

THE JUSTIFIED SINNER

a play by

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Freely adapted from the novel

The Private Memoirs & Confessions of a Justified Sinner

by James Hogg

3rd Draft @ 1st December 2019

Act One only



James Hogg (1770 – 1835) was a Scottish poet, novelist and essayist who wrote in both Scots and English. As a young man he had been a shepherd and a farmhand, and an auto-didact. In later life he moved in Scotland's literary circles, becoming friends with many of the great writers of his day.

His most celebrated work, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, was first published in 1824. It is told in two voices; the 'memoir' itself, which belongs to the years 1704-5, is related by the 'justified sinner', Robert Wringhim, while the unnamed 'Editor' records the facts of Robert's life as far as he has been able to gather them over a century later.

We adopt a rather different strategy, and also diverge from the book in many other respects, both in character and in incident.

A.H. & D.P.

CHARACTERS

in order of appearance

ANNIE, *an elderly labourer*

BALDIE, *Annie's husband*

LOCKHART, *a researcher*

ROBERT – *Robert Colwan, supposedly Dalcastle's younger son*

MAIRI, *a young woman of Dalcastle village*

DALCASTLE – *George Colwan the Elder, the Laird of Dalcastle*

BLANCHARD, *a Church of Scotland Minister*

MARGARET Logan, *the Laird's Housekeeper*

GEORGE – *George Colwan, the Laird's elder son and heir*

RABINA Colwan, *the Laird's estranged wife*

WRINGHIM – *Robert Wringhim, a Calvinist minister*

STEWART – *Will Stewart, a young friend of young George*

GIL-MARTIN

PROCURATOR *Fiscal*

WAINWRIGHT – *Mrs Wainwright, cook to Will Stewart's father*

DRUMMOND – *Tom Drummond, friend to George*

BEL Calvert, *a prostitute*

MINISTER

2 GRAVEDIGGERS

KEELER – *Mrs Keeler, Mairi's mother*

LINKUM, *a lawyer*

The play may be performed by a company of 11 or more (see overleaf)

The action takes place in Scotland in 1823, and in 1704–1708

A possible doubling scheme:

Men

BALDIE with DALCASTLE, DRUMMOND & 1st GRAVEDIGGER

BLANCHARD with PROCURATOR, 1st MAN, 2nd GRAVEDIGGER &
LINKUM

DALCASTLE with PROCURATOR & 1st GRAVEDIGGER

Women

MARGARET with WOMAN

MAIRI with WAINWRIGHT & KEELER

ANNIE with BEL

Not to be doubled (except as Bystanders on Arthur's Seat and in Court):

ROBERT

GEORGE

WRINGHIM

GIL-MARTIN – an androgynous character of either sex

RABINA

[4 Women & 7 Men, or 5 Women & 6 Men]

Act One

Scene 1

1823. Colwan Cross. It is dusk in a bleak Scottish landscape, a rotting gibbet nearby. An elderly couple, ANNIE & BALDIE, muffled against the cold, are digging. A third person, LOCKHART, well-dressed in a handsome greatcoat and hat, is holding a lantern aloft to illuminate the work. After some moments, ANNIE stops.

Annie Naebody down there.

Baldie They'd nae go six feet down, not here.

Lockhart I'll be the judge of that. Dig deeper.

Annie As ye wish.

Digging resumes.

Baldie *[To ANNIE]* We're no going home wi'out the guinea he promised.

Annie Guinea apiece, husband.

Baldie Aye, guinea apiece –

Annie One for you and one for me.

Lockhart You'll not see a groat, unless you find him. Dig.

Digging continues.

Annie Medical man, would ye be, sir? Be too rotted to cut up. Rotted intae the soil.

Baldie The flesh, Annie. Nae the bones. Nor the hair, they say. D'ye mind when they dug up Old Meg Cowan? What, ten year since?

Annie Ten, maybe more.

Baldie Grandson come from Glasgie, sir. Wanted a Christian burial for her.

Annie Meg was never a Christian. Hung up here for poisoning sheep thirty year afore.

Baldie Buried her shallow – under a dung heap, they said.

Annie True – they did.

Baldie When they dug her up she was covered in fur.

Annie Beard, braw and bushy as any man's.

Baldie Nae, nae. Hair all over her, like a wolf. Said it was the devil.

Annie Red hair it was. A proper Scot, devil or no devil.

Baldie The men of science said it was the soil made it grow.

Annie It were the dung made it grow, like corn in a field ...

BALDIE reaches into the grave and pulls out a rotting canvas bag. ANNIE grabs it from him, and empties it onto the ground. There is a bundle of papers tied with string.

Och! Nowt but papers. Papers and words. Nae money in writing.

Baldie Dry 'em out, wife, use them for the fire.

Lockhart Give that to me.

Annie You can have it. Stinks o' the pit.

She throws it down at LOCKHART'S feet. He picks it up and shines his lamp on it, trying to read. ANNIE and BALDIE have resumed digging and immediately there is the sound of a spade striking wood.

Baldie Wheesht!

Annie What?

Baldie The coffin.

Annie They wouldna bury him in a coffin.

Baldie Listen!

Baldie plunges the blade into the hole.

Wood.

Lockhart Let me see.

ANNIE & BALDIE stand back. LOCKHART shines the lamp into the hole.

Ay, it's a box. Break it open.

Annie Nay, we be done now.

Baldie Give us our money, and we'll go.

Annie A guinea apiece.

Lockhart Not until you bring him up.

Baldie D'you think we's resurrection men?

Annie We're honest Godfearing labourers.

Baldie Paid to dig, nae more.

Lockhart There's no time for this. Another guinea to bring him up.

Annie Another guinea apiece?

Lockhart What, friends, are you bandits? Take it, damn you!

LOCKHART throws coins on the ground. ANNIE scrambles to retrieve them.

Baldie I don't like it.

ANNIE pockets the coins and picks up her spade.

Annie Ach, the money's sound. Nae need to be frit.

She plunges her spade in to break the coffin lid. Then she puts down her spade and peers into the hole.

 There's a rope there.

She lies down, puts her hand into the hole and comes up with a rope-end.

 Left it round his neck, looks like.

Lockhart Just get him out of the ground.

Annie Mebbe it'll still hold ...

ANNIE and BALDIE take hold of the rope and begin to pull.

Lockhart Careful – gently –

Baldie He's coming up!

There is a rending of wood. ANNIE and BALDIE fall over backwards as ROBERT sits bolt upright in the grave, covered in filth, face partially rotted, a noose around his neck. ANNIE screams.

Annie Lord save us all!

ROBERT opens his mouth, emitting a coarse rattling sound. He clammers out of the grave and runs off. LOCKHART draws a pistol from his greatcoat and fires after him.

The lights fade quickly.

In the darkness MAIRI sings a capella:

THE THIRD BROTHER

*Two brothers lay upon the strand,
"Oh brother, why look you so pale
and who sits there at your left hand
and stares upon that distant sail?
Oh brother let us kneel and pray*

for fear he'll carry you away."

Scene 2

It is still night. A candle lights a room sparsely furnished with two chairs and a table. On the table is the bundle of papers (still tied), LOCKHART's pistol, and the lighted candle.

LOCKHART appears out of the darkness, carrying a decanter of wine and a glass. He pours himself wine, sits at the table and unties the bundle. He takes the top sheet and begins to read.

There is a slow knock on the door. LOCKHART reaches for the pistol. Another knocking. He points the gun at the door. Slowly the door opens, and ROBERT lurches into the room. He walks towards LOCKHART, who shrinks back in his chair. Suddenly, ROBERT sits in the chair opposite LOCKHART, puts his hands on the table and stares at him.

Quick fade.

Scene 3

Pale daylight on the same room, now revealed as a private room in an inn. LOCKHART and ROBERT sit in the same positions, though the pistol is again on the table, and ROBERT's hands are by his side.

Lockhart They'll catch you, and hang you. You know that. Silence won't save you.

ROBERT opens his mouth, but no sound comes out. LOCKHART pours himself wine.

It's said there's a sort of man, though one may scarcely call such a person a man – a thing that will haunt graveyards at night and seek out the dead. Do you follow me? To lie with them. Why would anybody do such a thing? It beggars belief, but they do it. Their souls are so blotted with evil, they lie with the dead for their own lust and pleasure. Such a creature deserves to be obliterated from the face of the earth. (Sips wine) Tell me, friend, are you such a man as that? Are you such an unnatural fiend?

ROBERT tries again to speak. All that comes out is a croak.

You may now feel remorse, but I will have to report you, and you will hang, most assuredly.

ROBERT finally manages to speak in a series of gasps:

Robert Were – I – such – man – did – all – that – more – I – my salvation –

my salvation would be safe – would be secure while you rot in hell.

Lockhart It *can* speak. Well, you're unaccountably assured of your salvation. Let me tell you at once, I am a rational man. I do not believe in evil spirits, and I refuse to be afraid. I take you for an ordinary rather than supernatural sinner. Are you not going to tell me who you are?

Robert I ... I am he that you seek.

Lockhart I repeat, I'm a rational man. I've come in search of the past. Not the past of pagan superstition, but true events, true history. So that we may reach beyond blind belief to understand the mechanism of our age.

Robert I tell you, I am he.

Lockhart What? Haven't I told you? Can't you understand? The man I seek has been dead for over a hundred years. The best I hoped for was a skeleton. Perhaps an artefact or two thrown in the ground after him. A ring? A pocket-knife? [*Pointing to the papers*] I hadn't imagined a manuscript.

