

Six Enid Blyton Plays



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SIX ENID BLYTON PLAYS

by ENID BLYTON

First published in 1935



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There is no fee for the performance of any of these plays.

1
THE PRINCESS AND THE ENCHANTER

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

Act I. IN THE GARDEN OF THE PALACE OF THE KING OF BELLONIA.

Act II. IN THE COUNTRYSIDE NOT FAR FROM THE ENCHANTER'S CASTLE.

Act III. INSIDE THE ENCHANTER'S CASTLE.

(This play can be acted by children of one age or of mixed ages. As many characters may perform as wished.)

CHARACTERS

THE KING OF BELLONIA
THE QUEEN OF BELLONIA
THE PRINCESS FENELLA, their only daughter
HER NURSE
THE NORTH WIND
ROLLAND, a shepherd boy
THE ENCHANTER LONG-BEARD
MANY COURTIERS
MANY SOLDIERS
SERVANTS

PROPERTIES NEEDED

Garden-seat. Plants in tubs or pots. Doll's pram and doll. Book. Plate of biscuits. A stick. A crook. Boxes or forms draped with green. Bracken or heather. Drapings of black, adorned with cut-out silver stars and moons. A big draped chair for throne. One or two ordinary chairs. A document with seals. A hen's egg. A curly hair, long if possible. A small table and iron.

ACT I

SCENE—*In the garden of the King's Palace. Plants in tubs or pots are here and here. There is a garden-seat at the back. On it are sitting the little PRINCESS FENELLA and her NURSE. She has a doll's pram near with a doll in. The NURSE is reading to her from a book.*

NURSE (*reading*): And so the Prince married the Princess, and they went to live in a palace together and were happy ever after. There, that's the end of the story, Your Highness.

FENELLA (*yawning*): Thank you, Nurse. Oh, dear, I'm tired of sitting still. I do wish I had some one to play with. I'm always alone, and it's *so* dull not to have other children to play Hide-and-Seek with or Mothers and Fathers.

NURSE: Well, you've plenty of dolls and other toys. Take your big doll for a ride in her pram, Fenella, dear. I'll go and get your morning biscuits for you.

(*She goes off. FENELLA gets up and goes to her doll's pram. She tucks in the doll carefully.*)

FENELLA: I suppose dolls are better than nothing—but I *do* wish I was allowed to play with other children. It's no fun at all being a lonely Princess. (*Begins to wheel her pram about.*)

(*Enter the ENCHANTER LONG-BEARD, at the back. The PRINCESS does not see him at first. He looks at her, and strokes his long beard.*)

ENCHANTER (*in a deep voice*): So this is the little Princess who is lonely! Come with me, my dear, and I will show you where you can find many playmates.

FENELLA (*turning in surprise*): Oh, you made me jump! Who are you?

ENCHANTER: Never mind my name. Come with me.

FENELLA: I mustn't. My nurse says I must never go with people I don't know.

ENCHANTER: You will have to come with *me*!

(*He holds up his wand and makes passes in the air with it. Gradually he goes off stage and FENELLA, as if in a dream, follows him slowly and jerkily. She leaves her doll's pram behind.*)

(*Enter the NURSE, carrying plate of biscuits.*)

NURSE: Your Highness, here are some special sugar biscuits for you. (*Looks all round in surprise.*) Now where's that child gone? Fenella! Fenella! Where are you? Come and have your biscuits! (*Looks in every corner.*) Can anything have happened? Fenella!

FENELLA!

(*Enter a COURTIER, haughtily.*)

1ST COURTIER: Her Majesty the Queen asks you not to make such a noise.

NURSE (*in a panic*): But the Princess is gone—disappeared! Oh, whatever shall I do?

1ST COURTIER (*in alarm*): What do you mean? I'll fetch the Queen at once.

(Hurries off.)

NURSE (*wringing her hands*): And I only left her for a minute! Just whilst I went to get her favourite biscuits.

(Enter the KING and QUEEN, upset and alarmed, followed by a crowd of COURTIERS. The KING and QUEEN sit down on the garden-seat, and the QUEEN looks round for NURSE, who begins to weep noisily.)

QUEEN: What's all this about Fenella disappearing, Nurse?

NURSE: She's gone! I went to fetch her biscuits and when I came back she wasn't here.

KING: She's probably hiding in the garden. Courtiers, hunt and see.

(COURTIERS run off.)

QUEEN (*anxiously*): Oh, I hope she hasn't been taken away. Whatever shall we do?

KING (*pompously*): Calm yourself, my dear. Fenella is probably up a tree—or paddling in the duck pond.

(Enter 1ST COURTIER and bows.)

1ST COURTIER: The Princess is not in the orchard, Your Majesty.

2ND COURTIER: (*entering out of breath*): Nor in the swing, Sire.

3RD COURTIER (*entering and speaking solemnly*): And I have looked up every tree, Your Majesty, and the Princess is not to be seen.

(Rest of COURTIERS enter.)

4TH COURTIER: She isn't eating peas in the pea-patch.

5TH COURTIER: She isn't in the dog-kennel or the chicken-house.

REST OF COURTIERS (*together*): She isn't anywhere in the garden at all!

KING: Then where *is* she? (*Glares all round, but nobody answers.*)

QUEEN (*anxiously*): Well, we can't sit here doing nothing. We must find out where she's gone. Some one must have seen her go. What wind is blowing this morning?

1ST COURTIER: The North Wind has been blowing in the garden all morning, Your Majesty.

QUEEN: Then he must have seen all that happened. Call him here, please.

(2ND COURTIER bows and goes off, crying 'North Wind! North Wind! North Wind!')

KING: A blustery fellow, that North Wind. He always makes me feel cold! (*Wraps his cloak tightly round him and hunches up his shoulders.*)

(A windy, wailing sound is heard off. One of the trees in tubs blows over. All the COURTIERS shiver and wrap their clothes round them as much as possible.)

QUEEN: He's coming. I can hear him.

(Noise gets louder and on to stage leaps the NORTH WIND with a whistling sound. He bows low to the KING.)

KING: Good morning. Don't come quite so near me, please. I want to know if you saw anything of the Princess Fenella this morning.

NORTH WIND: Yes, Your Majesty. I saw her with the Enchanter Long-beard. He took her away with him.

KING (*leaping to his feet in rage and fear*): What! The Enchanter Long-beard! He took Fenella away! How dare he! Where has he gone?

NORTH WIND: Back to his castle in the Blue Mountains, I expect.

KING (*stamping up and down*): My poor little Fenella! That Enchanter always vowed he would be revenged on me for turning him out of my kingdom because of his wicked ways—and now he has taken Fenella!

QUEEN (*weeping*): We must get her back. Oh, North Wind, go quickly to the Enchanter and ask him what we must do to get back our little Fenella.

NORTH WIND (*bowing*): Madame, I go! I will be back before you expect me!

(Rushes off stage and a noise of loud whooping and whistling is heard off, gradually dying away.)

NURSE (*weeping*): Oh, my dear little Fenella, why did I leave you to go and get your biscuits! Oh, what shall I do?

QUEEN (*kindly*): Don't cry, Nurse. The Enchanter would have waited his chance, and if he had not taken her to-day he would have tried to-morrow. We will get her back, never fear, even if we have to pay a great ransom.

COURTIERS (*altogether, turning to one another and ramming their fists against the palms of their other hands*): We'll get her back!

KING (*gloomily*): I don't know what conditions the Enchanter will make. I don't expect he will want gold—he's richer than I am already! I've a feeling he will make some quite impossible conditions, and then we shall never see Fenella again. (*Nurse weeps loudly.*)

(A loud, windy noise is heard off stage again and in leaps the NORTH WIND. Every one shivers and pulls clothes round them.)

NORTH WIND (*bowing*): I have been there and back again, and I have spoken with the Enchanter.

KING (*surprised*): You have been swifter than lightning! What did old Long-beard say? Does he want gold?

NORTH WIND: No, Your Majesty. You may have Fenella if you can do three things.

KING (*groaning*): I thought so. What are the three things?

NORTH WIND: You must take the Enchanter something that neither he nor any one else has ever seen before.

COURTIERS (*holding up hands in dismay*): Impossible!

NORTH WIND: The second thing is—you must ask him to do something he cannot do!

KING (*putting head in hands*): There is nothing he cannot do! He knows all the magic in the world!

NORTH WIND: And the last thing is—you must tell him truly what thoughts are in his head.

(All groan deeply and look at one another in despair. The KING jumps up again and paces up and down. The QUEEN mops eyes. The NURSE sinks down on grass and weeps into handkerchief.)

KING: Well, it's no use moaning and groaning about it. Something has got to be done. I shall send out all over my kingdom and see what unknown, unheard-of treasures I can get. That will be the first thing. For the second thing I shall consult my wise man. Maybe he can tell me something that the Enchanter cannot do. As for the third, there is no use thinking about that until I see the Enchanter face to face—and, even then, who knows what strange thoughts fly through his wicked mind!

QUEEN: Call for the soldiers. Send them through the kingdom with a proclamation. We must start for the Blue Mountains in a week's time without fail. Nurse, stop crying and pack up some clean clothes for Fenella. She is sure to want some!

(NURSE hurries off. COURTIERS follow. The KING gives his arm to the QUEEN.)

KING: We must be brave, my dear, and do our best. Come, let us go to find the Captain of the soldiers.

(They go off as curtain falls.)

ACT II

SCENE—*In the countryside not far from the ENCHANTER'S castle. There is a green bank towards the back. On it is sitting a SHEPHERD BOY, dressed in plain tunic and cloak, whittling a stick. He is singing a song sweetly and softly. To him enters a SOLDIER. The BOY looks up, surprised.*

SOLDIER: Ho, boy! Do you know this countryside?

BOY: As well as I know my flock of sheep!

SOLDIER: Then tell me this—are we far from the castle of the great Enchanter Long-beard?

BOY: About half a day's march, sir. But where do you come from? It is seldom I see soldiers here, or indeed any strange face, for no one likes to journey too near the Enchanter's dwelling!

SOLDIER: I am here with the bodyguard of the King and Queen of Bellonia. They come to visit the Enchanter.

(Tramping noise heard off. Enter more SOLDIERS.)

SOLDIER *(saluting the CAPTAIN, who comes first)*: Sir, this boy says we are but half a day's march from the castle.

CAPTAIN: We will rest here for a while. The King and Queen are tired, for the roads are bad and have jolted their carriage for many miles. Prepare a place for Their Majesties to sit, men, and you *(nodding to 1ST SOLDIER)* go to tell the Nurse that we have found a good resting-place.

(SOLDIER goes off, saluting. Others pat the bank, fetch bracken or heather to sit on. The SHEPHERD BOY stands aside, watching.)

CAPTAIN: Attention! Their Majesties come!

(SOLDIERS spring to attention and stand stiffly in a semicircle round the back of the green bank. The SHEPHERD BOY is behind them, peeping excitedly to see the KING and QUEEN.)

(Enter the NURSE, hurriedly and fussily.)

NURSE: Oh, my poor bones! It's a wonder I've any left whole in my body, I've been jolted about so. Never have I seen such bad roads! What's the good of being an enchanter if you don't make your roads fit to travel on?

CAPTAIN: It is said that Long-beard uses the lightning when he wishes to travel, Madam. He has no use for roads.

NURSE: And I've no use for enchanters! Now, is there a comfortable place for the Queen to sit? Poor lady, she's fit to drop! She is just coming, listen!

(Steps and sighs heard off. Enter the QUEEN, slowly, helped by the KING, who holds her arm and pats her hand comfortingly.)

KING: Now you have a nice rest here for a little while. Our journey is nearly at an end.

QUEEN (*sinking down on green bank*): And our troubles are only just beginning! However are you going to fulfil the conditions set out by the Enchanter? Do you really suppose he will take that red ruby and believe you when you say no one has ever seen it before?

KING: Well, it was found by a blind goblin, and cut by a blind dwarf, both working in the darkness. No one *has* seen it!

QUEEN: You've only got their word for it that it is a red ruby! You haven't dared to look to see. Suppose it's a pebble—or just a boot-button! You know what those goblins are for playing tricks!

KING (*wearily*): Well, well, my dear, we've got to chance that. It's the second and third conditions *I'm* worrying about! What in the world am I to tell the Enchanter to do that he can't do? My Wise Man told me to tell him to change himself into a six-legged tiger, saying that as there was no such thing old Long-beard couldn't turn into it. But, you know, I'm quite sure he can!

(Walks up and down, hands behind his back, thinking.)

NURSE (*looking off stage*): Here come the courtiers to say that they have prepared you a meal, Your Majesty.

(Enter three or four COURTIERS. They bow.)

1ST COURTIER: Your Majesty, lunch is prepared.

2ND COURTIER: It is in the next field, out of the hot sun.

KING (*turning to QUEEN*): Come, my dear. We must eat.

QUEEN: I don't want anything this morning. I am tired and sad. Leave me here to think alone.

KING: The soldiers had better stay with you, then.

QUEEN: No, they must have their meal. Leave me here by myself. I shall come to no harm.

NURSE: I will stay with you, Madam. I am not hungry either.

KING: Very well. Come, men, leave the ladies to themselves.

(All go out, the KING first, then the COURTIERS and last the SOLDIERS. The QUEEN sits on bank with her head on hand and weeps.)

NURSE (*kneeling by her*): Don't cry, sweet lady. We will get our little Princess again, never fear!

QUEEN: If only I could see her! If only I knew where she was!

(The SHEPHERD BOY, who went out with SOLDIERS, now creeps back again. The NURSE hears him, looks round, and gives a little cry.)

NURSE: Oh, it's you, boy! What are you doing, creeping about like that?

BOY: Madam, I have seen the little Princess.

QUEEN (*looking up in surprise and delight*): Where? Where? Tell me quickly.

BOY: Madam, she is a prisoner in the Enchanter's castle. I saw her looking from a window. She was the fairest child I have ever seen! I wish I could help you to rescue her. Tell me how she was captured. Maybe I can be of some use to you.

QUEEN (*shaking her head sadly*): How can you help, shepherd boy, when kings and queens, wise men and counsellors have not brains enough to outwit old Long-beard?

NURSE: The Princess was stolen away by Long-beard. He will only give her back on three conditions.

BOY: Tell me them.

NURSE: First, we must take him something that no one has ever seen before.

BOY: Ha! Easy!

NURSE (*looking surprised*): Second, we must ask him to do something he cannot do.

BOY: Easier still.

NURSE: You are foolish, boy! The third thing is, we must tell him his thoughts.

BOY: And that's the easiest thing of all.

QUEEN (*catching hold of BOY's hand, earnestly*): Boy, tell me what you mean. Surely, surely, you cannot outwit such a wizard as the Enchanter Long-beard? Oh, if we only could!

BOY (*kneeling down by QUEEN*): Madam, let me try. I am not clever like your courtiers, nor smart like your soldiers. I am only a shepherd boy who has nothing to do all day but think, and dream, and think again. I can do all those three things if you will but trust me.

QUEEN (*rising to her feet*): I do trust you. You shall try. Nurse, fetch the King here to me.

(NURSE runs out, excitedly.)

KING (*entering hurriedly*): Now, now, what's all this story about a shepherd boy cleverer than the Enchanter himself! Is it you, boy?

QUEEN: Yes, this is the boy. He says he can fulfil all three of the conditions if we will trust him.

KING: What nonsense! A boy hardly in his teens! You must be mad, my dear! Go, boy, and let us see you no more. If you think to get gold from the Queen, you are wrong. Be careful you do not get a beating!

BOY: Very well, Sire. I go! (*Turns to go.*)

QUEEN: Wait, wait! Boy, tell the King how you can outwit Long-beard and let him judge for himself whether or no you are speaking truth.

BOY: Very well. I will tell him how I would fulfil the first condition, but for the others he must trust me to do what I say.

KING (*stiffly*): Tell me then.

(BOY steps up to KING and whispers for a little while, very earnestly, in KING's ear. At first KING's face is scornful, then changes to astonishment and finally to the greatest delight. He turns to BOY and claps him on shoulder.)

KING: Splendid! Marvellous! So simple—and yet so cunning! Boy, I will trust you. How will you fulfil the second and third conditions?

BOY: That I shall not tell you, Sire. It would be better for you not to know, in case the Enchanter sees from your face that there is some kind of trickery. There is only one thing I must ask.

KING: What is that? You shall have anything!

BOY: Will you allow me to dress in your robes, Your Majesty, and go before the Enchanter as if I were you?

KING (*surprised and doubtful*): Well—er—really—er—I don't think I could do that.

QUEEN: Oh, let him do anything he wants to, if only there is a chance of getting our little Princess back again!

KING: Well, I suppose no harm can come of it. As a matter of fact, I'd just as soon let somebody else face that merciless old Enchanter! I don't want to be suddenly turned into a jumping frog or spotted beetle!

QUEEN: Go and change clothes now, before the soldiers come back. Then we can tell them what we are going to do.

KING: Very well, my dear. Come, boy!

(They go out together.)

QUEEN: Oh, Nurse, I do hope we shall get Fenella back again now. I feel somehow we can trust that shepherd boy. He has such an honest, clever face, and isn't he brave! He doesn't seem to mind a bit facing the Enchanter. I feel afraid myself to see him, don't you?

NURSE: Oh, I'm all of a shake, Madam, when I think of it. Look! Here come the courtiers.

(A sound of feet off. Enter the COURTIERs talking. When they see the QUEEN they stop and bow.)

1ST COURTIER (*looking round*): Where is His Majesty, Madam? He left our meal to come back to you.

QUEEN: He will be here in a moment.

(Sound of marching, off. Enter the SOLDIERs.)

CAPTAIN (*saluting*): We come to say, Madam, that your carriage is ready for you. The horses are fed and watered, and are anxious to go.

QUEEN: Wait a moment, Captain. The King will be here soon. I will wait for him.

NURSE: Here he comes, Your Majesty!

(Enter the SHEPHERD BOY, dressed in the KING's robes and crown, looking very grand, and walking very proudly, with his head well in the air. Behind him, dressed in the boy's cloak, comes the KING, coughing behind his hand, and looking apologetically at every one as if he were half-ashamed of himself.)

CAPTAIN (*alarmed*): What is this?

SOLDIERs (*shouting*): This is not the King.

KING: Now, now, now, not so much noise, please! Let me explain. (*Sits beside QUEEN. The SHEPHERD BOY stands behind him.*)

KING: We are about to see the Enchanter, as you know. For reasons of my own I am pretending to be a shepherd boy, and this youth is to be the King. You will please treat him as such, and once we are in the castle take no notice of me at all. Do you all understand?

ALL (*puzzled*): Yes, Your Majesty.

CAPTAIN (*stepping forward*): But, Sire——

KING: This is no time for butting. Find me a horse I can ride. The boy who is dressed up as myself will ride in the royal carriage, of course. Now, no more delay! We must start off, or we shall not be in time to see the Enchanter to-day!

(Gets up and begins to stalk out, every one bowing low, when the SHEPHERD BOY taps him on the shoulder and waves him back. Then the BOY steps in front of the KING and stalks out in imitation, all bowing low to him. The QUEEN follows, and then the NURSE. Curtain falls as the COURTIERS and SOLDIERS are marching out.)

