

**NOBODY'S CHILDREN**

**ACT ONE / SCENE ONE**

**A STEET IN LONDON ENGLAND, 1899.**

*MARY, a young girl of about fourteen appears in a special on stage.*

MARY

What if? Two small words that have haunted men and women throughout history. What if I had been born, not to my poor mother who died shortly afterwards, but instead to the wife of the wealthy landowner in the cottage down the road? What if my father, desperate for money, had not taken that internship and moved to London where the adventures of my life were about to begin?

*Fog rolls in.*

What if, on that fateful Christmas Eve in 1899, instead of going left to catch a glimpse of the window at Hamley's I had gone home with father? Had I chosen differently, whose to say what might have happened.

*JACOB appears from the fog.*

What ifs, my father would caution me, are useless.

JACOB

Your life is a series of riddles, which you consciously or unconsciously follow in order to solve the mystery that is...you.

*JACOB steps back into the fog.*

MARY

I had no idea what he meant at the time, but I was about to find out.

*Throughout the following, four children appear from behind and between buildings begging those who pass by for money.*

**(#01) WHEN CHRISTMAS TIME IS HERE**

CHILDREN

IT'S CHRISTMAS EVE AGAIN AND WE  
ARE OUT HERE IN THE COLD  
NO PRESENTS FOR THE LIKES OF US  
NO FAMILY TO HOLD  
AND SO WE BEG FOR SCRAPS TO EAT  
WITH THREADBARE SHOES UPON OUR FEET  
FOR US THERE IS NO FESTIVE CHEER  
WHEN CHRISTMAS TIME IS HERE

A passerby crosses the stage

CHILD

Alms for the poor. Alms for the -

*The passerby continues on their way, simply ignoring the children*

CHILDREN

THE PASSERBY CAN'T EVEN SEE  
US STANDING IN THE STREET  
WE ONLY GET THE THIRD DEGREE  
FROM BEADLES ON THIS BEAT  
WE'VE BEEN THIS WAY FOR YEARS ON END  
THERE'S NO POINT TRYING TO PRETEND  
WE WISH FOR TOYS THAT WON'T APPEAR  
WHEN CHRISTMAS TIME IS HERE.

WE HEAR GOD REST YE GENTLEMEN  
LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY  
THE WORLD IS FILLED WITH HOPE AS WE  
GET CLOSE TO CHRISTMAS DAY

WE DARE IMAGINE CLOTTED CREAM  
AND CHOCOLATES FROM AFAR  
BUT WHEN WE WAKE UP FROM THIS DREAM  
WE'RE RIGHT BACK WHERE WE ARE

*JACOB appears again holding onto several cages. One cage he hands to MARY and the two of them celebrate their recent good fortune.*

**(#01A) TWO PENCE FIVE**

JACOB

TWO PENCE FIVE  
TWO PENCE FIVE  
DON'T IT MAKE YOU FEEL ALIVE  
KNOWING YOU GOT TWO PENCE FIVE  
JUST TO CATCH A RAT?

MARY / JACOB

OUR TECHNIQUE  
TRIED AND TRUE  
LET A FEW RATS LOOSE THEN YOU  
WHISTLE AND THEN TWO BY TWO  
THEY COME AS FAST AS THAT  
(holding up two cages)

JACOB  
THIS IS EDWARD, THIS ONE'S REIT,

MARY  
THIS HERE'S RACHEL, AIN'T SHE SWEET?

JACOB  
REMY, REGGIE, AND ROBERTA  
THEY'S ALL TAME.  
THEY'D NEVER HURT YA.

IT'S A FACT  
PEOPLE HATE  
RATS OF ANY SIZE AND WEIGHT  
AND FOR THIS THE GOING RATE  
TO CAPTURE THEM ALIVE  
IS TWO PENCE, TWO PENCE,  
TWO PENCE FIVE.

*While JACOB and MARY continue to celebrate their good fortune, the children beg once more on a nearby corner.*

**(#01B) WHEN CHRISTMAS TIME IS HERE**

CHILDREN  
THERE SEEMS TO BE NO END IN SIGHT  
FOR THOSE OF US WHO PLEAD  
AND SO WE STAND HERE DAY AND NIGHT  
THE CHILDREN MOST IN NEED  
NO SHILLING, FARTHING, PENCE OR POUND  
LOST CHILDREN WHO ARE NEVER FOUND  
WE'LL BE THIS WAY AGAIN NEXT YEAR  
WHEN CHRISTMAS TIME IS HERE

*The special once more focuses on MARY.*

MARY  
One last word. I am telling this story as the  
child I once was. This adventure is mine.

*The lights restore to the street scene.*

JACOB

Here you go.

*EDWARD, one of the four children begging sees JACOB hand his daughter a coin.*

JACOB (CONT'D)

Treat yourself. Go on. Hamley's is just across the way, as if you didn't know. Just bring Rachel home in one piece and don't dawdle.

*JACOB exits. MARY is about to cross the street when EDWARD, blocks her way.*

MARY

Let me pass.

EDWARD

This here bit of sidewalk belongs to me. Now if you want to get from here to there (pointing) you'll have to pay a toll.

