SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an excerpt - an appetiser, if you will - from a full Samuel French title.

This sample is just for you to try out, and it can't be used for performance, downloaded, printed or distributed in any way.

Take it for a whirl and see if it tickles your fancy!

For more information about licensing this or other shows, or to browse thousands more plays and theatre books to buy please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

SF PERUSALS

AFTER MIDNIGHT—
BEFORE DAWN

A play

DAVID CAMPTON

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON

NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

© 1978 by DAVID CAMPTON

1. *This play is fully protected under the Copyright Laws of the British Commonwealth of Nations, the United States of America and all countries of the Berne and Universal Copyright Conventions.*

2. *All rights, including Stage, Motion Picture, Radio, Television, Public Reading, and Translation into Foreign Languages, are strictly reserved.*

3. No part of this publication may lawfully be reproduced in ANY form or by any means—photocopying, typescript, recording (including video-recording), manuscript, electronic, mechanical, or otherwise—or be transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, without prior permission.

4. Rights of Performance by Amateurs are controlled by SAMUEL FRENCH LTD, 52 FITZROY STREET, LONDON W1P 6JR, and they, or their authorized agents, issue licences to amateurs on payment of a fee. **It is an infringement of the Copyright to give any performance or public reading of the play before the fee has been paid and the licence issued.**

5. Licences are issued subject to the understanding that it shall be made clear in all advertising matter that the audience will witness an amateur performance; that the names of the authors of the plays shall be included on all announcements and on all programmes; and that the integrity of the author's work will be preserved.

The Royalty Fee indicated below is subject to contract and subject to variation at the sole discretion of Samuel French Ltd.

Basic fee for each and every performance by amateurs in the British Isles	Code D

In Theatres or Halls seating Four Hundred or more the fee will be subject to negotiation.

In Territories Overseas the fee quoted above may not apply. A fee will be quoted on application to our local authorized agent, or if there is no such agent, on application to Samuel French Ltd, London.

6 The Professional Rights in this play are controlled by Samuel French Ltd.

The publication of this play does not imply that it is necessarily available for performance by amateurs or professionals, either in the British Isles or Overseas. Amateurs or professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to the appropriate agents for consent before starting rehearsals or booking a theatre or hall.

ISBN 0 573 12002 1

CHARACTERS:

Old Woman
Neat Woman
Man (or Embittered Woman)
Girl (or Simple Young Woman)
Boy (or Frightened Young Woman)
Calm Woman

The action takes place in a prison cell, just after midnight

Time—late sixteenth or early seventeenth century

PRODUCTION NOTES

Although the play was originally produced with a mixed cast, it could be staged with an all-female cast as indicated, with very slight changes to the text.

When the Man strikes the Calm Woman, and when the Neat Woman and the Boy kick her, the blows should not actually land on the body; if delivered with shouts of fury, the right impression will be given.

The door in the set is not practical. The step in front of the window is optional (in the original production it was a 12-inch high rostrum), but it raises the Calm Woman to a commanding position during the opening scene when she is not speaking. If a rostrum is not available, another bench could be used.

AFTER MIDNIGHT—BEFORE DAWN

A seventeenth-century prison cell

Moonlight streams through a barred window on to six manacled prisoners

An Old Woman on her knees is huddled in an attitude of prayer, mumbling unintelligibly. A lumpish simple-minded Girl in her late twenties is curled up in straw trying to sleep. A middle-aged Man sits on a bench with his back to a wall, face hidden in hands. A Woman in her thirties sits upright in the middle of the floor, staring into space as though in a state of shock. She is possibly more neatly dressed than the others, having striven to keep up appearances in difficult circumstances. A Boy in his late teens lies face downwards, whimpering. A Woman in early middle-age stands by the window from which she can just see out. Alone among the occupants of the cell she seems untroubled, calmly waiting. The Old Woman's prayers become briefly audible

Old Woman God ha' mercy. Lord ha' mercy. Saints ha' mercy.
Neat Woman (*in a monotone*) It was a mistake. They should admit their mistakes.
Old Woman Mercy, God. Mercy, Lord. Mercy . . .
Neat Woman They meant to take somebody else. Not me.

