

**COME RACK! COME ROPE!**

By Dale Ahlquist and Adrian Ahlquist  
Based on the Novel by Robert Hugh Benson

## Cast of Characters

10 Females; 15 Males

<u>ROBIN:</u>	Robin Audrey, a man who becomes a priest.
<u>MARJORIE:</u>	Marjorie Manners, a woman in love with Robin.
<u>MR. AUDREY:</u>	Robin's father.
<u>MRS. MANNERS:</u>	Marjorie's mother.
<u>JANET:</u>	Servant to Marjorie.
<u>ANTHONY:</u>	Anthony Babington.
<u>THOMAS:</u>	Thomas Fitzherbert.
<u>LUDLAM:</u>	A priest.
<u>MRS. FITZHERBERT:</u>	Mrs. Elizabeth Fitzherbert, Thomas' wife.
<u>DICK:</u>	Dick Sampson, a servant.
<u>JAILER:</u>	A jailer.
<u>TOPCLIFFE:</u>	A priest hunter.
<u>CAMPION:</u>	St. Edmund Campion.
<u>ALICE:</u>	Alice Babington, Anthony's sister.
<u>ELIZABETH:</u>	Queen Elizabeth.
<u>BURLEIGH:</u>	William Cecil, Lord Burleigh.
<u>LEICESTER:</u>	Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.
<u>DR. BOURGOIGN:</u>	An old physician.
<u>MRS. BOURGOIGN:</u>	Dr. Bourgoign's wife.
<u>SIR AMYAS:</u>	The jailer of Mary, Queen of Scots.
<u>MARY:</u>	Mary, Queen of Scots.

LEONIE: Servant to Mary.

OWEN: Nicolas Owen, a carpenter.

MRS. ROBERTS: An innkeeper.

JACK: An officer.

GUARDS

SOLDIERS

CROWD

## ACT I

- Scene 1 – Manners Estate, Derbyshire, England, The Year 1579
- Scene 2 – Merton Farm, Near the Audrey Estate, Later That Day
- Scene 3 – Audrey Estate, That Evening
- Scene 4 – Manners Estate, Three Days Later
- Scene 5 – Audrey Estate, A Few Weeks Later
- Scene 6 – Manners Estate, The Next Day
- Scene 7 – An Inn in London, Two Years Later
- Scene 8 – The Streets of London, The Next Day
- Scene 9 – Manners Estate, A Few Weeks Later
- Scene 10 – Jail in Derby/Manners Estate, A Few Days Later
- Scene 11 – Mrs. Manners' Bedchamber, Later That Evening

## ACT II

- Scene 1 – Manners Estate, Five Years Later
- Scene 2 – An Inn In London, A Few Days Later
- Scene 3 – Manners Estate, Three Months Later
- Scene 4 – Village Near Chartley Hall, Two Weeks Later
- Scene 5 – Chartley Hall, Anteroom, The Next Day
- Scene 6 – Chartley Hall, Chamber Of Mary Queen Of Scots, A Few Minutes Later
- Scene 7 – London, The Palace, A Few Days Later
- Scene 8 – Manners Estate, Several Weeks Later
- Scene 9 – The Tower Of London, A Few Days Later
- Scene 10 – Tyburn, Three Days Later

### Approximate Length

120 Minutes

### Time

The Elizabethan Era

### Place

England

Scene 7

Setting: An inn in London, two years later.

At Rise: Enter ALICE BABINGTON and MARJORIE, weary from travel.

ALICE

It is a quiet inn.

MARJORIE

(With exhaustion)

It is heaven!

(Enter ANTHONY)

ANTHONY

Welcome to London, ladies!

ALICE

Anthony!

(They embrace)

ANTHONY

How was the journey, dear sister?

ALICE

Do not ask Marjorie that question!

MARJORIE

We are very happy to be here, Mr. Babington.

ANTHONY

And very tired, I see!

(Enter MRS. ROBERTS, the innkeeper)

Ah! Mrs. Roberts, my good woman. These are the ladies.

MRS. ROBERTS

(Bowing respectfully)

Your rooms are ready. And supper will be served immediately.

(Exit MRS. ROBERTS)

MARJORIE

An angel!

ANTHONY

I hope you still have some strength left in you after your travels. We have another very special guest joining us.

MARJORIE

Who?

ANTHONY

I will introduce him when he arrives, which will be any minute.

(Enter EDMUND CAMPION, a larger than life presence, dressed in a dark gentleman's suit, carrying his feathered hat in his hand, a sword at his side)

I was wrong! He is already here!

CAMPION

(Boisterously)

I am come to the right room?

ANTHONY

Indeed!

(Introducing)

My sister, Alice. And my faithful friend, Marjorie Manners. Ladies, Father Edmund Campion!

(The ladies rush to him and kneel before him)

ALICE and MARJORIE

Father Campion!

(He blesses them and they rise)

CAMPION

I am honored to meet you, ladies!

MARJORIE

The honor is ours, Father!

