

# The Scottish Soldier

## *Scene 1 – on the bank of the new river*

*Walks across in front of the audience – in white tunic that has been splatted with mud - holding a spade. He speaks with a Scots accent directly to the audience.*

So, you've come to hear my story - pick through my bones.

### *He pauses and smiles*

My story was taken from me ..... my story was grabbed by the neck and dragged through blood and dirt to end up here.

I didn't even want to join the army – my excuse was worse than the rest of the lads from my village - that's all – I didn't have a bad knee like my brother or young bairns to feed like my cousin – didn't help with the kirk – didn't own any land.

So, they put an arm around me and said – I think you should fight for Scotland and the Covenant – for all of us. You'll make us proud they said – as if I'd never done a good thing in all my days to make them proud.

I wanted to say no!

You couldnae say no - couldnae say no to kirk ....

I wanted to say no so so much .....

### *Pause*

There isn't much where I come from - see– only hills and cows and sheep. I'd barely see fifty people from the start of the year to the end.

Often, I'd worked out late out on the hills – no-one in sight in all the world.

I didn't know a thing of the world.

### *Pause*

Thousands and thousands came to fight from all over Scotland – most like me – useless young lads who'd not done well – who were surplus to requirements.

### *Beat*

I didn't want them to think me scared so said I said yes in the end and shook their hands.

***Beat***

The other lads who came to fight were just like me – useless lads like me.

Almost all of them are dead now – a few of them are here – it was as if a great hammer came down from the sky and smashed us to pieces – If you weren't killed you were thrown to the four winds.

***Beat***

I suppose you want to hear about the fight....that's why you've come here....

We didn't have a clue what they hell was going on that day – didn't have a clue what we were meant to do - only shouts and cries – go this way – go that way - there was so much noise with the crying and guns and more cries – go this way – go that way – the noise got worse and worse – and smoke – shouting to go this way then that - there was no way to make sense of it with all the smoke and noise – and before sense came – the English fired at us – suddenly they were there - charging at us – we rushed down the hill into horses and guns and swords and....urghh

***Pause (puts his hands over his ears and closes his eyes)***

No - no

I'll not say one more word..

I don't care what you think

Don't care why you're here...

Others can make some sense of it for you – you can speak to them! You can pick through my bones with them.

The hammer came down – SMASH – and...

***Pause***

Others died on the march – exhausted and starved we could bare walk another step – they even shot the lads who were too tired to walk ... so tired they couldn't walk so just lay down...shot on the ground where they lay in the dirt....

***Pause***

Others died of cold and flux – all crammed on top of each other we were  
Stinking of piss and shit and death...

And so cold....

No – no

I'll not say one more word

Others will tell you more.

***Pause***

Just look at you – you look so....well....

You haven't got a clue of what it was like for us back then...digging this great  
drain – up to our knees in the cold and wet all day long...

***Pause***

It wasn't the cold so much as the wet - up to your knees in water for most of  
the day – splashed by mud from the spade - many days the mist grew so thick  
you couldnae see more than a few yards ...other days it rained and rained...and  
before long the floods came down on us...

***Pause***

Sorry I'm doing it again – I'm telling you the story before it was meant to be  
told....

***A shout from off stage***

GET BACK TO WORK.

***Kelsey the overseer comes onto the stage – dressed in half military uniform  
as if he was once a soldier in the Parliamentary army***

I knew it would be you

If only you worked as hard as you talked, the work would be long since done.

Over there – put the straw down by the dam – there – there!

Go on ...there

***The soldier rushes to the far side of the stage and Kelsey turns to speak to the  
audience***

Did he talk to you?

He did – didn't he?

I've never known a man who talks so much as that one

Oh - I can see what he's done - he's made you feel sorry for him?

Ignore him

Only feel sad for him if you feel sad for the rest of us

***Pause***

Just look at you!

Sitting here like this - all clean and calm on your seats

You haven't a clue what it was like for us...

Because this land was soaked in the blood of the war back then

The damage and the wounds were still raw

***He looks at the Scots man***

Are you still here?

I told you to get back to work

Any chance to get out of work

Any chance to talk

***The Scotsman stands still in defiance. Kelsey looks back at the audience***

Stop – don't take his side – I can see he's got you on his side

Stop it now - please

***Pause***

Nobody dreamed that this great breach would be made through the land

It began with talk – nothing but talk – talking for talking's sake

That rabble of Parliament - talking and talking and talking – nonsense half the time -

Somehow that turned into – either you are for Parliament or the king.....

Parliament or the king

Before long they forced us all to make a choice – Parliament or the king - the godly or the pope – heaven or hell – black or white ...

Before long, the king fled and raised his arms...

Before long, it became a bloody, tearing, endless, endless, fight

Nobody thought it would come to this when they set out their words and disagreements

.....

I didn't want to fight – none of us did

I'm a carpenter you see – a craftsmen – always loved to make things with my hands –wouldn't have dreamt back then I'd live by the sword and the gun - always messing around with off cuts of wood and bits and string - the quiet boy in the corner – that was me - that's where I'd be found - couldn't fight to save my life - until the war descended on us.

