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FLORA

An opera

Libretto by John Rodger

The action takes place in 1773 on the day when Boswell and Johnson visited the Macdonald house. Alan Macdonald is factor (tacksman) of the Sleat estate at Kingsburgh on Skye. Boswell and Johnson are touring the Highlands.

Principal characters

Flora Macdonald - 50-year-old woman (mezzo-soprano)

Alan Macdonald - Flora's husband in his late 40s (baritone)

Sandy Macdonald - one of their sons in his late teens (tenor)

Boswell - tourist in the Highlands, tall slim in his early 30s (tenor)

Dr Johnson - tourist in the Highlands, very fat, in his early 60s (baritone)

Mixed chorus

Other characters

Kate - servant girl (mezzo soprano)

Various soloists from the chorus (both men and women)

Two men (non singing)

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Scene 1

Somewhere in the Highlands

*(Enter Boswell leading Johnson on a makeshift
horse; expansive, sentimental, romantic, ludicrous)*

BOSWELL Doctor Johnson!

JOHNSON Yes, Mr Boswell?

BOSWELL Are you pleased with our country?

(long pause, no answer, they keep walking)

The 15, the 19 and the 45

BOTH were none of them successful
though in hearts the cause still thrives.

JOHNSON In the mountains or the islands
whatever the native terrain
we've come to study the Highlander
to whom the Gaelic tongue remains.

BOSWELL The 15, the 19 and the 45

BOTH were none of them successful
though in hearts the cause still thrives.

BOSWELL This subject gives me such feelings
that to hear those Highland names
or the sounding of the bagpipe
just sets my blood aflame.

I am filled with such a melancholy
and respect for martial courage
I'd readily march out on to war
with thoughts no season nourished.

The 15, the 19 and the 45

BOTH were none of them successful
though in hearts the cause still thrives.

JOHNSON But who gives to violence honour
will in times of peace and ease
be inclined to give us bother
and bring commerce to its knees.

BOSWELL The 15, the 19 and the 45

BOTH were none of them successful
though in hearts the cause still thrives.

BOSWELL In truth there is but one name
whose company we seek
in these hills without our heroine
we would not stay one week.

BOTH Miss Flora Macdonald and the 45
were none of them successful
though in hearts the cause still thrives.

(Exeunt)

(End of Scene 1)

Scene 2

The parlour at Kingsburgh

(Flora stands in the parlour looking out window)

FLORA

To push out a boat

that's a phrase

that's often heard in these parts

Quite a few people

have been pushing a boat out

pushing *their* boat out

They think ...

they think that I ...

-- oh I don't know what they think --

but I'm not in their boat

I'm not in any boat

yet.

I still have my feet on the ground

wet and boggy though it may be.

The preparations are underway

nobody has forced me to do anything.

I'll carry through the tasks
that come my way
this time as a thousand times before
but does anyone know what I *want*?

With so much discord and dispute
what are we striving for?
No-one dares think of that question.
We just board another boat
push off,
and this time it's for America.

Quite a few people have been
pushing a boat out
pushing *their* boat out.

But I'm not in their boat
I'm not in any boat
yet.

(Sandy entering and stopping to listen)

SANDY Is that those fishermen you're watching?

FLORA *(startled)* What?

SANDY Boats. You did say something about boats

FLORA *(regaining her composure)* Yes -- right -- and that's exactly
why I called you in.

SANDY But my father said...

FLORA Your father and I...

SANDY ... you want me to write out a letter for you.

FLORA ... want you to write out a letter.

(pause)

Remember son, that we are islanders

that this is not like other places

I mean *(turns to window again)* there is the sea

here we are in the house

everything here has its own distance

and its own difficulty,

there are ... straits

that have to be crossed to accomplish ...

SANDY Is it sailing terminology that you're after?

FLORA *(staring at her son for a second, then laughing)*

It's a slap on the ear

will come sailing to you in a minute!

SANDY I won't harbour a grudge.

FLORA *(bringing over a pen)*

Here have you got a knife
to sharpen this one?

(Sandy taking out a knife)

I want it to be done
in your best handwriting

SANDY Well what is it?

(starting to sharpen pen)

I hope it's not going to take too long.

The boys are waiting for me
and we're going over the hill
to Uig this afternoon.

FLORA No that's all right.

I'm expecting some visitors today myself.

SANDY I don't see why

I have to write a letter out for you anyway.

Why can't you write it yourself?

Can my father not write it out for you?

FLORA

When I was not much older
than you are now
I'd been to the city
to Glasgow and Edinburgh
No matter that my situation was particular
for everyone from these islands, from this way,
soon finds, once there
that their situation is particular.

You talk of walking over the hill.
I'll tell you that in the city
if you walk to the end of the street
you'd meet more girls.

And you, as a Gael, will be something there.
Your deeds and words there
will always meet with a reaction
Some will love you
and, of course, some will hate you.
When you talk of
"walking over the hill"
lovers and haters alike
will look out their window

at their own streets crammed
cheek to jowl with houses
at their dead end views
of bricks and mortar
and suspect you of
guarding some secret soulfulness.

When you tell them of
the simple and the everyday
of pulling on your boots in the morning
of digging out peats
of how your father lost 300 cattle in one winter
of the dull drudgery of this life
and then of sailing across to the mainland
they'll think you're reciting a poem.

You'll be faced with such
chaotic and perverse notions
in the city
even if you've never written
a line of poetry in your life.

But these prejudices
won't be without their counterpart
here among the Gael.
Before you go you'll hear
that such romantic notions of the city dwellers
are only the other side
of that same coin upon which is stamped
their hatred of our language
of our families, of our morals.
It's ironic that it's a line of poetry
they'll throw you for proof
and a line of your own uncle's poetry.
-- mi-run mor nan Gall -- they'll say
as if it were already a formalised concept
a tried and tested code
of the Lowlander's behaviour.
Ah but I'm raving on.
You don't know. you can't know
what I'm talking about.

It's just this son,
your situation is particular

SANDY

(pretending to write)

Is that a full stop after

“Your situation is particular”

or will I just write “dot, dot, dot”?

FLORA

All I’m saying son

is everyone has to live

with others and get on

but you, you keep your own counsel.

SANDY

(archly) “My own goods”, “my own wife”

and “let’s go home”,

the three finest sayings in the Gaelic language!

(changing mood now to seriousness)

So all this is just by way of letting me know

that you lot are pissing off to America

and I’m getting left on my tod

-- I’m not even invited!

FLORA

No, That’s not how it is at all!

And if you know that we are going to America

then you know why.

I can’t answer for your brothers’

exaggerations and incitements.

It’s all right for them to talk,

three of them are settled already in positions.

We're trying to give you all the chance
to make your own life first,
and then decide for yourselves
if you want to follow us.

