

# CAUGHT BY THE CUFF.



*An Original Farce,*

IN ONE ACT.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

*"A Photographic Fix," &c., &c.*

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CAUGHT BY THE CUFF.

*First performed at the Victoria Theatre (under the management of Messrs. Frampton and Fenton), on Saturday, the 30th of September, 1865.*

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**Characters.**

MR. HECTOR SHAKERLY FUNK ... Mr. J. HOWARD,  
BENJAMIN BUTT (a *Commercial Traveller in the Hardware line*) ..... Mr. J. BRADSHAW.  
JOB BEAT .....(a *Policeman*)..... Mr. GEORGE YARNOLD.  
HARRY CUFF ..... (a *Ditto*) ..... Mr. NEARNEY.  
MRS. PRYER (a *Lodging-house Keeper*) Miss MARIA DALY.

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**Costumes.**

FUNK.—Black coat and waistcoat, dark trousers.  
BUTT.—Coarse brown coat and waistcoat, dark trousers, fur travelling cap.  
BEAT and CUFF.—Policeman's dress.  
Mrs. PRYER.—Spotted muslin, small cap.

[Mr. Lacy's List.]

## CAUGHT BY THE CUFF.

SCENE.—*A Kitchen; practicable window, c.; entrance, L. u. E. ; entrance, R. u. E. ; practicable door leading into cellar, L. 2 E. ; table, chairs, &c.; candle lighted on table; small shelf, L.*

MRS. PRYER *discovered arranging and dusting chairs.*

MRS. PRYER. The leastest noise terrifies me in these awful times, when burglars is as plentiful as blackberries, and murders commoner nor musherrooms. Ah! if Mr. Beat of the Force didn't come in to cheer me up of a evening, I never should have the courage to go to bed alone. When Beat's on dooty, I know there's protection for Eliza Ann ; and if he does have supper here nearly every night, what's that to anybody—the Force must be kept up, and policeman can't live on air; especially night air, 'taint likely, (*tap heard at window*) Gracious! What's that ? Go away !

BEAT, (*opening window —calls*) Eliza Ann, it's only me.  
(*comes in through window*)

MRS. P. Oh, Mr. Beat, you've unstrung all my nerves—I'm shaking like a *ashpan* leaf—however could you frighten me so ?

BEAT. Frighten you! Why, bless you, Beat's hopes would be blasted if he only thought he'd alarmed the angel that ministers mutton to the anxious watchman, and supplies pickles to the protector of Podger's Row. I say, got any lodgers in the house ?

MRS. P. NO, the train isn't in yet. Whatever wind blowed you here so early ?

BEAT. Devotion and duty. First devotion to the creature that contributes to the comfort of X 101, and second—dooty, that sacred dooty that impels Beat to seek the spot where there *isn't* any danger.

MRS. P. However can you expose yourself in that reckless manner? but you always was romantic, and it's my belief you'll fall a victim to dooty. Is there any news ?

BEAT. My eye, there is! awful news too.

MRS. P. Well, what is it ?

BEAT. Why the inspector's just been to me, and says he,

quite confidential like, " There's glory to be won, and we want you to lead the van."

MRS. P. But didn't you say you couldn't drive?

BEAT. "Tain't a regular van like Pickford's or a prison van, it's just a nobby way of asking me to catch a ferocious burglar.

MRS. P. YOU won't, will you?

BEAT. Certainly not; am I a maniac? Contemplate me calmly and inform me if there's any indication of insanity about X 101—of course I don't mean to----- I know my dooty.

MRS. P. Well, what did you say ?

BEAT. "Inspector," says I, "beneath these buttons there's a heart panting to capture the culprit."

MRS. P. Oh! Beat, you're too good for the Force, you are. What did the inspector think of that ?

BEAT. Why, he was idiot enough to *think* it was true.

MRS. P. Deluded creature !

BEAT. Of course he is—so they all are. Then he goes on to tell me that Jack Sheppard was a lamb to him, and nothing like him had ever been heard of before; so they have put a hundred pounds on his head, dead or alive—and where do you think he was last seen ?

MRS. P. Where!

BEAT. Why in Podger's Row.

MRS. P. Jack Sheppard in Podger's Row—I'm going off.

BEAT, (*supporting her*) Cheer up, Eliza Ann, I've got you. You haven't heard all yet—the vagabond is roving about dressed as a policeman—yes, he's actually attired in this pleasing and picturesque costume.

MRS. P. The impudence of the wretch! What a wicked world we live in ! However will you know him ?

BEAT. Well, I don't see the absolute necessity of making his acquaintance at all; but I've details of the vagabond that would appal you—the right cuff of his coat is torn off—supposed to be in a murderous struggle with his victim, and in fact—well, never mind, I've information enough-----

MRS. P. To capture him.