Robert My true memoir.

LOCKHART sighs and shakes his head.

Lockhart You know, sooner or later you will have to give me your name. If ye'd the first idea of the man I enquire about, you'd not be laying claim to his. A thief and a murderer – of the most abominable kind – a fratricide, perhaps. Ay, and an apostate. They say talk of his ghost frightens the children hereabouts even now, so many, many years gone. The last Laird of Dalcastle – Robert Colwan, known to infamy as Robert Wringhim.

ROBERT shrieks, suddenly, appallingly.

Robert Hang me ... if you would. Flay the skin from my bones. Take out my heart. Hack it into pieces. Feed it to the dogs. I appear as I am by the power of a great emperor. While your perjured soul will writhe with fiends in hell, I will yet glory in Heaven. I tell you, I am Robert Wringhim. There is my history – the journey of my soul. Read it, if you dare. Read of my salvation and your own damnation.

LOCKHART picks up the papers.

[Quietly] Read it and learn.

LOCKHART starts to read. ROBERT closes his eyes.

I have been here before.

The lights fade slowly.

MAIRI sings ...

*Two brothers walked out in the field,
"Oh there is one would have you damn'd
that walks behind and bids you yield
and bow your head to his command.
Oh brother let us kneel and pray
for fear he'll spirit you away."*

Scene 4

1704. A room in the Laird of Dalcastle's country house. One feature is an oil-portrait of the Laird.

The lights fade up to the sound of fiddles, (perhaps a song), playing early 18th century dance music, and the muted sounds of celebration/laughter from the adjoining room.

At either side of a table sit DALCASTLE and BLANCHARD. They are sharing a decanter of wine.

Dalcastle The world will say I'm at fault, he being my own flesh and blood. *[An ironic grimace]* Well ... His mother was always a harsh, unyielding woman. You'd have seen that yourself. She and I put first a few walls, and then a good mile between us, for there was nae other way to live in peace. I'd known her father, ye see, and liked him, no smack of this disease that sours her heart. I thought she could change, that I could bring her round. I was a vain fool. I'm afraid young Robert has drunk of the same poison as she has – aye and from a worser source, his canting, sour-faced guardian. But he will apologise to ye, Blanchard. If he doesn't, I'll cut him off without a groat.

Blanchard Nay, that's not why I'm come. I need no apology. I only thought to warn you of what might be a new affiliation on his part, he being new to the city, but from what you say ...

Dalcastle Nothing new under heaven, eh? He'll find plenty of his mind in Edinburgh?

Blanchard I fear he's done so already. The Calvinists are strong there, and it's not just the rabble – there are great families, with money and influence. It's the misfortune of these unhappy times, that the love of

God, that should unite men and make them brothers, has turned them into enemies.

Dalcastle Well, thank the Lord I have Georgie. He's bound to Edinburgh too. *[Indicating the next room]* There's a fair part of the handsomest youth of Midlothian come to wish him well. *[Getting up]* Look, you shall meet him. *(Calling)* Mrs Logan! – I will confess he follows his father in that he's not always to be found at the kirk of a Sunday morning, but he is a good-hearted boy and I'm proud of him. You'll not hear *his* voice raised against you, I'll promise you that.

Enter MARGARET.

Mrs Logan, will ye find master George and bring him here?

Margaret He'll be dancing wi' the lassies.

Dalcastle Away, woman. We'll not detain him long.

MARGARET exits through the door into the next room. The music swells up. The door closes again.

You shall have your apology, Blanchard. I am ashamed that my aen flesh and blood could do you such discourtesy. Mind, he may not have been entirely to blame. Put up to it, I'll warrant, by his mother and his guardian.

Enter young GEORGE COLWAN, followed by MARGARET who exits by the other door.

Georgie! Come here and kiss your father on your birthday ...

Father and son kiss.

Now greet the Reverend Blanchard. He was minister here for many a year – in fact I believe he may have baptised you?

Blanchard I did, indeed. And remember it well.

Dalcastle But then – foolish, wayward man – he couldna resist the call of the city. He's minister there at Greyfriars. You'll not find a better in Edinburgh, or one with a sounder doctrine.

GEORGE shakes BLANCHARD by the hand.

George Good day to you, sir. I am proud to meet you – again!

Blanchard And you, Mr George. So you're to come and live in your father's house in Edinburgh?

George I am, sir, yes. I'm of age at last.

Dalcastle Ay, and a credit to the name of Dalcastle.

MARGARET enters.

Blanchard I wish you blessings and a long life. And that we'll become better acquainted.

George Thank you, sir. I hope we will.

Margaret They're here.

Dalcastle What? Oh, then you'd better away back to your friends, Georgie.

George May I not stay and greet my mother and my brother?

Dalcastle Nay, I'll no have a shadow cast over your day. Away with you and dance!

George But, sir –

Dalcastle What? Disobey your father? In with you now. You'll not keep the fair lassies waiting a minute longer!

GEORGE exits. A cheer welcomes his return.

Dalcastle *[To MARGARET]* God save us all. Send them in, Meg.

Margaret Ye'll not be happy – they've brought yon empty cassock wi' 'em.

Dalcastle They've brought Wringhim?

Margaret Aye, that they have. And, saving your grace, all three wi' a look that would curdle milk.

Dalcastle *[Touching MARGARET on the arm]* Well, bring them in.

MARGARET exits. DALCASTLE turns the key in the door to the reception room.

They're come to touch me for money. For Robert's sake, my wife says, they must all three move into the city – I'm told they've taken lodgings in the Grassmarket – and that I must support my son there. Well, I'll do what I must, or they'll concoct a scandal, I daresay.

Blanchard Then I will leave you, George. It's a private matter, and Mr. Wringhim and I are already acquainted. Unhappily so, I'm afraid. I'll ride back to the city now while the light lasts.

Dalcastle Nay, man. You're a guest in my house, and while you're here you'll receive an apology from Robert. I'll not let ye leave wi'out it. You gae away home tomorrow as we planned. We'll have a fine dinner here tonight.

Margaret *[Off, calling]* The Laird's in here, so come in if you're coming.

MARGARET shows in RABINA Colwan, ROBERT and the Reverend WRINGHIM. RABINA is dressed in an austere grey wool gown, ROBERT and WRINGHIM in the plain, dark Puritan uniform. MARGARET exits.

Dalcastle Well, Rabina, it's nae a secret we no see eye to eye, but I bid you welcome. And you, sir, though what your business is here I canna tell. Robert's I have wind of and –

Rabina Mr Colwan, I would not put my soul, or Robert's, in jeopardy by entering your house without our spiritual guide and protector.

Dalcastle 'Mr Colwan'. Still cold and unforgiving, Rab?

Rabina Still true to my God and to his divine revelation.

Dalcastle Aye, aye, how could I doubt it?

Wringhim Sir, I am come here somewhat unwillingly, to shield Mrs Colwan and her son from the contamination of this house. We had barely passed through the gates before our ears were assaulted by revelry and devilish music. We could see, sir, through your windows – the shutters lie wide open on your shame – silken women, cavorting lasciviously –

Rabina The devil's own sputum shining on their for'eads!

Dalcastle Ach, be quiet, Rab! And you, sir, I'd be obliged if you'd keep your preaching for the pulpit, and nae slander my guests in my house. Did ye ne'er enjoy dancing yourself? Or were ye afeard your unbending spirit'd make ye look a fool?

Wringhim If you must deride the Lord's witnesses, sir, I beg you go in there and observe for yourself. Chief among them you will find your elder son putting his soul in pawn to luxury and vice.

Rabina He was conceived in drunkenness and shame. Is it any wonder he exults in sin?

Dalcastle Nay, nay, Rab, are you so unnatural, to damn your own son? – Nay, I'll not hear any more. You are here because of your other whelp. And it is he brings Reverend Blanchard here too. I am sure you all know why.

Wringhim I, certainly, do not. I confess, I am astonished to see you here, Mr. Blanchard, on such an immodest occasion. And I know of no possible connection a man of your stamp could have with my ward.

Dalcastle *[To ROBERT]* Well, come here, sir.

ROBERT moves forward and stands impassively in front of DALCASTLE.

Robert Father. What is your wish?

Dalcastle Ah, so for today you will call me father, will ye? I have heard that you are more like to borrow your mother's tongue and disown both me and my name.

Robert If you say so, sir.

Dalcastle Well, then, what business had you to interrupt this good man's service so violently last Sunday? But a week in his parish and ye shout and harangue him? Have ye no respect for Christian ministry?

Robert I have, sir, when that ministry is truly Christian. When I hear false doctrine, I must speak out.

Dalcastle You young devil! Would you put yourself against an ordained minister of the kirk?

Blanchard Come, sir. Don't let this come between you. Youth is a time of great certainty. We have all been impetuous in our time. I freely forgive you, Robert, and take no offence. Come, be friends with your father.

Rabina How can you say for certain what transpired? Were you there yourself, Mr Colwan?

Dalcastle Happily I was not. But I would not for one second doubt the Reverend Blanchard's word, and nor should you, Rabina.

Wringhim Mr Colwan, I will not presume to question the fact of the matter, but Robert should not be censured for following his conscience.

Dalcastle Conscience is it? Well, here's something for his conscience to wrestle with. – Your mother tells me your expenses, now that you live in the city, are greatly increased, and that I must bear the cost.

