

AN TAHRAN

A One Act Play

By

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Based on the image 'An Tahrán' by Craig Mackay

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Direction: The curtain opens. The stage is dark, save for one muted light beam profiling, ever so discretely, An Tahrán. An Tahrán is sitting, cross-legged and mummified, on a sandstone equilateral triangle, its apex pointing to the rear of the stage and elevated. A backdrop shows the moonlit seashore. The sound of the sea breaking across the distant shore brings the audience onto a dark, cold beach somewhere in the Highlands of Scotland.

A deep rumbling bass chord begins to fill the theatre. From the rear, two broken, dishevelled and black-cloaked lovers stumble towards the stage. He is carrying a lantern and she is sobbing. They reach the front of the stage and look up at An Tahrán. The rumbling chord fades so that only the almost subliminal sound of the sea remains.

Jonah: She's still here Mary.

Mary: Oh, my wee darling [sobbing]. What have we done to her Jonah.

Jonah: Now, now Mary. We did nothing wrong.

Mary: [Breaking down and falling to her knees]. Of course we did... [screaming at him]...we had her out of wedlock.

Direction: Jonah lifts her up from the ground and pulls her to him. He embraces her and then lifts her onto front stage left. He uses a step to lift himself up beside her. The lights come up slightly more, a blue wash to highlight the deathly coldness of the scene.

Mary crawls up to the triangle and hugs An Tahrán. Mary is sobbing uncontrollably. An Tahrán sits motionless.

Mary: My wee darling. My poor wee darling. My poor wee Chrissy. Chrissy. Chrissy. What have we done to you? [Mary looks up to heaven]. Why punish her Lord? She has done nothing wrong...take me...kill me...punish me...torment me...cast me into Hell...but don't do this to our baby.

Jonah: She's dead Mary.

Mary: No she's not! I know she's alive...God has taken her away to punish us and to...

Jonah: She was still born Mary. Can you no see these things happen... it has nothing to with God or his punishme...

Mary: What do you know? You're no a minister. Reverend Lochy said...

Jonah: Him! Not him again. Mary, Mary. They've filled yer head with old wife's tails and myths from the Church. There's no such thing as purgatory I keep telling yea. Our wee girl's no an tahrán.

Mary: Yes she is! She is an tahrán. And our wee Chrissy is chained there until the end of time because we couldn't wait until we got married – by the Church. No - you said it would be alright and it...

Jonah: Sshh!

Mary: And it would be...

Jonah: Sshh! I hear something.

Direction: From back stage right there is a sound of jangling chains and keys. It gets louder as it nears the scene. Then above it we hear a man's voice singing Psalm 23.

Mary: Its Reverend Lochy. We'll have to hide.

Jonah: I'm no hiding from him...he's yer Uncle after all – how he managed to become a minister I'll never know.

Mary: Please Jonah. I can't have him seeing me here like this.

Jonah: No way. I'm no running from that...

Mary: Jonah! Think of me or Chrissy for a change instead of yourself. What would he do to Chrissy if he saw us speaking to her like this?

Jonah: Yer uncle?

Mary: Wheesht! Reverend Lochy to you and me. Now come on.

Direction: Mary drags Jonah by the hand off stage front left and a few moments later Lochy enters. He is dressed in a black suit with hat and overcoat and white collar. From one hand he dangles long chains with many keys attached. There is also a chain with keys around his neck. In his other hand he carries a shovel.

Lochy: Aye, yer still here ye wee devil.

Chrissy: Aye.

Lochy: And no repenting no doubt.

Chrissy: No...and why should I?

Lochy: Yer a bastard. A curse to man. Eve re-born - and come to turn us away from Eden.

Chrissy: Eh?

Lochy: The word's no eh – its pardon.

Chrissy: Pardon?