BEAT. Not a bit of it; to avoid him though.

MRS. P. And you've undertook this awful dooty ?

BEAT. I have, and I mean to do it; and if I see him I'll—(*flourishing staff*)—I'll keep out of his way. (*aside*) Eliza Ann don't seem as anxious about supper as I could wish, (*going*)

MRS. P. (*detaining him*) 'Ardy man, promise Eliza Ann you'll take-----

BEAT, (*eagerly*) Supper!

MRS. P. (*aside*) I didn't mean that.

BEAT. Certainly I will: did you say nine or half-past ?

MRS. P. I can't resist him; say in half an hour, and if any

lodgers come they'll be sure to go to bed at once. I'm all in, a tremble about Jack Sheppard !

BEAT, (*going*) Good-bye ; and if the stiffened body of Beat be found weltering in its gore—(*aside*)—which ain't likely—drop a tear for the protector of Podger's Row ! (*gets through window calling from outside*) Booty first and supper afterwards.

*Exit.*

MRS. P. It's a marvel to me how robberies gets committed at all when there's some thousand men in the Force, and all doing their dooty like My. Beat; perilling their lives every night going down into areas, and mostly dark nights, so dark that even the inspector can't see—and what he have suffered ! Many a time Beat have told me his legs would scarce carry him up again on account of being took with giddiness in the head, poor fellow; and to think I was going to grudge him the bit of supper this very night of all nights, when murder is rampagous, and stalking about like a spelican in the wilderness. (*knock heard at door*) Mercy protect us ! Perhaps that's him. I've a good mind not to open the door, (*loud knocking heard again*) Perhaps it's lodgers after all. (*calls out*) Coming! *Exit.,.*

*Re-enter* MRS. PRYER, L., *followed by* MR. BUTT *and* MR. FUNK, *they each carry a small valise or carpet bag.*

BUTT. Here's a pretty night to keep gentlemen waiting in the street. Aint deaf, are you? We might have been robbed and murdered before you opened the door, (*puts valise, L.*)

FUNK. Mrs. funk might have been rendered an inconsolable widow, and all the little Funks orphans—it's disgraceful! (*puts valise, R.*)

MRS. P. Beg pardon for keeping you outside, but there's awful doings going on. I'm that terrified you might blow me down with a pea-blower. Awful doings there is!

FUNK. Awful doings! (*looking alarmed*) There isn't any Immediate danger is there ?

MRS. P. Awful doings there is, indeed. Jack Sheppard—leastwise not Jack Sheppard, but a connection of his, principally on the mother's side—is wandering about murdering everybody.

FUNK. Where?

MRS. P. In this very row !

FUNK, (*dropping carpet bag*) Oh! Then we're all done for.

BUTT, (to FUNK) Now then, what's the matter? What are you pitching your wardrobe about in that reckless manner for—ain't afraid, are you ?

FUNK. NO ! oh no ! I—I—in fact I think it's a subject for congratulation, (*with a forced laugh*) Ah, ah! I feel awful

jolly under the circumstances; I dare say you wouldn't think so to look at me.

BUTT. I certainly shouldn't, (to MRS. PRYER) NOW then, if you've finished with Jack Sheppard, perhaps you'll shew me a room; I've been compressed in a railway carriage all day, with a dog fancier on one side and a draught on the other, until I have succeeded in getting a cold in my head and a sore throat, (to FUNK) Good night—I should advise you to look after your throat too, I shouldn't wonder if it isn't sore in the morning, (to MRS. PRYER) NOW then. (MRS. PRYER *lights candle and shews him out, R.*)

FUNK. Look after my throat—he shouldn't be surprised if it was sore in the morning—I should. What does he mean ? Why can't he leave my throat alone ? I'm naturally a man of a courageous disposition, in the absence of danger; but I'd be grateful if it was morning and I was out of this. What a consummate idiot I was to make his acquaintance in a railway carriage. He said he had been recommended to lodge here, and when I mentioned I'd never been in London, he suggested this would " do for me"- *do* for me. Ominous expression ! I shouldn't wonder if it doesn't do for me altogether. I see it all—he's in league with that criminal looking female—I'm their victim, this is a snare ! a delusion! a sell—a condemned cell. That's Jack Sheppard—I'm getting excited—decidedly I am—its useless denying the fact. I shan't go to bed ; I shall insist on sitting up all night, and if I see any desire on the part of that female to put me to bed, I shall resist, (*reflecting*) I have it. I'll put on the policeman's coat I purchased yesterday ; I got it of a gentleman who seemed anxious to dispose of it—in fact, I may say there was a disposition on his part to get rid of that garment at an alarming sacrifice; he must have been selling off or *clearing* out—three shillings and sixpence for a hat and coat is a ridiculous sum. It's true the right cuff is torn off, what's that to me. I shall be just as imposing when attired in the garb of the Force, and I dare say it will be the means of securing me a peaceful night, and of striking terror into Jack Sheppard and that blood-thirsty female—here she comes. I dare say she'll want me to go to bed at once.

