

Theatre
Episode One: Cholera

by
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INT. EMILIA CREEDENCE'S BOUDOIR - DAY

EMILIA CREEDENCE (22) sits prim in front of her vanity mirror. Young, pretty and proper, she wears just her nightgown, hair up and back.

The accoutrements of a Victorian lady about town sit on the desk in front - beet juice for her cheeks, beeswax for her lips. A dropper of lemon juice for bright eyes, and a pot of Mrs. Epsom's zinc oxide to hide any unsightly blemishes. And a moustache.

She prepares for her day. Getting up, she lets the nightgown drop to the floor and we watch from behind as she takes a long length of cotton and starts to wrap it around her bosom.

She opens her chest of drawers and pulls, from the very back, her clothes for the day - pinstripe trousers, a frock coat, shirt and starched collar. Putting these on, she pulls a pair of gigantic men's shoes from under her bed, easily four sizes too big for her.

Finally from the bottom of her CUPBOARD she pulls a TOP HAT. Looking back in the mirror it is obvious she is still Emilia Creedence, middle class daughter of a lawyer and his wife. *The final piece is missing...*

She attaches the moustache and, *voila*, she becomes he.

Mr. Emil Creedence.

INT. BRISTOL MEDICAL SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

So much smoke, so many men.

Every man jack in the tight corridor is smoking. Pipes. Cigarettes. Cigars. Cigarillos. Even a hashish pipe. Creedence immediately stands out with nothing betwixt her lips.

She fumbles in her pocket and pulls out a pipe, stolen from her father. Putting it into her mouth, she starts pushing through the crowd.

She gets the odd nod from the men, but no one seems to know her secret. Most of the men continue to CHAT as she makes her way through to the big double doors at the end. She pushes the door open and enters...

INT. BRISTOL MEDICAL SCHOOL OPERATING THEATRE - DAY

The operating theatre is also consumed with hazy smoke. In fact, she almost can't see down into the center.

In the center, ringing by ascending benches for the students to watch from, stands a single table, currently occupied.

The occupier is covered with a bloodied white sheet, but Creedence can make out the distended bloat of a condemned man's corpse.

Scanning for seats, there are plenty of spots near the back where she can hide, but her natural keenness pushes her towards a free seat in the front row.

She perches at the end of the row. Across the aisle sits a tall, slightly dim, sneery man, CHAUNCEY THISTLEWHIP (24).

Thistlewhip eyes Creedence up and down, not sure what to make of him. He then notices what is wrong and leans across the narrow aisle...

THISTLEWHIP

Shag?

CREEDENCE

(high-pitched)

I beg your pardon.

She is so taken aback that her voice is even higher than usual...

She COUGHS and readjusts her pitch...

CREEDENCE (cont'd)

(low)

I beg your pardon?

THISTLEWHIP

For your pipe. 'Tis unstuffed and unlit.

Creedence regains her composure, remembering to maintain her manly timbre...

CREEDENCE

Oh. Yes. Thank you.

Thistlewhip pulls a POUCH out from his coat.

THISTLEWHIP

My tobacconist does a wonderful
smooth Turkish...

Thistlewhip almost can't contain himself for the
punchline...

THISTLEWHIP (cont'd)

...and then he blends my tobacco!
What!

He SLAPS his thigh, then leans over the aisle to punch
Creedence in the shoulder, sending her flying off the bench
and into the lap of the man next to her, a friendly, red-
faced chap by the name of TOBY HASTINGS (22)...

TOBY

I say old boy.

CREEDENCE

Sorry.

She picks herself up, just about managing to contain her
flowing locks within the top hat, moustache now awry.

THISTLEWHIP

Ha! Get you into the university
gymnasium and on the kettle-bells I
think my man.

He hands Creedence the pouch of tobacco, and remembering
what she had seen her father do, takes a pinch out and
stuffs it into the pipe. Thistlewhip proffers a lit match
and she sucks in, lighting the pipe and inhaling the smoke.
She COUGHS mightily.

THISTLEWHIP (cont'd)

Good. Works that disease right out of
your lungs, does this stuff. Great
quality.

Just as Creedence regains her composure, the door adjacent
to the operating table flies open, a SHAFT OF LIGHT beaming
through into the smoky haze of the theatre.

A beat passes and no one comes through, until, finally, a
SMALL SCOTTISH TERRIER bounds into the room, YAPPING.