ACT III

SCENE—*In the castle of the ENCHANTER LONG-BEARD. The walls are draped in black, sewn with great silver moons and stars. There is a throne on one side, half-turned to the front. One or two smaller chairs are about. The ENCHANTER is seated on his throne, studying a long parchment hung with many seals. He is dressed in a purple cloak and tall, pointed hat on which silver moons and stars shine. He has a very long beard. Two servants stand behind his chair.*

ENCHANTER (*in a deep voice*): A pound of peacock's feathers—a thimbleful of moonlight—an adder's tongue—the foot-fall of a cat—the roots of a mountain. Yes, this would be a very powerful spell. Ho, servant.

(*A SERVANT darts from behind his chair and kneels.*)

ENCHANTER: Take this spell and get me the things written in it.

(*SERVANT goes out running.*)

ENCHANTER: Soon I shall be the richest man in the world—the most powerful—the most feared. I have a King's daughter for my servant, and when she grows older I shall make her help me with my spells.

(*A trumpet-call is heard off.*)

ENCHANTER (*surprised*): Ho, servant! (*The second SERVANT comes from behind chair and kneels.*) Go to see who that is. I do not expect guests to-day.

(*SERVANT runs off. Comes back almost at once and bows.*)

2ND SERVANT: Master, it is the King of Bellonia, his Queen, his court, and his bodyguard. They come to beg you for their daughter, the Princess Fenella.

ENCHANTER (*surprised and scornful*): What! That stupid King! He will never be able to fulfil the three conditions I gave him! Bring him before me. Now I have my revenge on him for turning me out of his kingdom years ago! He shall never have his little daughter again!

(*SERVANT goes out.*)

ENCHANTER (*getting up, pacing up and down, rubbing his hands in glee*): I have him in my power! If he cannot fulfil all three of my conditions I shall turn him and his Queen into a pair of monkeys and keep them in a cage. Ho, ho!

(*Noise heard off. ENCHANTER sits down again, and waits scornfully and silently for his visitors. A trumpet blows. Two SERVANTS enter and stand one on each side of the place where the guests are about to enter.*)

1ST SERVANT (*loudly*): His Majesty, the great and gracious King of Bellonia!

(*Enter the SHEPHERD BOY, dressed in kingly robes. He advances to the ENCHANTER and bows.*)

2ND SERVANT (*loudly*): Her Majesty, the lovely and gracious Queen of Bellonia!

(*Enter the QUEEN, and bows stiffly to the ENCHANTER, who waves her to a chair. Enter the NURSE, the COURTIERS, the SOLDIERS, and, among them, the KING, still wrapped in the SHEPHERD BOY'S cloak. All group themselves round the back and sides, leaving the SHEPHERD BOY KING in the centre and the ENCHANTER seated on his throne.*)

ENCHANTER: I bid you welcome.

SHEPHERD BOY: I give you greeting. I have come to fetch the Princess Fenella.

ENCHANTER: She is my servant and no longer your daughter.

NURSE: Oh, you cruel, heartless creature!

ENCHANTER: Another word from you, woman, and you will be changed into a beetle!

(*NURSE squeezes herself into background, sniffing noisily into handkerchief.*)

SHEPHERD BOY KING: I have come to fulfil your three conditions, Long-beard.

ENCHANTER (*scornfully*): You think you can do this, oh, King? You are mistaken. If you fail, I shall turn you and your Queen into a pair of monkeys and keep you in my big parrot cage. Ho, ho, you will soon learn to do tricks for a piece of banana!

S. B. KING: Have done with these threats, Long-beard. I have no time to waste!

ENCHANTER: Very well. Ho, servant, read out my first condition!

SERVANT (*stepping forward and reading from a document*): The King of Bellonia shall bring to the Enchanter Long-beard something that neither he nor any one else has ever set eyes on before!

ENCHANTER: Yes. I remember. Well, King, what marvellous thing have you brought me? Treasure from a deep-hidden cave? Nay, even the beetles have seen that! Riches from the depth of the sea? The fishes have seen everything!

S. B. KING: No treasure, no riches have I brought, Long-beard. Simply this! (*He holds out his hand and on the palm, clearly to be seen, is a hen's large egg.*)

ENCHANTER (*scornfully*): You are mad! How can you say that no one has seen that egg before?

S. B. KING (*suddenly dropping egg on to floor, where it smashes and breaks*): Ah, but see, Long-beard! Have you, or any one else in the whole world, ever set eyes on that yolk before? Has it not been hidden from all eyes in its brown shell? Not even the hen has seen the yellow yolk!

ALL (*excitedly*): True! True! That yolk has never been seen before!

ENCHANTER (*angrily and reluctantly*): Well, it's a silly sort of trick, but I suppose I must admit that neither I nor any one else has ever seen the inside of that egg before. You have fulfilled the first condition, oh, King! Now, what is the second?

SERVANT (*stepping forward again and reading*): The King of Bellonia shall ask the Enchanter Long-beard to do something that he cannot do.

ENCHANTER (*pleased*): Ha! That is impossible!

S. B. KING: We shall see. (*He looks round as if seeking for something. He goes up to some one with curly hair.*) Will you give me one of your hairs? (*In surprise the person asked*

pulls a hair from his or her head and gives it to the false KING in full view of every one.)

S. B. KING: Thank you. Now, Long-beard, here is a task for you. Straighten this curly hair for me! (*He gives it to the surprised ENCHANTER.*)

ENCHANTER (*scornfully*): This is easy! (*He pulls hair straight. It springs back curly again. He pulls it again. Then he wets his finger and strokes the hair to make it damp. It becomes curlier than ever.*) What's the matter with the thing? The straighter I make it the curlier it gets! (*Throws it down on ground and stamps heavily on it. Picks it up again and finds it still curly.*) This is ridiculous! Ho, servant, fetch me an iron. I will iron it straight!

(*SERVANT rushes off, coming back immediately with small table and large iron.*

ENCHANTER *snatches iron, puts hair on table and irons violently. Picks up hair and finds it still curly. Throws it away in rage.*)

S. B. KING: Well, Long-beard, is it straight yet?

ENCHANTER (*sulkily, flinging himself down on throne*): You know quite well it isn't! Another stupid trick! Well, it will go hardly with you when you fail the third time—for fail you will!

SERVANT (*stepping forward and reading*): The King of Bellonia shall tell the Enchanter Long-beard exactly what his thoughts are.

ENCHANTER: Ha! No trickery will serve you this time! My thoughts are my own, and no man knows them.

S. B. KING (*stepping forward and looking closely into LONG-BEARD'S face*): I can read your thoughts, Enchanter! Yes, I can read them. You think—you think I am the King of Bellonia! You think the King himself stands before you. You think it is he that is defying you! Those are your thoughts—but you are wrong! (*Throws off cloak and crown and stands before ENCHANTER in shepherd's tunic.*) I am only Rolland the shepherd boy! Yonder is the King!

(*The ENCHANTER leaps to his feet and glares round. The real KING steps forward, smiling. He takes the crown and the cloak and puts them on. There is a murmur of voices.*)

REAL KING: Now say truly, Long-beard, were those your thoughts? Did you think that shepherd boy was I? Did you think the King stood before you?

ALL: He did! He did!

ENCHANTER (*sulkily*): Another trick!

KING: Answer me, I say! Were those your thoughts?

ENCHANTER: Of course they were. How should I know there was such trickery afoot?

KING: You are the master of tricks and deceits, and it is well that you are for once caught in your own snare. You are defeated. Where is Fenella?

ENCHANTER (*gloomily*): Ho, servant! Fetch the Princess.

(*SERVANT runs out, coming in immediately with the PRINCESS. She runs in delight to her mother and father and kisses them and hugs her NURSE.*)

FENELLA: Oh! Oh! You've come to fetch me! I knew you would! I told this nasty old man you wouldn't leave me here!

KING: Fenella, come here. This is Rolland, a shepherd boy, who came to our help and really saved you from the Enchanter.

FENELLA: Oh, what a nice boy, Father! I wish he was my brother, and then I could play with him all day!

KING (*turning to ROLLAND*): What reward do you ask for? Gold? A castle? Servants for yourself?

SHEPHERD BOY: I suppose—I suppose I couldn't come and live at your palace, Your Majesty? I should very much like to learn nice manners and perhaps sometimes play with the little Princess.

FENELLA: Of course he must, Father. Do let him! It's so lonely being a princess by myself. Let me have some one to play with. Rolland could guard me too, so that I would never be taken away again!

QUEEN: That is a splendid idea, Fenella. I am sure Rolland would take care of you. We will take him back with us.

ENCHANTER (*getting up suddenly and angrily*): Go, all of you! I may lose my temper and change you all into frogs in a moment! Go, I tell you!

(All look rather astonished and scared. The KING hustles FENELLA out and the QUEEN follows. The NURSE and COURTIERS go, and then the SOLDIERS, backing out, pointing their swords towards the ENCHANTER as if afraid he is going to do them harm. Only the SHEPHERD BOY is left. He picks up the crook which the KING has left on the floor.)

SHEPHERD BOY: Farewell, Enchanter. Be sure you know the difference between a king and a shepherd next time. Considering you are such a clever man you are really surprisingly stupid!

(Goes out laughing just as ENCHANTER rises up in a fury to catch him. The curtain falls as servants catch hold of LONG-BEARD and try to hold him back.)

THE END

ROBIN HOOD AND THE BUTCHER

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

Act I. IN THE GREENWOOD*Act II.* IN THE BUTCHERS' MARKET IN NOTTINGHAM TOWN*Act III.* IN THE GREENWOOD

(To be played by any number of children. This play is excellent for production out of doors, but may be played equally effectively indoors. A greater number of characters may be introduced if played in the open air.)

CHARACTERS

ROBIN HOOD

LITTLE JOHN (played by a tall child)

WILL SCARLETT

FRIAR TUCK

OTHER OF ROBIN HOOD'S MEN

A BUTCHER

THE SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM

A NUMBER OF BUTCHERS AND OTHER STALL-HOLDERS

A NUMBER OF MARKETERS OF BOTH SEXES

PROPERTIES NEEDED

If acted indoors, greenery, a green-draped form and stools for a bank and tufts of grass, and branches overhanging to give effect of wood. Bows and arrows. White-covered load to represent butcher's meat. Money. Wooden stalls or tables with different wares. Table, chairs, dishes, glasses. Also dishes for meal in greenwood. A wallet with twenty pieces of money in it.

ACT I

SCENE—*In the greenwood. If played in the open air, natural scenery is all that is necessary—grass, trees, etc. If played indoors, greenery should be hung about to give the impression of a green wood, ROBIN HOOD and his MEN are seated or standing, talking to one another. Some are polishing their bows.*

ROBIN: Little John is gone a long time to-day. He left at earliest dawn and is not back yet, though it is past the hour for breakfast.

WILL SCARLETT: I will go to see if he comes, Master.

(Rises and goes to side, looking with his hand to eyes.)

FRIAR TUCK: I hear a whistling, Will. Is it Little John?

(Whistling heard off.)

WILL: Yes! Here he comes, our Little John, ducking his tall head to escape the branches of the trees!

(Enter LITTLE JOHN. Drops on one knee before ROBIN, who is now standing.)

LITTLE JOHN: Greetings, Master.

ROBIN: Greetings, Little John. What news in Nottingham to-day?

LITTLE JOHN: Nothing great, Master. It is market day and all the stalls are being put up. I saw the Sheriff, and heard him roundly scolding his soldiers for letting you roam free in the greenwood!

ROBIN *(laughing)*: No soldiers will catch *me*! As for the Sheriff, he is too cowardly to come to the wood to seek for me himself!

WILL: What said the Sheriff, Little John?

LITTLE JOHN: He shouted that if only he could see Robin Hood face to face and have him within his reach, then would the soldiers see how he would deal with the robber!

ROBIN: Ho! Said he that in truth? Then he shall have his wish! I will go to Nottingham this very day and let the Sheriff see me face to face. Then will I see what he will do with me.

FRIAR TUCK: No, Master, do not go. There is a price upon your head, and danger stalks you too closely to be scorned.

WILL: If you go, let me go with you.

ROBIN: No. I go alone; but maybe I will bring the Sheriff back with me! So prepare a goodly meal to-morrow.

LITTLE JOHN: Bring the Sheriff back! Master, you are mad! The Sheriff would never ride to the greenwood with Robin Hood.

ROBIN *(laughing)*: You will see! I have a mind to be a butcher to-day, and go to sell meat in the stalls of Nottingham.

WILL: A butcher! But you have no meat, Master! You have no butcher's apron, cap, or blouse. It would be madness to go.

ROBIN: Have done, Will. I will find a way. Now leave me to myself, and see that tomorrow you kill two deer and roast them well for dinner.

(MEN salute and go off or hide behind trees where they can see what ROBIN does. They do not talk, but nod at one another, grin, etc., as the play proceeds and ROBIN talks to the BUTCHER.)

ROBIN (*sitting down*): If I mistake not, the fat butcher from the hamlet of Greendale comes this way. I will await him.

(*Noise heard off.*)

ROBIN (*looking to side*): Ah, here he comes, well-laden with meat to sell. (*Rises.*) Hallo there, fellow!

(*Enter BUTCHER, in blue blouse, apron, and white cap. Carries a load of meat wrapped up in white cloth.*)

BUTCHER: Greetings to you.

ROBIN: Where do you go with your meat?

BUTCHER: I am a simple butcher and I go to Nottingham to sell my meat. Who are you, friend?

ROBIN: I am Robin Hood.

BUTCHER (*dropping meat and falling in terror on his knees*): Oh, mercy! mercy! I am truly but a poor butcher! Do not use me ill!

ROBIN (*laughing, and pulling BUTCHER to his feet*): Have no fear, friend! I would never rob a poor man, I promise you. But listen, butcher, I have a bargain to drive with you!

BUTCHER: Oh, sir—oh, sir—I am full of fear (*trembles violently*). Let me go, I pray you. What bargain can you make with a poor man like me?

ROBIN: Stop shaking, fellow! You need not be afraid of Robin Hood. I rob the rich, 'tis true, but only to give to the poor. Now listen to me. To-day I would be a butcher and go to sell meat in the town of Nottingham. Will you sell me your meat and your dress, so that I may go?

BUTCHER: Willingly, good sir.

ROBIN: Good. I will give you four marks for them. See? (*Holds out money.*)

BUTCHER (*taking it gladly, and stowing it in wallet*): Thank you, Master. It is more than I would get in Nottingham Town for either meat or dress! (*Unties apron, slips blouse over head, and hands them with white cap to ROBIN.*)

ROBIN: Ha! Now I shall be a fine butcher! (*Puts on blouse over tunic and ties on apron. Takes off his own green hat and claps it on to BUTCHER's head. Puts on BUTCHER's cap.*)

BUTCHER: Sir, you make a good butcher! May you sell the meat well, and prosper greatly. Now may I go to my home?

ROBIN: Yes, go, good fellow. (*Lifts meat on to shoulder. BUTCHER calls farewell and goes off whistling.*)

ROBIN: Why did I not ask him what price to sell the meat for in the market? Ho, men, ho, are you there?

(MEN come running to him, laughing and pointing to apron and cap.)

FRIAR TUCK: You are a fine butcher, Master!

WILL: See you sell your meat well!

ROBIN: That I will—but I do not know the price to cry it? Do you know, Will?

WILL: Nay, Master, it is many months since I bought meat! We feast so well in the greenwood on the King's deer—for which we pay no penny—that I have forgotten the price of meat in the market.

ROBIN: No matter. I will cry it at twopence a pound. If it is too cheap it will soon be bought!

(Begins to go off, carrying meat.)

MEN: Farewell, Master. We will await you to-morrow!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE—*The Butchers' Market in Nottingham Town. There are stalls with meat on, and one or two other stalls hung with tinware, brooms, etc. The owner of each stands beside his stall, bawling out his wares as the curtain rises. ROBIN HOOD has the stall in the middle. A number of buyers of both sexes wander up and down, sometimes buying, sometimes standing and talking, sometimes merely looking.*

ALL STALL-HOLDERS (*together*): Buy, buy, buy! Buy our wares! Cheap and good, good and cheap! Buy, buy, buy!

TINWARE STALL-HOLDERS: Kettles, saucepans, good and strong! Buy, good people, buy!

ANOTHER STALL-HOLDER: Good brooms for sweeping! Buy, buy, buy! Good brushes, good brooms!

THREE *or* FOUR BUTCHERS: Buy our meat! Fresh and fine! Buy our meat!

ROBIN HOOD (*loudly*): Twopence a pound, the finest meat in the market! Twopence a pound! Come and buy, come and buy!

ONE BUTCHER (*to another*): Twopence a pound for meat! Did you hear that, friend? The man must be mad! Why, our meat is eightpence a pound, and cheap at that!

ROBIN HOOD (*shouting*): Twopence a pound, I say! Good, fresh meat at twopence a pound!

(*Buyers crowd round his stall in excitement.*)

1ST BUYER: Serve me first, butcher!

2ND BUYER: Give me five pounds of your meat!

3RD BUYER: Here is my twopence!

(*A great talking and chaffering goes on between the buyers at ROBIN'S stall. He serves his customers. The other BUTCHERS look at one another sourly. They have no customers.*)

1ST BUTCHER: Who is this fellow?

2ND BUTCHER: No one knows. He has not come to the market before.

3RD BUTCHER: He will ruin us with his cheap meat. Maybe he is a foolish fellow who thinks to take up trading and knows not how to sell at a profit.

1ST BUTCHER (*darkly*): Perchance he has killed a butcher and taken his meat to sell!

ROBIN HOOD: There, good people! You have bought all my meat and my stall is empty. I bid you good day!

(*His buyers murmur or cry 'Good day' and go off, pleased with their purchases, showing one another what they have in their bags.*)

1ST BUTCHER (*going up to ROBIN HOOD*): Sir, if you are a butcher, you must join our guild and learn the rules of our trade.

ROBIN (*gaily*): And where shall I learn all this, good fellow?

1ST BUTCHER: In a short time the market will close, and we shall all dine here together with the Sheriff. If you join us, we will tell you our rules.

ROBIN: So we dine here in the market-place with the Sheriff! That will please me greatly.

(A bell rings.)

2ND BUTCHER: The market is closed! No more buying until the afternoon. Close your stalls, good sirs.

3RD BUTCHER: We will set up the table for dinner.

(Goes off with another BUTCHER.)

ROBIN: And who pays for our dinner, friend?

1ST BUTCHER: The Sheriff.

ROBIN *(jingling money in wallet)*: Nay, I will pay to-day. Listen to my gold!

2ND BUTCHER *(to 3rd)*: Here is a young fool who has plenty of money and is longing to part with it. Let us put him next to the Sheriff and tell him how easily he can get the young man's money! Then maybe he will not come selling his meat so cheaply again, ruining us all!

(By this time the 3RD BUTCHER has come in with a table. He sets up chairs round it, and in a short time dishes and mugs are set out. Sound of trumpet heard off.)

1ST BUTCHER: The Sheriff comes! We will place you next to him as you are a new guest. He will be pleased to hear all that you tell him.

ROBIN *(amused)*: Thank you, good friend. *(Aside.)* So they put me next to the Sheriff! Then he will at last see me face to face, and have me within his reach! But I doubt if he will capture me!

(Enter SHERIFF, very grand and pompous. BUTCHERS bow and pull out chair at head of table.)

SHERIFF: Good morning, butchers. And how did your trade go to-day?

1ST BUTCHER: Not so well—not so well! There is a young man here who sold his wares at twopence a pound and underbid us all!

SHERIFF *(surprised)*: Where is he? Is he a fool or a knave?