*Enter MRS. PRYER, R.*

MRS. P. Hope I haven't kept you waiting; this way, please—everything's ready.

FUNK, (*aside*) Except the victim.

MRS. P. And I'll warrant you'll never sleep sounder anywhere.

FUNK, (*aside*) Never sleep sounder anywhere ! She's positively getting facetious over her murderous intention; I've a

good mind to inform her of my resolution—I will, too. (*aloud*) I say, don't you wait up on my account.

MRS. P. I always sees the lodgers to bed afore I locks up.

FUNK. Well, nevermind seeing me to bed—in fact, I ain't going to bed.

MRS. P. Ain't going to bed ? (*aside*) He's a lunertick; and Mr. Beat's coming back to supper.

FUNK. Certainly not. Will you inform me why I should go to bed ? (*aside*) I see this has upset their diabolical scheme.

MRS. P. Why to sleep—besides you must be tired.

FUNK. I ain't tired—I ought to know, (*yawns*) In fact I'm too fresh—I want hard labour, that's what I want.

MRS. P. Ain't tired ! I say you are—you're looking awful bad now, you'll be dead before morning.

FUNK, (*aside*) Be dead before morning ! there she goes again, with another pleasing allusion to my dissolution, (*takes chair, places carpet bag on his knees and arranges himself for the night*)

MRS. P. Whatever does he mean?

FUNK. NOW, my good woman, you'd better turn in—good night! (*blows out candle, sits—aside*) Why the devil don't she go ?

MRS. P. (*aside*) Oh, he's a raving lunertick ! I must get him to bed ; Beat will be here directly, (*approaching him — aloud*) It's quite distressing to see you on that chair.

FUNK. Well, being a man of an obliging disposition, I'll move to the other, (*takes another chair, places carpet bag, and arranges himself as before*) Good night! (*aside*) Why the deuce don't she go ?

MRS. P. (*aside*) Poor gentleman, he's awful bad; but he must go to bed—I'll coax him. (*approaching him*) You'll be all right when you get up stairs. Let me take your bag, there's a good gentleman, (*attempts to take his carpet bag*)

FUNK. Here, let go—will you ! (*snatches bag away—aside*) I believe they are going to attack me at once! I'll pretend to go to bed, and come down here when that she-brigand has turned in. (*aloud*) Give me a candle—I've made up my mind to go to bed.

MRS. P. That's a good gentleman, you'll be calmer directly, (*lights candle and gives him*) First room on the left, I'll shew you. (*attempts to follow him*)

FUNK, (*stopping her*) Stay where you are, can't you—what do you come following me about for? Get out.

*Exit with carpet bag, R.*

MRS. P. Well I thought I never should get him to bed, he's the most aggravating gent I've seen for many a day—it's drink that have turned his brain I suppose. Only to fancy he

was going to set up all night! I'd like to catch him at it when I expects Beat every minute. Talking about Beat, I'll lay his supper, (*goes to cupboard, takes out table-cloth, knives, &c, she prepares table*) There now I've got a dozen and a half oysters and a quart of porter for him, and if there was a pearl in every oyster they wouldn't be too good, (*goes to cupboard and brings out dish containing oysters*) All shelled ready for eating--now for his porter, (*gets porter from cupboard*) There, now I think everything is all right. Porter is good for him, cause he says - it keeps up the *mussel* and *cartridge*; but then he do talk so learned that it's quite confusing, often I says to him what's the use of the Blue Coat School bringing up all those young boys to be policemen, and teaching them grammar and Greek when they ought to be learning tumbling and running to fit 'em for their dooty; but then he *excites* a bit of a book and says somebody else said " Knowledge was *sour*," and blows me up for being stoopid, so I gives in. I wonder whether that maniac is asleep? the other gentleman told me they was both going away early in the morning, I expect that's his keeper—it's a pity he don't look after him better instead of letting him loose, frightening delicate females into fits. I've a good mind to lock him in his room with the dooplicate key, and I will too as soon as I've put down a couple of chops for my supper. I shall have plenty of time afore Beat comes, and if he do come fust he'll have manners enough to wait. *Exit, L.*

*Enter MR, PUNK, R , carrying a policeman's coat and hat, he is in his shirt sleeves.*