Robert Is not that a father's duty, sir?

Dalcastle It is not, sir, for you have never shown me a son's duty for a moment. Well, you'll not see a groat more, unless ye apologise to Mr. Blanchard and give me your word that you'll never trouble him again. On that condition only, I will raise your allowance to five guineas per month. Is that understood?

Robert I will bow to my father's will.

Dalcastle And – ?

- Blanchard** Dalcastle, please. I am quite content. As far as I am concerned, the matter is closed.
- Dalcastle** Well, if ye wish it. However, there'll be one other condition, Robert, and on this there must be no half measure. From tomorrow your brother George will be living in my house in Edinburgh. You must swear to me that you'll never attempt to twist his honest soul to your own sorry views. In fact you had best not come into his company at all.
- Robert** Perhaps, sir, I have more care for George's soul than you do. For though he is not of the Elect, were I to befriend him, I might at least save him from occasions such as this.
- Rabina** Amen! Amen!
- Dalcastle** No, sir. You will give me your word on this or you'll get not a penny. Well?
- Robert** I will do as my Father wishes.
- Dalcastle** Can I be sure of that? They tell me you were ever a stranger to the truth.
- Wringhim** If you will allow me, sir. I have long wrestled through prayer and entreaties to that God who sees and knows all, and today – this auspicious day – Robert is blessed in God's word that he will dwell for eternity among the chosen.
- Rabina** Amen, amen, let God be praised!
- Wringhim** You need not doubt him. While others tumble into the everlasting fire, he through the mercy of the true God, will escape certain damnation.
- Rabina** Amen.
- Wringhim** Amen. Will you accept my undertaking that – more to save the boy from contamination than for your peace of mind – that Robert will never seek the company of your son? You will accede to this condition, Robert?
- Robert** I will do as my Father wishes.
- Dalcastle** Very well. Reverend Wringhim, I fear that my God is not your's –
- Wringhim** Doubtless, sir, doubtless.
- Dalcastle** Nonetheless, for the sake of peace, I accept your assurance. *[Calling at the door]* Mrs Logan! – So, now our business is settled, I will bid

ye good day. Meg will see you out.

Rabina 'Meg', is it now? Well ...

Dalcastle Hold your tongue, Rab.

Wringhim Mrs. Colwan, Robert, come –

MARGARET appears.

Dalcastle Our guests are leaving, Mrs Logan. See them out, please.

Robert I should like to stay, mother. For a short while. An hour, no more.

Dalcastle Why the devil d'ye ask that?

Rabina For shame, Mr Colwan! – Nay, come away, Robert. You have no place here. We'll away home and sit by the fire and study together.

Robert You need not fear me, mother. This is my father's house. Am I to be barred from it, cast out like a bastard or a criminal? Well, father?

Dalcastle Nay ... nay, I'll no deny you. I may not like it, but I'll not have it said that I turned ye from my door. Ye may stay an hour, if you wish.

Rabina Robbie –

Wringhim Mrs Colwan, no, let Robert stay. I am sure he wishes only to better understand the world on which he has so justly and irrevocably turned his back. He is strong in the Lord, ye need not fear him. *[To MARGARET]* We shall see ourselves out, thank you. Come, Mrs. Colwan. We will wait for you, Robert, at Colwan Cross.

WRINGHIM and RABINA exit, followed by MARGARET.

Dalcastle I have your word, Robbie, that ye'll not seek out your brother. So you must leave him and his friends to their dancing, is that clear? You may wander as you wish through the gardens and the rest of the house. You may find the library of interest now you are grown.

Robert I will do as –

Dalcastle *[To BLANCHARD]* Och, will you look at him, man! He's half starved. *[To ROBERT]* Does not your mother and yon holy man feed you at all? For the love of God, Robbie, go to the kitchen and have them give you a venison pasty and a draught of porter.

Robert As you wish, sir.

Dalcastle It's a bad business, this, a bad business. They tell me ye are my son.

Well, that is a mystery indeed ... but I will not disown you. Nay, but I canna bear to look on you and that's the truth on it. Come, Blanchard, let us breathe some clean air in the orchard.

DALCASTLE exits, followed – after a hesitation – by BLANCHARD. ROBERT goes to the door to the reception room and turns the key. He opens it a crack and peers through. The music and laughter swell. He watches fascinated. Suddenly the door opens wide and GEORGE enters from the party. His manner is different, he seems older. He closes the door behind him.

George Robert. I have looked for you.

Robert George? Is it you – are you my brother George?

George More than a brother.

He holds out his hand.

Will you not shake my hand, Robbie? You can scarcely be aware – the most holy fellowship binds us.

Robert Indeed I doubt that. My guardian is certain you number among the damned. You, our father, and all that brazen company in that room there.

George Your guardian is mistaken, Robbie. Things are not as they seem. *[Indicating the party]* What I've contrived – I knew you would be drawn to it – I have done only that I might meet you. To honour one newly elect of God. Please –

Robert My election is yet to be published.

George Ay, but if one has eyes to see, written in flaming letters, since the beginning of time. Come, will you not take my hand?

Robert Why ... yes ... I will, gladly.

George Robbie ... May I call you that? I so long to become better acquainted. But not here, amid this gaudy frenzy. Let us meet in Edinburgh, on Sunday. Say at noon, on the path across the Meadows? Will you promise me?

Robert Yes, yes, I promise.

George Thank you. We have great matter to speak about.

He holds ROBERT's gaze for a moment, but then releases his hand and exits quickly into the party, shutting the door behind him.

Robert Wait!

ROBERT tries to open the door, but it won't. Enter MARGARET.

Margaret Whit's this? Trying to spy on the lassies, are ye! Get away with ye. You were always sneaking and spying as a bairn. Your good father's too soft, to leave you here on your ain to sow your mischief. Be off with ye!

ROBERT moves reluctantly towards the exit.

Aye, skulk away. I'll ne'er believe ye belong here.

Robert What do you mean by that?

Margaret What I mean, I'll not say, but I know it to be true.

Robert Thou art a worm, Logan. Who made thee to be a judge of the Almighty's creatures? How can a woman judge between good and evil?

Margaret I ken I have a mind in my head as sprightly as any man's. And I said nowt on the subject of evil.

Robert To set your face against the Lord's Elect is in itself a great evil.

Margaret Elect, is it? Sickan sublime and ridiculous sophistry I never heard come out of another mouth but ane. Twas nae only thy mother made thee the dirty bowkail thing that thou be'st!

Robert Be careful how you slander my mother and my guardian. I am not without friends.

Logan Friends? Naebody can stand the sight of ye – lest they be whey-faced and pious frauds like ye. Away wi' ye, afore I take a broom to ye.

ROBERT exits.

I'll ne'er believe ye have one friend in the world. But if ye have, he can go wi' ye to perdition for aught I care. *[Shivers]* Och, but it's cold in here ...

The lights fade.

Music, and then Church bells.

Scene 5

Inside Greyfriars Kirk on a bright morning. Blanchard is in the pulpit. The bells continue underneath.

Blanchard Our text today is from St Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?"

Who are we that we presume to judge one another? Do we not remember the words of our Lord when he urged that the woman taken in adultery be spared: Who are ye that is without sin, for it is ye that should cast the first stone upon her?

We are enjoined to have faith; only so shall we deserve salvation. But faith hath many faces, and takes many paths. Humbly we beg that our own path be a true one, that we shall be saved and that when we pass from this mortal realm we shall be admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven; but let us not glance at the path our neighbour chooses but rest humbly in the hope that we shall meet one another again in Paradise ...

His words fade under the sound of the church clock tolling twelve.

Scene 6

The Edinburgh Meadows. As the toll continues, ROBERT enters, looking around eagerly. A young man, STEWART, red-faced, with tousled hair, carelessly, but very expensively dressed saunters by, sees ROBERT and stops.

Stewart Young Robert, Colwan's brother, ain't ye?

Robert I am, yes. I do not believe we are acquainted –

Stewart Will Stewart at your service. Very happy to know you, very happy.

Robert You do me too much honour –

Stewart Saw you rip into old Blanchard last week. Splendid!

Robert So you too abhorred the manifest error in his sermon.

Stewart Good Lord, no. Old Blanchard? Sound as a bell on the Bible stuff. But deuced tedious in the pulpit. You certainly livened things up. Don't know when I've ever laughed so much in a kirk.

Robert Then you and I can share no further communion. Do you understand me, sir?

Stewart Not a bit. Know your brother, see. On my way to meet him now. Be a good fellow, come and share a bottle with us. Georgie will be happy to see ye.

Robert You are as mistaken in that as you are in your doctrine. I am to meet my brother here, now.

GIL-MARTIN enters apart and watches. He is richly but soberly dressed in black. He has an unnaturally pale face, and wears a heavy metal ring with a large red stone.

Stewart The devil you say. I don't believe so. Have an appointment with him – with Tom Drummond and Geordie Munro – the Black Bull in the Grassmarket. Good fellows all of them. Do come along.

Robert I tell you, I have arranged to meet George here, at this hour.

Stewart Mm? Don't think so. Well, must go. Don't want to keep the fellows waiting. It's deuced cold out here. Will Stewart, by the way. Did I say that?

Robert Goodbye, sir.

Stewart Good fellow! Poor old Blanchard. Give your regards to Georgie, shall I? We must crack a bottle soon ...