The only thing I ever wanted in life was my tools and a good piece of wood to work...

Not this....not this..

At Marston Moor I looked across the field when the fight was done and all I could see were the dead – sticking up out of the mud – nothing but the dead except you could hear groans and wails of the not yet dead – Scotsmen mainly - they fought with us that day – the king ripped them all to shreds ....

.....

Finally, it seemed there was no more blood left to spill

We returned to our lives .....

I'd forgotten what it was like to have some peace and my tools and a good piece of wood to work

### **Pause**

It doesn't make sense they turned to fight us in the end...

Even less that they came here...

After all the blood and tears, they wanted to take it all back from us ....everything we'd fought for....

Even wanted to bring back the king's son ....

They deserve to burn in hell for what they did....

Rising up against God's will.....dragging us back to the war...

Cromwell ripped out their hearts .....

The wretched lot of them...

Mouthy and rude they are...

Lazy as hell ...

Always causing trouble - a more useless, wretched a bunch of men you'd not find of God's Earth....

Just look at him...

Anything to get out of work

Look

***Kelsey angrily walks across to the soldier and shoves him toward the door***

I told you to get back to work

***Kelsey shoves him out of the door then walks back to look at the audience .....***

Don't look at me that way

I'm doing my job – that's all .....

The Company pays me to keep them all at the works

Make sure they work hard

The pay is good for a man like me ...

***Pause***

Can you promise me one thing?

Whatever you hear for the rest of this day – remember all of us who died – not just them

Because if we'd lost the fight, it would be you and me who'd be down in that stinking drain - instead of them, we'd be in the cold and the mud....

.....

None of us wanted this breach in our land

None of us wanted heaven or hell - black or white

None of us

***He leaves the stage***

## Scene 2 - In the Fen

***A common man walks onto the stage – dressed in rough clothes - he has a long pole in his hand. He addresses the audience as if he is at some public meeting***

They talk to us about cole-seed and rape-seed

Corn and grain

About winter grounds

About how the land will be worth two or three times more than it is now

About how we'll all have more food

Escape the floods

About how wretched our lives have been all these years

.....

Nonsense (***hitting his stick down on the ground***) – none of them has a clue

None of them

.....

I've always lived here see - I'm a fen man – a marsh man – for better or worse  
– that's what I am - all I'll ever be – for better or worse

Taking away the fen and marsh for me is like taking France away from a French man – England away from an Englishman.

.....

What do you think I should do – just sit around and let them steal our land and starve...?

Every year we've put our cows out on the summer grounds ... it's been that way for as long as summer's followed spring. Now they cut drains and build banks so we can't even get our cows out to the poor grounds we've been left.....taking the best land for themselves....

The undertakers – they chatter and babble away in London and think they know on what's good for us ..

Telling us how to live our lives.....



**Beat**

Barely any of them live round here – so how come they think they know what's good for us?

The only thing they care about is filling their own pockets.....that's the truth of it

.....

***Walks over to the window looking over the washes***

Look out there – go on look – that is what they want to take from us

Hundreds of miles of land like this

Once it was ours

In winter when I'm out on the Fen and the floods stretch out as far as they eye can see - I feel like I'm the king of the world....

Nobody can tell me what to do - see

Nobody

Even if they tried they'd be sure to drown.....uplanders don't have a clue how to get round the Fen....

The only thing I have are my lines and my nets and what I know in my head – Fenmen know where the birds fly – where the fish hide – where the ground's hard and where it's too soft to go – just by the way it looks – the Fen talks to is - tells us these things

***Pause***

The undertakers – they chatter and babble and tell us what's good for us and what's bad ..

I prefer to stay well out of all their talk

I'd prefer not to be here stuck in a room like this when I could be out in the Fen - but I've no choice - there are things I need to tell you

**Beat**

And besides - it isn't bad work – I can earn more from a few days fishing and fowling than I could if I worked for them for weeks – my family won't starve because there are always more fish to catch – more birds to net....

.....

They threaten to send us to gaol if we fill in the drains and cut the banks – explain to me please - what should we do .....allow our cows to starve.....allow our families to starve with them..

.....

Every time they try to drain the Fens, and many have tried, things go wrong – the floods rise too quickly and are held back by the banks too long – the rivers silt up – the fishing goes off....

.....

So, don't tell me not to fight

***Pause***

Look at you - I can see you don't have a clue what it used to be like out there

Come on – look out there

Nothing was as sweet as being out with my cows on the summer grounds– an ocean of sedge and grass – sweet and rich – the best grazing land in all of England ...

Nothing smells as sweet as litter and sedge cut fresh by the scythe – nothing matches a breeze that comes off the Fen on a clear hot day.

I only had to clap my hands and thousands and thousands of wigeon and teal would fly up all around me – enough to fill up half the sky

Watching them made me feel like king of the world

***Turns away from the window***

I only pray the floods will come down strong this year – wash it all way – the Bailiff of Bedford – Captain Flood - bear down on the down banks and break their channels and cranks and gates.

.....

Until then we'll make it as hard as we can for them....break down the banks – throw the mud back in their drains -

.....

