

## Characters

<b>Narrator (M/F)</b>	-	The Storyteller
<b>Joseph Goodenough (M)</b>	-	Innkeeper
<b>Lord Elkins (M)</b>	-	Husband of the deceased
<b>Prosecution (M/F)</b>	-	The prosecutor
<b>Wardress (F)</b>	-	Prison guard
<b>Charlotte Horsferry (F)</b>	-	The accused
<b>Turnkey (M/F)</b>	-	Jailer
<b>Voices (M/F)</b>	-	Disembodied onlookers
<b>Walter (M)</b>	-	Bystander

It is intended that this script is performed as a monologue; one actor performing all characters. It could alternatively be played by more than one actor with an onstage or offstage narrator.

## Scene 1 – The Gallows Inn

**Narrator:** Somewhere, there is a pub; it might be called the Wagon and Horses, the Queen’s Head, the Carpenters Arms or even the Toad and Turnip. Outside the walls may be half timbered, of white pebbledash, hard blue brick or shiny tile. The name of the pub may have been changed, the insides knocked about, landlords come and gone. What is certain, is that inside this pub, there is a snug or failing that, a corner where friends keep up with the latest gossip, acquaintances exchange views and strangers confide. You may think when the heavy doors are bolted at the end of the day, the stories depart with their speakers into the night air; that nothing remains; this is not so. Once spoken or even thought, they enter the patina that builds up with the heat and light and smoke on the horse brasses, the old photographs, the oak beams, the mirroring behind the bar. Some stories are from the present, some have been around for aeons.

**Narrator:** You can’t beat a good hanging for entertainment. I’m not being bloodthirsty, ‘tis true. People come into the Gallows Inn after a hanging and celebrate that it wasn’t them. Business is always good on hanging days. The turnkeys know they’ll get free ale if they bring the convict in on his way to eternity. As for the prisoner well, not many refuse. They know the story of the one who refused to stop, then a minute or two after the hanging, the pardon coming. That’s the thing about hanging, it be quite undoable.

I always put the prisoner in the snug, it being more private for final reflections. Then for a silver sixpence, I, Joseph Goodenough, let customers in, two or three at a time to take a peek. Mind you I have to share that dividend with the turnkeys, for there’s stiff competition hereabouts for a view of a condemned man - or woman. This time it’s going to be a little bit special, because not only is it a woman, but it be none other than the murderess of Lady Elkins. Today in fact, I may charge a silver shilling, for Charlotte Horsferry is reputedly a cool customer. Still, I expect you know that, for the story has filled the paper many a day. But if you don’t, I could recount it for a small consideration,

**Joseph:** into the black bag there, sir, madam.

**Narrator:** You’ll excuse me for keeping one eye on the window for the approach of the black horse and cart. Well now, it’s difficult knowing where to start, but I’ll go back to the beginning, as far as ‘tis known. Charlotte Horsferry was an actress, well I suppose she still is, because she ain’t been hanged yet. Her life is a mystery before she appeared on the London stage. Some say she was a flower girl at Covent Garden; others that she grew up in the debtors’ prison at Fleet. But whatever her history, it has been wiped away like spilt ale. Those that gave evidence said she acted quite the lady, full of airs and graces. Maybe that’s what gave her the idea of becoming a real lady, Lady Elkins. Trouble was - there already *was* a Lady Elkins! It all started when Lord Elkins saw her on stage and sent her flowers.

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**Lord Elkins:** Just because she was a damned fine actress,

**Narrator:** he told the judge at the trial. Later though, she applied for the job of governess to his children, saying she had wearied of the stage. What happened next is a matter for conjecture; did his lordship encourage her, or was it all in Charlotte Horsferry’s mind? Whichever, within three months, Lady Elkins lay dead, poisoned by nightshade. Charlotte Horsferry was arrested because she’d given the lady an elderberry cordial the night before. She said if she’d given poison it was by accident; she only made her lady the cordial out of the goodness of her heart.

