

This production and film are dedicated to the memory of John Koopman who began the opera program at Lawrence University and whose loss is felt by the community. We, the opera studies ensemble, stand on his legacy.

The Nefarious, Immoral but Highly Profitable Enterprise of Mr. Burke & Mr. Hare
Music by Julian Grant | Libretto by Mark Campbell

Directed by
Copeland Woodruff

Produced by
Iris Designs

Music Director/Piano/MIDI orchestration – Kristin Roach
MIDI orchestration – Darrin Newhart
Live Orchestra Conductor – Michael Clayville
Sound Engineer – Brent Hauer
Technical Director – Austin Rose

Dr. Robert Knox – Luke Honeck
Dr. Ferguson – David Womack
William Burke – Max Muter
William Hare – Baron Lam
Helen McDougal – Emily Austin
Margaret Hare – Colleen Bur
Donald – Zachary Adams
Abigail Simpson – Grace Drummond
Daft Jamie – Jack Murphy
Mary Paterson – Meghan Burroughs
Madge Docherty – Emma Milton

Flute – Carmen Magestro
Viola – Gabe Hartmark
Bassoon – Jessica Kleebauer
Cello – Ernesto Bañuelos
Trombone – Omar Tlatelpa-Nieto
Bass – Ali Remondini
Percussion – Spencer Bunch-Hotaling
Harp – Rachel Overby

Assistant Director – Morgan Donahue
Stage Manager – Tommy Dubnicka
Assistant Stage Managers – Emmeline Sipe, Mae Capaldi, Sam Victor

COMPLETE LIBRETTO

The Nefarious, Immoral
but Highly Profitable Enterprise
of Mr. Burke & Mr. Hare

A chamber opera in one act

Music
Julian Grant

Libretto
Mark Campbell

Commissioned by Music-Theatre Group
with the support of Boston Lyric Opera

World Premiere:
Boston Lyric Opera
November 2017

SETTING

The main set is an abstracted representation of a surgery theatre in Edinburgh, 1820: a central area and raised platform with a row of seats on either side, anatomical posters, a large chalkboard to write on, and a surgery table. There are three other settings in the piece: a boardinghouse, a pub and a street, which can be delineated using projections of engraved line drawings from the period. Many elements in the set design may be re-purposed: the raised platforms can become jury stands or a bar; the surgery table may become a bed, a coffin, or a courtroom stand.

CAST

PRINCIPALS

Dr. Robert Knox. Tenor. 35 years old. A highly intelligent man and a witty and charismatic lecturer, greatly beloved by his students. When success gets the better of him, he compromises his morals for ambition, tidily turning a blind eye to the methods Burke and Hare use to supply him with dissection subjects for his lectures; becoming arrogant and downright monstrous when he is confronted about this decision. To this day, Dr. Knox is identified by every Scottish child in the nursery rhyme about Burke and Hare as “the boy who buys the beef.”

Dr. Ferguson. High baritone. 20-25 years old. Young assistant to Dr. Knox, a somewhat Byronic figure who has fallen in love with Mary Paterson, a woman beneath his class. Ferguson is fully aware of the immorality in the crimes being committed by Burke and Hare, but is caught in a dilemma he cannot control—and ultimately decides to preserve his reputation by not getting involved.

William Burke. Baritone. 35 years old. A co-owner of a boardinghouse in a slum of Edinburgh called Tanner’s Close. Poor, alcoholic, a bit slow, but surprisingly sweet (for serial killer), a “hail fellow well met with the vestige of a moral conscience; more the brawn than the brains of the enterprise.

William Hare. Bass. 25 years old. Owns the boardinghouse with Burke, he is quick, wiry, intelligent, and without morals. Hare knows how to manipulate Burke to get what he wants. He can switch on a ferocious temper as quickly as a seductive charm.

Helen McDougal. Soprano. 30 years old. Burke’s lover. In cahoots with Margaret Hare; conniving and deceitful, somewhat sexy.

Margaret Hare. Mezzo-soprano. 30 years old. Hare’s wife. A bit more ambitious and practical than Helen and almost as much of a ringleader as her husband is.

SECONDARY ROLES (THE VICTIMS)

Donald. Bass. 60-65 years old. A former soldier fallen on bad times.

Abigail Simpson. Soprano. 55 years old. A feeble, indigent salt and camstone seller arrived in town to collect a pension.

Daft Jamie. 18 years old. Tenor. A sweet idiot savant who wanders the streets of Edinburgh barefoot. Much beloved by locals.

Mary Paterson. Mezzo-soprano. 18 years old. A young prostitute prone to drink, who sees an opportunity in her relationship with Ferguson.

Madge Docherty. Soprano. 40 years old. A recent immigrant from Ireland, come to Edinburgh in search of her son.

LIST OF SCENES

Prologue.

The Surgery Theatre

Part I. Donald

Scene 1. The surgery theatre
Scene 2. The boardinghouse at Tanner’s Close
Scene 3. The Lecture Hall of the Surgery Theatre

Part II. Abigail Simpson

Scene 1. The pub
Scene 2. The surgery theatre
Scene 3. The pub
Scene 4. The surgery theatre

Part III. The Others

The surgery theatre, pub and street

Part IV. Daft Jamie

Scene 1. The surgery theatre
Scene 2. The street
Scene 3. The surgery theatre

Part V. Mary Paterson

Scene 1. The surgery theatre
Scene 2. The pub
Scene 3. The surgery theatre

Part VI. Madge Docherty

Scene 1. The surgery theatre
Scene 2. The boardinghouse at Tanner’s Close
Scene 3. The surgery theatre

Part VII. Exeunt Alles

The surgery theatre, pub and street

Production Note:

The ensemble of victims never leave the stage until the end of the work. When they finish a scene, they return to their “seat” in the surgery theatre.

PROLOGUE.

