SHADOWS OF ANGELS FLEUR MURPHY

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Shadows of Angels was first performed at the Adelaide Fringe Festival in March 2012 with the following cast and crew:

Good Femme - Kara Stacey Merrin Old Femme - Rosemary Johns Man Femme - H.Clare Callow Pretty Femme - Erin Dewar

Director - Chris Saxton Lighting Design - Chris Saxton / Fleur Murphy Lighting op/Stage Manager - Fleur Murphy Costume - Fleur Murphy

Characters:

Good Femme: One of the first female Police Officers in Australia. Single, 25-30 years old. (Based on Lilian Armfield)

Old Femme: Older woman, 50-60 years old, who runs an illegal abortion clinic in the 'secret room' of her alteration business.

Man Femme: Is a woman who is living, quite convincingly, as a man. (Based on Eugenia Falleni)

Pretty Femme: Young woman, quite 'pretty', around 17 years old. Works as a low level prostitute for one of the local Madames.

Setting:

Melbourne, Australia - 1929.

GOOD FEMME

The dress I hold is foreign in my hands.

The collar starched,

rough.

Restricting.

I am not one for dresses. Especially pink.

Why the boys gave me pink?

I know though... it was the nicest looking dress they had -

not soiled and bloody or torn or smelly,

like the others that are kept.

No, this one is starched and clean with a delicate pink floral print.

I feel its texture again,

wonder...

what lady owned it?

I wonder her fate.

Thoughtful in this moment I shift my gaze out the small

second floor window.

I see blue, hot sky

and am reminded of my discomfort -

the suffocating heat,

the feeling of sweat against my skin,

between my crossed thighs,

in my armpits.

And its smell,

a slightly salty sweetness mixed with the skerrick of perfume I dabbed on this morning.

Still the window,

and look, down, the street with its hot and bothered faces.

They walk by the little door below

and do not know....

what is inside and up the narrow stairs of 777b.

Most would not notice the door at all -

squeezed between the grocer's and a shoe shop.

In a moment

I shake my head and exhale a static laugh of bewilderment.

But stop,

remember my place,

this place,

and return my gaze to the pink dress as a gentle rush of adrenaline races.

flutters.

to my fingertips.

I unfold it. Hold it up in front of me.

It's not anywhere near my size!

Closer to that of my mother,

or grandmother

who was about 5 feet from head to toe and from side to side.

Perhaps it's a joke?

It's a laugh for them?

A test.

To keep my cool and play the game.

Those boys... like brothers,

OLD FEMME

A light tap at me door – a nervous knock.

I know that sound well.

And in me midst of trying to tidy the mess of spools of cottons and scattered fabric,

though it is hard and slow because of me age

and stiff back,

I am called to once again answer the door.

I take a moment to calm meself, as the last one left me feeling a little flustered –

frustrated!

Door, open. There she is, with grimy man at side.

Probably the one that did it.

Caused it.

Her to have to come and see me.

This one is quite young though,

around fourteen or fifteen?

Little duck.

Her body and soul pale with fear.

"Come in", I say - but hold up me hand to the gentleman with her.

"Not you. We don't need you in the mix."

He is left in the hall to sit and play with the brim of his hat.

Spinning it 'round and 'round in his hands like a blessed rosary.

Me patience is thin.

I have no time for her fear,

for their exchanged looks of concern,

after the morning I've had.

This one better go through with it. Christ knows the money is badly needed.

I excuse the mess in the sewing room as we pass through

but I sense that the chaos surrounding her doesn't calm her nerves.

Over to the wardrobe and a jingle of keys...

then another...

and we are through.

She follows close behind.

Remembering to be wiser this time, I ask her for the coin up front.

A brown envelope emerges from under the tattered garments she holds. I flick through and carefully count...

All there.

We can begin.

"Alright duck, hop on the bed for me."

She fumbles and stutters, "What do I do with these?"

Holding out her poor, shabby dresses to me.

"I don't wannem. Pop them on the floor there by the door, along with your undergarments."

She does this while I go over to me tray and check over me instruments. A silver smile they give me.

All ready.

She goes to sit - notices some marks on the mattress and hesitates.

"Come on!" I say. Me impatience growing more and more obvious.

She jumps at me snap, like she's dancing on hot coals.

MAN FEMME

Hurried, she scrambles out my door.

Good riddance!?

Good luck, I think.

A favour I did her. Paid her way more than her pieces of tin were worth.

But I am in a good mood now, despite my gross generosity,

as I sift through her wares and pinch out

the ring...

As I hold it in my hand I think of...

My girl.

The thought softens me. Shoulders start to relax, roll in a little – head bows slightly.

A moment of prayer for this Magdalene.

Moment brief though as she also stirs a rage within me.

Her image dances,

flickers,

through my mind.

Seductive.

Luring. Her lying with others...

Tonight...

Tonight I will go to her.

Make her see.

Save her from her sins.

Up from my place

and steady out the door.

Onto the street. Into the thick of it. Through the slums of Regent Street.

I can feel the heat of the sky start to give

as the cool beginning of evening slowly appears.

The blue above starts to turn almost a...

Like a, a bleached violet?

As I look up I see the chalk outline of a happy half-moon...

and a tiny,

almost invisible star.

I make a fickle wish.

A promise to myself that this night will deliver an outcome. An end to one thing or another.

Up in the distance I can see the pub, hear the slurred laughter of those gorging themselves before the 6 o'clock cut off.

I act on the impulse to join them. Perhaps I can pocket a few more trinkets.

For fun... Because I can.

Step,

heavy thud,

onto the step and in the front door.

The pub is full of dock workers.

A sea of grey and grit.

Over near the corner I see a familiar face - "Freddy!"

Frederick "The Tailor" Dennis.

Always dressed in his finest old suit, no matter the weather.

PRETTY FEMME

The day is red and I am hot and all I want to do is lie on my bed and half-dream. Not a gritty friggin' finger on me,

heavy breath,

sweaty torso...

just me and my sweet sheets.

My breeze softly floating in cool kisses on my skin.

The sea's lips sending me notes from afar.

A letter of come hither...

Bang!!!

Peace broken,

and a raspy voice shouting,

scratching,

from the other side to:

"Come on, we've got another one!"

Me, up.

Pulled from the softness of my sheets,

wrenched from my head of calm,

and before I know it I am standing before him.

The line-up...

Ruby Dolson, Sarah Williams and myself....

What?

No Agnes?

Off sick again? Still throwing up her guts maybe.

Wonder if it's the drink?

Or the snow?

She's frail that Aggie.

Don't really know how she does this business? Why?

Though I guess we all need the coin.

So we stand there,

faces pursed and pinched into sultry shapes.

We know the routine,

the dance,

have done it many times.

His eyes dart, quickly over our faces,

but he takes his time perusing our bodies.

He asks Ruby to come closer.

Fuck! What?...

I'm not the prize?

But on closer inspection of her arm and wrist he waves her back into

line and calls for me.

Four steady paces forward

and I'm in front of him.

My chest right there, at his eye level.

So I take a deep breath and give him an innocent -

No,

then,

cheeky smile.

This is my favourite part - the beginning of the thrill of it all.







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