She was an actress, not an expert on hedgerows. And she might have got off but for the upstairs maid. She said she'd seen the suspect parading about in her ladyship's clothes and jewels, whilst the mistress was out. Well, when the actress said she was rehearsing for a new part. The prosecution said,

**Prosecution:** Prey tell me what part was that - of Lady Elkins?

**Narrator:** Now I see the black horse pulling up the hill; the person in the back, seated regally as if on a tour. Outside the Gallows Inn, the customers stand round the doorway, gawping. Helping her down, the wardress says,

**Wardress:** Here we are then Joseph.

**Narrator:** The black bag is still being passed, coins jingling. Cut three ways there should be a pretty penny for each of us. As the prisoner steps forwards, her eyes miss nothing for she stops,

**Charlotte:** If it's a show, shouldn't I be paid too?

**Narrator:** says she. That silences us, but the wardress gathering her wits says,

**Wardress:** If you have a share, you won't keep it for long dearie.

**Charlotte:** For my part in this entertainment, I want a quarter of the takings, or I shan't come in.

**Narrator:** The male turnkey frowns; the least a prisoner can do is co-operate and make things pleasant on their way to a hanging.

**Turnkey:** If you don't come in, you might be too quick if a pardon comes.

**Narrator:** Charlotte Horsferry looks thoughtful.

**Charlotte:** Yes; a pardon might come, for the queen is set to become a grandmother again.

**Narrator:** This was news to us, but Queen Victoria has so many children, t'aint surprising if one or t'other isn't regularly producing a grandchild. But still Charlotte Horsferry stands her ground.

**Charlotte:** A quarter of the takings, in advance.

**Narrator:** The wardress looks at the woman as if hanging is too good for her. However, a cheer goes up from the crowd when the prisoner adds,

**Charlotte:** If a pardon doesn't come, you can give my share to Lord Elkins poor motherless children.

**Narrator:** I thought that was a bit rich, seeing it was her fault they were motherless in the first place. Well we give Charlotte Horsferry a quarter of the collection, and troop towards the snug. Of course, there are far too many people to squeeze in. She says helpfully,

**Charlotte:** I'll shout, for I'm used to throwing my voice on stage

**Narrator:** Suddenly she spots old Walter the unwashed at the front, and looks at him with an expression of disdain as he squints, mole like, about him; turning his head this way then that like an old hound. Summoning him, she cups her mouth to his ear and says something. He shambles to the back of the crowd where he'll never hear a word, but I'll recite it for him later.

For ten minutes she gives the performance of her life; declares her innocence; says as sure as eggs are eggs her pardon will come. She will set up a small acting academy on the continent; never again make anybody an elderberry cordial. However, when she finishes and no pardon has come, there is a hush. The turnkeys have finished their drinks; and on the hill, Marfoot, the hangman. As the crowd turns, a voice comes loud and clear,

**Voice:** Pardon!

**Narrator:** Like wildfire the word spreads,

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**Voice:** Pardon!

**Voice:** Pardon!

**Voice:** It's a pardon!

**Narrator:** Charlotte Horsferry swoons and half a dozen men rush to catch her. In an instant she recovers and calls out,

**Charlotte:** Long Live the Queen, and her grandchildren!

**Narrator:** Naturally, we all echoes 'Long Live the Queen and her grandchildren!' More drinks are ordered and the child's health drunk. T'is a merry mood at The Gallow Inn. When this merriment is over, we notice that not only has Charlotte Horsferry vanished, but so too has the black horse and cart.

The turnkeys are a bit put out. There's paperwork and such to fill in. The Governor will surely grumble at letting her go just like that, pardon or no pardon. Then the turnkeys enquire about the pardon. They heard it of course - but where is it? Ask as we might, we can find no messenger. When we think about it, none can remember that Queen Victoria was expecting a grandchild this day either. Word gets around that an accomplice shouted it from the back, but just then I catches sight of old Walter. Seeing me looking, he grumbles,

**Walter:** I wants my shilling back!

**Narrator:** What?

**Walter:** That Charlotte wots'er'ferry said if I didn't hear, she'd say it all o'er again for me. I only had to say the word.

**Narrator:** The word?

**Walter:** Yes, I know my manners. I might say 'what' and 'eh' here, but I know what to say in front of a lady.

**Narrator:** Pricking up his ears, the turnkey asks sharply,

**Turnkey:** And what be that?

**Walter:** You don't know either? Well you both want learnin'! It be 'pardon' of course!