It runs in circles around the table, getting sawdust and
blood on its paws, until it finally comes to rest just in
front of Creedence. The yapping turns into as much of a
throaty BARK as the animal can muster...

A scream comes from the back room, beyond the doorway...

FILLIBUT (O.S.)

Finlay!

The crowd HUSHES and the little dog scurries back in.

From the doorway emerges DR. FILLIBUT, a rotund middle-aged gentlemen with a luxurious beard, a bloodied apron and a top hat. In one hand a LARGE KNIFE, the other a STEEL.

He sharpens the knife methodically, and slightly maniacally, like a butcher about to carve a fat pig.

Following in his wake is Finlay, the terrier, and DR. HATCHETT, his lick-spittle assistant. Hatchett is all grease and no chin.

Fillibut addresses his audience...

FILLIBUT

Now, gentlemen...

Creedence looks around shiftily...

FILLIBUT (cont'd)

...gentlemen, welcome to the first day of your, no doubt distinguished, medical careers. You are the best, the brightest, the most bewhiskered that our fair city has to offer.

The crowd look around admiringly, twiddling moustaches and stroking beards, happy at how privileged and coiffured they all are...

FILLIBUT (cont'd)

I am Dr. Periwinkle Fillibut, and I will be your tutor for this year, and today I will show you the modern miracle that is nineteenth century medicine...

The Audience APPLAUD.

With a flourish, Hatchett pulls back the drapes to reveal the body underneath...

A green, putrefying mess. The corpse is rotten and bloated, still with the executioner's noose around it's neck.

Toby takes off his top hat and vomits into it. A man two rows back faints, and another runs for the door...

Creedence and Thistlewhip are unmoved. Toby, unsure what to do with his hat, puts it back on...

Fillibut eyes the two strong-stomached students in the front row, along with their vomit-hatted neighbour.

FILLIBUT (cont'd)

What did the blighter do, Hatchett?

HATCHETT

Stole a goose from the Duke of Gloucester, Doctor.

FILLIBUT

Oh dear lord. The humanity. On the Arabian peninsula they cut off the hands off such frightful folk. Here we take the whole arm...

...and with that he hacks down with his knife on the cadavers arm, severing it.

He wrenches it away from the corpse and puts it up against his own...

FILLIBUT (cont'd)

You see gentlemen, if I peel away this piece of flesh here, you can easily see the man's Brachial artery...

Creedence and Thistlewhip? Rocks. Toby, though goes a very white shade of pale...

Sensing his is just about to push Toby over the edge again, he proffers the arms hand to Toby to shake...

FILLIBUT (cont'd)

Delighted to meet you dear boy.

Toby, vomit running down his face, upturns his hat once more and wrenches into it.

Creedence recoils from the vomiting Toby and Thistlewhip bursts into laughter, leading the rest of the assembled men to point and laugh uproariously at Toby.

This time, no matter the etiquette, Toby does not return the hat to his head.

Deciding his has had enough fun, Fillbut starts proceedings proper. He flings the arm down onto the ground for Finlay, who starts to devour it, and takes up his place behind the corpse.

He plunges the knife into the deceased and starts to rip out body parts. Holding a bloody something up to the audience...

FILLIBUT (cont'd)
What is this?

Silence.

Silence.

Silence.

CREEDENCE
(faintly)
The left kidney.

All eyes turn to Creedence. Again her natural zeal means that she cannot not answer...

FILLIBUT
Louder man. We are not at Mrs.
Ripples tea party here.

CREEDENCE
The left kidney, doctor.

Fillibut crops the Kidney down for Finlay to eat...

FILLIBUT
(impressed)
Good. This?

Another organ is flung out...

Silence.

CREEDENCE
Bile duct.

FILLIBUT
Excellent young man.

That goes on the ground too, and Fillibut rummages around further...

FILLIBUT (cont'd)
Tricky one here. This?

CREEDENCE
Descending thoracic aorta!

Creedence feels a swell of pride and more confident as the questions keep coming...

CREEDENCE (cont'd)
Right clavicle. Appendix. Lymph node.
Splenic plexus.

The rest of the students look on with one thought - cretin. Hatchett looks on with barely contained rage.

Finally Fillibut reaches down into the dead man's groin and pulls off his most vital of organs...

FILLIBUT
And what's this!

The audience erupts in laughter once more. All except Creedence who goes a deathly shade of crimson and averts her eyes...

