

# **LET. HER. RIP.**

A Story from the Crosshairs of Major Events in 1888

Updated 8/31/22

*“Remember the Matchgirls!”*

*-Dockers Labour Activist (1889)*

Maggie Lou Rader (she/her)  
3926 Zinsle Ave.  
Cincinnati, OH 45213  
816-729-9783  
[maggierader@live.com](mailto:maggierader@live.com)  
[www.maggielourader.com](http://www.maggielourader.com)

## CONTENT WARNING

Strong language, descriptions of violence, police brutality, misogyny, mentions of assault, sexual assault, sexual mutilation, and familial loss

## CHARACTERS

**AHUNNA (NANA pronounced ‘NAH-na’)** (Based on the unnamed woman centered around the walkout that led to the Match Women strike as well as many other women this history overlooked)- 17-25 years old. Of Nigerian descent.\* Not as sheltered as her friends want to keep her. A Match Woman. Driver of change. Natural leader. Hungry to get her hands dirty in the fight for a better life. A light in a very dark world.

**LIZA (Based on Eliza Gold)**- 40-70 years old. Born in Birmingham, but moved to London as a teenager. A Match Woman. A mother. A widow. Doesn’t want much. Doesn’t need much. Doesn’t have a lot of fucks to give. Angry because she loves deeply.

**EM (Based on Mary Jane Kelly)**- 25-40 years old. Irish, or is she? Brilliant. Connected. Worldly. Alcoholic. A survivor of trafficking. Fiercely protective, to a fault. A fabulous performer, as the base of the lie is always truth and a desire for better.

\*In the playwright’s mind, Nana is the daughter of a first generation immigrant mother who moved to England as a child with her own parents (likely in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars where her father could have served as a soldier). Due to Nigeria’s large southern coastline and the increasing ease of sea travel, many men from Nigeria chose to enlist and settled in England rather than returning home at the end of the war. With that timeline, Nana’s mother could very well be speaking English as a second language, having learned it as a child. As many people with forms of dementia revert back to solely speaking their native language, it’s possible Nana’s mother is reverting back to her native language. There is a Nigerian language map at the end of this script to aid the actor in finding the soundscape that the actor feels would best connect to her to what she’s hearing her mother speak at home.

## SETTING

Whitechapel, London, August-November 1888, Em’s modest East End flat.

## SYNOPSIS

*LET. HER. RIP.* is the story of comradery, activism, and ferocity which lies in the crosshairs of the Match Women labor movement and the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888. Behind the scenes labor leaders, Em, Liza, and Nana are busting their lady balls to make the East End safer for women and all working people, when the headlines move away from their accomplishments to the mysterious man mutilating women in the streets. Women they know. Women of their community. Neighbors and friends. They support and reignite each other in their fight against deadly misogyny, police brutality, personal demons, problematic saviorism, social reform, and a better life for all poor East End women. But as tensions come to a head, who will make the final rip?

## PUNCTUATION NOTES

Dashes ( - ) at the end of a sentence mean you are cut off from finishing your thought.

Dashes ( - ) within a line mean you cut yourself off from finishing a thought.

Dashes between words ( x-x-x-x-x ) mean your words are tumbling and connected.

Ellipses ( ... ) mean you don't know what to say next, but the struggle is still active.

A beat (*beat*) or .. is a breath.

A forward slash ( / ) means the next line begins at the denoted place; you'll be talked over.

Parentheticals ( (Whatever you say.) ) Is a throwaway, nearly under the breath.

Text in italics and brackets ( [*I love you*] ) is your subtext.

## PLAYWRIGHT MESSAGE:

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the heinous murders that took place in 1888 made real, lasting, institutional changes to the way policing was done not only in London, but across the world? It didn't. Instead the "era of the great detectives" was born, still idolizing privileged men in power instead of the forgotten women they failed every day.

Hallie Rubenhold, who wrote about the five canonical women murdered in Whitechapel in 1888, has been subjected to voxxing and trolling not by asshats on the dark web, but her peers, colleagues, fellow historians for having the audacity to suggest that these women were not all sex workers and that perhaps that bias and overarching assumption of classification led to more victims because of a biased police force. Her book, THE FIVE was published in 2019.

Jack the Ripper, Peter Sutcliffe (who died of Covid in 2020, good fucking riddance), and Willie Pickton were/are madmen who don't deserve to have their names remembered at all, much less at an elevated place above their victims. But how many women were murdered by these sick fucks simply because of police apathy and bias?

