

## THE LASSES OF THE HAAF GRUNEY by MARSALI TAYLOR

### CHARACTERS:

LISE, aged 17  
MAIRN, aged 14  
JAMES, their father  
TOMASINA, their aunt  
YOUNG LISE  
YOUNG MAIRN  
ELIZA, their mother  
Extras: 2 Norwegian Men

If you want to use this as an exam script which, length-wise, it is well-suited to, it would be possible, and give sufficient opportunity for each candidate, with the following doubling:

LISE/ YOUNG LISE  
MAIRN/ YOUNG MAIRN  
JAMES / NORWEGIAN MAN [the other one can be left out]  
TOMASINA/ ELIZA

It then becomes a piece for four players, three girls and a boy.

Running time is about 25 minutes.

This is a very old Shetland story, so little detail is available, but it is supposedly a true tale. Cows were kept on the island of Haaf Gruney, a small isle two kilometres from the South-eastern tip of Unst and two sisters used to row across every day to milk them. One day they became disoriented in a sea mist and were swept out to sea. They landed safely in Norway, but were unable to get home or send a message. They married in Norway and it was not until two generations later, when their descendants visited Shetland, that their family there knew they had survived.

The Shetland poet Vagalund wrote a version of this story which has the girls being taken for witches on their arrival in Norway until one makes the sign of the cross.

### EXTRACT 1:

***Smoke machine. Shore with waves whispering on pebbles. A still day.  
Lise and Mairn enter, each carrying two full pails of milk. Lise is visibly in a bad mood. Mairn is placatory.***

LISE

Two hundred yards, that's all.

MAIRN

We can't see the shore.

LISE

Ten minutes to row it. If that's no asking too much of you.

MAIRN

It's too misty.

LISE

It'll clear soon.

MAIRN

It's getting thicker.

LISE

I'm no staying here.

MAIRN

But it's no safe. Dad said...

LISE

Aye, he would say. And what'll he say if we stay here on the isle all morning?

MAIRN

He'll say we were being sensible.

LISE

Aye, that's what he'll say to you. Dad's peerie darling.

MAIRN

He'll say it to both of us.

LISE

Aye, right.

MAIRN

He will!

LISE

Like this morning, then.

***She dumps the pail angrily into the boat as Mairn says:***

MAIRN

Careful, you'll spill it.

Flashback.

***Crossfade to 'flashback' lights on RHS of stage.***

LISE *ignoring Mairn, angrily*

Lise, why are -

JAMES & LISE *together* -

these dishes no done?

***Lise moves over to crofthouse, faces her father defiantly. Mairn freezes.***

JAMES

Do you think I have nothing to do but keep you in idleness?

LISE

I'll do them the minute I get back from the kye.

TOMASINA

They should have been done last night, niece. Where were you, when your chores were waiting at home?

***Lise tilts her chin, firms her lips, not answering. Her attitude is 'why should I answer you?'***

JAMES

Reply to your aunt, Lise.

LISE

I was meeting someone.

TOMASINA

Tam Jamieson frae Easthouse.

LISE

The Kirk women have all the gossip.

JAMES

Is that true?

LISE *defiantly*

Aye.

***A long silence.***

JAMES

You be about your chores. I'll talk to you later.

TOMASINA

Talk's no use. She's as stubborn as her mother.

JAMES

There's no need to bring Eliza into this.

LISE *over James, to Tomasina* My mother wouldn't have treated me the way you do.

TOMASINA

'Spare the rod, spoil the child.'

JAMES

Get on wi your work. [*To Tomasina.*] There's no need to bring Eliza into this.

TOMASINA

She should be whipped.

LISE

I'll do the dishes when I come back.

***She storms out of the croft into the outside mist.***

MAIRN

Aunt Tomasina just thinks it's right to be strict with children.

LISE *bitterly*

'Spare the rod, spoil the child.'

MAIRN

She gives me trouble too.

LISE

When? When was the last time you got into trouble, Miss Goody Two-Shoes?

MAIRN

Well -

LISE

Little Miss-Ask-her-to-teach-at-the-sunday-school. [*She holds the boat's gunwale, prepares to push off.*] Get in then.

