

THE LAST JACOBITE

Adapted from Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*, for performance in the Aros Hall, Tobermory.

CAST

Redcoat sergeant (of Highland origin)

Redcoat soldier

Redcoat drummer

A ragged fugitive

A lass who sings

SCENE

The old pier, Tobermory, autumn 1746, with large barrel, looking towards Calve.

ROLL OF DRUMS AS REDCOATS ENTER WITH 'WANTED - REWARD' PLACARDS. SERGEANT WITH LANTERN PEERS OVER THE EDGE OF THE PIER.

SOLDIER. This is a good place to put one up.

DRUMMER. You better ask the sergeant.

SOLDIER. Will we put one here, on the barrel?

SERGEANT. There's a flight of steps here that leads to the water. This is a place that should be minded well. If he got down here, his friends might have a boat to meet him.

DRUMMER. It's the only way out for him now. We've got pickets at the Doirlinn and Rubha nan Gall and on all the heights around the village.

SOLDIER. Would the barrel be a good place?

SERGEANT. It might. You can stick it up there.

SERGEANT (READING PLACARD) Dark hair, dark eyes. Extremely dangerous to all law and order. There's not much to take hold of in that. They say he's a wonder at escaping too.

SOLDIER Thirty thousand pounds, dead or alive! Just think what we could do with that!

SERGEANT You're not paid to think. I will mind this place myself. I wouldn't wonder at all if he came this way. He might come slipping along and his friends might come here with a boat. And once he got away we would never catch him - away in a small boat to the mainland at Drimnin, or even a frigate to France.

DRUMMER It's very dark.

SERGEANT It's dark indeed. A frigate could have slipped into the sound under the cover of it, and be lying there at the back of Calve, waiting to collect him.

SOLDIER If we catch him tonight, there will be nothing but abuse for us from the natives.

SERGEANT Well, we have to do what we're paid for. Haven't we the whole island depending on us to keep up law and order? If it wasn't for us, those that are down would be up again, and those that are up would be down. Hurry up then. Get the rest of your placards up around the village. And then come back here. Take the lantern with you. Don't be too long, now. It's very lonesome here with nothing but the dark for company.

SOLDIER We'll be as fast as we can. But we hardly put them up when the natives tear them down again.

DRUMMER Why can't we teach them a proper lesson like we've done everywhere else?

EXIT SOLDIER AND DRUMMER WITH ROLL OF DRUMS

SERGEANT Thirty thousand pounds. What I could do with that!

RAGGED FUGITIVE APPEARS AND TRIES TO SLIP PAST

SERGEANT What the hell do you think you are doing there?

FUGITIVE I am only a poor beggar, your honour, with nothing left me but my rags and a pair of tin whistles. I hoped to beg my dinner from any sailors that might go back to their boats tonight.

SERGEANT Stop! Didn't I tell you to stop? You can't go down this pier tonight.

FUGITIVE Ah well, it's a hard thing to be poor and the north in ruins. All the world's against us now.

SERGEANT Where are you from anyway?

FUGITIVE I am not from anywhere now, your honour. Once you Redcoats had been there, there was nothing left to beg at all.

SERGEANT. That's what the king does to rebels!

FUGITIVE He surely does, your honour.

SERGEANT I serve for king and country now.

FUGITIVE Ah yes, your honour. But which king? And which country?

SERGEANT Less of that nonsense here! Anyway, if you've come so far, you can go further yet. Get out of here now!

FUGITIVE GOES TOWARDS THE STEPS

SERGEANT Come back from those steps! Nobody is allowed down there tonight!

FUGITIVE I will just sit here then, your honour. Some of the sailors should be on their way back soon and I can give them a tune for my supper.

SERGEANT Move on, I tell you. I won't have any loafer on this pier tonight.

FUGITIVE I amn't a loafer, your honour, I am a musician. I will give you a tune to yourself, you'll surely like that, here all on your own in the dark.

FUGITIVE SOFTLY PLAYS A KING HAS LANDED IN MOIDART

SERGEANT It's a lovely tune. What is it called?

FUGITIVE STOPS PLAYING

FUGITIVE A king has landed in Moidart.

SERGEANT Play some more of it. a king has landed in Moidart! stop that noise now! You'll get us transported.

FUGITIVE There's many been transported this last summer. And burned from their homes and hanged on gallows.

SERGEANT Don't I know it! Get out of here at once!

FUGITIVE HEADS FOR STEPS

SERGEANT Where are you going?

FUGITIVE I am just getting out of here.