He saunters off unevenly. He passes GIL-MARTIN, who salutes him. STEWART appears not to notice him.

Gil-Martin Robbie – good morning.

Robert I'm sorry – ?

Gil-Martin I so rejoiced to meet you at last at Dalcastle. To embrace a brother, though not of the flesh, but in our belief in the same truths, the same mode of redemption, is a true privilege.

Robert Who are you? What d'you want with me?

Gil-Martin Have we not an appointment? Did I not hear the Greyfriars clock tell noon? I feared for a moment you would forsake me for Edinburgh's gilded youth.

Robert I have an appointment with my brother. My brother George Colwan.

Gil-Martin I can't believe that, Robbie. George – as your guardian, Mr Wringhim, is rightly certain – numbers among the damned, along

with your father, and all those ... 'silken women, cavorting in gaudy frenzy' the other night.

Robert I am at a loss.

Gil-Martin Did you and I not shake hands, and agree to meet here today?

Robert You mean ... you suggest that two days since, at my father's house, I conversed not with my brother George, but with you?

Gil-Martin Ah, forgive me. I see how it was. You were profoundly curious about your brother, trying, I daresay, to penetrate the very heart of his sinfulness. And in that moment I assumed a striking resemblance to him. It is common enough.

Robert But he ... I ... you alarm me, sir.

Gil-Martin George could never have spoken to you as I did then. You saw just now the sort of people he is familiar with – that young sot, William Stewart, drinking himself to damnation, bent on introducing your brother to every low tavern in Edinburgh. Between them I am afraid they will besmirch the name of Dalcastle.

Robert I confess I was repelled by that man's conversation.

Gil-Martin Only the justified, the Elect, will extend a hand to you, Robbie, as I did at Dalcastle and do again now. Here ...

Nervously, ROBERT takes his hand.

Your state is one to be envied. I envy it, and am come to be your humble disciple; to be initiated into the true way of salvation by conversing with you, learning from you. I am blessed with the means to travel the world for the good of my soul.

Robert Why ... how you seem to know me bewilders me. But it may be you are a friend indeed, and so well met in my present state. These are weeks of great rejoicing in spirit for me. I'm bound to return thanks to the Most High for my election and my redemption from the bonds of sin and misery. If I can be sure of your purpose and that you will join with me heart and hand in thanksgiving, then might we go and worship together?

Gil-Martin Your caution does you credit. Perhaps, if you were to test me on doctrine, I might put your heart at ease?

Robert Thank you, yes, let us sit together, and I will catechise you.

Gil-Martin It will give me the greatest happiness.

They sit.

Robert I have been well instructed by my guardian, the Reverend Robert Wringhim, a gentleman who sees most profoundly into the revelations of the reformed church. If you are to be my disciple, I must be assured that you accept his teaching as wholly and freely as I have done. Above all, you must assure me that you reject the abominable heresy that man may come to God by good works?

Gil-Martin It is a ridiculous and loathsome doctrine that has led men from the true path ever since the divine Nazarene walked on the earth.

Robert Do you believe in the eternal and irrevocable decrees of God, regarding the salvation and condemnation of all mankind?

Gil-Martin It was decreed on the First Day who should be saved and who condemned.

Robert Do you reject the sentimental lie that Christ came down to earth to save all mankind?

Gil-Martin I do.

Robert He came not to save the heathen?

Gil-Martin No.

Robert Nor the many among those who ascribe to his church, but only those few who were predestinied to salvation?

Gil-Martin Only those. To the Devil belong the greater part of mankind. They are his family, his children, and he will glory in them for ever.

Robert Yes. ... I see ... I see you are blessed indeed. I ... Then will you pray with me? What, do you hesitate?

Gil-Martin Your invitation is gracious, but I must decline. We must not beg for ourselves what cannot be granted, nor attempt to intervene on behalf of others. If of the Elect, then our words are superfluous; if of the damned they are futile, we engage only in that sentimental lie you have so eloquently demolished. Our only address to the higher power must be to give thanks for our blessings, and that is done silently in the privacy of our own hearts.

Robert You do not believe in the efficacy of prayer?

Gil-Martin I see you're shocked. Isn't prayer posited on the specious belief in the capacity of degenerate man to be saved?

Robert Yes, I suppose it is.

Gil-Martin Then, according to your own catechism, what is its function, for you know that that is hopeless?

Robert Yes... Yes, I see that now ...

Pause.

I am eager to question you, my friend. From where you come, and how you seem to know me, for I never saw you before in my life. But first, you will tell me your name?

Gil-Martin *[After hesitating]* You may call me 'Gil', for the present. You may know me by another name, some time in the future, when more is revealed. But let it be 'Gil' for now.

Robert 'Gil'? Have you no name but Gil? And which of your names is it – your Christian or your surname?

Gil-Martin O, a surname, too? Then call me Gil-Martin. It is neither a *Christian* name, nor a surname, but it will serve your turn.

Robert Gil-Martin. A name I have never heard before. Are you ashamed of your parents, that you not give your real name?

Gil-Martin I have no parents. Save one, whom I do not acknowledge. Pray drop the subject. It is disagreeable. I am a being of a peculiar temper, for though I have servants and subjects across the world – and many more than I can number – yet I have travelled a great and particular distance to this city – to seek out you, Robert, and you alone. This – and my true self – are secrets. I pray let them remain so.

Robert Indeed, as you wish. I begin to see that rather I'm to be a disciple of thine; that I am honoured indeed. Servants and subjects without number! Surely, you are some great potentate, come here in disguise – from Europe, perhaps? Some great country, or city, powerful in the Word, and able to speak in tongues? And seeing by some means my own hunger to avenge the libels and slanders done by the Hittites against our Lord in Heaven – you have selected me to be your help-mate!

Gil-Martin Do not try to guess too far, Robbie. Say only that we are to be friends, eternally bound together from this moment in our great purpose. There is much to be done. In fire and flame, Robbie. Understand – your mother and guardian tend towards the truth, but they see not as searchingly into things as you do; they are people of words, not action. So it is that their work with you is almost done. You see that, don't you?

Robert Yes. Yes. They have raised me well, but I see that I must now go

beyond them. I must follow my own path.

Gil-Martin Good. *[Rising]* We shall soon become better acquainted, that we may follow that path together, as befits brothers in spirit. May I take your hand once more?

ROBERT rises and offers his hand. GIL-MARTIN suddenly embraces him, kissing him on the cheek.

Let us meet again tomorrow. May I suggest in the evening, there in Greyfriars kirk?

Robert At Greyfriars! ... Why, yes, I will be there.

Gil-Martin Good. Throughout Europe, Robbie, the righteous are cruelly persecuted. You and I are tasked to strike out against the unbelievers, and make our own kingdom of the Elect, a beacon for the whole of Christendom. And we'll begin – how fittingly! – in the place you cried out against the anti-Christ. *Doviđenja*, Robbie.

GIL-MARTIN exits. ROBERT stares after him, excited.

Robert Gil! ... You are ... You are Czar Peter of Russia, are you not?

Blackout.

Music. We hear RABINA & WRINGHIM singing a psalm.

*He that doth in the secret place
of the most High reside,
under the shade of him that is
th' Almighty shall abide.*

*I of the Lord my God will say
He is my refuge still.
He is my fortress, and my God,
and in him trust I will.*

*Assuredly he shall thee save,
and give deliverance
from subtle fowler's snare, and from
the noisome pestilence.*

Scene 7

The Wringhims' digs in Edinburgh, the same day.

RABINA is sitting in a chair, embroidering a sampler with a religious text that is in front of her. WRINGHIM sits, still and silent, until ...

- Wringhim** It would be better if he stayed here with us.
- Rabina** Robert?
- Wringhim** Yes, Robert. He should not wander abroad on the Sabbath.
- Rabina** He is naturally curious to see the new city.
- Wringhim** The city has its temptations, even for a boy like Robert.
- Rabina** Nay, Wringhim, did you not tell him his salvation was assured.
- Wringhim** I did.
- Rabina** And what better time to go forth than on the Sabbath. Surely no harm can befall him on such a holy day.
- Wringhim** You are too innocent. The devil never rests. He sets snares for all of us, even you, Rabina. It is not godly to labour on the Lord's day.
- Rabina** I do but embroider the Lord's own words, Mr Wringhim: 'Take not the name of the Lord thy God in vain'. I fear my husband be damned by that sin alone.
- Wringhim** It but testifies to the certainty of his damnation; Mr Colwan is not of the Elect.
- Rabina** Amen.

WRINGHIM begins to cough. RABINA goes to him.

- Wringhim** I was – I was wrong to reproach you, Rabina –
- Rabina** Nay, Mr. Wringhim, nay. You must take some physic. I fear it is worse.
- Wringhim** It will pass soon enough.
- Rabina** It is stuffy in here. The air outside is clear today. A turn or two in the yard will soon mend that cough.
- Wringhim** I fear ...
- Rabina** Fear what, Mr Wringhim –

He shakes his head and exits suddenly.

- Rabina** *[Calling after him]* Wringhim – take your scarf -

Sound of door closing. RABINA returns to her embroidery. She sings:

*Assuredly he shall thee save,
and give deliverance*

*from subtle fowler's snare, and from
the noisome pestilence.*

*ROBERT enters. He is in an excitable state, his face flushed and his clothes
disordered. Unseen by her, he watches for a moment.*

Robert I see you have idle time enough for your needle, mother.