[Lights up on an abstracted surgery theatre that appears to be out of use. Rows of cloth cover a lectern and the seats on either side of the “stage.” The cast files in and all—anonously—restore the theatre to its old purpose: the cloths are lifted, surfaces dusted, surgery tables rolled on, surgical instruments polished and displayed, anatomy charts rolled down, and a chalkboard with the phrase “the wing wherewith” is erased and cleaned. As the cast does this, they sing in very hushed and dispassionate voices.]

ENSEMBLE:

The people
Of Edinburgh
Are not dying
Quickly enough.
Are not dying,
Are not dying,
Quickly enough.
Quickly enough,
To serve as subjects
In our world-renowned
Schools of anatomy.
In our world-renowned
Schools of anatomy.

Supply cannot keep up
With demand.
Supply cannot keep up
With demand.
Graveyards are unreliable.
Graveyards are unreliable.
And always remember:
“The fresher, the better
The fresher, the better
The fresher, the better.”

The law declares:

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

“Only those the state has executed,
Are to this purpose rightly suited.”
And that rule merely forces
Schools to seek other sources.

DR. KNOX, DR. FERGUSON: *[Over above.]*

“The fresher, the better
The fresher, the better
The fresher, the better.”

ENSEMBLE:

The people
Of Edinburgh
Are not dying,
Are not dying,
Quickly enough.
Not dying
Quickly enough.

Quickly enough
To serve as subjects
In our world-renowned
Schools of anatomy.
Our world-renowned
Schools of anatomy,
Schools of anatomy.
The people
Of Edinburgh
Are not dying,
Are not dying,
Quickly enough.
Quickly enough.
Quickly enough.

[The last touches of the transformation into a surgery theatre are complete, including the reveal of a sign that says, “Lectures in Practical Anatomy and Operative Surgery, Dr. Robert Knox.” The ensemble sits in their “assigned” seats.]

PART I. DONALD

Scene 1.

[Donald rises and goes to the chalkboard. He writes his first name only.]

DONALD: *[Recalling the sounds of a drum and flute in battle.]*

Pum pa dum Pum pa dum Pum pa dum...
Ter-root ter-root, ter-root, te-roo...

[Singing a section of a battle song:]

“Fierce were the battles we fought in,
Bonny boys, brave and true,
But we will ne’er be forgotten!
Not him, not me, not you.”

[Sadly.]

Not him, not me, not you...

I was a soldier,
Fought for your country,
Got shot in battle,
Some years ago.

You soon forgot me,
So I forgot *you*.
Became a loner,
And roamed through life.

Pum pa dum Pum pa dum Pum pa dum...
Ter-root ter-root, ter-root, te-roo...

DONALD:

I drew a pension,
And in my last days
Found me some lodgings
In Tanner's Close.

You'd never know me,
You'd never know me,
If I'd not died there,
In Tanner's Close.

The name is Donald.
Aye, only Donald.
Court records,
Newspapers,
History books,
All the same—
Gave me no last name.

Pum pa dum Pum pa dum Pum pa dum...
Ter-root ter-root, ter-root, te-roo...
[Singing a section of a battle song:]
But we will ne'er be forgotten!
Not him, not me, not you."

[Donald throws a handful of straw on to the ground and lies down in it. The image of a large medical chart is replaced by an engraving of the interior of a boardinghouse at Tanner's Close: dilapidated walls, a few beds.]

Scene 2.

[The boardinghouse in Tanner's Close. William Burke and William Hare enter. Hare kicks the body of Donald; he does not respond.]

HARE:

Dead.
Fookin' dead.

BURKE:

Dead
As a doorknob.

HARE:

Some cheek.
Blighter owes four quid in rent.
I'd like to break his neck.

BURKE:

No time for dreaming.
Help me with his stinking corpse.

[Burke goes to lift Donald.]

HARE:

I got a thought.

BURKE:

Oh, not a thought.

HARE:

But this one's good.

BURKE:

So was the last.

HARE:

You know old Tom—

BURKE:

Who digs up graves?

HARE:

He says a bloke
In Surgeons' Square
Will pay ten quid
For one of these.

BURKE:

A dead old man?
For bloody what?

HARE:

They carve 'em up
And look inside.

BURKE:

Well, Tom's a dog

HARE:

A well-off dog.
We may's well try.
We've naught to lose.

BURKE:

And if we're caught?

HARE:

We won't be caught.

BURKE:

It don't seem right,
I tell you,
It don't seem right.
I tell you.

HARE:

And was it right
For him to die
When rent was due?

BURKE:

It don't seem right,
I tell you,
It don't seem right.

HARE:

And this is why
You'll never get
Ahead in life.
Here's a chance
To make a few bob,
To buy a nice gift for our ladies,
To do something useful.
[Threateningly.]
And yes, it does seem right,
I tell you,
And yes—yes!—it does seem right,
I tell you,
It's bloody right,
It's damn bloody right!

BURKE: *[Shocked by Hare's sudden ferocity. After a short pause.]*

Well, then.
How?

HARE:

Grab the tea-chest.
Oh, and rub some dirt on him
So he looks like he was buried.

BURKE:

Old bugger's worth more dead than alive.

[Burke and Hare freeze. Donald addresses the audience.]

DONALD:

And that is how I
Came to the table,
Over there,
At Surgeons' Square.

[Burke and Hare return to their seats. Donald rises, lies down on a surgery table and covers himself with a sheet.]

Scene 3.

[The lecture hall with the sign: "Lectures in Practical Anatomy and Operative Surgery, Dr. Robert Knox." Knox stands before his students and speaks.]

KNOX: *[Dramatically and passionately.]*

"Ignorance"—Ignorance—
"Is the curse of God;
"Knowledge"—Knowledge—
"Is the wing wherewith
We fly to heaven."

[Musing.]

