

The Long Story



*Marie Campion
and
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ACT I

Time:

First and second scenes: 29th of November in 1781.
Third scene: December of 1781.

Location: The Zong slave ship in the Caribbean Sea.

Characters:

LUKE COLLINGWOOD, the captain of the Zong slave ship, interpreted by Jesús Bach.

JAMES KELSALL, who had been the first mate of the ship until he was suspended from his duty due to a disagreement, interpreted by Maria Campins.

SLAVE WOMAN, one of the slaves in the ship, interpreted by Maria Campins.

ACT II

Time: 1782.

Location: The insurance company office.

Characters:

INSURER, a representative of the insurance company, interpreted by Jesús Bach.

WILLIAM GREGSON, one of the two ship owners, interpreted by Maria Campins.

ACT III

Time: late spring of 1783.

Location: The Guildhall in London.

Characters:

PROSECUTOR, representing the insurance company, interpreted by Maria Campins.

DEFENCE, representing the ship owners, interpreted by Jesús Bach.

ROBERT STUBBS, a witness of the massacre and part of the crew,

WILLIAM MURRAY, first Earl of Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice, voice of Maria Campins.

GRANVILLE SHARP, a slavery abolitionist, voice of Maria Campins.

VOICE OVER, voice of Jesús Bach.



Maria Campins & Jesús Bach

The Zong Story

Cast of Characters

ACT I

LUKE COLLINGWOOD, the captain of the Zong slave ship.

JAMES KELSALL, who had been the first mate of the ship until he was suspended from his duty due to a disagreement.

SLAVE WOMAN, one of the slaves in the ship.

ACT II

INSURER, a representative of the insurance company.

WILLIAM GREGSON, one of the two ship owners.

ACT III

PROSECUTOR, representing the insurance company.

DEFENCE, representing the ship owners.

ROBERT STUBBS, a witness of the massacre and part of the crew.

WILLIAM MURRAY, first Earl of Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice.

GRANVILLE SHARP, a slavery abolitionist.

Time

The first and second scenes in the first act take place on the 29th of November and the third one on December in 1781. The second is set the following year, in 1782. The third act is developed during the late spring of 1783.

Location

The first act occurs at the Zong slave ship, which is in the Caribbean Sea. The second act happens in the insurance company office. The third act takes place at the Guildhall in London.

ACT I

Scene One

At the front of the scene there are decorative elements with the shape of the lateral part of the ship. It can be heard the sound of the waves hitting the wood of the ship. On the deck there are the captain COLLINGWOOD and KELSALL, whose face denotes concern.

KELSALL:

Captain, we have a huge problem.

COLLINGWOOD:

What is it?

KELSALL:

We are running out of water. We just have enough supplies for four more days and many slaves are getting sick. We warned you that 442 slaves were too many for the Zong.

COLLINGWOOD:

Are you suggesting that this is my fault, Mr. Kelsall?

KELSALL:

Of course not, my Captain. The ship could have perfectly brought this number of slaves if we hadn't failed to stop at Tobago to replenish our water supplies.

COLLINGWOOD:

And whose fault is that? I've been ill all this time, I'm still sick and here I am, solving all the problems you fools have created during my absence.

KELSALL:

You're right, my Captain.

COLLINGWOOD:

At least the slaves are insured, aren't they?

KELSALL:

Of course, my Captain, at 30 pounds a head. It does not cover natural death, though.

COLLINGWOOD:

So it does mean that if they die of disease or malnutrition we won't get the money, right?

KELSALL:

That's right, my captain.

COLLINGWOOD:

In that case, I only see one possible solution. *(he stops for a short moment and continues with a calm low voice)* We will have to leave some slaves back.

KELSALL:

What do you mean, my Captain?

COLLINGWOOD:

Well, that's easy. We'll have to throw many of them overboard.

KELSALL:

Oh, do you mean you are going to kill them?

COLLINGWOOD:

Me? Of course not. You will.

KELSALL:

I'm not comfortable with that. Perhaps it's not the right thing to do. I think that we should consult it first with the rest of the crew.

COLLINGWOOD:

All right, do what you want. You'll see that they will agree with me. You stupid bastard.

KELSALL goes out of the scene. The lights go down for a moment. Then the lights turn on and KELSALL comes in again, slowly and looking at the floor.