1ST BUTCHER: He is yonder, sir. He is a fool and a simpleton, methinks, but no knave. I will place him next to you. He is a rich young man. Maybe he will share his wealth with you!

(They wink at one another. The SHERIFF nudges the BUTCHER knowingly, and laughs.)

SHERIFF: Maybe he finds his riches a burden. It would be a kindness to relieve him of a little. What say you, friend? *(Louder)* Ho, young man, sit here. I am told you are a new-comer and I bid you welcome.

(ROBIN HOOD comes and sits next to SHERIFF. He smiles gaily at him. All others take their places and begin to eat and drink.)

ROBIN: I take it kindly of you, sir, to seat me by your side.

SHERIFF: You are an honoured guest. Tell me, have you much land?

ROBIN: Sir, it is half a day's ride to circle all my land!

SHERIFF (*impressed*): Bless us all! You must be wealthy, young man.

ROBIN: Aye, sir, I have plenty for myself and my men.

SHERIFF: And have you many men?

ROBIN: A great band, Sheriff, strong and willing.

SHERIFF: Ah, it is a pity you could not lend them to me to hunt down that rascal, Robin Hood. He tries me sorely.

ROBIN: But your soldiers, sir—can they not catch the merry outlaw?

SHERIFF: Pah! He slips through their fingers like an eel. Now if *I* could get hold of that robber—aha! he wouldn't slip through *my* fingers, I can tell you!

ROBIN: Would you know him, Sheriff, if you saw him?

SHERIFF: Know him! That ugly, squinting, long-nosed lout! Of course I should know him. What say you, butchers? Would you know Robin Hood?

BUTCHERS (*variously*): Aye, surely! Of course. Aye!

ROBIN: I won't doubt your word, friends, though I would dearly love to. I too would know Robin Hood if I saw him. I have seen him riding in the greenwood with his men.

1ST BUTCHER: An ugly fellow, isn't he?

ROBIN: Not so ugly as you!

(*Laughter. The SHERIFF claps ROBIN on the back.*)

SHERIFF (*to* 1ST BUTCHER): One for you! Ho, ho!

2ND BUTCHER: Has he a long nose?

ROBIN: Aye, as long as most noses are.

SHERIFF: And does he squint?

ROBIN (*squinting violently*): He squints like this!

(*Laughter. ROBIN stands.*)

ROBIN: This is a merry company, good masters! Eat your fill and drink heartily, for I will pay the bill!

ALL (*except* SHERIFF): Hear, hear!

SHERIFF: Now it is plain you are a right good fellow! But I cannot let you pay to-day, for this feast is mine. You must have much land and a great many head of hornèd beasts to spend your money so generously!

ROBIN: You speak truth, sir. On my land are five hundred hornèd beasts, but I cannot sell one of them. So now I have turned butcher, as you see. But methinks I shall not make a good seller of meat, and if I could but sell my herd of beasts cheaply I would. But, alas! I cannot find a buyer.

SHERIFF (*eagerly*): Five hundred beasts to be sold cheaply! Now maybe I can help you, good sir. I have taken a fancy to you, and would do you a good turn if I could.

2ND BUTCHER (*to his neighbour*): Listen to the old fox! He will soon part the fool from his money!

(*Nodding of heads.*)

ROBIN: Can you find me a buyer, sir.

SHERIFF: I have a mind to help you, young man, as I said. I will buy the beasts myself.

What price are you asking?

ROBIN: Would twenty pounds be a fair price, Sheriff? Or mayhap that is too dear.

BUTCHERS (*in jeering undertones*): Twenty pounds! Twenty pounds! No wonder he sells meat so cheaply!

SHERIFF (*overjoyed*): Nay, good fellow, twenty pounds would be the right price. I will buy your beasts, for I love to help any man in my town.

ROBIN: Sir, you are good to me. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are generous and kind, and I am sure you will never rue it.

SHERIFF: You must drive your herd of beasts into this market-place to-morrow, young sir. Then I will count them and pay you your money, as I promised.

ROBIN (*shaking his head*): Sir, I cannot drive them into the market-place, for they are much scattered. But I live not far from here, and would be pleased if you would come with me and see the hornèd beasts for yourself.

SHERIFF: Be it so. I will come with you to-morrow. But to-night you must stay with me.

You shall sleep on my softest bed, and to-morrow we will go together to see your land and your herds.

(*Claps ROBIN affectionately on back and rises.*)

SHERIFF: Friends, the dinner is at an end. I am about to do this young man a good turn. To-night he will be my guest. I thank you for making him known to me. You shall not fail to have your reward.

BUTCHERS (*laughing and winking to one another*): Thank you, Sheriff.

SHERIFF (*slipping his arm through ROBIN'S*): Come, young sir, and see my lady wife.

(*They go out.*)

1ST BUTCHER: And by to-morrow that young fellow will wish he had never set eyes on the Sheriff!

2ND BUTCHER: A fool is never rich for long.

3RD BUTCHER: We shall get a beast apiece, I doubt not, for our share in to-day's business!

(*All laugh. A bell rings.*)

1ST BUTCHER: The market is reopening. Clear away the table, friends!

(*All go out with table, dishes, etc.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE—*In the Greenwood, in the same place as the first act. No one is on the stage when curtain rises, but footfalls are heard off. Enter ROBIN HOOD and the SHERIFF. ROBIN is still dressed as a butcher.*

ROBIN: How cool the woods are, Sheriff, after the hot sun of the road! (*Stands still and mops brow.*)

SHERIFF: How quiet they are too! (*Looks nervously round.*)

ROBIN: Let us sing and whistle to keep our courage up! (*Begins to whistle gaily.*)

SHERIFF: To keep our courage up! Do you need to fear anything, young man, when the Sheriff of Nottingham stands by your side?

ROBIN (*slyly*): I fear the outlaw, Robin Hood, Master Sheriff! He cares nothing for *you*, so 'tis said!

SHERIFF (*pompously*): That is not the truth. Why, Robin Hood would run at once if he set eyes on me—and as for his merry men, they would fear to come into my presence!

ROBIN (*catching hold of SHERIFF'S arm suddenly, and startling him considerably*): But suppose—just suppose, Sheriff—that behind that tree yonder Robin Hood himself was peeping, with all his merry men beside him. Would you still be unafraid?

SHERIFF (*glancing about nervously*): I tell you, man, Robin Hood would run like a rabbit if he saw me! Besides, he would never dare to come so near the highway as this. We have but two minutes since left the road to Nottingham.

ROBIN (*clutching SHERIFF'S arm again*): The outlaw was here yesterday, Sheriff—just where we stand!

SHERIFF (*really frightened*): Here! Good land, let us leave this spot. Come, young man, I would not have you harmed by Robin Hood. (*Tries to pull ROBIN away.*)

ROBIN: I have never been frightened of that merry outlaw. He does not harm the simple, the poor, or the good—only the rich, the wicked, and those who oppress the poor. Why are *you* so frightened, Sheriff? Surely you do not fear the outlaw. Do you not say that he runs at the sight of you?

SHERIFF: Young man, you talk too much. Let us go on our way. We must find these hornèd beasts of yours, for I would buy them and go back to Nottingham Town.

ROBIN (*pointing between the trees*): See, Sheriff, we need go no farther. Yonder are some of my fine, hornèd beasts.

(*SHERIFF looks, and then starts back in amazement and fear.*)

SHERIFF: Hornèd beasts? But those beasts yonder are not *cattle*! They are the King's deer!

ROBIN: I said nothing of *cattle* to you. I told you of my herd of hornèd beasts, and there they are! Are they not fat enough for you? Will you not buy them, Sheriff? You promised to, you know!

SHERIFF (*frightened, but trying to keep his dignity*): Young man, I did not come to look at herds like these. Nor will I parley further with you, whoever you may be. I go back now

to Nottingham Town, and I warn you to go your way before I send my soldiers to take you!

(Turns to go off, but ROBIN catches him by the arm and stops him.)

ROBIN: Not so fast, Master Sheriff; not so fast. Think what trouble I have taken to bring you here. I cannot let you go so soon. Nay, I wish you to meet my friends and to dine with me. Did you not give me a good meal yesterday? Then the least I can do is to offer you one in return!

SHERIFF *(pulling away)*: I will not stay with such as you. You are no butcher.

(ROBIN keeps a firm hold, takes horn from his belt and blows it.)

(Enter, running, his MEN, their bows in their hands; they run to ROBIN, surround him and the SHERIFF, and kneel.)

MEN: Welcome back to the greenwood, Master!

ROBIN *(letting go SHERIFF)*: I bring you the Sheriff, men, as I promised.

MEN *(mockingly)*: Welcome to you, Sheriff!

SHERIFF *(afraid and angry)*: Who are you? You are no butcher.

ROBIN: You say truth. I am but a bad butcher. Let me doff these clothes and I shall be myself! *(Takes off blouse, apron, cap. One of his men gives him a green hat, and his bow. He bows mockingly to the SHERIFF.)*

ROBIN: Sir, I am Robin Hood.

SHERIFF *(passing hand across forehead in dismay and anguish)*: Robin Hood! I might have guessed it!

ROBIN: Yes, here he is—that ugly, squinting *(squints violently at SHERIFF)*, long-nosed lout that you said you would know as soon as you set eyes on him. So you thought, Sheriff, that you would soon part a young fool and his money? You came to buy my herds for a few pieces of gold! Shame on you for a rogue!

SHERIFF: Have done with this fooling. Set me free to go back to Nottingham.

ROBIN: Not yet, Sheriff, not yet! Nay, you must dine with me, as I said. You shall taste the flesh of my hornèd beasts and see if you like it! *(Looks round at men.)* Ho, men, is the meal ready? Bring in the dishes, for we are hungry, the Sheriff and I. We have come many miles this morning!

(MEN go off. Return with dishes, etc., which they set out on a green-covered bank towards the back.)

SHERIFF *(glowering)*: It is treason to eat the King's deer! It means death! I will not taste of it.

ROBIN *(mockingly)*: Nay, nay, call it not the King's deer to-day. Did you not come to see my herds? Then think that the meat you eat is mine! Do not be a discourteous guest, Sheriff. I ate freely yesterday at your table. Now you must eat at mine.

SHERIFF *(striking fist on palm)*: If I had known who you were! If I had guessed!

ROBIN *(leading SHERIFF to place where dishes are set out)*: Ah, you had me within your reach, Sheriff, but you did no better than your soldiers! You let me go! Ho ho, that will

be a fine tale to spin in the Town of Nottingham!

SHERIFF (*seating himself down on tuffet*): I beg you, Robin Hood, not to spread this tale about. Surely it is enough that you have tricked me in this manner!

(*They all begin to eat and drink.*)

ROBIN: What say you, men? Shall we keep this visit of the Sheriff's a secret? Or shall we tell it in the ears of the people of Nottingham?

FRIAR TUCK: Whether we tell it or not, Master, it will be known! Such fine tales as this are told a hundred times!

ROBIN: You speak truth, Friar Tuck. Ah, Sheriff, I fear that this visit of yours will go ringing down through the years. Now, you are not eating? Why is this?

SHERIFF (*sulkily*): I will not eat the King's deer.

ROBIN: In the greenwood my commands must be obeyed. Eat, Sheriff!

(*The SHERIFF looks at ROBIN HOOD, and obeys.*)

WILL SCARLETT: Master, make him pay well for his meal at the Greenwood Inn!

FRIAR TUCK: And for the good entertainment you have given him! Such courtesy and kindness as yours, Master, it is rare to meet!

(*MEN laugh. SHERIFF scowls and goes on eating.*)

ROBIN: Doubtless the Sheriff will be pleased to pay for his excellent meal!

SHERIFF (*surlily*): I have no gold to pay you for a meal I am unwilling to eat.

ROBIN: What, Sheriff! You came to buy the herds of a poor butcher and did not bring gold to pay for them! Shame on you!

SHERIFF: I will pay for no herds and no dinner, Robin Hood.

WILL SCARLETT: Master, he has a wallet. Shall I count his money for him?

SHERIFF (*clutching wallet*): You shall not rob me, thief!

LITTLE JOHN: Thief, you say! And was it honest of you, Master Sheriff, to come to buy for a few pieces of gold the herds you thought belonged to a poor simpleton of a butcher? Outlaws we may be, but thieves we are not. We are more honest than you, Sheriff of Nottingham.

ROBIN HOOD (*impatiently*): Have done with your talk! Sheriff, what money have you?

SHERIFF: Only a little.

ROBIN HOOD: I said how much?

SHERIFF: Twenty pieces of gold.

ROBIN HOOD (*taking the SHERIFF's wallet and tossing it to LITTLE JOHN*): Count it for me, Little John.

(*LITTLE JOHN counts it. There are twenty pieces.*)

LITTLE JOHN: The Sheriff speaks truth. There are twenty pieces.

ROBIN HOOD: Alas, Sheriff, only twenty pieces! I fear it is not enough to buy my herds of hornèd beasts, so those you must leave with me, and we will not charge you for them. But for your good dinner you must give me these twenty pieces, and must also swear never to molest us men of the greenwood.

SHERIFF: Will you let me go in peace then?

ROBIN HOOD: Yes. Now swear!

SHERIFF (*solemnly*): I swear, by good St. George of England, that never again will I molest the outlaws in Sherwood Forest; but, by the good St. George, Robin Hood, if ever I catch you *out* of the greenwood that will be a different tale!

ROBIN HOOD (*laughing*): You will never catch me, Sheriff. Give me those gold pieces, Little John. Many thanks, Sheriff, for your generous payment. The poor people of the woods and hills around will load you with blessings and thanks when we send this gold to them in your name!

SHERIFF: You are nothing but a robber, say what you will!

(MEN *jump up and murmur angrily.*)

LITTLE JOHN (*threateningly*): Unsay those words, rogue!

(SHERIFF *cowers back.*)

ROBIN HOOD (*laughing*): You see my men are more loyal to me than your soldiers are to you, Sheriff. Back, men; let this poor simpleton go. He came to rob a simple butcher, but found that *he* was the simpleton to be robbed! Come, Sheriff, I will take you safely to the highway.

(Takes SHERIFF by elbow and leads him off. MEN *stand, watching.*)

WILL SCARLETT (*shouting*): Fare you well, Master Sheriff, and next time you would rob a poor fool of his herds, remember the hornèd beasts of our master, Robin Hood!

ALL: Aye! Robin Hood!

THE END

THE ENCHANTED CAP

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

(To be acted by children of any age. There is scope for twelve to twenty-four characters, as desired.)

CHARACTERS

PEGGY

JOAN

PETER

JOHN

LUCY

MRS. BROWN, their Mother

MR. BROWN, their Father

OLD MAN GREEN-EYES, a half-wizard

HIS IMP ATTENDANTS

FAIRY TIPTOES

HER PIXIE ATTENDANTS

A MESSENGER

PROPERTIES NEEDED

Table, chairs, cupboard, clothes-line with clothes, another smaller table on which is bowl of water, soap and towel and sponge. Saucepan, dishes, etc. Bandage. Bread on table. Large boots. Yellow cap. Book. Big coat, fur, bottle of medicine. Necklace. Toys. Packets, bottles, and tins. Sheet of paper and pencil in drawer. Cloth and duster (to wash with cap). Letter, delivered by messenger. Frock. Shawl. Pipe. Matches. Biscuits.

ACT I

SCENE—*The kitchen of MRS. BROWN: There is a table in middle, front. It has a drawer in it. There are chairs about. At the back is a fire-place with mantelpiece over it. There is a cupboard in one corner. A line stretches across the kitchen from front to back, slightly slanting, so that the audience can see the clothes hung on it. There is a small table near fire-place on which is a bowl of water, a soap-dish, and a sponge.*

Four children are in the room—three girls and one boy. The biggest girl is ladling soup out of a saucepan into dishes on the table. One child, PETER, has a bandage round his head, covering one eye. LUCY wears a coat that reaches to her knees.

PEGGY (*ladling soup*): Come along, children. Here's your supper.

JOAN: Do you call that soup! (*Sniffing it.*) It's just smelly water!

PEGGY: Well, it's all you'll get. There's nothing else in the house except one cold sausage, and Mother's going to have that when she comes home. There's some bread on the table you can eat with your soup.

PETER (*feeling lumps of bread and groaning*): Bread! It's as hard as stone.

PEGGY: Well, put it into your soup to soak. What's the good of complaining, Peter? It's the best we can have till Dad gets work again. You know how he tramps round day after day looking for it. And Mother goes out scrubbing and cleaning though she's not fit to do it, with that awful cough of hers. It's a pity we're not old enough to leave school and help a bit.

(Whilst this talking is going on the four children pull up chairs to the table and begin to eat, trying hard to break bits off the hard bread.)

LUCY: John is lucky. He takes newspapers round and earns four shillings a week. I wish I could.

PEGGY: Well, you needn't envy poor old John. *You* wouldn't like to have to walk for miles in the wet with a pair of old boots that let water in all the time. They're three times too large for him and make him quite lame.

JOAN: John's late to-night. He ought to be in now. We must leave him some soup, Peggy. He'll be hungry.

PETER: What about Dad? What's he going to have when he comes in?

PEGGY: He said he'd bring something for himself. Don't gobble so, Lucy. We can have good manners even though we're as poor as can be.

LUCY: I hate being poor! It was lovely when Dad had a job. We all had nice clothes then, and plenty to eat. Oh, Peggy, I wish I had a nice frock to wear to-morrow; then I could go to the party my Sunday School teacher is giving. There's going to be buttered buns, ham sandwiches, and iced cakes. But how can I go when my frock is all in rags?

PEGGY: Can't you go in that coat you've got on? That hides your ragged bits?

LUCY: Of course I can't! Every one takes off coats at a party, and think what I'd feel if I took mine off and showed the dirty old dress underneath—at a *party* too! It's bad enough to have to show it at school.

PETER: Well, you ought to take your coat off at home, Lucy. That will get messy next.

LUCY: Well, I'm going to keep it on. I'm cold.

PEGGY: Now don't quarrel! Have you all finished?

(Before any one can answer there is a noise of quick footsteps outside. Enter JOHN.)

JOHN: Hallo, everybody? Any supper left for me?

(He has on a pair of enormously large and holey boots, a ragged overcoat, and a bright yellow cap, round and tight-fitting, with a pom-pom on the top.)

JOAN *(laughing)*: Oh, John, wherever did you get that funny cap? You *do* look queer!

JOHN *(sitting down at table)*: Well, I was jolly glad of it to-night, I can tell you! I found it lying in the road, and as the wind was as cold as ice I was glad enough to put it on and wear it.

PEGGY: You'd better wash your hands, John. There's some water over there.

(John gets up obediently and goes to bowl on table. Washes hands.)

JOHN: I don't know who the cap belongs to, but it must be some one with rather a small head. It's tight on me.

PEGGY: We ought to ask whose it is. It looks a nice cap, and some one may be looking for it.

JOHN: Well, they won't get it to-night. It's warm and comfortable and as I've got a bit of a cold *(sniffs two or three times)* I'm going to keep it on. This room is very cold.

LUCY: Yes, isn't it? That's why I'm keeping my coat on.

(PEGGY begins to stack up plates. PETER, the child with the bandage, gets a book and sits on chair to read. JOAN goes to clothes-line and feels to see if clothes are dry.)

PEGGY *(to PETER)*: Peter, you oughn't to read now your eye is so bad. You'll make the other eye bad too. You know what the doctor said.

PETER *(looking very miserable)*: I know, Peggy. But I do so love reading, and there's nothing else to do. If I read I forget that my eye hurts so much.

