

The Wreckers of Red Rock

OR

The Force of Destiny

(1 Act Version)

A Brand New and Original Melodramatic Operetta
based on the works of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan

by

Fraser Charlton

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Maximillian Blackheart (*a Villain*) BASS
Jessie McPhee (*an Old Lady with a Secret*) CONTRALTO
Maggie McPhee (*Jessie's Daughter; a Heroine*) SOPRANO
William Valiant (*a Hero*) TENOR
Molly O'Brian (*Head Wrecker*) MEZZO-SOPRANO
Faith Jarvis (*her Second-in-Command*) MEZZO-SOPRANO
Hamish Walters (*Head Revenueman*) BARITONE
Seth Appleby (*his Second-in-Command*) HIGH BARITONE

Chorus of WRECKERS and REVENUEMEN.

Time - Somewhere in the 19th Century

Location - The Clifface at Red Rock

Scene - A Cove with an overhanging cliff. A Lighthouse stage R is represented by a circle on the floor, or perhaps a spot. To ascend and descend it is necessary to walk around this circle (clockwise = up, anticlockwise = down). There are four 'floors' in total! Exits R and L.

ACT I

OVERTURE

SCENE ONE - *Night*. MAGGIE is seen walking the clifftop downstage with her lamp, looking out to sea. As she exits the female WRECKERS, led by MOLLY and FAITH, creep on, cloaked and hooded. They carry various bags and tea chests and pick up new treasures from the stage as they enter. They strike evil and melodramatic poses as they sing.

OPENING CHORUS - MOLLY, FAITH *and* WRECKERS

Music - "With cat-like tread", The Pirates of Penzance

With cat-like tread,
Upon our prey we steal,
In silence dread
Our cautious way we feel.
No sound at all,
We never speak a word,
A fly's foot-fall
Would be distinctly heard -
So stealthily the wrecker creeps,
While all the village soundly sleeps.

Come, friends, who plough the sea,
Ships of ev'ry nation
Join in devastation,
Come, meet thy destiny -
Wreckers of Red Rock are we!

MOLLY & FAITH We're the wreckers from the Red Rock village,
We come to plunder - we come to pillage!
Following orders from an evil master,
We're the wicked ones who profit from disaster!

ALL With cat-like tread, etc.

Enter JESSIE.

MOLLY This has indeed been a successful night. Yet another ship has met its doom on the desolate crags of Red Rock and yet another fortune has been salvaged by us from the wreckage.

FAITH It's a wicked business, Molly. Every night, innocent young Maggie McPhee walks the clifftop with her lantern, little realising that by her actions scores of vessels are lured to certain destruction on the rocks below!

JESSIE Aye, Faith, it is a bitter irony that while she, in her artless, gude-haired way, looks for the arrival of her long-prophesied lover from over the sea, scores o' bonny sailors die in terrible agonies beneath her!

MOLLY And to think we used to mock her for it! She can little suspect what great wealth she has amassed for us!

JESSIE That is tae true. But dinna forget the ither debt we owe, lassie. We'd no have thought o' robbing the floundering vessels had not the evil inhabitant of yonder lighthouse suggested it to us.

FAITH You mean Maximillian Blackheart? How I hate him - how we all hate him! Even his name reeks of infamy and wickedness.

JESSIE Dinna be sae hasty, girlie. Nae matter how revolting his personality, muckle are the fortunes that we have gained by following his advice.

- MOLLY** You're right, Jessie, but it does seem heartless to exploit Maggie's gullibility in this way. How do you square it with your conscience? After all, she is your own daughter. Have you not thought of telling her about the havoc she's causing?
- JESSIE** Weel, I hae given it mickle thought, but my ainly bairn is a varra, varra sensitive soul, and if she kent the truth it would break her puir wee hairt. Now, I'm sure that naebody here cares about the money...
- ALL** (*Shaking their heads vigorously*) Not me, never thought of it, heaven forbid, etc.
- JESSIE** And neither dae I - it's only my wee darling's happiness that I care about. So, I argued to myself, the agonising death o' a few hundred sailors is surely a reasonable price for my Maggie's peace o' mind. Nae loving mither would o' thought otherwise.
- MOLLY** I'm sure you're right, Jessie. Oh, if only we had daughters of our own to love, but it seems highly likely that we shall all die spinsters. I mean, how were we to know that the very day after our first wrecking expedition all the single men in the village would, as a body, become Custom's Officials? How can we explain to them our reluctance to marry, when if we did we would most surely be sent to the gallows?
- FAITH** It really is most vexing. As there is no way we could hide our nocturnal activities from any husband, we have had to end up choosing between wealth or weddings!
- JESSIE** Ach, who knows as well as I that destiny can play cruel tricks on us mortals. But hide your misgivings, lassies - our leader approaches. Look! He is descending his lighthouse as we speak!

MAX appears, descending several floors of the lighthouse. He is a classic stage villain - top hat, voluminous black cloak and a mask that covers most of his face. He strikes a melodramatically evil pose at every chord during the introductory music.

SONG - MAX and CHORUS

Music - "I once was as meek as a new-born lamb", Ruddigore

I am a most thoroughly evil man,
Destruction is my goal - ha, ha!
A loathing blind
Of humankind
Consumes my twisted soul - ha, ha!

To curse the innocent is my plan,
To prove how cruel is fate - ha, ha!
I show them why
All love's a lie,
And teach them how to hate - ha, ha!

I once was honest, good and true,
As virtuous as all of you,
Till destiny revealed its plan
To make of me a villainous man!

GIRLS A villainous man!

MAX A villainous man - ha, ha!

- MAX** You summon me from my lighthouse, my friends, and I am here. I trust that you bring me some more valuable salvage?
- JESSIE** Aye, we dae. A braw merchantman had its belly ripped open on the Northern reefs tonight, spilling its valuable contents into our waiting hands. We hae brought you rare spices, bonny silks and muckle valuable jewels.

