

PRAY

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Characters: Carla Woman, slim, well dressed, appears to be late 20s / early 30s.
 Wearing men's clothing—many mistaking her for a man.

 Prudence Woman in late 20s / early 30s

 Jane Woman in 40s / 50s

 Ursula Girl in 20s

 Sophia Girl in late teens / 20s

Some extras walking with the characters as they 'fare la passeggiata'
(circulate / walk around / looking at others and being seen).

Setting – 1890, London, in a park where people go to walk before going out to theatre.

[Music could be provided where singing mentioned as an alternative to just speaking the lines]

(Carla talks with audience – with women dressed in their finery parading around her)

Carla When I was younger, I moved from one brief encounter to another with no concern for the consequences. I simply fed my appetite for bright young things. Living for the moment. The thrill of the chase. The conquest...but afterwards, all was empty.

Some of them stayed with me for a time. They looked after my Villa, fed me, cleaned up – but they were not true partners. More like servants.

In this dark or foggy weather that London calls days, I have risked the odd foray into the 'normal life'. I suppose my existence would be hard for any companion. Still, I would rather have love, and share my life, even with its limitations.

Then, what is normal? In these modern times, with steam power, electric lights and more paved streets – one can go out. Theatre, evening strolls. I can now mingle safely, no longer being so alone.

Tonight, as always, I seek my perfect long-term companion.

(sings (or talks) – walks around girls as she does) In my dreams
There she seems
So perfect

(Sighs)

Carla Now – showtime...

Carla Signorina, you look lovely.

Prudence Signora.

Carla Oh, my apologies (doffs hat)

Prudence Why? For paying me a compliment? (laughs)

Carla I am sorry. I am normally adept at piercing the vital point...in most of my personal interactions. However, seeing you, I find myself oddly...flustered.

Prudence You are foreign? You addressed me in Italian...

Carla I imagine that I am the most foreign creature here. I was born in Italy.

Prudence How do you find England?

Carla Cold and dull. The food here is terrible – rarely spicy like home. But I find there is more freedom. Take the evening passeggiata, or stroll. In Italy, everyone knows everyone else. Here you can be more...anonymous.

Prudence Were your family...excuse me...nobility? (sighs) Oh, to be a Princess or – silly me, I'm already married... (she tails off)

Carla An unwanted husband is rarely a problem for a determined noble.

Prudence (shocked) You are not suggesting –

Carla (laughs) Merely making an observation. My family was minor nobility – but does it matter? I have no living connections in Italy anymore.

Prudence (losing interest) I am quite comfortable. Sorry, I have an appointment.

(Carla completes an elaborate bow at her rapidly retreating figure and is accosted by an older woman)

Jane Young Man (smiles coquettishly)

Carla You might be surprised Signora. Can I help you?

Jane I could not help overhearing some of your previous conversation. (looks around to ensure nobody listening) Perhaps we can help each other.

Carla I don't follow you.

Jane Can you keep a secret?

Carla I have been pondering life, death and the surrender to unconditional love.

Jane Oh, a poet. I love poetry (leans closer and gives her an admiring glance) and my husband's out of town – so if it's unconditional surrender you desire...

Carla Are we talking a mere instant or for always?

Jane (giggles) He is away rather a lot.

Carla And you would leave him?

Jane Oh no – he is no exciting lover but...you are direct!

Carla You mistake my intentions. However, be assured, I am good at keeping secrets.
Arrivederci.

(Carla moves to talk to group of women)

Carla Ladies – I have been told that few women here are brave enough to defy convention. Is there one who dares walk and talk with me if we remain in public view?

Ursula (The women whisper together then one joins Carla) You are strange – the talk of the passeggiata - so cold, almost aloof...yet here you are propositioning ladies as if –

Carla As if?

Ursula As if we were...common harlots!

Carla An interesting analogy. Would you be willing, for sake of conversation, to explore that analogy?

Ursula Sir. If you are about to make an indecent proposal, you insult my character.

Carla No, No Signorina. We talk of social conventions. I am intrigued by you, but you are perfectly safe at this moment with your friends watching – no doubt with bated breath, jealous of your daring.

Ursula (flattered) Continue.

Carla May I enquire why a lady like yourself strolls in the evening, goes to theatre, balls -

Ursula Why to find a husband

Carla Why?

Ursula For security, a home, a family

Carla Do you really want a family?