FUNK. I've just descended that tortuous declivity that leads from my cell, and I'm becoming more impressed every moment with the solemnity of my melancholy situation; my legs are shaking like a calves' foot jelly, and I perspire without the slightest provocation. I've inspected my chamber, and have arrived at the inevitable conclusion that if the spots on the floor ain't blood, they are something else ; and the awful conviction that that's the condemned cell where they put the victim the night before he is despatched, forces itself upon me, I'd almost swear I saw that gallows-looking female crawling and creeping up to my room with a key in her hand just like Blue Beard's wife ; I wish she'd drop it—I don't mean the key, but her murderous Intention ; this suspense is agonizing. I'll put on this elegant and economical garment, and I've no doubt I shall feel better, (*puts oncoat*) What a pity that cuff is gone, evidently torn away in a struggle—never mind! (*puts on hat*) Now then, I don't think any unbiassed individual would call that lot dear at three shillings and sixpence; it's quite reviving I declare, I feel like the whole of Scotland Yard rolled in

one—egad ! I'm getting quite brave, (*sees trunk*) Holloa! there's *his* trunk, with a laudable curiosity I mean to look into the contents of it. (*goes to Butts valise and opens it*) Murder ! (*shuts it down suddenly*) I'm a dead man! it's full of pistols and revolvers; I shall never see Mrs. Funk any more! Funk, be a man, take a desperate *revolver*—I mean a desperate resolver, so I will; my head's turning! (*goes to valise and takes out a pistol*) I'll fight him with his own weapons, and the 'scutcheon of the Funks shall be stained with blood, (*puts pistol in his pocket*) Not being loaded, there can't be any danger of explosion, (*looking at table*) Holloa, breakfast laid for to-morrow; I might not be alive to-morrow for that matinal repast, so I'll have it at once; I dare say they'll charge for it in the bill, (*goes to table*) Oysters! shelled too, evident proof they have a knife in the house, (*sits L., and eats oysters*) Awful idea! only fancy being opened like this delicate bivalve—rather muddy that one —imagine being taken out of your shell and put into a bed ; I mean being taken out of your bed and put into a shell. I suppose they'll indulge me with a coffin of some description; it strikes me that last oyster has been out of water for a considerable time—if it wasn't for the melancholy circumstances under which I am accomplishing my testing and this dozen, I should positively be jolly ; but every time I think of that fearful female and Jack Sheppard, it damps anything like exhilaration.

MRS. P. (*looking in, L.*) I'll be down directly, Mr. Beat. *Exit.*

FUNK, (*turning round*) Why, that was Charlotte Corday, I thought she was in bed. She called me Beat—who the devil's Beat ?—it's disgustingly familiar to talk to a dying man that way. She didn't seem the slightest degree surprised at finding me here. Perhaps the coat intimidated her—I thought it would. Porter, too! (*takes up pewter and drinks*) Hollo! under the influence of that exciting and exhilarating fluid I'd face sixty Sheppards, and forty thousand she-brigands wouldn't alarm----- (*sees policeman's bull's-eye through window—rises alarmed, and looks at it*) Take it away, I was only joking—don't fire—I see his eye on me. Jack Sheppard—I beg your pardon—John Sheppard—Mr. John Sheppard—don't murder me !—there's a hundred of them at least. I'm a dead man—hide me. (*runs about and finally goes into coal cellar, L.*)

*Enter BEAT at window, carrying a bull's-eye lantern.*

BEAT. I've had enough of it. I call that a good night's work—been twice into the " Blue Bottle," and moistened my clay, and if I ain't entitled to supper and shelter after that there's something rotten in the British Constitution. I observe the prudent and providential Pryer, with that instinct peculiar

to females, has invested in the nourishing native ; and I see by the pewter that the liquor has not been neglected. I suppose she'll be down directly; but as I don't see the slightest necessity for waiting, here goes, (*sits, L.—takes up dish and looks at it—puts it down again and turns the bull's-eye on it*) Well, I call that *selfish* !— it's mean—it's disgusting—it's irritating ! [*takes up pewter, looks in it, then turns bull's-eye on it*] And that's selfisher, and meaner, and disgusting! (*turns it upside down*) Not a drain, not a drop. Eliza Ann, a repetition of this conduct will produce in the protector of Podgers' Row feelings of unmitigated contempt. She might have moved the shells—I hate shells, damn the shells, (*takes up dish, comes down stage*) I'll fire them in here, (*opens coal-cellar door and pitches shells in—brings back dish and replaces it*) There now, Beat is avenged, but not satisfied, (*sits, L.*)

*Enter* MRS. PRYER with a plate containing two chops—she sits, R.

MRS. P. I've locked in that lunetik, and done a couple of chops for my supper; I knewed you liked oysters best—nice things, ain't they ?

BEAT. Very; shells ain't though.