-- Besides, I thought you had somebody
waiting over the hill for you?

SANDY *(ignoring this last question)*

So you want to send a letter
to some old fart Sir Something-or-other?

FLORA Your father once knew the Duke of Atholl.

SANDY My *father* knew him,...

FLORA It's worth a try.

He could pull strings

SANDY ... yet the letter is from *you*.

FLORA If it is written, however,
in *your* handwriting
he has before him
a demonstration of your competence.
I've already composed the letter mentally.
Have you sharpened that pen yet?
Are you ready? Dated and addressed?

(Sandy shrugging his shoulders, making as if to start writing. Flora comes behind him and tries to grab pen)

No, look, like this, up here...

SANDY *(recoils, raises pen out of her reach)*

Don't touch it!

FLORA I'm just going to show you ...

SANDY I thought this was to be a
(affecting manner) "demonstration of competence"?

FLORA Don't be cheeky. I can write fine.

SANDY Yes but some poor sod's got to *read* it!

FLORA Okay, okay

(walking off round the room while Sandy dates it etc.)

Ready? Begin like this....

"My Lord, Necessity often forces both sexes

to go through transactions contrary to their inclinations ...

(End of Scene 2)

Scene 3

At the Kyle of Lochalsh

*(The tourists enter in the usual manner,
swaggering, ridiculous)*

BOSWELL Now we'll cross the Kyle sir
 it's not too far I'm sure
 if this rain stops for just one minute
 we shall see the other shore.

JOHNSON And will the crossing be done
 in a superaqueous way?

BOSWELL 'Twould be handy to have a bridge
 but the ferry is on its way.

JOHNSON Thus by going into the sea
 we will get us out the water!

BOSWELL But do you not agree, sir
 these waters are Scotland's boast,
 when it comes to lakes and rivers
 this country has the best and most?

JOHNSON Splish splash splosh
 Sir you have too much!
 Splish splash splosh
 We would not have your water
 Splish splash splosh

that's walking in the Highlands
Splish splash splosh
here every man's an island.

You Scotsmen love your country
more than you love enquiry
when you talk of Scotia
it is not conversation
your bragly talk has this effect
it's all mere consopiation

Splish splash splosh
Sir you have too much!
Splish splash splosh
We would not have your water
Splish splash splosh
that's walking in the Highlands
Splish splash splosh
here every man's an island.

In England all our drink
is confined within the river banks
here your roads and houses sink
your clothes and hair are damp and dank

Splish splash splosh
Sir you have too much!
Splish splash splosh
We would not have your water
Splish splash splosh
that's walking in the Highlands
Splish splash splosh
here every man's an island.

One gentleman in whose house we rested
had the finest books and china
and good linen laid on the bed
but when I took my boots off
in a vile and sodden bog
I felt my bare feet spread.

Splish splash splosh

Sir you have too much!

Splish splash splosh

We would not have your water

Splish splash splosh

that's walking in the Highlands

Splish splash splosh

here every man's an island.

(Exeunt)

(End of Scene 3)

Scene 4

The parlour at Kingsburgh

(Flora in room. Racket of men offstage.)

Enter maid, Kate)

KATE They're bringing in the master!

FLORA What?

(Enter two men carrying Alan longwise, one at his feet and one at his arms)

ALAN *(moaning)* Right! Put me down! Carefully!

Aaaaaaaagh! My back!

Get these spurs off me! Aaaagh!

FLORA *(Directing men to bring him over)*

Set him down on the couch!

ALAN *(to Flora)* Aaaagh it's my back ya stupid...

aaagh! ... get that cushion out the ... aaagh!

FLORA What happened? What's going on?

ALAN Get these spurs off me!

(Men standing back, sheepishly)

FLORA *(leaping to it)* Oh God yes! Get them off!

You'll rip the material to shreds!

But what happened? Did you come off your horse?

Is it your back? Did he fall?

(Men murmur not answering her question)

ALAN Right men, you two can go now

FLORA Oh yes. *(Going over to sideboard, opening drawer)*

Thank you for bringing him home

(Holding out some money to each of them)

Thank you so much.

(The men leave)

ALAN Aaaagh my back.

FLORA What did...

ALAN It was those damn spurs...

...coming off the horse...

...I should have...

FLORA Where did you come off?

ALAN I didn't fall...

It was those Martins.

Those damn Martins...

...what do you expect?

FLORA *(takes a deep breath, turns to Kate who is gawking)*

Could you go and make us a pot of tea please.

KATE Right away Mrs Macdonald. *(Exits)*

ALAN If it hadn't been for those spurs...

FLORA Never mind the spurs, just lie back.

Tell me where it hurts,

then you can tell me why.

Is it here?

ALAN No

FLORA Your back? Here?

ALAN No ... aaagh!

FLORA and down along ... your ribs?

ALAN Aaaagh ... that's enough!

FLORA Okay, lie out, put your head on this.
I don't think there's anything broken
-- badly bruised ribs.
-- Get your breath back.

ALAN *(gasping for air at first)*
It seems that nothing
will turn these people for us.

FLORA You mean the Martins?

ALAN Them and others.
I swear I've tried so hard.

FLORA You're simply overworked.

ALAN Since those Martins
were put out of Floddigarry
to let us have the tack
they've brought out every other heart against us
and nothing we do can win them back.

FLORA But what about your work?
Can't you explain the good that...

ALAN The latest farming ideas, point for point,
have been laid out to them,
-- Himself did us no favours --
the weight of our own money
has backed it up.
I've taken the spade in my own hands.
I've dug and planted,
the new methods -- successful --

are there to be seen

in our own fields.

But no-one, no ideas, no hard work, no sums of money

can set store against a Black Spring

against three months of rain

followed by eight weeks of snow,

and all that on top

of the back hatred spread by the Martins.

And now these damn spurs

-- where are they? --

*(with a dash of the hand he clears them off the table at his
side and they clatter down on the floor)*

bring me down to this!

FLORA I don't see what the spurs...

ALAN Because I had him, don't you understand

-- I had him -- and then these spurs

I had forgotten to take them off!

FLORA Had who?

No I don't understand.

ALAN *(slowly catching breath, sighing)*

I was riding out

to check on some men

I had set to digging

out a new drainage system

over some sodden land.

As I was coming up to the site
the rain came on heavily
so I turned towards the new
barn over at the town for shelter

I could hear voices as I approached
and when I entered that barn,
which I had helped to build with these hands
I found besides my own men
that some of the Martins were in there too.

A little banter started up.
Good natured enough on the surface
One thing led to another,
and John Martin
threw up a challenge to a wrestling match.

Far be it from me
to show up a spoilsport before my own men
I assented straight away to the bout
by swinging down off my mount
and grappling with John in the clay.