The wing wherewith
We fly to heaven.
To heaven.
So, my wingéd students:
As Shakespeare tells us,
We must pursue
Knowledge.
Above all.
Above all,
Knowledge.
We cannot—
Shall not—
Quake when the ignorant tell us that
Knowledge is dangerous.
When the imbecilic say:
"Only God can know all."
For God gave us brains,
God gave us brains,
(With some exceptions).
God gave us
Reason, intellect.
God wants us to marvel
At His work,
To gaze upon His Creation,
In all its perfection,
And understand it,
And understand it,
Understand it completely.
When they say we go too far,
We must go farther.
When they mewl
That we are breaking a rule,
We must break more.
And when the law limits our subjects,
We must defy it, defy it...
For here, here, in Surgeons' Square,
Just a stone's throw from the other schools
(And if you need a stone, just ask...)
Here, beneath our sacred dome,
Every syllable,
Every page,
Every chart,
Every incision,
Is devoted to
The pursuit of,
The quest for,
The love of...
Knowledge.

[Ferguson enters, wheeling on a corpse hidden under a sheet. Knox smiles, perhaps too relieved. To Ferguson.]

KNOX:

About time!

[To the class, pointing to the corpse.]

Today's subject.

Never known for his punctuality.

Thank you, Dr. Ferguson.

[Ferguson stands to the side. Knox pulls down the sheet. It is Donald. Knox describes him to the class.]

About sixty years old.

A drunk.

Pickled himself to death.

Explains his freshness.

Took some gunshot here,

Possibly in battle.

Had a bad heart.

Shall we start?

DONALD:

"Fierce were the battles

We fought in,

Bonny boys,

Brave and true!"

But we will ne'er be

Forgotten!

Not him, not me, not you."

ENSEMBLE: *[Quietly intoning.]*

The fresher, the better,

The fresher, the better,

The fresher, the better.

[End Part 1.]

PART II. ABIGAIL SIMPSON

Scene 1.

[An engraving of a pub is projected. Burke, Hare, Helen and Margaret sit at a table. They are inebriated, especially the women. In another corner of the pub is slumped Mary.]

HARE:

A toast to our good fortune!

BURKE:

A toast to dead old Donald!

MARGARET:

A toast to more good fortune!

HELEN:

More money, more things, more whisky!

[They laugh, toast, then freeze. Abigail Simpson rises and writes her name on the chalkboard.]

Scene 2.

ABIGAIL: *[Harassing the audience.]*

Who'll buy me a whisky?

Who'll buy me a whisky?!

Will you, lad?

You, madame?

Who'll buy me a whisky, whisky, whisky?

Just a wee dram,

A wee dram.

Who'll buy me a whisky?

Will you, sir?

You there, lass?

Who'll buy me a whisky?

Will you fill my ass...

[Laughing loudly.]

Sorry, glass!

[To herself.]

In life,

I peddled salt and camstone,

Salt and camstone.

Lived in Gilmerton,

Was in town for the night,

That cold wet night.

I had a whisky,

And then another,

And needed more.

And then they saw me,

They saw me,

A bag of tatters,

All alone.

Oh, how I dreamt

Of going somewhere,

Somewhere far away,

That cold wet night.

Somewhere far away...

I was old.

I was tired.

I was done with life.

How funny then,

When they brought me here,

The doctor called me

"Fresh."

Scene 3.

[Back in the pub, Helen, Margaret, Burke and Hare re-animate and toast.]

HARE:

A toast to our good fortune!

BURKE:

A toast to dead old Donald!

MARGARET:

A toast to more good fortune!

HELEN:

More money, more things, more whisky!

MARGARET/ HELEN:

A toast to our good husbands!
To our good husbands, good husbands, good husbands!

BURKE/HARE:

Hear, hear!

MARGARET/ HELEN: *[Alternating and in unison.]*

And may we add...
That dead old man is but a start,
That dead old man is but a start.
Imagine—imagine!—
Where it could lead,
Where it could lead,
Think of the potential,
If you only follow your heart,
Follow your heart,
And keep dreaming,
Keep dreaming
Of a better life,
A better home,
A brighter future.
A brighter future.
There's more where that came from—
Much, much more,
Much, much more!

HARE: *[A thought flashes in Hare's brain.]*

Words of inspiration.

MARGARET:

And now we're off...

HELEN:

We're off!
Home to warm your bed.

BURKE: *[Kissing Helen on the cheek.]*

Kisses for me Missus.

[Margaret and Helen exit. Burke and Hare turn to their whiskys. Abigail bumps into them.]

ABIGAIL:

Who'll buy me a whisky???

HARE:

Get on home, mother.

ABIGAIL:

Would, if I had one!

[Abigail goes to a corner and sits disconsolately.]

BURKE:

Someone ought to put her out of her misery.

HARE: *[Staring at Abigail.]*

I've got a thought.

BURKE:

Oh, not again.

HARE:

Remember what you said
About the old man?
Worth more dead than alive?

BURKE:

What are you playing at?
What are you playing at?

HARE:

Look! Look around you,
All around you,
In this pub,
On the street,
People sick,
People starved,
People barely alive.

BURKE:

What are you playing at?!

HARE:

Look! Look around you,
All around you,
People old,
People poor,
No one knows,
No one cares,
When they finally croak.

They should be good for something,
Other than the worms,
Other than the soil.
They should be good for someone,
For someone.
Why not us?

All around you,
All around you,
There is coin
To be made,
On the street,
In the pub,
Time for us to collect.

BURKE:

Now I know what you're playing at.
That's murder.

HARE:

It's mercy.

BURKE:

It's immoral.

HARE:

Immoral?
We're only putting one foot
Where the other already is:
In the grave.

BURKE:

Except it's not the grave.
But the butcher block.

HARE:

You know what your problem is?
You have no ambition.
What have you got to lose?
Hunger?
What have you got to lose?
Poverty? Debt?
What have you got to lose?
What? Tell me—
The feeling you'll never
Get out of this stinking,
Beggarly hell?!
What have you got to lose?
What? Tell me—
What have you got to lose?
Look inside you,
Deep inside you,
You're worse off
Than the rest,
And will croak
Just like them.

BURKE:

I won't listen to you.
This is wrong, wrong, wrong.
I won't listen to you.
No matter what you tell me
It's wrong, dead wrong.
Murder is murder,
And that's all there is to it.
All there is to it.
Murder is murder.
I won't listen to you.
I won't listen to you.
[Weaker, starting to yield.]
Murder is murder.