The Boy's whimpering becomes louder. The Girl stirs and sits up

Old Woman God save us. Lord save us.

The Man looks up

Man Stop your caterwauling, you sop-witted bezoms. Nothing's going to save us.

The Boy gives a cry of terror. The Girl shuffles over to him

Girl Don't fret, lad. (*She puts a hand on his shoulder*)

Boy (*wincing*) Ah!
Girl Back sore?
Boy (*looking up*) I—I . . .
Girl Perhaps I'm more used to a strapping than you. Mistress were always over fond of laying about her when mispleased.
Boy I—I didn't cry out.
Girl Not you.
Boy Not then. Not even when they . . . (*He buries his face against her shoulder*)
Girl There, there.
Neat Woman Why should they beat on my door? I always kept myself apart. Nobody heard me spreading tattle. I scarcely spoke, except to my Tib.
Girl There, lad. (*She puts her arm around him, but touches a sore spot again*)

The Boy winces and pushes her away again

Girl Sorry.
Boy To loosen my tongue. A touch of pain now, they laughed, to mind me of hell-fire later. Then they showed me instruments. Oh.
Neat Woman Someone must have spread tales.
Boy Hot irons and pincers.
Girl Be thankful it's over, lad.
Boy Over.
Girl No more beady-eyed crows with questions, questions . . .
Boy Give thanks because . . .
Neat Woman I was stirring the broth when they broke in. I showed them the mutton, the onions, the turnips, the herbs . . . But still they called it Hell's Brew.
Boy There's a device for stretching a person. It isn't even considered persuasion. Words from the rack count as free confession.
Girl I yelled at their ugly great needles—screamed worse than the old sow when her farrow were taken. But when I stopped, so did the pricking. If I'd known that were what they wanted, I'd ha' clamped my teeth shut long afore.
Boy They only had to explain the purposes of the machine, and I babbled like a stream in spate. (*He breaks down and cries*)
Neat Woman Everybody drew aside on from the path when I

was taken. What could they find to whisper? A mistake had been made.

Girl Poor boy.

Boy Lies. Lies. I had naught to do with the powers of darkness.

Girl Who has?

Boy Yet I confessed.

Girl Why shouldn't you? If you spoke after your limbs had been torn apart, all that agony would have been for naught.

Boy I confessed to abominations. Had I danced naked before the devil's altar? Yes. Had I kissed his backside? Yes. Had others been with me? Yes. Who? Yes. Names. Yes. Lies. Lies. But yes. Yes. To anything. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Neat Woman I shouldn't be in this place. It's not just.

Man Bleating for justice?

Old Woman Justice, Lord. Give us justice.

Man You'll get justice on Judgement Day. Not until.

Boy With every "yes" I knotted the hemp around my own throat.

Girl We're not so deep in the midden as you fear.

Boy How can you smile? You'll hang, too.

Girl Hang?

Boy Yes, hang.

Girl Why should I hang?

Boy You heard the judge pronounce sentence.

Girl Old Rumbleguts with the black kerchief over his wig? Did all those words mean that I should hang?

Boy With us. Tomorrow. Tomorrow.

Old Woman Spare us, Lord. Spare us, sweet Jesus.

Girl We've done naught to be hanged for, lad.

Man At a rope's end innocent swing as dead as guilty.

Girl I can't bring my mind to hanging.

Man No more than a cow imagines a butcher.

Boy By this time tomorrow we'll be rotting in the cold earth. Cold. Cold! (*With a cry he covers his face*)

Neat Woman I have done nothing to bring me here.

Man Avarice brought me here. Malice and murdering greed. Prosperity's a crime in these times. A person can't enjoy the fruit of their labours without a charge of being about the devil's business. Your neighbours sell more cloth than you or their cow yields more milk?—have them put away. Envy's the crime, not witchcraft.

