

The Jester

BY LADY GREGORY
A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

FOR RICHARD

January, 1919

A.G.

PERSONS

The Five Princes.

The Five Wrenboys.

The Guardian of the Princes and Governor of the Island.

The Servant.

The Two Dowager Messengers.

The Ogre.

The Jester.

Two Soldiers.

The Scene is laid in The Island of Hy Brasil, that appears every seven years.

Time: Out of mind.

ACT I

ACT I

Scene: A winter garden, with pots of flowering trees or fruit-trees. There are books about and some benches with cushions on them and many cushions on the ground. The young PRINCES are sitting or lying at their ease. One is playing "Home, Sweet Home" on a harp. The SERVANT--an old man--is standing in the background.

1st Prince: Here, Gillie, will you please take off my shoe and see what there is in it that is pressing on my heel.

Servant: *(Taking it off and examining it.)* I see nothing.

1st Prince: Oh, yes, there is something; I have felt it all the morning. I have been thinking this long time of taking the shoe off, but I waited for you.

Servant: All I can find is a grain of poppy seed.

1st Prince: That is it of course--it was enough to hurt my skin.

2nd Prince: Gillie, there is a mayfly tickling my cheek. Will you please brush it away.

Servant: I will and welcome. *(Fans it off.)*

3rd Prince: Just give me, please, that book that is near my elbow. I cannot reach to it without taking my hand off my cheek.

Servant: I wouldn't wish you to do that. *(Gives him book.)*

4th Prince: Gillie, I think, I am nearly sure, there is a feather in this cushion that has the quill in it yet. I feel something hard.

Servant: Give it to me till I will open it and make a search.

4th Prince: No, wait a while till I am not lying on it. I will put up with the discomfort till then.

5th Prince: Would it give you too much trouble, Gillie, when you waken me in the morning, to come and call me three times, so that I can have the joy of dropping off again?

Servant: Why wouldn't I? And there is a thing I would wish to know. There will be a supper laid out here this evening for the Dowager Messengers that are coming to the Island, and I would wish to provide for yourselves whatever food would be pleasing to you.

1st Prince: It is too warm for eating. All I will ask is a few grapes from Spain.

2nd Prince: A mouthful of jelly in a silver spoon ...or in the shape of a little castle with towers. When will the Lady Messengers be here?

Servant: Not before the fall of day.

2nd Prince: The time passes so quietly and peaceably it does not feel like a year and a day since they came here before.

Servant: No wonder the time to pass easy and quiet where you are, with comfort all around you, and nothing to mark its course, and every season feeling the same as another, within the glass walls and the crystal roof of this place. And the old Queen, your godmother, sending her own Chamberlain to take charge of you, and to be your Guardian, and Governor of the Island. Sure, the wind itself must slacken coming to this sheltered place.

3rd Prince: That is a great thing. I would not wish the rough wind to be blowing upon me.

4th Prince: Or the dust to be rising and coming in among us to spoil our suits.

5th Prince: Or to be walking out on the hard roads, or climbing over stone walls, or tearing ourselves in hedges.

1st Prince: That is the reason we were sent here by the Queen, our Godmother, in place of being sent to any school. To be kept safe and secure.

2nd Prince: Not to be running here and there like our own poor five first cousins, that used to be slipping out and rambling in their young youth, till they were swallowed up by the sea.

3rd Prince: It was maybe by some big fish of the sea.

2nd Prince: It might be they were brought away by sea-robbers coming in a ship.

3rd Prince: Foolish they were and very foolish not to stay in peace and comfort in the house where they were safe.

Servant: There is no fear of ye stirring from where you are, having every whole thing ye can wish.

4th Prince: Here is the Guardian coming!

(They all rise.)

Guardian: *(A very old man, much encumbered with wraps, coming slowly in.)* Are you all here, all the five of you?

All: We are here!

Guardian: *(Standing, leaning on a stick, to address them.)* It's a pity that these being holidays, your teachers and tutors are far away.

Gone off afloat in a cedar boat to a College of Learning out in Cathay.

1st Prince: It's a pity indeed they're not here to-day.

Guardian: For it's likely you looked in your almanacs, or judged by the shape of the lessening moon, That your Godmother's Dowager Messengers are due to arrive this afternoon.

2nd Prince: We did and we think they'll be here very soon.

Guardian: But I know they'll be glad that each royal lad, put under my rule in place of a school, Can fashion his life without trouble or strife, and be shielded from care in a nice easy chair.

3rd Prince: As we always are and we always were.

Guardian: It is part of my knowledge that lads in a college, and made play one and all with a bat and a ball, Come often to harm with a knock on the arm, and their hands get as hard as the hands of a clown.

4th Prince: But ours are as soft as thistledown.

Guardian: And I've seen young princes not far from your age, go chasing beasts on a winter day, And carted home with a broken bone, and a yard of a doctor's bill to pay; Or going to sail in the teeth of a gale, when the waves were rising mountains high, Or fall from a height that was near out of sight, robbing rooks from their nest in a poplar tree.

5th Prince: (To another.) But that never happened to you or me.

Guardian: Or travelling far to a distant war, with battles and banners rilling their mind, And creeping back like a crumpled sack, content if they'd left no limbs behind.

1st Prince: But we'll have nothing to do with that, but stop at home with an easy mind.

Guardian: (Sitting down.) That's right. And now I would wish you to say over some of your tasks, to make ready for the Dowager Messengers, that they may bring back a good report to the Queen, your Godmother.

1st Prince: We'll do that. We would wish to be a credit to you, sir, and to our teachers.

Guardian: Say out now some little piece of Latin; that one that is my favourite.

1st Prince:

Aere sub gelido nullus rosa fundit odores, Ut placeat tellus, sole
calesce Dei.

Guardian: Say out the translation.

2nd Prince: Beneath a chilly blast the rose, loses its sweet, and
scentless blows;

If you would have earth keep its charm, stop in the sunshine and keep
warm.

Guardian: Very good. Now your history book; you were learning of
late some genealogies of kings, might suit your Godmother.

3rd Prince:

William the First as the Conqueror known At the Battle of Hastings
ascended the throne, His Acts were all made in the Norman tongue
And at eight every evening the curfew was rung When each English
subject by royal desire

Extinguished his candle and put out his fire. He bridled the kingdom
with forts round the Border And the Tower of London was built by his
order.

2nd Prince:

William called Rufus from having red hair, Of virtues possessed but a
moderate share, But though he was one whom we covetous call, He
built the famed structure called Westminster Hall. Walter Tyrrell his
favourite, when hunting one day, Attempted a deer with an arrow to
slay, But missing his aim, shot the King to the heart And the body was
carried away in a cart.

Guardian: That will do. You have that very well in your memory.
Now let me hear the grammar lesson.

3rd Prince:

A noun's the name of anything As school or garden, hoop or swing.

Guardian: Very good, go on.

4th Prince:

Adjectives tell the kind of noun As strong or pretty, white or brown.

5th Prince:

Conjunctions join the nouns together As men and children, wind or weather.

Guardian: It will be very useful to you to have that so well grafted in your mind.... What noise is that outside?

Servant: It is some strolling people.

1st Prince: Oh, Guardian, let them come in. We will do our work all the better if we have some amusement now.

Guardian: Maybe so. I am well pleased when amusements come to our door, that you can see without going outside the walls.

(A Jester enters in very ragged green clothes and broken shoes.)

But this is a very ragged looking man. Do you know anything about him, Gillie?

Servant: I seen him one time before.... At the time of the earthquake out in Foreign. A mad jester he was. A tramp class of a man. *(To Jester.)* Where is it you stop?

Jester: Where do I stop? Where would I be but everywhere, like the bad weather. I stop in no place, but going through the whole roads of the world.

Guardian: What brought you in here?

Jester: Hearing questions going on, and answers. I am well able to give help in that. It's not long since I was giving instruction to the sons of the King of Babylon. Here now is a question. How many ladders would it take to reach to the moon?

1st Prince: It should be a great many.

2nd Prince: I give it up.

Jester: One ...if it is long enough! Which is it easier to spell, ducks or geese?

3rd Prince: Ducks I suppose because it's shorter.

Jester: Not at all but geese. Do you know why? Because it is spelled with *ees*. Tell me now, can you spell pup backwards?

