

The Wardrobe Audition Scene 3

A boys' Catholic boarding school attached to an abbey and run by Benedictine monks, England, 11th November 1888. We hear singing choristers or similar sounds of the time and place.

The papers are awash with stories of a series of gruesome murders that have terrorized Whitechapel in London since the summer. TOM, fifteen-years-old, ARCHIE, sixteen-years-old, HUGO, fifteen-years-old, and JAMES, sixteen-years-old, are students of the school. They huddle together in the wardrobe. TOM reads from a copy of The London Times dated 10th November 1888; he reads with flourish. He reads by the light of a church candle or candle-lamp. HUGO scratches his initials into the wall with a knife.

TOM. *(Reading)* "During the early hours of yesterday morning another murder of a most revolting and fiendish character took place in Spitalfields. This is the seventh which has occurred in this immediate neighbourhood, and the character of the mutilations leaves very little doubt that the murderer in this instance is the same person who has committed the previous ones.'

HUGO. I thought there were only four.

JAMES. Shhh!

TOM. "The scene of this last crime is at Number 26 Dorset Street, which is about 200 yards distant from 35 Hanbury Street, where the unfortunate woman, Mary Ann Nicholls, was so foully murdered.

ARCHIE. Hugo, what are you doing?

HUGO. Writing my initials. Next to these ones. A. R. Who do we know with the initials A.R.?

JAMES. *(To TOM)* Get on with it, Tom.

TOM. *(Reading)* About one o'clock yesterday morning a person living in the court opposite to the room occupied by the woman heard her singing the song "Sweet Violets."

ARCHIE sings the song "Sweet Violets," chorus by Joseph Emmet taken from his 1882 play "Fritz Among the Gypsies."

ARCHIE. *(Singing the song)* Sweet Violets, sweeter than all the roses...

JAMES. *(Speaking over ARCHIE'S singing)* Shhh! Tom, finish reading it.

ARCHIE. *(Continuing)* Covered all over from head to toe.

JAMES. Tom?

TOM & ARCHIE. Covered all over with sweet violets.

ARCHIE. *(Singing)* There once was a farmer who took a young miss

In the back of the barn where he gave her a...

TOM. Lecture on horses and chickens and eggs

And told her that she had such beautiful...

HUGO. Manners that suited a girl of her charms

A girl that he wanted to take in his...

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TOM. Washing and ironing and then if she did

They would get married and raise lots of...

ARCHIE/TOM/HUGO: *(Deliberately taunting JAMES)* Sweet Violets, sweeter than all the roses,

Covered all over with sweet violets...!

JAMES. *(Snatching the paper from TOM)* Well if you won't read it, I will.

HUGO snatches the paper from JAMES; ARCHIE snatches it from HUGO and returns it to TOM. They all laugh at JAMES.

JAMES. Just read it, would you?

ARCHIE. Somebody's hungry for all the gory details!

TOM. Maybe he's wondering what the papers are saying about him? If you can sneak out of the dormitory to come here, perhaps you can also sneak off to London.

JAMES. Don't be ridiculous. Just get on with it.

TOM. All right. *(Smoothing the paper, deliberately taking his time. Reading:)* "At a quarter to 11 yesterday morning, as the woman was thirty five shillings in arrears with her rent, Mr M'Carthy sent an employee to No 13 to get some rent. But knocking on the door, he was unable to obtain an answer. He then turned the handle of the door and found it was locked. A pane of glass in one of the windows was broken. He put his hand through the aperture and -

ARCHIE. *(Shaking JAMES suddenly)* Boo!

JAMES lets out a little cry of shock. They laugh at him.

JAMES. You're such an infant, Archie.

ARCHIE. You're the one screeching like a little girl.

TOM. Did you think it was the ghost?

The others make ghostly noises

TOM. They say she was strangled to death.

ARCHIE. In this very wardrobe.

HUGO. By a royalist soldier during the Bolton Massacre of sixteen forty-four.

TOM. They say she begged for life. *(Imitating the dying girl)* Please, please don't kill me.

HUGO and ARCHIE reenact the strangulation; TOM laughs

JAMES. *(Standing to exit)* Fine, if you're going to be like this about it.

TOM. *(Stopping James)* Wait, wait. No more jokes.

JAMES. Promise?

TOM. *(Crossing his heart with a finger)* Cross my heart.

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TOM winks at ARCHIE as JAMES resumes his place; TOM continues reading (as he progresses through the article his tone sobers).

TOM. *(Reading)* "He put his hand inside the aperture and pulled aside the muslin curtain which covered it. On his looking into the room a shocking sight presented itself. He could see a woman lying on the bed entirely naked, covered with blood and apparently dead. Her throat was cut from ear to ear, right down to the spinal column. The ears and nose had been cut clean off. The breasts had also been cleanly cut off and placed on a table, which was by the side of the bed. The stomach and abdomen had been ripped open, while the face was slashed about, so that the features of the poor creature were beyond all recognition. The kidneys and heart had also been removed from the body and placed on the table by the side of the breasts. The liver had likewise been removed and lain on the right thigh. The lower portion of the body and uterus had been cut out and these appeared to be missing. The thighs had been cut. A more horrible or sickening sight could not be imagined.

Pause.

JAMES. It's him. It has to be.

ARCHIE. But this is so much more...

HUGO. Gruesome.

JAMES. He's evolving. He's developing new techniques.

TOM. Do I detect a hint of excitement, James?

JAMES. No, of course not

TOM. Do you like the idea of cutting a woman into little pieces?

JAMES. Don't be disgusting. I'm just pointing out that he clearly has a fascination with dissection.

Perhaps he's a medical student.

PETER. *(Mocking JAMES by imitating him)* Perhaps he's a medical student.

ARCHIE. Aren't you always reading medical journals?

TOM. James, isn't your father a doctor?

JAMES. Very funny.

TOM. Perhaps they've got it wrong. We shouldn't be calling him Jack the Ripper, but *James* the Ripper!

ARCHIE cackles. JAMES swipes at him and they play-fight. Suddenly the door handle of the wardrobe turns; they freeze. There is a heavy knock on the door.

TOM. *(A terrified whisper)* Father Aloysius.

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ARCHIE. No he's away from the Abbey until tomorrow.

The knocking on the door grows more aggressive.

HUGO. How did he find us?

JAMES. You were laughing so loudly you gave us away!

TOM. *(Putting a finger to his lips to silence the others; whispering)* I have the only key.

A key is heard in the lock. The handle of the door turns.

TOM. *(Imploring the other boys)* Please don't leave me with him. Please. Please don't leave me with him.

The door of the wardrobe opens a crack; the room beyond is in darkness. One by one the boys exit the wardrobe: first ARCHIE, then HUGO, then JAMES.

TOM. *(To JAMES as he exits)* Promise me you won't leave me with him.

JAMES nods and crosses his heart with his finger. But as soon as JAMES exits, the door is slammed shut behind him sealing TOM inside.

TOM. No. No!

The key turns in the lock. TOM struggles to fit his key in the lock to open it. but in his terror he drops the key with trembling hands. He scrambles on the floor of the wardrobe to find the key before resigning himself to the inevitable, curling his knees up to his chest and hugging them close. He waits. He sings softly.

TOM. Sweet violets, sweeter than all the roses...