An awkward lot – us fen men

Always will be - nothing will change us – whatever they do to us or say.

***Hamond – one of the Adventurers and a key player in the management of the drainage works walks on stage –the Fenman grabs a seat at the front***

**Hamond:** What's he doing here – I offered to speak – not be part of a rabble?

Who let him up here?

Where is the organizer?

Is it you?

Or you?

Will one of you tell me please?

What did he say to you?

Tell me please?

***The Fenman grabs a seat at the front***

Anyway, don't listen to him please (*pointing at the fen man*) – for every one like him I can find you three who are exhausted from the summer grounds flooding – exhausted of having their houses washed away by the floods – exhausted of having nothing to eat when the winter floods freeze up the land.

If everyone listened to people like him we'd still all be living in caves and nothing Godly would ever have been made on this earth

The drainage has been so bad with the silting up of the rivers outfalls and flooding of the summer grounds - it can't be left to get worse and worse .....The Commission of Sewers made this clear – we've only done what they said was needed ..

Anyway enough of this..I'm here to tell you the good that will come from our drainage work - how the grain will provide food for the cattle in the winter so more can graze on the summer meadows -how they'll be more food– more money – more wealth for all of us once these lands are drained...

The ague and the foul air will disperse and we're not taking all of the land – just a third of it...

Allow me to tell you what we have planned...

**Fenman (*from his seat*):** Nonsense – he’s here to get rich – that’s all – him and the rest of those crooks

**Hamond:** It’s essential now that we think of the wealth of the nation – after everything we’ve been through - abundant grains and foods will be good for the commonwealth – and because the king has gone, this means they’ll be more for everyone...

**Fenman:** And what about our common rights – what about them – that go back to the start of time..

**Hamond:** The nation’s wealth pays for armies and ships to keep safe our way of life – the Dutch or the French won’t care a fig for men like you....they’d take all the land....

**Fenman:** Is that why you’re led by a Dutchmen – to help them steal our land?

**Hamond:** I assure you – we’ll not get rich from this - no man has ever got rich from drainage – the expense is so great – the risks too high

**Fenman:** So why are you here then

**Hamond:** For the general good – as parliament has decided – they decide what is required for the general good

**Fenman:** Nonsense

**Hamond:** Allow me to speak sir – then you can have your say – along with the other people here...

**Fenman:** Parliament is nothing but a bunch of crooks and thieves – they promised to help us when it suited them a few years back....

**Hamond:** Will you let me speak sir – these people have come to see me not you.

I’ll have you arrested if you persist like this...

Allow me to speak ...

***The fenman gestures for him the speak***

See what we are dealing with here.

People like him with closed minds

***Beat***

I promise you this will be a rich land one day – the great source of food and prosperity for this nation – people will be proud to work and live here.

We are building roads and bridges – long gone will be the days when it takes days to cross the level or be trapped here when it floods...

I promise it will be a fine place

After we Adventurers have long gone you'll thank us for what we've done.

I believe you are proof of this...look at you all here in this room – you look so hearty

***Pause***

Now let me tell you how we plan to do the work – how the drains will work – how they'll keep the land free of floods

**Fenman:** Captain Flood will be back one day – you can't keep him off. You'll see he'll come back.

**Hamond:** This is impossible – I was asked to come here to explain our work – not be part of a rabble. I want you to have this man arrested or I'll not go on..

No?

Very well then – I have to leave..

I should have known it would be like this....

It's always is like this...

***Hamond walks off the stage and then the Fenman walks off after him a few seconds later turning as he does***

**Fenman:** So, what did you make of him then?

A complete .....***(gestures to the audience to complete the sentence)***

Outsiders – I'll never make sense of them

Always telling us what to do as if we don't know how to live in our own land –

You wouldn't think we've lived here all our lives?

***Here turns to walk off***

God help us

***Scene 3: The Scottish soldier comes back on the stage with a spade***

**Soldier:** Sorry – I forgot you were here – I thought you’d be long gone by now...

I forgot you’ve come to hear my story

***He puts down the spade***

Sorry - where did we get to?

***Pause***

A guard told us to stand in a line – only the hale and hearty without children or wives – he said

After all we’d been through not one of us was either hale or hearty – closer to half dead – everyone stood up mind – wherever they wanted us to go – it couldn’t be worse than where we were – drainage works they said but if they’d planned to send us to hell it couldn’t have been worse ...

So, we stood in a line – propping each other up to stand hale and hearty but clearly wretched as hell - you could tell by the way he looked at us - disgusted at the sight of us he was – the gentleman who’d come to take us here...

He picked us by tapping our shoulders with a cane – then walked off without a word said.

The following day they marched us off – a rumour spread we were to be transported to the New World

Another rumour spread that we were to be sent to the mines and dig beneath the earth

I hadn’t even heard of the Fens till that day....

Didn’t know a place could be so dull and flat

Hundreds of men were stretched out in this great cut in the earth – I’d never seen such a sight – as many men as an army and all working on the drains - digging and shifting water and mud – miles and miles of it – and whirligigs and planks and ropes and barrows

and shouting and talking and everyone covered in stinking mud – something I’ve been since the day I got here...

They told us to wait in a line....

