

ACT I. Sc 1.

*One by one, the women's cameras turn on, each woman goes through her own process of realizing she's here again. With each other. Again. Once all five women are on screen, their focus shifts from looking at each other to looking directly into the camera. A moment of seeing "you" the audience member, through the camera. The women are unapologetic in their stares. Finally...*

MARY ANN "POLLY" NICHOLS

Look at you. Watching each of us pop on your screens, waiting... still waiting, aren't you? Well, guess what, loves. We're assembled. And He ain't here. So let's just be honest for a moment, and address that you're already a little disappointed. Because, you didn't come here for Polly Nichols....

*(Quietly and nearly overlapping...)*

CATHERINE EDDOWES

For Catherine Eddowes...

ELIZABETH STRIDE

Elizabeth Stride...

ANNIE CHAPMAN

Annie Chapman...

MARY JANE KELLY

Mary Jane Kelly.

POLLY

No you definitely didn't come here for us. You came here for Him. He's the one you've heard about most of your lives, yeah? Let me tell you, He's the one we've heard about most of our un-lives.

ELIZABETH

Deaths.

CATHERINE

Quiet.

ELIZABETH

Just saying. Un-lives sounds like we're zombies.

CATHERINE

Polly's in charge. Go on, Poll.

POLLY

Don't interrupt me again, *Liz*.

Point is. We're fed up with hearing His name. See, time sort of escapes us where we are, but we feel every second pass each time He gets a mention. Each time one of you lot says His name. And be

honest, how many times have you yourself said his name? How old were you the first time you said it? The first time you heard it? The first time you got goosebumps hearing bout what He done? And that's how you've always felt since. A prickle of macabre pleasure when you think bout what He. Done...

ANNIE

Look, we ain't mad at you. (*POLLY scoffs*) Well, we ain't. Truth is you live in a world that's not so different from ours. You give men all the power. The blokes do things and the women Have Things Done to em.

MARY JANE

Imagine how it feels. To see all this time pass but nothing much change. All these books bout Him have been written, movies have been made, and in all of em, we play such a small part. We're just the bodies it happens to.

CATHERINE

None of us grew up thinking we'd exactly leave a legacy behind us. (*Some stifled laughter at that*) We weren't born men. And we always knew what that meant. Just to live was gonna be a fight. And the five us were good at that. We were strong. But you only know the weakness that was the last minutes...

POLLY and ELIZABETH

The last seconds

MARY JANE

The last hour...

CATHERINE

...of our lives.

ELIZABETH

And we're done with it.

POLLY

And just a warning to you lot, whatever you have thought of us in the past, whatever you think He may have ripped from us... We take it back tonight.

*Beat.*

CATHERINE

Think you're forgetting something, Mrs. Nichols.

POLLY

Right. (*to camera*) Look, you're comin along with us on this ride now, whether you like it or not. But you should know, each of us are in our own place, now. Can communicate with each other just fine--

ELIZABETH

Too fine, f'you ask me.

CATHERINE

No one did.

POLLY

But we can't rightly interact like we used to. No bodies and all. So we'll tell our stories, best we can. And you lot better keep up. Ain't no goin back this time.

CATHERINE

Hear, hear.

POLLY

Right then. Spose' we'll start with Annie pickin that nasty fight.

ANNIE

Posh, I did no such thing.

MARY JANE

Let them decide.

*All cameras off.*

CATHERINE

It's complicated, see. Never much liked children but it was the sex I liked least. I hated the ol' sweaty bollocks. And Thomas wanted it all the time. Always the thwack, thwack, thwackin of his sweaty twiddle-diddles against my arse and me bored dim.

ELIZABETH

Dim prospects after that. Couldn't bring myself to go back to domestics. Always fearin' the man of the house would jump my skirt when the mistress was away. Truth was, I didn't mind the jumpin. I minded the poor dumb face on the mistress.

CATHERINE

Good mistress that I was, I gave him the children he needed to be happy. Then it was all very cordial. I found a new feller to care for me, and ol' Thomas changed his name, moved the kids and never told me where they all went. Seemed fitting.

