

**Audition Piece Five – pages 71 - 75**

- Albert** Hello, Toad.
- Toad** I beg your pardon.
- Albert** I said 'Hello Toad'.
- Toad** Toad? I'm a washerwoman.
- Albert** Yes, and I'm Sherlock Holmes. It's not another one of your crazes, is it? Caravans, cars and now dressing up in women's clothing.
- Toad** Ssh. This is my disguise.
- Albert** Well, I've penetrated it.
- Toad** Who are you?
- Albert** You don't recognise me? I'm not in disguise. I'm one of your ex-employees. Albert.
- Toad** Albert, of course. My trusty steed. My long-lost friend.
- Albert** Cue for bottom-smacking. (*Toad smacks his bottom.*)
- Toad** What are you doing here?
- Albert** After the caravan incident my doctor advised me to seek employment in a less, as it were, stressful occupation, and preferably one where motor cars didn't come up behind me and without so much as a by your leave biff me on the bottom. Hence the barge now coming slowly round the bend. The lady on the barge is the Barge Lady, my new employer. Virginia Woolf she isn't, but her pie and peas is to cooking what Michelangelo was to ceiling painting. I will introduce you.
- Toad** No, no. She mustn't know we know each other. There, there old fellow. (*He starts smacking Albert's bottom.*)
- Albert** (*under his breath*) Don't do that.
- Bargewoman** Nice morning, ma'am.
- Toad** Is it? Not for a poor a washerwoman who this very morning got a letter from her married daughter telling her to drop everything and come at once. Are you a mother, ma'am?

**Bargewoman** I was once. Where was this married daughter of yours living, ma'am?

**Toad** Near the river, ma'am, not far from an elegant, self-contained gentleman's residence called Toad Hall. Perhaps you've heard of it?

**Bargewoman** Toad Hall? I certainly have. And it just so happens I'm headed that way myself. Hop on the barge. One more don't make no difference to Albert.

**Albert** Oh no. And why draw the line at one? One washerwoman doesn't make no difference...why not offer a lift to the entire staff of the Snow White Laundry? Plus their dependent relatives. Albert doesn't mind. The more the merrier.

**Bargewoman** He's cheered up. He was very depressed earlier on. So, you're in the washing line, ma'am?

**Toad** Yes. One is a career woman for one's sins.

**Bargewoman** Are you very fond of washing?

**Toad** I love it. Love it. It's my vocation. Laundry is my life!

**Bargewoman** Well, what a blessing it is that I met you. We can both do each other a good turn.

**Toad** (*nervously*) In what way, precisely?

**Bargewoman** Why, my washing silly, a whole heap of my scanties and whatnot.

**Toad** Scanties?

*She gets him his tub, washboard and a packet of Rinso soapflakes.*

**Bargewoman** There you are... the tools of your trade. The raw materials of your art.

**Toad** Well, I suppose any fool can wash.

**Bargewoman** I bet you can't wait. Look at these...it's a laundress's banquet.

**Toad** I don't feel very well.

*(Toad starts to rinse and scrub with no great enthusiasm and a great deal of slopping the water about and general mess, while at the same time getting tied up in the stuff that he's washing and gradually getting furious and furious.)*

**Bargewoman** (*singing*) Happy to float  
In a lazy old boat  
On a lovely sunny day.  
Drifting along,  
Singing a song  
Wash all your troubles away  
Completely. Happy to glide  
As you go with the tide,  
As you wend your weary way,  
Drifting along  
As you're singing a song  
On this lovely sunny day.

*This traditional ballad from the pen of Mr. Jeremy Sams comes to an abrupt end when the Toad hangs the washboard on the line rather than the washing, a departure from established laundry procedures that convinces the Bargewoman of something she has suspected for some time.*

Ha ha ha. I've been watching you. You're never a washerwoman. I bet you've never washed so much as a dish cloth all your life.

**Toad** Don't take that tone with me, madam. Washerwoman? No, I'm not a washerwoman. I am Toad, the well-known and distinguished Toad, the landed proprietor. I'm under a bit of a cloud at present but I'm still streets ahead of you... a common bargewoman.

**Bargewoman** A toad? Why so you are. Ugh. A horrid crawling toad and in my nice clean barge too. Now that's something I will not have. (*She grabs hold of Toad and thrusts him overboard.*) Over you go! And good riddance! Ugh, what a nasty, scaly hand.

**Toad** Did you see that? Did you see it?

**Albert** Why? Laundry person, I see you're wet through! [Notice how I'm keeping up your disguise.]

**Toad** There's no need to, stupid. She's twigged that I'm a toad.

**Albert** I'm not surprised. You never deceived me for a minute.

*Toad starts undoing Albert's harness.*

Here, what're you doing?

**Toad** I'm riding you back to Toad Hall.

**Albert** You can't do that.

**Bargewoman** Stop that. Stop that this minute.

**Albert** I've got a bad back. Besides, I'm quite happy here. My only complaint is that it lacks a bit of civilisation.

**Bargewoman** Albert. It's a toad. That washerwoman is a toad.

*Now that Albert is out of harness, the barge naturally begins to drift, so the Bargewoman has to leap for the bank and grab the towrope herself. Meanwhile, Toad tries unsuccessfully to mount the horse.*

**Toad** I'll give you civilisation. I'll give you as much civilisation as you want.

**Albert** Can I have the run of the library?

**Toad** Yes, yes.

**Albert** And you won't object if I put my nose in a book?

**Toad** No.

**Albert** Because I like a bit of Tennyson now and again.

**Toad** She's got out of the barge.

**Bargewoman** Listen, you horrible toad. That horse is my property.

**Albert** Property? I'm not your property. I'm not anybody's property. You'd better get on, Toady. Her property indeed. All property is theft.

*They gallop off and the Bargewoman, unable to follow because she is still tethered to her towrope, promptly bursts into tears. Two young rabbits come innocently along trailed by the Chief Weasel and Weasel Norman. Suddenly the two weasels bring out bags of sweets which they offer to the rabbits, who, very sensibly scream in terror and take to their heels. Only then does the Chief Weasel notice the blubbering Bargewoman.*

**Chief Weasel** The good lady seems a trifle upset. Perhaps you should enquire why. And, Norman, sensitively.