

Elder Eel A Sketch

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PERSONS OF THE SKETCH.

MR. MEEK, the Minister.
MR. DOSE, the Doctor.
MR. BONES, the Butcher.
MR. BUN, the Baker.
MR. CHIPS, the Carpenter.
MR. TONGS, the Tinker.
MR. GRAB, the Grocer.
MR. AWL, the Cobbler.
Women, including JEANNIE MACKAY.
ELDER EEL, the Exciseman,
and
LILITH.

SCENE: The Market-place of the village of Houghmagandie.
(Enter L., Bones, Bun, Chips, Tongs, and Grab. All are dressed in the black shiny clothes conventional on Sundays in the provinces. They are followed by a number of women dressed with equal propriety, who enter the houses that surround the marketplace, and disappear. One of them, Jeannie Mackay, walks apart, and as if ashamed of herself. The scene is one of characteristic Sabbath gloom. The men carry immense black Bibles. They walk very slowly and heavily.)

BONES: A stirring discourse.

CHIPS: Ay! the meenister was juist gran'.

TONGS: Losh! But that was guid about the destruction o' Sennacherib.

BUN: Ay!

GRAB: D'ye ken what he meant?

ALL: Ay! Ay! Ay!

GRAB: D'ye ken what he meant?

BONES: Ay! the meenister's verra clear.

GRAB: Na! Na! but d'ye ken he was drivin' the arrow of the Wurrd to oor ain hairts?

BONES: Ay! But what d'ye mean?

(Enter R. Awl. He is a tall, sprightly man in a decent suit of tweeds, and he is smoking a pipe. All turn from him as if he were a leper.)

AWL: A brow day the day!

GRAB: Is this a day to be ta'king o' days? *(All groan.)*

AWL: This is the Lord's day, and A'm thankin' Him for his guid gift o' tobacco.

GRAB: Ye dirty little Atheist! D'ye no ken this is the Sawbath? Awa wi' ye from the Lord's children!

BONES: An' dinna blaspheme!

GRAB: Beware, ye fausse loon! The judgement o' the Lord is nigh at han'.

CHIPS: The meenister preached o' the destruction o' Sennacherib.

AWL: An' wha's Sennacherib?

CHIPS: Juist sic anither as yoursel'. A fleein', flytin', floutin', sweerin' deevil like yoursel'!

AWL: Ah weel! pur bodies, ye don't know all! Guid job for you. *(He passes over and goes out, L.)*

BUN: The sculduddery wastrel!

BONES: The blaspheming loon!

CHIPS: The feckless child o' Satan!

TONGS: The rantin' roarin' lion!

GRAB: Ah! d'ye ken the noo wha the meenister meant by Sennacherib?

ALL: Ah!

GRAB: D'ye mind Sennacherib was King o' Babylon?

ALL: Ah!

GRAB: D'ye ken — Ah! here comes Elder Eel, the guid man. He'll tell t' 'e. He's seen wi' his ain een!

(Enter L. Elder Eel is very tall and thin and lantern-jawed, more solemn and portentous than the others.)

GRAB: The Blessin' o' the Lord be on ye, Elder. Will ye tell the fowk o' the terrible scandal in Houghmagandie?

EEL: The han' o' the Lord is heavy upon us for oor sins.

ALL: Ay! Ay!

GRAB: We are but pair sinners.

EEL: Ay! we deserve it. But our punishment is greater than we can bear.

ALL: Woe unto us!

EEL: Wi' these een hae I seen it! Alack the day! My brethren, d'ye ken wha's ta'en the lodging ower Awl's shop?

BONES: When?

EEL: Last nicht. The very eve o' the Blessed Sabbath!
(All groan.)

CHIPS: Wha' then?

EEL: The 'Hoor o' Babylon!

ALL: The 'Hoor o' Babylon!

EEL: A wanton, forward wench! A Babylonish harlot!

BONES: The Lord ha' mercy on us!

EEL: An actress body!

ALL: The Lord ha' mercy on us!

CHIPS: Fra' Glasgie, I doot?

EEL: Waur!

ALL: Waur?

EEL: Waur!

BUN: No' fra' Lunnon, Elder? It's main impawsible!

EEL: Waur!

BONES: It canna be! It canna be!

EEL: Waur. Far waur!

TONGS: Hoots! but we maun ha' fallen into terrible sin.

BONES: Fra' whaur? In the Lord's name, mon, tell. We're fair distrachit.

EEL: Fra' Pairiss!

GRAB: Fra' the Hame o' the De'il!

BONES: Fra' Hell! Fra' the Bottomless Pit!

CHIPS: The 'Hoor o' Babylon! The Scarlet Wumman
that rideth on the Beast wi' Seven Heads!

TONGS: Fra' the very hairt o' a' sculduddery an' wick-
edness!

BUN: O Lord! ha' mercy upon us!