CAMPION

You have pleasant rooms here, and music to cheer you, too. I understand that you are often here, Mr. Babington.

ANTHONY

It is convenient and very secure. Mrs. Roberts is a prudent landlady.

CAMPION

So I am told! Excellent!

ANTHONY

She knows her own business, which is what few landlords do, in these degenerate days; and she knows nothing at all of her guests. In *that* she is even more of an exception.

CAMPION

(His eyes twinkling delightfully at the ladies)

And so God blesses her in those who use her house.

ALICE

How long are you in London, Father?

CAMPION

Only a few days. Have you been to London before, madam?

ALICE

I have, but it is Marjorie's first time.

CAMPION

(To MARJORIE)

Wonderful! Tomorrow, if you please, I will be your guide. It is the high duty that lies on all country ladies to make themselves acquainted with the sights of the town. Her Grace, of course, must be seen; that is the greatest sight of all.

MARJORIE

Her Grace Elizabeth?!

CAMPION

Of course! We must make an opportunity for that; and there will surely be no difficulty, since Her Grace likes nothing better than to be looked at. And we must go up the river from the Tower to Westminster; not from Westminster to the Tower, since that is the way that traitors come, and no good Catholic can, even in appearance, be a traitor!

ALICE

But Father! How do you dare walk about openly?

CAMPION

(Laughing)

There is no better way to stay hidden than to flaunt as boldly as possible in the open ways. If I lie in my room, with a bolt drawn, I would soon have some busy fellow knocking on the door to know what I did there. But if I could but dine with Her Grace, or take an hour with Mr. Topcliffe, I should be secure forever!

MARJORIE

Topcliffe?

ANTHONY

You do not know who Topcliffe is, Marjorie?

CAMPION

Mr. Topcliffe, madam? Well, let us say he is a dear friend of the Lieutenant of the Tower, and has, I think, lodgings there just now. And he is even a friend of Catholics, too — to such, at least, as desire a heavenly crown.

ANTHONY

He is an informer and a tormentor!

(Spits)

A devil possessed by worse devils!

CAMPION

Well, sir, let us say that he is very loyal to the letter of the law; and that he presides over our Protestant bed of Procrustes.

MARJORIE

The...bed...of...

CAMPION

The bed of Procrustes, madam, was a bed to which all who lay upon it had to be conformed. Those that were too long were made short; and those that were too short were made long. It is a pleasant classical name for the rack.

(MARJORIE gasps)

ANTHONY

It is Topcliffe's specialty.

CAMPION

We shall have a clear day tomorrow, I think...

ANTHONY

And we expect more friends to join us. From Rheims, sir.

CAMPION

From Rheims?

ANTHONY

(Nodding)

Several will be arriving. Not all are priests. One is a friend of our own from Derbyshire, who has been studying for two years in Rheims, and will be made priest in five years, God willing.

MARJORIE

Robin?



ANTHONY

Yes, Marjorie. Robin.

CAMPION

I had not heard they were to come so soon. And what a company of them!

(MRS. ROBERTS enters with a tray of goblets. They each take one and lift it.)

To London town!

ALL

To London town!

BLACKOUT

Scene 8

Setting: The Streets of London.

At Rise: Street sounds, carriages, horses, dogs, people. CAMPION escorts MARJORIE, ALICE, and ANTHONY.

MARJORIE

People do not actually drink the water from the Thames, do they?

CAMPION

(Laughing)

I hope not!

MARJORIE

London is such an amazingly dirty place!

CAMPION

(Beaming)

It has all the makings of a great town, which it once was, and so may be again. Good things *should* come from this place.

MARJORIE

I have never seen so many people!

CAMPION

There it is! The Tower of London.

MARJORIE

It does not look like a tower at all.

CAMPION

No, not at all. I am not sure why they call it a tower. In fact, I have no idea. There must be a story there. We shall see, at least, the outside of the Paradise where so many holy ones have lived and died. There are three or four of them here now; but the most of them are in the Fleet or the Marshalsea.

MARJORIE

I do not understand.

CAMPION

I mean Catholic prisoners, Mistress. There are several of them in ward here, but we had better speak no names.

(Pointing)

And there is Tower Hill, Mistress; where My Lord Cardinal Fisher died, and Thomas More.

(MARJORIE crosses herself)

You must not look so grave. You must gape more. You are a country-cousin, madam.

MARJORIE

(Smiling in spite of herself)

Tell me everything.

CAMPION

Here is the gateway whence they come out to glory...And there on the right...That is the place of execution for those who die within the Tower — those usually of royal blood. My Lady Salisbury died there, and my Lady Jane Grey, and others. That is the so-called “Traitors’ Gate,” through which passed those convicted of treason at Westminster, or, at least, those who were under grave suspicion.

(With a twinkle)

Her Grace herself once came that way! Now she sends other folks in her stead.

MARJORIE

And what is that building?

CAMPION

That is the White Tower. It is there that the high council sits on affairs of importance.