PEGGY *(gently)*: You certainly mustn't read if your eye's bad to-night, Peter. Let me read to you instead. I'll be ready in a minute. Have you had enough supper, John?

JOHN: *Enough* supper? Why, Peggy, I could eat four herrings, two chickens, three chops, six sausages, one treacle pudding, five buns, a pound of biscuits and perhaps a turkey to end with!

(All laugh. JOHN swings his chair away from table and sticks out his great boots for them all to see.)

JOHN: Oh, these boots! They let the water in and the mud! They fall off my feet whenever they can. They hurt my heels. They rub my toes. How I wish I had a fine pair of nice black boots to wear like the other boys at school! Shouldn't I be happy then!

PEGGY (*sympathetically*): Take them off, John. I'll try and dry them for you. You'll get your cold worse if you keep them on.

JOHN (*sniffing loudly*): It's worse already.

(He tugs at his big boots and pulls them off. On his feet are fine, shining black boots fitting him well. JOHN stares at them in the greatest surprise, rubs his eyes, and stares again. Then he lifts up one foot and puts it on the table.)

PEGGY: Take your foot down, John, you rude—— (*Stops and gasps in surprise.*) John! John! Where did you get those boots from?

(Other children crowd round in amazement. They feel the boots and exclaim in astonishment.)

LUCY: Did you buy them?

PETER: You never told us!

JOAN: Where did you get the money?

JOHN: I don't know *where* they came from! I'd no idea they were on my feet! I took off my old boots, and these were underneath! Wherever could they have come from?

JOAN: It's magic!

PEGGY: Don't be silly, John. Don't pretend you don't know. Tell us where you got them. Did you find them with that yellow cap?

JOHN: Peggy, I tell you I don't *know* where these boots came from. They just appeared. (*Walks proudly round room in new boots.*)

PEGGY (*sitting down and looking puzzled*): Well, this is very queer. It's like a dream.

LUCY (*looking at JOHN'S shining boots*): I wish I could get a new frock out of nowhere, like John's boots!

JOHN: I wish you could, too, Lucy. I'd love you to have a nice frock and go to your party to-morrow.

LUCY: It's not much good wishing. Even Peggy hasn't a frock she can lend me. (*Walks to JOHN'S old boots and bends down to pick them up. As she does so JOAN gives a cry and points to LUCY.*)

JOAN: What's that under your coat, Lucy? There's something pink peeping out.

(LUCY stands up and pulls aside coat. Under it is seen a pretty pink silk frock. In great excitement she tears off her coat and dances round stage in her party frock.)

LUCY: Look at me! Look at me! John's got boots and I've got a frock. Now I can go to the party! Hurrah! Hurrah!

PEGGY *and* OTHERS (*in surprise*): Where did it come from?

LUCY: John wished it for me and it came!

JOAN: Yes, John. You wished the boots to come, and they did. And you wished the frock, and it's come! Your wishes are all coming true to-night.

PEGGY (*pointing*): It's that yellow cap he picked up! I knew there was something strange about it. It's a wishing-cap!

ALL: A wishing-cap!

JOHN (*pleased*): Is it, do you think? (*Takes it off and looks at it.*) Oh, well, if it's a magic cap, I'll do a bit more wishing with it! I wish for a treacle pudding!

(All stand quite still and silent, waiting for pudding to appear. Nothing happens at all.)

JOHN (*more loudly*): I said I wish for a treacle pudding!

(Still nothing happens.)

PEGGY (*excited*): You silly boy. You've taken the cap off! I don't expect it works unless you wear it. Put it on again.

(JOHN puts it on.)

PETER (*going up to him*): John, don't wish for a treacle pudding. Wish for my bad eye to be better. I do so want to read my books.

JOHN: Of course I will, Peter. I wish your eye was quite better!

(PETER gives a cry and claps hand to bandage. Then he tears it off. All crowd round him.)

PEGGY: Look! His eye is quite all right! There's nothing wrong with it at all! Oh, Peter, you do look nice without your bandage!

PETER (*joyfully*): I can see as well with it as I can with the other one. Now I'm like you all! I can read all day if I like!

JOAN: Wish some more, quickly, John! This is the loveliest time we've ever had.

LUCY: Wish something for Mother—quick!

JOHN: I wish Mother had a warm coat, a big fur, and a bottle of the best cough syrup for her cough!

(All stand looking round. Nothing happens. They wait again, but nothing comes.)

PEGGY: Never mind. Perhaps they'll come later on. There's no hurry, because Mother isn't here.

PETER: Now wish something for Dad.

JOHN: What shall I wish?

PEGGY: Wish him a job of work, of course! That's the best thing you could give poor old Dad!

JOHN: I wish Dad a good job of work!

LUCY: Oh, I do hope he gets it!

PETER: Now wish Peggy and Joan something. They haven't had anything.

JOAN: Oh, wish Peggy a necklace, John. She's always looking at that blue one in the jeweller's and longing for it.

JOHN: I wish Peggy a very fine necklace!

(All stand and look at PEGGY. She stands quite still in centre of stage, waiting. Then she suddenly gives a shriek and wriggles about as if something were tickling her. She puts her hand down her neck and brings out a long and beautiful necklace at which all gaze in the greatest admiration.)

LUCY: Ooh! It's the loveliest I've ever seen.

JOAN: You deserve it, Peggy. You're so kind and good to us all.

JOHN: Isn't it fine! Put it on, Peggy; you'll look lovely in it. Now what about you, Joanie? What do *you* want? A dress? A ring? A book? A cake? Tell me.

JOAN: Oh, John, I'd like some toys. I've nothing but that old rag doll and I would so like some clockwork toys—you know, a train, or a motor-car, and perhaps an aeroplane or something. Could you wish me some toys, John?

JOHN: Of course! I wish lots of clockwork toys for Joan!

(Curious noise heard off, and then many clockwork toys, wound up, run on to stage. Children shriek with delight and pick them up. JOAN dances about, overjoyed, winds them up, sets them going again, etc.)

JOAN: Oh thank you, John, thank you! Oh, I'm so happy now! I can play all day long!

PETER: John, let's wish for a good meal, shall we? I'm hungry again already. A cupboard full of goodies would be lovely!

JOHN: So it would! I wish for a cupboard full of good things!

(Noises heard. Children look towards cupboard. LUCY runs to it and opens it. Inside are packed tins, packets, etc. The children take them to table, and make excited noises.)

LUCY: Tins of biscuits!

JOAN: A packet of chocolate!

JOHN: A bottle of sweets!

PEGGY: A bag of oranges!

PETER: A tin of cakes!

(Noise of footsteps heard off. Enter the MOTHER and FATHER, looking excited and pleased.)

FATHER: Hallo, youngsters! I've got a job of work at last! I start to-morrow!

CHILDREN: Hurrah!

JOHN: My wish came true!

MOTHER: And look what I've got, children! A fine warm coat, a lovely big fur, and a big bottle of cough syrup.

JOHN: I knew you'd get them!

MOTHER: I can't understand all my good luck. The lady I work for gave me the coat and the fur, and on my way home the chemist came out and pushed this cough medicine into my hands! *(Takes off coat and fur and shows it to admiring children. Puts cough medicine down on table. Sees all the good things there, and stares in astonishment.)* What's all this? And where did you get that frock, Lucy? And those boots, John? And that lovely necklace, Peggy? And where did all these toys come from? And, goodness me, Peter, where's your bandage? You don't mean to tell me that your eye is better?

PETER: Yes, Mother, quite better. And it's all because of John's wishing-cap. Look, he's got it on. Whatever he wishes comes true!

FATHER: So that's the explanation of all this strange good luck? John, my boy, I'm not sure you ought to have used that wishing-cap for yourself. When you found out how powerful it was you should have put it on one side until I came home. Some one may be looking for that. Take it off and put it down. I think I had better write out a notice and say we have found it, and the owner can have it if he asks for it.

(Goes to drawer of table, takes out sheet of paper and pencil and writes a notice quickly. Children watch. JOAN winds up train and runs it across floor. MOTHER feels clothes on line to see if they are dry.)

FATHER: Here you are, John. Just run downstairs and pin that on our front door. I've said: 'Found. A wishing-cap. Owner can have it if he will ask Mr. Brown.'

(JOHN takes it and runs off. Comes back at once.)

MOTHER: I do wonder who the cap belongs to. It must be a witch's or a fairy's, I should think.

(Sits down and begins to eat. PEGGY has set her a plate, cup, and saucer.)

PETER: Isn't it lovely about my eye, Mother? It's really quite better. Look! *(Shows her it, closely.)*

LUCY: And I'm so pleased I can go to the party to-morrow!

PEGGY: Oh, Lucy, hadn't you better go and tell your teacher you are coming after all? Put on your coat and run out to tell her.

(LUCY puts on coat, waves good-bye, and runs out. She comes back shortly.)

LUCY: Mother, there's a funny old man downstairs. He says he has come for the wishing-cap.

MOTHER: Tell him to come up then.

(LUCY goes to side and calls loudly.)

LUCY: Will you come upstairs?

(Noises heard off. Enter a cross-looking, bent old man, dressed in strange, bright clothes.)

OLD MAN GREEN-EYES: Where's that wishing-cap? I've come for it.

PEGGY *(suspiciously)*: Did you lose it?

O. M. G.: I said where is that wishing-cap?

JOHN: Tell us what colour it is.

O. M. G.: I don't know. It belongs to Fairy Tiptoes, I expect. She always was careless of her belongings. Look here, give it to me and I'll share all my wealth and riches with you. I'm Old Man Green-eyes, who lives in that great castle over the hill. I'm half a wizard, and if only I can get hold of that wishing-cap I'm willing to reward you anyhow you like.

PEGGY *(indignantly)*: It's no use trying to make us do something mean or dishonest. We may be poor and ragged, but we all speak the truth and try to do the right thing. You go away, old man, and don't come here again. We shall give the cap to Fairy Tiptoes if it's hers, and no one else will get it!

O. M. G. (*savagely and fiercely*): You dare to defy me! Then I'll send for my imps and they'll find the cap, never fear, and punish you all into the bargain!

(Whilst all this and the next speeches are going on LUCY quietly picks up the wishing-cap, also a cloth and a duster, and goes to the bowl of water. She busies herself apparently washing them all, then goes to the clothes-line and hangs them all up, dripping wet, wishing-cap too.)

JOHN (*indignantly*): You do what you like, you horrid old man.

FATHER (*getting up from chair*): Go away. We don't like you. You're not a half-wizard or a half-anything. You're just a fraud, come to see what you can get!

O. M. G. (*snarling*): So that's what you think, is it? Well, we'll see! You've been using the wishing-cap for your own enjoyment, and I'll soon spoil all that! Now I'll send for my servants, and you'll see if I'm a fraud or not!

(Claps hands seven times and chants a string of meaningless words. Noises heard off—a sound of many pattering feet. Enter small IMPS, all dressed in red and wearing tight pointed caps with feather in front.)

O. M. G. (*chanting*): Ollaboolaminnirangasoomikongatibblerimminy!

(Repeats until all IMPS are in room. The IMPS make horrible faces at the children, who shrink back, scared.)

O. M. G.: Ha, you look afraid now! You see I'm not such a fraud after all. Old Man Green-eyes has many servants to do his bidding! Now are you going to tell me where that wishing-cap is?

LUCY (*boldly*): No! It's well hidden where you won't find it!

O. M. G.: Clear out of the room all of you! I'll soon get my imps to find it!

(IMPS rush at children and father and mother, pinching and prodding and making funny little high cries as they do so. The children and grown-ups go out of the room in panic. O. M. G. is left there with his IMPS.)

O. M. G.: Find that cap, imps. Quick now! There's no time to lose!

IMPS (*in little high voices*): Yes, Master! (*They run about room with little shuffling steps, peeping everywhere, looking into drawer, cupboard, under rugs, etc., etc., etc. One of them goes to clothes-line and runs his hand along. He comes to the wet wishing-cap.*)

IMP: Master, Master, is this it? There is a little yellow cap here?

O. M. G. (*looking round crossly*): Don't be foolish. You heard that child say the cap was well hidden? Do you suppose it would be hung up there for us all to see? It is just part of the washing. See, it is soaking wet! Would they wash a wishing-cap? Of course not. Be ashamed of yourself, silly little imp!

IMP: Yes, Master!

(IMPS hunt round once more and then come and kneel before O. M. G.)

ALL (*altogether*): Master, we cannot find the cap!

O. M. G.: Silly, stupid, blind creatures! What use are you to me? Listen? What is that noise? Go to the window and see, imp.

(An IMP runs to side and pretends to look out.)

IMP: Master, it is Fairy Tiptoes. She has just driven by. She is searching for her cap, there is no doubt. And once she sees the notice downstairs she will come here. Had we not better go?

O. M. G.: Yes. I am afraid of her. Her magic is more powerful than mine! But first I will punish these defiant children and make them sorry they would not obey me. *(Draws circle round him with his stick, muttering meaningless words all the time. Then suddenly raises voice and shouts loudly and distinctly:)* May all their wishes go to nothing! May none of them be true!

(O. M. G. then goes out muttering, and IMPs follow, taking with them all the goodies from the table, the mother's cough syrup, coat and fur, and toys left by JOAN. There is silence for a moment, then JOHN comes peeping round the corner.)

JOHN: They've gone, all of them!

LUCY *(entering quickly)*: And they didn't find the wishing-cap after all! Look, there it is, where I hung it up wet on the line!

(All enter and look wonderingly at LUCY.)

MOTHER: But what did you do that for?

LUCY: Oh, I thought if I put it in some place where it could easily be seen they would never think it could be the cap! They would think it was just part of the washing. And that's what they *did* think.

JOHN: How clever of you, Lucy. I should never have thought of that!

JOAN *(with a cry)*: Oh, my toys have all gone!

PEGGY: And so have all those good things on the table!

MOTHER: And my lovely new coat and fur, and the bottle of medicine!

FATHER: And where are John's fine new boots? He's nothing on but his stockings!

(All look at JOHN's feet. JOHN too.)

JOHN: They're gone, and I never saw them go! Lucy, have you still got your frock? And Peggy, where's your necklace?

LUCY *(crying)*: My lovely frock has gone! It's not under my coat!

PEGGY: And my necklace is gone too!

PETER: Oh, oh! My eye is hurting me dreadfully! Mother, it's got bad again! Bandage it quickly, please!

(MOTHER runs to him with bandage.)

FATHER *(slowly)*: That old man was a wicked fellow. He has taken away all your wishes, John. But thank goodness I have a job to go to to-morrow.

(Footsteps heard outside and a knock. JOHN goes to door and takes in letter. Footsteps depart.)

JOHN: A note for you, Dad.

(FATHER tears open note, groans, and sinks down in chair.)

FATHER: This is to say that another man has got that job I was promised. So now we are all back where we were. It's too bad.

(LUCY, JOAN, and PETER begin to cry softly. JOHN looks round in despair at them all, and then a bright thought comes to him. He steps to clothes-line, unpegs cap and puts it on.)

JOHN (*loudly*): I wish that all those good things I wished before may come back again!

(*Every one looks up expectantly, but nothing happens at all. JOHN takes off cap and flings it down.*)

JOHN: The magic is gone out of it. Nothing's any use. We're poor and unlucky and we'll always be the same. What's the good of being honest?

(*Quietly and slowly, unseen by any one, an OLD WOMAN creeps into the room. She is dressed in a black cloak and a shawl is over her head. She sits down on a chair at the back.*)

MOTHER: Don't say things like that, John. The luck will turn one day.

PETER (*nursing his eye*): It would have turned for the better if only we had given Old Man Green-eyes the cap when he asked for it. He promised us riches and wealth.

PEGGY (*scornfully*): Riches and wealth! Thank you, I'd rather be poor and decent than rich and dishonest.

LUCY: So would I.

JOAN: I'd rather be like Mother and Dad than any rich and nasty old man.

MOTHER: Don't quarrel, children. John and Peter are as good and honest as any of you, but they're disappointed, that's all.

JOHN: Yes, that's right, Mother. We're not really sorry for what we did. I'd turn Old Man Green-eyes away again if he came—I know I should.

PETER: So should I.

(*The OLD WOMAN in corner coughs softly. Every one turns round and looks at her in surprise.*)

MOTHER: How did you get here? I didn't hear you come. What do you want?

OLD WOMAN: I saw a notice downstairs about a wishing-cap. I thought it might be mine. So I came to ask for it. I have been listening to all you have been saying, and I am so glad you didn't give it to that horrid man Green-eyes.

JOHN: Tell us what the cap is like, old dame.

OLD WOMAN: It is bright yellow and has a tassel at the top. It is rather small and would be a little tight for you, my boy.

JOHN: Yes, that's the cap all right. But I'm sorry to say something has happened to the magic in it. It won't make our wishes come true any more.

OLD WOMAN (*taking the cap from JOHN*): Oh, that's only because it is wet. As soon as it dries it will be full of magic again. Thank you very much for keeping it safe for me, and not giving it to that old man, in spite of all the rewards he offered you.

PEGGY: He said it belonged to Fairy Tiptoes.

OLD WOMAN: Well, I *am* Fairy Tiptoes! (*She throws off cloak and shawl and shows herself to be a pretty fairy, dressed in short, frilly skirt, with fillet round hair, and wand in her hand.*) I just dressed up as an old woman to see what you were all like, and I think you're very nice indeed!

(*Taps on floor with her wand seven times.*)

FAIRY TIPTOES: Elves, come to me!

(*Enter some small ELVES, prettily dressed. They bow to the FAIRY.*)

FAIRY: Fetch good things for these children! Bring them everything you can think of!

(*ELVES disappear.*)

FAIRY (*touching PETER'S head with her wand*): May your eye be better.

(*PETER tears off bandage again joyfully.*)

FAIRY (*touching LUCY*): May you have the dress you wanted. (*LUCY flings off coat and shows party frock underneath again.*)

FAIRY (*touching PEGGY*): May you have your pretty necklace back again. (*PEGGY pulls her necklace out with cry of joy and shows it to others.*)

(*Enter ELVES with all kinds of things. They stack goodies on the table, bring a lovely frock for the MOTHER and a fine shawl which they place round her shoulders. They bring boots for JOHN, and many toys for JOAN. They bring a pipe for the FATHER and matches.*)

FAIRY (*looking round at the happy faces*): And now, is there anything else I can do?

FATHER: I suppose—I suppose you couldn't get me a job. I'd really rather *earn* good things for my family than have them given to me.

FAIRY: Can you do any gardening?

FATHER: Yes. It used to be my job.

FAIRY: Then come to my house on the hillside to-morrow and I will make you my head gardener. You shall have a good cottage and a place to grow your own vegetables.

ALL CHILDREN (*excitedly*): Oh, how lovely! A cottage in the country. Dad in a job!

PEGGY: What fun!

MOTHER: Thank you! Thank you! You have made us all very happy.

FAIRY: You deserve it! Come, elves, it is time we went. Good-bye, children, until to-morrow.

ALL: Good-bye, good-bye!

(*FAIRY and ELVES go off, leaving children staring after them.*)

JOHN: *What* an exciting night! Come on, every one, let's have a jolly good tuck-in!

(*All sit down round table, pulling in chairs, and then help themselves to a biscuit each. As they sit happily munching the curtain falls.*)

THE END

A VISIT TO NURSERY-RHYME LAND

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

Act I. IN THE NURSERY*Act II.* IN NURSERY-RHYME LAND

(This play may be acted by children of all ages, or by two older children and a number of younger ones. Any number of characters may take part. If wished, the nursery rhymes may be sung to the traditional tunes, instead of being spoken.)

