



The Lady of the Lake

Dramatization of the poem by Walter Scott

by Christian Lanciai (2006)

The characters:

Ellen Douglas
James Fitz-James
Margaret Douglas
Allan-Bane, the family minstrel of the Douglas clan
Roderick Dhu, warrior chief of the Highlands
James of Douglas
Malcolm Graeme
Roderick Dhu's and Douglas' followers
Brian the hermit
Murdoch, a guide
Blanche of Devan
Herbert and three other servants in green
A prison guard
Another guard
Court people

The action is in Scotland by Loch Katrine and the castle Stirling
during the reign of James V in the 16th century.

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Act I scene 1. A very rustic home in the Highlands.
The door is opened from the outside by Ellen, showing in her guest.

Ellen Come in, my friend! Our house is always open to you with everything it could have to offer.

James My lovely maid, you offer me your own home without even knowing who I am.

Ellen It's our custom here in the Highlands to first make the guest feel well at ease and at home before we start asking any questions.

James Your hospitality is irresistible, and I almost feel forced into accepting it. *(Exactly as he enters, a handsome sword falls down from a sheathe above the door where it has been hung on the trophy of a stag. The sword dances down to James' feet. He halts himself, regards the sword, then lifts it up and tries it.)* This is a warning. Someone else greets me welcome with a heavier language than you, my lovely Ellen. I don't know anyone who can swing such an impressing sword as this except one man.

Ellen I am his ward, but he is himself gone away. It's careless of him to throw his sword up so casually that it could fall out of its sheathe and hurt the first best guest who would enter! *(takes care of the sword, restores it in its sheathe and puts it out of reach.)*

Margaret (enters) Have you brought a guest, my Ellen?

Ellen Yes, it must be the noble stranger who Allan-Bane saw in his vision, whom we were commended to take well care of in every way.

Margaret How did he get here?

James Alas, let me explain myself. I and my company chased a stag, but the stag was too fast and clever for us, and both the dogs and my followers were left behind. When I stubbornly pursued my chase all alone, the brave stag succeeded in breaking my horse's wind, so I had no choice but to abandon my valiant comrade, the faithful courser, to the crows.

Ellen It was the broken horse than Allan-Bane saw.

Margaret So you are a Lowlander?

James I found myself tricked up here in the Highlands by myself, my eagerness for hunting and my stubbornness. And as I was not at home here I was completely lost until I heard this lovely voice from the lake, who thought my noise came from some Malcom or her father.

Margaret Your name, Sir?

James Fitz-James, with James also as surname.
Margaret Allan-Bane never sees wrong. He saw that you were a high born nobleman and knew what he said when he commended us to give you everything.
James I thank you from my heart.
Margaret But you must be exhausted after the hunt, which you must have pursued for several miles.
James I drove my horse to his death by my reckless hunt and abandoned myself to an alien land of strangers while only the stag triumphed.
Margaret He is of the Highlands and owns his freedom here, like we all do who live here.
James Your overwhelming hospitality is without doubt a sign of the soundness of your freedom.
Margaret Yes, we live soundly and correctly who live freely. You may sleep here on the fur by the fireplace. It's the warmest and coziest place in the house.
James It's more than I deserve.
Ellen Don't be modest. We treat all strangers the same way.
James I can only thank you with all my heart. I am completely worn out, I notice now, after the strain of the hunt and your soothing entertainment.
Ellen We are all tired. Come, mother. Allow the stranger to retire back into his loneliness to find his peace in pleasant and beneficial dreams.

(The ladies retire.)

James (relaxes on the fur) Dreams! What dreams could result from this? The sword that welcomed me with a warning, Ellen's looks, complexion and revealing plaid, and the housewife's integrity and dignity – it all speaks of Douglas, Douglas, Douglas! My life's torturer in the form of a constantly worse conscience and agony for all that I have cost others for just being what I am – my destiny has brought me to Douglas' own home, which his family generously has opened to me without reservations, the one they would have most reasons enough to wish dead! Well, if I in any way will be able, I shall for Ellen's sake in the future try to restore something of what I have broken and the sensitive balance in their and the Highlanders' life that only I have disturbed. Welcome, nightmares! Let me dream of my irreconcilable friend Douglas!
(stretches out. The scene fades out.)

Scene 2. By the shore.

Ellen and Allan-Bane.

Ellen You warned me of him but still asked us to look after and take care of him well.

Allan-Bane Yes, for security, but it would have been better still if he never had come. All we know about him is that he carries a secret, and his assumed name is probably just assumed – it doesn't say anything about who he is, while all decent and honest people have a family name.

Ellen He seems well educated though and polite and has no harm in his mind, and his story about how he happened to come here is probably all correct – the frustrating stag hunt, the horse that broke his wind which you found yourself, and how he never has been to these parts before.

Allan-Bane He is a Lowlander which is bad enough to raise all the deepest suspicions. Expect bad fortune from lowlander pride. That's all I can say.

Ellen But I hear familiar and warlike cries from the lake.

Allan-Bane It is Roderick Dhu with his following.

Ellen My suitor, whom I am compelled to marry, although I only love Malcolm.

Allan-Bane Our chief, the hard Roderick Dhu dominates the Highlands completely with his hard long acquired power. That he proposed to you must demand a yes for an answer, for a refusal would be impossible. He would take you anyway.

Ellen I must see it in as bright a light as possible. Only he could defeat the Lowlanders and perhaps at last give our house Douglas back their rights.

Allan-Bane That's how you must see it, and Roderick Dhu is now in his very strongest position and intends to give decisive battles against the Lowland tyranny in your name. If he defeats them you could be queen of Scotland.