EEL: Indeed, I ha' seen her at the window. Aboot nine
o' the clock last nicht, when a' guid fowk suld be abed —
and I mysel' was wa'king hame fra' the meenister's.
And there she was at the window, wi' her lang hair down
on her bare shou'ders.

ALL: A' weel! a' weel! 'T is a wicked wurrd!

EEL: D'ye ken she leanit oot, the Jezebel, wi' her
painted face, an' — an' — **ALL:** Weel!

EEL: The audacious wench cried oot, "Guid-nicht,
Chairlie!" an' blew me a kiss.

ALL: A' weel!

EEL: An' I cried oot i' the wurrd o' the gude buke: "An
Jehu cried unto the eunuchs, Throw her dune!"

BONES: An' was she rebukit?

EEL: Nay! she cried back on me: "There's no eunuchs
here, Chairlie, nor none wanted. Throw it up!"

CHIPS: The brazen, forward, sculduddery wench! The
flytin', sweerin' harlot o' Babylon!

EEL: An' then she picks up her fiddle, that she's lured
thousands o' men to their doom wi', and she plays, "We
are na fou, we're no that fou."

ALL: Shame on her!

GRAB: Hark! wha's that? (*The tuning of a violin is
heard, off.*)

EEL: There she is! There's the 'Hoor o' Babylon! (*Li-
lith, off, plays a lively though classical piece of music.*)

EEL: To your tents, O Israel! To your homes, men o'
Houghmagandie! On to the marrow-bones o' your
knees, and pray that the curse may be removed from
us!

ALL: Amen!

EEL: As for me, I'll wrestle wi' this deevil, and maybe have strength given me to overcome it. Here comes the meenister; I'll hae twa wurds wi' him on the matter!

ALL: Guid guide ye and preserve ye! (*All go off R. in consternation.*)

EEL: An' noo to wrastle wi' the demon! (*Enter L. Meek and Dose. Dose is an educated man, well dressed.*)

EEL: Gude-mornin', meenister! Gude-mornin', doctor!

MEEK: (*very humble and quiet*): Gude-mornin', Elder!

DOSE: Morning, Elder!

EEL: I wad hae twa wurds wi' ye, meenister!

MEEK: Ay! Ay! What is it, noo?

EEL: Meenister, it's verra terrible, what I wad say to ye. The 'Hoor o' Babylon's amang us. (*The doctor laughs.*)

DOSE: At it again, Eel? Ha! Ha! Ha!

EEL: Ay, sir, d'ye ken this is a muckle serious affair! There's a French actress body in the village! In the village o' Houghmagandie!

DOSE: Ha! Ha! Ha! I was just going to tell you about it, Meek. It's a dear little Russian girl, a friend of my wife's. She's had a tremendous season in Paris — they went mad over her — so we suggested her coming up here for a rest. She wouldn't stay with us — poor child, she has to practise eight hours a day! — so we got her the room over Awl's, and she comes to the Surgery for meals. My wife's bringing her up to the Manse to call on Monday.

MEEK: Oh! Oh! There, Elder, you see it's all right.

EEL: (*aghast*): A'richt!!! — a'richt!!! (*Meek and Dose nod and pass on, laughing.*)

EEL: He's fair witched! He's the prey o' Satan! The meenister was laughing on the Sawbath! Oh, Lord! Lord! An' I'm left by my lanes to wrastle wi' the de'il i' petticoats! Witchcraft! Fair witchcraft! An' sorcery! Whaur's ony help but in the A'mighty?

(He takes out a flat whiskey flask and swallows a big dram.)

Whaur, I say, is ony help but in the A'mighty? *(Re-enter Awl, L., still smoking.)*

AWL: Hullo, Elder, an what's the matter noo? Hae ye discovered the sin of Achan again?

EEL: Ah, well! Ah, well! Alack the day. . . . Hae ye come to torrment me, ye dirty little Atheist?

AWL: Three lies in three words, Elder. Ye'll win the Bishop's Kettle this year, for sure! But what is it? Hae the Glasgie fowk got wind o' your little affair wi' Bunges? What d'ye mak' a year oot o' that?

EEL: Ye wicked deevil!

AWL: I dinna care. It's your affair to take the King's siller, and the whisky man's gowd! But I'm wondering hoo it gangs wi' sae muckle reelegion!

EEL: Hoo dare ye?

AWL: Or have they found your ain private still o'er the brae? An exciseman wi' a still o' his ain! ha! ha! ha!

EEL: Ye fausse fiend! Hae ye gi'en me awa'?

AWL: Na! I'm no sae reelegious as ye are. But I doot it's fowk ken o' your dealin's wi' Jeannie Mackay!

EEL: Hoo did ye ken that?

AWL: Why, the lass is in trouble; and you best ken wha's the fault is.

EEL: Ay! And didna I gie her fower shilling an' saxpence to get to Glasgie an' hide her shame? An' didna I rebuke her for the sin o't by the reever bank, so that she might hae found grace to droon hersel'?