MAX Excellent, my loyal crew, excellent. But tell me, were there any survivors amongst the wreckage?

FAITH I found one half-drowned sailor flapping about on the rocks like a landed fish.

MAX And what was your action, young Faith?

FAITH I did what I do to all such fish, and put him back in the sea where he belonged!

MAX Very good, you are learning fast! Now, quickly, put the haul in my storeroom. The Revenuemen will be along shortly - it's almost midnight, and their patrols are so fortunately punctual! (*Exeunt all the GIRLS except FAITH and MOLLY.*)

MOLLY I wonder if we could have a moment's word with you, Mr Blackheart. We must tell you that we are not happy with the present arrangement.

MAX Oh yes? Do you feel that you are not being well paid?

MOLLY No, that's not the problem. It's just that while we carry on with this wrecking it seems increasingly unlikely that we will ever marry. I was about to wed Hamish Walters until I started this business, but when he became a revenue man I obviously had to break it off. Mr Blackheart, we've all made a goodly amount of money. Could we not stop this evil and return to our former lives?

MAX You fools! This is not some childish game that you can pick up and discard at will! I *need* this money to fund my own despicable schemes - your happiness is of little concern to me! If you so much as think of leaving my service, I shall instantly denounce you to the revenue men!

MOLLY But then we'll tell them who's behind all this - and you'll be off to the hangman with us!

MAX How little you innocents know of the way this country works! It'll be your word against mine. A rich, highly educated gentleman versus a rabble of illiterate yokels! I think even *you* could predict the outcome.

FAITH He's right, Molly. The scales of justice are easily tipped by a well-filled purse. We'd better join the others.

MOLLY Aye, I suppose you're right. I curse you, Blackheart, but I'll do your bidding.

MAX Good girls. Now, you'd best return to your hovels ere the patrol arrives. (*Exeunt MOLLY and FAITH*) What right have these women got to complain - who told them that life would be fair? Destiny is a cruel mistress, and I am the slave of destiny. Many years ago I too was a virtuous man, I played by the book, I trusted in fate. And what happened? Everything I held dear was destroyed! Thus I adopted the name of Maximillian Blackheart and vowed to do all I could to spread unhappiness throughout the world. For seventeen years I wandered this country, desolate and distraught, until I arrived at Red Rock village as nightfall was approaching. Preparing to sleep in this very cove I saw Maggie McPhee walking the clifftops. I instantly fell in love with her, but before I could approach I witnessed the appalling spectacle of a mighty warship crashing onto the jagged reef below. At that moment, a plan formed in my mind. I moved into this abandoned lighthouse and soon persuaded the greedy women of the town to loot the wrecked shipping for me. Despite my ever-growing love for her, I have carried on exploiting Maggie's midnight walks, and, with the wealth I accrued, I have assembled a large army of evil accomplices spread throughout the country. They creep into people's houses on washing day and steal two odd socks! They knock on people's doors when they are in the bath - then run away! They sneak into privies and take all the toilet paper! They break into public libraries and tear the last page out of all the detective novels, ha, ha ha! Little irritations, perhaps, but they all add up. Soon everyone will share my terrible fate, and curse the Force of Destiny! (*Exits*)

SCENE SECOND - *Morning. Music ("The sun whose rays" - The Mikado). Enter JESSIE with a shopping basket. MAGGIE dawdles along behind, gazing dreamily into the middle distance. She is a pretty, girlie and innocent type of heroine.*

JESSIE Ach, Maggie, will ye no get a move on? The market'll be finished by the time we get there. What is it that bothers your pretty wee heid?

MAGGIE Oh, mother, I was just thinking of my future husband. Don't you realise that it is a year today since I was given the prophecy by that mysterious gypsy?

JESSIE I ken ainly tae weel.

MAGGIE I still remember her words. 'He will not have parents, yet have them. He will be from abroad, yet not a foreigner. He will arrive at night, yet be met by day. And he will be valiant in more ways than one.' What can it all mean?

JESSIE Ach, ye shouldnae fill yer heid with such nonsense. Let's be off tae the village.

MAGGIE Oh, mother, mother, I feel sure that I shall meet him soon! You will consent to my marriage, won't you? After all, you're my only surviving relative.

JESSIE Oh, my wee Maggie. (*Aside*) Shall I tell her? Aye, she is auld enough noo. (*Aloud*) Maggie, I must tell you a terrible secret that has been eating away at my hairt for these past eighteen years. Maggie, my darling Maggie, I am not your real mither!

MAGGIE You? Not my... (*She swoons*)

JESSIE (*Producing smelling salts. MAGGIE revives*) Maggie, I'm sorry, but it was time you kent the truth. You are the bairn of anither mither! (*MAGGIE faints again*)

MAGGIE (*Reviving*) But how did this all happen?

JESSIE Ach, I hate to fret your gude wee hairt, but if you really want to ken the truth, then I must tell it you. Listen, my child, and lairn what it is to be fortune's toy!

SONG - JESSIE

Music - "When Frederic was a little lad", The Pirates of Penzance

When I was young, I found and wed a handsome young stockbroker,
A goodly man, who never drank and rarely was a smoker.
We had a house, we had a coach, but still we were not happy,
So nine months later there arrived a baby in a nappy!
This bouncing child, so meek and mild, was loved by mum and daddy;
But I must state, to set you straight, the baby was a *laddie*!
(*MAGGIE faints*)

A fairy tale of wedded bliss you think this is a version?
Our happiness was soon cut short by a holiday excursion!
The sun was out, the sky was blue, and as we felt so merry,
The perfect way to spend the day was sailing on a ferry.
An island fair where you take the air was our general inclination -
The Isle of Wight, we thought was right to make our destination.

