

Detailed summary of the play *The Rising of the Moon* by Lady Gregory

Summary :

The play begins with a sergeant and two policemen pasting a notice or a placard with physical details of the escaped prisoner. The sergeant suggests that they put up the notice on the barrel. There is a flight of steps that lead to the barrel. This place must be watched because there is every chance that the friends of the escape might bring a boat there to help him get away to some safe place. The sergeant reads the placard and feels sorry that he had not seen before he escaped from jail. He knows that the wanted man is no ordinary criminal but an important political figure. He is the person who makes all the plans for the entire Irish nationalist organization. The sergeant believes that he could not have escaped without the support of some of the jailors. Policeman B says that the hundred pounds reward is not enough but he is sure that any policeman who captures him will get promotion. The sergeant then says that he will mind the place himself because he is sure that he will be able to catch the wanted man himself. However he regrets the fact there is no one to help him. He, being a family man requires the money. Policeman B says that if they capture him, the people will abuse them and their own relations will not be happy. The officers know how popular the escapee is with the Irish people. But the sergeant says that they were only doing their duty. The whole country depends upon the policemen to keep law and order. If the officers do not carry out their duties, those who are down will be up and vice versa. He sends the two policemen to put up the placards in other places and asks them to come back to the harbour because he has only the moon as his companion. Policeman B says that it is pity that the government has not brought more policemen into the town. They wish the sergeant good luck and they go away.

As the sergeant thinks of the reward a ragged man comes up. The sergeant does not know who this ragged man is. He introduces himself as an Irish ballad singer from the town of Ennis. But he was none other than the Irish nationalist who escaped from jail. He says he has come to the harbour to sell some ballads to the sailors. He has gone to the assizes to sell ballads and is now at the harbour, having come there by the same train as the judges. The man then goes towards the flight of steps and is prevented by the sergeant. The man however promises to sit on the steps till some sailor buys a ballad. He knows that they will be going back to the ship late. He has often seen them in the neighbouring town of Cork, carried down to the harbour in a hand-cart. He then gives the sergeant a few ballads. When the officer orders him back, the man starts singing a ballad, about a rich farmer's daughter who fell in love with a Scottish soldier. The sergeant is not pleased and orders him away. The man looks at the placard and tells the sergeant

that he knows the wanted man. The sergeant now wants him to tell him all about the escapee.

The ragged man then goes on to tell him that he saw the wanted man in county clare. He warns the sergeant that he is a dangerous man who knows how to use every weapon and his muscles are hard. With a stone, he once killed a sergeant from the town of Bally Vaughan. The sergeant says he has not heard of such an incident. The man explains that the newspapers had not reported it. In the town of Limerick, there was once an attack on the police barracks on a moonlit night. The man tells the sergeant that the nationalist kidnapped a policeman from the barracks and nothing has been heard of him ever since. The sergeant says that it was terrible. The man continues his account of the adventurous exploits of the nationalist. It is difficult for the policeman to capture him because he is such a guerrilla. He will be upon the sergeant before he knew where he was. The sergeant says that a whole troop of police ought to be put there. The man offers to help the sergeant by sitting on the barrel and keeping an eye on that side of the harbour. The sergeant accepts his offer. The man does not want to share the reward.

The two sit on the barrel and the conversation continues as they keep an eye on the water. The man asks for a match to light his pipe and the sergeant obliges him and lights his own pipe. The sergeant says it is a hard thing to be a policeman. His is a thankless and dangerous job; Policemen have to face the criticism of the people and have no choice but to obey their orders. People do not know how married policemen feel when they are sent on dangerous mission. The man then sings a famous Irish folklore. The sergeant asks him to stop singing the song because it is unsuitable to the times. The man says that he wanted to sing it to keep up his spirit. His heart sinks when he thinks of the escapee creeping up to get them. The man pretends that something has hit him and he rubs his heart. The sergeant tells him that he will get his reward in heaven and the man replies that life is precious. Then he resumes the singing about the wrongs that the foreigners have done to mother Ireland. The sergeant tells him that he has missed a line about Mother Ireland's blood stained gown. The man is happy that he knows that patriotic ballad. He reminds the sergeant that as a young man, he must have sung that ballad with his friends. He must have sung other ballads too, like Shan Bhean Bhocht and Grean on the Cape. The nationalist also must have sung those ballads when he was young. The man appeals to the sergeant's patriotism. He tells him that the wanted man might have been one of his friends. The sergeant agrees. The man says that in his youth, if his friends told him a plan to free Ireland from foreign hands then he might have joined them because he too liked his motherland to be free. The sergeant agrees that in his youth he had the nationalist spirit. The man says that it is a strange world because a mother cannot say what her child will grow up to be or who will be who in the end. The sergeant agrees with the man's argument. If he had not become a policeman for the

sake of his family, who knows what he would have become. He might have become a nationalist and might have escaped the jail and might have been sitting like this on the barrel and the wanted man might have become a sergeant and might have hunted him. He might have broken the law and the wanted man might be keeping it. He might have tried to kill him with a pistol or a stone.

The two men hear the sound of boat in the water. The man tells a lie that he hears nothing. He adds that when the sergeant was young, he was with the people and not with the law. This remark hurts the sergeant who replies that he is proud of being an officer. The man says that he should have been a nationalist and then he would have been on the side of Ireland. The sergeant is and tells the man not to talk like that. He has his duties to perform. As he hears the sound of a boat approaching, the man begins to sing a patriotic ballad. The song was a signal to the boatman to come. The sergeant threatens the man with arrest if he does not stop singing. A whistle from below answers the song of the wanted man, repeating the tune. The sergeant tries to stop the man and asks him who he is. He realises at once that he is the wanted man. As the man takes off his hat and wig, the sergeant seizes them. He is sorry that he has been deceived well. The man declares that he will arrest him. As the man tries to take out a pistol from his pocket, the voice of the two policemen is heard. Then he requests the sergeant not to betray him.

As the two colleagues come near he hides the wig and hat behind him. He says he had seen no one and does not require their company. He wants the place to be quiet. When policeman B offers to leave a lantern with him, he does not accept it. They tell him that he may need it as the night is dark and cloudy. Besides they tell him a lantern is a comfort. It provides not only light but warmth too. It is like the fire at home. The sergeant orders them to go at once. As they go, the man comes out from behind the barrel. He tells the sergeant that he wants his hat and wig back before he goes away. As the man goes towards the steps, he expresses his gratitude to him. He tells him that he may be able to do as much for him When Ireland becomes free, when the small will rise and the big will fall down. At the rising of the Moon they will change places. The Rising of the Moon is a symbol of Irish independence. As the man disappears the sergeant reads the placard and then turning to the audience, wonders whether he is a fool to give up the reward.