SERGEANT Don't be a fool. I didn't say that way. Get back into the village now. Here, I'll help you on your way with my boot. Be off with you!

FUGITIVE STUDIES PLACARD

FUGITIVE I think I know what you're waiting for, your honour.

SERGEANT What's that got to do with you!

FUGITIVE I know that man well. But I must be going now.

SERGEANT You know him, do you? Come back here. What sort is he?

FUGITIVE Come back? Do you want to have me killed?

SERGEANT Why do you say that?

FUGITIVE Never mind. I'm going now.

SERGEANT Come back here! What sort is he? And where did you see him?

FUGITIVE He has been many places these last few months, on the run all over the north. You wouldn't like to meet him, your honour. A desperate man and no friend of your Redcoats. There isn't a weapon he doesn't know the use of, and he's used them too, many a time.

SERGEANT Is he as bad as they say?

FUGITIVE Worse. There was a poor man in our place, a sergeant just like you. He took the throat out of him, some people say with his own teeth. A sergeant - on a very dark night - just like this - and at the water's side too.

SERGEANT The moon will rise soon and give us some light. What a terrible country to belong to!

FUGITIVE That's so indeed! You might be standing there, looking out that way, thinking you saw him coming up this side of the pier, and he might be coming up this other side. He'd be on you before you knew where you were!

SERGEANT It's a whole battalion of soldiers we would need here to stop a man like that!

FUGITIVE Maybe I should stay with you, your honour, until the moon rises. I can watch this way and you can watch the other. We could sit up on this barrel for a better view of things.

SERGEANT And you would recognise him?

FUGITIVE I would know him a mile away.

SERGEANT But what about the reward? Would you want a share of it?

FUGITIVE I couldn't live with the shame, your honour, that would be handed down the generations like a curse for ever on my people. You can take it all, if you want it. But I better be going now.

SERGEANT No, no, you can stay here till the moon rises.

FUGITIVE GETS UP ON BARREL

FUGITIVE All right, your honour. It's a wonder you're not tired out, walking up and down the way you are.

SERGEANT My nerves are bad in the dark.

FUGITIVE They might be worse yet this night. Take it easy while you can. There's plenty of room up here on the barrel, and you can see further when you are higher up.

SERGEANT GETS ONTO BARREL AND THEY SIT BACK TO BACK

SERGEANT I felt a bit nervous there, the way you were talking.

FUGITIVE PRODUCES A PIPE

FUGITIVE Give me a match, your honour, and share a smoke with me. It will quieten your nerves. Wait now, and I will pass you the pipe. But don't turn round! Keep your eyes on the lookout as if your life depended on it!

SERGEANT You don't need to worry, I will.

THEY SMOKE CONTEMPLATIVELY

SERGEANT It's a hard thing for me, this army and this Red coat. Out at this time of night, and in mortal danger. We get nothing but abuse from the people, and no choice but to obey orders.

FUGITIVE Why did you join them?

SERGEANT I just told you, I had no choice. They hanged my father and transported my brothers. It was either a Red coat for me, or the gallows too.

FUGITIVE So why don't you leave?

SERGEANT I would swing on their gallows when they caught me.

FUGITIVE PLAYS FREEDOM COME ALL YE

SERGEANT Stop that! That sort of music is against the law now!

FUGITIVE STOPS PLAYING

FUGITIVE Ah, your honour, I was only playing to keep my heart up. It sinks when I think of that poor man on the run. His people say he is a hero, and your Redcoats hunt him like a rat. No wonder he is desperate. To think of us two sitting here and him creeping up the pier, ready to do for us both!

SERGEANT Are you keeping a good look out?

FUGITIVE I am. And for no reward either. What a fool I must be. But if I ever saw a man in trouble, I had to help him out of it. What's that noise? Did you hear something?

SERGEANT Your nerves are bad.

FUGITIVE They are getting worse by the minute.

SERGEANT Well, you can play the tune again, if you like, but don't make too much noise. It will help to keep your courage up.

FUGITIVE PLAYS, LOUDER, FREEDOM COME ALL YE.
SERGEANT LISTENS CAREFULLY. AFTER A WHILE THE
SERGEANT INTERRUPTS.

SERGEANT You haven't got that one right.

FUGITIVE STOPS PLAYING

FUGITIVE You're right, your honour, you're right. To think of a man like you knowing a tune like that!

SERGEANT There's many a thing a man might know and might not have any wish for.

FUGITIVE GIVES SECOND WHISTLE TO SERGEANT

FUGITIVE Play with me a little, your honour, but don't make too much noise. it's illegal music now, you know.