CHARACTERS

JACK }
 MARY } Brother and Sister
 JACK HORNER
 JACK SPRAT
 HIS WIFE, MARY SPRAT
 JACK-A-DANDY
 MARY MUFFET
 MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY
 MARY, WHO HAD A LITTLE LAMB
 JACK
 JILL
 TOM, THE PIPER'S SON
 TOMMY TUCKER
 POLLY FLINDERS
 BABY BUNTING
 WEE WILLIE WINKIE
 JACK, WHO BUILT A HOUSE
 THE KING'S SOLDIERS
 THE OLD WOMAN WHO LIVED IN A SHOE
 HER CHILDREN
 A GOLLIWOG
 A DOLL

PROPERTIES NEEDED

Ordinary furniture. Rocking-horse. Atlas. Book. Bundle of clothes. A cardboard or paper imitation house-frontage. Two full sacks. Toy pig. Dish. Pieces of white paper for eggshell. Hobby-horses. Bowl and spoon. Bandages. Pail of water. Toy lamb. Piece of cake. Sugar-candy. Silver bells. Cockleshells. Doll. Mince-pie. Letters of invitation.

ACT I

SCENE—*In the nursery of JACK and MARY. Ordinary furniture is about. There is a rocking-horse at the back. Two children, JACK and MARY, are sitting together in an arm-chair reading a book.*

JACK: The little dog laughed to see such fun, And the dish ran away with the spoon!

MARY: I'm sure I know all the nursery rhymes off by heart, Jack.

JACK: Well, we've read the book all the way through. (*Closes it with a bang.*)

MARY: I wonder if there ever were such people as we've read about—Jack and Jill, and Miss Muffet, and Jack Sprat, and Mother Hubbard, and all the rest.

JACK: Oh, yes, I expect so, and they may be alive still!

MARY: How could they be, Jack? Why, some of these nursery rhymes are hundreds of years old! People don't live as long as that.

JACK: Perhaps nursery-rhyme folk do; they may be something like the fairies, you know, and live for ages and ages.

MARY: Ooh, Jack, wouldn't it be lovely if they really *were* alive, and we could go and see them! I wonder where they'd live, don't you?

JACK: They'd live in Nursery-Rhyme Land, of course.

MARY: Where is that? Do you suppose we could find it in our atlases? Perhaps Daddy and Mummy would let us go there for our summer holiday.

JACK: I'll get our atlas and see. (*Goes to shelf and gets down atlas. Opens it.*)

MARY: Look at the index, Jack. It gives the name of all the countries there. Look in the letter N. Here they are.

JACK (*reading*): Natal, Naples—no, we want *NU*, don't we? Oh, it's not there! Well, I didn't think it would be!

MARY: What a pity! Now we shall never know where it is; but how I'd love to see little Jack Horner, Humpty-Dumpty, Polly Flinders, and all the rest! Wouldn't it be fun!

(*A knock is heard outside.*)

JACK: There's some one at the door. I wonder who it is.

(*Knock heard again.*)

MARY: Come in!

(*Enter the OLD WOMAN WHO LIVED IN A SHOE.*)

JACK: Good afternoon. Who are you?

OLD WOMAN: I'm an old dame who has a lot of children, and they're growing so fast that I can't make enough clothes for them—so I'm going round to see if any one can spare me some of the old clothes belonging to *their* children.

MARY: Well, our mother is out just now. But I dare say we could find you a few clothes. Mother put some away for the jumble sale, I know. She wouldn't mind you having

those.

(*Goes to a cupboard.*)

JACK: How many children have you? Six?

OLD WOMAN: Bless you, far more than that! More like a hundred! I've never been able to count them because they won't keep still, the little monkeys.

MARY (*bringing a few clothes out of cupboard*): A hundred children. My goodness, however do you manage to wash and dress them all!

OLD WOMAN: Oh, they have to do that for themselves. It's as much as I can do to feed them. There's always some broth stewing for them in a big pot over the fire, but there isn't always bread to go with it, I can tell you!

JACK (*staring at OLD WOMAN*): Broth without any bread! Now where have I heard that before?

MARY: Why, you silly, don't you remember? It's in our nursery-rhyme book. We read it just now: 'She gave them some broth, without any bread, and whipped them all soundly and sent them to bed.'

JACK: Oh, yes, of course. That was the old woman who lived in a shoe. But *you* don't live in a shoe, do you, old woman?

OLD WOMAN: Yes, I do; there's no one will let us have a house to live in, we're such a large family. So I begged a boot from the giant who used to live up the bean-stalk, and it's quite large enough for all of us. But what worries me is clothes—if only the children didn't grow so!

(*MARY and JACK have been looking most excited whilst the old woman talks.*)

MARY AND JACK (*together, excitedly*): But are you the old woman who lived in a shoe?

OLD WOMAN: Of course I am! Every one knows *me*.

JACK: Where do you live?

OLD WOMAN: In Nursery-Rhyme Land, of course. Where else *should* I live?

MARY: But there isn't such a place. We looked in our atlas to see.

OLD WOMAN (*indignantly*): So you think I'm not telling the truth, then. Impudent children! I've a good mind to take you with me and make you live for a while in my shoe. You'd learn better manners then!

JACK (*taken back*): Oh, we didn't mean to disbelieve you; but it seems so strange somehow. Where *is* Nursery-Rhyme Land? Can we go to it?

OLD WOMAN: If you want to. But you can't get there by train or bus, so don't think it! (*She gathers up clothes, makes them into a bundle and puts them on her back.*)

MARY: Oh, don't go yet. Do tell us how to get to your land. We do so want to go.

OLD WOMAN: Well, your toys know the way. Ask them! Thank you for these clothes. Good-bye! (*Goes off.*)

JACK (*excitedly*): Well, what do you think of that, Mary! So there *is* such a place as Nursery-Rhyme Land, after all!

MARY: And we'll go there *somehow*!

JACK: We'll ask our toys.

(Noise heard outside.)

MARY: Dear me, who's that now?

(Enter a GOLLIWOG and a DOLL.)

JACK: Golly!

MARY: And Angela, my doll! They've come alive!

GOLLY: Yes—just for a little while. The old woman who lives in a shoe told us to come and tell you how to get to Nursery-Rhyme Land if you want to. We know the way.

DOLL: It's not very far. We've often been when you and Jack are in bed at night.

JACK: What an exciting evening this is! Do tell us, Golly, how to go to Nursery-Rhyme Land.

GOLLY: Well, first I must warn you that you are not really supposed to go there unless you are one of the Nursery-Rhyme people, or a fairy, or a toy, like us. You may get into trouble.

MARY: Oh, we'll risk that! We really *must* go.

JACK: Go on, Golly and Angela. Tell us how to get there.

ANGELA: Well, the rocking-horse will take you if you would really like to go!

MARY (*turning to look at ROCKING-HORSE in surprise*): Will he really? I didn't think he could go anywhere by himself!

GOLLY: Oh, he has often taken us at night!

JACK: So that's where he went when we heard him rocking all by himself at night!

ANGELA: Come along. If you really want to go, we'll say the words that will take you there.
(She goes to ROCKING-HORSE and with GOLLY brings the HORSE to front of stage.)

GOLLY: Climb up, both of you. It's a bit of a squeeze, but never mind. You can hold on tightly.

JACK: Come on, Mary. I'll get on first and you can hold on to me at the back.

(They climb up on to horse.)

MARY (*excited*): Oh, the horse is beginning to rock all by itself!

(HORSE rocks slowly to and fro, and, in time to the rhythm the DOLL and GOLLIWOG chant the following words.)

DOLL and GOLLY (*together*):

Off to the Land of Nursery-Rhyme

You will go, you will go!

You'll get there in an hour's time,

Rocking slow, rocking slow!

All the people in that land

You will know, you will know,

Hold on tight with either hand,

Rocking slow, to and fro!

(More quickly, and then more quickly still, as ROCKING-HORSE gathers pace): To and fro
—to and fro—to and fro—to and fro!

MARY AND JACK: We're off! Good-bye, Golly! Good-bye, Angela!

DOLL AND GOLLY: Good-bye, good-bye!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE—*In the Land of Nursery-Rhyme, just outside a house labelled 'Jack's House'. This need only be a frontage, with imitation windows and a door. There are two forms or seats outside the house. On the door is the name, in very large letters, so that the audience may also read them. Lying against the wall are two full sacks. The ROCKING-HORSE is rocking by the house, with the two children still on it. As the curtain goes up the children are heard chanting softly.*

JACK and MARY: To and fro—to and fro—to and fro!

(The HORSE rocks more and more slowly and then stops rocking altogether. The children look round and see Jack's House.)

JACK: The horse has stopped! Wasn't it marvellous the way he rocked himself along, Mary—through all those woods and over that big hill! I'd no idea he could go like that!

MARY (*slipping off*): This must be the Land of Nursery-Rhyme. Come along, Jack—get off and we'll see if it is. How exciting!

(JACK gets off too. The children glance about and look closely at Jack's House.)

MARY: Jack's House! Oh, Jack, it must be a house for *you*! Perhaps the Nursery-Rhyme folk built it for you because they knew you were coming. That old woman who visited us may have told them.

JACK: Yes, I expect it *is* for me—and you too, Mary. Come on, we'll go inside and see what it is like! What fun it would be to stay here for a time!

(They go up to the door and JACK takes hold of the handle. As he does so a shout is heard, which makes him turn round, startled. Enter JACK, whose house they are about to enter.)

JACK II: Now then, what are you doing, you naughty boy?

JACK: Oh, I was just going into my house.

JACK II (*fiercely*): *Your* house! What do you mean, *your* house! It's *my* house! You were going to rob me—I know you were!

MARY: No, no, really we weren't. We'd never dream of doing such a thing! We thought this was Jack's house.

JACK II: So it is—but *I'm* Jack, not this boy!

MARY: He's Jack too.

JACK II: Well, it's true there *are* a lot of Jacks in Nursery-Rhyme Land. Which one are you? Jack Horner? Jack Sprat? Jack-a-Dandy?

JACK: Well, I don't think I'm any of those, you know. I'm just Jack.

JACK II (*suspiciously*): H'm, that sounds funny to me! No one is allowed in this land unless they belong to it, so you *must* be one of the Nursery Rhymes.

MARY: Well, which Jack are *you*?

JACK II: Haven't you ever heard of the house that Jack built? Well, I'm the Jack that built this house! And there's the malt that lay in the house that Jack built! See?

MARY: Oh, yes, I did wonder what those sacks were. Where's the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built?

JACK II: Killed by the cat, of course. But what I want to know is—what are you doing here? I don't think you've any right to be here. Tell me your nursery rhyme, or I'll fetch the King's soldiers and have you put into prison!

(JACK and MARY look at one another in despair. They whisper.)

JACK *(aside to MARY)*: We'll have to be *some one*. I'll be Jack Sprat and you be my wife.

JACK II *(impatiently)*: Well, what Jack are you—and who's this girl?

JACK: I'm Jack Sprat and she's my wife, Mary Sprat. *You* know—I can't eat fat and she can't eat lean.

JACK II: Oh, so that's who you are. Well, I must say you look a lot younger than when I last saw you.

(Footsteps and shouts heard off. Enter TOM, the piper's son, running, very much out of breath. He carries a small pig under one arm. He sinks down on seat outside house and mops his forehead.)

JACK II: Tom! What are you doing? Are you up to mischief again?

MARY: Who is he? And, oh, look at his dear little pig!

TOM: I'm Tom, Tom, the piper's son,
Who stole a pig and away did run.

(All join in song.)

The pig was eat,
And Tom was beat,
And Tom went howling down the street!

JACK II: You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Tom! How many more times are you going to steal pigs from the butcher? You must be tired of beatings.

TOM *(grinning)*: I nearly got caught to-day. Jack Sprat was in the butcher's, buying a piece of lean meat, and I took the pig when the butcher was serving him and looking the other way. Old Jack Sprat called out—

JACK II: Stop a minute. Jack Sprat, did you say?

TOM *(annoyed)*: Yes, you heard me. Don't interrupt.

JACK II *(to JACK and MARY)*: Then you are *not* Jack Sprat and his wife! I shall call the King's soldiers and have you arrested!

(Goes to side and whistles loudly.)

MARY: Oh, don't do that. Don't have us put into prison!

(A great crash heard off, then noise of galloping feet.)

JACK *(startled)*: Whatever's that?

TOM: Don't you know? Why, that's old Humpty Dumpty fallen off his wall again. He's always doing it! Ah, here come the King's horses and the King's men, carrying bits of him!

(Enter KING'S SOLDIERS, riding hobby-horses. Each holds a piece of a big eggshell, and chants as he comes.)

KING'S MEN:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,
All the King's horses and all the King's men,
Couldn't put Humpty together again!

(They clatter round the four listeners and then stop.)

1ST SOLDIER: He's done it again. Crash, he went, and fell right to the ground. Here's a bit of his shell!

JACK II: Well, he ought to know better than to sit on walls now. Look, soldiers, I want you to arrest these children. They say they are Jack Sprat and his wife, and they're not.

2ND SOLDIER: I'm sorry, but we haven't any time for arresting people just now. We're going to try and put Humpty together, though we know it's practically impossible. Still, he's like a difficult jigsaw. We *might* get him to come right sooner or later. I believe *my* piece fits into your piece, friend.

(1ST and 2ND SOLDIERS put their pieces of shell side by side to see if they fit.)

TOM *(as footsteps are heard off)*: Who's this coming?

(Enter JACK SPRAT and his WIFE, holding a big dish between them.)

JACK II: Ah, here are the *real* Jack Sprat and his wife. Good-day to you, friends!

JACK SPRAT: Good-day. *(Chanting)*

I'm Jack Sprat,
I can eat no fat,

WIFE *(chanting)*:

And I can eat no lean,

BOTH *(together)*:

And so betwixt us both, you see,
We lick our platter clean!

(They pretend to lick dish.)

JACK *(aside to MARY)*: We'd better be some one else. I'll be Jack who went up the hill, and you be Mary Muffet who sat on a tuffet.

JACK II *(going up to them)*: Well, you two, what have you to say now? You see, you are not Jack Sprat and his wife, after all!

JACK *(boldly)*: No—I'm the Jack that went up the hill to get some water, and she's Mary Muffet, who sat on a tuffet.

JACK II: Where's your Jill, then? *(Turning to Mary.)* And where are your curds and whey?

(Footsteps heard off. Enter POLLY FLINDERS, crying.)

TOM: Hallo, hallo, hallo, what's all this? Why are you crying, little girl? What's your name?

POLLY:

I'm little Polly Flinders,
I sat among the cinders,
A-warming of my pretty little toes,

ALL (*chanting loudly*):

Her mother came and caught her
And whipped her little daughter,
For spoiling her nice new clothes!

POLLY: I'm so miserable. Where's Miss Muffet? She said she would meet me here and let me share her curds and whey.

JACK II: Well, *this* little girl says she is Mary Muffet.

(*Points to MARY, who tries to hide behind JACK.*)

POLLY: No—that's not Miss Muffet; besides, Miss Muffet's name isn't Mary, it's Susie.

(*Shrieks heard off. Enter MISS MUFFET, running, carrying her bowl and spoon, and looking behind her in fright.*)

POLLY: There's little Miss Muffet. Hallo, Susie, dear!

JACK II (*to MISS MUFFET*): Are *you* Miss Muffet?

MISS MUFFET:

I'm little Miss Muffet,
Who sat on a tuffet,
Eating her curds and whey!

(*Sits down and eats.*)

ALL: There came a big spider,

(*Enter SPIDER.*)

Who sat down beside her,
And frightened Miss Muffet away!

(*She gets up with a shriek and runs across stage.*)

SPIDER: Silly child! Always so frightened of me! She might know by this time that all I want is a sip of her curds and whey! I'm hungry, just like any one else! (*Goes to a corner and sits down sulkily.*)

JACK II (*accusingly, to MARY*): So you're not Mary Sprat and not Miss Muffet either! And I'm pretty certain *you're* not the Jack who went up the hill (*to JACK*).

POLLY: Of course he isn't! Why, look, here *are* Jack and Jill!

(*Enter JACK and JILL, both with heads bound up. JACK is sniffing and wiping his eyes. They carry a bucket between them.*)

LITTLE MISS MUFFET: What's the matter, Jack? Have you hurt yourself?

JACK AND JILL (*swinging bucket in time to rhyme*):

Jack and Jill went up the hill,
To fetch a pail of water,

JILL (*pointing to JACK, who snuffles loudly*):

Jack fell down and broke his crown,

JACK (*pointing to JILL*):

And Jill came tumbling after.

MRS. SPRAT: Well, I see your mother's bandaged you up again—and I guess she whipped you too. I never did see such careless children!

JACK AND JILL: We're *not* careless! (*They swing bucket as they speak and some water spills on the ground.*) We hardly ever spill the water we fetch!

POLLY FLINDERS (*jumping out of way of water*): Well, look at that! Just keep away from *me*, please. I've already got into trouble once, for spoiling my nice new clothes.

(*As JACK and JILL move towards back, JACK I speaks aside to MARY.*)

JACK (*aside*): Well, I can't be *that* Jack! Now whoever *can* I be! (*Frowns hard.*)

MARY (*aside*): And I can't be Mary Muffet! I know. I'll be the Mary who had a little lamb!

JACK: And I'll be Jack-a-Dandy, who loved plum-cake and sugar-candy!

JACK II (*turning and pointing to two children*): Does any one know who this boy is and this girl? They don't seem to know themselves! I don't believe they belong to our land at all!

JACK: Haven't you ever heard of Jack-a-Dandy who loved plum-cake and sugar-candy?

MARY: And haven't you ever heard of Mary, who had a little lamb?

JACK II (*doubtfully*): Well, you seem to think you are so many different Marys and Jacks. I *have* heard of Jack-a-Dandy, of course. And I've met Mary with her little lamb? Where's your lamb, Mary?

MARY (*pertly*): I should think it's grown up into a sheep, by now! Lambs usually do, don't they?

JACK II: Not Nursery-Rhyme Lambs.

(*A noise of some one singing heard off. Enter TOMMY TUCKER, singing a song.*)

TOM, THE PIPER'S SON: Oh, here comes old Tommy Tucker! Still singing, Tommy?

TOMMY (*singing*):

I'm Little Tommy Tucker,

I'm singing for my supper

ALL: What shall we give him?

TOMMY: White bread and butter?

ALL: How will he cut it

Without a little knife?

How will he eat it

Without a little wife?

TOMMY: Never mind how I'll eat it! Give me a piece of bread and butter and I'll show you.

POLLY: Oh, you're always hungry, Tommy Tucker—just like Miss Muffet's spider! Look at the spider now! It's trying to nibble the tail off Tom Tom's pig! (*SPIDER has crept close to TOM, THE PIPER'S SON, and is seen to be nibbling at the pig.*)

TOM, THE PIPER'S SON (*angrily*): Oh, you wicked spider! Get away, do! I saw you nibbling at Mary's lamb the other day, too. You're a perfect nuisance.

JACK II (*in surprise*): Oh, so Mary's lamb *hasn't* grown into a sheep yet!

TOM, THE PIPER'S SON: Tommy Tucker can tell you. He lives next door to Mary and her lamb.

TOMMY TUCKER: Yes—she's out walking this morning with her lamb. I saw her. I'll go and call her if you like.