Ellen I would rather stay up here in the mountains and go hunting with Malcolm Graeme.

Allan-Bane Unfortunately, Ellen, you must sacrifice your own good for the best of others.

Ellen I doubt that we could know what is best for all, but we always know the best for ourselves. To bet on the best of all is therefore an uncertain bet, while if you can fulfill your own happiness you have a better possibility to spread and transport that happiness to others.

Allan-Bane Maybe you are right. But I fear a threat against our happiness in the presence of the stranger here, since he very well could be a spy for the government.

Ellen He is too honest for such things. And we never had any secrets to anyone. There is nothing here for anyone to spy out.

Allan-Bane His mere presence is ominous enough, especially considering the reaction of your father's sword on his entrance in our house.

Ellen Father was always careless with that sword.

Allan-Bane Still it never fell out until a Lowlander stranger with a secret came uninvited and crossed the threshold.

Ellen We listen to you, Allan-Bane, and we hear your advice and try to obey it, even when it is most abstruse and ambiguous.

Allan-Bane Here is now Roderick Dhu. Receive your suitor well, virgin Ellen, for he might not last very long.

Ellen Allan, your meaning is more abstruse and ambiguous than ever.

Roderick (enters, a grand stately but brutal warrior chief) Greetings, my lovely virgin and my becoming consort, as I hope. *(kisses her hand but coarsely.)*

Ellen Shouldn't you first of all greet my father?

Douglas (a worthy and noble middle-aged man, entering with the young Malcolm)

My friend, welcome to our exile here on our island, as far away from all civilization and politics as possible.

Margaret (comes forth eagerly to greet) Roderick, welcome, the hope of the Highlands and of Scotland!

Roderick I hope indeed to realize that, but not without your help, Douglas.

Douglas That's something we'll have to discuss.

Ellen (discovers Malcolm in Douglas' following, flings herself round his neck) Malcolm Graeme, my hero! But where have you been so long?

Malcolm (a handsome young man with all good qualities) Dear Ellen, wherever I have been, my only occupation has been to long for you. Fortunately I had your father near by.

Roderick (to Douglas) It is me she should embrace and greet with so spontaneous warmth, and not that upstart milksop.

Douglas He is as indispensable to our future as you yourself, Sir Roderick. But please enter now and partake in our gathering, so that we may offer you all we can of our hospitality. Mother Margaret has made the table ready and prepared the banquet, which only misses you and your men, Sir Roderick.

Roderick As usual, Douglas, you excel all the nobility that your family already has represented for centuries.

Douglas If I do so I have succeeded in my intention to entertain my guests to some satisfaction. Now, all at table, comrades! The ale is waiting for us, and the ousquebaugh!

(All go up to the house. Roderick and Malcolm cast eyes at each other when Ellen keeps close to Malcolm and watches Roderick with shyness. Allan-Bane follows as the last man and with heavy steps.)

Scene 3. The party.

All enjoy what is served, and the mood is excellent.

Roderick (rises with his cup) As usual, Douglas, you have surpassed not only yourself but everything we expected of your excellent and boundless hospitality. It is an honour for us to have you as a friend and ally, and thereby I wished to take the opportunity to affirm our alliance by solemnly confirming my faithfulness to your house for life by in the presence of so many witnesses trouble you with at last granting me a promise of your daughter's hand. I must insist on my proposal and on the impossibility for you to decline this, since we must be united in a final settlement with the haughty king.

(Malcolm rises upset, Ellen calms him and makes him resume his seat. Douglas rises.)

Douglas My friend, it's not the first time you propose to my daughter, but since you now do it so demonstrably I must at last give you an answer. No one has any right to decide who my daughter will have for her husband except Ellen herself, and

even if I wanted you for my son-in-law, I would never have the right to give my daughter away to a man she couldn't love. She has the last word, and I don't even have the first. For the second, I could never go with you to war against the king. As a prince he was under my protection, I taught him sports and fighting arts, I was like a father to him, and you demand that I go to war against him. My simple answer is never, whatever he may have done as a king to wrong our clan. I would then rather remain in exile and quietly retire in a monastery, forget name and honour and become a hermit, than take part even in a word against the king.

Roderick Do you then prefer to be called a coward by healthier highlanders and clans, who don't demand more than justice and what is right?

Douglas It's not cowardice. It's only precaution or even fear, if you like, for I have a spy of the king's concealed and lodged in my house.

Ellen (rising) A stranger and guest is sacred and in the asylum of hospitality. Nothing can touch him, and if he is a stranger, that is no proof that he is a spy. On the contrary, as a lost stranger exposed in a wild land of rebels and brutal bellicose trouble-makers he is as vulnerable and innocent as a child, and we have no right even to ask him questions. He may be whatever he is in peace, God knows how unprotected he is, and our duty as his hosts is to protect him against everything. Concerning your proposal, Sir Roderick, I thank you for the honour of being desired and loved by you, but I can never mobilize any tender feelings for you, since you by your ambitious and aggressive hardness make yourself the opposite of everything I found worth loving in another. And you have no right to even try to press or force my family with you into the war.

Roderick Nothing can stop the war, I already sent the burning message of the cross abroad to the clans, and it would have been wiser of your family to take a stand here for our right cause than to be driven over, ignored and despised by both the king, the Lowlands and your own Highland friends.

Malcolm (rises, upset, can't control himself any longer) And what warrants do you have for your rebellion to succeed, you seducer of the people and villain professing power? How can you promise that you don't just lead all your men to death? And what is your right except presumption and egoism?