Rabina *[Absorbed]* This is not idleness, but work dedicated to the Lord. See.
Surely you understand that? Please pass me that basket of wool.

ROBERT hands her the basket.

Robert But you cannot pretend this will advance His purpose.

Rabina *[Taking him in]* Robbie? What is wrong? Let me call your guardian -

Robert No, let it just be us two, for a while at least.

He sinks down beside RABINA.

Rabina He has been anxious about you -

Robert You must not be alarmed, Mother. I am exalted, can you not feel it?

Rabina Nay, son, something ails you. You have a fever.

Robert You *can* feel it – the divine heat that emanates from my very soul.

Rabina No, I am dreadfully cold. Robbie, will you pray with me?

Robert Nay, not now -

Rabina Hand in hand, as we used to, when you were a child?

Robert There is no need for prayer.

Rabina Robbie?

Robert I tell you today I have learned such things. We of the Elect must not
be supplicants, to beg for what cannot be altered. Let the Elect bask
in Heaven's radiance.

ROBERT lays his head on RABINA'S lap.

Let me warm you, mother. We'll sit together as we used to, when
you read to me, remember?

Rabina Get up –

Robert Nay, mother –

Rabina Please, I beg you, send for Mr. Wringhim. Please, Robbie!

Robert Very well.

He stands, and RABINA falls to her knees in prayer. ROBERT exits.

[Calling, off] Mr. Wringhim? Mr. Wringhim? ... Mr Wringhim, Mrs Colwan wishes to see you.

Rabina *[Praying out loud]* For now is the axe put unto the root of the trees, so that every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewen down and cast into the fire. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God –

Robert *[Re-entering]* Mother! Stop this, get off your knees -

Rabina *[Louder]* For upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest - this shall be the portion of their cup. For lo, the Lord is come out of his place, to visit the wickedness of such as dwell upon the earth -

ROBERT tries to pull RABINA to her feet. RABINA resists.

Who may abide the day of his coming? Who shall be able to endure when he appeareth –

Robert Mother – come, this is futile and unseemly –

Rabina His fan is in his hand, and he will purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

WRINGHIM enters.

Wringhim What's the matter, Rabina?

Rabina Oh, Mr Wringhim! ...

Wringhim Robert?

Robert Sir, I fear my mother is fallen, quite suddenly, into a frenzy.

Rabina Oh, sir, our boy! Our dear boy, Mr Wringhim! Look at him, and speak to him!

Robert You see, she is transported.

Rabina He would not pray with me. I fear he has been tempted by Satan.

ROBERT laughs.

Wringhim God save us, Mrs. Colwan, that is a terrible charge, to lay against your own flesh and blood.

Rabina Can you not see how he has changed?

Wringhim Something has indeed befallen you, Robert, either in body or mind. You're indeed changed, severely so, in your demeanour since this morning.

He takes ROBERT's wrist and feels his pulse.

Have you met with any accident?

Robert None, whatsoever.

Wringhim Witnessed anything out of the ordinary course of nature?

Robert No.

Wringhim Then, Satan, I fear, has been busy with you, tempting you at this momentous juncture in your life. Tell me, have ye yielded to temptation?

Robert I have not, Mr. Wringhim. Indeed, if Satan has been busy with me, I knew it not. I have been in sweet conversation this day with one whom I take rather for an angel of light.

Rabina It is one of the devil's most profound wiles to appear like one.

Wringhim Silence, Rabina! This is beyond a woman's understanding. Tell me, boy: what manner of person was this? And what did he want with you?

Robert He is a man, I assure you, of great influence and wealth. Come here to further the Lord's purpose in our reformed church. I am not at liberty to name him – it is necessary he not put himself forward, the better to achieve his aims. Yet he has offered to be my patron and enlist me as a soldier in his great endeavour.

Wringhim Are you sure of his intentions?

Robert I am. He offered me true brotherhood. I made so bold as to question him deeply and he adhered to those divine truths in which you have educated me.

Wringhim Praise be!

Robert I catechised him with the utmost care, on good works, on the lie that is universal redemption, and on many other points, and found him without error on any. This is no agent of the wicked one, but one with us, determined to expose and denounce the principalities and powers, the might and dominion of the kingdom of darkness.

Wringhim My dear boy, this is as I hoped. Many great and noble families rally to our cause. For some it is expedient to hide their sympathies until the time is right. It has ever been my hope that you might make an alliance such as this. In the Lord's time let us meet your friend, and rejoice with him.

Rabina Mr. Wringhim, his complexion – does this not trouble you?

Wringhim Robert's habits have ever been modest. Among our noble families there is a habit of dining on rich food, and harmlessly indulging in wine. This may explain the disorder in his appearance. Is this so, Robert?

Robert Not in the least. My only intoxication has been fervent conversation on divine matters. It is an exultation of the spirit that makes me strange to you. That should be welcome to you.

Rabina Yet you would not pray with me. Mr Wringhim, he would not pray with me!

A slight pause.

Wringhim Well ... I am sure, Rabina, that it was out of concern for your distress. Robert, go to your mother, comfort her.

ROBERT offers his hand. She hesitates and then lets him take it.

There, see, your son is restored to you.

Rabina Is this true, Robbie? Are you still my son?

Robert I am your true son, mother.

He allows her to embrace him.

Wringhim Now let us three join in prayer together on this happy day. Come ...

Robert Sir –

WRINGHIM and RABINA both kneel, put their hands together and shut their eyes. Reluctantly, ROBERT also kneels, but his eyes remain open and his hands by his side.

Wringhim Lord, we beg that you accept our dedication of our son, Robert, to Thee only and forever. We give him unto Thee, soul, body and spirit. Not as one of the wicked of this world, or as a hireling of a church profanely called by Thy name. Accept him, Lord, not as one speaking by rote the lessons taught by the Antichrist, but, as a trumpeter, to herald the revelation of the elect upon earth, and as a mighty voice to denounce all falsehood and error. May he ever be

Thy witness and Thy mouthpiece and may the enemies of Thy church fall back before him in awe and reverence! We beg this of Thee, oh Lord. Thanks be to God.

Rabina We beg this of Thee, oh Lord. Thanks be to God.

WRINGHIM and RABINA open their eyes and look to ROBERT.

Robert Thanks. Thanks be to God.

The lights fade.

MAIRI sings ...

*One brother did the other slay
and took a dagger to his heart.
The stranger smiled and walked away
for he had played the devil's part.
Yet who slew who no man can say,
so must we bow our heads and pray.*

Scene 8

Inside Greyfriars Kirk. It is dusk and lamps are burning. GIL-MARTIN sits, reading from a large and singular book. After a few moments ROBERT enters.

Robert Sir, I have kept our appointment.

Gil-Martin My dear friend, how could I doubt it? Our lives are written already, hour by hour, moment by moment, in the great book.

Robert Amen to that.

Gil-Martin Why do you stare so?

Robert In the name of Truth, what book is that? Is it a Bible?

Gil-Martin It is *my* bible.

Robert I see ... I see it is printed in columns – and perhaps verses? – but in what language, or alphabet? ... But, of course, it is in Russian – cyrillic, I think? It is wonderfully beautiful.

GIL-MARTIN merely smiles.

And your ring, sir. That too – it must be of great value.

Gil-Martin It is. Here, look into the stone.

ROBERT hesitates as GIL-MARTIN proffers him his hand. Then he stares intently at the ring.

What is it you see, Robbie?

Robert Only my own face. But the red shimmers, like flames, most brilliantly.

Gil-Martin What you see is your true self, the hot flame of Heaven burning powerfully in your soul. A soul ready, Robbie, to do God's work. You're not only chosen, one of the Elect. I'm here to enlist you in a great and holy cause. Not a mere mouthpiece, Robert. Not a trumpeter. But a sword and a spear to do the will of your true Lord here on earth.

ROBERT seizes GIL-MARTIN'S hand and kisses it fervently.

Robert I am ready, sir. Command me as you will.

GIL-MARTIN strokes ROBERT'S shoulder.

Gil-Martin Understand this: we cannot blaspheme, we cannot sin. Any such action is become purity the moment it is done. Your salvation cannot be altered. You do believe that?

Robert Yes, yes. I believe it.

Gil-Martin Yet you're still troubled.

Robert I am ashamed to say that on my return home, my mother recoiled from me. She was afraid.

Gil-Martin To be expected. If her understanding is flawed, she will fear the light of truth.

Robert My mother has ever been a model of goodness and purity.

Gil-Martin She is of the flesh of eve. She, like all women, will always carry the stain of imperfection. And so ever be in awe of you.

Robert I see. Yes.

GIL-MARTIN stands abruptly.

Gil-Martin Then come.

He walks apart.

What do you think of this house, Robert? Here you challenged that servant of the damned, the Reverend Blanchard, and were beaten for your pains.

Robert I did. When we first arrived in Edinburgh I sought this place out, hoping to find it a true house of God. But I found it like a sewer.

Blanchard spoke brazenly of good works, and of universal forgiveness. I stood up and shouted, denounced his error. I hoped to move his congregation against him, but they hustled me out and beat me to the ground.

Gil-Martin They would do worse, if they dared. I see into their hearts, Robert. I see the great evil they would do us, how they'd amass the ungodly – here, in this polluted place – to persecute the Elect with fire and flame. Blanchard's mild manner is a mask, a lie. He and his like have persecuted you, and thousands like you. It is your duty to strike back with all the strength you've been given.