4th Prince: P-u-p....

Jester: Not at all.

4th Prince: But it is.

Jester: No, that is pup straight forwards.... Can you run back and forwards at the same time?

4th Prince: Answer it yourself so.

Jester: You would be as wise as myself then. But I'll show you some tricks. Look at these three straws on my hand. Will I be able to blow two of them away, and the other to stay in its place?

5th Prince: They would all blow away.

Jester: Look now. Puff! (*He has put his finger on the middle one.*) Now is it possible?

5th Prince: It is easy when you know the way.

Jester: That is so with all knowledge. Can you wag one ear and keep the other quiet?

1st Prince: Nobody can do that.

Jester: (*Wagging one ear with his finger.*) There, now you see I have done it! There's more learning than is taught in books. Wait now and I'll give you out a song I'll engage you never heard. (*Sings or repeats.*)

It's I can rhyme you out the joy That's ready for a lively boy.
Cuchulain flung a golden ball And followed it where it would fall,
And when they counted him a child He took the flying swans alive.
And Finn was given hares to mind Till he outran them and the wind;
And he could swim and overtake The wild duck swimming on the
lake. Osgar's young music was to thwack The enemy and drive him
back....

Guardian: That's enough now. I have no fancy for that class of song.
What other amusements are there?

Servant: There are the Wrenboys are come here at the end of their
twelve days' funning.

Jester: That's it! The Wrenboys; a rambling troop; rambling the world
like myself. I will make place for them. The old must give way to the
young.

(*He goes and sits down in a corner, munching a crust and dozing.*)

Servant: Come in here let ye, and show what ye can do!

(*Wrenboys come in playing a fife. They are wearing little masks and
are dressed in ragged tunics; they carry drum and, fife, and stand in a
line.*)

All Five Wrenboys: (*Together.*)

The wren, the wren, the King of all birds, On Stephen's Day was
caught in the furze. Although he's small his family's great, Rise up
kind gentry and give us a treat! (*Rub-a-tub-tub-tub, on the drum.*)

Down with the kettle and up with the pan And give us money to bury
the wren! (*Rub-a-tub.*)

We followed him twenty miles since morn, The Wrenboys are all
tattered and torn. From Kyle-na-Gno we started late And here we are
at this grand gate! (*Rub-a-tub.*)

He dipped his wing in a barrel of beer-- We wish you all a Happy
New Year! Give us now money to buy him a bier And if you don't,
we'll bury him here! (*Rub-a-tub, and fife.*)

(*Princes laugh and clap hands.*)

1st Prince: That is very good.

2nd Prince: We must give them some money to bury the wren!

Guardian: Come on then and I will give you some. They will be glad
of it. Play now the harp as you go.

(*Princes go off playing, "Home, Sweet Home." The Wrenboys sit
down.*)

1st Wrenboy: It is likely we'll get good treatment.

Jester: (*Coming forward.*) Ye should be tired.

2nd Wrenboy: We should be, but that we have our feet well soled,--
with the dust of the road!

3rd Wrenboy: If walking could tire us we might be tired. But we're as
well pleased to be moving, where we have no house or home that
you'll call a house or a home.

Jester: That's not so with those young princes. Wouldn't you be well
pleased if ye could change places with them? (*He goes back to his
corner.*)

4th Wrenboy: They are lovely kind young princes. I was near in dread they might set the dogs at us.

5th Wrenboy: They would do that if they knew the Ogre had sent us to spy out the place for him.

1st Wrenboy: It failed us to see what he wanted us to see. It is likely he will beat us, when we go back, with his cat-o'-nine-tails.

2nd Wrenboy: Wouldn't it be good if we could do as that Jester was saying and change places with those sons of kings! They that can lie in the sunshine on soft pillows.

3rd Wrenboy: They that can use food when they ask it, and not have to wait till they can find it, or steal it, or get it what way they can.

3rd Wrenboy: And not to be waiting till you'll hear a rabbit squealing, with the teeth of a weasel in his neck.

4th Wrenboy: And the weasel when you take it to be spitting poison at you, the same as a serpent.

5th Wrenboy: It would be a nice thing to be eating sweet red apples in place of the green crabs.

1st Wrenboy: Or to be maybe sucking marrow-bones.

2nd Wrenboy: It is likely they are as airy and as careless as the blackbird singing on the bush.

3rd Wrenboy: It's likely they go following after foxes on horses, having huntsmen and beagles at their feet.

4th Wrenboy: Or go out sporting and fowling with their greyhound and with their gun.

5th Wrenboy: Or matching fighting cocks.

1st Wrenboy: It's likely they lead a gentleman's life, card-playing and eating and drinking, and racing with jockeys in speckled clothes.

2nd Wrenboy: Their brooches were shining like green fire, the same as a marten cat's eyes. They have everything finer than another.

3rd Wrenboy: Their faces as clean as a linen sheet. Their hair as if combed with a silver comb.

4th Wrenboy: There is no one to so much as put a clean shirt on ourselves.

5th Wrenboy: (Rubbing his hand.) I never felt uneasy at the dirt that is grinted into me till I saw them so nice.

1st Wrenboy: That music they were playing put me in mind of some far thing. It is dreamed to me, and it is never leaving my mind, that there is something I remember in the long ago ... music in a house that was as bright as the moon, or as the brightest night of stars.

5th Wrenboy: Whisht! They are coming!

(The Princes come back.)

1st Prince: Here are coppers for you.

2nd Prince: And white money.

3rd Prince: And here is a piece of gold.

3rd Wrenboy: We are thankful to you! We'll bury the Wren in grand style now!

4th Prince: Have you far to go?

1st Wrenboy: Not very far if it was a straight road. But it is through the forest we go, beyond the lake.

2nd Wrenboy: We will hardly be there before the moon rises.

1st Prince: Are you afraid in the night time?

2nd Wrenboy: I am not. But I've seen a great deal of strange things at that time.

2nd Prince: What sort of things?

2nd Wrenboy: Fairies you'd see.

3rd Prince: Are there such things?

2nd Wrenboy: One night I was attending a pot-still, roasting oats for to make still-whiskey, and I seen hares coming out of the wood, by fours and by sixes, and they as thin as thin....

3rd Wrenboy: Hares are the biggest fairies of all.

4th Wrenboy: And down by the sea *I* met a weasel bringing up a fish in his mouth from the tide. And I often seen seals there, seals that are enchanted and look like humans, and will hold up a hand the same as a Christian.

5th Wrenboy: I that saw a hedgehog running up the side of a mountain as swift as a racehorse.

1st Wrenboy: It's the moonlight is the only time!

1st Prince: I never saw the moon but through a window.

1st Wrenboy: That's the time to go ramble. (*He chants.*) You'll see the crane in the water standing, And never landing a fish, for fright, For he can but shiver seeing in the river His shadow shaking in the bright moonlight.

2nd Wrenboy: Or you may listen to the plover's whistle, When high above him the wild geese screech; Or the mallard flying, as the night is dying, His neck out-stretched towards the salt sea beach.

3rd Wrenboy: When dawn discloses the oak and shows us The wide sky whitening through the scanty ash, High in the beeches the furry creatures, Squirrel and marten lightly pass.

4th Wrenboy: The badger scurries to find his burrow
The rabbit hurries to hide underground.

5th Wrenboy: The pigeon rouses the thrush that drowzes,
The woods awaken and the world goes round!

1st Wrenboy: Come now, it's time to be taking the road. Thank you,
noble Gentlemen! That you may be doing the same thing this day fifty
years! (*They go off playing fife and beating drum.*)

1st Prince: I would nearly wish to be in their place to go through the
world at large.

2nd Prince: They can go visit strange cities, sailing in white-sailed
ships.

3rd Prince: They have no lessons to learn.

4th Prince: No hours to keep. No clocks to strike.

5th Prince: No Lady Messengers coming to show off to.

1st Prince: They should be as merry as midges.

2nd Prince: As free as the March wind.

3rd Prince: I don't know how we stopped so long shut up in this place.

4th Prince: I would be nearly ready to change places with them if
such a thing were possible.

Jester: (*Who has had his back to them comes forward; the Princes
stand on his right in a half circle.*) And why wouldn't you change?