FIVE YEARS before Sutcliffe was captured, Olive Smelt was attacked and survived by fighting him off. She told police that her attacker had a Yorkshire accent, but this information was ignored, as was the fact that neither she nor a previous survivor were in towns with red light areas, and instead of LISTENING to survivors, it was easier to rely on biased assumptions that all the victims of this sick fuck were sex workers. On August 27, 1975, Sutcliffe attacked 14-year-old Tracy Browne in Silsden. He struck her from behind and hit her on the head five times while she was walking along a country lane. He ran off when he saw the lights of a passing car, leaving his victim requiring brain surgery. Sutcliffe was not convicted of the attack but confessed to it in 1992, twelve years after his capture, because again, she was 14, and police assumed she couldn't be a sex worker, (also not true), but that since she wasn't one, she *couldn't* have been a victim of Sutcliffe. Fuck me.

From 1983-2002 Willie Pickton murdered 49 women, mostly indigenous sex workers, in Canada and got away with it because the Canadian police actively chose to not give a shit about indigenous women and sex workers. In fact, when the police department was investigated shortly before his capture, it was discovered they didn't even take missing person reports in numerous cases later connected to Pickton. He murdered these women in his rodent, insect, and feces ridden home, handcuffing them, raping them with a dildo attached to a gun, grinding their bodies in his industrial meatgrinder, and feeding their remains to his livestock. And instead of showing any remorse for his 49 victims, he instead was angry he didn't get to an even 50.

And instead of giving these fuckers any more stage time, I'm going to read the names of the souls they took from this planet.

Mary Ann "Polly" Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine "Chic" Eddowes, Mary Jane Kelly, and possibly others, were killed in England because of one sick man and failed policing.

Wilma McCann, Emily Jackson, Irene Richardson, Patricia "Tina" Atkinson, Jayne MacDonald, Jean Jordan, Yvonne Pearson, Helen Rytka, Vera Millward, Josephine Whitaker, Barbara Leach, Marguerite Walls, and Jacqueline Hill were killed in England because of one sick man and failed policing.

Sereena Abotsway, Mona Lee Wilson, Andrea Joesbury, Brenda Ann Wolfe, Marnie Lee Frey, Georgina Faith Papin, Jacqueline Michelle McDonell, Dianne Rosemary Rock, Heather Kathleen Bottomley, Jennifer Lynn Furminger, Helen Mae Hallmark, Patricia Rose Johnson, Heather Chinnook, Tanya Holyk, Sherry Irving, Inga Monique Hall, Tiffany Drew, Sarah de Vries, Cynthia Feliks, Angela Rebecca Jardine, Diana Melnick, Debra Lynne Jones, Wendy Crawford, Kerry Koski, Andrea Fay Borhaven, Cara Louise Ellis aka Nicky Trimble, Mary Ann Clark aka Nancy Greek, Yvonne Marie Boen, Dawn Teresa Crey, two unidentified women, and over a dozen confessed to be murdered but never found women were killed in Canada because of one sick man and failed policing.

## SCENE 1

*(A very plain, very gray, very bare East End flat that discloses nothing about its inhabitants, other than hundreds of match boxes sitting on ledges, counters, and tucked in corners, and possibly, a small copy of the print “The Fisherman’s Widow” on a wall. The sounds of women happily, raucously, definitely rudely singing in the streets rise and move through the air. Shouts of support, shouts of victory, shouts of dissent can all be heard. Three voices grow louder. Louder. They’re coming up the stairs.)*

EM, NANA, AND LIZA

*We’ll hang old Bryant on a sour apple tree,  
We’ll hang old Bryant on a sour apple tree,  
We’ll hang old Bryant on a sour apple tree,  
As we go marchin’ on.*

*(The door is unlocked and EM, NANA, and LIZA practically flood the room, singing, dancing, living their beeeeeeeest fucking lives. As they should be. It’s a good day.)*

EM, NANA, AND LIZA

*Glory, glory, hallelujah,*

EM AND NANA

*Glory, glory hallelujah,*

LIZA

*(overlaps in time) Fuckinlujah!*

EM, NANA, AND LIZA

*Glory, glory, halle-FUCKING-lujah,  
As weeee gooooo march-in’ oooooooooon!*

*(Celebratory hubbub, joy, shouts, hugs, and commotion. EM realizes the opportunity, and pulls the newspaper out from under her arm and puts it on the table.)*

EM

Nana! Come here. Read this.

LIZA

Not now, for fuck’s sake.

EM

YES NOW! Nana, come.

NANA

Em, I know what / it says-

LIZA

She knows, I know, *(goes to the window to shout it out and celebrate)* ALL OF LONDON FUCKING KNOWS, so let the wee one enjoy a moment of fun without breaking a / lesson atop her head.

NANA

I *am* standing right here, you know, / and I can-

EM

I don't care if Parliament, the devil, or Queen Vic herself *know*; it's one thing to live this yoke, but / it's one thing-

LIZA

What yoke are *you* / living?

EM

I tell you, it's real different to read for yourself what Bryant and May have to see with their own eyes.

NANA

Uuuuu/uunnnnggggghhhhhh.....

EM

(Oh yes, it's so hard being you.)

