the century.

GILLIAN

I could... I could identify you to the police.

JACK

Might work. But even if they do catch me, it won't be your exclusive. You'll stay a nothing, a nobody, a peasant.

GILLIAN

I am no peasant.

JACK

Might as well be. A woman in the Empire. No power. No authority. No one even knows your real name. What would Tamburlaine do?

GILLIAN

But why? Why me?

JACK

Because I see who you could be.

GILLIAN

What does that mean?

JACK

Good night.

(Without warning, Jack falls backwards out of the window and disappears.)

GILLIAN

Jack? Jack?

(She runs to the window but he's gone. She turns back to the room. She goes to the letters and picks them both up. She stares at them. She walks to her desk, removes the paper from the typewriter, places a clean sheet in it, and starts writing.)

GILLIAN

Exclusive. The Central News Agency has discovered— No. The Central News Agency, through fine, systematic reporting, has discovered the first break in the case of the Whitechapel Murderer, or as the madman appears to call himself: Jack the Ripper.

To read the rest of this play or inquire about performance rights, please reach out to Jacob Marx Rice at jacob.marx.rice@gmail.com