Robert There is danger in such an enterprise.

Gil-Martin If you are to be a martyr, be a martyr for truth. I know that, in your heart, you are ready. Here, drink this.

He produces a flask and offers it to ROBERT, who hesitates, then drinks.

Robert It's bitter, and hot on the tongue. What is it?

Gil-Martin takes the flask back.

Gil-Martin It is the elixir of paradise. Take more.

ROBERT drinks again.

Robert I was inspired when I stood up here. I beheld Blanchard for what he was. It was for the righteous that I proclaimed against the army of the antichrist.

Gil-Martin Who wear the masks of saints, but the heart of the evil one?

Robert Who wear the masks of saints, but the heart of the evil one.

Gil-Martin I thank my Lord and ruler that you and I are one. For this they call 'the Church of the God' is what I am come to your country to help you destroy.

Robert I praise the Lord for it. But what is to be done?

Gil-Martin We must burn this and all such manifestations to the ground. What, do you flinch?

Robert No but ... are not your ideas perhaps too sanguinary, too arbitrary for the laws of this country? I dispute not your motive, but have you debated the consequences, and settled the result?

Gil-Martin I have. I hold my actions amenable to the laws of God. As to the acts of cowardly men, I despise them. Fain would I see the chosen

weapon of the Lord of Hosts begin the work of cleansing that awaits it. Are you not that weapon, Robert?

Robert What? Yes. Yes, I would be so. Let us do it. But have we the means?

Gil-Martin There are lamps to provide the flame. In the crypt, under the vestry where the floor is of wood, there are scraps of furniture, cloth, and faggots sufficient to build a holy pyre. Take a lamp, Robert, step below, build it and light it. Let us bring a hot fire from the depths to set this godless realm ablaze. Go now. And be blessed.

Robert Yes, yes, I will.

ROBERT takes a lamp from a pillar and exits. GIL-MARTIN walks into the shadows behind the pulpit. After a few moments a little smoke invades the church. ROBERT enters from the crypt, looks round for GIL-MARTIN, but cannot see him. He goes to the door, takes the key from the lock and exits. We hear him lock the door from the outside. The fire takes hold, and from behind the pulpit STEWART (pale-faced) appears, admires the fire for a moment, then exits through the door without difficulty. BLANCHARD enters from the vestry.

Blanchard What?

He goes to the main door. He can't open it.

Help! Fire! Fire!

After a moment's hesitation, grabbing something with which to tackle the blaze, he exits into the crypt. The sights and sounds build, and the lights fade.

MAIRI sings ...

*Three times round the hangman's tree,
dance at midnight, round and round.
Pray, Master, who is that you see,
that sits atop the burial mound?*

Scene 9

The WRINGHIM's lodgings. RABINA & WRINGHIM sit, reading Bibles by the light of three candles. After a few moments ROBERT enters and sits. RABINA and WRINGHIM kneel together and pray. ROBERT stays seated. RABINA & WRINGHIM stand, glance wonderingly at ROBERT, then exit, each with a candle. ROBERT is unmoving for a moment, then falls to his knees, praying fervently.

Scene 10

Daylight. A Court Room. There are the PROCURATOR, STEWART (hair and clothes

in disarray – he sways in the dock), WAINWRIGHT and onlookers, including GEORGE and Tom DRUMMOND and (separately) ROBERT.

Procurator Mr. William Stewart.

STEWART stares around the court, bemused, smiling.

You are to answer your name when the court addresses you. Do you understand me, Sir?

Stewart Aye, aye. Just so. How do you do, sir.

Procurator William Stewart, it is alleged that you deliberately and malevolently set fire to Greyfriars Kirk, causing the death of the good Reverend, Dr. Blanchard, and destroying the building. Now do you understand me, sir –

STEWART bursts into a madly inappropriate laugh.

Procurator Mr. Stewart –

Stewart Burn down a kirk? Me? Not me!

Procurator Sir, you are drunk. It is scarcely to be credited, at such a time as this, with such a serious charge against you. Intoxicated!

Stewart Am I? I don't know. I was drunk, with some good fellows. Now my head hurts confoundedly. The fellows I shared a bottle with will vouch for me – look, there's young Dalcastle – tell them it wasn't me, Dal!

GEORGE starts to speak, but is cut off by the PROCURATOR.

Procurator Witnesses will be called in due time. You were clearly seen running from the kirk as smoke began to belch from the tower and the windows shattered. You were observed by one that knows you well. Is that not your witness, Mrs Wainwright?

WAINWRIGHT steps forward.

Wainwright It is, sir. Though I would it were not so.

Procurator You have known the accused for a number of years, I believe?

Wainwright I have, sir. Poor lad. I have served his father as cook in his home at Inverleith for over twenty year.

Procurator I see. What was it brought you to Greyfriars Kirk at that time of night?

Wainwright My late husband was verger there for many a year, sir. And it fell to

me to wash and iron the cloths and vestments. I do it still, and return them to the kirk every second Tuesday evening. The reverend [*breaking down*] ... the reverend is always there on that night to receive them.

Procurator Yes ... So there can be no doubt in your mind that this was the man you saw running from the fire.

Wainwright He passed me very close – indeed it was clear he recognised me as I recognised him. Then he pulled his coat over his face to hide it from me. He was dressed exactly as you see him now. It was odd that his face was unusually pale – as you can see he has such a bonny colour – but I mind he was in shock at what he had done. I hope indeed he was wishing he had never dreamt of such a terrible, evil thing.

Stewart Wainey! I was never in Greyfriars kirk but the once this year, when old Blanchard was roasted that time. On Monday night I was with my friends, George Colwan and Adam Gordon at the Black Bull in the Grassmarket. We shared a bottle – more than one –

George That is true, sir, he was. Gordon and I will vouch for him.

Procurator You are George Colwan?

George Yes, sir.

Procurator He was with you *all* night, is that? I mean, all evening?

George Well, yes ... um, at least from about six o'clock until ten.

Procurator Four hours in a tavern, Mr Colwan? You must have consumed a mighty draught or two. Can you be absolutely sure Mr. Stewart was with you unbrokenly through those hours? Greyfriars is but a step away from the Grassmarket.

George Well ... yes, I think so ...

Procurator Mrs Wainwright, had you spent four hours in a tavern that evening?

Wainwright Indeed not, sir! Liquor has never passed my lips, nor am I familiar with any tavern. I will testify to that on the Bible.

Procurator And you remain convinced that it was Mr Stewart you saw running from the fire?

Wainwright I fear I do, sir. Yet I canna believe it. It may be that he's no right in the head, for he loves his bottle. But he has a good heart.

As a bewildered STEWART shakes his head, a note is passed to the PROCURATOR.

Stewart I am sorry that I mocked the old gentleman. Truly –

Procurator Will ye be quiet, please! ... A search has been made of your lodgings, Mr Stewart, and books have been found there. I cannot bring myself to name them. Books that are Satanic and licentious, books that praise the devil and talk of conjuring him. This is more than ordinary wickedness.

Stewart No, no. Some books I have that you might say are indecent, but no more. I have always loved the church. I am an Episcopal, sir. Ask my mother, ask old Blanchard – oh ...

A silence.

Procurator William Stewart, I find ample cause to commit you to the High Court of Justiciary for trial on the charges of arson, witchcraft and murder. I will hear no request for bail. Take him away, Officer. Court dismissed.

Stewart *[Crying out]* Wainy! Ask my mother to forgive me. Please! For the love of God!

The room empties, but for GEORGE and DRUMMOND on one side and ROBERT on the other.

George Poor Stewart! How can this be, Tom? Wainwright seemed sincere enough, but it cannot be true. Stewart was with me and Gordon on Monday. He may be simple, yet he's a good-hearted man. And he always stood for the rightful church. He'd sooner spit in his own drink than burn down a kirk.

Drummond He's a fool and a drunkard. The wonder is he had the wit to do it. But look at the evidence, George. I daresay you'd *like* to swear he never left you awhile on Monday, but at the trial will you truly be able to? The Bull was very full, and we talked to many friends ...

George But what can we do for him, Tom?

Drummond Keep him drunk until they hang him. That would be the kindest thing. Who's that pale-faced fellow over there? He stares at us as if we were guilty too.

George Who are you, sir? Would you anything with us?

Robert I have as much right to stand here as you, I am sure. One day it will be revealed that I have a greater right.

George What the devil d'ye mean by that?

Robert You will see. I have friends.

George So? What friends? You're an odd one, to be sure. Come, Tom, this place makes me shiver. Will ye come home wi' me and share some bread?

Drummond Willingly. This is an unhappy place indeed.

GEORGE and DRUMMOND exit. ROBERT turns to go the other way and finds he is face to face with GIL-MARTIN.

Robert Great sovereign!

Gil-Martin Robbie.

Robert I am heartily glad to see you. An innocent man is charged with a deed committed by another.

GIL-MARTIN lays a hand on ROBERT'S shoulder.

Gil-Martin Never grieve over Stewart, Robbie. Books praising the devil! D'you not see the greater purpose at work? Both he and Blanchard are destined to burn. What matters when the fire is lit? And this world is now the purer. You are doubly blessed in this outcome.

Robert That Stewart will hang for it?

Gil-Martin Ay, indeed. He's far worse to come, against which the stretching of his neck will seem the caress of the most voluptuous whore. Forget him ... yes? ... I see you have at last met your brother George.