Roderick You whelp, you don't speak like that to a chieftain! We had better settle this at once! Let's see which one of us is most deserving of the sweet Ellen! (*produces his long battle-axe, and Malcolm just as eagerly pulls his sword.*)

Douglas Stop! The first man here to lift any weapon to harm another is my enemy forever! Control yourselves! You are both breaking the most sacred law of hospitality as guests by drawing weapons to fight in the house of your own host!

Roderick (furious, lays his axe aside) I find it impossible to remain here. My friend, we remain sworn allies whether you take part in our war of rights or not. But we leave you and your family in peace, since you obviously don't wish to have anything to do with us.

Douglas We remain faithful to you as your friends and to the king as his subjects.

Roderick Says you, who suffered most and was the most humiliated of all by him! (*leaves in frustration with his men*)

Malcolm (to Ellen) That was a sad end to this party. When this wild chief sends around his clan message with burning crosses as a call to war, my family and clan will not be kindly seen and might even be exposed to persecution for disloyalty. I had better go to them and bring them to safety.

Ellen You leave us in a moment of need?

Malcolm The moment of need that brought us closer together than any welfare could have done. This separation, my love, is just a prelude to our future and our love. We must both first of all take care of our own to later, when we have survived, also be able to devote ourselves to deeper matters of importance.

Ellen All crises will just transcend into better times.

Malcolm That's what I mean. (*Ellen flings herself crying in her father's arms.*)

Douglas Ellen, all our security lies in the one fact that we keep ourselves innocent and honest.

Malcolm (to Allan-Bane) Farewell, you most faithful of hearts, the soul and comfort of your clan and family! I promise you, that I shall never give up until I fought myself to the right of all of us with the king, that the Douglas family once more shall have its right position restored to them. The hard Sir Roderick has nothing to demand of us, and we owe nothing to his pretensions. Tell him that, for he like everyone else will listen to you, for only you will reach all the way into even the hardest Scottish hearts with your song. Remain our comfort, my good Allan-Bane, when tragedy strikes and the earth starts shaking in convulsions of destruction.

Allan-Bane Like the truth, the music will never fall silent.

Malcolm Yes, carry on like that. Farewell. (*departs. Ellen remains in the arms of her father. Douglas comforts her. Margaret sighs and starts cleaning up after the sudden departure of everybody.*)

Act II scene 1. Back by the shore.

The chiefs are assembled around a fire with the hermit Brian.

Brian The oath is sworn, and whoever breaks it is condemned! Our holy alliance of war is valid until the war is won or ended, and if anyone breaks the alliance and oath before the war is carried through, he and his family shall be excluded from the community of the clans forever and to be regarded as outlawed outcasts and despicable unworthy parasites on the inviolable pride, honour and dignity of Scotland! Every family and clan to which the burning cross has been sent with its call to war must take part and join or perish and be hit by the curse of the oath!

Roderick You have made enough noise, you holy fanatic. You have performed the rituals, we get the message, it should be clear to everyone since it is impossible to misunderstand, so let's go to war, unite, get organized and carry on the operation.

Brian The mighty Roderick Dhu has spoken!
Roderick We have listened enough. Let's get going!

(All break up.)

(When everyone has disappeared, Ellen enters alone in her plaid in the light of the fire.)

Ellen The war maniacs have sworn themselves to blood and death and the madness of rebellion and violence, fanatically exhorted by a demented hermit who lived alone all his life and who only understands rituals and ritual fanaticism. What crazy fools they are, poor pitiable bandits, who senselessly devote themselves to violence just to ruin themselves! And one of them proposed to me and really loved me, wanted me and desired to gain me only to the more furiously challenge his destiny and cast himself to a mad and meaningless death all too early. And I can only feel pity for such a vain hero. It can only end by going precipitously from bad to worse.

And what is right in all this? I turn to the holy virgin, who herself saw her only son being executed for nothing, for the evil of man and for the madness and sick system of politics, for the self-destructive morbidity of the Roman power and its mortality. Holy virgin Mary, what is right in this? Have I acted right in abandoning the chief of violence to the blindness of his personal accursed destiny? Have I acted wrong in turning down his generous and brave but frightening love? Are we, the Douglas clan, really cowards by my father's wisdom in keeping us out of the way of violence and strife? It feels then as if we were the ones who in abominable detachment cruelly sacrifice the great Roderick Dhu with his power of initiative with his men to the war god's altar of dreadful cynicism. Have I done wrong? Am I guilty of Roderick's death? I shall never know. *(sits down by the fire)*

Roderick *(has appeared far above, listening)* Now I shall never hear the lovely voice again, the only light of my soul. I go to war and might never again have peace, for my destiny is to blindly follow the onslaught of unrest and storm and violence and disaster with the unmanageable turbulences of human passion as the instruments of egoism and the raving hatred without end of the terrible foundering of justice in the madness of despair and its darkness of mind. My Ellen, I thought for a moment that you perhaps could save me, but now nothing can save me and least of all myself. *(retires in sadness)*

Allan-Bane *comes up to Ellen*) Be comforted, Ellen. He is well taken care of, and your father's nobility must touch and make any heart of stone melt in softness.

Ellen Still he is a prisoner, and a free soul like my Malcolm can like any bird only stifle and languish in a cage.

Allan-Bane If your father appears to the king, whom he brought up himself, to offer himself as a prisoner in exchange of his friend, the king's heart must melt and liberate them both.