LIZA

It *is* hard being her, and me, and you too for fucking sure.

EM

Oh Liza, sing me another.

NANA

UUUUGGG/GGHHHHH!

EM

READ. THE *FUCKING*. PAPER.

NANA

... "Match Girl's Stri- *Strick*"-

EM

There's an "E" at the end, long "I."

LIZA

Long indeed; I was young when she fucking started.

EM

Liza, don't be a cunt. Long "I."

NANA

"Match Girl's Strike Ends in Vike-tory..."

EM

Sound it out...

NANA

"Vick-tore-ee," oh! *Victory!*

EM AND LIZA

VICTORY!

EM

Victory indeed!

LIZA

In-fucking-*deed* indeed, don't need to be afternoonified to see that!

NANA

She's not wrong though, sweeter to read it yourself.

EM

(*To NANA*) And just think of the gnashing of teeth when Bryant and May saw it in black and white! (*To LIZA*) And at least she *wants* to be the leader of a union.

LIZA

But I don't?

EM

Don't seem it.

LIZA

What's the wee one got that / I don't got?

NANA

I'm not that / wee.

EM

Brains, manners, *literacy*.

LIZA

Now what would I go and do with something like that?

EM

With what, *literacy*?

LIZA

Yeah you keep using that word like I know what it means.

NANA

She means knowing how to read and write.

LIZA

Now why wouldn't you just fucking say / that?

EM

(Oh my / God...)

LIZA

Why the fuck would I want to know how to read and write, wh-what would I do with that?

EM

Read and write / perhaps?

LIZA

Hell with that; I know what I'm about and that's / not it.

EM

You'd see and know what Bryant and May had to see and know in *print!*

NANA

And read it they did. Because it happened. And we made it happen. It happened because of us.

LIZA

*(pulling a flask out)* Well if I can't drink to that, slap my left tit and call me Sue.

EM

You know your right tit from your left tit, Sue?

LIZA

Shut your sauce-box and get the cups.

EM

Get them yourself.

NANA

I'll get them.

EM

LIZA

You're busy. *Liza!* Fuck it all, I'll do it. Keep on Wee One.

*(LIZA grabs some cups from the cabinet)*

NANA

"The London sock- soak.."

*(EM peeks over NANA's shoulder)*

EM

"Society."

LIZA

Oh God...

NANA

I knew what it said, but you both hovering over me makes me nervous!

EM

May I?

NANA

Are you serious?

LIZA

Take it Em! Take it before I have a fucking stroke.

*(NANA hands the paper to EM and with it, a LOOK. EM reads while LIZA pours the whiskey, giving her friends each a glass. EM never touches hers)*

EM

“The London society was shocked and astonished at the revelations concerning the wages paid to the girls of Bryant and May's Matchstick Factory in the East End. The wages of the adult women employed in the factory averaged from 3 to 9 shilling a week, during which they had toiled from half-past six in the morning until eight at night. And the wretched wage-rate was further reduced by fines from the company for little mistakes or carelessness, all while the girls were forced to eat their scanty meals amid the phosphorous fumes of the factory. The result of which in many cases, was ulceration and near disintegration of the jaw-bone.”

LIZA

Hurts like hell too!

EM

(Like you'd know.)

NANA

*(With affected class)* Another nip?

LIZA

*(Joining in the game)* Oh! Don't mind if I do.

*(LIZA sneaks another small pour, they clink and drink, pinkies out)*

EM

“Directly, a woman appeared with a swollen face and cheeks.” Oh is *that* what's happening with that gibface of yours?

LIZA

Jump up your own twat; I got the phossy-jaw!

EM

No you don't.

LIZA

Yes I do!

EM

With all the talking you do at me, you want me to believe / you have-

IT'S EARLY STAGES / EM!

LIZA

Stoooooop.

NANA

EM

“The foreman ordered her to have her teeth *drawn* on pain of dismissal.”

LIZA

He sure fucking did!

NANA

Whose twat should he jump up?

LIZA

Nobody's! Ugly little fuck.

EM

“This shameful system of oppression was exposed in a weekly paper by journalist, “ and my dear friend, “Annie Besant”-

LIZA

To Annie Besant!

NANA

To Annie Besant! And Em, her dirty little snitch!

*(LIZA laughs too hard, NANA and EM look at her)*

LIZA

...What?

EM

What do you mean ‘what?’

LIZA

Did you not just say “dirty little snatch?”

EM

...No.

LIZA

Too bad. It was funny.

EM

May I continue? (Dirty little-Jesus.) “The foremen were instructed to direct the girls to sign a statement that Annie Besant's charges were untrue,” But the Match Girls said?

NANA

LIZA

NO! FUCK-NO-YOU-DIRTYSNATCHES!