***Kelsey walks up to the soldier***

**Kelsey:** My name is John Kelsey – my job is to oversee your work – and keep you out of trouble

Hopefully, you’ll not be as bad as the last lot of you lads – see there (***points out the window***) – wearing the white tunics – Scots like you - you’ve come here to help them with the works...

The Company will pay you, you’ll be put in lodgings and all will be perfect as long as you work – that’s why you’re here – to work – not to chatter or straggle around– not to mess– you’re here to work - the faster you work the sooner you’ll be free to go home...

I promise I’ll be fair to you

But don’t try to mess with me....

Before I came here – I fought with Cromwell so I know how to deal with lads likes you.....

Remember Cromwell – Old Noll – remember what a fight with him was like?

Didn’t turn out well for you lads did it?

***Beat***

I promise to be fair unless you don’t do what I say - then you’ll quickly come to hate me

Is this clear?

**Soldier:** Yes.

**Kelsie:** Speak up..

**Soldier:** Yes

**Kelsey:** Above all else – don’t try to run off – don’t even give it a thought...

***He holds up a sheet of paper***

This order has been issued by Parliament ....let me read it to you.

*That such Scotts Prisoners who have been placed or disposed of by the Parliament or Council of State, or by their Authority, or by any of the Officers of the Army, as have, or shall run away from the Places where they are so disposed, or go into Scotland without Leave or Licence had from the Parliament, or Authority under the Parliament, shall suffer Death, and shall be proceeded against by Martial Law, and punished with Death*

Did you get this – run away and you’ll be put to death without mercy..

And don’t think we won’t do it ...

Now look out there – see – go on – look - that is the wild Fens – it might look fine standing up here but believe me it’s a hellish place – try to walk out into the Fen and you’re sure to get lost and you’ll find the ground sinks to your waist or you’ll fall through a floating bed of reeds that has just deep stinking cold water beneath or you’ll think you’ve found a way out until you meet the next mire and sink down and the next and another mire will bar your way then the next and the next and then, even worse, a mist will come down which it does most days destroying all sense of where you are or came from and it’s impossible to find one dry place to sleep at night – so you’ll die of exposure - taken by the spirits and bogles and witches that live out there

And don’t try to run off down the roads – soldiers will hunt you down – Cromwell’s soldiers – a band of them are nearby to hunt you down – ready to come down here if there’s any trouble...

Have I made this clear?

You only need to have one thought in your head – to do as I say and work as hard as you can -then you’ll all be fine...

Is that clear?

Oh yes - one more thing...

Never pay heed to the people who live round here – little more than savages they are...



Whatever they say or do just get on with your work...

Have I made this clear?

**No reply**

I didn't hear you?

Speak up

**Soldier:** Yes...

**Kelsey:** There's a spade there for each of you .....pick one up and come with me – I'll show you where the work's to be done

Come on

***Kelsey walks off, but the soldier doesn't follow. Instead he turns back to the audience.***

**Soldier:** So, we worked here from dawn to dusk

I always knew how to work hard on the farm at home, but it wasn't like this.

Within the drain, it was wet and cold all the time – the secret was to remain dry as long as you could – on the first day here - I slipped off the plank and fell in the water – soaked – it took days to get dry – if you worked too close to the next man you'd get splashed again and again by his spade but if you stood too far off - no-one would be there to grab you if you fell ..

The clothes they gave us took days to dry if you fell in and you got soaked through....we tried to hang them up at night but they were almost as wet the next day the air was so damp.....

But the planks and the banks were so slippery it was next to impossible not to fall

We were sent down to dig out the big drains at first and shift mud onto the high bank with barrow and bucket – I preferred digging – it was harder work but there was less chance you'd fall down the bank and get soaked

Some days it was too wet to dig – instead we worked at the top – shifting the mud – blasted by the wind and rain so hard it blew you off your feet...

Sometimes the bank would slip and try to bury us alive – you'd have to scramble away as fast as you could – after the mud gets thick around your legs you just can't move

After a few weeks of this, your legs start to rot – itch and stink and rot.

Being so cold all the time was the worse thing– it got so deep in your bones it just stayed there - even with the hard work – you'd sweat because of the work but still stay cold deep in your bones ....they throb with the pain of the cold

***Pause***

Sorry – I can see you're bored with this – just to say – it was hell – complete hell – brutal wet and cold - hell

Imagine the wettest and coldest you've been in your life – close your eyes and think – go on – humour me - then imagine you can't ever again go home and get warm. Instead it goes on for day after day until you get so weak you can't fight the cold – cold is all you have – cold is your entire being – go on – close your eyes – please..

Just look at you (***walking close to the audience***)- I can see you've no notion what it was like – it wasn't the cold as much as there being no way out of it – how could you know what it was like for us.....in your clothes and hats and warm beds...

***Pause***

Some of the men got so sick with the cold they had to stop work – many we'd not see again

***Pause***

Sometimes when I was digging, I'd close my eyes and imagine I was back in Scotland - on the farm – digging the earth there – my house across the slope – the stream – the mountain –mother's food waiting for us when we got home – a fire to go back to when we'd stopped work to thaw out our bones

I'd close my eyes and try to think of home

But then I'd look up and see I was still in this great cut in the ground  
– another part of hell

***Pause***

Sometimes they send us out in the Fen – digging the division dykes  
or digging out clay to line the drains or cutting away the reeds and  
sedge and grass to make the land bare or...