Old Woman Deliver us from evil. Deliver us, Lord.
Neat Woman I am no witch.
Man Is any one of us? If we were witches, would we be here? The devil looks after his own.
Calm Woman (*by the window*) Full moon in a cloudless sky. There'll be frost before morning.

There is a pause. Suddenly aware of her presence, one by one the others turn to look at her. Even the praying Old Woman pauses

There's a cart by the gate. What will its next load be?
Girl Turnips maybe.
Calm Woman A fine turnip you'll make.
Girl The cart's for us?
Calm Woman A short life and a merry one. With a crowd to cheer while you dance.
Girl Will they throw pennies, too?
Man She means dance on air, you witless cowpat.
Girl On air? I've never done that before.
Man Nobody does it but once.
Girl Hear that, lad? We're to dance on air. Will you partner me?
Calm Woman I've seen the hangman at work. A master of his craft. And he's had plenty of practice lately.
Boy I can't die. I mustn't die.
Girl Who spoke of dying?
Calm Woman Who needs to? But the rope's ready.
Girl There's to be no whipping, is there?
Calm Woman Nobody will whip you again.
Girl You don't know the mistress. She'll be angered that I've been away so long.
Calm Woman Sweet innocence. I do believe you'll forgive the executioner.
Man You'll not smile so smug when your eyes are bulging.
Calm Woman Few are vouchsafed precognition. But I am assured a rope does not figure in my end.
Man You were condemned with the rest of us.
Calm Woman Aye.
Man But you'll not swing with us?
Calm Woman Should I?
Man You've influence with Higher Authority.

Calm Woman Call it so.
Man Delusion.
Neat Woman They may discover their mistake. Time yet. A little. Do you believe . . . ?
Calm Woman Indeed. But your faith's not my faith.
Neat Woman We are innocent.
Calm Woman Of what?
Boy I confessed, but I lied. There was no dancing at full moon. There was no sacrificing at heathen altars. I only told them what they wanted to be told. Lies.
Calm Woman What, did you never fly on a broomstick?
Boy Never.
Man Did you?
Calm Woman Never.
Neat Woman You are as innocent as the rest of us.
Old Woman Holy Mary. Blessed Saints . . .
Calm Woman You're praying to the wrong quarter, grandmother. Would you expect the blessed saints to turn you back from the very threshold of Heaven? What's a few minutes' gasping compared with eternal bliss?
Man You have petitioned your Higher Authority, of course?
Calm Woman Of course.
Man The Lord Chief Justice is to intervene on your behalf?
Calm Woman My Lord will have his way.
Man Come down in person and open the prison gates for you, eh? Or at the last minute pluck you from the cart.
Calm Woman I do not know how his will is to be manifest. I only know that I shall not die on the gallows.
Man One of the saved, are you?
Calm Woman One of the damned.
Man Damned?
Calm Woman As you so rightly concluded— The Devil looks after his own. (*She turns again to the window*)
Neat Woman The devil?
Calm Woman The moon almost kisses the earth. His arm will be strong tonight.
Old Woman Lord protect us. Saints protect us.
Man She'd sell her soul for a cheap jibe.
Calm Woman A higher price than that.
Girl Have you truly seen the devil? What does he look like?

Calm Woman With a master such as mine some reticence is necessary.

Neat Woman Folly. Rumours begin with such mindless prattle. Then the evil spreads. Loose tongues brought me here.

Boy Will the devil take you hence?

Calm Woman Why should I invite mockery from unbelievers?

Man Aye. Hold your peace. We've misery enough without the torment of clacking tongues.

Calm Woman So be it.

Man We all die tomorrow. All. All.

Neat Woman All.

Boy Not me. Not me.

Man All.

Girl Don't trouble yourself so, lad. Dying's natural. Many's the time I've wrung a chicken's neck. One twist and it's over.

Boy No!

Man (*furiously*) You're a clod, girl.

Girl I meant dying's peaceful like. The other week I found a dead rabbit. He might have been sleeping. I'd have taken him for the pot, only when I stirred him, his belly was full of maggots.

Man Shut that cess-pit of a mouth before I shut it with my fist.

