

SCENE 3: A London Slum

(This is the lair of Old Joe, an old rascal, there are miscellaneous tatters about him, hung on a line.

A woman with a heavy bundle slinks into the shop. She is followed by another woman, with a similar bundle, she in turn is followed by a man in faded black. The three, after a moment of recognition burst into laughter. Old Joe joins in.)

CHARWOMAN: Look here, Old Joe, here's a chance! If we haven't all three met here without meaning it!

JOE: You couldn't have met at a better place. Come into the parlor. You were made free of it long ago, you know, and the other two ain't strangers. Well, well, well, the Charwoman, the Laundress and the Undertaker himself, and yours affectionately: Old Joe, the rag and bone merchant. HA! We're all suitable to our calling, we're all well matched. And my dears, you're all as welcomed as springtime in Old Joe's parlor, at any time, for any reason.

CHARWOMAN: Well, it's no crime is it! Eh, Mrs. Dilber? Every person has a right to take care of themselves. He always did!

LAUNDRESS: That's true, indeed! No man more so.

CHARWOMAN: Why, then, don't just stand there as if you were afraid, woman! Who's the wiser? We're not going to pick each other's coats, I suppose?

LAUNDRESS: No, indeed! I should hope not.

CHARWOMAN: Very well, then! That's enough. Who's the worse for the loss of a few things? Not a dead man, I suppose?

LAUNDRESS: No, indeed. *(laughing)* If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, wicked old screw, why wasn't he more natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself.

CHARWOMAN: It's the truest word that ever was spoke.

LAUNDRESS: It's a judgement on him.

CHARWOMAN: *(hefting her load)* I wish it was a little heavier judgement, and it would have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else! Open that bundle Old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I'm not afraid to be the first, not afraid for them to see it. We knew pretty well that we were helping ourselves, before we met here, I believe. It's no sin. Open the bundle, Joe.