Robert Yes, the first – well, yes, the first time I ever spied him.

Gil-Martin He's a fair young man.

Robert So the world esteems him.

Gil-Martin He seems to stand in the sun. But you're not deceived. You see him in his true colours, eager to defend the antichrist.

Robert My father loves him dearly, which is proof enough. I am ashamed that my mother's blood should be so contaminated with his. I would I could outface him, show the world how base and blighted he makes the Colwan name.

Gil-Martin An apt and just wish. Have patience, Robbie. When the sun next breaks through the mist I will see you triumph again.

GIL-MARTIN exits. ROBERT stands thinking as the lights go down.

MAIRI sings ...

Three times round the hangman's tree,

*dance at midnight, weave a spell.
Pray, Mistress, who is that you see?
Why do you shake? Nay, do not tell.*

Scene 11

A misty dawn, high on Arthur's Seat. Shadowy figures gather, perhaps wrapped up against the dawn chill.

GEORGE and Tom DRUMMOND arrive, slightly apart.

Drummond The day promises well, George. But a heavy dew – we'll have to mind our footing. I slipped twice on the way up. D'you see across the valley yet?

George Nae, the mist is still thick.

They come together, and GEORGE speaks confidentially.

Tom, I have barely the heart for this today. It grieves me so about poor Will. And those books they say they found!

Drummond Ay, the books will hang him, and there's an end. Come, George, the mist is thinning, put Stewart out of your mind for an hour and fence.

They put aside the swords and the dirks they wear, and kit-up for the match; subject to further research this may be padded jerkins and masks.

[To Onlookers] Good morning, Bevan. Morning, Foxy.

1st Man Good morning, sir. I've put a shilling on you to win, so look lively. The first to nine hits, is it?

Drummond The first to nine it is. I'll do my best, man, but you know Mr Colwan's a keen blade.

2nd Man Come, Mr Colwan. I've put my only guinea on you, sir!

George A guinea! Why friend, Drummond here may make you a poor man before you can blink.

2nd Man Ay, or a rich one. That fool McGilvrey's given me eleven to one.

Woman Caught him in his cups did you?

Laughter.

Drummond Come, George!

They start to fence. – a few calls of 'hit' etc – during which ROBERT appears. The first few hits happen quickly, then become more widely spaced.

2nd Man A hit! Four two to you now, Mr Colwan! That's the way, sir. Make it another for me!

Robert Oh yes, make it another, *Mr Colwan!* That's the way, that's the way!

George Come again, Tom. Your friend will lose his shilling at this rate.

Robert His *shilling!* His *shilling!* Why, would ye play for money and be damned, George?

George [*Lifting his mask*] What? Be damned?

Robert Ay, be damned in your devilish games.

Woman Aw, get away with you, man! Take your Calvinish chatter and away hame wi' ye!

Robert does not move.

Drummond Ignore him, George. Here, I'm ready!

They play again. Two or three more hits. ROBERT moves closer and closer to the action.

2nd Man Six four to Mr Colwan!

Robert Six four! Six four! So my arithmetic tells me that's ten hits to the devil!

Groans and expostulations. ROBERT moves close behind GEORGE. Again, play is prevented. Both GEORGE and DRUMMOND remove their masks (if they have them). They do not put them back again.

George Pray, sir, scorn us if you must, but be so good as keep off the field.

Robert Is there any law or enactment that can compel me to do so?

George I am sure there is not, sir. I speak for your own safety, and ours.

Robert You hold the blade, not I. If you would assault me, you shall pay the price.

Drummond Come, sir, this is foolishness. You spoil our sport, and to what end?

Robert A greater end than you imagine.

Drummond Here ...

DRUMMOND drops his foil and grabs ROBERT, drags him off the field and throws him to the ground. ROBERT has not resisted and makes no attempt to stand up. The play resumes. After a few passes ROBERT stands and walks right behind GEORGE. There are cries and groans from the small crowd and, turning suddenly to look,

GEORGE catches ROBERT in the jaw with the hilt of his foil. ROBERT falls and bleeds.

George Does any of you know who this infernal puppy is? That was his own fault.

2nd Man D'ye not know, sir? That's a strange thing. The gentleman's your ain brother, Mr Robert Colwan.

Robert Not Colwan, sir. Wringhim. Wringhim! I have renounced the name Colwan.

George Ay, and well you might. So you are Robert. *[To the 2nd Man]* Say you true, friend?

2nd Man Ay, nae doot o' that.

George Well, I apologise. I did not mean to injure you, or insult you, Robert. You took me by surprise. I pray you, pardon me, and give me your hand.

Still on the ground, ROBERT kicks out at GEORGE'S proffered hand.

Robert There's what suits such a hand better than my own. *[Getting up]* Well, are there to be no more of these damned fine blows, gentlemen? For shame, to give up such an edifying and profitable game! Come play!

GEORGE and DRUMMOND start to play again. ROBERT, making his bloodied face obvious to all, suddenly steps between the players. Protests from the crowd, including:

4th Voice Kick the fool down, or throw him off the cliff!

George No, by no means! He wants nothing else. I pray, don't even touch him. *[Quietly to ROBERT]* I beg you, Robert, retire to a safe distance. Else we cannot be certain ye'll not be hurt. And neither I nor Drummond could be answerable, however sore it be.

Robert I will take my chance of that. Hurt me, any of you, at your peril. It is my pleasure to be here, at this time, and I am sure I have as much right to occupy the common field as any.

Drummond Then you are no gentleman, sir.

Robert Are you one, sir?

Drummond I hope, by God, I am sir!

Robert Then thanks be to Him whose name you profane, I am none. If one

of this party be a gentleman, I do hope in God I am not! Play on, sirs. What troubles you? Play on!

Drummond Enough! George, be so good as to manage your basilisk brother. I'll play no further until you do. There's tainted blood there, I tell you, Wringhim or Colwan, I care not –

DRUMMOND turns away and throws his foil to the ground. GEORGE turns him round rather roughly with his free hand.

George You'll not insult me that way, Drummond. We've not finished yet. Eight five to me!

He picks his sword from its sheath on the ground.

Here. Come – first blood takes all!

Drummond *[Taking up his own sword]* I'll not refuse you. A real blade's always been a happier one for me ...

ROBERT moves close behind GEORGE, dogging his footsteps as the fight becomes furious. DRUMMOND lunges dangerously at GEORGE, who parries.

Robert Why, Mr Drummond, you will lose your friend a shilling!

As DRUMMOND turns furiously to ROBERT, GEORGE makes a sudden thrust at him, gashing his arm from behind, then drops his sword, appalled at what he has done. A groan from the onlookers.

3rd Man Badly played, sir!

Robert A damned fine blow, I declare!

DRUMMOND drops his sword, looks at his wound, then begins to run at GEORGE. The 1st MAN holds him back.

1st Man Nae, sir, stop. It's over.

George Forgive me, Tom. I lost my head –

Drummond Let go of me. I swear you'll pay for that, Colwan –

1st Man Come, sir, come, you bleed, ye must look to your wound.

Drummond Damn you, Colwan. You and your foul, half-breed brother.

1st Man Mr Colwan, stay here, sir. Leave this to us. Tempers must cool a while.

The 1st MAN gathers up the foils (leaving Drummond's sword and dirk) and leads DRUMMOND off. The other ONLOOKERS drift away.

Robert Look how they despise you now, George. I would not have friends such as yours for all the wealth you will inherit.

George You know full well from whom they flee. You're like some malevolent spirit, come to spoil our sport.

Robert Why should I not? I am chosen to make you face your own degeneracy. You are corrupted by sin, bloated by it, for all your blithe looks, your fine clothes and your courtesy.

George Tell me your true purpose, Robert, else I swear I will throw you from this precipice and damn the consequences.

ROBERT laughs. GEORGE hits him, Robert falling to the ground.

Tell me, you devil!

GEORGE threatens him with his sword. ROBERT screams.

Robert Spare me, spare me, brother!

George Tell me!

Robert I meant no harm. I meant no harm. I did nothing but for your good. I intended nothing at heart but your unspeakable profit. Your great and endless good.

George So you came not by chance – you sought me here? You knew where to find me?

Robert Yes.

George How? We have never set eyes on each other before today. Who told you I would fence with Drummond here?

Robert A friend.

George Who? What friend?

Robert You do not know him.

George How then does he know me?

Robert I cannot tell.

George Was he here present with you today?

Robert Yes, he was not far distant. He came to this hill with me.

George Then where is he now?

Robert I cannot tell.

George Why then, confess it was the devil told you how to find me.

Robert What?

George The devil.

Robert *[Getting to his feet]* Ah, George, how little you understand! Is there none but the Evil One can tell future actions from past ones? It was the Good Lord that led me here. I had no aim in seeking you but your good! I give you my word.

George Then, Robert, though you ... well, I must – I will – believe you. I am disposed to be hasty and passionate, a fault, I know in my nature. But I never meant you evil, or to hurt you. I would as soon stretch out my hand to my own life, or my father's, as to yours. *[Offering his hand]* So now, once and for all, may we be reconciled? Part – and remain – friends?

Robert I ... Would that be expedient?

George What? How 'expedient'?

Robert Would the lark shake hands with the adder? Reconciled? To what would I be reconciled?

George To your brother! Here – your own brother's hand, Robert.

ROBERT stares at him for a moment, and then looks away.