Calm Woman Bravely spoken. A worthy match for a milkmaid.

Girl I'm no child. See my arm. I've had men on their backs.

Calm Woman Strange reversal.

Man I won't be drawn into a brawl on account of a snivelling brat.

Boy I'm no worse than you. You're all cowards. All afraid.

Calm Woman Yet you fear the devil more than you fear death.

Old Woman Our Father which art in Heaven . . .

Calm Woman How odd those words sound . . .

Old Woman Eh?

Calm Woman In that order.

Old Woman Are you—truly—one of—them?

Calm Woman Them?

Old Woman A witch.

Calm Woman Say I struck a bargain with one who is all powerful. A scrap I weighed as lightly as a cast-off clout for the benefit of that power.

Man Power? What power? Chains and fetters hold you as

secure as they hold that old mumbler. Will you use those powers to dull the agony when the noose bites into your neck?

Calm Woman I repeat—I shall not be hanged. Terms were agreed. A service on my part in return for a service on his.

Neat Woman What—service?

Calm Woman Have you a wish to trade?

Neat Woman I—I don't believe in such—superstitions.

Girl If you have powers, lady, show us.

Calm Woman Ribbands out of air? Vanishing eggs? I'm no conjurer. If you want magic seek out a fairground mountebank.

Girl What other powers are there?

Calm Woman Over hearts. Over minds.

Man Over locks and bolts would be more use.

Calm Woman I shall convince you yet.

Man When?

Calm Woman When I escape the executioner.

Boy How? How can that be done?

Calm Woman There's a contradiction. You ask how a thing can be done, yet you don't believe that it can be done.

Boy I believe. I believe.

Calm Woman You believe a drowning man can be saved by a straw.

Boy I believe in anything that might save me from the gallows.

Calm Woman Whatever the cost?

Boy I'm to lose my life. What is worth more than that?

Calm Woman Your soul maybe.

Boy My soul?

Calm Woman A poor thing, no doubt, but at this moment the best you have to offer.

Boy Would it be enough?

Calm Woman For what?

Boy Would he save me?

Calm Woman Who is he?

Boy You know who.

Calm Woman Do I?

Boy Your—master.

Calm Woman His name?

Boy The devil.

There is a disconcerted reaction from the other prisoners—part shock, but part discomfort at the nearness of his reply to their own thoughts

Calm Woman That's better. Before a contract each party should be aware of the other's identity.
Boy Would the devil take it?
Girl Think, lad.
Boy What of?
Girl Such dealings may be right enough for that one. She made her choice and must surely abide by it.
Calm Woman True. Not many have cheated the devil.
Girl I think there be many the devil have cheated.
Neat Woman Aye. Father of lies.
Old Woman God save us.
Boy Offer me a chance as frail as a baby's hair, and I'll cling to it.
Girl Parting with your soul's a powerful step.
Boy What's a soul without a body?
Girl But to be damned, lad . . . Think on the burning, fiery lake of brimstone.
Calm Woman Think of tomorrow's scaffold and the newly-dug, waiting grave.
Girl Lady, you tempt like the devil himself. Were you sent to prison here to bargain for souls?
Calm Woman No offer has been made on either side.
Neat Woman Souls cannot be bought and sold.
Calm Woman They have been offered before now. Maybe accepted.
Man Like so many yards of linsey-woolsey? The devil doesn't stand market.
Calm Woman Where's the need? Customers seek him out.
Old Woman Our Father, which art in . . . (*She subsides, mumbling*)
Girl That's right, grandmother. Pray. Drown that wicked tempting.
Boy I asked—would he save me?
Girl From what, laddie? From dying? The devil can never save you from that. Late or soon everybody has to die. Even me. I suppose.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Please visit our website to buy the full script, apply for a license to perform this show (if it's available), or to explore hundreds of similar titles.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

To be the first to know about new books, licensing releases, and enjoy other theatre-related larks, do follow us on our spangley social media channels.



Samuel French London



SamuelFrenchLtd

SF **PERUSALS**