This could be
Our only chance.
This could be
Our only chance.
They should be
Good for something
Other than the worms,
Other than the soil.
They should be
Good for someone,
For someone,
Why not us?
Why not us?

HARE: *[Resolved.]*

Very well.
I'll do it on my own.
But don't come to me
Begging for a farthing
When I'm in clover.

HARE: *[Starting to walk away, then returning.]*

Just this once...

BURKE: *[After a pause, relenting.]*

We can't tell the ladies.

HARE: *[Quoting.]*

"There's more, there's more where that came from—"
Where do you think I got the idea?
Just this once.

BURKE:

We split the money.

HARE:

Down the middle.
Five quid each.
[Mouthing the phrase.]
...Just this once.

[Ferguson enters furtively with his hat drawn down to hide his face. He sees Mary Paterson in the corner and goes to her. He taps her on the shoulder to rouse her from her stupor; she sees him and stands to kiss him, but Ferguson prevents her with a gesture of discretion.]

HARE:

A lovely lady like yourself ought not be alone.

ABIGAIL:

But alone I am.

HARE:

Come on now,
Let two gentlemen
Buy you a whisky.
[Aside to Burke who is tentative.]

FERGUSON:

Would you like a whisky?

Just this once...

MARY:

Just the one, Doctor.

[Back to Abigail.]

...Won't you, sweet mother?

ABIGAIL:

A cure for my weary heart.
Oh, how I wish
I could go
Somewhere far away,
Far away,
And forget.
Far, far away.

FERGUSON:

Does my weary heart good
Seeing you, Mary.
How I wish we could go
Somewhere far away,
You and I,
And just love.
Far, far away.

[Ferguson and Mary kiss.]

HARE: *[To Abigail, dryly.]*

We can help with that, love.

Scene 4.

ABIGAIL: *[Addressing the audience.]*

They offered me a bed to sleep in
From which I never awoke.
[She goes to a surgery table.]
And the gentleman was right.
My corpse made more money
Than my live body ever did:
Ten quid.
And that was just the start...

[Abigail pulls the sheet over her.]

PART III. THE OTHERS

[A sequence that jumps around from the surgery theatre to the boardinghouse and the pub. Donald, Abigail, Daft Jamie, Mary and Madge take turns naming the next victims of Burke and Hare on the chalkboard.]

MARY: *[Standing and writing the name: "Joseph the Miller."]*

Joseph the Miller,
A beggar,
Ten pounds.

KNOX:

Fine times.
These are
Fine times,
Dr. Ferguson.
We do
Good work,

KNOX:

We teach
Good things,
That touch on the divine—
Very fine times.

DAFT JAMIE: *[Standing and writing "Female, name unknown."]*

Female,
Name unknown,
Vagrant,
Ten pounds.

BURKE:

Fine times.
These are
Fine times,
My delightful wife.
We eat
Fine food,
We drink
Fine drink,
Like all the other swine—
Very fine times.

KNOX: *[With above.]*

Enrollment grows...

FERGUSON: *[With above.]*

As does our stature...

HELEN: *[With above.]*

Pockets grow...

MARGARET: *[With above.]*

As do our bellies...

KNOX, FERGUSON, MARGARET, HELEN, HARE: *[With above.]*

A steady stream...

KNOX, FERGUSON: *[With above.]*

Of students...

MARGARET, HELEN, HARE: *[With above.]*

Of money...

KNOX, FERGUSON: *[With above.]*

And subjects...

MARGARET, HELEN, HARE, BURKE: *[With above.]*

And bodies...

KNOX, FERGUSON, MARGARET, HELEN, HARE, BURKE:

All according to plan.
Let's enjoy it while we can.

MADGE: *[Standing and writing "Male, name unknown."]*

Male,
Name unknown,
From Cheshire,
Drunk,
Ten pounds.

KNOX, FERGUSON, BURKE, HARE, HELEN, MARGARET:

Fine times,
Glad times,
Blessed times,
Joy is all around,
For our
Success,
For our
Good work,
May fortune ever shine—
As in these very fine times.

[While Knox lectures, Donald, Abigail, Daft Jamie, Mary and Madge continue to take turns naming the victims of Burke and Hare on the chalkboard.]

KNOX:

Anatomy, anatomy, in its signification,
meant dissection, or an artificial separation of parts...

DONALD: *[Standing and writing "Elizabeth Haldane."]*

Lizzie Haldane,
Vagrant,
Eight pounds.

KNOX:

Torsion of the main arteries, to suppress hemorrhage,
has few advocates among British surgeons...

ABIGAIL: *[Standing and writing "Effie."]*

Effie,
Cinder-gatherer,
Ten pounds.

KNOX:

The gouge, the gouge, the gouge, is an instrument which
has been overlooked by the modern surgeon...

DAFT JAMIE: *[Standing and writing "Grandmother, name unknown."]*

Grandmother,
Name unknown,
From Glasgow,
Eight pounds.

KNOX:

Ebony should be preferred to ivory for the handle...

MARY: *[Standing and writing "Grandson, name unknown."]*

Grandson,
Name unknown,
From Glasgow,
Blind,
Eight pounds.

KNOX:

Muscles—muscles—muscles—seldom act singly...

MADGE: *[Standing and writing "Female, name unknown."]*

Female,
Name unknown,
Beggar,
Nine pounds.

KNOX:

The fresh brain...the fresh brain...the fresh brain...

DONALD: *[Standing and writing "Female, name unknown."]*

Female,
Name unknown,
Drunk,
Eight pounds.

KNOX:

The materials of nutrition and growth...

ABIGAIL: *[Standing and writing "Peggy Haldane."]*

Peggy Haldane,
Prostitute
Eight pounds.

KNOX:

The subject should never be too emaciated or too fat...

DAFT JAMIE: *[Standing and writing "Mrs. Hostler."]*

Mrs. Hostler
Widowed washerwoman...