ELIZABETH

I didn't feel fit for most work after that. All my employers wanted to have a go at me. And if I didn't want to, it didn't right matter.

CATHERINE

Didn't matter to my new feller, John, that I wasn't looking for a normal marriage. He understood me. He'd give me the little money he 'ad, a warm bed when I needed, and all I 'ad to do was earn a little however I liked.

ELIZABETH

I like it when it's on my terms. Always have. That's when I started thinkin. If I couldn't make money at a job without bein' fucked... What's so bad about me fuckin to make /money?

CATHERINE

/What's so bad about me fuckin to make money? I had to put up with the cock and bollocks routine plenty for free, why not turn a few pence, now. And that life meant I could also enjoy the occasional woman. Always knew my preference. But it wasn't til I gave up on polite society that everything clicked.

ELIZABETH

Everything clicked the moment I came up with that whopper. I'm good at fuckin. I wouldn't need no boss. I'd be safer than workin in some chap's house where 'e could sneak up on me. Sure as mud beats slavin away at a factory.

CATHERINE

I was a right cock factory: in, out, onto the next. Perfectly transactional. Just like with ol' Thomas but endin with a few pence. And sometimes, I'd see a woman like me. We stay quiet. But we see each other. We crave each other.

ELIZABETH

We girls crave the summer. That's when it's a seller's market. All the folks on the street. I long for the gents in fashionable suits...

CATHERINE

Them big dresses hiding all that smooth skin. With their big beards...

ELIZABETH

Their big beards... Sometimes I'd be the one yearnin for a taste.

CATHERINE

The taste of their curves in all their variations.

ELIZABETH

The variations neath the fly of every /man.

CATHERINE

/Every man I serviced gave me stability. Lodgings, food... but you'd be surprised. Sometimes, rarely, a woman would find her way to my corner.

ELIZABETH

I'd be at my corner, and catch him lookin...

CATHERINE

She'd look at me and hold my gaze.

ELIZABETH

I'd drop my eyes,

CATHERINE

I'd smile friendly, but gently lick my lips.

CATHERINE

She'd make her way to me.

ELIZABETH

He'd make his way to me. He'd tell me what he wanted.

CATHERINE

I'd give her a price.

ELIZABETH

I'd agree.

CATHERINE

She'd agree.

ELIZABETH

And then I'd lead him down the alley to my spot where, if he's not in a rush, he'd remove every blessed layer I'm wearin and feast on me with his eyes first. Oh, that part.

CATHERINE

That part where she takes me to where she lives was always my favorite. Oh yes, loves. Women like to be comfortable and take their time. And her servants, none the wiser, her neighbors, any passers by... we're just two women. No reason for scandal. They'd never guess I'd be about to give her a trap lappin she'd never forget.

ELIZABETH

And I forget it all for a minute. Forget the cold, forget the baby I couldn't grow, forget the men who have beaten me. For that minute I'm seein me through his eyes. And I'm glorious.

CATHERINE

It's a glorious thing. Course, if she is in a hurry, it's easy nuff. No one ever looks at two women carrying on. Too much fabric in the way makes for an easy disguise. So right there on the street, I'd hike her dress and give 'er a strum.

*ELIZABETH and CATHERINE sigh.*

ELIZABETH

It was the first time I knew what it meant to earn my own way in life. Not relyin on the strength of a man, but rather his weakness. And I chose it. Some of the other girls hated me for that, but to hell with them. Nothin wrong with choosing your own path in this world.

CATHERINE

Course it's a man's world so most of the time, it was more sweaty lobcocks slappin me in the gullet. Still, if for every 90 men I got one woman, I took the pegos and was happy for it. May not sound worth it to most.

ELIZABETH

To each their own, I sponse.

*Beat.*

*Carnival Barker music plays.*

CATHERINE

Ladies and Gentleman! We do hope you're enjoyin the show so far.

ELIZABETH

We now have come to what the books would remember as:

CATHERINE

"The Double Event!"

ELIZABETH

Like, seeing two plays in one day.

CATHERINE

Two for one!