EM

“So the foremen tried terrorism. In one department, a young girl supporting her invalid mother at home was threatened with dismissal”-

NANA

*(Choking in shock)* Oh my God, they’re talking about me...

EM

“Still, she and all refused.”

LIZA

Sure fucking did, *(to NANA)* you dirty little snatch!

NANA

So this “snatch” thing-

EM

“The next morning, she was dismissed on a frivolous pretext, whereupon the whole factory threw down their work and came out on strike.”

LIZA

*(Pouring NANA a wee bit more)* Damn right, ain’t no one doing our girl that way.

EM

“One of the finest examples of spontaneous united action on record; and the first decided revolt among the working women of London.”

LIZA

*(shouting it out the window)* Working women of Londooooon!

NANA

*(Also out the window )* AND our dirty little snatches!

*(LIZA and EM give NANA a look of distaste.)*

NANA

Too far. I heard it.

EM

“For two weeks the strike went on. Bryant and May threatened, denied, abused. Meanwhile the Match Women stood by one another as their courage, steadfastness and determination drew sympathy from all sides.”

NANA

Yeah, Scotland Yard seemed real sympathetic clubbing heads on your march to Parliament.

LIZA

Truth.

NANA

Or so I heard. *Somebody* barricaded me inside her flat and wouldn't let me go.

EM

Stand by it. Much too dangerous / for you.

LIZA

Um-hm.

EM

"The tide of public opinion set so decidedly against the company and its big dividends, that Bryant and May gave in, *unconditionally*."

LIZA

Say it AGAIN, you dirty little snatch!

NANA

So she can say it, but I can't?

EM

"Bryant and May gave in, unconditionally! The managers swear they had not known the real state of affairs"-

LIZA

BALLS!

EM

"All fines and deductions are to be abolished, and Mr. Bryant out of his great generosity"-

NANA

"Greeeeeeeeeeaaaat generosity!" What a dick...

LIZA

Oh yes! Thank you Mr. Bryant! Thank you for greasing up all those years of fucking us sideways.

EM

"Mr. Bryant is going to build a dining hall, and the company will graciously permit the women to form a trade union."

*(Celebration erupts. While reading, EM pushes her shot closer to LIZA, and takes her used cup to the sink. LIZA continues drinking out of new cup, none the wiser)*

EM

"The strikers have won, the excitement is over"-

LIZA

But the drinks just started!

EM

“But the moral effect of their action remains. The spontaneous, united action of these unorganized and apparently submissive and helpless women has given a shock to capitalist security. If by their sudden, unpremeditated revolt they have won what they desired, what is to prevent the same thing from happening on a larger scale with equal success? If the hope of a little relief from suffering can inspire these down-trodden women with such high courage, perhaps today is a vivid glimpse of the reign of plenty which will spring from free cooperation without masters or laws.”

LIZA

Cheers to that!

NANA

Cheers to us.

EM

Cheers... to *tomorrow*.

NANA

What's tomorrow?

LIZA

Besides a massive hangover?

EM

Tomorrow, we get to *work*.

LIZA

Think they'd give us a few days to celebrate cutting their balls off.

EM

A union's a lot of work.

NANA

And we've got no time to lose.

LIZA

The fuck we don't. We been working for months, years to get to this. We stuck it to Bryant and May, got what we wanted, and my feet are going up and they're planning on staying there for a wee bit.

*(LIZA puts her feet up on the table, EM knocks them off.)*

EM

Get your nasty kebs off my table.

LIZA

Better than my dirty snatch.

EM

Put *that* on my table, good luck getting it back.

NANA

She's right.

LIZA

You a snatch snatcher you sneaky snatch?

NANA

For the love of God stop saying "snatch!"

LIZA

(To EM) Yeah! Knock off the filth you grubby little cunt.

NANA

My point is, if we want change, *real* change for working women, working men [!], factory workers, dockers, every poor East Ender struggling to, *just live*, today isn't the end of anything. It's only the beginning.

EM

The beginning.

NANA

The end of a strike, the beginning of a movement.

EM

Of a new way of life.

NANA

Of better days for all women.

EM

All *people!* ... Liza?

LIZA

What?

EM

Don't you care to get / involved in-

LIZA

I know, all for one, one for all, ta-ra-ra boom-de-ay, snatches stick together, all that.

EM

Sticking them together is grounds for arrest.

LIZA

Wouldn't be my first time being nibbed by police in Whitechapel.

EM

Or mine.

NANA

Or mine.

LIZA

Life's not been fair to us lot. But after today, maybe, things will be better. A wee bit better. At least.

*(beat)*

EM

That was actually nice.

LIZA

Don't get fucking used to it.

EM

There she is.

LIZA

To Bryant and May. And the balls they lost on Fairfield Road!

LIZA, EM, AND NANA

To the balls they lost on Fairfield Road!

*(THEY cheers, LIZA and NANA drink, and they celebrate)*