

Mary Jane of Whitechapel

A Play in One Act

By Julian Felice

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DEDICATION

To William and Natalie

STORY OF THE PLAY

Mary Jane of Whitechapel is set during the Autumn of Terror of 1888 when London was haunted by the spectre of a killer which, even now, we know only by the name of Jack the Ripper. Alternating between the investigation into the killings and the life of Mary Jane Kelly, the Ripper's final victim, the play re-creates the dark atmosphere of a city horrified by blood and violence. The play is based on real people and incidents: the frantic officers on the case, the scores of suspects, the vigilantes who attack foreigners, and ordinary people, scared of going out at night. The chorus serves at different times as news vendors, passers-by, reporters, and even a line-up of six Rippers whose staccato lines are striking. The action flows seamlessly from pubs, to police station, to streets, and finally to a home where one man, peering in a window, discovers Mary Jane of Whitechapel took her last, terrorized breath.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

Mary Jane of Whitechapel was first presented (as *Mary Jane*) in March, 2012 at Bayside School Drama Studio, Gibraltar. It was directed by Julian Felice with the following cast:

Mary Jane Kelly: Katherine Sanguinetti; Inspector Frederick Abberline: Michael Byrne; Sergeant George Godley: Christopher McAuliffe; Male Ensemble: Christopher Ablitt, Karl Ciruela, Ryan Delgado, Oliver Kelly, Ethan Rocca, and Nicholas Vatvani; Female Ensemble: Leah Bell-Jones, Gabrielle Garcia, Alexandra Menez, and Jessica Olid.

AWARDS

The play won the following awards at the 2012 Gibraltar Drama Festival: *Best Play, Best Original Play, Best Director, and Best Young Actor*. The play and cast also won the following awards at the 2012 Duncan Rand Youth One-Act Play Festival held at Medway Little Theatre, Rochester, UK: *Best Play (Runner-Up), Adjudicator's Award, and Best Actor in a Minor Role*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

8 m, 5 w, numerous extras, much doubling possible

Principal Roles

Mary Jane Kelly
Detective Inspector Frederick Abberline
Detective Sergeant George Godley

Ensemble Roles (can be played by 6 m and 4 w)

Rowan: Mary Jane's first husband.
Leather Apron: Unsavory character, a suspect.
Coroner: Explains the victims' cause of death.
George Lusk: Chairman, Whitechapel Vigilance Committee.
Joe Barnett: Mary Jane's partner.
Police Constable Long: Finds graffiti clues.
Detective Hulse: Works with Long.
Montague John Druitt: Suspect.
Michael Ostrog: Suspect.
Kosminski: Suspect.
Dr. William Gull: Suspect.
Walter Sickert: Suspect.
Prince Albert Victor: Grandson of Queen Victoria, suspect.
Two News Reporters
Julia: Friend of Mary Jane.
Sir Charles Warren: Metropolitan Police Commissioner.
Henry Matthews: Home Secretary.
Elizabeth Foster: Friend of Mary Jane.
Mary Ann Cox: Neighbor of Mary Jane.
Hutchinson: Witness who may have seen the killer.
Sarah Lewis: Neighbor who may have heard screams.
Bowyer: Discovers Mary Jane's body.

*Plus an assortment of news vendors, passers-by, policemen.
There is also a Chorus of six Rippers.*

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(AT RISE: Three MEN sit on stools at a pub, separate from each other, their backs to the audience. Their slouch betrays that they are drinking in the miserable manner of bar loners. They are dressed in Victorian garb. MARY JANE enters. She is a Victorian prostitute. She is dirty and her clothes are in a poor state, the result of many years living in the workhouses. While her trade depends on the semblance of attractiveness, there is an underlying sadness to her, an oppressiveness brought about by the weight of failed dreams. She approaches the men individually, but her actions do not reflect much hope.)

MARY: *(To FIRST MAN.)* Hello, handsome, looking for...?

(The FIRST MAN turns round to face the audience. MARY JANE approaches the SECOND MAN.)

MARY: *(Cont'd. To SECOND MAN.)* What about you, do you want...? *(SHE is similarly rejected. Hopelessness is increasing, To THIRD MAN.)* Look, I need...

(More rejection. SHE sighs and moves through two of the men to stand downstage of them. While THEY speak, she looks around, increasingly desperate for a customer.)

MAN 1: Mary Jane Kelly was born around 1863. Her origins are unknown.

MAN 2: In 1879, she married a coal miner, who died a few years later.

MAN 3: By 1884, she was living and working in London.

MAN 1: She gravitated to the East End and worked as a prostitute.

MAN 2: She was a very quiet woman when sober and noisy when in drink.

MAN 3: She moved into a house in Spitalfields, near Whitechapel.

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MAN 1: It was 1888.

MAN 2: It was the wrong place.

MAN 3: It was the wrong time.

(The dingy LIGHTING of the bar gives way to a street scene. The MEN join the CHORUS in making up the crowd of a busy London street. Two NEWS VENDORS take up opposite positions on stage. PASSERS-BY, WORKERS and a POLICEMAN make up the remainder of the crowd. The crowd mime speaking amongst themselves but, when their dialogue commences, they include the audience in the conversation. MARY JANE remains where she is, maintaining her state of mind.)

NV1: *(Calling out.)* Murder in Whitechapel! Read all about it!
The Star, one penny

NV2: *(Likewise.)* Police Stumped! Woman Killed! Murderer
Loose!

PB 1: Mutilated...

PB 2: Her throat cut...

PB 3: Her head hanging loosely on her neck...

PB 4: Bits missing...

PB 5: No one saw a thing...

PB 6: Murder!

PB 1: The streets aren't safe...

PB 2: Women aren't safe...

PB 3: No one is safe...

PB 4: Don't go out at night...

PB 5: Lock up your doors...

PB 6: *(Referring to the POLICEMAN.)* 'Cos this lot don't
know a thing!

(ALL stop to scowl at the POLICEMAN, who is trying to walk his beat.)

POLICEMAN: All right, you lot! Clear off! Don't you have any
jobs to go to?

ALL: NO!

POLICEMAN: Don't you have anything better to do?

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ALL: NO!

POLICEMAN: Don't you have anywhere else to go?

ALL: NO!

(ROWAN enters, looking like part of the street scene.)

PB 1: When are you going to catch this killer?

ROWAN: *(Calling.)* Mary!

POLICEMAN: I can assure you that the Metropolitan Police have the best men on the job.

PB 2: Who did it?

ROWAN: Mary!

POLICEMAN: Commissioner Warren has promised to dedicate all our best resources.

ROWAN: Mary!

PB 3: I heard it was a Jew!

POLICEMAN: We are following a number of leads.

ROWAN: MARY!

(The CROWD clears. We are now in Mary's home in 1879. HER manner changes – she seems much happier.)

MARY: *(Surprised.)* Rowan! Sorry darling, I didn't hear you.

ROWAN: *(Cheery.)* What have you been up to? You look filthy.

MARY: Cleaning the stove. You have no idea how dirty it all gets. *(HE looks at HER.)* What?

ROWAN: Guess.

MARY: I don't know. Tell me.

ROWAN: I found work, didn't I?

MARY: You didn't.

ROWAN: I did!

MARY: *(Ecstatically.)* Oh Rowan! *(SHE embraces HIM.)* Where?

ROWAN: Down the coal mine. It's not much, but it's a start.

MARY: A start for us, my husband.

ROWAN: Get me a drink. To celebrate, like.

End of Freeview

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