5th Prince: It is a thing not possible.

Jester: I never could know the meaning of that word "impossible."
Where there's a will there's a way.

1st Prince: It seems to me like the sound of a bell ringing a long way off, that I had leave at one time to go here and there.

Jester: If you are in earnest wanting to come to that freedom again you will get it.

2nd Prince: No, we would be followed and brought back through kindness.

Jester: If you have the strong wish to make the change you can make it.

1st Prince: I think I was never so much in earnest in all my life.

(The Jester takes his pipe and plays a note on it. The Wrenboys come back beating their drum. They stand in a half circle on Jester's left.)

Jester: (To all.)

If it's true ye wish to change, Some to have a wider range, Some to have an easy life, Some to rove into the wild, If you do it, do it fast, Do it while you have the chance.

Wrenboys: (Together.) We will change! We will!

Jester: (To Princes.)

If you wish to leave your ease And live wild and free like these Like the fawn free and wild, Not closed in as is a child, Take your chance as it has come, Let you run and run and run, Where you'll get your joy and fun!

2nd Prince: They will know us, they will know us!

Jester: Change your clothes, change your clothes!

3rd Prince: They will know us every place.

Jester: Put their masks upon your face.

(Wrenboys give them the masks.)

You never will be missed For I will throw a dust Before everybody's
eye That wants to look or pry To see if you are here,-- And if you
should appear To be someway strange or queer They will think
themselves are blind Or confused in the mind!

(Throws a handful of dust over all the boys.)

Dust of Mullein, work your spell; Keep the double secret well!

5th Prince: (To a Wrenboy.)

Give me here your coat now fast I don't want to be the last.

(They all rapidly change coats and caps.)

Jester: That will do, that is enough.

1st Wrenboy: But my hands are very rough.

Jester:

Never mind; never mind, The truth is hard to find!

Guardian: (Off stage.) Gillie, do as you are told, shut the door, it's
getting cold.

1st Prince: Oh, I'm in dread! What will be said!

2nd Prince: I'd sooner stay in my old way!

Jester:

Never mind, never mind! The truth is hard to find! Keep steady. Are
you ready?

1st Wrenboy: I'll be ashamed if I am blamed.

2nd Wrenboy: I have no grace or lovely face!

Jester: (To Princes.) Too late, too late! Go out the gate!

(The Princes have taken up fife and drum. They march out playing.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE I

(A front scene. A poor hut or tent, the Princes are coming in slowly, some limping. They are in Wrenboys' clothes and the masks are in their hands.)

1st Prince: This should be the hut where the Wrenboys told us to come.

2nd Prince: It is a poor looking place.

3d Prince: It is good to have any place to sit down in for a while. My back is aching.

4th Prince: My feet are all scratched and torn. There are blisters rising.

5th Prince: I thought we would never come to the end of the road. The stones by the lake were so hard and so sharp.

1st Prince: It was a root of a tree I fell over that made these bruises on my knees. I was watching a hawk that was still and quiet up in the air, and when it made a swoop all of a sudden I stumbled and fell.

2nd Prince: It was in slipping where the rocks are high I gave this twist to my arm. I can hardly move it.

3rd Prince: But wasn't the sight of the sunset splendid over the lake? And the hills so blue!

4th Prince: I like the tall trees best. I tried to climb up one of them, but it was so smooth I did but slip and fall.

1st Prince: I would wish to walk as far as the hills, and to have a view of the ocean that is beyond.

5th Prince: I am hungry. I wonder where we will get our supper.

4th Prince: Not in this place, anyway, it must be making ready in some big guesthouse.

3rd Prince: What will they give us, I wonder?

2nd Prince: I wish we had in our hand what they have ready for us at home.

1st Prince: What use would it be to us? Do you remember what we asked to be given, some jellies and a few grapes? It is not that much would satisfy me now.

2nd Prince: Indeed it would not. I never felt so sharp a hunger in my longest memory.

3rd Prince: It is roasted meat I would wish for.

4th Prince: There were pigeons in the tall trees. They will maybe give us a pigeon pie.

5th Prince: I would be content with a plate of minced turkey with poached eggs.

1st Prince: I would sooner have a roasted chicken, with bread sauce.

2nd Prince: Be quiet.... I think I hear someone coming! (*Looks out.*)

3rd Prince: (Looking out.) I see him. He is not a right man ...he is very strange looking....

4th Prince: (Looking out.) Oh! It is an Ogre! A Grugach!

(All shrink back and hurriedly put on masks.)

Ogre: (Coming in: he wears a frightful mask, has red hair and a cloak of rough skins and carries a whip with many lashes.) What makes ye late to-night, ye young schemers? What was it delayed ye? Lagging along the road.

1st Prince: We came as fast as we could. It was getting dusk in the wood.

Ogre: Dusk, good morrow to you! I'll dusk ye! I had a mind to go after ye and to change myself into the form of a wolf, and catch a hold of ye with my long sharp teeth!

2nd Prince: We did not know there was any great hurry.

Ogre: There is always hurry when you are on my messages. What did I bring you away from your own house for and put ye on the shaughraun for and keep ye wandering, if it was not to be serviceable and helpful to myself. Show me now what ye have in your pocket or your bag.

3rd Prince: This is all we got in the bag. *(Holds it out.)* It is but very little.

Ogre: (Turning it out and counting it.) Coppers! Silver! What is this? A piece of gold! Is that what ye call little? What notions ye have! Take care did ye keep any of it back! If ye did I'll skin ye with the lash of my cat-o'-nine-tails. *(Shakes it.)*

4th Prince: That is all we got. It should maybe pay for our supper in some place.

Ogre: What supper? To go buy supper with my money! It will go to add to my store of treasure in the cave that is under ground.

5th Prince: We are hungry, very hungry. When will the supper be ready?

Ogre: It will be ready whenever ye will ready it for yourselves. Ye should know that by this time.

1st Prince: We would make it ready if we were acquainted with the way.

Ogre: It is gone cracked ye are? What is it ye are thinking to get for your supper? What ailed ye that ye didn't climb a tree and suck a few pigeon's eggs?

2nd Prince: We were thinking of a pigeon pie.

Ogre: A what!!!

2nd Prince: A pigeon pie.

Ogre: Hurry on then making your pigeon pie! There are pigeons enough there in the corner, that a hawk that is my carrier brought me in a while ago. And there's a pike that was in the lake these hundred years, an otter is after leaving at my door.

3rd Prince: (*Taking a pigeon.*) I don't think this is a right pigeon.

4th Prince: Pigeons in a pie are not the pigeons that have feathers.

5th Prince: (*To Ogre.*) Please, sir, where can we find pigeons without feathers, that are trussed on a silver skewer?

Ogre: Aye? What's that?

1st Prince: Never mind. You'll anger him. Maybe we can pull the feathers off these. I have read of plucking a pigeon in our books. (*They begin to pluck.*)

2nd Prince: It is very hard work.

3rd Prince: I never knew feathers could stick in so hard.

4th Prince: The more we pull out the more there would seem to be left.

5th Prince: It will be a feather pie we will be getting in the end.

1st Prince: (*Throwing it down.*) It is no use. We might work at it to-day and to-morrow and be no nearer to a finish.

2nd Prince: The pike might be better.

3rd Prince: It has no feathers anyway.

4th Prince: (*Touching it.*) It is raw and bleeding!

5th Prince: We might roast it.

1st Prince: The fire is black out.

2nd Prince: I wonder what way can we kindle it?

3rd Prince: Better ask him. (*Points to Ogre.*)

2nd Prince: Please, sir, what way can we kindle the fire?

Ogre: What!

4th Prince: We would wish to light the fire.

Ogre: Well, do so.

5th Prince: If we had a box of matches....

Ogre: Matches! What are you talking about? Matches won't be invented for the next seven hundred years.

1st Prince: What can we do then, we are starving with hunger.

Ogre: Let ye blow a breath upon a coal under the ashes, and bring in small sticks from the wood.

2nd Prince: (Blowing.) The ashes are choking me.

Ogre: Very good. Then you'll put no delay on me, waiting till you'll cook your supper.

3rd Prince: Where can we get it then?

Ogre: You'll go without it, as you were too helpless to catch it, or to dress it, there's no one will force you to eat it.