KELSALL:

I consulted it with the rest of the crew and we have decided that if there is no other option we will have to do that...

COLLINGWOOD:

See? I told you. So go with the rest of the crew and throw into the sea the 55 slaves that you find in the worst state. That should be enough for now.

KELSALL:

At your service my captain!

KELSALL leaves the scene.

COLLINGWOOD:

Hum... I don't really trust this crew. They are capable of doing this task in the worst way I can imagine and I can't allow that. I should go to supervise it and help the others if I don't want them to mess up.

COLLINGWOOD leaves the scene. Lights go down.

Scene Two

At the centre of the scene there is a slave woman sitting on her knees and looking at the floor. She is wearing a brown mask with no facial expression and she has her hands tied at her back with a chain. She also has another chain tying her feet. COLLINGWOOD enters the scene.

COLLINGWOOD:

How is it going? I'm coming to give you a hand. First I would throw the children and the women, for they are more useless and cheaper than men.

SLAVE WOMAN:

Please, don't! Why are you doing this?

COLLINGWOOD:

Well, it is not of your concern, although it might be fair to tell you why you are going to die. We just don't have enough water supplies for everyone, so... we have no other choice.

SLAVE WOMAN:

Yes, you have. If the problem is that there isn't water or food enough, just don't give us any, but please don't throw us into the sea.

COLLINGWOOD:

Oh, I would be very glad to do that, if it weren't for the fact that you are going to die anyway and, if you die of thirst, it will be considered as a natural death and we won't get the money from the insurance. I'm sure you understand my position and, if not, well, it is not like it matters. I shouldn't even be giving you any explanations, you small piece of crap. You are in no position to ask any favours. You can not even beg for your life, because it is not yours. Don't you dare to ever tell me again what my choices are.

SLAVE WOMAN:

But please, I'm sure that you could get much more money if...

The Captain slaps the slave in her face.

COLLINGWOOD:

What did I tell you? You know what? You have just earned the honour of being the first slave to be thrown overboard by the figure of the Captain.

He grabs her hair, forcing her to get up.

SLAVE WOMAN:

No, please, please! Hakuna tafadhali! Hawawezi kutupa sisi ndani ya bahari! Huruma!

The slave woman screams for help, trying to resist and escape from the captain, but he immobilizes her grabbing her from behind. He lifts her and throws her overboard.

COLLINGWOOD:

One less. Who's next?

He exits as if he is going to grab more slaves. The lights go down.

Scene Three

COLLINGWOOD is on the right-hand side of the scene. Suddenly, KELSALL enters running and smiling. He seems to be excited.

KELSALL:

Captain, captain! Have you seen that? It has rained a lot and we have refilled our water reserves!

COLLINGWOOD:

Really? It didn't seem that it had rained so much. Well, that's good, we will be able to finish the trip without having to ration our supplies.

KELSALL:

Yes, there is enough water for all the crew and all the slaves now, so we don't need to throw any more slaves into the sea.

COLLINGWOOD:

Well... I think we will have to keep throwing those of them who are ill or in the worst conditions. They will probably die anyway and, if that happens, we won't get any money neither from selling them nor from the insurance.

KELSALL:

But... why my captain? That's not necessary. We can reach the coast without having any more losses. There are enough supplies for everyone.

COLLINGWOOD:

Come on, Kelsall! You are questioning all my decisions! If I say that we are going to throw more slaves we are going to do that. Don't you see that it is economically better for us? You are useless, I thought you would learn the lesson after I suspended you, Mr. Kelsall.

KELSALL:

But... my captain... I just thought that...

COLLINGWOOD:

Shut up, Mr. Kelsall, you have to think less and work more. I want you now working immediately with the rest of the crew. There are many slaves left to throw into the water and we are few for this task. Ah, by the way, I withdraw you the right of talking. Is it all clear, Mr. Kelsall?

KELSALL nods.

COLLINGWOOD:

Perfect. So come with me and help your mates to do this task. I will inform them now. And I don't want any more problems from you, Mr. Kelsall, or you'll be the next to taste the salt of this great sea.

KELSALL looks down and lefts the scene behind COLLINGWOOD. The lights go down.

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KELSALL looks down and lefts the scene behind COLLINGWOOD. The lights go down.