KNOX:

Or too fat...

DAFT JAMIE:

Eight pounds.

KNOX:

The semilunar incision...

MARGARET PATERSON: *[Standing and writing "Ann McDougal."]*

Ann McDougal,
Married, from Falkirk,
Ten pounds.

KNOX:

We need not provide for the dead
All that we provide for the living...

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

Ten pounds, nine pounds, eight pounds...
Grandson...Female...Joseph the Miller...
Lizzie Haldane...Ann McDougal...
Eight pounds, nine pounds, ten pounds.

KNOX, FERGUSON, BURKE, HARE, HELEN, MARGARET:

[With above.]

Fine times,
 Glad times,
 Blessed times,
 Joy is all around.
 For our
 Success,
 For our
 Good work,
 May fortune ever shine—
 As in these very fine times.
 Fine times!
 Glad times!
 Blessed times!
 May fortune ever shine
 As in these fine times.

[End Part III.]

PART IV. DAFT JAMIE

Scene 1.

[Daft Jamie rises and writes his name on the chalkboard.]

DAFT JAMIE:

You know me,
 You know me.
 'Course you do.
 Seen me
 On the street.
 Did a jig,
 Even with my bad foot.
 Told a joke,
 Sang a tune for you:
[Daft Jamie sings a fragment from a silly song.]
 “Nothing on me head,
 Nothing on me feet.
 Hatless, shoeless,
 ...But life is oh so, oh so sweet.”
 You know me.
 'Course you do.
 The name's James Wilson,
 But they call me,
 But they call me,
 But they call me,
 “Daft Jamie,”
 Daft Jamie, ah, you know.
 “Daft,” I guess,
 Because they say I'm slow.
 Though I could add,

And subtract,
 With the best of them.
 Never forgot a fact,
 Never forgot a name.

Scene 2.

[On the street, Knox enters and tips his hat to Daft Jamie.]

KNOX:

Good morning, Jamie.

DAFT JAMIE:

Good morning, Doctor Knox...
[Quietly, playing with sound.]
 Doctor blocks...Doctor pox...Doctor mocks...

KNOX:

Tell me, Jamie,
 On what date the full moon will occur
 In the month of June
 In the year of our Lord
 Twenty sixteen?

DAFT JAMIE:

The twentieth, Doctor Knox.
 Doctor blocks, Doctor fox, Doctor...
 A Monday.

KNOX:

Very good, lad.

[Knox presses a coin in Jamie's hands and leaves.]

DAFT JAMIE:

Cruel boys beat me,
 Made fun of me,
 But I just laughed right back.
 My life had a million kindnesses.
 You took care of me
 Well enough,
 Gave me food,
 Gave me snuff.
 But it was your smile,
 Your smile,
 I loved the most.
 A smile, please.
 May I have it again?
 May I?
 May I have it again:?
 “Nothing on my head
 Nothing on my feet.
 Hatless, shoeless,
 Hatless, shoeless,

DAFT JAMIE:

But life is oh so, oh so sweet.
Oh so sweet.”

[Helen and Margaret have entered with baskets. They see Daft Jamie, whisper, then approach him.]

HELEN/MARGARET:

Look who’s about!
Our bonny friend Jamie!
Jamie, Jamie, Jamie...

HELEN:

What a charmer, this one.
Jamie...

MARGARET: *[With above.]*

Many’s the lady
Who wants to be
With Jamie, Jamie...

HELEN:

How about some whisky, laddie?

DAFT JAMIE:

No, thank you.
D-d-don’t drink.

MARGARET:

Prefer a stronger brew, do you?

HELEN/MARGARET:

Come with us.
Come with us then,
Jamie.
Come with us then,
Won’t you Jamie?
Won’t you Jamie?
You wouldn’t turn us down—
You wouldn’t turn us down—
Proper ladies like us?
’Twould be rude.
’Twould be rude.

DAFT JAMIE:

I...I am never rude.
[Agreeing to come.]
Only for a bit.

HELEN/MARGARET:

There’s a lad.

[Helen and Margaret freeze. Daft Jamie moves to the surgery table and lies down, pulling the sheet over him.]

Scene 3.

[In the surgery theatre, Ferguson sits and looks off sadly. Knox enters with a letter.]

KNOX:

Excellent news.
I’ve been recommended to
Teach at the university.
May very soon be bidding adieu
To this place.

FERGUSON: *[Distractedly.]*

Excellent.

KNOX:

That means that this school
Will soon be yours.
Quite impressive
For one so young.

FERGUSON:

Indeed, sir.

KNOX: *[Sarcastically.]*

Your excitement is overwhelming.

FERGUSON:

Sorry, sir.
It’s only that...
This just came in.

[Ferguson pulls back the sheet to reveal Daft Jamie.]

KNOX: *[Initially shocked, then recovers.]*

Daft Jamie.

FERGUSON:

Saw him on the street only this morning.

KNOX:

So did I.

FERGUSON:

Did a jig,
Even with his bad foot.
Seemed fit as a—

KNOX:

What are you playing at?

FERGUSON:

These men.
Burke and Hare.

KNOX:

The suppliers?

FERGUSON:

What if they obtained their corpses another way?

KNOX:

Another way?

FERGUSON:

Other than digging up graves.

KNOX:

Meaning?

FERGUSON:

Murder.

KNOX:

You should spend more time on your books,
And less in low-class pantos.

FERGUSON:

Something is odd.
That's all.
Odd.

KNOX:

Doctor...

What we do,
We do,
For the greater good.

What they do,
They do,
For themselves.

We cure disease,
They spread it;
We lengthen—lengthen—life,
They shorten it;
We give—give!—life,
They take it.
And if one of them,
One of them,
Is sacrificed,
To save a hundred...

Then, my friend,
It is
For the greater, the greater good.
The greater good.

We require cadavers.
These men supply cadavers.
What more do we need to know?

FERGUSON:

I'm only saying—

KNOX: *[Emphatically.]*

What more do we need to know?

[Knox is about to leave, then pivots back.]