Ellen Dear Allan, in your minstrel wisdom you are as blue-eyed as the most naïve nun who never felt anything else than comfort and safety. It is wartime now, and even the law is made an exception. Of course the king has no other choice, when

father voluntarily offers himself as a pawn, than to keep both him and my Malcolm stuck in prison for at least as long as the war goes on.

Allan-Bane Still I find my blue-eyed optimism reasonable.

Ellen Maybe in the long run.

Allan-Bane We poets live only for the future in the long run.

Ellen You live only in your own world and devote yourselves only to wishful thinking wherewith to deceive those easily seduced listeners who gladly would take anything seriously that just sounds good.

Allan-Bane Here is now our dangerous unknown stranger.

James (enters) Ellen, my own people have now found me, and I have received a reliable guide to follow me back, and have come to bid you farewell.

Ellen You can't leave now. The Highlands are in arms in rebellion, and an unmistakable Lowlander like you have only enemies to expect everywhere.

James I must take that risk, and I trust my luck.

Ellen Then you are as naïve and blue-eyed as Allan-Bane if not even more.

James Ellen, come with me to a greater security than here. I can offer you a safe haven at the castle of Stirling until these troubled times have raved enough. You can never find anything safer than my protection.

Ellen And would I then abandon my own and my responsibility?

James Your family is outlawed since long, you have lived like fugitives in stealth and evil here on this island too long, and you are even threatened by enmity from the war-crazy gangs of Roderick for having refused to join him. Come with me to Stirling, and in time you shall all have your freedom, both your father Douglas and his friend Malcolm Graeme.

Ellen If that is true I might as well stay here. You ask me to confide in an unknown knight, and what warrant do I have that I could trust his completely unknown intentions with me? You have received everything from us, but we never trusted you and never will, no matter how much you could trust our protection. My friend, if you want to set out in a lawless country and believe yourself safe enough to assume responsibility for the life of a virgin, who is threatened and in a difficult situation, you are more naïve than everyone else. Be naïve as much as you like, but only for yourself. I must stay here.

James Farewell then, Ellen, and pardon my imposition.

Ellen I am sure you mean well.

James (hesitates, returns) One last offer I can make you. *(takes off a ring)* I once had this from the king for a service I did to him in a matter of life and death. He owes me a great deal. If you ever find yourself in any predicament, carry this ring to my king, and he will respond to your wish, whatever it might be.

Ellen This gift seems honest, and I thank you for it. *(accepts the ring and puts it on her finger)* I will remember you with gratitude, Fitz-James.

James And I shall remember you with warmth, virgin Ellen. Now farewell again one last time. My guide is waiting. *(breaks up)*

Ellen A strange man with many secrets. Perhaps one day we shall know some of them.

Scene 2. A pass in the mountains.

James Please go ahead. I don't trust you.

Murdoch We have nothing to fear. The road is perfectly safe.

James Why do you make such absurd hallos and yells?

Murdoch Just to frighten off eventual beasts and birds of prey that could be roaming here.

James Who really sent you?

Murdoch I am considered a very reliable servant by all.

James Yes, for all you Highlanders but hardly for a stranger and outsider like me.

Murdoch You fall a victim to your own suspiciousness. You imagine ghosts in the middle of the day. *(enter Blanche of Devan behind the pass.)*

James Is this a ghost?

Blanche *(dressed in white with wild white loose hairs and wild flowers in her hair)*

Yes, I am a ghost, hanging by a thin thread and pending nowhere in Limbo between the shadows of death and phantoms of the murdered, who will always haunt us forever day and night and hide the light for every man and murderer with a bad conscience forever!

James Who is she?

Murdoch It's the poor mad Blanche of Devan. Her husband was murdered on his way to his wedding. This is the bride.

James So she was never married and therefore remains a bride forever and has long since survived herself and lived too long. Poor girl!

Blanche I know who you are, brave stranger, who dares to tread alone up among the highland crooks and bandits! I was a thoroughbred Lowlander like yourself, and just like you my intended groom on his way to the wedding was also dressed all in Lincoln green when he was murdered by Sir Roderick and his bandits because he dared to stand for his right and defend himself and his life, when he was attacked by Sir Roderick.

James So your husband was murdered by Sir Roderick Dhu.

Blanche And he was never exonerated.

Murdoch Enough of this talk! Sir, your company is waiting over there on the other side of the pass. If you want to reach home before dark you have no time to argue with demented witches.

Blanche Don't trust him. I know well what is there behind that pass, treachery and ambush, just waiting to kill the stranger and leave him and his horse to the vultures!

James Traitor! I knew it! *(draws his sword)*

Murdoch Whoever you are, you will not get away. (*starts running and shoots an arrow against him, which misses and hits Blanche in her breast*)

James (overtakes him) Villain, who blindly murder an innocent female victim to senseless male arbitrariness! (*runs his sword through him*)

Blanche (dying) Avenge me, you green stranger!

James I would love to, poor Blanche, if only once I would meet this Roderick in close fight.

Blanche It was he personally who murdered my bridegroom, who all since then has been crying to me from the other side of the grave for righteous revenge for having been murdered for nothing!

James Unhappy timeless bride, I am the only witness to your own unfair and too early martyrdom.

Blanche I am grateful for having received the arrow intended for you. Now at last I may join my husband, but I leave you as a witness to take revenge on the living.

James I will only undertake Sir Roderick Dhu. If only he is rightfully executed, it will be possible for all his followers and friends to be pardoned and exonerated.

Blanche Who are you to promise such a thing?

James Only your avenger.

Blanche I thank you in advance. (*dies*)

James Unhappy deranged bride, I here cut a lock of your bloody virgin hair cried in sorrow to whiteness and add it together with your husband's to once both be dipped in the blood of Sir Roderick.

