

Sarah, Eva & Bertha. Act 1 Scene 8

*Winter 1915. EVA is at the stall. SARAH brings on BERTHA who is wearing a tram conductress's uniform.*

SARAH. Have you seen this Eva? Have you seen what she's gone and done? (To BERTHA:) Stand up straight. You're not standing up straight.

EVA. It does look nice on you Bertha.

SARAH. Nice? Look at her.

BERTHA. She's aggravating me.

SARAH. Don't tell me you haven't noticed!

EVA. What?

SARAH. She's shortened the skirt!

BERTHA. Not much . . .

SARAH. Twelve inches off the ground! I thought I was going it with ten! You racy little thing . . . and stop bending at the knees. If you're going to be fast, be fast. Flash your boots for us. Come on!

BERTHA does a quick kick.

EVA. Oh and you took in the jacket then?

BERTHA. And got in trouble for it. But it was that baggy.

SARAH. I thought it was for selling tram tickets not driving the male population mad.

BERTHA. Me? Even my father says I'm better followed than faced.

SARAH. What does he know? Two pounds of King Edwards. I'll pick 'em myself.

EVA. Is it getting any better?

BERTHA. Not much. The men are such beasts about it.

SARAH. Who are?

BERTHA. Inspectors and drivers. Drivers are worst. Mine's forever slamming the brakes on to have me fall over. Won't speak to me hardly . . . and they won't have girls in the rest room except to get our tea. Then they dock our pay cos they say we have to have assistance with the poles, turning the trams round at the terminus.

SARAH. Oh they would have to cheat you. Would you credit the way they go on?

BERTHA. They say we're taking jobs off them and that we'll want to be drivers next.

SARAH. And why shouldn't you? If there's one thing that narks the men about this war it's the way it shows them up for creating such mysteries round things. My God! Providing both your eyes point forwards and your arms aren't stuck on back to front, anyone can drive a tram! Especially with their skirt twelve inches off the ground.

BERTHA. I don't want to drive a tram.

SARAH. You rabbit! Still neither should I. I'd be a female lumberjack if I could. . . in the Forestry. . . if I hadn't my own burdens.

EVA. I suppose they're afraid really.

SARAH. Who?

EVA. The men. Of being displaced. Now there's conscription coming, if women take their jobs they'll have to go.

SARAH. So they should!

BERTHA. They can take some that I know!

EVA. Yes but they have to face getting killed. We don't.

BERTHA. What a thing to say!

SARAH. What about the munitions girls . . . the girls in Gretna that got blown to bits that they tried to hush up? And getting canary through working with TNT so you're coughing yellow cud the rest of your life?

BERTHA. You make me feel I've done wrong.

EVA. I didn't mean to . . .

SARAH. Come on Bertha. (To EVA:) You! You get yourself stuck here when there's so much you could do.

EVA. I'm not 'stuck'.

SARAH. I bet her nibs doesn't think so. She's got you.

EVA. It's not like that Sarah. I'm perfectly free. And I'd feel perfectly content in a way. At least we're all together. If I think back to home now all I remember is the dark. Whatever you say, Sarah, we've got what matters most.

SARAH. Well I never knew I was well off !