Ursula Yes of course

Carla Yes of course (regretful, then perks up) You are prepared to do your wifely duties for that security?

Ursula Naturally

Carla Naturally – yet what of love?

Ursula I would, no doubt, grow to love my husband if he is a good provider – hopefully also good looking. Then there would always be my friends for company.

Carla But here lies my confusion. A harlot sells her services for money – for the security of money – without love.

Ursula I think this conversation has gone far enough. Everybody of breeding knows the difference - the harlot enjoys it! Good day.

Carla Good night, Signorina. (laughs) What a strange perspective.

(A younger woman walking nearby detaches herself from her companions and joins Carla)

Sophia Sir. I hope you don't think me presumptuous, but I would have you know that many modern English women do look for love.

Carla I'm glad. I was beginning to think the notion had died out with Romeo and Juliet and people had forgotten passion.

Sophia I have a passion for poetry...like Lord Byron...

Carla “And both were young, and one was beautiful” (looking intently at lady) Would you consider taking a risk?

Sophia For such a...‘dream’ (laughs)...I might. Life is a risk.

Carla But (gently) would you risk all you have to...possibly...gain life everlasting?

Sophia You talk like a preacher?

Carla I am....concerned with the consignment of life to the hereafter – hopefully to assist its passing with decency and a minimum of suffering.

Sophia My friend married a Minister. She found his passion...directed only towards his ‘calling’. Others have been popular – only with young men if they are rich or from good families – or with old men if they are beautiful and obedient.

Carla I can assure you that my....passion....is directed to hot blooded pursuits. I seek to experience life – preferably with a companion - to the point that sometimes I forget my manners. It might even be suggested I am a pain in the neck when I focus on tasting what life has to offer.

Sophia Sir – or rather Miss. My, you are daring. To stroll as a man (giggles) you are stranger than I had thought.

Carla Stranger indeed – but you are more perceptive than your countrywomen.

Sophia Thank you. But how would you treat your...companion?

Carla She could have all I possessed and be my equal partner in all things – as long as she would offer the same to me.

Sophia Excuse me - my friends are waving. It means my parents are coming.

Carla May I see you again?

Sophia I expect to perambulate after the show...

Carla I will be here.

(light dims with spotlight just on Carla – can speak or sing following lines)

Carla The pose she strikes Unconsciously so striking!
The regal bearing Screams nobility Chiselled out of marble

Carla (to audience) Promising indeed – but I know disappointment too well. Will she sacrifice her current life to join me in my shadowy existence – even with the luxuries I can offer?

(smiles then sings) I can hear her heart
Beating for me
Stealing precious time
Oh, if I held her in my arms
I'd treasure her and savour
Her presence like fine wine
Perhaps for a mere instant
Or maybe for all time

(Two hours later. Sophia comes alone. A smile lights up her face when she sees Carla)

Carla (waves and murmurs to herself) Destiny approaches.

Carla (to Sophia) You came. I was not sure...

Sophia I could not resist. I have never met anyone like you before.

Carla Fortunately for me...and you, perhaps. But you seem upset.

Sophia I do not know what to do. I have just been told I must marry Lord Prig. He is old, fat and ugly. He has buried two wives - and some of the stories of how he treated them...

Carla Why would your parents agree to your marrying such a man?

Sophia There are certain...financial difficulties...

Carla And you cannot do a wifely duty for the sake of your family?

Sophia I would rather die! or...(she looks up hopefully) perhaps you can propose an alternative?

Carla (pauses) Would you be prepared to give yourself to me unreservedly for an eternity of love and all the protection I can provide?

Sophia (breathless) Yes. Oh, yes!

Carla You must trust me completely.

Sophia I do trust you completely.

(Carla stoops to apparently kiss Sophia on neck – but Sophia starts to struggle)

Carla No (Carla lifts her head) do not resist! This is merely the first step on our new existence together

Sophia Let me go or I'll scream.

(Carla regretfully lets Sophia go)

Carla I see you cannot trust me.

Carla Pity, I almost thought you were the one. (starts to walk away)

Sophia (looks at retreating figure and speaks to audience) What if she was telling the truth?

Sophia (calls out) You would protect me and look after me?

Carla (without turning around) For all time.

(exits with swirl of cape)

Sophia (holds arm out imploringly) Wait!

Lights fade

END