(Sir Roderick appears from the other side of the pass.)

Roderick What do I see? You must be that green knight that everyone talks about but no one knows. But what happened to you?

James My assigned servant, who lies here, was discovered as a traitor when he tried to murder me but instead killed this poor old woman.

Roderick So you murdered him?

James I couldn't just let him get away. But who are you yourself?

Roderick A wanderer of the mountains like yourself but of Highland blood and a follower of Roderick Dhu, unlike yourself. Are you his friend or his enemy?

James His enemy.

Roderick I warn you. For every word against him that you speak I have the right to kill you. But here in the freedom of the Highlands rules the law of nobility. You are a stranger here, and I who am at home here am obliged to do what I can for you. I will show you the way in peace, if you trust your life with me, instead of that failed guide who could only murder old women.

James I share your contempt of him and respect you for it.

Roderick If you were not so obviously a Lowlander I would assume that we were of the same and equally noble blood.

James I have nothing against you.

Roderick And neither have I with you. So let's be friends, (*offers his hand,*) as long as I am obliged to help you on your way.

James I accept it gladly, since we actually are on common ground, since none of us knows anything about the other.

Roderick Let's take advantage of that opportunity, that none of us really is anyone.

James Yes. *(finally accepts his hand)*

Roderick So we are brothers for today and tonight. You will share my own meal, and we will share the same plaid as a cover for tonight, like brothers, and sleep piously together, sharing the same good dreams. Will that suit you?

James It will. More and more I learn to know, respect and value the free spirit of nobility and honour in these highlands.

Roderick That's the intention. You lowlanders have very much of value to learn from the code of our inviolable freedom.

James I must trust you, for I have no other choice.

Roderick Exactly. I have a joint of venison here. Would it do for our dinner?

James I love venison.

Roderick And then we can sleep well on it.

James I trust your honour.

Roderick Good. Then be my guest and brother until tomorrow.

James With greatest gratitude and positivity.

Roderick That's the spirit. Let's make ourselves comfortable.

(They settle down beyond the stage of the corpses and make their camp.)

Act III scene 1. Morning.

They rise from their bed, where they have slept under the same plaid together.

Roderick I hope you had a good night.

James The best imaginable.

Roderick Perhaps we then could continue fortified on our walk together to your safety.

James Whoever you are, your hostship and protection have been perfect.

Roderick A natural thing for us in the Highlands. Just tell me one thing: why did you stay so long here?

James I was new to this land, and there was so much here to observe.

Roderick Like the beautiful Ellen Douglas?

James She was the one who first took care of me and showed me a good will.

Roderick And that highland magnanimity charmed you so thoroughly that you wanted to carry her away.

James Only to place her in security as long as the rebellion went on.

Roderick And what is your interest in that?

James In her security?

Roderick No, in the rebellion.

James I assure you, that I only thought of her security.

Roderick Sir Roderick Dhu has thought himself of the security of all Highland women and therefore asked them to gather with Ellen Douglas on her island, which her father selected as a safe asylum for his outlawed exile. Only you have asked Ellen to come out of there. Why?

James I guess I was so charmed by her.

Roderick She belongs to her father's friend Malcolm Graeme, who is taken prisoner by the Saxons.

James I didn't know.

Roderick That she belongs to Malcolm Graeme or that he is imprisoned?

James The latter.

Roderick So you have an interest in the war. You were suspected from the start to be a spy. Could you explain your curiosity and your prying and lingering so long in any other way?

James I am no spy. I was lost and led astray up here hunting for a stag.

Roderick Yes, that was Ellen Douglas' explanation. But it does not satisfy me. What do you have against Sir Roderick Dhu?

James He is a murderer.

Roderick What freedom fighter isn't?

James But he has murdered innocents without distinction.

Roderick Like who?

James Like the widow's husband who was murdered by another of Sir Roderick's servants yesterday.

Roderick Poor Blanche of Devan. He missed his shot. It was not murder, just a homicide.

James But he aimed his shot to murder a stranger who was under the protection of the highland laws of hospitality.

Roderick That is correct. And therefore he was killed. But why are you Sir Roderick's enemy?

James I promised the dying Blanche of Devan to avenge her bridegroom's death.

Roderick He was on the wrong side. It was his own fault. He was in the way and had to blame himself. Many committed that mistake. You are also on the wrong side.

James How can you then justify violence, chaos, rebellion and murder in the name of freedom? Isn't that just a fanatical obsession?

Roderick My friend, it is inherited. Watch the mountains around you, this glowing warm beautiful landscape of only freedom, heroism and glory, which appertained to the Celts through all times. But at one time there came from the south these ambitious, greedy and pretentious Saxons, who robbed us of our country. They made themselves our lords and kings by arbitrariness without our asking for it, and since then, during the last five hundred years, have we fought for our freedom and our rights, our natural heritage since the beginning of time. Can you then as a Lowlander claim that we are wrong?

James We were driven out of England by the Normans.

Roderick That's no excuse for robbing us Celts of our lands, make us outlawed, confiscate our property and force the best of us, like the Douglas family, into exile and poverty.

James You speak about your rights and advocate justice but take the law in your own hands and use violence against innocents, like Blanche of Devan and her bridegroom. How do you think the great Sir Roderick Dhu could reach anywhere by such means? How could it end up in any other way than badly when everything he does goes wrong? Come over to our side instead, my friend, for the Lowlands actually warrant order, law, and the rights of justice. We can give Douglas back his rights, for he took a stand aside of the war, but never Sir Roderick Dhu, who is leading it.