When we left port, the gentle wind to hurricane increases,
A giant wave attacks our ship and smashes it to pieces!
My husband was washed overboard, and midst the hurly burly
I grabbed, I thought, my baby boy - but found he was a girlie!
Though in a daze, I vowed I'd raise that baby from the water -
But I don't mock, it's quite a shock when son becomes a daughter!

MAGGIE So I am that baby that you accidentally saved from a sinking ship?

JESSIE Aye, lassie - as the ferry went down I snatched the nearest baby tae me. I tell you, it was a muckle shock when I finally came tae unwrap the nappy! But I said to myself 'Jessie, this may not be your bairn, but it's somebody's bairn,

and if you dinna raise her, naebody will. Treat her as your ain, and bring her up as best you can.' I have carried this terrible secret for near eighteen years - I canna conceal the dreadful truth any longer.

MAGGIE Oh, mother - and I still call you that - I cannot say this hasn't been a shock, but motherhood is more than a mere biological fact. Even if you are not my flesh and blood, you are still dearer to me than my true parents could ever be. Be at peace - I still love you.

JESSIE Oh, Maggie, you are the finest daughter any mither could wish for. You're ample compensation for the loss of my braw husband and bonny wee son. (*Wiping her eye*) But come along, my bairn, the Custom House men will be along shortly. We dinna wish to disturb them in their search for smugglers.

MAGGIE Of course not, mother. Let's be off to market. (*Exits*)

JESSIE Ah, if ainly those half-witted revenue men could see what villainy goes on under their very noses! Our wrecking is surely safe from being discovered while such men as these patrol our shores! (*Exits*)

Enter the REVENUEMEN, full of unfounded bravado.

CHORUS OF REVENUEMEN

*Music - "The soldiers of our Queen"
Patience*

The guardians of the sea
Are linked in friendly tether;
Custom men are we
Who fight the foe together!
No secret hide or cave
Is safe from our inspection -
The bravest of the brave,
We're masculine perfection!

SONG - HAMISH *and* CHORUS

Music - "When a felon's not engaged in his employment", The Pirates of Penzance

HAMISH We're the Custom House officials of this town -
ALL Of this town,
HAMISH Who protect our gallant island's barren shores -
ALL Barren shores,
HAMISH We collect the excise money for the Crown -
ALL For the Crown,
HAMISH From the naughty men who break importing laws -
ALL 'Porting laws.
HAMISH Although we're always pleased to do our duty -
ALL Do our duty,
HAMISH There's a problem that we've often verified -
ALL Verified,
HAMISH When we see a burly smuggler with his booty -
ALL With his booty,
HAMISH To be honest we're completely terrified!
ALL With so many violent smugglers on the run -
On the run,
A Custom House is not a happy one!
HAMISH Though we boast that we're the bravest of our youth -
ALL Of our youth,
HAMISH And we claim that we are manhood in its prime -
ALL In its prime,
HAMISH Our bravado hides the sorry, shameful truth -
ALL Shameful truth,
HAMISH We're the biggest weeds and cowards of all time -
ALL Of all time.

- HAMISH** We're scared to leave our comfy little station -
ALL Little station,
HAMISH When there's trouble we pretend that we don't know -
ALL We don't know,
HAMISH For if we are faced with brutal confrontation -
ALL Confrontation,
HAMISH Our control of body functions tends to go!
ALL With so many violent smugglers on the run -
On the run,
A Custom House is not a *nappy* one!
- HAMISH** At ease, men. Now, did anybody see anything on this patrol?
ALL No.
HAMISH That's a relief! You know, we've had a good deal less bother since we stopped doing continuous patrolling and only come out at midday and midnight - and not at all on Sundays and public holidays.
SETH I thought it was an especially good idea to publish our timetable in the newspapers. That way, all the smugglers know when to creep ashore to avoid us...
HAMISH And thus we avert any danger of putting ourselves at the slightest risk of personal violence. I must say, this is certainly an extremely pleasant form of employment.
SETH Aye, the job's fine - it's the rest of my life that I'm not happy with. Tell me, Hamish, how can we be truly content when all the girls of the village steadfastly refuse our advances? I can't understand it - we were all courting before we became revenue men, and now all we get is the cold shoulder.
HAMISH It certainly is a mystery, Seth Appleby. I thought Molly would've been impressed by my splendid new uniform but instead she practically stopped speaking to me. You don't think there up to anything they don't want us to find out about, do you?
ALL (*Worried*) No, never, etc.
SETH Let's hope not... Some of those girls look quite strong...
HAMISH You're right - let's not think on it further. Now, I've got some important news for you all. I just got word this morning that we are to expect a new revenue man today from Dover Custom House. He goes by the name of William Valiant.
SETH Not *the* William Valiant? The man who single handedly brought to justice the notorious Dover Delinquents, the scourge of the English Channel?
HAMISH The very same. I must remark that he sounds a little brave to fit in properly here at Red Rock, but I'm afraid we don't have any choice - orders from above, and all that. Anyway, it's too late to complain now, for here he comes!
SETH Curse the handsome devil! Look at the way the women are flocking round him!
HAMISH Bah! Some men have all the luck!

Enter WILLIAM with all the GIRLS except MAGGIE and JESSIE. He is handsome, dashing and brave - the archetypal hero.

CHORUS OF GIRLS

Music - "From the briny sea", Ruddigore

From the Dover quay
Comes young William, all victorious!
Valorous is he -
His achievements are all glorious!

Let the village ring
With the news we bring
Sing it - shout it -
Tell about it -
Bold and handsome, strong and tall,
He's the bravest of them all!