Well, I'll swear I cannot fathom thee. But I pity thee, Robert. I do, with all my heart.

GEORGE exits quickly. ROBERT watches him go, then drops to the ground, his head buried in his hands. The lights change. GIL-MARTIN slowly approaches. He kneels beside ROBERT and cradles his head.

Robert Is it you?

Gil-Martin Aye, Robbie, it is.

Robert I can't see you.

Gil-Martin I'm here, Robbie. Close your eyes. Can you see me now?

Robert Yes.

Gil-Martin I'll always be with you, Robbie. Is not that a comfort?

Robert Yes.

Gil-Martin Then why do you not rejoice?

Robert My brother. I came to him, as you said. Though not of the Elect, I came to him humbly, in friendship, that he might at least understand his error. He flouted me, hit me with his sword, and made mock of me with his friends.

Gil-Martin Ay, I watched. My heart swelled with pride. You discomfited them in their heathen sport and called down the wrath of heaven on them.

Robert He struck me!

Gil-Martin So? You have so seared his soul that he will never know another night's rest.

Robert Forgive me, great sir -

Gil-Martin What?

Robert I am ignorant of many things ...

Gil-Martin Speak.

Robert Why, when you saw my brother strike me, did you not intervene? I know you to be a man of infinite power. Had you wished it, you could have commanded an army to lay him low.

Gil-Martin Ah, Robbie, d'you not divine the reason?

Robert You must have reason, but what it is, I cannot guess.

Gil-Martin Deep in your heart you know. How many miles I have travelled to be with you, to enlist you in the great task. Have we not vowed to confound the blasphemers, the heathens who walk among us and pretend they will share with us in everlasting life? There can be no pity for those who mock the true Word.

Robert I am sensible of the great honour you do me –

Gil-Martin And you have accepted the bitter hardships you must face, that you'll be reviled for doing the Lord's work?

Robert I will, sir. I will wear the odium of the world as a badge of honour.

GIL-MARTIN clasps ROBERT in his arms.

Gil-Martin That's bravely spoken, Robbie and I love you for it. Now we're of one mind, I'll tell you why I'd not intervene. To give you the honour of doing the world a great service.

Robert What service, sir?

- Gil-Martin** Why, to dash out George Colwan's brains.
- Robert** What? I cannot believe ...
- Gil-Martin** Believe what?
- Robert** That you would sanction such a wickedness.
- Gil-Martin** *[Pushing ROBERT to the ground]* Come, sir. I've travelled too far. What's this – have ye the heart of a woman?
- Robert** You'd have me slaughter my own brother? To become as Cain –
- Gil-Martin** This is heresy, Robert. You are no Cain, and your brother's no Abel. He's an enemy to divine truth. Yes, he looks fair, with his bottomless purse, his fine clothes, and his bonny smile. See into his mind, Robbie, into that riot of filth. Hear him laugh and blaspheme when he's in his cups, watch him waste your father's treasure, see him sit atop his whores in their polluted beds –
- Robert** Stop! Stop! God, who sees all, will punish him.
- Gil-Martin** In time, yes. But now, Robbie, now. He is an enemy to you, to Christendom itself. He has struck you once. He will do so again. Run you through with no more compunction than he would feel at swatting a fly.
- Robert** I know ... I know he is wicked –
- Gil-Martin** Wicked! The man is party to the vilest plot, a proven enemy to the Word. George Colwan, and his like, is why I have come to this place, Robbie. To counter the dark with the light. Yours is the light, Robbie. You are the light. The soundness of your doctrine's the beacon that has given me hope.
- Robert** Oh, sire, you do me too much honour.
- Gil-Martin** But what use is doctrine without action?
- Robert** No use, I suppose.
- Gil-Martin** I offer you this great task, the privilege of ending your cursed brother's life. And tonight there can be no fitter moment. Tonight he goes to a bagnio, where he will slake his lust. He will be found naked, in the depths of his sin, and at your mercy.
- Robert** To enter such a house of shame would burn my very soul.
- Gil-Martin** Nay, Robert. There is a divine mechanism at work. Can you not hear its wheels? They have driven us from the day of creation. They

turn your basest action into gold. You cannot sin, Robert. All that you do is divinely ordained.

Robert You saw how he felled me. I have not the strength to take the life of another human being.

Gil-Martin George Colwan must die tonight, whether by your hand or not ... ?

ROBERT remains silent, perhaps shakes his head.

Well, I am disappointed in you, Robbie, but so be it. I shall undertake the great task myself.

GIL-MARTIN picks a sword from the ground.

The sword of Tom Drummond. A timely gift from Heaven.

Robert Forgive me, great lord.

Gil-Martin If I die in the attempt I shall die a martyr. I will dwell in glory.

Robert The world shall know of your sacrifice.

Gil-Martin Will you not accompany me? Will you not grant me that?

Robert I – it shall be as you wish.

Gil-Martin Then I am content.

GIL-MARTIN pulls ROBERT to his feet. He picks Drummond's dirk from the ground and proffers it to ROBERT.

Drummond left this for you, look. You must take it for your own protection. There are those there that will defend their own kind, their wealth and their entitlement, to the death. Take it, man!

ROBERT takes the dirk. GIL-MARTIN claps him in an embrace.

Come away with me. We have much to do before nightfall.

GIL-MARTIN and ROBERT walk away as the lights fade and the sounds of revelry from a tavern build.

Scene 12

A bedroom in an Edinburgh tavern. GEORGE's sword lies in its scabbard on the floor at one side of the bed. His dirk lies on top of his pile of clothes on the other side. GEORGE is mumbling in his sleep. BEL CALVERT, a woman in her forties, is sitting beside GEORGE, lacing up her bodice. Distant fiddle music, and the sound of laughter can be heard through the floor. GEORGE'S mumbling increases. BEL turns and shakes him awake. GEORGE sits up with a shout.

Bel What ails you, Mr. Colwan. No a guilty conscience, I hope?

George Bel – is that you?

Bel You didnae seem religious half an hour past.

George I must have been dreaming.

Bel Awful bad dream, was it?

George I don't remember.

BEL goes over to a bucket of water, takes a cloth from it, lifts her skirt and starts to wash.

Bel Are you going to the cards?

George I'll not be welcome there tonight.

Bel Go away with you. Two young bucks with their blood up. It'll be forgot by tomorrow.

George Perhaps. I own the fault was mine. I don't care for company while there is bad feeling.

GEORGE lifts the pillow and adjusts it under his head. As he does, he dislodges a rosary from under the pillow.

Bel Well you cannae stay here. I've got my living to make.

George [*Gesturing with the rosary*] Why, Bel, I never knew you were a papist.

Bel Give it to me –

George Nay, Bel – such a pretty trinket. Why would you hide it away?

They tussle on the bed.

Bel Give it back!

George Take it, Bel. I meant no harm. I care not if you are a Papist or a Mahometan.

Bel Well, there are many in this town that do.

George Aye, if those gentlemen prevail, we shall both meet in Hades.

Bel Time you were gone – I've customers waiting. You're not the only young blade with money in his britches.

George Not yet, Bel.

Bel What, you're no satisfied yet? Well, ye know my fee.

George Ay. Take it from my pocket there. I just want to stay a while longer.

The lights dim. BEL shivers as she takes the money. We hear raucous laughter from downstairs.

Bel It's freezing in here. Can you no feel it?

George Come here, Bel. Let me warm you –

BEL begins to unlace herself again. There is a hammering on the door.

Drummond *[Off]* George Colwan, damn your soul, will ye hide away with your whore? Come out and fight.

George What? *[Calling]* For God's love, Tom. If I offended you, then I ask your pardon, truly I do –

Drummond *[Off]* Pardon? It's too late for that –

The door bursts open and DRUMMOND enters, his sword drawn. ROBERT can be glimpsed behind him on the landing. GEORGE reaches to the floor for his sword, but DRUMMOND moves it out of reach with his foot.

What, George, push your own sword away, like a coward? You know what all cowards deserve –

He raises his sword to strike GEORGE. BEL steps in between them.

Bel No! No! Help! Murder!

DRUMMOND strikes BEL with the hilt of his sword. He then turns her round and pushes her to the floor. She covers her bloodied face, and hears but does not see.

Drummond Pox-ridden papist harlot –

GEORGE seizes his dirk and grabs DRUMMOND round the neck from behind.

George You'll answer to me for that, Drummond. Strike a woman, would you? Who's the coward now?

Drummond Spare me, George, spare me! *(Shouting)* Friend, will ye not help?

ROBERT enters silently, holding DRUMMOND's dirk. He stands behind GEORGE.

Ye'll not let him slaughter me?

George Who are you talking to?

Turning his head, he sees ROBERT. ROBERT hesitates, then stabs GEORGE.

Robert Anti-Christ!

George What ... what have I ... Brother, have you ... oh, God!

GEORGE collapses. ROBERT flees.

DRUMMOND watches GEORGE for a moment, picks up his sword, looks at BEL, with his foot checks that GEORGE is dead.

Bel Fiend!

DRUMMOND salutes her.

Drummond I am at your service, madam. You will remember my face another time, I hope?

Bel I'll ne'er forget you, Tom Drummond, 'til I see you hanged.

Drummond Good wench!

He tries to kiss her, then turns on his heel and exits the room. BEL sinks on to her knees beside the body of GEORGE. The noise of the revellers below grows louder.

End of Act 1