Roderick (*gives a high and shrill whistle. Immediately fully armed wild highland warriors turn up from everywhere.*) My friend, I am sorry, but the one who has helped you thus far is actually Roderick Dhu. Now he can't help you any more.

James (*finds himself threatened by an overwhelming superior power, takes a stand with his back against a rock and draws his sword*) What difference does it make? Come along, one or all of you! In the end we shall all fall anyway!

Roderick (*impressed by his bravery, gives a sign to all the warriors and waves them away*) He is too brave for all of you. Away with you! I want to speak with him alone. (*All the warriors disperse.*)

James (*shaken*) You make a great impression by your overwhelming power and force but don't use it.

Roderick You are still under the laws of hospitality. We still have some distance to go before you are out of my territory. Then we can settle our difference.

James Why not at once?

Roderick Only if you insist

James You are the insisting one. I have a better idea.

Roderick Well?

James Come with me to Stirling and give yourself up to the king's mercy, and he will grant it.

Roderick Your pretensions excel your haughtiness. Who are you to believe that you could make decisions for the king? Don't you think he will do whatever he fancies? Do you think he would hesitate to execute a rebel in cold blood, whoever would plead for him? Do you really think I am that stupid? Are you pulling my legs, you clown?

James No, I am just trying to help you the least way I can as some thanks for the grace you have shown me.

Roderick We have talked enough nonsense. I could never stand you lowlanders, and you are the worst of all. I never bargain with my freedom and rights as a freeborn clansman of the Highlands. Even if my life would be spared by your despicably arrogant king, I would rather, like you, take a stand with my back against a rock and defend my life alone against the most hopeless of superior powers.

James I regret that we have to fight.

Roderick Not I, for it will be a fair combat, where you stand for the arbitrary tyranny of the Lowlander arrogance, while I stand for the freedom and honesty of the Highlands. May the one who is right carry the victory, and I know that I am right. *(draws his sword)*

James I will spare you, if you fall before me. *(draws his sword)*

Roderick Not I, if you fall before me. You will like Murdoch be left for the vultures. Revenge for revenge.

James You are heavy and more qualified to lead a fight than to fight it.

Roderick I have been through more fights than I can remember.

James And therefore you are old and slow.

Roderick Yes, just go on provoking me! A raving bull is unruly and invincible.

James On the contrary. In his fury you find his weakness.

Roderick You just dally and rant like a rat! Fight instead like a man!

James That's what I am doing while you are only boasting. *(succeeds in wounding him)*

Roderick Your quickness gives you credits, and your skill is impressing but doesn't bite on an old bull.

James Weakened by an old man's love for a far too young and lovely maid.

Roderick Don't you dare involve Ellen in this!

James You were the one who wanted to fight, not I. *(succeeds in wounding him)*

Roderick The blood rises to my head and befuddles my precision. Where does all this blood come from? Am I that badly wounded already?

James The next round, my friend! Don't keep dodging!

Roderick You are the one who constantly evade the point of my sword, you minion! Then tell me at last who you are! You did learn who I was.

James You gave yourself away. I never do.

Roderick Coward!

James No, tactician! *(hits the sword off his hand. Roderick gets down on his knees.)* Surrender, noble veteran, and follow me to Stirling, where I will give you the best care for all your old wounds.

Roderick Never! *(attacks him from below and grabs his throat, they roll about with Roderick on top, but he pants and is tired and has blood in his front which hinders him from seeing, but then he gets his knife.)*

Get back into my veins, blood, and don't drown my front and get into my eyes to blind me! May I then thrust in my blindness not to fall myself. Fall, enemy, whoever you are! *(thrusts, but hits the ground with his knife, since James in his quickness succeeds in avoiding the strike. Roderick rattles and rolls over while James quickly rises unhurt and free. Roderick lies without moving unconscious on his back.)*

James Thus you are fallen, great hero, but it required many wounds to get you on your back. Well, you poor Blanche of Devan, *(takes forth the two locks of hair and dips them in Roderick's welling blood,)* now you are avenged with your bridegroom, too late but still. The man who caused your misfortune is not dead but is panting, rattling and fallen to never be able to rise again. Let it then be enough. *(takes out a*

horn and blows a signal, repeats it a few times. Then gradually four young men appear dressed in the same Lincoln green as he.)

Take care of him, bring him to Stirling and dress his wounds carefully. We could still be able to save his life.

Herbert He would hardly have desired it himself.

James If he wants to die, that's his concern. But if we can save his life, it is our duty to do so. Make it quickly. He must not lose more blood, and every moment of the life he has left is like an eternity to him. Let's save him for his eternity.

Herbert We will do ur best.

(The four take care of the unconscious Roderick and carry him out.)

James Now to Stirling. I can do nothing more for my friends here but the more where a new life now begins. *(follows his followers.)*

Act IV scene 1. The Stirling dungeons.

Guard But what business could a beautiful and delicate virgin like you and an old minstrel like this old picturesque original have in these dungeons of hell with only lamentations of anguish and death?

Ellen I am looking for my father, who is supposed to be here somewhere. I have a ring, which a good friend of his gave to me, if I ever would have any request to make him. I do have that now. *(shows the ring)*

Guard (with awe when he sees the ring) My daughter, this rings commands us to the deepest respect. You will at once be brought to see the king personally. Hallo there, guard! Escort this girl at once to the higher regions, and present this ring to the king as her imperative argument.

Guard 2 Follow me, Miss. You will meet the king personally and immediately.

Ellen I am most obliged.

Allan-Bane I stay here, Ellen, and will try to find your father in the meantime.