MAIRN *slightly smug*

Faith is a gift from God, Aunt says. [*Defiantly.*] You haven't got it.

LISE

I wouldn't want it. You don't really believe those stories either.

MAIRN *shocked*

Lise! They're in the Bible!

LISE

People who lived till they were a hundred and eighty. A man who survived in a whale's stomach for three days. You saw the whale that got washed ashore. How could anyone live in there?

MAIRN

It was a miracle.

LISE *contemptuously*

Aunt's peerie good girl.

MAIRN *timidly*

Maybe if you didn't argue with her so much...

LISE

She has no right to order me around.

MAIRN

It was good of her to come and look after us when Mother died.

LISE

Good! She couldn't wait to move in. Are you getting in this boat or not?

MAIRN *getting in boat*

She didn't want to leave her own house and come to ours. She told me that. She felt it was her duty.

LISE

The poor motherless bairns. [*She gives the boat a shove. Then clambers in, takes up her oar, ignoring Mairn.*] Well, row then.

***Mairn obeys. Freeze.***

## **EXTRACT 2:**

***James is in the doorway looking out. Tomasina is in her chair, knitting.***

JAMES

They should be home by now.

TOMASINA

I'll say this for Lise, she's no stupid. If it's too thick, she'll have stayed on the isle.

JAMES

Mairn has the sense. Lise is just headstrong.

TOMASINA

She winna tak a telling.

JAMES

It's getting thicker.

TOMASINA *to herself*

Times I see her mother looking back at me. [*To James.*] They'll have stayed on the isle.

JAMES

There's no work to be done there, aye.

TOMASINA

Now, James, I will be just to the lass. [*Puts knitting away, rises to the kettle.*] She does her fair share o the work. Usually.

JAMES

What's all this about Tam Jamieson?

TOMASINA

Hairy butter's good enough for seedy bread.

JAMES

I don't want a daughter o mine mixed up wi the likes o him.

TOMASINA

You married a gipsy lass. Why should she no marry a gipsy lad?

JAMES

I'm an Elder o the Kirk.

TOMASINA

Like mother, like daughter. [*To herself.*] A stranger in the family, stealing my brother.

JAMES

I have a reputation to keep.

TOMASINA

If she won't be told, she'll have to go her own way.

JAMES

He'll get her into trouble.

TOMASINA

If that's how she makes her bed, that's how she'll lie upon it.

*Pause.*

JAMES

Nor will I have Lise leading Mairn into trouble.

TOMASINA

Mairn is a good lass. She'll no heed her.

***Pause.***

JAMES

They've been gone too long. I'll just go down the banks and call them.

***He turns and exits through the door. Tomasina picks up her knitting again.***

***Freeze.***

**Flashback.**

***Young Lise and Mairn are up on the stage block, sitting with their dolls.***

YOUNG LISE

It was your fault, Mairn. Yours, yours. Not mine.

YOUNG MAIRN

Aunt Tomasina said it was your fault.

YOUNG LISE

Wasn't.

YOUNG MAIRN

She said you were told not to go to the burn, and you went, and you fell in, and got the cold, and then Mother caught it and died and went to heaven and you'll go to hell if you don't learn to take a telling.

YOUNG LISE

That's all lies. I didn't get a cold.

YOUNG MAIRN

Yes, you did. You sneezed and sneezed, and your nose was all runny.

YOUNG LISE

People don't die of colds. I didn't die.

YOUNG MAIRN

Mother died.

YOUNG LISE

She wasn't well for years. Since *you* were born.

YOUNG MAIRN

I didn't make her not well.

YOUNG LISE

Yes, you did. You did. When you were born she cried and after that she was always tired, and she didn't have time to play with me and take me out in the hills, and she argued with Da. She did. That was your fault. She was so tired that she lay down to sleep and died.

YOUNG MAIRN

I didn't mean to make her tired.

YOUNG LISE

It wasn't my cold at all. It was your fault.

YOUNG MAIRN

I didn't mean to! [*She bursts into tears.*] I didn't!

***She runs off.***

YOUNG LISE *to herself*

Her fault, not me, her fault. [*She follows, slowly.*] Her fault.