SONG - WILLIAM *and* CHORUS

Music - "A magnet hung in a hardware shop", Patience

Young William Valiant is my name,
A revenue man of enormous fame!
But though I seem so gay and free
My life began in misery!
In happiness this baby grew,
With loving parents (numbered two),
Till shipwreck robbed me of my joy
And I became an orphan boy!

ALL An orphan boy?
WILLIAM An orphan boy!

This happy go lucky,
Jolly and plucky,
Baby was full of joy,
Till sudden sinking,
Briny drinking,
Made him an orphan boy!

ALL This happy go lucky, etc.

Alone I floated within my cot,
I feared that drowning would be my lot,
Till fortune answered my childish plea -
A passing warship rescued me!
I lost two parents but gained a crowd
Who raised me to be strong and proud,
So when of age this boy became
From that good ship I took my name!

ALL You took your name?
WILLIAM I took my name.

When this young stripling,
Muscles-a-rippling,
Eighteen years became,
The ship to save me
A surname gave me,
So 'Valiant' is my name!

ALL When this young stripling, etc.

MOLLY That is a strange tale you spin, William Valiant. A man with a whole crew of sailors as his parents - 'tis a blessing you turned out normal!

WILLIAM Do not besmirch the good name of the British Navy, young lady. The company of the Valiant were as fine a parent, collectively, as any man could hope for.

MOLLY But why then did you not stay with them and seek your fortune in the Navy? Surely working for Custom House must be dull compared to a life on the waves?

WILLIAM You may well think that, pretty miss, but the sea is a fickle mistress - she took away one lot of parents and yet repaid me twenty fold! Well, I didn't want to risk losing any more family, so I decided that a landlubber's life was for me. Still, I couldn't forsake the briny entirely, so I did the next best thing - I vowed to protect her shores from evil-doers with all my strength.

FAITH What an exciting life you have led compared to *some men* I could mention! Do tell us all about your adventures! What beauties and horrors have you seen on your travels?

WILLIAM I am afraid, ladies, that there is no time for that now. I shall be happy to meet you all here tomorrow, so could you kindly prepare questions. Good day to you. (*Exeunt GIRLS*) Ah, 'tis a curse being so handsome - the girls will scarce give me a moment to myself!

HAMISH Welcome, young William. I am Hamish Walters, head revenue man, and I am happy to receive you into our gallant band. I hope you won't find Red Rock too tranquil for your tastes.

WILLIAM I thank you, Mr. Walters. To be frank, I am pleased to be in such a peaceful place after the dangers of Dover.

SETH Well, you can't get much quieter than here. We haven't had a smuggler here since... Ever!

WILLIAM You must patrol your coastlines most fastidiously!

HAMISH Aye, well, something like that... Now, let's relieve you of your tackle - my men will take it to the station house for you. Seth and I have been elected to show you around the village. (*The REVENUEMEN take WILL's bags and exit.*)

WILLIAM Wait! I have more news to divulge. I am here not just to join your band but to lead it. My success at overcoming the Dover Delinquents lead to head office giving me control of my own group of revenue men. There weren't any decent jobs left, so I got yours.

HAMISH But this is ridiculous! I've heard nothing about it!

WILLIAM The decision was rather sudden. I have the papers here. (*Handing them to HAMISH*). There is no doubting what they say. I am sorry, Hamish, but orders are orders. Do you think that you could see to it that all the men are gathered together after the banquet to receive new instructions? (*HAMISH nods*) Well, come along then, let's have a look at your station house - I want to see what calibre of man you have here at Red Rock.

Exeunt WILLIAM, HAMISH and SETH (who look distinctly worried). Enter MAGGIE.

MAGGIE The girls of the village are all talking about the arrival of an handsome new stranger. Could it be the man prophesied to be my husband? No, that would be too much of coincidence. This day has already yielded too many surprises. You know, it is a little unsettling to an artless girl like me to find out that she could well be an orphan, or the daughter of a prince, or goodness knows what! Oh dear, I'm starting to feel a little faint. I'll sit here a moment and rest my nerves.

Enter MAX. He does not see MAGGIE.

MAX It's no good - I am unable to extinguish my love for Maggie McPhee. I have waited a year and can control myself no longer. I simply must have her for myself - and if she won't accept me willingly I shall have to take her by force! (*Sees MAGGIE*) But soft! Yonder is the source of my desires - alone, unprotected and ripe for abduction! Beware Maggie - thou art about to meet thy destiny! (*WILLIAM is heard whistling "Young William Valiant is my name" off stage*) Curses! Someone is coming! I cannot risk being discovered. I shall conceal myself until the danger is past. (*He hides at the back of the stage*)

Enter WILLIAM.

WILLIAM Never have I met such a collection of lily-livered poltroons! When I agreed to undertake this secret mission to investigate the mysterious wreckings at Red Rock I didn't think that I would have to do all the fighting myself! Oh, how tiresome! This looks like being a job with few compensations... (*Sees*

MAGGIE) But who is this attractive stranger I see here? She looks like a *most agreeable distraction!* (*Crossing to MAGGIE*) Good morning, miss, I don't believe we've met. It is a fine day, is it not? (*MAGGIE looks up, stares at him for a few seconds and promptly faints into his arms*) I say, things are looking up!

MAGGIE (*Recovering*) Oh my good sir, I am so sorry, but when I saw your face I thought that you... (*Faints*)

WILLIAM I'm used to turning girls' heads, but this is taking it a little too far! (*Slapping her, gently*) Miss, miss - pray recover yourself - it is unseemly for us to be seen like this.

MAGGIE (*Recovering*) Thank you, gentle stranger. I feel stronger now. It's just that you're so like the gentleman that has been prophesied to be my... Husband!

WILLIAM Now *that* is a story I should very much like to hear, pretty miss.

MAGGIE Then, kind sir, I shall tell it to you.