ANTHONY

(Harshly)

And it is there—

CAMPION

(Turning on him, suddenly grave, as if in reproof)

Yes. It is there that the passion of the martyrs begins.

MARJORIE

You mean—

CAMPION

Well, it is there that the Council sits to examine prisoners both before and after the Question. They are taken downstairs to the Question, and brought back again after it. It was there that—

(Stops, notices someone standing far off to the side)

Who is this? Wait here, if you please.

(He leaves the group and goes and begins a conversation with the stranger, making gestures, as if asking for directions)

MARJORIE

Who is it, Mr. Babington?

ANTHONY

(Staring acidly)

It is Topcliffe.

(Exit TOPCLIFFE. CAMPION returns to them.)

CAMPION

I assume you told the ladies who that was?

ANTHONY

Yes.

ALICE

How could you speak with him so openly?

CAMPION

I suppose I am one of those who better like their danger in front than behind. So I looked him in the eyes, and asked him whether some ladies from the country might be permitted to see the White Tower, and to whom we had best apply. He told me that was not his affair, and looked me up and down as he said it. And then he went his way to the White Tower, where I doubt not he had business.

ALICE

He said no more?

CAMPION

He said he would be leaving London for a while. I wonder where he is going. Someone is going to be paid an unfortunate visit. I wish I could have kept him talking. But I shall know him again better next time, and he me.

(Pauses, reflects a moment, and then brightly to MARJORIE)

You have come on a fortunate day, Mistress! First Topcliffe, and now Her Grace; if we make haste we may see her pass by.

MARJORIE

Really?! Her Grace?

CAMPION

Did I not promise you Her Grace today? She will be going to dinner in Whitehall, after having taken the air by the river. They will be passing by shortly. But she will not be in her supreme state; I am sorry for that. Ideally, you would want to see her in her carriage, with her full entourage, with the arches and the speeches and the declamations, and the heathen gods and goddesses that reign round our Eliza. This will be a tame affair, but at least this way, we will get a closer look.

(Fanfare, a crowd gathers)

They are coming now!

(Led by GUARDS, QUEEN ELIZABETH, accompanied by WILLIAM CECIL, LORD BURLEIGH and ROBERT DUDLEY, EARL of

LEICESTER, processes formally by. ELIZABETH maintains the air of one being stared at, which is what everyone is doing.)

CAMPION

(Lifting his cap with grave seriousness)

God save Her Grace!

(The others are startled by this unexpected and strange act from the priest. ELIZABETH passes on.)

ANTHONY

So that is our Eliza. Someday soon I intend to have an even closer look.

ALICE

What do you mean?

(The crowd disperses. ANTHONY sees a group of men among them.)

ANTHONY

These are our men!

(The two groups hasten toward each other. MARJORIE stays back. From the other group emerges, unseen till now, ROBIN. He stands alone, while the rest of them move to one side in animated conversation. ROBIN and MARJORIE stand still, looking at each other for a moment.)

MARJORIE

(With an admirable composure)

You look very well.

ROBIN

(Eyes twinkling)

I am as weary as a man can be. We have ridden since before dawn. I have heard much about you and your good works.

MARJORIE

I simply receive messages and pass them on.

ROBIN

But you have also entertained perhaps a dozen priests since the summer. Perhaps you will entertain me, too, one day.

MARJORIE

(Carefully)

Mr. Audrey, I wish you to pray for me. I do not know what to do.

(He is silent)

At present, my duty is clear. I must be at home, for my mother's sake, if for nothing else. And, as I told you, I think I shall be able to do something for priests. But if my mother died—

ROBIN

Yes?

MARJORIE

Well, I think of you as a priest already, and I can speak to you freely... Well, I am not sure whether I, too, shall not go overseas, to serve God better.

ROBIN

You mean join a religious order?

MARJORIE

Yes. A dozen or more are gone from Derbyshire. Some are gone to Bruges; some to Rome; two or three more to Spain. We women cannot do what priests can, but, at least, we can serve God with our prayers.

ROBIN

Well, however you look at me, I am not a priest... You had best speak to one — Father Campion or another.

MARJORIE

But—

ROBIN

(With an air of finality)

And I will pray for you.

(ALICE crosses back to join ROBIN and MARJORIE. The men's conversation grows even more animated.)

CAMPION

(Shaking his head sharply)

I am not of that view at all, I think...

(The conversation returns to an unintelligible murmur)

ALICE

As interesting as their conversation is, I felt it was not my place to be a participant.

MARJORIE

What are they talking about?

ALICE

About what it will take to restore the faith to England.

(ANTHONY rejoins MARJORIE)

CAMPION

(Waving to them and calling as he walks off with the others)

God be with you!

ALICE

What a thrill to meet Father Campion.

ANTHONY

(Somewhat upset about something)

The Jesuit is too simple, I think—

ALICE

(Smiling at him placidly)

You are too hot, Anthony.

ANTHONY

(Turning sharply towards her)

All the praying in the world has not saved us so far. It seems to me—

ALICE

Perhaps our Lord would not have us saved as you mean it.

BLACKOUT