AWL: Ay! ye're a mean, sneakin', coordly, murderous dog! That I didna ken, an I thank ye for tellin' me. I'm for ben. *(He spits ostentatiously on the ground and goes off R. But remains visible to audience as one watching the scene. He whistles softly and beckons, off.)*

EEL: Bad! Bad! I maun be fey to hae tellt him that. But I'll see Jeannie, and gie her twa pund sterling — na! one pund fifteen shillin' — na! one pund ten shillin' —

an' get her tae Glasgie — wi' the promise o' mair! Ay yon's the teeket — wi' the promise o' mair! An I'll chase the Babylonish Harlot from Houghmagandie, so that if the wurst comes tae the wurst, fowk winna gie ony creedit tae the lass. An' noo, then, wi' my conscience clearit, I'll confront the lioness i' her den. *(He turns to go off R., and is startled to find Lilith entering R. She wears a thin summer dress very beautifully made, and on her head is a coquettish hat with a suggestion of horns. On seeing him she laughs. His gloom deepens. She goes up and curtseys to him, then puts up her fiddle and plays the "Old Hundredth" or other Scottish hymn tune.)*

EEL: Weel, wad ye aye play holy tunes, I wadna say! *(She plays a religious classical piece.)*

EEL: That savors o' Popery, I doot! But i' the main ye mean weel! *(She plays "Auld Lang Syne," and other Scottish ballads, arranged so as to lead from grave to gay. He is by this time enthralled by the music, and begins to show animation, following the beats with his hands. Even his feet begin to be uneasy.)*

EEL: Weel! weel! wha wad hae thocht it? There's no sic hairm after a', maybe. *(She sees him her prey, and plays a mad Hungarian dance. He is compelled to pick up the step, and she leads him, dancing, three or four times round the stage and off, L. Awl comes out to centre of stage. Lilith, off, changes to "The De'il's awa wi' th' Exciseman.")*

AWL: *(sings):*

The de'il cam' fiddling through our toun,
An's danced awa' wi' th' Exciseman;
And ilka wife cries:

(The windows of every house burst open, and women appear, joining in the song.)

Auld Mahoun!

I wish ye joy o' your prize, mon!

The de'il's awa', the de'il's awa',

The de'il's awa' wi' th' Exciseman.

He's danced awa', he's danced awa'

He's danced awa' wi' th' Exciseman!

(Repeat chorus while the villagers flock back to the stage. The women are now dressed in the gayest peasant costumes. Lilith, off, resumes the dance tune and leads on Eel, who by this time is dancing with absolute abandon. All make way for him and stand back, laughing. The music stops. Eel, suddenly brought to himself, stares and gasps. He would go off, but Awl stops him.)

AWL: Na, Elder, ye've made this toon a hell lang enough! Tae the fountain, lads! *(They catch Eel and duck him half a dozen times. Enter Meek.)*

MEEK: *(throws up his arms):* An' what, i' the Lord's name, is come to Houghmagandie?

AWL: It's a' richt, meenister. But I'm the Law an' the Prophets the day! *(Elder Eel comes dripping from the fountain.)*

AWL: Prisoner at the bar, are ye guilty or not guilty? Guilty! Whaur's Jeannie Mackay? Dinna fear, lass. Will ye wed this mon here?

JEANNIE: Ay, sir *(she is in tears)*. It's his bairn, Gude kens.

AWL: Now, meenister, this is whaur ye're wanted. D'ye consent,

Elder: Ye've been a hairtless old scoundren, but ye can e'en dae the richt thing by the lass noo.

EEL: Ay! I repent sincerely.

AWL: None o' that! Say ye're sorry, like a mon!

EEL: I'm sorry, Jeannie. An' I'll be a gude mon tae ye, lass.

AWL: That's better. Now, meenister, the Blessing.

MEEK: In the name o' God, I declare ye lawful man an' wife.

(He joins their hands and blesses them.)

AWL: And no more private still, Elder, and no more bribes fra distillers!

EEL: Ay! I mean it.

AWL: Guid. Now, lass, run off wi' him, lest he fa' into the snare o' the 'Hoor o' Babylon again; an' this time for his soul's ill! *(All laugh. Eel goes off with Jeannie.)*

AWL: Noo, lads an' lasses a', prayer i' the morning, an' thanksgivin' in th' afternoon. *(Lilith plays.)*

AWL: *(sings):*

We'll mak' oor maut, we'll brew oor drink,
We'll dance an' sing an' rejoice, mon,
An' mony braw thanks tae the mickle black de'il

(Bowing to Lilith)

That's danced awa' wi' th' Exciseman!
There's threesome reels, there's foursome reels,
There's hornpipes an' strathskeys, mon;
But the ae best dance e'er came tae oor land
Was — the de'il's awa' wi' th' Exciseman!

(Chorus as before. All dance merrily, and at last even the minister is carried off by a big, flamboyant girl into the centre of the crowd.)

(CURTAIN.)