SONG - MAGGIE

Music - "The sun, whose rays", The Mikado

Not long ago,
A year or so,
I was a doleful maiden.
Without a spouse
To share my house,
My life was sorrow-laden,
I'd pine and mope,
With fading hope,
Of finding true devotion.
No local boy
Could bring the joy
To raise my dead emotion.

It may suspend belief
To think this pearl
Was slave to woe and grief -
A lonely girl!

But then one day
There came my way
A curious gypsy dancer,
Her mystic scry
Did prophesy
My prayers would have their answer!
My love-to-be,
From o'er the sea,
Would soon arrive in Dover.
And then, she said,
We would be wed
Before a day was over!

And now you've come to me,
My heart's a whirl!
No longer must I be
A lonely girl!

WILLIAM Are you sure that I am the one who is prophesied to be your future husband?

MAGGIE I felt certain of it the moment I saw your face! But we must be sure about such things before we do anything rash. The exact prophesy runs as follows (*Producing paper*) 'He will not have parents, yet have them.'

WILLIAM Well, I certainly had parents once, but now I know not whether they be alive or dead. That description suits my situation admirably.

MAGGIE Good. (*Makes a tick*) 'He will be from abroad, yet not a foreigner.'

WILLIAM That's me exactly! I was raised on board a ship, shunted from port to port, and yet I'm told that my true home is old Blighty.

MAGGIE Excellent! (*Makes a tick*) 'He will arrive at night, yet be met by day.'

WILLIAM Another coincidence! My boat docked last night, but now it's morning and we're meeting.

MAGGIE Wonderful! (*Makes a tick*) One last prediction. 'He will be valiant in more ways than one.'

WILLIAM It's uncanny! Not only is my name William Valiant, but I am the most valiant revenue man ever to wield a cutlass!

MAGGIE Then you are he - my future husband!

WILLIAM My future wife! (*They embrace*)

MAGGIE I hope you don't think me vulgarly forward, proposing marriage so soon after we have met, but I am a simple, uncorrupted maid who knows but little of the correct manners of society.

WILLIAM Don't fret, pretty one. Who are we to argue with destiny?

MAGGIE Oh, William, my love, I knew that one day you would come. Many times I was told to forget you, but I held firm. Night after night I wandered the clifftops with my lantern looking for you...

WILLIAM What was that?

MAGGIE I was just saying how, every night, I would walk the clifftops looking for my lover from across the sea. At least I won't have to do that any more.

WILLIAM (*Aside*) Neptune's beard, that must be how all those ships were wrecked! This innocent girl was unwittingly luring vessels to destruction with her lamp while awaiting my arrival. But who is evilly exploiting this misfortune? There is only one way I can find out... (*To MAGGIE*) My dear, I think perhaps you should walk the cliffs one more night.

MAGGIE But why? You're here now!

WILLIAM Please, my love, do it for my sake. I will explain why later.

MAGGIE Very well, I shall do as you bid. Oh, my heart is so happy I fear it shall burst! But when shall we marry? I feel it should be soon, before we get to know each other.

WILLIAM You're right, for I might find out that I can't stand you. How about tomorrow morning?

MAGGIE I've nothing planned. How wonderful - it's just like the prophesy! Oh William!

WILLIAM Oh... Oh... Just a minute. What exactly is your name?

MAGGIE Maggie. Maggie McPhee.

WILLIAM Maggie! What a beautiful, beautiful name! Now, I must be off - I have a very important mission to undertake tonight. Farewell, Maggie! (*They embrace*)

MAGGIE Farewell, William!

Exit WILLIAM and MAGGIE in opposite directions

MAX (*Coming forward*) I know your game, William so-called Valiant! You seek to deprive me of my love - but I shall soon put an end to your dream of wedded bliss. I overheard your plan to catch my wreckers red-handed tonight - well I'm afraid, my innocent little hero, that it's *you* who shall be caught in *my* trap! There is only one price to be paid for interfering with my evil plans - your life! You will soon learn not to meddle with the Force of Destiny!

MAX exits, laughing melodramatically.

SCENE THREE - *Night. The stage darkens and the moon appears. MAGGIE appears on the clifftop with her lamp. As she walks off, enter WILLIAM leading the REVENUEMEN, singing very quietly and nervously.*

CHORUS OF REVENUEMEN (*Pianissimo*)

*Music - "The soldiers of our Queen"
Patience*

The guardians of the sea
Are linked in friendly tether;
Custom men are we
Who fight the foe together!
No secret hide or cave
Is safe from our inspection -
The bravest of the brave,
We're masculine perfection!

SOLO and CHORUS - WILLIAM

Music - "A rollicking band of pirates we", The Pirates of Penzance

GIRLS (*Offstage*) A rollicking band of wreckers we,
Who prey on sailors on the sea,
Are coming to wreak their villainy
On unsuspecting weaklings!

WILLIAM Hush, hush! I hear them on the clifftop poaching,
With silent step the wreckers are approaching.

HAMISH They come in force, with stealthy stride,
Our obvious course is now - to hide.

The REVENUEMEN conceal themselves as the WRECKERS enter, hooded and masked so as to conceal their identity. They creep about in such a way as to make their evil intentions known (i.e. flashing weapons about, etc.)

CHORUS

Music - "In a doleful train/Now is not this ridiculous", Patience

WRECKERS Stealthily we creep
By the moon's celestial glow.
While the goodly sleep,
'Bout our wickedness we go.
Who knows whose ship's doom is nigh?
Who will live, and who will die?

REVENUEMEN Now is not this detestable - and is not this arrestable -
So brazen-faced a felony you've never seen before!
These evil ones are giving us a proof quite incontestable
That they're the ones who're causing all the wreckings on the
shore!

The guilty way they're sneaking at us,
Secrets that they're speaking at us,
Taunting at us, flaunting at us, trying to incite.
They're actually sneering at us, fleering at us, jeering at us
Just the sort of villainy our duty is to fight!