(*Goes to side and shouts.*)

TOMMY TUCKER: Mary, Mary! I say, Mary! Come over here and bring your lamb.

VOICE (*off*): I'm just coming! Wait till I catch my lamb!

(*Enter MARY, carrying her lamb.*)

ALL (*chanting*):

Mary had a little lamb,

MARY (*pointing to it*):

Its fleece was white as snow,

ALL: And everywhere that Mary went,

MARY (*putting lamb down on ground and dragging it along by string*):

The lamb was sure to go!

JACK II (*accusingly, to MARY*): So you're not the Mary who had a little lamb. I do think you are a most dreadful story-teller! And I suppose (*turning to JACK*) you are not Jack-a-Dandy either! Well, we can soon find out. (*Turning to others*): Does any one here know Jack-a-Dandy?

VOICES (*variously*): 'Who's he?' 'Jack-a-Dandy, of course!' 'Never heard of him!' 'I know him.'

JACK II: Oh, one at a time, please. Tommy Tucker, did you say you knew him?

TOMMY TUCKER: Of course I do! I like bread and butter, and he likes plum-cake and sugar-candy, so we often go out to tea together, and Jack-a-Dandy lets me have all the bread and butter if I'll let him have all the plum-cake and candy!

JACK II: Where does he live?

TOMMY TUCKER: Not far away. I'll go and fetch him for you! (*Goes off.*)

JACK II (*to JACK*): Well, there you are! You're wrong again! You don't seem to know *who* you are!

(*Noise of feet heard off.*)

POLLY FLINDERS: Here they come!

(*Enter TOMMY TUCKER with JACK-A-DANDY, who is hopping on one foot, and carries a piece of cake in one hand and some candy in the other.*)

JACK-A-DANDY:

I'm Handy-Spandy, Jack-a-Dandy,

ALL:

He loves plum-cake and sugar-candy!

JACK-A-D.:

I bought some at a grocer's shop,
And then I came out hop-hop-hop!

(*Hops all round stage. As he passes the SPIDER it makes a grab at his plum-cake.*)

JACK-A-D.: Oh, that spider! It nearly ate my plum-cake!

(*SPIDER is hustled to corner.*)

JACK (*aside to MARY*): Goodness, we'll have to be some one else again! I shall be Jack Horner!

MARY: And I'll be Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary!

JACK II (*turning to children*): Well, you see, *you're* not Jack-a-Dandy, nor are *you* Mary with a little lamb. There's no one in Nursery-Rhyme Land left for you to be!

JACK (*boldly*): Oh, yes, there is. I'll be Jack Horner!

MARY: And I'll be Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary!

JACK II (*nonplussed*): Oh, I forgot those.

TOM, TOM, THE PIPER'S SON: He's *not* Jack Horner! Jack Horner is my cousin, and he's fatter than this boy!

(*Feet heard off. Enter BABY BUNTING.*)

BABY BUNTING:

I'm little Baby Bunting,
My Daddy's gone a-hunting,
To get a little rabbit-skin
To wrap his Baby Bunting in!

POLLY FLINDERS (*stepping forward and taking her hand*): Oh, Baby Bunting, you shouldn't be out by yourself, darling! You might tumble down! Who is supposed to be looking after you to-day?

BABY BUNTING: Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary—but I runned away from her!

(*Noise of feet heard off. Enter MARY, QUITE CONTRARY, panting, looking worried. All the others crowd round BABY BUNTING and hide her.*)

ALL (*chanting*):

Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary,
How does your garden grow?

MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY:

With silver bells (*rings some that she carries*)
And cockle shells (*shows some*)
And pretty maids (*holds up a doll*) all in a row!

JACK II: Why are you running so fast?

MARY, Q. C.: Because I've lost Baby Bunting. Her mother asked me to look after her this morning, and she ran away. Oh, has any one seen her?

POLLY FLINDERS: You're a careless little girl, Mary. Look, here she is, quite safe!

(BABY BUNTING *comes forward, smiling*. MARY, Q. C. *kisses her and takes her by the hand*.)

MARY, Q. C.: You see, I was talking over the wall to Jack Horner, and Baby Bunting just slipped out of the garden. Jack is looking for her too. Oh, here he is! (*Enter JACK HORNER*). It's all right, Jack. I've found Baby Bunting. She hadn't run far!

(JACK HORNER *goes to a corner and sits down. He has with him a mince-pie, which he begins to eat*.)

ALL (*pointing*):

Little Jack Horner,
Sat in a corner,
Eating his Christmas pie,
He put in his thumb

(JACK *does so*.)

And pulled out a plum

(JACK *does so*.)

And said—

JACK (*loudly*):

What a good boy am I!

POLLY FLINDERS: You're always eating, Jack Horner. No wonder you're fat!

JACK HORNER: Don't make rude remarks, Polly Flinders, or I'll tell the old woman who lives in a shoe, and she'll take you to live with her and teach you manners!

JACK II: The old woman who lives in a shoe! Just the one I want, of course! I tried to get the King's soldiers to arrest these children, but they hadn't time. So I'll hand them over to the old woman, and *she'll* soon deal with them!

TOM, THE PIPER'S SON (*pointing off*): There are some of her children playing over there. I'll call them and they'll soon fetch her. (*Goes to side and shouts*) Hie, children! Come here a minute!

(*Enter some of the OLD WOMAN'S children*.)

1ST CHILD: What do you want, Tom?

TOM, THE PIPER'S SON: Where is your mother?

2ND CHILD: She's in the shoe, making some broth.

3RD CHILD (*mournfully*): Without any bread!

TOM, THE PIPER'S SON: Well, go and ask her to come here, will you? We've two naughty children who don't belong to our land, so we think we'll send them to live in the shoe.

CHILDREN (*together*): We'll go and fetch her!

(*They go off*.)

MARY (*crying*): I d-d-don't want to g-g-go and live in the horrid old shoe!

JACK (*putting arm round her*): Don't cry, Mary. The old woman knows us, remember, because we gave her those clothes for her children. She told us how to get here—so

perhaps she'll get us out of our fix!

(*Enter the OLD WOMAN, accompanied by her children.*)

OLD WOMAN (*briskly*): Now, what's all this? Who wants me?

JACK II (*accusingly, pointing to JACK and MARY*): It's these two children, old woman.

They've come to our land and we are sure they don't belong here. They say they are called Jack and Mary, but they are none of the Jacks and Marys that belong to Nursery-Rhyme Land!

OLD WOMAN (*looking at the two children*): So you got here after all! Well, I thought you might have trouble!

JACK: Do help us, please. We don't want to be arrested by the King's soldiers, and we don't suppose you want us to come and live in your shoe. It must be far too crowded already!

OLD WOMAN: Well, it certainly *is*! I don't want any more children if I can help it. I'd like to help you, though. You were kind and gave me those lovely clothes.

JACK II (*impatiently*): Well, what are you going to do with these children, old woman?

OLD WOMAN: Wait a minute, wait a minute, Jack. You are always in such a hurry! (*Aside to JACK and MARY*) I've thought of a good rhyme for you both. Perhaps it will do!

JACK AND MARY: Oh, thank you!

OLD WOMAN (*turning to JACK II*): These children are quite harmless. You may let them stay here for a little while. I know them, and they are kind-hearted children.

JACK II (*obstinately*): But they haven't a rhyme. They ought to have a nursery rhyme.

OLD WOMAN: Well, listen (*chanting*):

Mary and Jack
Went there and back
On their trusty old rocking-horse!
How did they go?
Why, to and fro,
For miles and miles, of course!

(*MARY and JACK climb up on rocking-horse.*)

ALL (*chanting*):

Mary and Jack
Went there and back
On their trusty old rocking-horse,
How did they go?
Why, to and fro
For miles and miles, of course!

(*MARY and JACK rock in time.*)

OLD WOMAN: There you are! There's a nursery rhyme for them! Now you'd just better be nice to them, Jack, or I might take *you* to live in my house! You could easily put all the children to bed for me!

JACK II (*hastily*): Oh, I should hate that!

(Noise heard off of shouting and pattering feet. Enter the KING'S SOLDIERS on their hobby-horses, waving letters in their hands.)

1ST SOLDIER: Good news, good news! Old King Cole is giving a party, and every one's invited!

2ND SOLDIER: You're all to go! It's this evening!

JACK *and* MARY (*eagerly*): Oh, could *we* go too, do you think?

JACK II: Yes, I should think so. After all, you've a nursery rhyme, so there's no reason why you shouldn't. We'll all go!

ALL: Hurrah! Hurrah!

POLLY FLINDERS: King Cole's parties are always lovely!

TOMMY TUCKER: I like dancing when his fiddlers three play a merry jig. (*Dances a few steps.*)

JACK-A-DANDY: I shall hop! (*Hops.*)

JACK HORNER: I shall find another pie to eat!

1ST SOLDIER (*galloping about*): Hurry up, every one and go and put on your best frocks! The party begins in an hour's time!

POLLY (*hurrying off*): I'm going to ask my mother to give me some more new clothes.

JACK SPRAT *and* WIFE (*going off*): We'll put on our Sunday suits.

(All go off, talking happily, except JACK II, whose house is at back of stage, the OLD WOMAN and her CHILDREN, and the SOLDIERS.)

2ND SOLDIER (*to other SOLDIERS*): Come along, men! We must go and tell every one, or they won't be ready for the party!

(They gallop off.)

JACK II (*to JACK and MARY*): Would you like to come into my house and get ready for the party?

OLD WOMAN: No—I'll take them to the shoe and tidy them up nicely. They can go to the party with my children. You can ride to the shoe on your horse, my dears. Come along!

(JACK II stands at door of his house and waves good-bye. The children climb on their horse and begin to rock it. The OLD WOMAN and her CHILDREN slowly go off stage.)

MARY *and* JACK (*chanting*):

Mary and Jack

Went there and back

On their trusty old rocking-horse!

How did they go?

Why, to and fro,

For miles and miles, of course!

(The CURTAIN falls in the middle of the rhyme.)

THE END

THE SQUIRREL'S SECRET

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

(This is a simple play and may be easily acted by small children or amusingly performed by older ones. It is excellent for out of doors, but may be easily produced indoors also. If more performers are desired, any animal mentioned may have a 'family' of two or three smaller children. It is an easily rehearsed play, and one that can be quickly produced owing to the fact that there is much repetition in it, which means quickly learnt parts.

The most effective and easiest way of making animals' heads is merely to make a bonnet-shape for the head, with two ears erected by means of wire; and for the muzzle of the animal a piece of cloth is taken, creased in half, and sewn to the top half of the bonnet, the shape of the creased piece made long or short according to whether the muzzle is supposed to be blunt or tapering. The muzzle is stiffened with cardboard. If desired each child may wear a placard with his name on—i.e. Mister Fox, or Mister Hare.)

CHARACTERS

BUSHY SQUIRREL

REYNARD FOX

BIG-EYES THE HARE

BUNNY RABBIT

MOWDIE THE MOLE

PRICKLES THE HEDGEHOG

SLINKY THE STOAT

DERRY DORMOUSE

And, if desired, other characters in the form of smaller members of the families of the main characters.

PROPERTIES NEEDED

If played indoors, branches of greenery, plants in tubs or pots, and an imitation tree at back. A score or so of hazel-nuts. The only dresses needed for this play are the head-masks, and placards, if desired. Also, if wished, the children may be dressed in plain brown tunics and stockings to make them more animal-like in appearance, and may wear tails.

THE SQUIRREL'S SECRET

SCENE—*Out-of-doors in a wood. There should be a tree at the back, the scene of the squirrel's activities. No other scenery is needed. If acted indoors, place branches of greenery at the back and tubs of plants here and there. THE SQUIRREL is seen counting over a big hoard of hazel-nuts.*

BUSHY SQUIRREL: What a fine store of nuts for the hungry winter-time! I will hide these away so that when I awake on a warm morning I shall have a good feast! Nuts from the hazel-tree! Good, ripe nuts, sound and hard! Where shall I hide them?

(Looks all round. Patters here and there, searching for good place. Talks all the time.)

SQUIRREL: Shall I hide them here? No, that is too easy a place! Some one might see them. Shall I put them *here*? No, the rain would get to them and spoil them for me. Here? No, it's too difficult to remember! It would be so tiresome to wake up hungry and not be able to remember where I had hidden them. Where *shall* I put them? Shall I bury them? No, they might grow!

(Patters to tree at back and feels about trunk.)

SQUIRREL: Ah, just the place! I will put all my nuts in this little hole—then they will be safe. No one will find them there!

(Deposits nuts and comes to front, rubbing hands.)

SQUIRREL: What a fine, secret place! No one will guess. Aha, I've a good secret to keep!

(Enter REYNARD THE FOX. They bow to one another.)

REYNARD: Good morning, friend. What news?

SQUIRREL: None—except that I have a fine secret!

REYNARD *(inquisitively)*: What is it? Tell me.

SQUIRREL: Come nearer and let me whisper. *(REYNARD comes near and inclines his ear.)*

I've hidden my nuts in the hole that's in the old tree there. Look! *(Shows REYNARD.)*

REYNARD *(scornfully)*: What a stupid secret! Fancy making a fuss about a silly thing like that! I thought at least you were going to tell me how to get into the farmer's poultry-yard. There are some fine, plump chickens there. By the way, Bushy, *you* are looking nice and fat this morning! *(Makes a sudden movement towards the SQUIRREL, who squeaks in fright and runs off.)*

SQUIRREL: You wicked fox! I won't let you get me! *(Exit.)*

REYNARD: Well, he wouldn't have made much of a meal—all ears and tail! Hallo, who's this?

(Enter BIG-EYES THE HARE. They bow to one another.)

HARE: Good morning, friend. What news?

REYNARD: None—except that Bushy Squirrel told me a secret this morning.

HARE (*inquisitively*): What is it? Tell me.

REYNARD: Come nearer and let me whisper. (HARE *comes near and inclines his ear.*) Bushy Squirrel has hidden his nuts in the hole that's in the old tree there. Look! (*Shows HARE.*)

HARE (*scornfully*): What a ridiculous secret! Fancy making a fuss about a silly thing like that! I thought at least you were going to tell me where the farmer has planted his new lettuces. I know he has some good, juicy ones, but I can't find them anywhere.

REYNARD: *I feel hungry, too, Hare. I feel very hungry! (Edges nearer HARE, licking his lips. HARE backs in alarm.)*

HARE: Listen! Is that dogs barking! Perhaps the huntsmen are coming this morning, Reynard!

(Barking noise heard off.)

REYNARD (*alarmed*): Dogs: I'm off! See you another time, Hare.

HARE: I hope not, Reynard! (*Fox runs off.*) Ho, ho, he thought they were the hounds! It's only the farmer's puppy practising his new bark!

(Enter BUNNY RABBIT.)

RABBIT: Good morning, friend. What news?

HARE: None—except that Reynard Fox told me a secret this morning.

RABBIT (*inquisitively*): What is it? Tell me.

HARE: Come nearer and let me whisper, (RABBIT *comes near and inclines his ear.*) Reynard the Fox said that Bushy the Squirrel has hidden his nuts in the hole that's in the old tree yonder. Look! (*Shows RABBIT.*)

RABBIT (*scornfully*): What a nonsensical secret! Fancy making a fuss about a silly thing like that! I thought at least you were going to tell me where I could find some nice young carrots to eat! Ooh, carrots, long and juicy, small and sweet, round and tender! How I wish I could find some!

HARE: I like carrots too. I'm off to see if I can find one for a meal. Good-bye, Bunny Rabbit! (*Runs off.*)

RABBIT (*washing face with back of paws, and bending down ears to wash behind them*): Who cares for nuts? *I don't!* What *I* want is a young carrot, a spring cabbage, or a juicy lettuce, but they don't seem to grow in *this* wood! (*Sighs loudly and looks round to see.*)

(Enter MOWDIE THE MOLE.)

MOLE: Good morning, friend. What news?

RABBIT: None—except that Big-eyes the Hare told me a secret this morning.

MOLE (*inquisitively*): What is it? Tell me.

RABBIT: Come nearer and let me whisper. (MOLE *comes near and inclines his ear.*) Big-eyes the Hare said Bushy Squirrel has hidden his nuts in the hole that's in the old tree there. Look! (*Shows MOLE.*)

MOLE (*scornfully*): What a rubbishy secret! Fancy making a fuss about a silly thing like that! I thought at least you were going to tell me where I could find some nice fat worms, or a few good beetles for my dinner. Now that would certainly be grand news!

RABBIT: Worms! Beetles! How *can* you eat such disgusting things, Mole. You make me feel ill! *I'm* going to find a lettuce to eat! Good-bye! (*Runs off.*)

MOLE: Well, what's disgusting about worms and beetles, I should like to know? I never knew such finicking creatures as rabbits in all my life! They live in holes as moles do, and yet never touch any of the worms or grubs that crawl in the earth around them! Hallo! Here comes old Prickles the Hedgehog.

(*Enter PRICKLES THE HEDGEHOG.*)

PRICKLES: Good morning, friend. What news?

MOLE: None—except that Bunny Rabbit told me a secret this morning.

PRICKLES (*inquisitively*): What is it? Tell me.

MOLE: Come nearer and let me whisper. (*HEDGEHOG comes near and inclines his ear.*)

Bunny Rabbit said that Bushy the Squirrel has hidden his nuts in the hole that's in the old tree there. Look! (*Shows HEDGEHOG.*)

PRICKLES (*scornfully*): What a poor, foolish secret! Fancy making a fuss about a silly thing like that! I thought at least you were going to tell me where I could find the beetles and grubs that you and I like so much—or perhaps a few slugs. All I've had this morning is two snails!

MOLE: Snails, did you say? I might try one or two. Where did you find them?

PRICKLES (*pointing off*): Under the bushes yonder.

MOLE: Many thanks! (*Runs off.*)

PRICKLES: Well, he won't find them there now! I've eaten them, and very nice they were too! If only he had told me where he gets his beetles—they are *such* a nice change after snails and slugs!

(*Enter SLINKY THE STOAT.*)

STOAT: Good morning, friend. What news?

PRICKLES: None—except that Mowdie the Mole told me a secret this morning.

STOAT: What is it? Tell me.

PRICKLES: Come nearer and let me whisper. (*STOAT comes near and inclines his ear.*)

Mowdie the Mole said that Bushy the Squirrel has hidden his nuts in the hole that's in the old tree yonder. Look! (*Shows STOAT.*)

STOAT (*scornfully*): What a stupid, fiddling sort of secret! Fancy making a fuss about a silly thing like that! I thought at least you were going to tell me where I could find a plump young rabbit, or a tender little mouse or two! Ha, that would be a *good* secret to tell me! It's a pity hedgehogs are so prickly, I always think. I dare say you are nice and fat underneath!

HEDGEHOG (*alarmed*): Whatever do you mean? Don't you dare to touch me, Slinky Stoat! You'll be sorry if you do! (*Runs off in a fright.*)

STOAT (*grinning*): Don't worry, Prickles. Nobody wants to make a meal off you! You're much too uncomfortable to eat. Who's this? Ah, a nice, plump little dormouse.

(*Enter DERRY DORMOUSE.*)

DORMOUSE: Good morning, friend. What news?

STOAT: None—except that Prickles the Hedgehog told me a secret this morning.

DORMOUSE (*inquisitively*): What is it? Tell me.