ACT II

Scene One

There is a desk with papers on it in the middle of the scenario. Behind it, there is the insurer, who is sitting on a chair writing something. All of a sudden, the ship owner GREGSON comes in.

GREGSON:

Good morning.

INSURER:

Good morning. What can I do for you?

GREGSON:

Well, I'm coming to get the money from my insurance.

INSURER:

Do you have the papers, Mr...?

GREGSON:

Gregson, William Gregson. Yes... *(he looks for the papers in his pockets)* Here you have. *(he hands them over to the insurer)* You'll see. I ensured the cargo of my ship, in case something happen to it. So... the cargo got lost and I am here to collect the payment for it.

The insurer looks at the papers and searches for in a drawer of his desk. He takes out some papers, too. Then he skims them.

INSURER:

Well, let's see. By "the cargo" you mean... 442 slaves?

GREGSON:

Yes, although only 133 got lost. It's 30 pounds per head... That makes 3390£, if I'm right.

INSURER:

Well, the calculation is correct, Mr. Gregson. However, I don't really understand how 133 slaves "got lost".

GREGSON:

Hum... How can I explain this? During the trip, some complications arose. The crew lost their way and they couldn't arrive at Tobago to replenish their water supplies. As a consequence, they ran out of water and to be able to survive they found themselves forced to throw some slaves overboard. It was a matter of survival, you understand.

INSURER:

I am not sure the insurance covers this type of... setbacks. If they had died of thirst it would have been a natural death, which was not covered by this insurance.

GREGSON:

But it was not a natural death.

INSURER:

No, but I don't think the insurance covers the cargo if it was... damaged on purpose.

GREGSON:

It was not done on purpose, it was necessary, a matter of life or death.

INSURER:

I'm sorry, Mr. Gregson, but we cannot pay for this. It just doesn't make any sense.

GREGSON:

So, this is how you want things to go? You insurers just seek any excuse that exempts you from paying what you owe. Don't you want to pay? Fine. We'll meet at the Court. I'm going to present a suit against you.

GREGSON starts walking away.

INSURER:

(standing up) Mr. Gregson, that is just unneces...

The insurer tries to talk to him, but GREGSON keeps walking until he is out of the scene. The insurer snorts, seeming worried.

INSURER:

Oh, my God. This is just what we needed, a trial.

Lights go down.

ACT III

Scene One

There is a table in front of the scenario. Behind it there is the judge MANSFIELD sitting on a chair. At the back of the scene there are two more tables, one on the right side, where the PROSECUTOR, representing the insurance company, and Mr. SHARP are sitting, and another on the left side, where there are Mr. STUBBS and the DEFENCE, who is representing the ship owners.

VOICE OVER:

On the 6th of March in 1783, this case was taken to court. In the first trial, as the Captain Collingwood had died before the ship returned to Britain, the only witness was Robert Stubbs, a member of the crew. At the end, the jury found in favour of the ship owners. However, new evidence was found, which is why the first Earl of Mansfield ordered a second trial. And here it comes.

MURRAY:

Good morning. *(he looks for some papers on his desk)* Today we are here in the Guildhall to judge the case of the default of the insurance for the lost slaves of the Zong ship because of the new evidence that has been found, which will be taken into account in this review. The prosecution counsel may proceed.

PROSECUTOR:

(standing up) Thank you, Your Honour. With your permission I will present you the new evidence that we have. The reason given in the last trial to have thrown the slaves into the sea was that the water supplies were not enough. Am I right? But now we have an affidavit from James Kelsall where he says that, on the 4th of December, after having it rained for several days, many slaves were thrown overboard. Actually, when the ship arrived at Jamaica on the 22nd of December, there were nothing less than 422 imperial gallons full of... guess what? Water. Enough water for all the remaining slaves and the members of the crew. Enough water for all the days left. So it wouldn't be fair that we have to pay the money for the insurance because it was negligence. *(he sits)*

DEFENCE:

(standing up) I request permission to talk, Your Honour.

MURRAY:

Permission granted.

DEFENCE:

Thank you. If the captain ordered the crew to throw more slaves it sure was for a good reason. Probably they were ill or even already dead. Even some slaves threw themselves into the water. If they did so, it means that they were in such a bad condition that they preferred to kill themselves instead of suffering a slow and horrible death. The defendant and the captain did them a favour. Moreover, in the other trial the judge found in favour of the ship owners because there was no reason why they couldn't get the money of the insurance according to the clauses of the contract, and this new evidence does not prove anything important to change the decision of the jury. *(he sits down)*

PROSECUTOR:

(standing up) Your Honour, I request permission to talk.