KNOX:

However...
If you're so bothered,
Have his head and feet removed.
No one will know who he is then.

[Blackout on Knox and Ferguson. Jamie rises and sings.]

DAFT JAMIE:

Turn a blind eye
On the street;
To them
Who are sick,
To them
Who are lame,
To them
With no name.

Turn a blind eye
Through the town;
To them
Who are poor,
To them
Who can't read,
To them
In despair.

Turn a blind eye,
Turn a blind eye,
And some day, some day,
We will not be there.
We will not be there.
We will not be there...

[End Part IV.]

PART V. MARY PATERSON

Scene 1.

[Mary Paterson rises and writes her name on the chalkboard. She sings.]

MARY:

Just eighteen years old,
I led what they call
A disorderly life.

My parents both dead,
I had little choice,
But to turn to the streets.

Did all right,
Did all right,
Loved the whisky too much,
But I did all right,
Did all right.
All right.

My shape caught the eye,
Of many a man,
All around the old town.

And I was well-known,
Though not as well-known,
As I was to become.

Scene 2.

[In the pub, Mary sits in a corner drunkenly. Burke, Hare, Margaret and Helen enter. Burke is distraught.]

BURKE:

I need a drink.

HELEN:

Yeah, poured on your head.

[Helen and Margaret shriek with laughter.]

BURKE:

I still see his face.
That poor lad.
Who knew an idiot
Would struggle so much?

HARE:

Right.
An idiot offing an idiot.
You did the world a favor.

BURKE:

I don't need to hear anything from you!

HARE:

If you're feeling guilt...

BURKE:

Not a word, hear me?!
I said: not a word!

HARE:

Bugger off to church and confess.

MARGARET:

Quiet you two.

HARE:

Quiet, *you* be quiet.

HELEN: *[Louder than all.]*

All of you hush down.
Listen to me...
We need each other,
We need each other now.

HELEN/MARGARET:

We need each other,
We need each other now.
One slips,
We all slip;
One falls,
We all fall.

Don't fight each other,
Don't fight each other now.
Don't fight each other,
Don't fight each other now.

One breaks,
We all break;
One's caught,
And we all end up,
Dangling from nooses,
In Lawnmarket.
All of us.
Each and every one.
Dangling from nooses,
In Lawnmarket.
All of us.
Each and every one.
Each and every one.

HELEN/MARGARET/BURKE/HARE:

We need each other,
We need each other now.
Stay calm,
Unruffled,
Don't get
All bothered,
We need each other now.

HARE:

All I need now
Is a little fun.
[Noticing Mary Paterson.]
Who's that there in the corner?

[Burke, Hare, Margaret and Helen turn toward Mary and freeze.]

MARY PATERSON:

They offered me whisky,
And a place to stay.
What a surprise,
I would end up here,
In Surgeons' Square.
Reunited as it were...
In Surgeons' Square.
Where I was drawn,
Where I was drawn,
And, later, quartered.

[Mary moves to a surgery table and lies down, pulling the sheet over her.]

Scene 3.

[In the surgery theatre, Ferguson enters. He turns back the sheet and sees Mary there.]

FERGUSON: *[Deeply shocked.]*

Mary.
[Sadly recalling.]
Mary, Mary, Mary, Mary.
I said:
"We will go somewhere,
Somewhere far away,
You and I,
Only you and—
Only you and—"

[Knox enters, sees the corpse.]

KNOX:

Splendid timing.
[Noticing Ferguson's expression.]
Something wrong?

[Ferguson nods "yes" and wipes away the tears forming in his eyes. Knox looks at the corpse.]

KNOX:

Pretty.

FERGUSON: *[Evasive.]*

Didn't notice.

KNOX:

Perfect for illustration.
Set up a session
For the lads to draw her.

FERGUSON:

Draw her?

KNOX:

Who better?

FERGUSON:

But I don't want her to be drawn.
She's—

KNOX:

Ideal.
Ideal.
Clear bone structure.
Musculature defined.
Skin a bit pink.
From the drink,
I suppose.
I guarantee enrollment will double.

FERGUSON: *[Controlling his rage.]*

Dr. Knox.
I don't want us to accept bodies
From those two men anymore.

KNOX: *[Playing innocent.]*

Two men?

FERGUSON:

Our suppliers.

KNOX:

Whatever for?

FERGUSON:

I know for a fact
This woman was in prime health
Only last night.

KNOX: *[Shyly.]*

As were you, no doubt.
As were you.

FERGUSON: *[Ignoring Knox.]*

I suspect...

KNOX:

Murder?
As you said before.
And if it is?

FERGUSON:

You would accept it?

KNOX:

Don't forget the greater good.
I would—what is the phrase?—
Turn a blind eye.
Look around you,
All around you,
In the streets,
People sick,
People starved,
People barely alive...

FERGUSON:

I cannot agree.
I will be forced to resign if we continue—

KNOX:

Resign?
You know how grave this is—
How serious!
Your reputation, man!
An affair with a trollop,
[Ferguson protests.]
A murdered trollop.
Accepting victims
From killers—

FERGUSON:

I didn't accept them!
I didn't know.

KNOX:

Did I?
[Narrowing it down.]
The problem with you is that
You have no ambition.
Think—think!—of your career,
All that you could lose,
All that you have worked so hard for,
If word got out,
All of that is over.
Over and done.
We need each other,
We need each other now.
We need each other now.

You speak
We're both done.
You snitch,
We both hurt...
You speak
We're both done.
You snitch,
We both hurt...

FERGUSON: *[A long pause, Wiping away the tears, relenting.]*

Make this one the last.
No more.

KNOX:

Agreed.
[Pointedly.]
Prepare her for drawing.

[Knox exits, followed by Ferguson.]

MARY: *[Continuing from the top of the scene.]*

And one day I met
A proper young man
Fair, and manners refined.

He paid me good money
And promised me nonsense
But I fancied him some.

Scene 5.

[In the surgery theatre, Ferguson and Daft Jamie and Donald (as students) have set up easels and draw Mary, reclined on the table.]