Ellen Good luck, Allan-Bane! I have a feeling that everything will be satisfactorily arranged. *(is led away by the guard to higher levels.)*

Allan-Bane So I beseech you, good prison guard, to immediately bring me to my lord. Yes, I implore you earnestly, for I am his man and have no right not to be by his side.

Guard You old faithful minstrel, you shall see him, but I must warn you, that he is not in a very healthy condition.

Allan-Bane What is ailing him?

Guard You shall see, if you insist.

Allan-Bane I insist.

Guard Listen to these choruses of despair and complaints! This is not just the fore-court to hell but above all to death, and few are those who get out of these holes of torture and the most bitter misery. Here you are buried alive, and you are only let out when you are dead.

Allan-Bane Then bring me at once to my master, and don't augment the despair of my involuntary separation from him by threats of his death!

Guard My friend, you shall see him. *(They reach the cell. He unlocks it.)* Stay with him as long as you like. He hasn't got much time left anyway. *(Allan enters a dark cell, where someone lies on a bunk and moves in pain.)*

Roderick Who is it?

Allan-Bane (comes up to him) Roderick Dhu! I asked to see my master!

Roderick Then they thought I was your master. But you are welcome, Allan-Bane, for I am alone and comfortless. A neutral company like yours was just what I needed. How are they all? Who has survived? Who has fallen? How did the war go? I know nothing and are here pending in desperate uncertainty between life and death.

Allan-Bane (examines him) You are badly wounded.

Roderick I fought an honest combat and lost. Therefore am I lying here in a desperate effort by my overlord to save my life, he has shown me all possible care and bandaged me well, but I don't know if there is anything more for Roderick Dhu to live for.

Allan-Bane We thought you were dead as you had completely vanished. No one knew where you were, and the war was carried through by the highland clans without you.

Roderick Were you there?

Allan-Bane I followed the action. I saw the entire tragedy. I can bear witness of it all. Ellen is all right.

Roderick Thank heavens! That's the most important thing!

Allan-Bane But no one knows anything about Douglas and Malcolm Graeme.

Roderick The king has put them away somewhere to deal with them later. But sing for me about the war. Let me hear the swansong of the Highlands, the last fight of the last brave warriors for the freedom of their rights. Let me hear how everything was lost and then die.

Allan-Bane My chief, it will be a tearful song of suffering about only bad luck, misfortune and treason. I must warn you that it might be unbearable.

Roderick What is more unbearable than the life we have to live, when everything we lived for only has been robbed and ruined for our eyes? Let me suffer the supreme unbearable account of the false reality, so that I then may appeal to the devil and organize worse consequences of revenge than can be fathomed by the living in this mortal vale of tears of blood and misery.

Allan-Bane I cannot praise the war, how the noblest are made to suffer for nothing, how those who survive are rewarded for their murders and trespasses, and how fresh widows and motherless sons only have to expect a more hopeless and doleful existence than death.

The king's troops advanced but met with resistance in a valley on the way up to Loch Katrine, where they were surprised by an ambush and completely surrounded, but they closed their lines and fought their way through. There was a Highland

victory within reach, but then there was a query rising: Where is Roderick Dhu? His signal and presence was all that would have been needed there to grant us a victory, only his personality in visible form with his indomitable superiority was requested by fate, and the wildness of our highlanders would have been able to annihilate the greedy intruders of bullying pretentious masterfulness.

But the king's troops proceeded to the lake Katrine, and they knew very well that the only inhabitants of the island were women seeking protection. Still they said: "There is the island, that for centuries served bandits for hiding themselves and their stolen goods. It's their last refuge. If we just get a hold of it we have the heart of the rebellion and the enemy in our hands."

A brave swimmer was then sought for, who could get across to just release some small boat to cross the water with, and at once there was a voluntary lancer who was willing to brace the challenge. He valiantly swam across under showers of arrows fired from the island, but reached the island unharmed and started releasing a boat, when from a hiding-place behind an oak there by the shore the Highland widow appeared with a dagger in her hand. I saw how it flashed in murderous lust in the light of lightnings to be buried in the bold man's back, who straight lay lapped by the waves of the shore. Then there was the shocking message. A courier from Stirling announced publicly that the war was ended since Sir Roderick Dhu and also Douglas were prisoners at the king's mercy in Stirling. The king's soldiers then exulted like mad possessed by the joy of hubris, while the highland hearts that still throbbed burst into tears, if they did not completely break.

Roderick That's enough. I can't take any more.

Allan-Bane Thus the war came to an end, Douglas imprisoned as he voluntarily had offered himself to mediate, and Sir Roderick captured no one knew how. Then the last hopes of freedom from the Lowland overbearing barbarity, pettiness and greed withered, and then died the last free spirit among the free mountains of the Highlands when even Sir Roderick Dhu was taken prisoner, as everyone took for granted, by ignominious treason.

Roderick No, it was not ignominious. We honestly fought a combat, the stranger and I, he for the advance of the Lowlands and I for my right. As a gentleman and knight he has tried to take care of me and save my life, but, my friend, I don't want to live any more. (*tears his bandages and immediately starts bleeding profusely*)

Allan-Bane Oh no, my chief!

Roderick Let me die. If I am not allowed to live any longer for the ideals that were mine, I have nothing to live for and can but die. Sing on, my friend, about our misfortunes and tragedies, sing me sweetly to my sleep straight to eternity, and go on singing of me when I am dead. Your songs will never quieten, and from a safe distance of eternity I will always continue listening to them, enjoy them and only live on in their consistent truth of beauty and eternity... (*dies*)

Allan-Bane (rising) No, you great warrior and chieftain! You must not leave us like that, abscond with your soul and let us down! My ruler, your life was ours, and without you there is no real life any more in the withering Highlands that only lived

for their freedom. We shall never forget you, and never shall we ever stop singing your songs of glory, courage and indomitable integrity.

