

EXCERPT FROM *THE ELEPHANT MAN*
- *Bernard Pomerance*

From Scene VII: “The English Public Will Pay For Him To Be Like Us”

BISHOP HOWE: With what fortitude [Merrick] bears his cross! It is remarkable. He has made the acquaintance of religion and knows sections of the Bible by heart. Once I'd grasped his speech, it became clear he'd certainly had religious instruction at one time.

TREVES: I believe it was in the workhouse, Dr. Howe.

BISHOP: They are awfully good about that sometimes. The psalms he loves, and the book of Job perplexes him, he says, for he cannot see that a just God must cause suffering, as he puts it, merely then to be merciful. Yet that Christ will save him he does not doubt, so he is not resentful.

GOMM: Christ had better; be damned if we can.

BISHOP: Ahem. In any case Dr. Treves, he has a religious nature, further instruction would uplift him and I'd be pleased to provide it. I plan to speak of him from the pulpit this week.

GOMM: That announcement makes my news seem banal, yet yes: Frederick, the response to my letter to the *Times* about Merrick has been staggering. The English public has been so generous that Merrick may be supported for life without a penny spent from Hospital funds.

TREVES: But that is excellent.

BISHOP: God bless the English public. Mr. Treves, I'll visit Merrick weekly if I may.

TREVES: You will be welcome, sir, I am certain.

BISHOP: Then good day, sirs.

GOMM: Well Jesus, my boy, now we have the money, what do you plan for Merrick?

TREVES: Normality as far as is possible.

GOMM: So he will be like us? Ah. (*smiles*)

TREVES: Is something wrong, Mr. Gomm? With us?

NARRATOR: *Merrick becomes a celebrity in mid-Victorian England. Members of the nobility, even the royal family, make it a point to visit Merrick without disgust and shower him with presents. His physician, Frederick Treves, has been honored by the Queen and is now the personal physician to the Prince of Wales, as well as other members of high society. But Treves has become less and less certain that he has created a "normal" life for Merrick, and wonders how he differs from the manager who used to exhibit Merrick at side-shows for a fee. His disillusionment is apparent to his boss, Carr Gomm, the hospital director.*

GOMM: What is it, Freddie? What has gone sour for you?

TREVES: It is just – it is the overarc of things, quite inescapable that as Merrick's achieved greater and greater normality, his condition's edged him closer to the grave. So--- To become more normal is to die? More accepted to worsen? He – it is just a mockery of everything we live by.

GOMM: Sorry, Freddie. Didn't catch that one.

TREVES: Nothing has gone sour. I do not know.

GOMM: Cheer up, man. You are knighted. Your clients will be kings. Nothing succeeds my boy like success.

BISHOP: I find my sessions with Merrick utterly moving, Mr. Treves. He struggles so. I suggested he might like to be confirmed; he leaped at it like a man lost in a desert to an oasis.

TREVES: (dryly) He is very excited to do what others do if he thinks it is what others do.

BISHOP: Do you cast doubt, sir, on his faith?

TREVES: No, sir, I do not. Yet he makes all of us think he is deeply like ourselves. And yet we're not like each other. I conclude that we have polished him like a mirror, and shout hallelujah when he reflects us to the inch. I have grown sorry for it.