We were twisting around
but he was no match for myself
I had him in my grip

---damn it I had him---
and I swung him to the ground
but as I fell on him
my spurs caught in something,
snagged in a bag of meal or something
I tripped and he got the better of me,
and he ... *(Maid comes in with tea tray)*
well this is the state of me now.

FLORA *(Takes tray from maid, thanks her, send her out again, sets it
down and starts pouring out tea)*
(sarcastically) A wrestling bout?
(pause, making tea)
I better put extra sugar in your tea my lad.

ALAN *(huffing)* Oh you don't ... you just ... Ah!

 *(Flora passes him his tea. He puts it on the table
beside him. She goes back to sit opposite him,
while he notices a piece of paper on the table beside
his cup.)*

FLORA No I don't --- you're right! *(sighs)*
*(pause) (picking up spurs and taking them over to another
sideboard at the other side of the room)*
You've earned your spurs! *(laughing out loud)*
(pause)

ALAN *(lifting up sheet of paper and looking)*
What's this?

FLORA That is the work I was doing this morning.

While you were out ... playing.

ALAN

(reading)

Now let's see,

"My Lord, Necessity often forces both sexes
to go through transactions
contrary to their inclinations ..."

(laughing)

Ha-ha – that's cute.

Do you expect a man
of the Duke of Atholl's standing
to be moved by a saucy nudge in the ribs
and a wink in the direction
of your career as Little Bo Peep
of the Jacobite penny dreadfuls?
You really make us out so pathetic!

FLORA

I make us out pathetic?

Well yes, I *do*.

(coming over and snatching the letter)

Let's see who comes out of it worst!

(Reading excerpts from letter)

"Such is the present transaction
as nothing but real necessity
could force me to give your Grace this trouble
and open my miserable state
to your Lordship's view."

My husband, by various losses
and the education of our children
fell through the little means we had
therefore of course we must, contrary to our inclinations,
follow the rest of our friends
who have gone this three years past to America.
Had I this boy off my hands
before I leave the Kingdom
I could almost leave it with pleasure.
Mr Macdonald, though he once had the pleasure
of a little of your Grace's acquaintance
could not be prevailed upon
to put pen to paper
therefore I, with the assistance of what remained
of the old resolution
went through this bold task.
And with the prayers of a poor distressed woman,
once known to the world,
for the prosperity of your family.

I am with the greatest esteem and respect
your Grace's most obedient servant."

*(Flora comes round, makes as if to massage Alan's shoulder
with one hand, and then with the other passes the letter into
his hand)*

ALAN

(Throws the letter across the room)

Why didn't you just go the whole hog
and say it was all *your* money
that I lost?

All written out in Sandy's hand too,
that's a nice way to get respect from *him*.

(pause)

FLORA *(Swinging round by the window again)*

Respect has to be ...

ALAN ... earned. Yes I know. *(sighing)*

But I know I've done enough for Sandy:

I've had him working with me

ditching, draining, marking out boundaries.

I've educated him in new ways.

At best he'll be confused.

He's seen the cattle drop from starvation
despite our efforts.

The whole place is stinking
of rotten carcasses.

We just need a breath of air.

FLORA We'll get it. We'll get that
it's coming across the sea.

ALAN I know, darling
we'll be away from here
from this sickening life here.

The people here cannot lift themselves out of it,
a different outlook is required.

(Pause)

FLORA *(at window)* Did you know we're receiving visitors today?

ALAN The tourists? Yes I heard they're on the island.

FLORA Boswell and Dr Johnson
have been in Raasay for a few days.
Kate is preparing something in the kitchen
and I've made up the beds in the spare room.

ALAN Dr Johnson is, I hear,
very keen on the work of the Improvers.
I should like to take him out
to inspect the estate, let him see
for himself how science and learning
is having a rough time of it
in these islands
when it meets up with rude tradition.

FLORA Yes, I think he would like to hear
about my cousin, about Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair
and his first dictionary of the Gaelic language.
It's a shame the two never met.

ALAN Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair!
that rebel versifier of the praskan na Garbh-crioch!
Ha -- ha
Your jokes would be getting
funnier by the minute
if it weren't dragging us down
into a morass of rebel sentimentality.

First you think to win over the Duke of Atholl
with sordid allusions to a broken prince's sexuality
and now you compare
the enlightened and ordered intelligence
of the great Dr Johnson's dictionary
to a two hundred page list of Gaelic words
thrown together at random
as they came into the head
of a rascal, runaway teacher
without so much as an alphabetical
or any other kind of ordering.

Ha - ha!

You wonder why people are laughing at us?

FLORA

History was assigning that
"rascal, runaway teacher"
a different lesson.

His poetry ...

ALAN

... His *poetry*??!

*(He jumps off the couch, come over to centre stage
in front of Flora)*

Is this poetry? -- Down on one knee,

(goes down on one knee)

taking an Italian prince

(grabs a cushion and sits it on his knee)

-- or should I say a French queen? --

on the other knee

-- for that is how Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair
greeted him is it not, and sighing,

"O Thearlaich mhic Sheumais

Mhic Sheumais, mhic Thearlaich!"

-- *That* is the great poetic scene?!!

FLORA

You know nothing about that scene
because you were not here.

You can wrestle, big tough guy,
with your peasants in a barn

-- *that* will *surely* win you fame and fortune --

but you would not have dared

say these things to Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair's face,
or to any of those men who were there with him
when he met the prince.

You're a disgrace to the name Macdonald.

(*lisping*) Besides, I thought you had hurt your back?

ALAN

I can suffer it for poetry.

Should we rhyme of these *great men's* names then
in the manner of a Macdonald genealogy:

Clanranald, Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair,

Boisdale, your own stepfather Hugh, and the rest ...

all those to whom I would not dare

challenge face to face,

-- and their greatest feat of heroism? --

-- to ship off a scared prince

dressed in woman's clothing

in the care of a young girl --

This is the heroic deed

for which so many houses were burnt

so many men, women and children put to the sword,

and others transported in chains.

So many Macdonalds slaughtered

so that name can live on

in these two heroic images:--

the poet Macdonald with the prince on his knee;

and the prince in woman's clothing

in a boat with the girl Macdonald's head in his lap.

And now to round it all off

the girl herself turns poet

"Necessity often forces both sexes

to go through transactions

contrary to their inclinations ..."

Isn't that sweet?

FLORA

It would be if any of it were true.

If it were not just the wishful thinking

of a jealous, lily-livered, failed farmer!

ALAN

Failed farmer? -- Failed bloody marriage!

FLORA Your social conscience didn't stop you marrying
to get your hands on all my money
which came from those very Jacobites
you profess to despise.
Where would your farming have been
without...