FERGUSON:

Where once I
Traced your body
With my hands,
And my mouth,
I trace it now with ink and paper.
Forgive me, my darling.
All of you,
Forgive me.
All of you,
Forgive me,
Forgive me.

MARY: *[With above.]*

He said:
"We will go somewhere
Somewhere far away,
You and I,
Only you and I."

DAFT JAMIE/DONALD: *[With above.]*

...Latissimus dorsi
...Trapezius
...Rhomboides Minor.

MARY:

Of all the times
In my life
I gave up my body to men,
This must have been
The most memorable.

[End of Part V.]

PART VI. MADGE DOCHERTY

Scene 1.

[In the surgery theatre, Madge Docherty stands and writes her name and walks to the boardinghouse. She holds up her hands as if in a dance and is soon joined by Hare as she sings the words of a song. Burke enters.]

MADGE:

“A dance,
A dance,
Won’t you dance with me?
A whirl
With a girl,
So fancy-free?
A dance,
A dance,
Let’s go on all night.
A dance,
A dance,
While we’re still upright.”

[Madge stops dances and addresses the audience.]

How he charmed me,
He charmed me,
A meek Irish lady,
Come to town,
To find my son.
—So kind, so kind.

[Madge addresses the audience.]

Have any of you seen him?
My sweet boy.
Have you? Have you?
Came here for work.
Last name is Docherty.
Docherty.

[Hare suddenly appears.]

HARE:

Dear lady:
Did I hear you say
Your name is Docherty?

MADGE: *[To Hare.]*

Indeed it is.

HARE:

From?

MADGE:

Don-e—

HARE: *[Before she has a chance to finish.]*

Donegal!
The Dochertys from Donegal?
I knew it, I knew it!
With them sparklin’ eyes.
Like those of me own blessed mother—
May she rest in peace.

MADGE:

She was a Docherty?

HARE:

As sure as me faith in Jesus!

MADGE: *[To audience.]*

He said that we were kin and
Could help me find my son.
Brought me here,
To Tanner’s Close.

[Madge puts her arms up; she is joined this time with Hare.]

“...A dance,
A dance,
Let’s go on all night.
A dance,
A dance,
While we’re still upright.”

HARE:

Another whisky, Madge?

MADGE:

Two, two, was enough.

HARE:

Nonsense.

[Hare brutally forces whisky on Madge. She spits it out, then laughs.]

MADGE: *[Half-terrified, half making light of the sudden brutality.]*

Flirt!

BURKE:

You must be weary, Madge.
How about a lie down?

HARE: *[With above.]*

A lie down—

MADGE: *[Reeling.]*

Don't mind if I do.

[Suddenly.]

Where is my son?
You promised he'd be here...

HARE:

On his way...
On his way...

[Burke and Hare throw down some straw. Mary lies in it. Burke sings a lullaby softly. As he does, he slowly wraps his hands around Madge's throat while Hare mounts her and kneels on her ribs. Madge gasps for breath and tries to call out. Briefly.]

BURKE:

Lay down your head,
My darlin',
Lay down your weary head.
Let clouds of sleep
O'ertake your soul.
Stay safe in your bed
My darlin',
Stay safe in your little bed.
Till sunrise comes
And morning bells toll,
Let clouds of sleep
O'ertake your soul.
My darlin',
My darlin',
My darlin'...

MADGE: *[Waking.]*

Where is my son?
Where is my son?

[Madge is dead. Burke begins to feel guilty.]

BURKE:

Done.
She said:
"Where is my son? Where is my son?"
She's someone's mum!

HARE:

As was yours.

BURKE: *[Suddenly revolted by his deed.]*

Someone's mum!
I am an evil man.
I deserve God's full wrath.

HARE:

Shut up. You're wasting time.

BURKE:

I deserve God's full wrath.

[Helen and Margaret enter suddenly.]

HELEN: *[Noticing Madge.]*

What is *she* doing here?

HARE:

Not much now.
On her way to Knox.

MARGARET/HELEN:

Get her out.
We got some capital in the other room.
A whole family...

MARGARET:

Dad, mum and a wee baby girl.

HELEN/MARGARET:

Old friends.
Old friends.
Here for the night.
Could be worth twenty-five quid.
Twenty-five quid,
Twenty-five quid,
Twenty-five quid.

BURKE: *[With above.]*

Someone's mum!
I deserve God's wrath.

HELEN: *[To Burke.]*

Later for that, love.

HARE:

Hide her in the straw.
Quickly.

BURKE:

God's wrath.

[They cover up the body of Margaret with straw, but one arm dangles out.]

HARE:

Show our fine guests in, won't you now?

[They freeze. Madge rises and sings.]

MADGE:

And it was this little arm,
This little arm,
That brought them all down.

[Helen and Margaret usher in the family; Daft Jamie plays the Wife; Abigail, the Husband; and Donald, on his knees, as Bobby, their child.]

HELEN:

Here you are.

MARGARET: *[Trying to force drink on them.]*

Have a whisky to warm your bones.

DONALD: *[As Bobby, seeing Madge's arm and pointing.]*

Look, Mum!

MADGE:

This little arm...

HELEN: *[Joining Margaret in forcing the whisky on the family.]*

Just a little amenity,
For our favored guests.

[The Wife sees Madge's arm in the straw and tries to disguise her shock.]

DAFT JAMIE: *[Clutching her Husband's hand, indicating what she sees.]*

Shush, Bobby.
I'm afraid—

MADGE:

That's what the family saw
Poking out of the straw.

DAFT JAMIE: *[Stuttering, recovering.]*

I'm afraid this is not what we're looking for.

ABIGAIL: *[Helping his wife, with above.]*

Not what we're looking for.
Not at all.

DAFT JAMIE/ABIGAIL:

We must go.

[Daft Jamie and Abigail hurry out, dragging Donald.]

HELEN:

How do you like that?

MARGARET:

No class.