SERGEANT Give me a tune to start with then.

FUGITIVE BEGINS TO PLAY WILL YE NO COME BACK AGAIN.

SERGEANT What's that one called?

FUGITIVE STOPS PLAYING

FUGITIVE I don't know if it has any name at all yet.

SERGEANT It better not be a danger to the state!

FUGITIVE Not in the circumstances.

THEY BOTH PLAY TOGETHER. AFTER A WHILE, WE HEAR A LASS SINGING OFFSTAGE WITH GREAT PURITY OF VOICE. AS SHE SINGS, THEY STOP PLAYING TO LISTEN.

LASS (OFFSTAGE)

Will ye no come back again

Will ye no come back again

Better loved you canna be

Will ye no come back again? etc.

HER VOICE RISES AND THEN FADES.

SERGEANT A lass was singing in the village.

FUGITIVE Well, she's stopped now.

SERGEANT I hope they haven't arrested her.

A BEAT

FUGITIVE Ssssh! Is there something there?

SERGEANT Was that a boat? Is it a boat come for him?

THEY STARE INTO THE NIGHT IN TENSE SILENCE

FUGITIVE It's all clear, your honour. That was a false alarm.

SERGEANT Thank God for it! But don't close your eyes for a second!

AGAIN THEY STARE INTO THE NIGHT IN TENSE SILENCE

FUGITIVE Oh yes, it's a strange world with little justice in it. A hero on the field of battle, they say, with his enemies vanquished around him - and then you hunt him down. And a good musician too!

SERGEANT A musician!

FUGITIVE Just like you, your honour.

SERGEANT Isn't it a strange world.

FUGITIVE Maybe once you played old tunes together, and now tonight you could be arresting him. And sending him to the gallows.

SERGEANT That's true, indeed.

FUGITIVE And maybe one night, after you had been playing, if they told you of a plan they had, you might have joined with them - and maybe it would be you that they would be hunting now.

SERGEANT Well, who knows but it could have gone like that.

FUGITIVE It's a strange world, and it's little any mother knows when she sees her child creeping on the floor what might happen to it before it has gone through its life, or who will be who in the end.

SERGEANT That's a thought now, and a true thought. Wait till I think it out. If it wasn't for them putting me into this Red coat, it could be me now skulking in the dark. It might be me creeping up here, trying to break out of my own country - and that country overrun by others and all in ruins. It could be him on this barrel, keeping the mighty up and the humble down - what's that?!

FUGITIVE JUMPS OFF BARREL AND LISTENS INTO THE NIGHT

FUGITIVE It's nothing, your honour, but the sea birds on the shore-rocks at Calve. They can see the moon starting to rise in the north.

SERGEANT I thought I heard the creak of thole on muffled loom. Friends of his with a boat come to take him away from his native land.

FUGITIVE Do you know, your honour, when you were young. I think you were with the people, and not the law and the Redcoats at all.

SERGEANT Well, I was young then and that time has gone.

FUGITIVE But if it comes back, your honour, whose side will you be on then?

SERGEANT It's no business of yours what I think!

FUGITIVE Maybe, your honour, but you'll be on the side of the country yet.

SERGEANT GETS OFF BARREL

SERGEANT Don't talk to me like that. I have my duties and I know them. That was a boat. I can hear the oars again now.

FUGITIVE BEGINS TO PLAY WILL YOU NO COME BACK AGAIN,
BOLDER AND NOISIER

SERGEANT Stop that, stop that at once! If you don't stop now, I will arrest you!

FUGITIVE STOPS PLAYING. A WHISTLE FROM BELOW
REPEATING THE AIR

SERGEANT There's a boat coming! That was a signal. You must not pass this way - step back now - who are you? You are no common beggar!

FUGITIVE You needn't ask who I am. That placard will tell you.

SERGEANT You are the man we are looking for!

FUGITIVE REMOVES HAT

FUGITIVE I am that man. There is a price of thirty thousands pounds on my head. There is a friend of mine below in a boat. He will help bring me to safety - if you will only let him.

SERGEANT What a pity, what a pity! You deceived me completely.

FUGITIVE Will you see me go to the gallows for my country?

SERGEANT What a pity, what a pity!

FUGITIVE Will you let me pass, or must I make you let me?

SERGEANT I am the law.

FUGITIVE Ah yes, but there are two sides to every law. Which side of it are you on?

DRUMS ARE HEARD APPROACHING

SOLDIER (OFFSTAGE) That's them up, all round the village.

SERGEANT It's my comrades coming.