ALAN *Your* money?
The English Jacobite money!
No wonder we're hated here
you coming back flaunting your wad
in everybody's face.
Did you notice what had
happened to everyone else
while you were being wined and dined in London?

(Pause)

FLORA For your information, the beginning of that letter
was not supposed to refer to the prince.
It's not poetic at all
-- it's a straight excuse for my husband's desertion of his
duties.
Even your own son asked
why *you* couldn't write the letter.
The prince is not the only Molly
I've had to look after.

(Alan steps forward, strikes Flora)

(Long pause, Alan goes back, lies out on couch)

*again. Flora gets up onto seat opposite,
rearranging herself etc)*

ALAN I've just had enough today
I can't take any more

(Pause)

FLORA You get it tough.
Perhaps we should tell Dr Johnson about this,
it would make an interesting study of Highland manners.

(Long pause)

ALAN Tell? About what?

FLORA I'm going to my room, I need rest.
I'll see you at supper.

(Flora gets up, exits in a hurry)

ALAN Flora! ...

(End of Scene Four)

Scene 5

A bedroom at Kingsburgh

(Flora sitting on a bed in room. Dim light)

FLORA

So we are to go to America

a sea crossing to the colonies

will settle our worries?

Leave the children here,

Follow our kinsmen and women

to that new country

-- a dumping ground -- some say

for rebels, suspects, malcontents, fanatics

-- what then are our worries?

Away from poverty and oppression,

for our two abject souls

does bad luck end in a land of plenty?

Every night I'm back aboard those ships

howling, heaving, seasick

(Procession of Highland prisoners, dishevelled,

filthy, in chains, starts filing on at the back of stage)

MEN

Veteran...

FLORA

those transports whose unhappy cargo

I'll now follow

MEN

...Scarborough, Furnace...

FLORA

of my own free will,

MEN

...Tryton...

FLORA Of my special treatment
 in those days of defeat
 I'm not unaware.

MEN Terror, Greyhound, Diamond, Eltham

FLORA For the few months I was held
 prisoner aboard those ships
 I was accorded the status of a "Lady"

MEN Shark, Loo, Pamela, Serpent

FLORA I had a gentlewoman's relation
 with the prince, they say
 I was never locked down in the hold
 with the rest of the Jacobite scum.

MEN Veteran, Scarborough, Furnace, Tryton

FLORA My own cabin, and my own servant Kate,
 were two fine phrases I could use.

MEN Terror, Greyhound, Diamond, Eltham

FLORA I was not overawed by the rank
 of those I met; Captains, Generals, Princes.
 Never pretend, or repent or be ashamed, they said.
 Be honest and the government
 will not try you for your life.

MEN Shark, Loo, Pamela, Serpent

FLORA I was not tortured or flogged,
 full rations were left at my door.
 A commodore gifted me
 a handsome suit of riding clothes

and some fine linen riding shirts
and was perplexed when I laughed out loud.

MEN Shark, Loo, Pamela, Serpent

FLORA My “modest” behaviour gained me many friends
the highest society visited me on board.
This misfortune, they assured me
would be my greatest honour.

MEN Veteran, Scarborough, Furnace, Tryton

FLORA But these names still
come singing out;
every night, when they unbatten the hatches,
let me look down
on the “lesser lights”

(One of the prisoners clanks forward in chains)

1ST YOUTH Dougal Campbell, age 18
A servant from Lochaber,
5 foot 4 inches
Brown complexion, well-made, ruddy.

FLORA They gave me a bag of herbs
to sanitise the rebel airs,
I packed them into my nose
and was led forward to witness
the count of my ex-countrymen.

2ND YOUTH Alexander Cattenach, age 18
A labourer from Badenoch
5 foot 5 inches

	Black, ruddy, well-made, healthy
FLORA	The filth of that hold surpassed imagination. I was saluted with such intolerable airs, too malignant to describe, that I thought I would faint and fall down among them.
1ST MAN	Duncan MacPhearson, age 36 A labourer from Invernesshire 5 foot 6 inches Thin, pal, ruddy.
FLORA	Of some seventy prisoners on board only fifty could make it up the ladder to be registered. at a snail creep pace and with such looks on their faces.
3RD YOUTH	Hector McGillis, age 16 A herd from Invernesshire 5 foot tall Black and lusty
FLORA	Of the rest, too ill to move a sling was sent down to bring them up on deck. Raging with fever and distemper they came moaning into the daylight
4TH YOUTH	Duncan McLeish, age 18

	A pedlar from Perthshire
	4 foot 11 inches
	Pale, fair complexion, slender
MEN	Bridgewater!
FLORA	Not one of those men
MEN	Two Sisters!
FLORA	rounded up on deck for counting
MEN	Happy Janet!
FLORA	then herded back into the hold
	for shipping to the colonies
MEN	Veteran, Scarborough, Furnace, Tryton
FLORA	could look at me
	in my riding clothes
	herbs stuffed up my nose,
	and a hankie covering my mouth.
2ND MAN	Angus MacDonald, age 50
	A labourer from Argyll
	5 foot 4 inches
	Black hair, well-made, ill looking
MEN	Terror, Greyhound, Diamond, Eltham
5TH YOUTH	Hugh MacDonald, age 13
	A servant from Arisaig
	4 foot 7 inches
	Slender and sickly
MEN	Shark, Loo, Pamela, Serpent
3RD MAN	Donald MacDonald, age 22

A labourer from Invernesshire

5 foot 6 inches

Black hair, lusty

MEN Veteran, Scarborough, Furnace, Tryton

6TH YOUTH Archibald MacPhearson, age 16

A cowherd from Skye

4 foot 9 inches

Thick set, pock pitted.

(Crescendo on this theme)

MEN Veteran, Scarborough, Furnace, Tryton

Terror, Greyhound, Diamond, Eltham

Shark, Loo, Pamela, Serpent

Bridgewater

Two Sisters

Happy Janet

(Calm, quiet again)

FLORA While I sat in my cabin, rocked by the tides,

and reading my prayer book,

in the hold down below my feet

contagion and epidemics grew.

The sickness came to the guards and crew

and the Lady Jacobites came aboard to dance.

(Ladies appear)

LADIES O Miss Macdonald

1ST LADY I could wipe your shoes with pleasure

and think it an honour so to do

When I reflect that you had the honour
to have the prince for your handmaid.

LADIES We all envy you greatly.

(Ladies still swooning etc)

1ST MAN They brought me to Captain Ferguson
who used me with all the barbarity of a pirate
stripped me, ordered me put in a rack
and whipped by his hangman,
all because I would not confess
where the prince was.

FLORA I lived on with my servant,
agreed with the ladies
that my great punishment
was to be so
“cabinned, cribbed, confined”.