4th Prince: If there is nothing for us to eat we had best pass the time in sleep.

5th Prince: I am all covered with ashes and dirt. *(To Ogre.)* Please, where can I find a towel and a piece of soap?

Ogre: Soap! Is it bewitched ye are or demented in the head? Did ever anyone hear of soap unless of a Saturday night? Letting on to be as dainty and as useless as those young princes beyond, that are kept closed up in a tower of glass. Come on now. If there is no food that suits you, leave it. It is time for us to get to work.

1st Prince: But it is bed-time.

Ogre: Your bed-time is the time when I have no more use for you. Don't you know I have made a plan? What was it I sent you for, spying out that place of the young princes? Wasn't it to see where is it that treasure is kept, the golden-handled sword of Justice that is used by the Guardian when he turns Judge.

2nd Prince: That is kept in the Courthouse.

Ogre: That's right ...in what part of it?

3rd Prince: What do you want it for?

Ogre: I have it in my mind this long time to get and to keep it in my cave under ground, along with the rest of my treasures that are in charge of my two enchanted cats. I have had near enough of grubbing for gold with a pick in the clefts and crannies of the earth. It is time for me to find some rest, and get into my hand what is ready worked and smelted and purified. We are going to that Courthouse to-night. If we cannot get in at the door, I will put ye in at the window and ye can open the door to myself. I will find out where the sword is, and away with us, and it in my hand.

4th Prince: But that would be stealing.

Ogre: What else would it be?

4th Prince: But that is wrong. It is against the law.

Ogre: The law! That is the Judge's trade. Breaking it is mine.

5th Prince: Ask him for it and maybe he will give it to you, he is so kind.

Ogre: I'll take no charity! What I get I'll earn by taking it. I would feel no pleasure it being given to me, any more than a huntsman would take pleasure being made a present of a dead fox, in place of getting a run across country after it. Come on now! We'll have the moon wasted. We'll hardly get there before the dawn of day.

1st Prince: Whatever time you get there the Guardian will be awake. There is a cock of Denmark perched on the curtain rod of his bed, specially to waken him if there is any stir.

Ogre: There is, is there? What a fool you think me to be. Do you see that pot?

2nd Prince: We do see it.

Ogre: Look what there is in it.

3rd Prince: Nothing but a few bare bones.

Ogre: Well, that is all that is left of the Judge's cock of Denmark, that was brought to me awhile ago by a fox that is my messenger, and that I have boiled and ate and devoured.

All the Princes: O! O! O!

Ogre: (*Cracking his whip.*) He was boiled in the little pot. Come on now and lead the way, or I give you my word it is in the big pot your own bones will be making broth for my breakfast in the morning!
(*Cracks whip.*) Now, right about face! Quick march!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

(*The Winter Garden, evening. The Servant settling benches and a table.*)

Guardian: (*Coming in.*) Are the Dowager Messengers come? They are late.

Servant: They are come. They are at the looking-glasses settling themselves.

Guardian: As soon as they are ready you will call in the Princes for their examination before them, and their tasks.

Servant: I will.

Guardian: The Messengers will have a good report to bring back of them. They have come to be good scholars, in poetry, in music, in languages, in history, in numbers and all sorts. The old Queen-Godmother will be well satisfied with their report.

Servant: She might and she might not.

Guardian: They would be hard to please if they are not well pleased with the lads, as to learning and as to manners and behaviour.

Servant: Maybe so. Maybe so. There are strange things in the world.

Guardian: You're in bad humour, my poor Gillie. Have you been quarrelling with the cook, or did you get up on the wrong side of your bed?

Servant: There is times when it is hard not to be in a bad humour.

Guardian: What are you grumbling and hinting at?

Servant: There's times when it's hard to believe that witchcraft is gone out of the world.

Guardian: That is a thing that has been done away with in this Island through my government, and through enlightenment and through learning.

Servant: Maybe so. Maybe so.

Guardian: I suppose a three-legged chicken has come out of the shell, or a magpie has come before you in your path? Or maybe some token in the stars?

Servant: It would take more than that to put me astray.

Guardian: Whatever it is you had best tell it out.

Servant: To see lads of princes, sons of kings, and the makings of kings, that were mannerly and well behaved and as civil as a child a few hours ago, to be sitting in a corner at one time as if in dread of the light, and tricking and fooling and grabbing at other times.

Guardian: Oh, is that all! The poor lads. They're out of their habits because of their Godmother's Messengers coming. They are making merry and funning, thinking there might be messages for them or presents.

Servant: Funning is natural. But blowing their nose with their fingers is not natural.

Guardian: High spirits. Just to torment you in their joy.

Servant: To get a bit of chalk, and to make marks in the Hall of dancing, and to go playing hop-scotch.

Guardian: High spirits, high spirits! I never saw boys better behaved or more gentle or with more sweetness of speech. I am thinking there is not one among them but will earn the name of Honey-mouth.

Servant: Have it your own way. But is it a natural thing, I am asking, for the finger nails to make great growth in one day?

Guardian: Stop, stop, be quiet. Here now are the Dowager Messengers. (*Two old ladies in travelling costume appear; bowing low to them.*) You are welcome for the sake of her that sent you, and for your own sakes.

1st Dowager Messenger: We are come from the Court of the Godmother Queen, for news of the Princes now in your charge;

She hopes they have manners, are minded well, and never let run at large;

For she never has yet got over the fret, of their five little cousins were swept away.

Guardian: Let your mind be at ease, for you'll be well pleased with the youngsters you're going to see to-day.

They're learning the laws to speak and to pause--may be orators then, or Parliament men.

2nd Dowager Messenger: Are they shielded from harm?

Guardian:

In my sheltering arm; Do their work and their play in a mannerly way
And go holding their nose, and tipped on their toes, If they pass
through a street, that they'll not soil their feet.

2nd Dowager Messenger: And next to good manners and next to good looks ...

Guardian: I know what you'll say ...she asks news of the cooks; I'm with her in putting them equal to books; There's some rule by coaxing and some rule by beating, But my principle is, tempt them on with good eating. When everything's said, isn't Sparta as dead As many a place never heard of black bread? And as to a lad who a tartlet refuses,-- If Cato stewed parsnips he hated the Muses!

1st Dowager Messenger: And at meals are they taught to behave as they ought?

Guardian: You'll be well satisfied and the Queen will have pride, You will see every Prince use a fork with his mince, And eating his peas like Alcibiades, Who would sooner go mute than play on the flute Lest it made him grimace and contorted his face.

1st Dowager Messenger: Oh, all that you say delights us to-day!

We'll have good news to bring of these sons of a king.

Servant: Here they are now coming.

(Wrenboys in Princes' clothes come in awkwardly.)

Guardian: Now put out a chair. Where these ladies may hear. Come over, my boys ...(Now what is that noise?) Come here, take your places, and show us your faces, And say out your task as these ladies will ask. I would wish them to know how you say *Parlez-vous*, And I'd like you to speak in original Greek And make numeration, and add up valuation; But to lead you with ease and on by degrees In case you are shy in the visitors' eye I will let you recite, as you easily might, The kings of that Island that no longer are silent But ask recognition and to take a position-- (Though if stories are true they ran about blue, While we in Hy-Brasil wore our silks to a frazzle--) So the rhymes you may say that I heard you to-day; And the opening will fall on the youngest of all.

Servant: Let you stand up now and do as you are bid. (*Touches 5th Wrenboy.*)

Guardian: Go on, my child, say out your lesson. William the First as the Conqueror known.... (*Boy puts finger in mouth and hangs his head.*) Ah, he is shy. Don't be affrighted, go on now; don't you remember it?

5th Wrenboy: I do not.

Guardian: Try it again now. You said it off quite well this morning.

5th Wrenboy: It fails me.

Guardian: Now I will give you a start: "William the First as the Conqueror known, At the Battle of Hastings ascended the throne ..." Say that now.

5th Wrenboy: (*Nudging 4th.*) Let you word it.

4th Wrenboy: (*To Guardian.*) Let you word it again, sir.

Guardian: "William the First as the Conqueror known."

4th Wrenboy: William the First as the congereel known....