DRUMMER (OFFSTAGE) This is where we left him.

FUGITIVE You won't betray me, a friend of our country.

FUGITIVE SLIPS BEHIND BARREL.

SERGEANT CONCEALS HAT

ENTER SOLDIER AND DRUMMER

SOLDIER Did you see anyone?

A SILENCE

SERGEANT No one.

DRUMMER All quiet?

SERGEANT I heard the shore-birds scream on Calve when first they saw the moon. But nothing else, nothing else at all.

SOLDIER All the placards are up. We can stay here with you now.

SERGEANT There is nothing for you to do here.

DRUMMER You told us to come back when we were finished.

SERGEANT You're not needed now.

DRUMMER I will check the steps down to the water.

SERGEANT Leave these steps alone! I have been inspecting them all night. What sort of fool would bring a boat in here with three loyal soldiers of the king to watch them? Be off with you!

SOLDIER Well, we'll leave the lantern with you for company.

SERGEANT I don't want it. The moon will rise above the village at any moment now.

SOLDIER I will put it on the barrel.

SERGEANT Take it away with you! I don't want it now!

SOLDIER I thought it might be a comfort to you. Flashing it about in dark corners, it's like being beside the fire at home.

SOLDIER FLASHES LANTERN AROUND THE BARREL

SERGEANT Get out of here now! And take that lantern with you!

EXIT SOLDIER AND DRUMMER. FUGITIVE COMES FROM BEHIND BARREL.

SERGEANT Your boat's below, and there's a price of thirty thousand pounds on your head! What are you waiting for?

FUGITIVE My hat, of course. It is a cold night, and it could still be a long one.

FUGITIVE PUTS HAT BACK ON

SERGEANT I hope you make it. For the old times.

FUGITIVE They're not gone yet.

AN URGENT WHISTLE FROM BELOW. MOON JUST BEGINNING TO RISE

FUGITIVE This boat will take me to Calve. A frigate came into the sound tonight, under cover of the darkness. She is waiting for me on the other side of the island. They will send a ship's boat to Calve for me, and take me out to her.

SERGEANT For the old times. But I hope we never meet again.

FUGITIVE We might. I am late to the ship. She must be away by moonrise sharp. If she has gone then you will find me still on Calve in the morning. And you will get your thirty thousand pounds.

SERGEANT How will I know?

FUGITIVE There will be a signal. When you hear one gun, you will know the anchor's hove aboard, all sail's set to topsails and royals, and she is already under way.

SERGEANT And you will be on Calve.

FUGITIVE If you hear a second and final gun, yes. They will have gone without me.

SERGEANT I will have you in the morning.

FUGITIVE Yes, you will have your fortune in the morning.

MOON RISING

SERGEANT That's the moon rising quickly now. Look, look, you can see her masts at the back of Calve already!

FUGITIVE But there might be a third gun, Sergeant. If there is, that will be a signal to my friends in the island. It will let them know that I am safely aboard and we are standing up the sound for Ardmore and Calgary and the Treshnish: and then the open sea.

FUGITIVE APPROACHES SERGEANT WHO HAS BEEN GUARDING THE WAY TO THE STEPS

SERGEANT And will you come back again?

FUGITIVE I do not know. But I will leave my spirit behind me. And as long as there are people here, my spirit and my music will be among them. So good night, Sergeant, and thank you. You did me a good turn tonight, and I am obliged to you. Maybe I will be able to do as much for you when the small rise up and the big fall down, and our country's ours again: when we all change places -

SERGEANT AND FUGITIVE CHANGES PLACES.

BOTH WITH FLOURISH TO RISING MOON

BOTH - at the rising of the moon!

EXIT FUGITIVE

SERGEANT STUDIES PLACARD

SERGEANT Thirty thousand pounds reward! Thirty thousand pounds!

SERGEANT TURNS TO AUDIENCE

SERGEANT I wonder now if I am as great a fool as I think I am?

DRUM ROLL AND CURTAIN

CURTAIN UP AS CAST COME ON STAGE, FEMALE SINGER LAST, TO LEAD THE AUDIENCE (BECAUSE THE WORDS ARE PRINTED IN THE PROGRAMME) IN A ROUSING RENDITION OF THE CHORUS OF WILL YOU NO COME BACK AGAIN.

FINAL CURTAIN

AND AS THE AUDIENCE SPILL OUT OF AROS HALL, THREE CAREFULLY SPACED AND MIGHTY GUNSHOTS (LIFEBOAT MAROONS?) FROM THE DIRECTION OF RUBHA NAN GALL.