2ND LADY One could not discern by her conversation
that she had spent all her former days in the Highlands
for she talks English -- or rather Scots --
and not at all through the Erse tone.
She has a sweet voice, and no lady,
Edinburgh bred,
could acquit herself better at the tea table.

2ND MAN Each one of us
had only half a seaman’s ration
served up to us daily
in foul, nasty buckets.

FLORA While these men
 were left to die below
 regardless of age, injuries or social standing;
 rich shoulder to shoulder with poor
 teenagers alongside the old.

3RD LADY We came aboard and found
 Miss Flora Macdonald
 age 23 from the Isle of Skye.
 She was of low stature, fair complexion,
 and well enough shaped.
 Her behaviour in company
 was so easy, modest and well-adjusted
 that every visitant was much surprised.

3RD MAN Stripped naked and tied to a mast
 I was whipped
 with the cat o' nine tails
 till the blood gushed out at both sides.

FLORA I was served
 to the Edinburgh and London ladies
 larded with fiction.
 The whole story was well cooked up
 before their delicate tastes
 could down a dish of Highland stew.

4TH LADY O miss what a happy creature
 are you who had that dear prince
 to lull you to sleep

and to take such care of you
with his hands spread about your head
while you were sleeping!
You are surely
the happiest woman in the world!

4TH MAN We slept below
and were given no blankets.
Anywhere you could lay down your head,
a coil of rope,
the ship's ballast,
the bare boards were good enough.

(Ladies start to dance as men start up again)

MEN Veteran, Scarborough, Furnace, Tryton
Terror, Greyhound, Diamond, Eltham
Shark, Loo, Pamela, Serpent
Bridgewater
Two Sisters
Happy Janet

1ST MAN Go throw the dog in irons, he said.

1ST LADY We must raise the Jacobite spirits,
Miss Macdonald.
Will you dance with us?

FLORA My prison was the Jacobite tea table,
while the dogs below
were howling for scraps!

1ST MAN *(looking up as if noise of dancing coming through deck)*

Fhoir na Goill sinn fo'n casan

Is mor an naire's am masladh sud leinn.

FLORA

(to ladies with heavy irony)

No, I will not dance.

I cannot think of ... *(diversion)*

...until...

...until my prince is safe.

Perhaps not until I am blessed

with the happiness of seeing him again.

(Now Flora throws her head down on the bed;

*anguish weeping, sobbing etc., while dance of ladies
and chorus whirl around her nightmarishly)*

*(Music and dance to climax, then all in stage in still
position. Flora sits up.)*

FLORA

They brought me gifts of clothes,

food, a two-volume Bible,

linen, cambric, needles

a thimble and thread

let Kate and I sew.

Pictures of me were painted by the best,

I was taken out in society

and finally they raised money,

a subscription to send me back to Skye

a free woman

with a fat bank balance.

(stops, sobs again for a moment)

These... *(she points back at the men)*

...they were shipped to America.

(End of scene)

Scene 6

On Skye

BOSWELL What sir,

do you think of Highland manners?

JOHNSON The Gaelic language

is for barbarians;

abecedarians

have they none.

They're not acroamatical

BOSWELL They can't get grammatical

JOHNSON for not one volume

appears in their tongue.

BOSWELL Big words!

JOHNSON What?

BOSWELL We're using big words

JOHNSON and they probably don't know

BOSWELL they probably don't know what we mean.

JOHNSON they probably don't know what we mean.

JOHNSON Of the Gaelic Bible

and Macpherson's Ossian

they boast out loud.

But when you ask them

to view the original,

their mouths are shut

-- those can't be found.

BOSWELL Polysyllables

cause aching mandibles

JOHNSON and homonyms and palindromes,

but without letters,

of all man's eloquence

we're left nothing

but his jaw bones!

BOSWELL Big words!

JOHNSON What?

BOSWELL We're using big words

JOHNSON and they probably don't know

BOSWELL they probably don't know what we mean.

JOHNSON they probably don't know what we mean.

JOHNSON Their talk's just serendipity

BOSWELL and flibbertigibberty!

JOHNSON that's no gross iniquity

BOSWELL but it's hullabaloo!

JOHNSON Who?!

BOSWELL Big words!

JOHNSON What?

BOSWELL We're using big words

JOHNSON and they probably don't know

BOSWELL they probably don't know what we mean.

JOHNSON they probably don't know what we mean.

(End of Scene)

Scene 7

The parlour at Kingsburgh

*(Alan dressed now as Boswell describes him in
"Highland outfit" putting final touches to his attire,
perhaps looking in mirror etc.)*

KATE Sir, sir, we have news that the tourists are on their way.
They're at the bottom of the road already.

ALAN Go and tell the mistress
to dress and come down.
We'll receive them in this room.

KATE Right away sir. *(exits)*

*(Alan, still fixing pleats and folds etc., goes over and
gazes out the window. Comes back into the centre
of the room looking hesitant, apprehensive. Goes
over to hat stand, picks out a walking stick or cane,
tries walking about the room with it a bit. Strikes a
few poses. Puts the stick back and then lies out on
the couch. Moans, then puts hand behind to rub
his back. Goes to window, turns smartly, crosses
room and exits.)*

(Sound of voices off)

ALAN *(re-entering with Boswell and Johnson, the latter with a
walking stick)*

This is the parlour sirs!

JOHNSON Ah, a warm fire and some home comforts!

We shall recover now from the ravages of your climate.

BOSWELL Inside some gentlemen's houses of late
we have been wading up to our knees in muck.

JOHNSON They were scarcely drier in the inside than on the out.

ALAN Indeed.

I will arrange for some refreshment, gentlemen.

(Alan pouring some whisky, passing glasses)

JOHNSON I do not partake of a social drink sir

May I have some water?

*(Alan fetches Johnson some water, himself and Boswell take
the whisky, drink it off, cheers etc.)*

JOHNSON Would I be right, as I desire,
and as I suspect from your dress,
to consider you Jacobite sir?

ALAN There have been ... *troubled times* here.
I only hope for the best
for this island and its people.
The constitution...

KATE *(entering and speaking to Alan in Gaelic)*
The mistress is sleeping sir.

ALAN *(brisk Gaelic reply then English again)*

Then wake her!...

...sorry gentlemen...

...yes...the constitution...

...my wife, however,

is the heroine of a more orthodox stamp.

Perhaps you have...

BOSWELL Miss Flora Macdonald and the 45!

ALAN Mistress of this house.

(drinking whisky, then pointing at Boswell with glass)

Mistress Kingsburgh.

BOSWELL Ah the Highland appellation sir!

You will forgive my falling
foul of your intricate system.

ALAN It is not *my* system.

Holy matrimony is...

(calming himself down, as if counting to ten)

...My wife will join us shortly.