Guardian: What is that? You would not do it to vex me! Gillie is maybe right. There is something strange.... (*To another.*) You may try now. Go on to the next verse. "William called Rufus from having red hair." ...(He does not answer.) Say it anyone who knows....

3rd Wrenboy: (*Putting up his hand.*) I know a man that has red hair!

All the Wrenboys: (*Cheerfully*) So do I! So do I!

2nd Wrenboy: He lives in the wood beyond! He is no way good! He is an Ogre, a Grugach....

1st Wrenboy: He can turn himself into the shape of a beast, or he can change his face at any time; sometimes he'll be that wicked you would think he was a wolf; he would skin you with his cat-o'-nine-tails!

Guardian: What gibberish are you talking?

2nd Wrenboy: He goes working underground to get gold!

3rd Wrenboy: It is minded by enchanted cats!

4th Wrenboy: They would tear in bits anyone that would find it!

Guardian: Now take care, lads, this is carrying a joke too far. I was wrong to begin with that silly history. Tell me out now the parts of speech.

"A noun's the name of anything As school or garden, hoop or swing."

5th Wrenboy: An owl's the name of anything....

Guardian: A noun.

5th Wrenboy: An owl.

Guardian: Don't pretend you don't know it.

5th Wrenboy: I do know it. I know an owl that sits in the cleft of the hollow sycamore and eats its fill of mice, till it can hardly put a stir out of itself.

Guardian: I do wish you would stop talking nonsense.

1st Wrenboy: It is not, but sense. It devoured ere yesterday a whole fleet of young rats.

2nd Wrenboy: It's as wise as King Solomon.

Guardian: Gillie was right. There is surely something gone wrong in their heads.

2nd Wrenboy: Go out yourself and you'll see are we wrong in the head! Inside in the old sycamore he is sitting through the daylight.

1st Dowager Messenger: There is something gone wrong in *somebody's* head.

2nd Dowager Messenger: (*Tapping her forehead.*) The poor Guardian; he is too long past his youth. It is well we came to look how things were going before it is too late.

1st Dowager Messenger: Ask them to say something they *do* know.

Guardian: Here, you're good at arithmetic, say now your numbers.

1st Wrenboy: Twelve coppers make a shilling. I never handled more than that.

Guardian: (*Angrily.*) Well, do as the lady said, tell us something you *do* know.

2nd Wrenboy: (*Standing up, excited.*) I know the way to make bird-lime, steeping willow rods in the stream....

3rd Wrenboy: I know how to use my fists; I knocked a tinker bigger than myself.

4th Wrenboy: I am the best at wrestling. I knocked *himself*. (*Pointing at 3rd.*)

5th Wrenboy: I that can skin a fawn after catching him running!

2nd Dowager Messenger. Where now did you get that learning?

5th Wrenboy: Here and there, rambling the woods, sleeping out at night. I would never starve in any place where grass grows!

1st Dowager Messenger: This is worse than neglect. The poor old Guardian the Queen put her trust in must be in his dotage.

Guardian: (Hastily.) Here, there is at least one thing you will not fail in. Take the harp (*hands it to the 1st Wrenboy*) and draw out of it sweet sounds, (*To Dowager Messengers.*) He can play a tune so sweet it has been known to send all the hearers into a sound sleep. Here now, touch the strings with all your skill.

(1st Wrenboy bangs harp, making a crash.)

2nd Dowager Messenger: (With hands to ears.) Mercy! Our poor ears!

1st Dowager Messenger: That is the poorest music we have ever heard.

2nd Dowager Messenger: That sound would send no one into their sleep. It would be more likely to send them into Bedlam.

1st Dowager Messenger: Whatever they knew last year, they have forgotten it all now.

Guardian: (Weeping into his handkerchief.) I don't know what has come upon them! At noon they were the most charming lads in the whole world. Their memory seems to have left them!

2nd Dowager Messenger: It is as if another memory had come to them. They did not learn those wild tricks shut up in the garden.

Servant: (To Boys.) Can't ye behave nice and not ugly? (*To Guardian.*) You would not believe me a while ago. I said and I say still there is enchantment on them, and spells.

Guardian: Oh, I would be sorry to think such a thing. But they never went on this way in their greenest youth.

2nd Dowager Messenger: If there is a spell upon them what way can it be taken off?

Servant: It is what I always heard, that to make a rod of iron red in the fire, and to burn the enchantment out of them is the only way.

Guardian: Oh, boys, do you hear that! You would not like to be burned with a red hot rod! Say out now what at all is the matter with you? What is it you feel within you that is putting you from your gentle ways?

1st Wrenboy: The thing that I feel in me is hunger. The thing I would wish to feel inside me is a good fistful of food.

1st Dowager Messenger: They have been starved and stinted! It would kill their Godmother on the moment if she was aware of that!

Guardian: It is a part of their playgame. They have everything they ask.

2nd Wrenboy: I did not eat a farthing's worth since yesterday.

3rd Wrenboy: My teeth are rusty with the want of food!

4th Wrenboy: I want some dinner!

5th Wrenboy: We want something to eat!

Guardian: Give them whatever you have ready for them, Gillie.

Servant: (*Giving the plates.*) Here is the supper ye gave orders for this morning.

1st Wrenboy: What is it at all?

Servant: It is your choice thing. Jellies and grapes from Spain.

2nd Wrenboy: (*Pushing away grapes*) Berries! I thought to get better than berries from the bush.

3rd Wrenboy: There's not much satisfaction in berries!

4th Wrenboy: If it was a pig's foot now; or as much as a potato with a bit of dripping.

5th Wrenboy: (Looking at jelly.) What now is this? It has like the appearance of frog spawn.

1st Wrenboy: Or the leavings of a fallen star.

5th Wrenboy: Shivering it is and shaking. It's not natural! *(Drops his plate.)*

4th Wrenboy: There is nothing here to satisfy our need.

2nd. Dowager Messenger: I am nearly sorry for them, poor youngsters. When they were but little toddlers they never behaved like that at home.

3rd Wrenboy: It's the starvingest place ever I was in!

1st Dowager Messenger: There must be something in what they say. They would not ask for food if they were not in need of it. And the Guardian making so much talk about his table and his cooks. We cannot go home and report that they have no learning and no food.

2nd Dowager Messenger: As to learning I don't mind. But as to food, I would not wish to leave them without it for the night. They might be as small as cats in the morning.

Guardian: They are dreaming when they say they are in want of food.

1st Dowager Messenger: It is a dream that will waken up their Godmother.

Servant: Look, ma'am, at the table behind you, and you will see is this a scarce house! That is what is set out for yourselves, ma'am, lobsters from Aughanish! A fat turkey from the barley gardens! A spiced and larded sucking pig! Cakes and sweets and all sorts! It is not the want of provision was ever brought against us up to this!

2nd Dowager Messenger: If all this is for us, we would sooner give it up to those poor children.

(To Wrenboys.) Here, my dears, we will not eat while you are in want of food. We will give it all to you.

1st Wrenboy: Is it that we can have what is on that table?

2nd Dowager Messenger: You may, and welcome.

1st Wrenboy: (With a shout.) Do you hear that news! Come on now. Take your chance! I'll have the first start! Skib scab! Hip, hip, hooray!

(They rush at table and upset it, flinging themselves on the food)

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

The Hall of Justice. It is nearly dawn. The last of the Princes is getting in through the window. They are wearing their masks.

Ogre: (Outside door to left.) Open now the door for myself.

1st Prince: No, we will get rid of him now. Let the Grugach stay outside.

2nd Prince: That will be best. He cannot break the bars of this door, or get round over the high wall to the door on the other side.

3rd Prince: I am sore with the blows he put on us, driving us before him through the wood.

4th Prince: Let us call to the Guardian, and let him deal with him. He can bring his foot soldiers and his guns.

5th Prince: A villain that Ogre is and a thief, wanting to steal away the golden-handled sword. But we would not tell him where it was, and he never will find it under the step of the Judge's chair. (*Lifts top of step, takes out sword and puts it back again.*)

Ogre: (*Outside.*) Are ye going to open the door?

1st Prince: It is a great thing to have that strong door between us.

2nd Prince: Take care would he break it in.

3rd Prince: No fear. It would make too much noise. It would bring every person in the house running.

4th Prince: Let us go quick and call the Guardian.