***The Fenman walks onto the side of the stage and throws a clod of  
mud at the soldier, then another and another***

**Fenman:** Get off my land

How will my cows get to their grounds if you put a drain there?

What good's the lands if we can't get there?

Stop now or we'll wring your neck

Stop

***He throws some more mud at the soldier***

You're wasting your time – once you've gone we'll fill in that damned  
drain of yours

**Soldier:** We just do what we're told

**Fenman:** Do what we tell you then and get off our land

**Soldier:** We've no choice

**Fenman:** Take this for your choice (***throwing more mud***)

***The Fenman leaves***

**Soldier:** It wasn't just the abuse we got – the wind would cut through us out  
there

The only thing left was to hope you could make it through to the  
spring

***Pause***

Sorry - that's not true – there's one more thought – running away  
and getting the hell out of here

Every day there was so much talk of running off – making sure the English dikers couldn't hear us - several of the lads had gone – we didn't know how far they got though....

Kelsey said they'd been shot but we knew he was a liar

***The soldier turns scared he's been heard – he grabs the spade and barrow and moves to the side as Hammond and Kelsey walk on stage***

**Kelsey:** Over there, sir – look how much the banks have been raised – running from Mepal to Welney

And below, how wide and long the drains are now..

**Hmnd:** Very good - yes

**Kelsey:** The Scots know how to work hard once they set their minds on it – it's taken time but they work well these days....

**Hmnd:** Good – pleased to hear it ...

***Beat***

The Company wants them to move on the Division Dykes....secure against the floods here then move out there..

**Kelsey:** My instructions are to keep them here

Sir Cornelius said

**Hmnd:** The Company decides what we need to do next – without the Company there are no works – I believe I made this clear the last time we met.

It's essential to have this done by spring so we can move to the Division Dykes

**Kelsey:** But

**Hmnd:** We have to get more done- our funds will run out if we fail to get more done

The Scots have to do more

**Kelsey:** They cannot work any harder – they work from dawn to dusk

**Hmnd:** Anyone can work harder – look at that man there – he appears to be idle (*points at the Scottish soldier*) why's he not at work

**Kelsey:** He's only fit for light work

**Hmnd:** He's distracting the rest of the men– chatting to them – the digging's stopped

**Kelsey:** I allow them short breaks

**Hmnd:** So, more work can be done - cut down their breaks – do whatever needs to be done.

**Hmns:** Do they work in all weathers?

**Kelsey:** Apart from when it rains so hard it runs off the banks

**Kelsey:** Working in the wet makes the work go back, it makes such a mess.

**Hmnd:** Anyway - we need to raise the work

**Beat**

I'm only saying this to you because we've no choice

**Beat**

Without the Division Dykes there'll be no money and without money there will be no works.

After all this work, our debts will kill us if we don't move on

I explained this the last time...

At least tell that man there to get back to work

And the North Bank – is it secure? I saw the water running high along the river? The last thing we need is another blowing up of the bank. Does it look secure?

**Kelsey:** The last time I looked it seemed fine

**Hmnd:** When?

**Kelsey:** Last week

**Hmnd:** The river wasn't running high last week – I want you look and let me know if things have changed – Sir Cornelius tells us nothing until we

force it out of him – we've instructed him to set out the Division Dykes again and again

And then he just goes on and does what he wants

And you haven't sent us the muster this month – we need to keep a track of the men ...

The Council of State told us not to be late this time

Any more escapes?

**Kelsey:** No – but some are sick

**Hmnd:** Any deaths?

**Kelsey:** Three men have died

**Hmnd:** How?

**Kelsey:** Fever and cold

**Hmnd:** On the works or in their beds?

**Kelsey:** At night in their lodgings ...?

**Hmnd:** Found by the men or the landlord?

**Kelsey:** The landlord - we move the sick to their own place

**Hmnd:** So, the others don't know?

**Kelsey:** Only that they are sick.

**Hmnd:** Better to keep it that way. The last thing we need now is any kind of insurrection or running away of the men...

Do you think they might riot?

**Kelsey:** No sign of it now

**Hmnd:** And the muster must be with me by the end of the week. See you do this for your own sake

**Kelsey:** I'll make sure

**Hmnd:** Good

***Pause***

I've always liked you John – we need good men like you on the works - an engineer, a carpenter, an ingenious man like you – unlike the scoundrels, liar and cheats I have to deal with most of the time

Only last week I found out a whole lot of planks had gone missing from where we planned to store them – I suspect it was the scoundrel we paid to keep them safe

Remember – it was me who chose to hire you

The Company, however, has expressed its concern about the number of the Scots prisoners who have run away

A suggestion was made to find a new overseer – someone the men would fear

I defended you – I told them what a good man you are

But we need to make sure no more are lost

For your own sake

I'm only telling you this, so you know....so that you can take more care...

.....