JOHNSON Depend on it, gentlemen,
no woman is the worse
for sense and knowledge.

Some cunning men
choose fools for their wives,
thinking to manage them well
but they always fail.

There is a spaniel fool, and a mule fool.
The spaniel fool may be made
to do by beating
The mule fool will neither do
by words nor blows.

And the spaniel fool
often turns at last to mule
and suppose a fool be made to do pretty well
you must have the continual trouble
of making her do.

Men know that women
are an overmatch for them
and therefore choose
the weakest or most ignorant.

If they did not think so
they never could be afraid
of women knowing as much as themselves.

Depend on it, gentlemen,
no woman is the worse
for sense and knowledge.

ALAN My wife has supported me
...that is...

there have been, as I say,
troubled times here,
for a number of years...

BOSWELL the 15, the 19 and the 45!

ALAN those numbers and others,
--you have brought your ready reckoner, Dr Johnson --
some say the defeat of 1707

was the greatest,

Those numbers are others

have added up to a deal

of political ferment in these parts.

I have tried in my own way

to make improvements to this situation,

and my wife has stood behind me

with care and...good sense.

BOSWELL

Yes we are sad to hear

that *good sense* has not turned to your profit.

ALAN

I would like to show

you gentlemen around my land

let you see what improvements I have attempted.

You, Dr Johnson, would be interested

in the rough time science is having in these parts:

I have put an end to the runrig system,

separate holdings, forced enclosures,

and a building plan in stone and lime

has been started.

I have introduced the concept

of fallow, sown rye grass and clover,

three new types of potato have been brought in

to replace the small red Scotch type,

and a new breed of sheep

to replace the natives.

Money has been spent,

a lot of hard work has been done.

Formerly the land here was laid out
to support the clan system,
to verify mutual obligations.

It passed from proprietor
to tacksman to subtenant
to cottar to servant
and it ensured kinship, loyalty, service.

Now all that is gone or going.

We must now be commercial,
scientific, the land must be productive.

All that needs hard work.

BOSWELL

You *are* working hard sir.

But it is *surely* against the grain of things.

I must observe that in Skye
there seems to be much idleness:

for men and boys follow you,
as colts follow passengers on a road.

The typical figure of a Skye boy
seems to be a lown

with bare legs and feet,
a dirty kilt, ragged coat and waistcoat,
a bare head and a stick in his hand,

which, I suppose, is partly
to help the lazy rogue walk,
partly to serve as a kind of defensive weapon.

JOHNSON I am pleased to hear of your attempt at improvement
but I do not think we shall
have time to view your lands.
We came hither to see what we expected,
a people of peculiar appearance
and a system of antiquated life.
There was perhaps, never any change in national manners
so quick, so great, and so general
as that which has operated in the Highlands
by the last conquest and subsequent laws.
Your clans retain now little of their original character
their military ardour is extinguished,
their dignity of independence is depressed,
their contempt of government subdued
and their reverence for chiefs abated.
Of what you had
before the late conquest of your country
there remains only your language and your poverty.

ALAN The peasant here is caught
in a trap of poverty
how can he embark on a trial
when he lives in famine conditions?
For this reason my improvements:
rotations, fallowing, rootcrops, grass,
are all suspected, distrusted.
The profit in better animal feeding

must outweigh the loss in food
from ground under fodder crops;
the increased cereal yield of proper rotation
must balance loss in fallow years.

The Highlands are used to decisions
always made on the short term.

BOSWELL But a decision to be a *Jacobite*
is not a short term one!

JOHNSON No, it is a way of life!
A Jacobite believes
in the divine right of kings.

He that believes
in the divine right of kings
believes in a divinity.

A Jacobite believes
in the divine right of bishops.
He that believes
in the divine right of bishops
believes in the divine authority
of the Christian religion.

BOSWELL (*toasting*) the 15, the 19, and the 45!

ALAN (*to Johnson*) I do not dispute that sir.
(*now to Boswell*) --your figures are immaculate!--
but I do not see the urgency
with which such a theory
bears on the matter in hand.

Your country has had a peaceful century
in which to tend its gardens
and ponder mysteries in the evening sunlight.
Your young companion here
proves by mathematics
that we have had a turbulent time.
The question for us now
is how to put meat on the table.

BOSWELL A Highland chief should now do
everything to endeavour to raise his rents
by means of the industry of his people.
Formerly it was right for him to have
his house full of idle fellows
now he cannot have influence but by riches,
because ...

ALAN The rents have been raised,
but a superstitious and distrusting
tenantry are reluctant to make the improvements
which allow them to pay these rents
--they prefer to leave for America.

JOHNSON I have found men
not defective in judgement or general experience
who consider the tacksman
as a useless burden on the ground
as a drone who lives upon the product of the estate
without the right of property

or the merit of labour,
and who impoverishes at once
the landlord *and* the tenant.

ALAN Sir, I have ... my wife and I
 have spent much of our *own* money
 trying to make these improvements.
 Our landlord, however, prefers to drink imported claret
 than let his tenants afford humble punch.
 He rarely visits his estates
 --it is said that he is frightened of the sea crossing.

JOHNSON *He* is frightened of the sea
 and his tenants are frightened
 when it comes to land!

BOSWELL But is it true, as we hear,
 that you also propose now,
 to cross the sea to America?

ALAN There will soon be no remembrance
 of my family on this island.
 The best of its inhabitants
 are already following their friends to America.
 Here we cannot promise ourselves
 but poverty and oppression.
 It is melancholy to see
 the state of this miserable place.
 There is, as I say, on all sides
 suspicion, distrust, superstition.

The superiors summon the tenants
for not paying the greater rents
and the tenants the superior
for oppression and violent profits.
The factors and tenants are always at law
forcing them out of their lands
in May or June
without previous warning.
There is no respect of persons
as the best are mainly gone,
stealing of sheep constantly,
picking and thieving of corn,
garden stuffs and potatoes,
perpetual lying, backbiting and slandering,
honesty entirely fled,
villainy and deceit
supported by downright poverty.
Most miserable is the state
of this great and good family.
When the next emigration is gone
Only Aird, and three other old men
will be here that bear the name Macdonald.

KATE *(enters)(in Gaelic)* The mistress is coming down now sir.

ALAN *(in Gaelic)* Good. *(in English)* Gentlemen, *(as Flora enters)*
the Mistress of Kingsburgh -- my wife.
Doctor Johnson and Mr Boswell, the tourists.

JOHNSON)

) *(together)* Miss Flora Macdonald!

BOSWELL)

FLORA Gentlemen, please excuse my keeping you waiting...

JOHNSON Madam it was an honour to wait upon you.

BOSWELL As you once waited upon...

FLORA ...I was suffering from a headache
and retired to bed in the later afternoon.