ENSEMBLE

WRECKERS Stealthily we creep, etc. **REVENUEMEN** Now is not this detestable,
etc.

WILLIAM (*Over music*) Forward men and capture these villains!

Over fight music (Coda of "Melodrame" from Ruddigore) both sides draw weapons and engage in battle. The REVENUEMEN fight bravely but are overcome one by one, WILLIAM being defeated last of all. When the music stops, all the REVENUEMEN (including WILLIAM) have been disarmed and are being held at knife point by the still-masked and hooded WRECKERS. Enter MAX, dragging MAGGIE. He releases her and she runs to WILLIAM.

MAX Ha, ha, ha! What a pathetic display of fighting your men put on, William Valiant!

WILLIAM How do you know my name, you black fiend?

MAX Maximillian Blackheart knows many things, you young upstart. For instance, I knew all about this little surprise ambush you were going to attempt tonight. Why do you think we were so easy to find?

WILLIAM I suspected it all along!

MAX Did you, Mr. Valiant? Well, let us see whether you suspected my other little secret. My friends! Throw off your disguises!

The WRECKERS take off their hoods and masks. The REVENUEMEN are aghast.

HAMISH Molly O'Brian! You're a wrecker?

MOLLY Aye, Hamish, and I have been for nigh on a year.

SETH Faith, my own Faith. Tell me that you're not mixed up in this too?

FAITH I can't deny my guilt, Seth. Now perhaps you can see why none of us could marry you.

MAX My, my, this is a touching reunion. It quite brings a tear to the eye!

WILLIAM Don't pretend that there are feelings inside that empty frame of yours. Tell us what you intend to do with us.

MAX You're so impatient, William - I was just coming to that. I have decided to let the Custom House men leave with their lives. I feel that this little demonstration of my power will convince them to turn a blind eye to my proceedings in the future.

WILLIAM And what of me?

MAX I'm afraid that you will have to die, Mr. Valiant. I could never trust you to compromise your integrity for my sake.

WILLIAM If I am to perish, then do it quickly. You will not see me begging on my knees for mercy. I shall show you how a real man can die!

MAX Quite the *prima donna*, aren't we? No, you shall not die now. I want to make you suffer a bit first. You will live just long enough to see me marry Maggie McPhee at dawn!

MAGGIE screams and rushes to WILLIAM. MAX pulls her off him while WILLIAM struggles vainly to free himself from his captors.

WILLIAM You detestable toad! You malevolent fiend!

MAX Oh, don't break my heart! Ladies, set the revenue men free. Come, Maggie, come to my lighthouse. Osbourne Road will be here at daybreak to make us one - forever! Sleep well, William my friend, sleep well! Ha, ha!

MAGGIE Will, Will, save me, save me!

MAX drags MAGGIE towards the area of floor marked out to be the lighthouse and starts 'ascending' the stairs.

WILLIAM This is more than any man can bear! Shall I take this insult without rebuke? Shall I turn the other cheek and let this demon marry the girl I love? No!

William Valiant will never let evil triumph! (*With a tremendous effort WILLIAM breaks free of the WRECKERS who hold him and grabs a scimitar*) Beware, Maximillian Blackheart! You are about to meet your destiny!

The crowd parts, allowing MAX to see WILLIAM approaching. He starts to run up the lighthouse, dragging MAGGIE behind him. WILLIAM is hot on his heels, and they 'ascend' the lighthouse's staircase until they reach the roof.

WILLIAM Prepare to die, Blackheart!

MAX Ha, ha! Such ill-advised bravado! *En guard!* (*He draws a sword*)

WILLIAM *En guard!*

As WILLIAM and MAX begin to duel, everyone else commences singing.

CHORUS

Music - "This is our duty plain towards", Princess Ida

Upon the lighthouse roof they duel,
Our hero and the evil one!
The love of Maggie is the fuel
For bloody conflict now begun!
Oh, William!
Oh, William!
Oh stop this foul perversity!
With trusty blade
Release the maid
And conquer o'er adversity!
Oh, William! Oh, William! Oh, William!

As the song finishes, WILLIAM strikes MAX's sword out of his hand and stands over him, the point of his sword to MAX's breast.

WILLIAM So, Maximillian Blackheart, now *you* are in *my* power! Do you yield your claim on Maggie's hand?

MAX I do. I shall never marry her.

WILLIAM Good. (*Dropping his sword*) I hope that this teaches you a lesson.

MAX (*Getting up*) I think that it's *you* who will learn the lesson. If I am not to marry Maggie McPhee, then no man shall! (*He rushes to MAGGIE and grabs her*) See - I cast her off the rooftop to her death on the rocks below!

MAX 'throws' MAGGIE off the lighthouse. She stands to the side of the lighthouse floor area, waving her arms, screaming and pretending to fall.

WILLIAM You monster! You shall not get away with this!

WILLIAM pushes MAX over the other side of the lighthouse. Over chase music, WILLIAM runs down the lighthouse (anticlockwise) while MAGGIE and MAX continue to fall. Just before WILLIAM reaches MAGGIE both she and MAX jump into the air - MAGGIE to be caught by WILLIAM and MAX to land on the rocks. A general cheer goes up.

MAGGIE Oh William, my hero!

WILLIAM My own Maggie! (*Maggie swoons*)

Unnoticed by WILLIAM and MAGGIE, MAX recovers.

MAX (*Aside*) No! My plans fall through again! This cannot be! I must succeed, for I am the Slave of Destiny! (*Running up to MAGGIE and WILL*) Beware, you

despicable goody-goodies! If I am not to triumph then we must all perish together! (*He produces a bomb. MAGGIE screams*)

HAMISH Look, he's got a bomb!

MOLLY Keep away from him!