(sits down by the dead man and cries.)

Scene 2.

Ellen waiting in a room of the castle.

Ellen (listens to something outside the window) What is the voice I am hearing? I seem to recognize it all too well. I have heard that musical soothingly sweet voice before. It is Malcolm Graeme who is sitting somewhere by a window, but it doesn't sound as if he was imprisoned. Still I recognize his longing and understand it all too well.

Malcolm (from a window above) My falcon is tired of its peg under his hood, my dog is tired of his food, my horse is restlessly stamping in the stables of rising impatience, and I am myself sitting here languishing of boredom and restlessness. Why am I not free way out there in the woods, wildly galloping forth in my best hunting hour in the morning, with my dogs cheerfully barking, storming ahead with my falcon for a guide flying high in triumph to spy a prey! But I am bereft of my proper life out there in the woods and must sit here to count the hours in fatiguing dullness through the heavy tolls of the lamenting chimes, like for a never-ending funeral, and see how the sun-rays crawl along the walls as slowly as possible in endless immovable procession, when it used to be the lark that woke me up faithfully at dawn and always at the right time, and the rook was the one who always called me back to my rest at dusk. These luxurious royal towers and battlements with their purple halls and expensive ornaments have nothing to offer me that could please me, as they only add shadows and darkness and heavy depression to my existence by the presence of power and pretensions. I can't bear these unnecessary encumberments. I would rather like before bask in the light of Ellen's appreciative eyes, who were my life's only real sun, and which always spread fresh glory and flair on the hunt, which always brought me fortune, so that I with joy before the evening could present her with the trophies and harvest of the day's work. Now I only thirst and hunger from want of my former life of freedom, when I now only can suck in melancholy, nostalgia and the unfathomable sadness of incurable disappointment.

Ellen He is singing for me without having an idea that I am here and can hear his song.

James (enters) The king is ready to see you, Ellen. He is waiting.

Ellen Then I will do my best to plead for all the unhappy lives of my own.

James I will bring you to him. Just don't expect too much.

Ellen I expect nothing, for I have already lost everything.

James Life always remains.

Ellen What life?

James You will see. (*shows her out. The scene opens and reveals a royal gallery where the entire court is assembled. All uncover their heads and bow to James in polite submissive greeting, while he leads Ellen forth holding her by the hand.*)

Ellen (*overwhelmed when she understands, can't make a sound, wants to sink through the floor, covers one eye with her hand while she presents the ring with the other, which is all she can do.*)

James It's over now, Ellen. You are now and for always in safe hands, for behold! Your father is waiting here. (*Douglas steps forth.*)

Ellen Father! (*throws herself in his arms. The embrace is long and mutually tender and sincere.*) I thought I had lost you!

Douglas My daughter, all divisions between me and the king are forgotten and forgiven. The war is over, and so is our outlawed exile. We now belong like we used to do to the king's own and closest family again.

James Your ring, Ellen, I gave you to give you the right to present a wish to the king, which he must grant. You have not presented your wish yet.

Ellen Then there is only thing for me to wish for, and that is a pardon for Roderick Dhu.

James I wish I could grant it, but a higher judge than we has interfered and made all appeals impossible. He has been taken care of by a higher command, and we can impossibly get him down again. He passed away in painful compassion with your family bard Allan-Bane's recounting to him the whole war at his own wish.

Ellen So he is dead?

James He has passed on to the better world of eternity.

Ellen Then there is only one other possible wish for me, which I with proper virginal timidity leave for my father to present. (*gives the ring to her father*)

James Don't you think I would know your heart's wish and prayer? Malcolm Graeme, come forth! (*He appears without having been seen earlier. He kneels to the king.*)

Here you came shamelessly and gave yourself over to us with a prayer to release James of Douglas from his outlawed exile and offered yourself as prisoner in his stead, why Douglas did the same thing and offered himself for you. You surrendered both quite willingly, we accepted you both as pawns for the wild war, but you had already exchanged one another for each other, without your knowing about it. Go hence now back to your forest and remain honoured and free for always as Scottish men of honour and the king's own best friends! Here is a shackle, Malcolm Graeme, as an eternal gift of friendship for a punishment for life, if you will only marry Ellen Douglas. (*removes his own neck chain and hangs it on Malcolm.*) Be mine now and each other's, so that we may all live long in our well-deserved happiness. (*lays Ellen's hand in Malcolm's. They finally embrace.*)

Douglas James, my son, if I may call you that, who taught you all these tricks, your art of masquerade, this manipulative human diplomacy and this magnanimous nobility?

James You were my teacher, and I have never forgotten you. You were the most feared man in Scotland for your astuteness, only I admired you and was careful in acquiring, learning and copying your masterful art of manoeuvres.

Douglas As my most faithful apprentice you still managed to surpass your tutor.

James For a pupil to receive the report that his teacher is surpassed can only mean one thing, that the teacher was superior.

Ellen Don't start arguing now again about that the other had to be better. You were best both of you, and be at last satisfied with that!

Douglas Let us allow the woman to decide, for only she can end all wars.

James Now for the banquet, please, if I may ask you, for if there is anything I owe you, my friends, it is at least a final friendship and festive banquet.

(Music. The court applauds. The King leads his friends out to the banquet.)

The end.

(Gwaldam 2.11.2006,
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