STOAT: Come nearer and let me whisper. (DORMOUSE *comes near and inclines his ear.*)

Prickles the Hedgehog said that Bushy the Squirrel has hidden his nuts in the hole that's in the old tree there. Look! (*Shows DORMOUSE.*)

DORMOUSE: Ooh, what a wonderful secret! Oh, thank you so much for telling me, Slinky Stoat.

STOAT (*surprised*): Well, I thought it a poor kind of secret myself.

DORMOUSE: Oh, no, Slinky Stoat, it's a wonderful secret. I'm so glad to know it—truly I am. It's most kind of you to tell me. I'd rather know that secret than any other—really I would.

STOAT: Well, *I'd* much rather know where I could find a nice plump rabbit, or a fat little mouse. (*Looks cunningly at DORMOUSE.*) I suppose you wouldn't like to come to dinner with me, Derry Dormouse?

DORMOUSE (*with a shriek of fright*): Oh, you wicked stoat! I know what an invitation like that means! Come to dinner with you, indeed! Come and *be* your dinner you mean! Not I! (*Runs off.*)

STOAT: Silly creature! She would have made a nice little meal, though there wasn't really very much of her. Well, I'm going to find a rabbit—a good plump one, too! (*Goes off.*
DERRY DORMOUSE *puts her nose round the corner and sniffs to see if STOAT is gone.*)

(*Note that if desired more characters may easily be introduced at this point in the shape of small dormice. Or the one dormouse may perform. The two alternatives are worked out fully as follows.*)

1ST ALTERNATIVE: DORMOUSE *with family.*

DORMOUSE: The Stoat has gone, children! We are safe. Come along!

(*Enter DORMOUSE, followed by members of her family.*)

1ST CHILD: What a nasty smell of stoat!

2ND CHILD: Will he come back, Mother?

DORMOUSE: I don't expect so. Now, my dears, I've a fine feast for you! Come and get these nuts.

(*All go to tree and come away with handfuls of nuts. They sit down in a half-circle and pretend to gnaw shells and eat nuts.*)

3RD CHILD: Oh, Mother, where did you get these lovely nuts? How clever of you to hide them away for us!

DORMOUSE: Hurry up with your meal, child. They really belong to Bushy Squirrel, but I happened to hear where he had hidden them and thought they would do for you!

4TH CHILD: What will he say when he sees they are gone?

DORMOUSE: Oh, he will think he has made a mistake in the tree and will go hunting all over the wood for them!

1ST CHILD: How cross he will be! It was clever of you to find them, Mother.

DORMOUSE: Oh, Slinky Stoat told me where they were. He didn't want them for himself, because he much prefers rabbits or mice to eat.

(A pattering noise heard off.)

ALL CHILDREN *(squeaking in terror)*: Ooooooooooh!

1ST CHILD *(jumping to feet in terror)*: The stoat! The stoat! I hear him coming! *(All run off except DORMOUSE, who collects a few nuts and hides behind tree.)*

(Enter BUSHY THE SQUIRREL.)

BUSHY: I'm hungry. I think I'll have a few of my nuts before I settle down to sleep for the winter. Now where did I put them? I had such a good place! Oh, yes, I remember! In the hole that's in the old tree there! *(Goes to tree.)*

Second Alternative: DORMOUSE alone, without family.

(Start from DERRY DORMOUSE puts her nose round the corner and sniffs to see if STOAT is gone.)

DORMOUSE: Has that Stoat gone? Yes! *(Comes on.)* Now for a fine feast! Oh, what a wonderful secret it was that Slinky Stoat told me! He must be a kind fellow, although he's so fierce.

(Goes to tree and finds nuts. Brings out a handful, comes to front, sits down and begins to gnaw them in great enjoyment.)

DORMOUSE: Delicious nuts! The very finest I've ever tasted! I suppose Bushy Squirrel must have picked them off that big hazel-tree in the middle of the wood. I know the finest nuts grow there but I'm always afraid of looking on that tree because of the big tawny owl that lives near by. *(Gnaws busily.)*

DORMOUSE: Nothing better than nuts in the autumn! Not even the hips and haws are nicer, or the little young mushrooms. Ah, Bushy Squirrel, what will you say when you find your nuts are gone?

(A pattering of feet heard off. DERRY DORMOUSE jumps to feet in alarm and listens.)

DORMOUSE: Is that the Stoat coming back? Tails and whiskers, I must hide! *(Runs to back and hides, leaving nut-shells scattered.)*

(Enter BUSHY THE SQUIRREL.)

BUSHY: I'm hungry. I think I'll have a few of my nuts before I settle down to sleep for the winter. Now where did I put them? I had such a good place! Oh, yes, I remember! In the hole that's in the old tree there! *(Goes to tree. Hunts there and scrabbles round, trying to find nuts.)*

BUSHY: That's funny! I feel sure this must be the hole! But there's not a single nut here! *(Runs here and there, hunting in different places, then goes back to same tree.)*

BUSHY: I feel sure they were here! Oh my, oh my, who's taken them? *Somebody's taken my nuts! Oh, what a shame, what a shame! (Suddenly sees nut-shells on ground and points to them.)*

BUSHY: Look at that! Nut-shells! Yes, someone's found my nuts this morning and eaten them—and it was such a secret! Who is the thief? Who has found my secret? (*Looks round and spies the DORMOUSE peeping. Rushes up to her and drags her out.*)

DORMOUSE: Don't! Don't! You're hurting me!

BUSHY (*fiercely*): You deserve to be hurt. Have you eaten all my nuts, you wicked robber?

DORMOUSE: Well, you shouldn't leave them in a place where people can find them.

BUSHY: You didn't find them! Some one told you my secret! Who was it?

DORMOUSE (*crying*): Boo-hoo-hoo! It wasn't my fault! Slinky Stoat told me your secret and showed me where you had hidden your nuts.

BUSHY (*angrily*): Slinky Stoat! That wily old thief! How did *he* find out my secret I'd like to know? (*Shouts.*) Hi, Slinky Stoat, Slinky Stoat, where are you? I want to speak to you for a minute.

(*Enter SLINKY STOAT. DERRY DORMOUSE quickly slips to other side of BUSHY SQUIRREL.*)

STOAT: Why do you call me so loudly, Bushy? Is anything the matter?

BUSHY: Matter enough! This little robber here has stolen all my nuts, and she says *you* told her my secret, Slinky. Did you?

STOAT: Yes, I did—and why shouldn't I tell a stupid secret like that?

BUSHY (*angrily*): It *wasn't* a stupid secret. How did *you* get to know where my nuts were hidden?

STOAT: Oh, Prickles the Hedgehog told *me*. He knew all about it.

BUSHY: Prickles the Hedgehog! How did *he* find out my secret, I should like to know? (*Shouts*) Hi, Prickles, Prickles, where are you? I want to speak to you for a minute.

(*Enter PRICKLES THE HEDGEHOG, looking surprised.*)

PRICKLES: Why do you call me so loudly, Bushy? Is anything the matter?

BUSHY: Matter enough! This little robber here (*pointing to DORMOUSE*) has stolen all my nuts, and she says Slinky Stoat told her my secret, and *you* told him, Prickles. Did you?

PRICKLES: Yes, I did—and why shouldn't I tell a stupid secret like that?

BUSHY (*angrily*): It *wasn't* a stupid secret. How did *you* get to know where my nuts were hidden?

PRICKLES: Oh, Mowdie the Mole told *me*. He knew all about it!

BUSHY: Mowdie the Mole! How did *he* find out my secret, I should like to know? (*Shouts*) Hi, Mowdie Mole, Mowdie Mole, where are you? I want to speak to you for a minute.

(*Enter MOWDIE MOLE, panting.*)

MOWDIE: Why do you call me so loudly, Bushy? Is anything the matter?

BUSHY: Matter enough! This little robber here (*pointing to DORMOUSE*) has stolen all my nuts, and she says Slinky Stoat told her my secret, and Prickles told *him*, and *you* told Prickles. Did you, Mowdie Mole?

MOWDIE: Yes, I did—and why shouldn't I tell a stupid secret like that?

BUSHY (*angrily*): It *wasn't* a stupid secret. How did *you* get to know where my nuts were hidden?

MOWDIE: Oh, Bunny Rabbit told *me*. He knew all about it!

BUSHY: Bunny Rabbit! How did *he* find out my secret, I should like to know? (*Shouts*) Hi, Bunny Rabbit, Bunny Rabbit, where are you? I want to speak to you for a minute.

(*Enter BUNNY RABBIT in a hurry.*)

RABBIT: Why do you call me so loudly, Bushy? Is anything the matter?

BUSHY: Matter enough! This little robber here (*pointing to DORMOUSE*) has stolen all my nuts, and she says Slinky Stoat told her my secret, and Prickles told *him*, and Mowdie Mole told *him* and *you* told Mowdie. Did you, Bunny Rabbit?

RABBIT: Yes, I did—and why shouldn't I tell a stupid secret like that?

BUSHY (*angrily*): It *wasn't* a stupid secret. How did *you* get to know where my nuts were hidden?

RABBIT: Oh, Big-eyes the Hare told *me*. He knew all about it!

BUSHY: Big-eyes the Hare! How did *he* find out my secret, I should like to know? (*Shouts*) Hi, Big-eyes, Big-eyes, where are you? I want to speak to you for a minute.

(*Enter BIG-EYES, surprised to see such a crowd.*)

HARE: Why do you call me so loudly, Bushy? Is anything the matter?

BUSHY: Matter enough! This little robber here (*pointing to DORMOUSE*) has stolen all my nuts, and she says Slinky Stoat told her my secret, and Prickles told *him*, and Mowdie Mole told *him*, and Bunny Rabbit told *him*, and *you* told Bunny Rabbit. Did you, Big-eyes?

HARE: Yes, I did—and why shouldn't I tell a stupid secret like that?

BUSHY (*angrily*): It *wasn't* a stupid secret. How did *you* get to know where my nuts were hidden?

HARE: Oh, Reynard the Fox told *me*. He knew all about it!

BUSHY: Reynard the Fox. . . Oh, Reynard the Fox told you, did he? (*Looking embarrassed.*) Dear me—er—er—

(*Enter FOX, surprised to see every one.*)

FOX: Hallo, what's all this?

HARE: Reynard, Bushy Squirrel is very angry because Derry Dormouse has found out where Bushy hid his nuts. We are trying to discover who first told the secret. Slinky Stoat told the Dormouse, Prickles told Slinky, Mowdie Mole told Prickles, Bunny told Mowdie, I told Bunny, and *you* told me, didn't you?

FOX: Certainly I did.

HARE: Well, who told *you* the secret, Reynard?

FOX: Who—why silly old Bushy Squirrel himself! (*Points to BUSHY, who is trying to hide behind others. They push him forward.*)

BUNNY: What! *You* told the fox, Bushy!

MOWDIE: *You* gave away your own secret!

PRICKLES: Nobody knew but you where your nuts were hidden!

FOX: And he told *me*!

HARE: And Reynard told *me*!

RABBIT: And Hare told *me*!

MOLE: And Bunny told *me*!

HEDGEHOG: And Mole told *me*!

STOAT: And Prickles told *me*!

DORMOUSE: And the Stoat told *me*—and I was hungry and ate all the nuts!

HARE: It was your own fault, Bushy—you should have kept your secret! You can't blame any one for doing what you did yourself!

FOX: Well, I'm off to catch a chicken. (*Goes out.*)

HARE: And I'm going to find a cabbage. (*Goes out.*)

RABBIT: A carrot for me. (*Goes out.*)

MOLE: I shall find some juicy worms for *my* dinner. (*Goes out.*)

HEDGEHOG: I'll come with you. (*Goes out.*)

STOAT: I'm off to get a dinner of mice. (*Goes out.*)

DORMOUSE (*hurrying off in a different direction*): But not *this* mouse, Slinky!

BUSHY (*dolefully*): All going to get their dinners excepting me! *Why* did I tell my secret? (*Sighs heavily.*) Well, *next* time I'll remember this—if I want my secret to be kept, I'll KEEP IT MYSELF!

THE END

THE WHISTLING BROWNIES

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

Act I. IN THE KITCHEN OF THE BROWNIES' HOME

Act II. NEAR THE CANARIES' CAGE IN HIGH-UP LAND

Act III. INSIDE MR. FEATHERS' COTTAGE

(To be acted by any number of children, and any age).

CHARACTERS

HEYHO }
 TUPPENY } the Three Brownies
 JINKS }
 TWO FAIRIES
 A GNOME
 A WITCH
 PIXIES
 MR. FEATHERS
 ANY NUMBER OF CANARIES
 COURTIER BELONGING TO THE PRINCE'S CASTLE
 PRINCE MIGHTY
 PRINCESS MIGHTY

PROPERTIES NEEDED

Chairs, tables, fire-place, pot on fire, cupboard, bag. Map. Bird-seed in box. Second box. Blue dish. Chalk. Plants in tubs. Tree branches or greenery. Deck-chair. Bag of pence. Tea-things, eatables. Cushions. Kettle. Long, dark curtain. Poker and tongs. Box of cigarettes and box of matches. Clock.

To make the trilling, warbling sounds it is necessary to purchase the small, round, tin bird-whistling instruments sold at toy-shops. These may be used either by the players themselves or by children just off the stage, at the right moment, but in this case great care must be taken to ensure good synchronization.

For the loud squeaks, any of the squeak-tricks sold in toyshops, or in stores such as Hamleys or Gamages may be bought—the louder and longer squeaks the better. The squeaks can be made by the Brownies hidden behind the curtain; they will sound as if coming from the different places when the actors pretend that they do. For the cakes or biscuits false cakes or biscuits can be bought with squeaks inside; one or two of these will be most effective.

There is a good gramophone record called 'Dawn in an Old-World Garden' (H.M.V. B2469), which may be used to reproduce the birds singing during the play, and at the end of it. Or one of the well-known nightingale records might be used.

This play is easy and amusing to act, but all the various trills and squeaks must be well rehearsed in order to get them at exactly the right moment. If this is done, the play will be extremely effective and very puzzling to the audience.

The teapot and the cake-plates should, of course, be made of enamel.

ACT I

SCENE—*In the kitchen of the three BROWNIES. There is a small table in the middle and three or four small chairs are about. There is a fire-place at the back with a fire or the pretence of one. A pot hangs over the fire. A cupboard is in the corner. The three BROWNIES are packing a bag.*

HEYHO: Well, we're off to seek our fortunes at last! We shall never make any money if we stay in this little village.

TUPPENY: Wouldn't it be fine to come back rich! We'd ride down the lane in a golden carriage and blow silver trumpets!

JINKS: Well, what *I* should like to know is—where are we going? It's all very well to seek our fortunes—but where are fortunes to be found?

HEYHO: Oh, we'll get rich somehow.

(A knock is heard outside.)

ALL *(shouting)*; Come in!

(Enter two FAIRIES.)

1ST FAIRY: Hallo, Brownies! We've just come to say good-bye—and to tell you some news.

HEYHO: What news?

2ND FAIRY: We've heard that Prince Mighty, of High-up Land, is very much upset because he has some canaries that never sing. They had a fright one night and ever since then they can't trill a note.

TUPPENY: Well, what's that got to do with us?

1ST FAIRY: How slow you are! Can't you go to Prince Mighty's and make the canaries sing? Then he will give you a great deal of gold and you can come back rich!

JINKS: And how are we to make canaries sing if they don't want to?

2ND FAIRY: Gracious! Just get a whistling spell, of course—or something like that.

HEYHO: Pooh! Just the sort of silly idea a fairy *would* think of! A whistling spell! And how are we to get one? And if we do, how can we use it to make canaries sing? And if we *could* make canaries sing with it would Prince Mighty let us try it on *his* precious canaries?

1ST FAIRY: Oh, well, if you're so scornful of our idea, we'll go!

(Both FAIRIES turn to go.)

TUPPENY: No, don't go. I say, come back! We *might* do it. Who's that Gnome who goes about whistling to the birds such a lot? He might help us.

2ND FAIRY: You mean Chippy, that old Gnome with the long beard? I'll fetch him and see if he'll help you. *(Goes out.)*

JINKS *(fastening up bag)*: I don't expect the Gnome will help us at all. He's no brains except for whistling.

HEYHO: You don't want *brains* for whistling. You want breath.

(*Enter 2ND FAIRY and a long-bearded GNOME.*)

BROWNIES (*politely*): Good morning.

GNOME: Good morning. What do you want me for?

TUPPENY: We wondered if you could tell us how to whistle like you. You make all the birds sing back to you. How do you do it?

GNOME (*whistling beautifully*): Like this!

(*BROWNIES all crowd round him, trying to see into his mouth. They then try to do his trilling, etc., themselves, but cannot.*)

JINKS (*dolefully*): It looks so easy, but it isn't. Gnome, how would you make canaries sing that won't trill a note?

GNOME: Oh, I'd make some whistling bird-seed and give it to them! Then they'd sing all right!

HEYHO (*excited*): How would you do that?

GNOME: Oh, I couldn't do it by myself. I'd have to get the old Witch to help me, and a few Pixies to dance round in a ring whilst the spell was being made.

1ST FAIRY: Shall I go and get the old Witch, Heyho? I saw her out doing her shopping this morning. I can soon get her. It would be lovely if you could make some whistling seed for Prince Mighty's canaries!

HEYHO: All right. You go and get the old Witch. She's a friend of ours and I dare say she'd help us.

(*1ST FAIRY goes out.*)

TUPPENY: Oooh, we shall make our fortune! I knew we should some day.

JINKS: Well, we've got a long way to go before it's made! Does any one know where Prince Mighty lives?

2ND FAIRY: Yes—in High-up Land.

GNOME (*feeling in his pocket*): I've a map here. (*Spreads it out on table. All crowd round to look at it.*)

HEYHO (*excitedly*): There it is! Goodness, what a long up! All up those hills!

JINKS: That won't matter if there's a fortune at the end. Can we borrow your map, Gnome?

GNOME: Certainly.

(*Noise heard outside. In come the old WITCH, the 1ST FAIRY and some PIXIES, chattering excitedly.*)

1ST FAIRY: Here's the Witch. She says she'll help you.

PIXIES (*all together*): And we've come to help too, and to say good-bye when you go.

WITCH: What is it you want to do, Brownies?

HEYHO: Well, we want to take some whistling seed to Prince Mighty and give it to his canaries, you know. They won't sing, and he's offering a reward to any one who can make them. The Gnome here can whistle and trill like a bird, and he says he'll help to make the magic seed if you'll do the spell.

PIXIES: And we'll help, too.

GNOME: Has any one got any seed?

WITCH (*producing a box and opening it*): Yes, I have some.

(BROWNIES *look inside*.)

TUPPENY: Why, it's empty! There's no seed there!

JINKS: Not a grain! Put your spectacles on, old Witch. There isn't any seed in your box! We must send out for some.

WITCH: You don't need to. The box is not empty, though it seems so to you. (*Tilts it up and shakes seed from it so that every one can see*.) Now we'd better put some in a blue dish—have you a blue dish, Heyho?—and then start the spell working.

HEYHO (*going to cupboard and getting a blue dish*): Here you are.

(WITCH *pours out some bird-seed into dish, then gives it to GNOME to hold. Puts box back on table*.)

WITCH: Now, Gnome, get into the middle of the chalk ring I'm going to draw on the floor. Hold the dish to your mouth and whistle like a bird all the time the Pixies are dancing round you. I shall say the magic words. Brownies and Fairies, clap your hands softly all the time and don't say a word.