HELEN/MARGARET:

Now we're out thirty pounds.
[To Burke:]
Thanks to you—

BURKE: *[Angrily, referring to Madge's corpse.]*

Let's just get her out of here.

HARE:

Before the worms eat our profits!

MADGE:

The family ran to the police.
While the kind gentlemen
Brought me here to Surgeons' Square.
Got ten quid,
They did.
When they returned.
The police were waiting for them.
And thus ended
This tale of grief.
"...And what of the man who buys the beef?"

[Madge does not get onto a surgeon's table.]

Scene 2.

[In the surgery theatre, Knox enters. Ferguson confronts him.]

FERGUSON:

I see a box just arrived.
You said no more.

KNOX:

Indeed.
But I forgot it was the end of the term!
Just one more.
We'll start afresh
Come the new season.
Like eager schoolboys.

FERGUSON: *[Furiously.]*

You lied.

KNOX:

Stop your moralizing...

FERGUSON:

I will not stop.
You lied to me, and—

[The ensemble of Donald, Abigail, Daft Jamie, Mary and Madge play the police constable; they pin badges on their chests and take notes on notepads.]

KNOX:

Good evening, constable.

ENSEMBLE:

Good evening, gentlemen.

FERGUSON:

Evening.

KNOX:

May I inquire about the nature
Of your visit?

DONALD: *[Circling the men, jotting on a notepad.]*

The tea-chest in the vestibule...

ABIGAIL:

What are its contents?

KNOX:

I doubt it's Darjeeling.
This is a surgery school.
You know its contents.

DAFT JAMIE:

May I look inside?

FERGUSON/KNOX:

No/Of course.

KNOX:

I guarantee it won't be too aromatic.

MARY:

Before I do...

MADGE:

May I ask you a few questions?

KNOX:

Our lives are open books.

DAFT JAMIE:

A family reported a murder...

MARY:

In Tanner's Close...

DONALD:

It is suspected...

ABIGAIL:

That the killers...

ENSEMBLE:

Brought the body here.

KNOX:

Unthinkable! Preposterous!

ENSEMBLE:

Do you have any knowledge
As to how the contents were obtained?

KNOX:

Knowledge? Knowledge?

None whatsoever.

We merely receive the cadavers—

Since they can't come here

Of their own volition.

It's not our job to know how they got here.

And I'm sure my associate would concur.

[Ferguson is silent.]

As if his reputation depended on it.

[Ferguson is silent.]

Isn't that right, Doctor?

FERGUSON:

He is correct, sir.

No knowledge.

None.

[Ferguson, Knox and the Officer freeze, sit.]

PART VII. EXEUNT ALLES

[The ensemble rises and sings.]

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

Turn a blind eye...

The fresher, the better...

The fresher, the better...

The fresher, the better...

Turn a blind eye...

MADGE:

And it was this little hand that brought them all down...

ABIGAIL: *[With above.]*

My corpse made more money

Than my live body ever did...

MARY: *[With above.]*

I was well-known, but not as well-known

As I was about to become...

DAFT JAMIE: *[With above.]*

Never forgot a fact, never forgot a name...

DONALD: *[With above.]*

"Fierce were the battles we fought in!"...

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

Turn a blind eye...

[Knox stands while the others freeze.]

KNOX: *[Spitting langrel.]*

Despicable!
 Ignominious!
 Reprehensible!
 The court finds me innocent—
 Entirely innocent.
 And you condemn me.
 You condemn me.
 Lob rocks through my windows.
 Burn me in effigy.
 As if you—all of you—
 Wouldn't have done the same.
 As if all—all!—of you
 Haven't done the same.
 And Ferguson—Ferguson!—
 The little fool,
 Deflects the blame,
 Clears his name,
 And gets a job at a better school.
 Despicable!
 Reprehensible!
 You know what?
 You know what?
 You know bloody what?
 I'd like to take my gouge
 And remove the mouth
 Of every brat who—
 Daytime, nighttime—
 Screeches that spiteful rhyme:

KNOX, DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

“Up the close and down the stair,
 But and ben wi' Burke and Hare.
 Burke's the butcher, Hare's the thief,
 Knox the boy that buys the beef.”

HARE:

I turned King's Evidence.

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

Turn a blind eye...

HARE:

Got off Scot-free...

MARGARET:

And did the same for me.

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

Turn a blind eye...

BURKE: *[Quoting.]*

One slips,
 We all slip;
 One falls,
 We all fall.

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

Turn a blind eye...

**DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE,
 HARE, MARGARET:**

Turn a blind eye...

HELEN:

I had a good lawyer...
 Who saw that no conviction stuck.

BURKE:

But I had no such luck.
 I swung on a rope in Lawnmarket Square.
 Was removed from there
 And brought to this classroom,
[Referring to Ferguson.]
 Where this good doctor cut me apart.

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

Vagrant, name unknown, ten pounds...

BURKE:

They examined my brain, my heart.

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

Beggar, name unknown, ten pounds...

BURKE:

Looked at lumps, organs, glands, muscles,

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

Eight pounds...nine pounds...

BURKE:

All with the supposed goal
 Of dissecting the criminal soul.

FERGUSON: *[Lecturing.]*

For here, my wingéd students:
 Here, beneath our sacred dome,
 Every syllable,
 Every page,
 Every chart,
 Every incision,
 Is devoted to
 The pursuit of,
 The quest for,
 The love of,
 Knowledge.

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

“Up the close and down the stair,
But and ben wi’ Burke and Hare.
Burke’s the butcher, Hare’s the thief,
Knox the boy that buys the beef.
Knox the boy that buys the beef.”

BURKE:

And when they were done
Cutting me up,

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

The fresher, the better...
The fresher, the better...
The fresher, the better...

BURKE:

The students each made a run
For a piece of my flesh.

DONALD, ABIGAIL, DAFT JAMIE, MARY, MADGE:

The fresher, the better...
The fresher, the better...
The fresher, the better...

BURKE: *[Offhandedly.]*

It apparently made for
A very nice wallet.

[All exit.]

[The End.]

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