BOSWELL But are you much recovered now madam?
Do not let us...

FLORA Do not fuss over me gentlemen.
--my husband is the one
at whom your sympathies should be directed.
This very morning he sustained wounds which...
...yet here he is -- *bravely* holding court.

*(All three, Flora, Boswell and Johnson, stop, turn
and look at Alan -- silence for a couple of seconds)*

JOHNSON Are you well sir?

ALAN I ... my wife is referring
to an injury I sustained this morning
while I ...
...I was overseeing some buildings
those of which I told you
--I am rebuilding some barns
and so on, in stone and lime
and my ... eh ... spur caught ...

that is I tripped on a bag

... a bag of meal, and ...

I feel hearty as ever.

FLORA

(coy) Boys will be boys!

Gentlemen we knew you were headed this way.

It was passed around the ladies that Mr Boswell

was touring the country in the company

of a *young English buck!*

JOHNSON

(laughing) Yet you see madam I am chaperoned

by a civil decent young Scotchman

who will protect the young ladies!

FLORA

(mock coquettish) But let us know, how do you young bucks

like the Highlands?

JOHNSON

(reciprocating mood) But who *can* like the Highlands?

I like the people well.

BOSWELL

Dr Johnson would not like to speak unfavourably

of a country where he has been so hospitably entertained.

But he did find, for example,

the riding in Skye, very disagreeable.

JOHNSON

The way is so narrow,

only one at a time can travel

so it is quite unsocial;

and you cannot indulge

in meditation by yourself

because you must always be attending

to the steps which your horse takes.

ALAN But has your jaunt answered expectations?

BOSWELL It has much exceeded it.

JOHNSON Wherever we have come
we have been treated like princes in their progress.

BOSWELL But this reminds us of another prince
who once *toured* in these parts.

JOHNSON (*coy*) They say in England, madam,
that one Miss Flora Macdonald was with him.

FLORA They were very right.

BOSWELL Madam we understand you are much troubled
by requests to hear of your part in that tale.
But we prostrate ourselves before you,
we have come far,
and count every moment wasted
that was not spent in your company
listening to your account.

JOHNSON We would gladly hear it madam.

FLORA If I have been troubled
I have also been well rewarded.
My husband knows of this.
It is not a happy tale, you know the sorry outcome
-- it was achieved through a sorry means.

Strange though it may seem,
most islanders cannot swim
and I do not like to sail on the sea;

the rock of the waves, and the swell
do not soothe or calm my dislike,
they instil a panic in me,
I sometimes think to hear voices in the wind,
whispers and screams in unknown tongues.
Yet my destiny seems to be adrift,
washed here and there
at the whim of the wind and waves.
Soon we are to leave here,
leave Skye, our home, for America,
who knows what the wind will blow us to.

But you are asking me about a specific sailing
it seemed straightforward at first
-- to take our guest, dressed in women's clothing
that My Lady and myself had sewed,
across the Minch in a boat.
But the swell came up during the night,
rain lashed in our faces,
we were bumped and banged on the waves,
fog came down and we could not get our bearings.
Some soldiers shot at us from the shore.
We hid in a cave
with a waterfall pouring down on our heads.
Of all this, as you see,
my memory is a confusion,

I became delirious, fevered almost
Some say our guest held my head
in his hands,
I do not remember this,
I do not know who witnessed it.
Finally we landed and I got him to safety.

BOSWELL It is said that you could not decide
at first, whether you should help the prince,
but that Captain Felix O'Neill persuaded you.
He even offered, it is said,
to marry you to protect your honour.

FLORA Oh, many things are said!

ALAN My wife got the pretender to Skye
and brought him to this house
where he received the hospitality
of my mother and father.

BOSWELL Sir, I do not call him the pretender,
because it appears to me an insult
to one who is still alive,
and I suppose, thinks very differently.
It may be a parliamentary expression,
but it is not a gentlemanly expression.

JOHNSON At any rate, gentlemen, the grandson of King James
was sheltered and aided
by high and low throughout this country.

FLORA Even when a price of £30,000

was set as the reward for his capture.

JOHNSON

In such a poor country
that sum must have represented a great temptation.
The Scots, with a vigilance
of jealousy which never goes to sleep
always suspect that an Englishman
despises them their poverty.
When Leslie, two hundred years ago,
related so punctiliously
that a hundred hen eggs, new laid,
were sold in these islands for a penny,
he supposed that no inference could possibly follow
but that eggs were in great abundance.
Posterity has since grown wiser,
and having learned
that nominal and real value may differ
they now tell no such stories
lest the foreigner should happen to collect
not that eggs are many
but that pence are few.
Money and wealth have
by the use of commercial language
been so long confounded
that they are commonly believed to be the same.

BOSWELL

Yet is there not the suspicion
that for a people so little used to commerce,

such a sum means nothing.

FLORA £30,000 nothing?! Look out the window!
The people have no trousers!

(Flora and Alan laughing)

JOHNSON Quantum cedat virtutibus aurum!

BOSWELL *(translating lap dog style)*

With virtue weighed what worthless trash is gold.

ALAN Yes, my son has Latin too
but the language does not alter
the truth of the matter.
The idea that not even that enormous sum
could procure a traitor
even from among those clans
who regarded his enterprise with indifference
is fine and congenial to ourselves.

But is it not strange
that one Jacobite follower, Barrisdale,
had switched to the Hanover side
precisely after thieving £30,000
from the prince's coffers?
One minister, MacAuley of Uist
in his zeal and affection for the government
had sent word to Harris
to block the prince's way,
and even the so-called great Jacobite bard,

Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair

was suspected of being a fraud.

“These were all traitor gentlemen” you might say,

“but not one squeak came from the lower orders”.

Ha -- do you imagine for one second

that £30,000 would have been handed out

to some filthy peasant standing

before Butcher Cumberland?!

He would have been shot on the spot.

The truth of the matter is

that a good opportunity was offered

to any man who bore a grudge against his neighbour.

Arrests were made frequently on mere suspicion

and without a shred of evidence

The whole place was in turmoil.

BOSWELL But Miss Flora Macdonald,

she led them through to safety!

JOHNSON The whole place was in turmoil.

BOSWELL Miss Flora Macdonald!

ALAN Mistress of Kingsburgh!

FLORA This whole place is in turmoil!

(etc etc on this theme)

FLORA Gentlemen, I think we have pushed the boat out.

Let's throw down an anchor for tonight.

--Your bed, Doctor Johnson, is a celebrated one,
Come, I'll show you to where the prince laid his head.

JOHNSON I am very grateful madam
to what do I own the honour.

FLORA Oh you know you young bucks
are always the favourites of the ladies.