MURRAY:

It is granted.

PROSECUTOR:

I'm sorry to say that this evidence is perfectly valid and it proves that it was not necessary to throw so many slaves. For this reason I would like to ask a few questions to Mr. Stubbs, who witnessed what happened in the ship.

MURRAY:

I accept your petition. Mr. Robert Stubbs, now you will answer the questions that he is going to ask you. All right?

STUBBS:

Yes, Your Honour.

MURRAY:

Perfect. Remember that you're under oath. Go on.

PROSECUTOR:

Thank you, Your Honour. (*looking at Mr. Stubbs*) All right Mr. Stubbs, I have some questions to ask you. First of all, were you at the Zong ship on the trip to Jamaica in 1781?

STUBBS:

Yes, I was.

PROSECUTOR:

Right. So you were there. And... did you help the rest of the crew to get rid of some slaves?

STUBBS:

Yes sir, it was necessary for us, we had run out of water.

PROSECUTOR:

You are right, Mr. Stubbs, but in Kelsall's affidavit we can read perfectly that, after throwing many slaves, it rained for many days and water supplies were refilled. However, the crew kept throwing slaves, when there was water more than enough for everyone. How can you explain that?

DEFENCE:

Your Honour, I must protest. This question is improper.

MURRAY:

Protest denied. Answer, Mr. Stubbs.

STUBBS:

Eh... Well... I don't really know the reason. It was the captain's decision, I was just following orders. On the other hand, I must say that the slaves were very ill. They would have probably died anyway.

PROSECUTOR:

Probably, but you don't know that for sure, do you?

STUBBS:

Well, no one could ever know what would have happened for sure, whether the slaves would have survived or not...

SHARP:

(standing up) Come on, Your Honour! They are guilty! They are murderers! They just wanted the money, so they killed most of the slaves on purpose to get it! Slaves are people too, they are human beings! We should claim respect for them! These arrogant assassin ship owners should be condemned to prison!

MURRAY:

Order, order! If someone talks again without the Court's permission he'll have to leave the room! Mr. Stubbs, please, you can continue.

(Mr. Sharp sits down)

STUBBS:

Well, as I was saying, I cannot assure that they would have survived, but... I don't know, this is what we thought. We did what we thought it was best for the slaves and everyone.

PROSECUTOR:

You did what you thought it was best for the slaves or for your pockets?

DEFENCE:

Your Honour, this question is insulting and the witness shouldn't answer that.

MURRAY:

Accepted.

PROSECUTOR:

All right, I don't have any more questions, Your Honour. *(with a voice that denotes accusation)* I think that it is very clear what truly happened. *(he sits down)*

MURRAY:

Fine. I state that the new proofs and the declaration of the witness show that the insurance company has no obligation to pay any money to the ship owners, since it is not responsible for the errors committed by the Captain and the rest of the crew. However, I cannot consider this as a case of murder because we are talking about the cargo, so the case is the same as if horses had been thrown overboard, because slaves are not people. Therefore, the Court sentences that it is the crew's problem if they lost the cargo on purpose. The insurance payment shall not be paid.

SHARP:

(standing up) But the ship owners and the members of the crew are responsible for this massacre! They should be prosecuted! They should be punished and imprisoned!

MURRAY:

I suggest you to be careful, or the one who will end up in prison for contempt is you, Mr. Sharp. This is what the Court has decided and it shall not be changed. I declare the session adjourned.

(sharp sits down)

VOICE OVER:

Despite all the attempts of Granville Sharp to consider this case as a murder case and to condemn the people responsible for the Zong Massacre, he didn't success and no one was prosecuted. However, he continued fighting for the abolition of slavery and this story helped for the cause. Thanks to Sharp's efforts, the Zong massacre became an important topic in abolitionist literature, where the names of the ship and the captain were often omitted, to create the feeling that this could have happened in any ship in the Middle Passage. The Zong massacre offered a powerful illustration of the horrors of the slave trade that aroused the development of the abolitionist movement in Britain, which became wider and acquired more influence in the late 1780's.

THE END