MRS. P. (*aside*) He might have had the manners to wait. (*she eats*)

BEAT, (*aside*) I can't stand this much longer, it's too trying. (*aloud*) You'll burst directly!

MRS. P. (*looking up*) Law! whatever have you done with the shells ?

BEAT. Whatever have *you* done with the oysters ?

MRS. P. Me done with the oysters ! you're trifling with my feelings.

BEAT. I know jolly well you're trifling with mine; my stomach's rumbling like a coach over a wooden pavement.

MRS. P. Well, you should have put more pepper with them.

BEAT. Aggravating female, I've never seen an oyster, not even the *ghost* of one to put *pepper* with.

MRS. P. (*looking into pewter*) Oh, *this* is too much!

BEAT. I think it's too little, it's a d-----d sight too little—there, I feel better now.

MRS. P. Many a time I've seen you in liquor, but never seed you in this way—you shouldn't have took the porter if it was too strong.

BEAT. Me took the porter? I know I shall do something rash directly !

MRS. P. Yes, you—I saw you.

BEAT. GO it, young woman; stick to that!

MRS. P. I mean to : perhaps you'll have the meanness to say that you didn't hear me call out to you.

BEAT. Of course I didn't—don't go asking me ridiculous questions ; you've been drinking—you're regular excited, that's what you are—I expects you've eaten the oysters, and forgotten it.

MRS. P. I been drinking—I—oh ! you bad man to go and bolt them heavenly victuals like a devouring locust, and then deny it.

BEAT, *(aside)* There she goes again! I can't stand it much longer; I shall explode directly, I know I shall, *(aloud)* Go to bed, I'm ashamed of you.

MRS. P. You're a low man; why don't you say you drank the porter, like a man ?

BEAT. Because if I did I should be telling a whopper, like a woman I know; I wouldn't have minded if you'd only left me half a dozen oysters, and enough porter to rinse a fellow's mouth out; but to nail the lot, and then to gorge yourself with chops before my very eyes, without saying, "Beat, will you have a taste ?" was mean; gallons of porter won't wash this offence out.

MRS. P. To know that I seed you in that chair flopping them oysters down your throat; and then to see you a sitting there looking as innocent as a plaster Samuel, which is sold for one shilling and sixpence along with Garibaldi making the pair, is enough to bring down depredation and vengeance on your head. Do you mean to say you never took them oysters ?

BEAT. Yes.

MRS. P. And do you mean to say you never took that porter.

BEAT. Yes.

MRS. P. And do you mean to say that you never heard me call out to you ?

BEAT. Yes.

MRS. P. Then I maintains there's another policeman in this yer house, and your dooplicate is here.

BEAT. A policeman in this house ! *(both rise)* Stop a bit! a policeman—it's the burglar, *(aside)* The man I *ain't* looking for; Jack Sheppard ! *(aloud)* Was his cuff torn ?

MRS. P. Burglar! mercy! I'm going off! *(falls into BEAT's arms)*

BEAT, *(supporting her)* Blowed if I don't think Eliza Ann likes going off, 'specially under these circumstances.

MRS. P. *(opening her eyes)* Have they stole the plate ?

BEAT, *(reflecting)* Eh! Now, unless she alludes to the two tin candlesticks and that pewter I'm done. Oh! certainly not: wake up and tell us all about it.

MRS. P. *(seizing his arm)* Oh, Beat, I'm all of a shiver.

BEAT. Tell us all about it.

MRS. P. I'd just laid your supper, the same as I've done for the last nine months.

BEAT, *(aside)* An allusion that she might have spared me. *(aloud)* Go on.

MRS. P. There was a dozen and a half of oysters, and a quart of porter shelled.

BEAT. The porter shelled—you're right, it was.

MRS. P. NO, the oysters shelled—my head's turning. I just went up stairs to lock in a lunetick lodger, and when I came down, I looked in and saw you at supper.

BEAT. I tell you it wasn't me.

MRS. P. Well, he was dressed in a policeman's coat, and as his back was towards—his face looked awful.

BEAT. Horrible, *(nervously)* Don't you shake so. *(aside)* I wish I was out of this.

MRS. P. It's fearful to think on—he was sitting in that chair.

BEAT. Where?

MRS. P. *(pointing to chair)* There—I fancy I see him now.

BEAT. You're wandering, there isn't anybody: don't take on so.

MRS. P. Oh ! he's looking at me—take him away—ha! ha ! *(attitude)*

BEAT, *(aside)* I'll clear out. *(aloud)* I'll just go down to the yard and get assistance, *(attempts to go)*

MRS. P. *(seizing him)* No, Beat, you'll never leave me alive, we'll die together.

BEAT, *(aside)* Not if I know it. What a fool I was to come here to-night: here's a prospect of a double funeral, on an empty stomach too.