Lochy: Yer just another Eve. [He shakes the keys at her and gets angry]. Lucifer puts the evil thoughts inside a man' head head...and that Mary is that foolish...thrusting herself onto unsuspecting men. A moment of passion right here and you try to come among us. Well ye were wrong. My God is no fool. That Lucifer! Hah! God's no putting up with his nonsense. Never has...never will. [He becomes almost delusional and raises his voice to a scream. He throws the keys and shovel to the ground, takes a large cross out from under his overcoat and shakes it at her]. Yer an evil spirit and thanks be to God that ye were still born yea Jezebel. [He raises his hands up to heaven]. Oh Lord have mercy on me that I am no like these sinners. [Chrissy starts to cry whilst Lochy falls to his knees and starts to mutter a prayer].

Lochy: Amen.

Direction: Lochy takes the shovel and begins to dig a hole next to An Tahrán. She continues to weep.

Lochy: I don't care how many times I've buried you in this hole you wee bitch. And I don't care how many times yea crawl back out. As the Lord is my witness tonight I'll rid myself of yea for ever.

Direction: He grabs An Tahrán and tries to raise her from the beach and drag her to the hole. She screams hysterically and fights him off.

Chrissy: Leave me alone.

Lochy: Come on yea wee Jezebel.

Chrissy: Leave me!!

Direction: A soldier wearing Highland Dress rushes in and grabs Lochy. They start to fight violently. Eventually the soldier gets the better of Lochy and throws him to ground. Lochy is whimpering for mercy. He crawls off front stage right and the soldier kicks him in the rear end. The Soldier takes a seat on the front of the triangle and from his belt pulls out a pipe. He lights it and has a smoke.

Soldier:
(Father) Aye. He always was a bully that Lochy. [He turns to Chrissy, leans over and wipes the tears from her eyes]. A nasty piece of work that. You take no heed of him. My faither should ha drowned him at birth.

Direction: Mary runs on stage holding Jonah's hand.

Mary: Daddy. Daddy.

Father: Ma wee Mary. [They hug each other]. How I've missed yea.

Mary: [Weeping]. We thought we'd never see you again. Lochy said...

Father: Now you know not to be listening to that wretched man. [Turning to Johan]. And who is this fine young man yer out with at this time o night?

Mary: Dad. Surely you recognise Jonah?

Father: Jonah Mackay?

Jonah: Aye Mr. Gunn. It's me right enough.

Father: What a size ye are boy. When I last you, you were about this high [pointing to his waste with flat palm].

Mary: Dad – ye've been away for eight years.

Jonah: And I think I was about this height [pointing to his chest].

Father: [Sitting down again with a wearisome groan]. Well, what's new?

Direction: [Mary and Jonah look at each other with a deep sense of trepidation]

Father: And what poor we might has Lochy cast into purgatory this time? For there's aye an tahrn when Lochy's been at yon Book of Revelation.

Mary: Dad...Lochy said that no-one had survived that thin red line. He read us the story from the Times newspaper from the pulpit about a year ago. Mam was so upset when she heard...

Father: Ah yer mother. My darling Maggie. I was hoping to creep in beside her the night so that she'd get a surprise and...

Direction: Jonah walks away to the back of the stage and sits down. Mary comes and kneels between her fathers legs and rests her head on his lap. He strokes her hair and she begins to cry.

Father: What is it lassie?

Mary: Mam's dead.

Father: What? No she canna be. Is this some sort of joke because if it...

Mary: Dad. I'm sorry [still crying] but Mam is dead.

Father: How?

Mary: She passed away in her bed about a year ago. They say she died of a broken heart.

Father: A year ago. That bastard Lochy. It was when he tellt her about Balaklava wasn't it? I should hae killed that brother of mine when I had the chance [breaking down] and then...

Mary: No – that's not it Dad. Well not all anyway. You see we had a bit of problem when you were away. Actually a big problem. Actually my problem.

Father: Oh aye.

Mary: Well. You see...

Father: Go on lassie – ye can tell yer faither.

Direction: Both of them begin to compose themselves. When she starts to tell the story, Jonah comes and stands beside her.

Mary: I was with child Dad.

Father: No! [A long, empty, painful scream]. No!

Mary: Lochy came and cursed me and Mam and then the bairn, even before she was born. He said she'd be damned to hell. [Mary breaks down and Jonah carries on the story].