5th Prince: What will he say seeing us in these clothes? He will be vexed with us.

1st Prince: It was folly of us running away. But he will forgive us, knowing it will teach us better sense.

2nd Prince: Come to him then, I don't mind what he will do to us so long as we are safe from the terrible Grugach of an Ogre. (*All go to right door, it opens and Ogre bursts in.*)

Ogre: Ye thought to deceive me, did ye? Ye thought to bar me out and to keep me out? And I after minding you and caring you these seven years!

3rd Prince: What way did you get in?

Ogre: It's easy for me to get in any place. If I had a mind I could turn into a house fly and come through the lockhole of the door. It's much if I don't change the whole lot of ye into small birds, and myself to a hawk going through you! Or, into frightened mice, and I myself into a starving cat! It's much if I don't skin you with this whip, and grind your bones as fine as rape seed!

4th Prince: I will call for help! (*Tries to shout.*)

Ogre: (Putting hand over his mouth and lifting whip.) Shout now and welcome, and it is bare bones will be left of you! If it wasn't that I need you to search out the golden-handled sword for me I'd throttle the whole of ye as easy as I'd squeeze an egg! Come on now! Show me where the treasure is hid.

5th Prince: How would we know?

Ogre: Didn't I send ye spying it out, and if it fails ye to make it out, I'll boil and bake you!

1st Prince: (Looking about and pointing to end of room.) It might be there.

Ogre: What way would it be on the bare floor? Search it out.

2nd Prince: (Looking under a bench.) It might be here.

Ogre: It is not there.

3rd Prince: (Looking up chimney?) This would be a good hiding-place.

Ogre: (Looks up.) There is nothing in it, only an old nest of a jackdaw,--a bundle of bare twigs. Trying to deceive me you are and to lead me astray.

4th Prince: It might be on the shelf.

Ogre: Stop your chat unless you have something worth saying.

5th Prince: (Sitting down on step under which sword is hidden.) Are you certain there is any treasure at all?

Ogre: You are humbugging and making a fool of me! *(Lashes whip and seizes him.)* Get up now out of that! *(Drags him up and taps board.)* There is a hollow sort of a sound.... That is a sort of place where a treasure might be hid. *(Drags up board.)* I see something

shining. *(Pulls out sword.)* Oh, it is a lovely sword! And the handle of pure gold. The best I ever seen!

1st Prince: (To the others.) I'll make a run now and call out and awaken all in the house! *(Is going towards door.)*

Ogre: (Seizing him.) You'd make your escape would you?

1st Prince: (Calling out.) Ring the big bell, ring the bell! I forgot it till now.

(They pull a bell-rope and bell is heard clanging.)

Ogre: (Rushing at them as they ring it.) I'll stop that!

(Voices are heard, at door to right. Ogre rushes to other door.)

2nd Prince: I'll get the sword from him. *(Snatches it away as Ogre is rushing at him. Servant and Guardian come in.)*

Guardian: What is going on! *(Blows a whistle.)* Here, soldiers of the guard!

(Feet are heard marching and bugle blowing at left door. Ogre rapidly slips off his mask, and appears as a harmless old man.)

Guardian: Thieves! Robbers! Burglars! Here, soldiers, surround the place; who are these ruffians? Murder! Robbery! Fire!

(Two soldiers come in.)

Servant: They are the very same youngsters were at our door this morning, doing their play; those Wrenboys!

Guardian: They are thieves. There is one of them bringing away my gold-handled sword. *(He and Servant seize sword.)*

Ogre: (Coming forward and bowing low.) It is time for you to come, your honour my lordship! I am proud to see you coming! It was I myself that rang the bell and that called and awakened you, where I

would not like to see the place robbed and left bare by these scum of the world!

All the Princes: Oh! Oh! Oh!

Guardian: What have you to do with it? Where do you come from?

Ogre: An honest poor man I am....

Servant: You have a queer wild sort of a dress.

Ogre: Making a living I do be, dressing up as a hobgoblin and a bogey man to get an odd copper from a mother here and there, would be wishful to frighten a stubborn child from bawling or from tricks. Passing the door I was, and hearing a noise I looked in, and these young villains were after rising a board and taking out that sword you seen in their hands. It is then that I made a clamour with the bell.

(Princes laugh.)

Guardian: Who are they at all?

Ogre: It is I myself say it; they are the terror of the whole district.

1st Prince: You may save your breath and stop that talk. This gentleman knows us well. He knows us and will recognise us.

Guardian: I do recognise you. I saw you but yesterday.

2nd Prince: There now, what do you say?

Guardian: You are those vagabond Wrenboys that came tricking and begging to my gate.

Princes: Oh! Oh! Oh!

Ogre: That's it! Spying round they were! Thinking to do a robbery! Robbery they're after doing!

3rd Prince: We were doing no such thing!

Guardian: You were! I stopped you making off with my sword of Justice.

Ogre: If it wasn't for me hindering them they would have it swept.

Guardian: That was very honest of you.

4th Prince: (*Rushing at Ogre.*) It is you that are a rogue and a thief!

Other Princes: Throw him down while we have the chance. (*They surround him.*)

Guardian: Silence! Don't make that disturbance! I felt a suspicion yesterday the first time I saw your faces there was villainy hidden beneath the dust that was on your cheeks.

4th Prince: Listen to us, listen!

Guardian: And whatever I thought then, you are seventeen times more wicked looking now! And the very scum of the roads!

5th Prince: Oh, have you forgotten your nurslings!

Guardian: It is well you reminded me of them. (*To Servant.*) Go now and bring the young Princes here till they will see justice done! They are maybe gone a bit wild and foolish since yesterday, put out by those Dowager Messengers. But whatever they were at their worst, they are King George compared with these!

1st Prince: You *must* listen!

Guardian: Must! What is that language! That is a word was never said to me since I was made the Queen's Chamberlain. Here! Put a gag upon their mouths! (*Soldiers do so, tying a handkerchief on mouth of each.*) Tie their hands behind them with ropes. (*This is done.*) Rapsallions! Do they think to terrify and command me! I that am not only Governor of the Island but am Supreme Judge whenever I come into this Court.

Ogre: That is very good and very right! Keep the gag in their mouth! You wouldn't like to be listening to the things they were saying a while ago! They were giving out great impudence and very disrespectful talk!

Guardian: Give me here my Judge's wig and my gown! (*Puts them on.*) Where now are the young Princes?

Servant: They are coming now.

Guardian: It will be a great help in their education seeing justice done by me, as straight as was ever done by Aristides. Give me here that book of punishments and rewards. I'll see what is bad enough for these lads! (*He consults book.*)

Servant: Here now are the Princes.

(*Wrenboys come in wearing Princes' clothes*)

1st Wrenboy: (*To another*) Do you see who it is that is in it?

2nd Wrenboy: It is the young Princes in our clothes!

3rd Wrenboy: What in the world wide brought them here? Believe me it was through some villainy of the Grugach.

4th Wrenboy: What at all has happened?

5th Wrenboy: Go ask them what it was brought them, or what they came doing.

1st Wrenboy: (*To Princes*) What is it brought you here so soon?

(*Princes shake their heads*)

2nd Wrenboy: (*Coming back*) There is a gag on their mouths!

3rd Wrenboy: (*Going and looking*) Their hands are tied with a rope.

4th Wrenboy: They had not the wit to stand against the Grugach; it is not long till they were brought to trouble.

5th Wrenboy: It was seventeen times worse for them to be under him than for ourselves that was used to him, and to his cruelty and his ways.

1st Wrenboy: It was bad enough for ourselves. We were not built for roguery.

(The Dowager Messengers rushing in.)

Dowager Messengers: (Together.) What is going on? What has happened?

Guardian: What you see before you has happened. Those young thieves came to try and to rob the house. They were found by myself in the very act of bringing away my golden-handled sword! They were stopped by this honest man. *(Points to Ogre.)*

1st Dowager Messenger: There would seem to be a great deal of wickedness around this place!

Guardian: I'll put a stop to it! I'll use my rights as Judge! To have that sort of villainy running through the Island, it would come through walls of glass or of marble, and lead away the best.

2nd Dowager Messenger: There must be something gone wrong in the stars, our own young princes having gone wild out of measure, and these young vagabonds doing no less than house-breaking! It is hard to live!