MRS. P. We'll be buried together, there will be some consolation in that.

BEAT. There might be to the London Necropolis Company—there won't be for me.

MRS. P. He'll be down directly—our minutes are numbered—yours are numbered.

BEAT. Yes, I know, I am numbered X 101 : don't you go alluding to a fellow's profession at this awful time, *(aside)* I wish I was out of this Kensal Green atmosphere. Better let me go for assistance.

MRS. P. Never—never! it will soon be over. We'll meet our fate together. One grave shall hold us both, *(holds him)*

BEAT. Then I'm blown if I stay in it; I object to it—here let me go.

MRS. P. *(clinging to him)* No, no, no !

BEAT. Here's a pretty go : it's getting serious.

MRS. P. *(laying her head on his breast)* We'll sink into the vault together and become spirits.

BEAT, *(contemplating her)* There's a sleeping beauty! Hang

me if I don't think she's been sinking down the spirit vaults alone, and stayed there too long. Wake up !

MRS P. Are you prepared?

BEAT. Yes, I am prepared to resist, do as I tell you—Now shout after me—he's sure to hear us and that'll alarm him. My eye! if we could only take him ? One hundred pounds reward ! Now then, begin!

BOTH, *(together)* Come on—death to the burglar—no quarter! Beat's sworn to take him dead or alive! Death to the policeman without a cuff.

BEAT. That will make him tremble, *(he flourishes policeman's staff)* Come on, Eliza Ann. *(both going)* Holloa! here's his trunk—*(opens trunk)*—revolvers, by jingo! he's brought his tools. We are in for it! *(takes a pistol)* Eliza Ann, help yourself.

MRS. P. *(takes a pistol)* What am I to do ?

BEAT. Why follow me with it.

*(MRS. PRYER puts it on the dish, and follows BEAT, who exits, L., both shouting " No quarter ! Death to the false Policeman!")*

*Enter FUNK from coal cellar—carries hat in his hand—face somewhat black.*

FUNK. If that murderous maniac sees me, I shall be dead, before I can explain anything, or divest myself of this ultramarine winding sheet. Economical but erroneous investment, come off. *(unbuttons coat)* Female brigand and some person unknown, are now wandering about the premises, with the fixed but infernal intention of blowing my brains out, independent of which I've been bombarded with shells, fortunately not explosive ones; but accepting any theory of probabilities, I don't see how I am to escape assassination: if fate favors me in eluding that criminal female and the unknown, my travelling companion of yesterday still survives, to blow me to atoms with the deadly revolvers. Oh, why did I eat oysters and go to the Coal Hole ? It always knocks me up. *(noise heard outside)* I say, don't fire ! I bought it cheap—one cuff gone. Don't tire, there's a good fellow, *(noise of pistol heard outside—falls on his knees)* I'm shot, *(looking round)* I ain't shot after all. *(rising)* I'd better get off this winding sheet at once, *(takes off coat and hat and places them on chair)* Perhaps they'll entertain the pleasing but delusive idea that I've escaped. Now for retirement and carbonic contemplation, *(goes to coal cellar—looking in)* It's the dirtiest place I ever was in. *(enters and shuts door)*

*Enter MR. BUTT, R., in shirt sleeves.*

BUTT. I'm forcibly impressed with the idea that somebody's

playing skittles in this house, there's such a devil of a row that I can't sleep, (*yawns*) Messrs. Stock, Lock and Co. had better get somebody else to represent them in the gun and pistol trade, because I don't like the occupation—a stale bed every night and a fresh railway carriage every morning don't suit my complaint. I mustn't sleep in the day, and I can't sleep at night, so that I'm a combination of a policeman and a railway guard, (*shivering*) It's infernally cold, and I've come down without coat or waistcoat. Holloa, what's this ? (*takes up coat and hat*) The lamented Pryer was in the Force I suppose. Wonder how I should look in it. (*puts on coat and hat*) Here's a cuff gone : never mind, it's jolly comfortable. I might as well sit in this as crawl up that spiral ascent denominated a staircase, that leads up to my den. Now what the deuce am I to do till morning? (*looks round*) Table laid for breakfast I perceive, (*goes to table*) An early breakfast is the same price as a late one I suppose, so here goes, (*takes MRS. PETER'S plate containing chop and sits L.*) It's the remnant of a supper I think. Only one chop, (*looks into pewter*) And no porter—never mind, I'm rather peckish, (*eats*)

*Enter MR. BEAT and MRS. PRYER, L., they approach him cautiously, and hold pistols at back of his head.*