Anyway, that's what I've come to say -

***He puts his hand on Kelsey's shoulder***

And remember – we need to secure the banks – then we can move onto the Division Dykes.

The Company have given me instructions to make this happen - remind Sir Cornelius of this if he ignores us again

***Kelsey and Hamond move to the side of the stage and the soldier comes back on to talk to the audience***

**Soldier:** I was up on the bank shifting earth to the top when I looked to the east and saw in a patch of reeds a white shape. At first, I thought it was a swan, but the white was too dull. Then when I saw the

prisoners working on the drain some 100 yards away I knew what it was...

Immediately, I rushed down the bank towards the Fen and had to splash and wade through the wet ground.

**Kelsey:** **(from the side)** – COME BACK

**Soldier:** Tangled up in reeds and sedge that made me trip up and get soaked right through...

Finally, I saw the white of his jersey through the reeds. Beyond was water so I swam the rest of the way. He was face down in the water when I reached him.

Then I turned him over.

**Kelsey:** COME BACK NOW I SAID

***Long pause***

**Soldier:** His face was white and cold, but I knew who it was – Michael Murray

Until the war I'd barely seen a dead man but now that look was so familiar

I'd fought with him in the war and been with him all the time since – he never looked strong – always half dead – others who looked twice as strong fell down but, somehow, he'd made it through.

I remember talking to him before the battle – the last one I talked to before the first shots - he told me he lived on a farm only fifty or so miles from me

“We'll be back there soon,” he said

Only a few days ago he'd talked about running away but everyone talked of this from time to time.

**Kelsie:** DID YOU HEAR ME

***Pause***



Somehow, I pulled him out of the mere and dragged him back to the works. It took the best part of an hour to drag him the two hundred yards.

**Kelsey:** What the hell do you think you were doing – I made it clear what happens to men who run away.

**Soldier:** I wasn't running away – I was trying to save this man.

**Kelsey:** He's dead.

**Soldier:** I didn't know he was dead.

**Kelsey:** He's been dead for days.

**Soldier:** You knew...

***No reply***

And left him out there....

***No reply***

Left him to rot and be picked at by the birds?

**Kelsey:** I could see he was dead

**Soldier:** So, you just left him there?

**Kelsey:** What point was there in risking another man's life to drag back a corpse. Even if he wasn't dead – we'd have sent him to be hanged for trying to escape.

**Soldier:** You didn't know he was dead then?

***Kelsey looks at him coldly***

What kind of man are you?

**Kelsey:** It would do no good for the rest of you to bring him back

**Soldier:** I asked you - what kind of man are you?

**Kelsey:** A Godly man

A Godly man– paid to work here

A Godly man paid to make sure you work – not run off when it suits you

I fought in the war as well

The war took sides - I was on the right side - you the wrong –  
that's all...

God chose my side..

Chose me

Not you

.....

What good would it do to bring back a corpse...

Anyway, I've heard too much from you

GET BACK TO WORK NOW

**Soldier:** No.

**Kelsey:** What did you say?

**Soldier:** I'll not work.

**Kelsey:** Do what I say or/

**Soldier:** Until we bury him with a service – we'll not work.

**Kelsey:** We?

**Soldier:** The others will feel the same when I tell them.

Michael Murray was with us for years.

Right from the start.

Before the fight...

**Kelsey:** You have half an hour. Bury him in the bank there – that part  
needing to be raised up there - then that will be the end of it –  
hear me – because I could have you hanged for this....

Say your unglodly prayers over him – they'll only send him to hell  
along with the rest of you.

Half an hour! That's all...

***Kelsey walks off.***

**Soldier:** So, we buried him – a few of us who knew him well – I did my best to remember the words of the service – the one we used at home – after that we sang a hymn as best we could – a bunch of useless lads standing up on that great bank

I scattered dirt over his face and put him in the ground – he still might be there for all we know

***Pause***

I decided then to make my own escape – not rush off but to be careful and plan the best way

From high on the bank I could see how the fenmen moved about—some parts they walked – others they used a boat to move up small creeks. Other parts where it was thick in reeds they didn't ever go. Slowly I built up a map in my mind and tried to work out a safe path

I didn't tell a soul what was in my mind. I couldn't trust them with Kelsey there.

Finally, I thought I could see a way out

I escaped when it was near dusk and the day's work was coming its end.

Enough light was left to make my way down through the meadows – I carried a stick down from the works and probed the ground ahead like I'd seen the fenmen do; checking how deep it was - how soft the ground.

I'd only go far enough to get out of sight, then early in the morning, I'd try to make my way to the high ground and make my way from there.

I'd noticed the swan's nest from the bank; raised up by a small channel and by the light of the moon I found it. I broke off the stems of the reeds and covered the nest in them, then covered myself up with more reeds to keep out of sight.

***The soldier lies down on the stage. After resting there for a few seconds, the Fenman walks up to him***

**Fenman:** Scotsman – wake up?

***The Scotsman wakes up, startled and afraid.***

Running away, are you?

Don't worry – I won't hand you in to them.

