

SCENE FOUR

WIDOW CORNEY's parlour.

MR BUMBLE sits, looking out into thin air with a most melancholy expression on his face. He has a tankard and takes a swig. He thinks he is alone and so he thinks aloud.

MR BUMBLE

Married! And two weeks ago tomorrow it was done. It seems an age!
(he heaves a sigh)

WIDOW CORNEY enters.

MR BUMBLE

I sold myself for six teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs and a milk-pot with a small quantity of second hand furniture and twenty pounds cash. I went very reasonable! Cheap! Dirt cheap!

WIDOW CORNEY, (Mrs Bumble) has been locking doors in the background.

WIDOW CORNEY

(shrieking)

Cheap! You would have been dear at any price; and dear enough I paid for you, Lord above knows that!

MR BUMBLE belches.

Are you going to sit there snoring, all day?

MR BUMBLE

I am going to sit here as long as I think proper, madam... and, although I was not snoring, I shall snore, gape, sneeze, laugh or cry, as the humour strikes me - such being my prerogative.

WIDOW CORNEY

(contemptuously)

Your prerogative!

MR BUMBLE

I said the word ma'am. The prerogative of a man...is to command.

WIDOW CORNEY

And what's the prerogative of a woman, in the name of Goodness?

MR BUMBLE

To obey, madam! To obey. Your late unfortunate husband should have taught you that, and then, perhaps, he might have been alive today, and I wish he was - poor man!

WIDOW CORNEY

Ooooooh! You hard-hearted brute!

MR BUMBLE

Oh 'ere we go. Cry away, madam! It opens the lungs, exercises the eyes, softens the temper, and washes the face - so cry away!

WIDOW CORNEY rushes up behind MR BUMBLE and hits him on the back with his hat several times. He jumps up screaming and shouting.

WIDOW CORNEY

Now talk about your prerogative, if you dare!

MR BUMBLE attempts to argue.

WIDOW CORNEY

Shut up! And take yourself away from here, unless you want me to do something desperate.

WIDOW CORNEY

Well, are you going?

MR BUMBLE

(backing away)

Certainly my dear, certainly. I had no intention of staying. It's just that you are so very violent.

MR BUMBLE exits.

Eerie MUSIC pulse continues under scene.

There is a knock on the Workhouse door. WIDOW CORNEY rises and opens it. THE MATRON is standing there with OLD SALLY.

WIDOW CORNEY

What's the matter?

MATRON

It's old Sally, ma'am. She says she's got something to tell you that must be heard. She's not got long and she'll never die quiet till you listen, ma'am.

WIDOW CORNEY

You better come in.

They enter.

Well what is it?