Ahem, I've demolished this chop. I've a good mind to polish up my pistols—murderous weapons these new ones! I shouldn't like a couple of them levelled at the back of my brain. Why the devil couldn't that old party leave some more porter out—trust a landlady for generosity—she looks a regular old flamingo, (*feels in pocket*) Hollo, here's a comforter, (*takes out comforter*) Just the very identical flute. I want to keep my neck warm, 'specially as I've got a sore throat. What a pity that cuff's torn off. (*places comforter round his neck, passing one end over each shoulder—MRS. PRYER seizes one end, BEAT the other, they gradually tighten it, and drag him up by his neck*)

BEAT. One cuff gone is there ? You're a murderous villain ! We've got you. (*tugs end*)

MRS. P. Yes, we've got you. (*tugs end*)

BUTT. YOU certainly have, and when you've done oscillating me, perhaps you'll have the goodness to let go—I'm choking !

MRS. P. Strike him in some vital part, Beat—hold him down.

BUTT. Excitable female, what's up ?

BEAT. What's up ? why your neck will be soon. I've got all the information about you—you'll swing for it. (*points pistol at him*) Only wink and you're a dead man.

BUTT. Then I shouldn't think of winking under those circumstances.

BEAT. Deluded the police, did you; but Beat has got his eye on you.

BUTT. Take it off then, there's a good fellow ; it's choking me—it's an eyesore.

BEAT. There's a hundred pounds on your head.

BUTT. Have the goodness to remove that also, and put it in here, (*showing pocket*)

MRS. P. Strike him in some vital part. Ugh, you villain ! (*tugs comforter*)

BUTT. Hold hard!

MRS. P. SO we means to. (*both tug*)

BUTT. Let me explain—take away this female, or I'll strugg—ugh ! ugh ! (*they tighten comforter*)

MRS. P. YOU won't *ugh* long at that rate. (*BUTT attempts to speak*)

BEAT. Not a word—circumstantial evidence dead against you. Eliza Ann, have you got him tight ?

MRS. P. Yes.

BEAT. Hold on, then; I'm going to ask him a question. (*looking at him attentively*) Now, I'll bet a sov'reign you didn't expect to be caught this way, did you?

BUTT, (*looking bewildered*) Of course I didn't.

BEAT. I thought so.

MRS. P. NOW I'm going to ask you a question, (*pointspistol at him*)

BUTT, (*aside*) There's the other maniac beginning, (*aloud*) Confound it! that's my pistol—let go!

BEAT. Exactly so. He acknowledges to the weapon—another important item in the evidence. I don't believe they'd recommend you to mercy.

BUTT, (*aside*) What the devil do they mean ? I shall go mad directly, (*aloud*) Let go—I'm choking—(*they tighten comforter*)—oking!—oking! I'll give you both in charge!

BEAT. Will you, my tulip ? It's melancholy to hear a man on his way to the gallows deluding himself. Come along ! (*they lead him across*)

BUTT. On my way to the gallows—everybody mad! Here, I say, what's your name.

BEAT. My name's Beat—*Job* Beat.

BUTT. I suppose this is *Job's* comforter; then take it off, I don't want it.

BEAT. I suppose you don't.

MRS. P. Come along, you varmint.

BUTT. I insist on explaining.

BEAT. Take my advice, don't. You ain't expected to criminate yourself : that cuff will hang you.

BUTT. This comforter will directly; I shall strike something

or somebody in a minute! (BEAT and MRS. PRYER drag him across to coal cellar)

BEAT. In with you, my covey—no good resisting; come along, it's neck or nothing with you.

BUTT. I'm under the impression it's nothing but neck. (BEAT and MRS. PRYER shove him in)

BEAT, (*shutting door*) The next cell you'll get will be in Newgate, (*wipes his face*) There, when the inspector hears I got the burglar he won't believe it. One hundred pounds—my eye! Eliza Ann, only fancy! (*noise heard inside coal cellar*) What's that? (*they both go to door and listen*) There's a dozen of 'em at least. Oh! Podger's Row is full of burglars. Help, help! I hear them kicking each other, (*he runs to window and springs rattle—MRS. PRYER sinks into a chair*)

*Enter CUFF (another policeman) through window.*

BEAT. You're too late for the reward. I've captured all of them single-handed, assisted by this brave female, (*to MRS. PRYER*) Wake up!

CUFF. HOW many of them?

BEAT. Six: it's been awful work.

CUFF. Are you wounded?

BEAT. Mortally, I'm afraid.

CUFF. Where?

BEAT, (*pointing to MRS. PRYER*) Not before her. (*makes signs to him to keep quiet*)

CUFF. Six of 'em—I wonder you wasn't overpowered.

BEAT. Not likely; we were two to one.

CUFF. TWO to one! How can you make that out if there were six?

BEAT. I said it was two to one we weren't. You're a fool, that's what you are, Cuff! You're always putting a fellow out.