Buy One Get One!  
ELIZABETH

"The Double Event"  
CATHERINE

We're lowering the prices...  
ELIZABETH

While hiking up our knickers!  
CATHERINE

I like that bit, you just come up with that?  
ELIZABETH

On the spot. We are here  
CATHERINE

To give you!  
ELIZABETH

The story as it's written  
CATHERINE

As it's recorded  
ELIZABETH

And etched into history books forever!  
CATHERINE

We hope you like it!  
ELIZABETH

Even if we don't!  
CATHERINE

*Elizabeth strikes a dramatic pose*

This here is Long Liz...  
CATHERINE

Known for my Long legs...  
ELIZABETH

Nope! Known for 'er long stories and tall tales!  
CATHERINE

ELIZABETH

Well now, I *was* tall.

CATHERINE

She's a pathological liar!

ELIZABETH

I wouldn't say pathological...

CATHERINE

Go on, tell 'em. Tell em one of your stories.

ELIZABETH

There once was a boy from Italy who...

CATHERINE

No, Liz! Tell em the one bout your family dyin on the Princess Alice!

ELIZABETH

What? Catherine. That one ain't made up...

CATHERINE

Ain't she a hoot, folks? Go on, Liz! *(with a wink to the camera)* We'll believe you!

ELIZABETH

No. Catherine!

CATHERINE

Well, I'll help ya. You see, Long Liz here, her entire family died on the Princess Alice-

ELIZABETH

But it's true.

CATHERINE

Knock it off. Hist'ry books say there weren't even anyone on the crew by the name Stride in the log books. And when they took up subscriptions for the survivors of the ship, none of the applications had the name "Stride" anywhere...

ELIZABETH (confused)

But, I was never aware that they asked for a subscription, otherwise I would have applied.

CATHERINE

Your man didn't die on the Princess Alice, but years later of TB...

ELIZABETH

He lived? Wait, he/ lived?

CATHERINE

/Not to mention the number of kids, and their sexes are always changin story to story...

ELIZABETH

Well that part's just because I dream bout the kids, but he and I were on the /boat when it sank!

CATHERINE

True or not, this is how you're written in the books now, love.

*ELIZABETH turns the tables and takes the metaphorical mic.*

ELIZABETH

Well, what about you? Gold digger, drunk that you were!

CATHERINE

'at's a lie.

ELIZABETH

You brought home a man six years your senior. *(to the camera)* In these times, the age gaps were much smaller.

CATHERINE

There's nothing wrong with older gentlemen.

ELIZABETH

But, that pension of 'is made 'is age a little more palatable.

CATHERINE

Wasn't just that. Thomas Conway and I loved readin and writin. We wrote stories and sold them.

ELIZABETH

Looks like, according to hist'ry he was the writer.

CATHERINE

We couldn't go writin my name on em, could we? But we were partners through and through. Thomas loved me.

ELIZABETH

Cept when he was drunk.

CATHERINE

Ach, that was when I learned my best sailor talk!

ELIZABETH

You'd argue

CATHERINE

I'd outwit 'im

ELIZABETH

He'd hit you

CATHERINE

I'd hit 'im 'arder. It was damn near 'ealthiest relationship I'd ever seen. Certainly equal matched. If it wasn't love, and it wasn't... it was respect. In its way.

*Beat.*

ELIZABETH

That's a lot of nuance for history, ain't it folks? Let's just boil it down. He was abusive.

CATHERINE

So was I.

ELIZABETH

You were a drunk.

CATHERINE

As much as he was.

ELIZABETH

And he hated you so much, he changed his name and took your children so you couldn't be round' em anymore.

CATHERINE

Well now... that's not fair...

ELIZABETH

*(addressing camera)*

And that's our show! We hope you enjoyed...

CATHERINE

"The Double Event!"

*The women irreverently put their fabrics over their light source. Annie, Polly and Mary Jane turn their cameras on. None of them are amused.*

ANNIE

Oy, why'd 'e hafta kill the two story tellers the same night. That part gets longer every time.

POLLY

You had your turn. They get theirs.

ANNIE

You didn't even talk about your deaths. You were supposed to/ tell them about...

ELIZABETH

Ehh, piss it.