FILLIBUT (cont'd)
Come on man. We've all got them!

Thistlewhip thinks this is amazing and cannot contain himself, smashing himself on the thigh once more and whacking Creedence into Toby's crotch once again...

THISTLEWHIP
(laughing)
It's his bloody cock!

Creedence regains herself and sits down. She looks at Toby, who is aghast...

CREEDENCE
Sorry, but it was his fault.

She points at Thistlewhip and looks over at the laughing idiot.

He immediately stops laughing.

In fact, the whole room has stopped laughing. She looks at Fillibut, who looks back, enraged.

She feels her top lip. The moustache. Gone. Now nestling in Toby's groin...

Thistlewhip stands up and points...

THISTLEWHIP

He's a bloody women!

FILLIBUT

(angry)

A woman!

Whispers of 'A woman' echo around the hall. The man two rows back faints once more. One more runs off, sobbing. Finlay starts to bark again.

FILLIBUT (cont'd)

No wonder Finlay's bile was up. Hates women like any good dog should.

Hatchett's missing chin starts to wobble, incensed that any lady could have fooled their way into this hallowed theatre and made his master look such a fool...

HATCHETT

Get out you heathen witch. This is no place for a lady.

He immediately picks up the drape and tries to cover up the body once more. Unfortunately in his haste he slips on the mixture of blood, decaying flesh and fecal matter on the floor. He falls straight into the rotting cadaver...

FILLIBUT

Who are you?

CREEDENCE

Miss Emilia Creedence. Pleased to make your acquaintance, professor.

She offers her hand, but Fillibut doesn't take it. He is furious. He addresses the class...

FILLIBUT

Class dismissed!

and then Creedence directly...

FILLIBUT (cont'd)

(seething)

Come with me.

Creedence rises from her seat and calmly follows Fillibut out...

INT. CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE ANTECHAMBER - DAY

Creedence sits in the outer office, with the Chancellor's SECRETARY. A fusty 56, she is completely taken aback by what has happened. She mutters to herself, but loudly enough for Creedence to hear...

SECRETARY

Not in my day. Oh no. Ladies were ladies. The young today are so risqué. So immodest. Not in my day.

Creedence ignores her. She can also hear the shouts coming from the Chancellor's office, as Fillibut tells him what has happened...

The door to the Chancellor's office opens, and CADOGAN FOX (54), the chancellor, peeks his head out.

CADOGAN

Hello Mr., I mean Miss Creedence. I would you come in.

Creedence gets up and heads into the office, the secretary's mutters following her.

INT. CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A light, airy room. Portraits of the previous chancellor's line the wall. The room is dominated by the massive desk in the middle of the room.

Fillibut is sitting at the desk, fuming. He does not even acknowledge Creedence as she enters. Cadogan offers her the seat next to Fillibut, then moves round to take his own place behind the enormous desk.

Cadogan is spritely, despite his age, and a complete contrast to the ill-tempered Fillibut. Friendly and open, he wouldn't be out of place 100 years in the future.

CADOGAN

So, miss, I am Cadogan Fox, the chancellor and administrator here at Bristol, and you have caused me quite the headache.

He says it all smiling. He says everything smiling.

CADOGAN (cont'd)

Was today some kind of joke?

CREEDENCE

No sir. I fully want to be the first women doctor in the city. Unfortunately this medical school does not admit women, so I had to improvise.

FILLIBUT

Of course, it doesn't admit women. What an idea!

CADOGAN

Well, personally, I am open to such forward-thinking ideas, but, others in the hospital are not so open...

Cadogan looks at Fillibut as he talks of dinosaurs...

CADOGAN (cont'd)

But the rules are the rules, and I am afraid what you did today was not a bright idea. You just cannot become a doctor at this time...

CREEDENCE

But I am far smarter and keener than anyone else in that class.

She addresses Fillibut, trying vainly to admit that he was impressed...

CREEDENCE (cont'd)

Tell him, doctor. I answered all the questions correctly, The other men did not have a clue.

FILLIBUT

You got lucky. And you didn't give the other men a chance. Anyway, they were all easy questions. Once I would moved onto the harder questions you would not have stood a chance.

Creedence senses a chance.

CREEDENCE

(imploring)

Ask me. Ask me. I am happy to take any entrance exam you want. Answer any questions. I would be the best student in this university.