CUFF. Where are they?

BEAT. He's in there, (*pointing to coal cellar*)

CUFF. They you mean.

BEAT. NO, I don't, I mean *he*. The ringleader—the murderer—the bloodsucker—in fact they're all in there! (*scuffle heard inside*) Don't you hear 'em kicking and murdering each other?

CUFF. Hadn't we better let 'em out, else nobody won't be hung.

BEAT. Lord! I never thought of that. Now then, prepare to strike.

(*Tableau—BEAT opens door—MRS. PRYER holds pistol towards it—CUFF flourishes policeman's staff—BUTT and FUNK issue with their faces blackened—FUNK staggers a few paces, then sinks down on stage—BUTT looks about quite bewildered*)

MRS. P. Why, I declare they have been garotting each other till they're black in the face.

FUNK, *(to Audience)* Let Mrs. Funk know I expired calmly.

CUFF, *(looking into coal cellar)* Come on, you other four.

BEAT, *(stopping him)* What are you at ?

CUFF. Calling them out.

BEAT. I'll call you out directly -don't be a fool, two at a time is as much as we can manage. Let 'em alone, I hear 'em moving, shut the door, you idiot, *(closes the door)*

CUFF, *(goes over and seizes BUTT)* Well, governor, we've got you at last, they're sure to take a cast of your head when you are cut down.

BUTT. They are all mad ! Cast of my head!—cut down ! I'm awfully cut up : I can't understand it.

CUFF, *(rushes across and seizes FUNK, drags him up)* Now then, governor, you've had enough of it. Come up—we ain't a-going to indulge you in all sort of luxuries—what have you got to say ?

FUNK. Nothing. I'm a dead man; break the news gently to Mrs. Funk, Crape Terrace, Brighton.

CUFF. Funk, Crape Terrace, Brighton ? I say, is your name Hector Funk?

FUNK. It was when I was alive.

CUFF. Why, bless you, don't you know me? I'm Harry Cuff.

FUNK. Yes, I know—one cuff gone. I bought it cheap. Let me go back to the cemetery, *(points to coal cellar)*

CUFF, *(to BEAT)* I say, there's some mistake here, *(to FUNK)* Look at me—I'm Harry Cuff as went to school with you.

FUNK, *(contemplating him melancholily)* So you are. I've been very much shaken. How's your mother?

CUFF, *(to BEAT)* I know jolly well you've made a mess of it; bless you, this is a friend of mine !

BEAT. Very likely, *(seizing BUTT)* and this is a friend of mine, and I mean to stick to him.

MRS. P. Yes, we means to stick to him!

CUFF, *(to FUNK)* I say, Hector my boy, explain it a bit, will you?

FUNK, *(to CUFF)* I say I'm delighted to see you—don't let 'em hang me. How's Mrs. Cuff?

CUFF. NOW go on.

FUNK. My head's not very clear; but I see it all now—It's the fault of that coat, *(pointing to BUTT)* I must have purchased it of the burglar that everybody's looking for.

BEAT, *(to BUTT)* And you, you villain, you prigged it.

BUTT. NO, I didn't; I found it on that chair.

BEAT. Whew! I'm afraid there's been a slight mistake somewhere.

FUNK. Yes, I was afraid of being robbed, so I sat up most half the night, and just as I had finished a dozen and a half of oysters, I found out that bloodhound was pursuing a burglar with a torn cuff. I fled to the coal cellar—left the coat on the chair. I'm getting confused—I can't go on.

BUTT. And as I couldn't sleep, I came down in the night, found the coat there, and like a fool put it on; since that fatal moment I've been pursued by this fiend for the real burglar.

BEAT. Whew ! I've done it this time and no mistake.

CUFF, (*to BEAT*) Beat, you're a fool.

BUTT, (*to BEAT*) I consider you a consummate ass.

MRS. P. Yes, Beat, I don't think you did your dooty.

FUNK, (*pointing to BEAT*) Hold him down while I tell him something. (*CUFF holds BEAT—FUNK approaching BEAT*) You're a ridiculous fool.

BEAT. HOW was I to know the gentleman bought the coat; there's the identical sleeve gone; and I mean to say I have done my dooty.

FUNK. And nearly suffocated me!

BUTT. And nearly strangled me!

MRS. P. Yes, you know you very nearly strangled the gentleman. I told you not to pull so hard.

BEAT. Eliza Ann, I don't remember that little observation of yours; but as you seem to have left me alone on the field, like a good soldier I mean to come to the front—(*coming to footlights*) and if our friends there will only give us a volley (of *applause* I mean) encouraged by their rounds of to-night, I should go my rounds to-morrow, determined not to be CAUGHT BY THE CUFF again.

**Curtain.**