MARY

Don't be ridiculous.

EDWARD

Ridiculous, am I?

MARY

Yes. Unless you're a troll and this is a bridge, move aside.

*MARY goes to move and EDWARD blocks her way again while several other children join him.*

I see. You are a troll and you're not alone.

EDWARD

Who is you calling a troll?

FLORA

She thinks she's better than us.

MARY

I assure you that isn't the case, but I'm in a hurry so...what is the going rate to get from here to there (pointing) on this cold Christmas Eve?

EDWARD

A shilling.

MARY

Fine.

*She puts down the box to reach into a small bag inside her pocket. As she does this, one of the girls, NELLIE, grabs the box.*

Here's your shilling. Now let me...

*MARY reaches down to grab the box and notices it missing.*

Who took my parcel? Give it here!

No one says anything.

I mean it!

*The children stand defiantly looking at her*

I paid you your shilling. Give me back my box.

NELLIE

(holding it up)

You mean this here thing?

MARY

Give it back.

FLORA

Sounds like it might be worth another shilling. What do you say Edward?

EDWARD

I say we look inside and see what is so important about it. Might be worth more than a shilling.

MARY

I assure you, it is not. Please, just give it back and let me on my way.

EDWARD

(To Nellie)

Hand it here!

*FLORA hands EDWARD the box and the children gather round to have a look.*

Now, let's have a little peek at what's inside, shall we?

*EDWARD opens the box.*  
It's a RAT!

*The CHILDREN run and scream in every direction as the rat scurries away.*

CHILDREN  
A rat! Run! Vermin! Rat! Get it away from me!  
Where did it go? Rat! Rat!

*Unbeknownst to EDWARD the BEADLE has come up behind him.*

BEADLE  
(Putting his hand on EDWARD's shoulder)  
Here now! What's all the commotion?

*The CHILDREN all freeze*

EDWARD  
Nothing.

BEADLE  
Didn't look like nothing just now, did it?

CLIFFORD  
We were just playing, is all.

BEADLE  
Playing at what?

FLORA  
Hoops and sticks.

BEADLE  
Don't see no hoops and the only stick is this one in my hand.

(he produces his BEADY club)

Now, what you got there? Come on now. Don't make me wrap your knuckles for it.

*EDWARD opens his fist to show the shilling.*

Well, well. A little pick pocket, are you?

EDWARD  
No sir. It was given me.

BEADLE  
Given? By whom?

MARY

By me, sir.

BEADLE

And where, may I ask, did you get this here shilling?

MARY

From my father, sir.

BEADLE

And where is your father?

MARY

Gone home.

BEADLE

A likely story. But here's what I think. I think you was all begging and bothering respectable folks by pilfering from their pockets. That's what I think. And begging and pilfering are both against the law where I come from. And when someone begs and pilfers on my beat....

*The BEADLE blows his whistle and another officers appears.*

They are arrested.

*The five children are grabbed by the collar.*

Seems to me, the whole lot of you need some lessons in how to behave. That's the problem with the youth of today. They ain't got no manners. Don't know their place. Not enough discipline.

**(#02)WHEN I WAS A BOY**

BEADLE (CONT'D)

WHEN I WAS A BOY I PLAYED BY THE RULES,  
I DID WHAT I WAS TOLD.  
I MINDED MY P'S AND Q'S YOU SEE,  
AND NOW THAT I AM OLD.  
I'VE COME TO EXPECT THAT EV'RY KID,  
SHOULD ACT AND BEHAVE THE WAY I DID.  
AND THOSE WHO ARE BAD,WELL GOD FORBID,  
WILL SIMPLY HAVE TO PAY.  
BY BEING SENT AWAY.

WHEN I WAS A BOY WE KNEW OUR PLACE,  
BE SEEN BUT NEVER HEARD.  
SINCE NOBODY ASKED A THING OF ME,

I NEVER SAID A WORD.  
I GREW TO RESPECT AUTHORITY,  
SO MUCH THAT I CHOSE THE LIFE YOU SEE.  
DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE TWELVE OR TEN OR THREE,  
YOU SIMPLY HAVE TO PAY.  
BY BEING SENT AWAY.

CHILDREN ARE THE WORST.  
VERMON ON TWO FEET.  
EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK THESE DAYS THERE'S GARBAGE ON THE STREET.  
IT'S TIME TO CLEAN THE GUTTERS,  
OF ALL THE DIRT AND SLIME.  
A NEVER-ENDING JOB, BUT STILL A GOOD USE OF MY TIME.

WHEN I WAS A BOY MY FOLKS WERE STRICT,  
AND IF I CHOSE TO LIE.  
THEY'D LOCK ME INSIDE A DARKENED ROOM,  
AND WARN ME NOT TO CRY.  
I LEARNED TO BE TOUGH INSIDE AND OUT,  
CAUSE THAT'S WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT.  
DON'T CARE WHAT THE PHILANTHROPIC SHOUT.  
IF CHILDREN DISOBEY,  
THEY SIMPLY HAVE TO PAY.  
BY BEING SENT AWAY.

Let's go. Come on with yous.

*The children are hauled away.*