(exit Flora leading Boswell and Johnson)

*(Alan walks about the room a bit as before, sorting
folds and pleats in kilt etc. Goes to hatstand, picks
out a walking stick, walks about the room a bit
again, as if imitating Johnson. Looking in mirror
etc. Hears Flora returning, goes back to lie on the
couch rubbing his back)*

FLORA *(enters)* The sleep of the just!

ALAN The point is the weather
is not to blame:
A black spring,
the barrenness of the soil
the lack of money or time
or of the science for change
--these are just circumstances

We're in the wring history
that's the problem.
Our history is too heavy,
it weighs down on us.

We can't get the clean
easy touch on things
--like them, like them upstairs.

(Flora moving over the window, looking out again)

But when we get away from here
then we'll get a new history.

FLORA *(turning suddenly)*

Do you think I *want* to go to America!

*(Flora makes as if to leave room again. Alan dives
off couch and grabs hold of her by the arms.)*

ALAN But don't you see that...

FLORA Let me go!

ALAN Wait! Wait! If we leave here then...

FLORA *(struggling to get away)* Leave me!

ALAN when we get away ... when we make the break from...

FLORA You'll have to break both my arms!

For I'll never leave!

(Flora gets away and runs out of room)

(End of Scene)

Scene 8

Somewhere in the Highlands

(Enter Boswell and Johnson travelling again)

JOHNSON Quantum cedat virtutibus aurum.

BOSWELL With virtue weighed what trash is gold

BOTH This should all be written down!

BOSWELL 'Twas a striking sight to behold
I'll transcribe it to my diary;
in Skye with Flora Macdonald
the champion of the English Tories!

BOSWELL In King James' grandson's bed
you laid your weary head

JOHNSON But lest King George should see this print
know that I had no ambitions in't.

JOHNSON So the name of Flora Macdonald
shall be mentioned in history
and mentioned with honour
in virtue of courage and fidelity.

JOHNSON Quantum cedat virtutibus aurum.

BOSWELL With virtue weighed what trash is gold

BOTH This should all be written down!

(Exeunt)

(End of scene)

Scene 9

A bedroom at Kingsburgh

(Flora in bedroom/boat scene again. This time the chorus are crew of some sort of boat/ship as it sails through a storm. It is a very nightmarish and apocalyptic scene. There should be some doubt for the audience as to whether Flora is dreaming as in the previous boat scene or if she is actually sailing -- to America or somewhere.)

FLORA

God, he said

God gave me this land

I will not let the rain wash it away.

Come down to the shore

and raise your skirts high

I will not leave you.

CHORUS

Then opened the windows of the sky

pied, grey-blue,

to the low'ring wind's blowing

a morose brew,

The sea pulled on his grim rugging

slashed with sore rents,

That rough-napped mantle, a weaving

of loathsome torrents.

The shape-ever-changing surges

swelled up in hills

And roared down into valleys in appalling spills.

The water yawned in great craters,

slavering mouths agape

Snatching and snarling at each other

in rabid shape.

It were a man's deed to confront

the demented scene,

Each mountain of them breaking

into flamy lumps.

Each fore-wave towering grey-fanged

mordantly grumps

While a routing comes from the back-waves

with their raving rumps.

FLORA

I asked you for a bridge

for sweet resined planks of pine

to lay my white feet on,

to walk to that solid ground.

You gave me your hand

and led me back to that solid ground.

Dry and white.

CHORUS

When we would rise of these rollers

soundly, compactly,

It was imperative to shorten the sail

swiftly, exactly.

When we would fall with one swallowing
down into the glens
Every topsail she had would be off.
--no light task the men's!
The great hooked big-buttocked ones
long before
They came at all near us were heard
loudly roar
Scourging all the lesser waves level
as on they tore.
It was no joke to steer in that sea
where the high tops to miss
Seemed almost to hear the keel scrape
the shelly abyss!

FLORA

We waded into the sea
with you, our husbands,
our fathers, our uncles, our bothers
on our shoulders,
with you, our princes, our kings,
we raised our skirts
but the wind billowed them out and out.
The sky got higher
and the tide came up,
our white feet are stuck in the mud
and the mud is blood.

I cannot marry you
you are my husband
I will not leave you.

CHORUS The sea churning and lashing itself
in maniacal states,
Seals and other great beasts were even
in direr straits,
The wild swelth and the pounding waves
and the ship's nose
Scattering their white brains callous
through the billows
They shouted to us loudly, dreadfully,
the piteous word:-
'Save us or we perish. We are subjects.
Take us aboard.'
Small fish that were in the waters,
murderously churned,
Floated on the top without number
white bellies upturned.
The stones and shells of the floor even
came to the top
Torn up by the all-grabbing motion
that would not stop.

FLORA You broke all the planks.

This bridge is a botched job,
nailed together,
battered, pounded,
bashed and leaky.

You have sent me a boat.

A BOAT

We are sinking!

CHORUS

The whole sea was a foul porridge

full of red scum

With the blood and the ordure of the beasts,

ruddy, glum

While screaming with their gill-less mouths,

their jaws agape,

Even the air's abyss was full of fiends

that had no shape.

With the paws and tails of great monsters

gruesome to hear

Were the screeching towerers. They would strike

fifty warriors with fear.

FLORA

The blood is coming up

washing over our children.

Waves of red, crashing down on them,

sweeping them away.

They are being torn

out of my womb.

CHORUS

The crew's ears lost all appetite

for hearing in that din,

Rabble of mad sky-demons

and their watery kin

Making a baying so unearthly

deeper than the sea-floor,

Great notes lower than human hearing

ever heard before.

What then with the ocean's turmoil

pounding the ship

The clamour of the prow flenching whales

with slime-foiled grip,

and the wind from the western quarter

restarting her windward blast,

Through every possible ordeal

it seemed we passed.

FLORA

The Man said he could walk on water.

I cradled his bottle

and patted him on the head.

--You're far too dry, I said

Going up and down, and up

and -- spleuch (*she throws up violently*)

all over the waves,

a foul purple scum
swelling up and down

How can we leave the things
we hate best.

The insides of our stomach
our upturned cracked-open womb of love.

CHORUS

We were blinded by the sea-spray
ever going over us;

With, beyond that, like another ocean,
thunders and lightnings to cover us,

The thunderbolts sometimes singeing
our rigging till the smoke

And stench of the reefs smouldering
made us utterly choke.

Between the upper and the lower torments
thus were we braised.

Water, fire and wind simultaneously
against us raised.

FLORA

I am ... spleuch (*she vomits*)

I am Princess spleuch (*vomits*)

... ... of this land

I have put my hands in this mud,
in this blood.

Break my arms, your spleuch (*vomits*) ... Lordship

break my head

break my heart

break my womb

I will not leave

... spleuch (*vomits*) ...

I will return.

END