***The Fenman opens his bag and the Scotsman moves back***

Go on - have some food

***He hands the Scotsman some bread which he eats quickly***

You've more sense than most of your friends – running into the marsh with no thought of how to get out – when it's this wet it's a brutal place

Are you going to say something – I won't bite.

***No reply***

I'm going to help get you run off

**Soldier:** You won't hand me in then?

**Fenman:** I'll help you reach the edge of the Fen – the rest is up to you

**Soldier:** Did you say you'd help? I cannae get more than half the words you say?

**Fenman:** I'll HELP

Go on - eat some more food – it will take the best part of the day

***The Fenman walks close to sit down beside the soldier and as he does the soldier raises his arms in defence***

I don't know what they told you - but we don't bite...maybe we smell a bit – but not half as bad as you friend...

Heading home, are you?

**Scotsman:** God willing.

**Fenman:** Scotland - what's it like?

Nothing like this I bet – no-where on earth's quite like the Fens.

Scotland has great big hills I've heard

**Soldier:** Immense hills – yes – see that crow up there in the sky – there – over there - the hills at home would look right down on that crow  
An many of them – great and small – no flat land in sight

***Beat***

Why do you want to help me?

**Fenman:** One more man less on the works is better for me – a better chance they'll not get the work done before the money runs out or the floods come and wash them away to hell.

.....

How would you feel if some men came up from London and said they were going to level all those great hills where you keep your cows – remove them from the face of the earth – make it as flat as the Fens are here then tell you they prefer to grow wheat and cole-seed and you can no longer keep your cows or live your life the way you've known it since you were born– not even go there because they block the way.

How would you feel?

***No reply***

How do you think you'd feel if there are no hills and it's all been laid bare when you get home..

Because that's what they plan to do to us

The Adventurer's and their friends

So, I'm going to help you

***No reply***

You didn't get half of that did you?

**Soldier:** Half of it

**Fenman:** Anyway - I'm going to help you get home

You look half starved to death...

Have more food...

Some eel and cheese – it's good

***He hands the food to the Scotsman***

**Soldier:** Perhaps we should go - Kelsey will be here soon -he stands up there every morning and looks out

**Fenman:** Come on then – and here – take my coat and cover up that white jersey of yours

***They both stand up – the Scotsman grabs his hand***

**Soldier:** Thank you

***He shakes the Fenman's hand***

Thank you

**Fenman:** Come on then – this way – come on – don't step that way – it's wet there – here have my pole to check the wet ground

***He hands him his pole***

Not like that – like this – exactly where you foot needs to go

Follow me..

I'll take you to a place where you can get to Cambridge – all sorts of strange types live there – you'll not stand out so much – you need to get to the Great North Road and from there you can head home

Come on

***The fenman walks to the edge of the stage – the Scotsman moves to talk to the audience***

He let me off at the edge of the Fens – from there we could see Cambridge

I decided to wait till it was dark and found a place to sleep in a barn

I found a few eggs there in the yard to eat and some straw to make a bed

***He sits down on the ground then sits still***

Hundreds of miles were left to go but I felt I'd done the worse of it - during than night I dreamt of home – the first time I'd done so for months – the old house – my mother was still looking out for me....even though it had been so long..

I imagined her face when I walked in the door....

Surely, she thinks me long dead by now...

I'll open the door and ....

Imagine it – the look on her face

***We watch him there - still for a few seconds – then Kelsey walks onto the stage and stands beside him...he puts his hand on his shoulder – the Scotsman looks up startled...***

**Kelsey:** Yes – it's me

Stand up

STAND UP

***Kelsey grabs him by the collar and pulls him up***

Didn't I tell you not to even think of running away

Didn't I say that...

**Scotsman:** Yes.

**Kelsey:** What else did I say?

**Scotsman:** I don't know...

**Kelsey:** The first day you saw me...?

**Scotsman:** To work hard..

**Kelsey:** What else?

**Scotsman:** I don't know...

**Kelsey:** If any of the Scottish prisoners is found to have run away he will be sentenced to death without mercy....

Remember now – do you?

**Scotsman:** Yes.

**Kelsey:** So why run away?

**Scotsman:** I..

**Kelsey:** Perhaps you want to die?

**Soldier:** No

**Kelsey:** I've known a few men who've hoped to die

During the war

Normally they got their wish once they had that thought in their heads

**No reply**

It's lucky for you – it's me who found you – not the soldiers

**Pause**

I understand lads like you

I've spent all of my life with lads like you...

English lads are just like you – despite what you think....

I didn't think it would be you though - you're not one of the bad ones

But it is you....

Was it your friend who set you off – the one you found – dead - was it him?

I should hand you in right now of course..

A company of soldiers is just down the road ...

**Pause**

Come here!

Look at me!

....

I've decided to give you a chance...



It hasn't done much good making examples of you – it's not prevented more running away – the trouble is you're too all used to death – it doesn't scare you

I understand – I've seen too much of death as well these last few years.....

***Pause***

I believe there's talk the war with the Scots has come to an end – a closing of it is to be signed in the next few weeks

So.....

I've decided to take you back to the works

You'll never say a word of this talk – even to your friends – you'll return from work on the roads – that's what you'll say to them

I want you to tell your friends – you've heard the war is soon to be over – someone told you when you worked on the roads..