Ogre: Indeed, ma'am, it would be a great blessing to the world if all the boys in it could be born grown up.

Guardian: (Sighing.) I, myself, am beginning to have that same opinion.

1st Dowager Messenger: And so am I myself. Young men have strength and beauty, and old men have knowledge and wisdom, but as to boys! After what we saw a while ago in the supper room!

Servant: The Court is about to sit! Take your places!

(Wrenboys make for the dock and Princes the jury-box.)

Guardian: What do you mean, prisoners, going up there, that is the place for honourable men! For a jury! It is here in the criminals' dock your place is.

Servant: (To Wrenboys.) Oh, that is the wrong place you're in. That is for the wicked and the poor that are brought to be tried and condemned.

1st Wrenboy: It is a place the like of that I was put one time I was charged before a magistrate for snaring rabbits.

Servant: Silence in the Court. The Judge is about to speak.

Guardian: (Reading out of book.) It's laid down in a clause of the Cretian laws, That were put through a filter by Solon, That for theft the first time, though a capital crime A criminal may keep his poll on. Though *(consults another book)* some jurists believe That a wretch who can thieve, Has earned a full stop, not a colon.

Ogre: That was said by a better than Solon.

Guardian: And the book says in sum, to cut off the left thumb, May be penalty enough for a warning; Though *(looks at another book)* the Commentors say That one let off that way Will be thieving again before morning.

Ogre: So he will, and the jury suborning.

Guardian: For the second offence, as the crime's more immense, Take the thumb off the *right* hand instead; And the third time he'll steal, without any appeal, The hangman's to whip off his head.

Ogre: Very right to do so, for a thief as we know, Isn't likely to steal when he's dead.

2nd Dowager Messenger: You won't order the worst, as this crime is the first, It's a pity if they have to swing.

Guardian: In the Commentors' sense, a *primal* offence Is as much an impossible thing As a stream without source, a blow struck without force, Or leaves without roots in the spring.

Ogre: Or a catapult wanting a sling.

Guardian: But although this case is proved on its face To be what is called a *priori* I cannot refuse to consider the views Of the amiable lady before me. (*Bows to 2nd Dowager Messenger.*) In compliance to her I am ready to err On the side that she leans to, of mercy, For she has a kind tongue, and the prisoners are young; But that they may not live to curse me, I give out my decree, the *left* thumb shall be Kept in Court till the next time they'll come. And now if you please let whoever agrees With my pledge turn down his own thumb.

1st Dowager Messenger: It is very just and right. (*Turns down hers.*)

Ogre: You're letting them off too easy. They're a bad example to the world. But to take the thumb off them is better than nothing! (*Turns down both his thumbs.*)

Guardian: (*To Wrenboys.*) Well, my dear pupils, I don't see you turn down your thumbs.

1st Wrenboy: We cannot do it. (*They cover their faces with their hands.*)

Ogre: Get on so. I never saw the work I'd sooner do than checking youngsters!

Guardian: Where is the Executioner?

Servant: I sent seeking him a while ago, thinking he might be needed.

Guardian: Bring him in.

Servant: He is not in it. There was so little business for him this long time under your own peaceable rule, that he is after leaving us, and taking a job in a slaughter house out in foreign.

2nd Dowager Messenger: Maybe that is a token we should let them off.

Ogre: (Briskly.) I am willing to be useful; give me here a knife or a hatchet!

Servant: (To Ogre.) You need not be pushing yourself forward. *(To Guardian.)* There is a stranger of an Executioner chanced to be passing the road, just as I sent out, and he looking for work. He said he would do the job for a four-penny bit and his dinner, that he is sitting down to now.

Guardian: (Sitting up straight and taking up sword.)

Bring him in quick. It often seems a curious thing that I, Who in my ordinary clothes would hardly hurt a fly, Hold to the rigour of the law when I put on gown and wig, As if for mere humanity I didn't care a fig. For once I'm seated on the bench I do not shrink or flinch From the reddest laws of Draco, or the practice of Judge Lynch.

Servant: (At door.) Here he is now.

(Jester comes in, disguised as Executioner, a long cloak with hood over his head.)

Guardian: Here is the sword *(hands it to him and reads)*, "In case of the first act of theft the left thumb is to be struck off." There are the criminals before you. That is what you have to do.

Jester: (Taking the sword.) Stretch out your hands! There is hurry on me. I was sitting at the dinner I engaged for. I was called away from the first mouthful, and I would wish to go back to the second mouthful that is getting cold.

Guardian: (Relenting.) Maybe now the fright would be enough to keep them from crimes from this out. They are but young.

Jester: (To Princes.) Don't be keeping me waiting! Put out now your hands. *(They shake their heads.)*

Servant: They cannot do that, being bound.

Jester: If you will not stretch out your hands when I ask you, I will strike off your heads without asking! *(Flourishes sword.)*

Guardian: (Standing up.) I did not empower you to go so far as that! It is without my authority!

Jester: You have given over the power of the law to the power of the sword. It must take its way!

Guardian: I will not give in to that! I have all authority here!

Jester: If you grow wicked with the Judge's wig on your head, so do I with this sword in my hand! You called me in to do a certain business and I am going to do it! I am not going to get a bad name put on me for breach of contract! If a labourer is given piece work cutting thistles with a hook he is given leave to do it, or a rat catcher doing away with vermin in the same way! He is not bid after his trouble to let them go loose out of his bag! And why would an Executioner that is higher again in the profession be checked. Isn't my pride in my work the same as theirs? And along with that, let me tell you I belong to a Trades Union!

(Guardian moans and covers his face.)

(To the Princes.) Kneel down now! Where you kept me so long waiting and that the Judge attempted to interfere with me, I have my mind made up to make an end of you! *(Holds up sword.)*

1st Wrenboy: (Rushing forward and putting his arms about Prince.) You must not touch him! These lads never did any harm!

2nd Wrenboy: (Protecting a Prince.) It is we ourselves are to be punished if anyone must be punished.

3d Wrenboy: They are innocent whoever is to blame.

Jester: Take their place so! Someone must be put an end to.

(All the Wrenboys kneel.)

1st Wrenboy: Here we are so. We changed places with them for our own pleasure, thinking to lead a prince's life, and if there is anyone must suffer by reason of that change let it be ourselves.

Jester: I'll take off their gags so and let them free.

(He cuts cord of gags and hands, then throws some dust over all boys as before, saying):

Dust of Mullein leave the eyes
You made fail to recognise Princes in
their poor disguise; Princes all, had men clear eyes!

(The Princes throw off their masks.)

1st Prince: It is all a mistake! Oh, Guardian, don't you know now that we are your murslings and your wards! Look at the royal mark upon our arm, that we brought with us into the world. *(They turn up sleeves and show their arms.)*

2nd Dowager Messenger: I am satisfied without looking at the royal sign. I have been looking at their finger nails. Those other nails *(pointing to Wrenboys)* have never been touched with a soapy brush.

2nd Prince: It is strange you did not recognise us. It was that Jester yesterday when we changed our coats that threw a dust of disguise between you and us.

1st Dowager Messenger: Was it that these lads robbed you of your clothes?

3d. Prince: Not at all.

4th Prince: We ourselves that were discontented and wishful to change places with them.

Guardian: A very foolish thing, and that I have never read of in any of my histories.

5th Prince: We were the first to wish the change. It is we should be blamed.

5th Wrenboy: No, but put the blame on us! The Wrenboys you seen yesterday.

Guardian: Ah, be quiet, how do I know who you are, or if ever I saw you before! My poor head is going round and round.

1st Wrenboy: Now do you know us! (*All recite "The Wren, the Wren, the King of All Birds." Give first verse.*)

Guardian: (*Stopping his ears.*) Oh, stop it! That makes my poor head worse again.

2nd Wrenboy: (*Pulling up sleeve.*) If you had chanced to see our right arm you would recognise us. We were not without bringing a mark into the world with us, if it is not royal itself.

(*Wrenboys strip their arms.*)

1st Dowager Messenger: What is he talking about? (*Seizes arm and looks at it.*)

2nd Dowager Messenger: It is the same mark as is on the princes, the sign and token of a King!