MAX Ha, ha, ha! Once I have lit this device you will see how cruel fate really is! William and Maggie, prepare to die!

JESSIE (*Rushing to MAX's feet*) Nae, you fiend, dinna dae it! Dinna kill my ain wee Maggie, the nearest thing I hae to a bairn! You canna be so hairless as tae... (*Pulls his mask off*) It canna be! But now I look mair closely... It is! Maximillian Blackheart - you are my ain lost husband!

MAX (*Recognising JESSIE*) Jessie? Jessie McPhee? My wife? But you were drowned!

JESSIE And I thought you were deid, tae! But you are alive! My ain Norman!

MAX Jessie, my love, my wife! (*They embrace*) But what became of our son? Is he with you?

JESSIE Nae, I'm afraid no'. Amidst the confusion of the sinking ship I grabbed the nearest baby, which unfortunately turned oot tae be a wee lassie. She grew up to be young Maggie here. I'm afraid that oor son is drowned, my dear.

WILLIAM Stop a bit! Did you say that you lost your young son when your ship sank?

JESSIE Aye, that is the jist o' what I was saying.

WILLIAM And where was this ship heading?

MAX To the Isle of Wight.

WILLIAM Neptune's beard, it must be true! Jessie, Maximillian, I lost my parents on a ferry sailing to the Isle of Wight! I believed myself to be an orphan, but now I find I have a family after all! Mummy! Daddy!

MAX & JESSIE Our long-lost son! (*They all embrace as MAGGIE swoons*)

TRIO - JESSIE, WILLIAM *and* MAX

Music - "Here's a how-de-do!", The Mikado

JESSIE Here's a how-de-do!
How can this be true?
Husband who I thought departed
Was reborn the evil-hearted
Leader of our crew!
Here's a how-de-do!

WILLIAM Here's a pretty mess!
Witness my distress -
Wicked monster I was spurning
Is my father, now returning
In a villain's dress!
Here's a pretty mess!

MAX Here's a state of things!
Fortune pulls the strings!
Now my life must change direction
For a wife and son's affection
To my conscience clings!
Here's a state of things!

ALL What a fickle thing is fate,
What tangled tales you spin!
When the people that you hate
Become your kith and kin!

If what I hear is true,
My family is *you*!
Here's a pretty state of things!
Here's a pretty how-de-do!

- MAX** (*Breaking away*) By the Gods, this is terrible. All my life I have done the most foul and evil acts in the belief that I was cursed by fate, and now I find that my family is still alive! How can I atone for all the wrong that I have done?
- MOLLY** (*ALL rush on looking stage R*) Look, look! All this light has attracted a ship to the shore! See, a great Merchantman is about to crash into the reef! What can we do the advert this disaster? (*General distress*)
- MAX** (*Aside*) Another victim of my evil! Another stain on my conscience! What can I do to prevent it? Of course, this device may provide the answer! (*Aloud*) I shall save that vessel by using this powerful bomb as a warning flare! Let no man stand in my way! (*Exit stage R*)
- JESSIE** No, Norman, dinna risk your ain life for the sake of others! (*Rushing after him*)
- WILLIAM** (*Restraining JESSIE*) Leave him. He must fulfil his own destiny.
- HAMISH** (*Looking off*) See, he climbs the rocks to reach the highest crag.
- MOLLY** Behold, he lights the fuse! There is no turning back now!
- SETH** He holds it aloft but does not throw it! He'll be killed!
- There is a tremendous explosion and flash of light offstage.*
- FAITH** Look - the boat must have seen the explosion! It turns away from the rocks!
- MOLLY** He has saved the Merchantman! Hurrah! (*General rejoicing*)
- MAX *staggers back on, his cloak ragged and his face black with soot. A space is cleared for him centre stage where he collapses in JESSIE's arms.*
- MAX** Did... Did I save the boat?
- JESSIE** You did. You are a hero, my ain beloved Norman.
- MAX** That is good. I hope it may provide some small compensation for bad deeds I have committed in the past. (*Coughs*) William, Maggie, come here, my children. (*They approach and kneel. He grasps their hands*) Live well and be happy - your union has my blessing. I still have some considerable wealth in my coffers - take it for yourself, and use it to do good. And Jessie, my dear Jessie, despite our separation, I always loved you. I have done great evils in my past, evils that can never be absolved, but can you somehow find it in your heart to forgive me?
- JESSIE** Oh, Norman, I forgive you, I forgive you!
- MAX** Good. Then I may die a happy man. (*He coughs, splutters, shakes and, after a few false alarms, dies. His body is carried off*)
- HAMISH** So, Molly O'Brian, this is how you spend your evenings. You always told me you were washing your hair!
- MOLLY** Aye, well, would you have preferred we'd told you the truth?
- HAMISH** Of course not, you outnumber us... But it might have sounded good in court. As it is, we have more than enough evidence to send you all to the gallows!
- MOLLY** (*Rushing to HAMISH*) Oh, no, Hamish, you can't do that. (*Signals to the other GIRLS to pair up with the remaining MEN*) You wouldn't want to have Red Rock village emptied of all women, would you?
- HAMISH** Well, you do have a point there...