Jonah: She was – sorry our wee Chrissy – was still born. Lochy said it was divine providence that she was chained in purgatory until God damned her to Hell for eternity. [Jonah points at Chrissy and all three look at her].

Direction: Father leaps up and grabs Jonah by the throat and pushes him to the floor. He tries to strangle him to death but Mary screaming manages to push him off.

Mary: Stop it! Stop it! What good is this going to do? I thought I'd lost you and then I lost my Mam and then Chrissy. Now are you wanting me to lose the only one who has stood by me all this time. All the time that you were away. Jonah is a good man Daddy. I'm as much to blame as he is. I love him. We are engaged you know – not that you'd have noticed after running with the Argylls.

Direction: Father puts his head in his hands and rolls onto the ground weeping. Jonah picks up Mary and takes her offstage.

After a few moments, Lochy rushes on stage from the right with a scythe and chops at Father. From the midst of each blow and the hacking and the bloodbath comes...

Lochy: You should never have come home.

Father: You killed my wife!

Lochy: Thinking yer special because yer the oldest and the bravest – away to war. But it was me who stayed and fed the flock. Eh?

Father: You killed my wife and that wee bairnie – my wee grand-daughter.

Lochy: Ye should have died on your brave thin red line.

Direction: Father lies bleeding and dying.

Lochy: And ye think your going to take all this away from me now do yu? Curse you Alasdair Gunn. [Lochy spits on him]

Direction: Father drags himself up on to the triangle.

Father: May God, not your God Lochy, but God. May He have mercy on your soul for you are an evil, evil man.

Direction: Lochy raises the scythe to deliver one last blow.

Father: Faither always said to me he didn't think you could be his – why do you think he sent ye away to the kirk? Yer no brither o' mine Lochy Gunn!

Direction: Lochy roars as he prepares to bring down the scythe. As he does Mary and Jonah run in.

Mary: No! Dad! No! [She rushes to him to comfort him].

Direction: All goes deadly quiet. For the first time the sound of the sea stops. The lights turn warmer. Jonah stares at Lochy and begins to move slowly towards him.

Jonah: Call yerself a man of the cloth. Maggie Gunn. Then our Chrissie. And now yer own brother.

Lochy: Back off Jonah or you'll get what he got.

Jonah: I'll kill you.

Mary: Jonah?

Jonah: You...

Mary: Jonah!

Direction: Lochy takes one full swiipe at Jonah and rips through his arm. Jonah drops to the ground clutching his arm. After a few moments he gets up and starts towards Lochy again.

Jonah: You killed my daughter.

Lochy: I never killed yer daughter. God did.

Jonah: Don't talk nonsense. God doesn't kill innocent children. You killed her because...

Lochy: God killed her because she was a bastard...your bastard.

Jonah: No!

Lochy: Yes!

Mary: [Mary leaps up onto the triangle between Father and Chrissy] No!

Direction: Jonah and Lochy stare at her for a brief moment and then she points at Lochy.

Mary: No! Not Jonah's. Your bastard.

Jonah: What? Mary?

Mary: He raped me [she collapses].

Direction: Jonah rushes at Lochy. Lochy delivers another almost fatal blow to Jonah's back. Jonah falls next to Father's leg which is hanging over the triangle. Lochy thinks that he has killed Jonah too. Lochy falls to his knees and begins to utter a prayer. Jonah snatches the dirk from the leg and after summoning up sufficient strength thrusts the knife into Lochy's back. Jonah falls forward. Lochy rears up like a hooked salmon and arching himself around falls slowly over Jonah.

Lochy: [As he falls he reaches out his hand towards Mary who has laid her head upon Father's body. She is weeping inconsolably]. Mary?

Direction: All is deadly silent. The sound of the sea returns, this time with birds singing. The stage goes darker again – but this time the cold blue light is replaced with a warm orange. Then Chrissy stands up as the dawn breaks ever so faintly. Chrissy unbandages herself. She slowly comforts Mary.

Chrissy Mama. Mama. It's alright Mama.

Mary: Chrissy.

Direction: They hug.

Mary: I always knew you'd come back to me. God has answered my prayers.

Direction: They embrace again as the theatre fills with uplifting music.

Curtain closes.