1st Dowager Messenger: It is certain these must be their five little royal cousins, that were stolen away from the coast.

1st Wrenboy: If we were brought away it was by that Grugach that has kept us in his service through the years.

2nd Dowager Messenger: It is no wonder they took to one another. It was easy to know by the way they behaved they had in them royal blood.

(The Boys turn to each other, the Ogre is slipping out.)

Jester: (Throwing off his cloak and showing his green ragged clothes.) Stop where you are!

Ogre: Do your best! You cannot hinder me! I have spells could change the whole of ye to a cairn of grey stones! *(Makes signs with his hands.)*

Jester: (In a terrible voice.) Are you thinking to try your spells against mine?

Ogre: (Trembling and falling on his knees.) Oh, spare me! Hold your hand! Do not use against me your spells of life and death! I know you now! I know you well through your ragged dress! What are my spells beside yours? You the great Master of all magic and all enchantments, Manannan, Son of the Sea!

Jester: Yes, I am Manannan, that men are apt to call a Jester and a Fool, and a Disturber, and a Mischief-maker, upsetting the order of the world and making confusion in its order and its ways. *(Recites or sings.)*

For when I see a master Hold back his hireling's fee I shake my pepper castor Into his sweetened tea!

And when I see a plan make The Birds that watch us frown, I come and toss the pancake And turn it upside down!

In this I follow after Lycurgus who was wise; To the little god of laughter I make my sacrifice!

And now here is my word of command! Everyone into his right place!

Ogre: Spare me! Let me go this time!

Jester: Go out now! I will not bring a blemish on this sword by striking off your ugly head. But as you have been through seven years an enemy to these young boys, keeping them in ignorance and dirt, they that are sons of a king, I cross and command you to go groping through holes and dirt and darkness through three times seven years in the shape of a rat, with every boy, high or low, gentle or simple, your pursuer and your enemy. And along with that I would recommend you to keep out of the way of your own enchanted cats!

(Ogre gives a squeal and creeps away on all fours.)

Guardian: I think I will give up business and go back to my old trade of Chamberlain and of shutting out draughts from the Court. The weight of years is coming on me, and it is time for me to set my mind to some quiet path.

1st Dowager Messenger: Come home with us so, and help us to attend to our cats, that they will be able to destroy the rats of the world.

2nd Dowager Messenger: (To Princes.) It is best for you come to your Godmother's Court, as your Guardian is showing the way.

1st Prince: We may come and give news of our doings at the end of a year and a day.

But now we will go with our comrades to learn their work and their play.

2nd Prince: For lying on silken cushions, or stretched on a feathery bed.

We would long again for the path by the lake, and the wild swans overhead.

3d Prince: Till we'll harden our bodies with wrestling and get courage to stand in a fight.

4th Prince: And not to be blind in the woods or in dread of the darkness of night.

1st Wrenboy: And we who are ignorant blockheads, and never were reared to know The art of the languaged poets, it's along with you we will go.

5th Prince: Come show us the wisdom of woods, and the way to outrun the wild deer, Till we'll harden our minds with courage, and be masters of hardship and fear.

2nd Wrenboy: But you are candles of knowledge, and we'll give you no ease or peace, Till you'll learn us manners and music, and news of the Wars of Greece.

1st Prince: Come on, we will help one another, and going together we'll find, Joy with those great companions, Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind. (*They join hands.*)

Jester: It's likely you'll do great actions, for there is an ancient word, That comradeship is better than the parting of the sword, And that if ever two natures should join and grow into one, They will do more together than the world has ever done. So now I've ended my business, and I'll go, for my road is long, But be sure the Jester will find you out, if ever things go wrong!

(*He goes off singing.*)

And so I follow after Lycurgus who was wise; To the little god of laughter I pay my sacrifice!

CURTAIN

NOTES FOR THE JESTER

I was asked one Christmas by a little schoolboy to write a play that could be acted at school; and in looking for a subject my memory went back to a story I had read in childhood called "The Discontented Children," where, though I forget its incidents, the gamekeeper's children changed places for a while with the children of the Squire, and I thought I might write something on these lines. But my mind

soon went miching as our people (and Shakespeare) would say, and broke through the English hedges into the unbounded wonder-world. Yet it did not quite run out of reach of human types, for having found some almost illegible notes, I see that at the first appearance of Manannan I had put in brackets the initials "G.B.S." And looking now at the story of that Great Jester, in the history of the ancient gods, I see that for all his quips and mischief and "tricks and wonders," he came when he was needed to the help of Finn and the Fianna, and gave good teaching to the boy-hero, Cuchulain; and I read also that "all the food he would use would be a vessel of sour milk or a few crab-apples. And there never was any music sweeter than the music he used to be playing."

I have without leave borrowed a phrase from "The Candle of Vision," written by my liberal fellow-countryman, A.E., where he says, "I felt at times as one raised from the dead, made virginal and pure, who renews exquisite intimacies with the divine companions, with Earth, Water, Air, and Fire." And I think he will forgive me for quoting another passage now from the same book, for I think it must have been in my mind when I wrote of my Wrenboys: "The lands of Immortal Youth which flush with magic the dreams of childhood, for most sink soon below far horizons and do not again arise. For around childhood gather the wizards of the darkness and they baptize it and change its imagination of itself, as in the Arabian tales of enchantment men were changed by sorcerers who cried, 'Be thou beast or bird.' So ...is the imagination of life about itself changed and one will think he is a worm in the sight of Heaven, he who is but a god in exile.... What palaces they were born in, what dominions they are rightly heir to, are concealed from them as in the fairy tale the stolen prince lives obscurely among the swineherd. Yet at times men do not remember, in dreams or in the deeps of sleep, they still wear sceptre and diadem and partake of the banquet of the gods."

The Wrenboys still come to our door at Coole on St. Stephen's Day, as they used in my childhood to come to Roxborough, but it is in our bargain that the wren itself must be symbolic, unmolested, no longer killed in vengeance for that one in the olden times that awakened the sentinels of the enemy Danes by pecking at crumbs on a drum. And, indeed, these last two or three years the rhymes concerning that old

history have been lessened, and their place taken by "The Soldiers Song."

I think the staging of the play is easy. The Ogre's hut may be but a shallow front scene, a curtain that can be drawn away. The masks are such as might be used by Wrenboys, little paper ones, such as one finds in a Christmas cracker, held on with a bit of elastic, and would help to get the change into the eyes of the audience, which Manannan's Mullein-dust may not have reached.

Air: "Shule Aroon"

[Music]

Air: "Mo Bhuachailin Buidhe"

Brightly [Music]

Air: "The Bells of Shandon"

My brain grows rus-ty, my mind is dus-ty
The time I'm dwelling with
the like of ye; While my spirit rang-es
through all the changes could
turn the world to fel-is-it-y
When Ar-is-tot-le

[Music]

The Time I've Lost in Wooing

Poco allegretto [Music]

My Molly-O [Music]

Air: "O Donall Abu"

[Music]

The Bard of Armagh

Slow. [Music]

Air: "Dear Harp of My Country"

[Music]

I wish I had the shepherd's lamb

I wish I had the shep-herd's lamb, the shep-herd's lamb, the shepherd's lamb, I wish I had the shepherd's lamb, And Ka-tie com-ing af-ter: Iso o gur-rim gur-rim hoo iso gra-ma-chree gon kel-lig hoo, Iso o gur-rim gur-rim hoo, Sthoo pat-tha beg dho wau-her.

[Music]

Air: "Let Erin Remember"

[Music]

Air: "And doth not a meeting like this"

[Music]

Garryowen

Quickly. [Music]

Air: "O Bay of Dublin"

[Music]

The Cruiskeen Lán

With expression. [Music]

The Beautiful City of Sligo

Quickly. [Music]

The Deserter's Meditation

Slow. [Music]

Oft in the Stilly Night

Slow. [Music]

Johnny, I hardly knew you

Spirited [Music]

By Memory Inspired

[Music]

Eileen Aroon

[Music]

Air: "The Shan Van Vocht"

[Music]

Air: "I saw from the beach"

[Music]

Air: "Silent, O Moyle"

[Music]

An Spailin Fánach

Moderately [Music]

Air: "The Last Rose of Summer"

[Music]