- MOLLY** You heard Jessie forgive her husband. Can you not over-look our misdemeanours? (*Suggestively*) We could make it worth your while...
- HAMISH** In what sort of way?
- MOLLY** Well, as we'd no longer be wrecking any more, I really can't see any objection to us... Getting married!
- HAMISH** In that case, Molly, of course I forgive you! (*Embraces her*) We all do!
- MEN** We do! (*They all embrace*)
- MOLLY** (*Aside*) I'm not sure this won't be worse than the gallows!
- MAGGIE and WILLIAM come forward.
- WILLIAM** Well, Maggie, you heard the words of my dear departed father. Will you allow the impending vicar to make you my wife?
- MAGGIE** Oh, William, it seems so soon after so much tragedy!
- WILLIAM** Life must go on, my love. Blackheart paid his price and died like a man. Our tears cannot reach him now.
- MAGGIE** You are right as always, my love. Look, the dawn is breaking – and here comes the vicar! (*Enter OSBOURNE ROAD, MAX once again in a dog collar and a moustache*) It's just like the prophecy – it is fate speaking to us again! Come, William, let us marry at once!
- HAMISH** Let us *all* be married!
- ALL** Hurrah!
- MAGGIE** For, after all, what are our wishes compared to *The Force of Destiny!*

FINALE

QUARTET - WILL, MAGGIE, HAMISH *and* MOLLY

Music - "Oh joy, oh rapture unforeseen", H.M.S. Pinafore

Oh joy, oh rapture unforeseen,
For now the sky is all serene;
We won't deny our happy fate,
So welcome love, farewell to hate,
Let celebrations start!

WILLIAM & HAMISH With you, my darling, for my wife
ALL We'll start a new and joyful life!
Let gloomy tales of former times
Be deafened by the marriage chimes -
Let rapture fill each heart!

CHORUS

Music - "Pray observe the magnanimity", The Pirates of Penzance

REVENUEMEN Here's a first rate opportunity
To get married with impunity,
And indulge in the felicity
Of unbounded domesticity.
We shall quickly be parsonified,
Conjugally matrimonified,
By a doctor of divinity,
Who is located in this vicinity.

WRECKERS Here's a first rate opportunity
Of escaping with impunity,
So farewell to the felicity
Of our maiden domesticity.

We shall quickly be parsonified,
Conjugally matrimonified,
By a doctor of divinity,
Who is located in this vicinity.

ENSEMBLE We shall quickly be parsonified, etc.

The couples dance off, leaving OSBOURNE ROAD/MAX alone. He tears off his moustache and addresses the audience.

MAX Ha, ha, ha! Fooled them all - it was me all the time! (*Exit, laughing maniacally*)

CURTAIN

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wrote this show because of two main inspirations.

The first was the result of a bout of reading 19th 'Blood and Thunder' melodramas, and wanting to write one of my own. These were the same sources that Gilbert mined so successfully in 'Pinafore', 'Pirates' and, particularly, 'Ruddigore', but I thought there were a few tropes that he had missed, and I wanted to write an 'ultimate melodrama', with every single cliché in it: a thoroughly decent hero who rescues a helpless heroine, a mysterious old woman with a mysterious accent, children separated at birth, and, in particular, a really good Stage Villain (Despard is one, but repents pretty quickly) who could chew the scenery!

The second source was a sketch that my father wrote and performed when he was a dental student, which was basically the same as the lighthouse duel. He described this to me many times, and the fantastic response it got from the audience, and it lay in my subconscious until I was looking for a dramatic climax for a melodrama... Consequently, doing the lighthouse business correctly is critical. It sounds odd when reading it, but the audience soon gets the idea and they really lap it up – there's nothing like people frantically running around a stage to get people going!

Initially, this was a one-act show for principals and chorus, to provide an alternative to 'Trial by Jury' and 'The Zoo', which Newcastle Gilbert and Sullivan Society frequently performed as a summer show (paired with 'Cox and Box' and, later, my shows 'The Philanderer' and 'Modern Girls'). The opportunity to produce this version didn't arise, so I decided to expand it to two acts. There a few songs and scenes added throughout, but the main additions were the finale of Act I, Max's party at the beginning of Act 2 and the introduction of Max's *alter ego*, Sir Bernard Booth. You can see the two act version on my website. I'm gratified that this extra 'padding' didn't come across as such in performance!

A few notes:

- Jessie's accent is written in 'Victorian Scotch', and is *not* supposed to be realistic (I spent half my childhood in Scotland, so I do know the genuine article!) It sound be said like a bad impersonation, making the most of the dialect words to draw attention to their incongruity!
- The location was inspired by 'Red Rock' cider, which was heavily advertised at the time (strapline delivered by Leslie Nielsen: 'It's not red, and there's no rocks in it!') At one time I considered changing it to 'Marsden Rock', which is a local landmark.
- The style of the performance should be serious, and the characters should not be aware of how ridiculous everything is. This follows Gilbert's aim 'to treat a thoroughly farcical subject in a thoroughly serious manner'. Trust me – it makes the jokes funnier!

I had set myself the restriction of never re-using songs in my shows, which is why the show originally opened with a song written to 'Search throughout the panorama' from 'Princess Ida' (see Appendix). Before the first production, I realised that the girls would really enjoy the chance to sing 'With cat-like tread', so re-wrote the opening song to fit that tune, and it makes a much punchier opening. The first revival used the original version, and it doesn't work as well – much less exciting.

Have fun!

28th May 2022

APPENDIX - Alternative Opening Chorus
OPENING CHORUS - MOLLY *and* CHORUS

Music - "Search throughout the panorama", Princess-Ida

Ladies from the Red Rock Village
Come to plunder and to pillage;
For some vessel on the water
Has met grim and grisly slaughter
Wrecking is our game!

Guided by the lamp of Maggie
They found devastation craggy,
So the ladies from the village
Come to plunder and to pillage
Wrecking is our game!

MOLLY We're wreckers who all profit from disaster,
ALL That we do!
MOLLY We follow orders from an evil master,
ALL That we do!
MOLLY We go to any lengths to get our treasure,
ALL That we do!
MOLLY So if survivors keep us from our pleasure;
ALL They die who'er they be!
If any one should see
Our wicked villainy,
To death they go, and so,

Ladies from the Red Rock Village
Come to plunder and to pillage;
For some vessel on the water
Has met grim and grisly slaughter
Wrecking is our game!