The chances are good you'll soon be set free – by the end of the year at least.

What is the point of running away and risk being put to death when the chances are good you'll be soon set free

The summer will be here soon

The Fens are not such a bad place when the sun's strong and it's warm and the floods have gone

The chances are you'll all be free by next winter

This is what I want you to say

If you don't do this I can still hand you over to the soldiers

Even if one more of you runs off, I can still have you hanged

Do I make this clear?

**Soldier:** Yes

**Kelsey:** So, you'll do what I say?

**Soldier:** And you won't give me up to them?

**Kelsey:** That's right  
Remember – I'll be keeping a close eye on you  
I never miss a thing  
You know that don't you?

**Soldier:** Yes

**Kelsey:** Come on then  
The sooner we're back there the better so we'll not be missed –  
and don't say a word of this talk  
Are you clear on this?

**Soldier:** Yes

**Kelsey:** Come on man – I can still change my mind

***They leave the stage but then the soldier returns and speaks again to the audience***

**Soldier:** I did what he said  
I didn't know if it was true or just more of his lies, but I had no choice  
No-one else ran away – even the thought of being free calmed everyone down  
And Kelsey was right – the Fens were not such a bad place in the summer once the cold was gone  
Apart from the mosquitoes and flies but they were no worse than Scotland  
I remember there were times when life was not so bad – sitting on the high bank we'd built (**sits down**) – a band of us – with the bread and cheese they gave us – the talk was good – we had a few laughs – the first time I'd laughed since before the battle - close to a lifetime back. We even sang some of the old songs from Scotland.  
From there we could look out on the works and across the great ocean of grass and reeds (**pointing at the window**)- it wasn't so

different to this – except it went on and on as far as the eye could see

Something about it made me think of home – not the place but the quiet and the talk

It couldn't look less like Scotland mind – these great flat lands

One of the lads stood up and looked down the great bank and the great drain and cried out – “we built this lads – we built this with our bare hands.”

“Get down”, we cried back but it was true what he said – it almost seemed beyond belief we'd done such a thing.

Look at it – we built this with our bare hands...

***Kelsey and Hamond come onto the stage in front of the soldier***

**Hmnd:** So - no more gone from the works?

**Kelsey:** None sir – not one

**Hmnd:** You did well – I knew you would - and lately the work has gone well – it almost seems we're able to see the end of it now

***Pause***

I've never told you this, but I've many times cursed the day I got involved in these works

It's taken up most of my life and there's barely been a day when I've not cursed it with all the problems I'd have to deal with – parliament, money, rioting, petitions against the works, stealing and violence – blowing up of banks - putting men to death – all of it one on top of the other

Sometimes I've felt there's not a single person on God's earth who isn't against these works

Somehow, we carried on though and got through these things

And heaven help me - trying to keep Sir Cornelius under control would drive a saint mad

But then I look out there and see what we've done in so short a time. I expect these great banks and drains will be here for hundreds of years to come

Just look at it – how did we do it – how could we think we could possibly do these things

How many men can say they've changed the face of the earth forever

Surely there's great good in all we've done – surely good will come to the nation – the wealth it will bring

Eventually they'll thank us for these works

**Kelsey:** After we're long gone

**Hmnd:** Quite..

.....

And there's one more thing...

The Company has informed me the Scots are to be set free – the guards will be dismissed - any man who wants to stay on the works can – without the guards – they can join the rest of the men...

**Kelsey:** I see

*He puts his hand on Kelsey's shoulder*

**Hmnd:** The Company won't need an overseer when they're gone

**Kelsey:** I know

**Hmnd:** You've done a good job with them

.....

I'm going to try to find you work

.....

The Company needs men like you and there's plenty to be done – the banks are believed to be slipping near Stanground and progress is needed on the Division Dykes and the highways and bridges need to be built and it essential to inspect all the banks

and sasses and sluices before the autumn rains come and we need to sort out the next pay day – we mustn't get this wrong and cause tumult like last time.

They'll never be and end to the work

***They stand together and are joined by The Fenman and the Scots soldier in a row. The Soldier takes a step forward.***

**Soldier:** So, we were set free – at last it had come to an end

We couldn't believe the words – set free – free to do what we wanted – to go where we liked

Many men chose to stay on the works and work with the English Dikers – the pay was more than we'd find at home they said

I believe some of them had children – perhaps their families are still in these parts to this day.

Perhaps some of you in this room have some of their blood

Maybe I can see it in some of you – in your faces – maybe – maybe not

Maybe you (***pointing at one of the audience***)

Perhaps not

Others found work in England and some like me made our return to Scotland – that long, long walk home

***They turn to leave then the soldier looks back***

Before I leave you to your lives – I have one more thing to say

Remember please the thousands of men who died – in battles, in marches, in prisons and on these drains – English as well as Scots – also the thousands of men who dug out all the rest of the drains – the hundreds of miles of them - poor men – forgotten men even though their work lies all around you...and keeps you from the floods

Also the common men who lost their grounds

Remember them.....please

***He smiles***

And now I must start my long walk home....