(HEYHO *pushes table to one side to give WITCH room to draw ring. WITCH chalks a small circle. GNOME steps inside and holds dish to lips, trilling clearly. PIXIES join hands and begin to move round him gently. WITCH stands outside, muttering magic words. Others clap hands softly*.)

WITCH (*chanting*):

Pikka-rooni, millimim,
Standing in the magic ring,
May the spell come in the dish
Pikka-rooni—now I wish!

(*Just as the WITCH is finishing her song one of the PIXIES treads on the GNOME's toe and he utters a loud squeal of pain*.)

WITCH (*crossly*): What do you want to make that noise for, Gnome? It's enough to spoil the spell!

GNOME (*hopping about on one foot, holding the other tightly*): Ooh! Ow! That silly, careless, clumsy Pixie trod on my best corn!

WITCH: Well, you ought to be glad it's not your worst one. I do hope the spell's not spoilt. (*She takes the dish from the GNOME and smells it*.) It doesn't smell quite right to me. We'd better try it on some one and see if it makes him trill like a bird.

TUPPENY (*stepping forward*): I don't mind trying it.

WITCH: Very well. Eat this seed and we'll see what happens. (*She gives TUPPENY a seed and he swallows it, making a face*.)

GNOME: Now try to trill like a bird, Tuppeny.

(TUPPENY *opens his mouth, but instead of a trill he makes a piercing squeak*.)

WITCH: Gracious, Tuppenny, what a noise! I *thought* the spell had gone wrong. Those seeds are squeaking seeds, instead of whistling ones! You see what's happened, Gnome. (*Turning to him.*) Your silly squeak sent those seeds wrong. It's a good thing I've some more left. Come along, let's do the spell again—and for goodness' sake, if any one treads on your toe don't say a word! Just go on trilling.

GNOME (*frowning round at PIXIES who are forming into a circle*): If any one *does* tread on my best corn again—aha!

(The whole performance is repeated once more, this time without mishap. The GNOME trills the whole time, the WITCH chants her little magic song, the PIXIES dance round, the others clap softly.)

WITCH: That's better. Give me the dish of seeds, Gnome. (*Sniffs at it.*) Ah, that's all right, I think. Here, Jinks, come and taste one and see what happens.

(JINKS takes a seed and swallows it. Then begins to warble beautifully. Every one is delighted and claps hands.)

HEYHO: Good! The seeds are whistling seeds now. Hurrah! We'll make our fortune with them!

TUPPENY: And we'll—(*Suddenly stops and utters loud squeak, much to every one's surprise.*) Oh, bother! That's the bird-seed I had just now! Sorry everybody! As I was saying, when we come back, we'll—(*Squeaks again, and every one laughs.*)

JINKS (*patting him on back*): Never mind, old chap. I'll say it for you. When we come back we'll give a fine party and ask you all to it, in return for your very kind help.

HEYHO: Yes, we will! (*Warbles unexpectedly.*)

TUPPENY: We certainly—(*Squeaks.*)

JINKS (*putting the whistling bird-seed into a small box*): We're ready to go now, I think. I'll take this and keep it carefully in my pocket.

TUPPENY (*taking up the first lot of bird-seed*): And I'll take this squeaking seed, I think. (*Squeaks suddenly.*) Oh, I do beg your pardon everybody! I'll take *this* seed. It might come in useful; you never know!

HEYHO (*picking up bag*): Well good-bye, every one till we next meet. We're off to the Land of High-up to make Prince Mighty's canaries sing like the larks in the fields!

EVERY ONE (*shaking hands and patting on back*): Good-bye, Brownies—good-bye. Good luck to you!

HEYHO: Good-bye.

JINKS: Good-bye.

TUPPENY: Goodbye-EEEEEEEEEEEEEE! (*Tails off its loud squeak.*)

(They go off amid laughter and shouts of farewell.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE—*Near the canaries' cage in the garden of PRINCE MIGHTY'S castle. Flowers or plants about in tubs. Branches of trees up wall at back to represent garden trees. There is some one in a deck-chair at the back of the stage, but turned away from audience, i.e. the back of the chair is about all they can see. A soft snoring can be heard.*

(Enter the three BROWNIES, looking about them.)

HEYHO: Well, here we are at last, after climbing, climbing, climbing for days and days!

TUPPENY *(sinking down)*: I'm tired out.

JINKS: Well, that's the castle all right. *(Points off.)* And look—those must be the canaries over there. *(Points off in different direction.)*

HEYHO: Let's listen a moment, to see if we can hear a trill or a whistle.

(All are silent. Soft snoring heard.)

TUPPENY: Not a trill! Funny, though, I thought I heard a sort of snoring noise.

JINKS: I suppose you think canaries snore, do you?

TUPPENY: Of course not; but I did think I heard snoring.

HEYHO: I thought so too. Perhaps one of the canaries is asleep. If they can't trill they may snore a little.

JINKS: I wonder where the keeper of the birds is. That servant we met just now told us he would be somewhere near the birds' cage. But there's no one there that I can see.

TUPPENY: What was his name? Something funny.

HEYHO: Mister Feathers.

TUPPENY: Oh, yes—Mister Feathers. It's a good name for some one who looks after birds! Let's call him.

HEYHO: Mister Feathers!

JINKS: Mister Feathers!

(Louder snoring heard. The BROWNIES look round and see deck-chair for first time with its occupant. TUPPENY steals round and has a look. Comes back to others, smiling.)

TUPPENY: Yes, that's Mister Feathers all right. He's got feathers growing out of his head instead of hair! He does look strange. And he's got feathers all down his fingers!

HEYHO: Let's wake him.

JINKS: Shall we play a trick on him? Let's pretend his master the Prince is coming. He'll wake up in such a state!

TUPPENY: Yes, let's. You go off to those trees there, Heyho, and Jinks and I will yell out that Prince and Princess Mighty are coming, and see old Feathers jump out of his chair in a hurry. Then you come stalking in and we'll see his face.

(HEYHO goes off stage. Others hide behind a tub, and then TUPPENY shouts loudly.)

TUPPENY: Make way for his high and mighty grandness the Prince! Make way for her sweet and gracious loveliness the Princess!

(MR. FEATHERS begins to scramble out of his chair in a terrible hurry, groaning and muttering. The chair falls over, and so does MR. FEATHERS. He picks himself up and bows to the ground.)

MR. FEATHERS: Greetings, Your Honour! Greetings, my Lady! (*Bows repeatedly to no one.*)
HEYHO (*entering grandly*): Oh, greetings, Mr. Feathers! How do you do? It's so nice of you to welcome me in this way!

(*Other BROWNIES laugh to themselves.*)

MR. FEATHERS (*indignantly*): And who are you, I should like to know?

HEYHO: Oh, don't talk to me like that after greeting me so politely! I thought you seemed so pleased to see me!

MR. F.: Somebody said the Prince and Princess were coming. I heard them distinctly. I was just sitting there in my chair, having a read——

HEYHO: Having a *snooze*?

MR. F.: Certainly not. I never snooze.

TUPPENY and JINKS (*together*): Oh, naughty little story-teller!

MR. F. (*whipping round and seeing them*): Oho, so there are three of you! Well, I'll teach you to wake me up like that and give me a fright! I'll teach you to scare me, I'll teach you to——(*Rushes at BROWNIES in a rage. They dodge behind tubs, etc.*)

TUPPENY: Now listen, listen, Mr. Feathers. We've come to do something wonderful.

MR. F.: Yes, and you're going to get something wonderful! (*Still goes after them.*)

HEYHO: We've come to make the canaries sing.

MR. F. (*stopping short suddenly*): What! What did you say?

HEYHO (*firmly*): We've come to make the canaries sing. Won't Prince Mighty be pleased?

MR. F.: But no one can make those birds sing! We've had witches and wise men from all over the place. Not a bit of good. Those canaries can't sing a note, and never will!

JINKS: *We* can make them!

MR. F.: Very well. You can try. I'll bring you a canary and you can do your best with it.

(*Goes off and comes back with hopping canary following him.*)

MR. F.: As you see, my canaries are very tame. Now let's see if you can make this one sing.

TUPPENY: Where's that seed, Jinks?

(*JINKS hands him box. TUPPENY empties a little seed into hand and offers to canary who hops up to him and pecks. A beautiful warbling sound is heard.*)

HEYHO: There you are, Mr. Feathers! What did I say? Can that canary sing or not?

MR. F. (*astounded*): Marvellous! Amazing! How pleased the Prince will be.

(*Canary hops off, trilling.*)

JINKS: Take us to the Prince and we will offer to make all his canaries sing like that one.

MR. F.: No, no. The Prince is too busy to-day to be disturbed by folk like you. I will deal with you myself. What reward do you want for making the canaries sing?

HEYHO: Oh, a fortune!

MR. F.: And what is a fortune, please?

HEYHO: Fifty pieces of gold!

MR. F.: Fifty pieces of gold! You must be mad!

TUPPENY: No, we're not mad. We know the Prince would give us that if we asked him.

Will you give us what we want, or not?

MR. F.: Fifty pieces of gold! (*Paces up and down, thinking.*) Tell me this, please, Brownies—once you have made those canaries sing, can any one take the spell from them?

TUPPENY: Nobody—not even us. They will sing for the rest of their lives.

MR. F.: Well, you may do it, and I will give you fifty pieces—but not one more, mind you—just fifty pieces.

BROWNIES (*delighted*): That's all we want! Fetch the canaries here.

(MR. F. goes off and in come some more hopping canaries. BROWNIES scatter seed about and soon all the canaries are trilling sweetly. MR. F. looks on, delighted, occasionally patting heads of any canaries that happen to hop near him.)

JINKS: Well, Mr. Feathers, we have done what we said we'd do. Now will you give us our reward, please?

MR. F. (*opening wallet at his belt*): Certainly. Here you are. (*Gives a purse into JINKS's hands.*)

JINKS (*opening it*): But these are not gold pieces. They are copper pennies—fifty copper pennies!

MR. F.: I said I'd give you fifty pieces, but I didn't say fifty pieces of gold! No, no, it was you who said that, Brownie. Now take your pence and be off. You won't get any more out of me! If you make a noise I'll call the gardeners and have you thrown out of here on your noses! Canaries, come along—come along! (*Shooes canaries out before him, and then suddenly comes back and grins.*)

MR. F.: Ho, ho! That will teach you to wake me up out of a nice sleep and tell me the Prince is coming! Ho, ho! (*Goes out again.*)

HEYHO: Horrid, deceitful old man! And we can't even stop the canaries from singing now! Oh, why didn't we make him pay us first?

TUPPENY: It's too bad. To come all this way and then only get fifty pence. *That* isn't a fortune.

JINKS: I wish we could punish the horrid old thing.

TUPPENY (*suddenly*): Well, let's. We'll find out where his house is and we'll go there when he's not there and we'll put some of these *squeaking* seeds I've got in all sorts of places! Ho, what fun! We'll give him the fright of his life!

HEYHO: Yes, we will! And we'll hide somewhere and watch the fun ourselves—and just won't we LAUGH! (*They go out, laughing.*)

(A noise is heard off. Enter the PRINCE and his LADY. As they come on stage they pause to hear canaries, who are trilling in distance.)

PRINCE: Strange! Strange! Ho, courtiers! Can you hear anything unusual?

(Enter some COURTIERS, group themselves round PRINCE and PRINCESS and listen in astonishment.)

1ST COURTIER: If I didn't know that your canaries couldn't sing I should think it was birds trilling, Your Highness.

PRINCESS: It *is!* That's just what it is! Oh, how lovely!

PRINCE *(looking round)*: Where's Feathers? He ought to have come to tell me about this at once.

COURTIERS *(shouting)*: Feathers! Feathers! Where are you?

(Enter FEATHERS, smiling and bowing.)

PRINCE *(pointing off stage)*: Are those my canaries I can hear?

MR. F.: Yes, Your Highness. Yes! I was just coming to tell you about them! Oh, Sir, after a great many days of hard work, trying to teach your birds to sing, in order to please you, I have been successful!

PRINCESS: What! You have taught them yourself, Feathers?

MR. F. *(bowing)*: Yes, my Lady, I did it to be a surprise for you.

PRINCE: That's very good and kind of you, Feathers. I am very pleased indeed. You shall be rewarded for this.

MR. F.: Oh, your Highness is too kind! I did not do it for a reward—only to please you. I did not grudge the many, many days of hard work, sitting by the cage, whistling, trilling, chirruping, to those birds to make them try to sing!

PRINCESS: Feathers, I am most touched—most delighted. We will come to tea with you this afternoon and talk about your reward. Make up your mind by that time what you would like. Whatever you ask shall be granted.

PRINCE: I agree. Now come, my dear—let us go to the cage and hear the sweet songs of our once-dumb canaries. Come, gentlemen and ladies, we will all go to see the fruits of Feathers' hard work.

COURTIERS *(muttering together in admiration of FEATHERS)*: 'Wonderful!' 'Marvellous!' 'Most praiseworthy!'

(They go out, whilst FEATHERS stands bowing.)

MR. F. *(jigging about in delight)*: Ho, ho! What a clever stroke of work I've done! Tricked those cheeky Brownies! Made the Prince think I taught those stupid canaries to sing, and earned whatever reward I like to choose for myself! Oh, Feathers, Feathers, you're a smart one! *(He dances about and does all sorts of silly antics.)*

MR. F.: I shall ask to be made *Sir* Feathers! Ho—*Sir* Feathers! As good as a courtier! And perhaps a bag of gold! And surely the Prince would give me a better house than my little cottage to live in if I'm *Sir* Feathers! Oh, joy! Oh, delight! How clever I am! *(Jigs about again.)*

MR. F.: I must go. The Prince and Princess are coming to tea. I must bake cakes. I must make sandwiches. I must put out cream. I must—I must—oh, there's hundreds of things to do. I'm going to do them, to do them, to do them! (*Dances off. Canaries heard trilling loudly in distance.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE—*Inside MR. FEATHERS' house. There is a table at side laid for tea. Chairs about, with cushions on seats. A fire-place is at back with a fire, or pretence of one. A kettle sits on the fire. On one side of fire-place hangs a long, dark curtain, big enough for the three BROWNIES to hide behind. A poker and tongs are by the fire. A box of cigarettes and a box of matches are on the mantel-piece, also a clock. MR. FEATHERS is in the room, just finishing laying the table. He darts about, humming merrily.*

MR. F. (*pleased*): There! That's all ready for this afternoon. My, it isn't every one has the Prince and Princess to tea! Have I remembered everything? Flowers on the table. Cakes. Sandwiches. Thick cream. Biscuits. What a tea! Ha, I shall be *Sir Feathers* before to-night, and every one will bow when I come along. (*Stalks across stage very grandly, head in air, then bows haughtily to left and right.*) To think I tricked those cheeky Pixies so cleverly too! Fifty pieces of gold, they said. And I said, yes, I'll pay you fifty pieces—but I didn't say they'd be gold, oh, no! (*Looks at clock, which points to ten minutes to four.*) Gracious! Nearly four o'clock! I must go to meet the Prince and Princess. (*Goes out, humming.*)

(*Enter JINKS, on tiptoe, peeping in stealthily. He looks all round, comes on stage a little farther and then beckons to others, who also come on quietly—first HEYHO, then TUPPENY.*)

JINKS: He's gone at last! I thought he was going to be in his house all day.

TUPPENY: Ooh! Look at the tea! He's going to have visitors.

JINKS: Perhaps we'd better not play our tricks, then.

HEYHO: Why not? The more the merrier! I expect he's having some of the castle servants to tea. Well, we'll play the tricks on them too!

TUPPENY (*looking longingly at tea-table*): Goodness, I'd like a sugared cake!

JINKS (*sharply*): Come away from the table, Tuppy. You're not to take even a biscuit.

TUPPENY: Yes, but old Feathers did us out of a lot of money. Why can't we do him out of a biscuit or two?

JINKS: There's no reason for *us* to be dishonest simply because Feathers was. Don't you dare to take a single thing, Tuppy. Have you got those squeaking seeds safely?

TUPPENY: Of course. (*Takes box out of pocket and shows JINKS the seeds.*)

HEYHO: The thing is—where shall we put the seeds?

JINKS: Under this cushion, I think, to begin with! (*Lifts up cushion and slips seed underneath.*)

TUPPENY: And under *this* cushion too! (*Does the same.*)

HEYHO: In fact, under *every* cushion—and then no matter where Feathers sits he'll squeak! Ho, ho! (*The BROWNIES put seeds under every cushion.*)

JINKS (*taking seed from the box*): And I shall put a squeaking seed in the teapot! (*Takes off lid and does so.*)

TUPPENY: And here's one for the plate of cakes!

HEYHO: And one for the biscuits, and one for the bread and butter, and one for the sandwiches! (*He puts a seed in each as he speaks. The others look on, in delight.*)

JINKS: Give me a seed, Tuppenny. I'll put one in this cigarette-box up here, and one in the match-box too!

HEYHO: And four for the poker!

(Noise of footsteps and voices heard outside.)

TUPPENY (*running to side and pretending to look out of window*): I say, come and look out of this window. Who do you think Feathers is bringing in to tea? Why, the Prince and Princess themselves!

HEYHO (*in a panic*): Oooooh! What about those squeaking seeds that we've put everywhere? Hadn't we better take them out again? We'd be silly to play tricks on the Prince himself.

JINKS (*rubbing his hair in dismay*): What *are* we to do? We can't escape without being seen now.

TUPPENY: They're coming! They're coming! What shall we do?

HEYHO: Quick! Hide behind these curtains! Perhaps no one will guess we're there!

(They all rush for the curtains and hide themselves just as the PRINCE and PRINCESS enter, preceded by MR. F., who bows them in most politely.)

MR. F.: It gives me the greatest pleasure to welcome you to my tiny cottage, Your Highnesses.

PRINCE (*looking round*): It certainly isn't any too big, Feathers. Well, you've only got to ask, you know, and you can have as big a place as you like.

PRINCESS: It was so *clever* of you to teach those little canaries to sing.

MR. F.: Do take a seat, gracious lady. Try this chair. It's very comfortable. And won't you sit down too, Your Highness?

(The PRINCESS sits down, and immediately a long-drawn-out squeak is heard. She jumps up in a fright and looks at the chair in astonishment.)

PRINCESS: What was that? Did you hear it?

MR. F.: (*puzzled*): Yes—a sort of squeak. Probably the kettle boiling, Your Highness. I'm so sorry you were frightened. Do sit down.

(PRINCESS sits down again, rather gingerly. A long-drawn-out squeak heard once more. She gets up, annoyed.)

PRINCE: There's something queer about that chair of yours, Feathers. (*Looks closely at it and peers under cushion, but apparently sees nothing. Looks at cushion. Replaces it. Sits down in chair himself. The squeak is heard again.*)

PRINCE (*getting up angrily*): So you keep squeaking cushions, do you, Feathers? Well, out of the window it goes! (*To FEATHERS' dismay throws cushion off side. Brushes chair seat*

with his hand and offers it to PRINCESS. She sits down again and this time nothing happens.)

FEATHERS (*who has been in a great way all the time, rubbing his hands, scratching his head, etc.*): I can't understand it, I really can't. It's never happened before! But it seems to be all right now. Do sit down yourself, Your Highness, and I'll hand round the cakes.

(PRINCE sinks down into another chair, which immediately gives a loud squeak. He jumps up in a rage, flings cushion out of window, brushes seat and sits down again. Nothing happens.)

PRINCE (*most annoyed*): A silly sort of joke, I suppose, Feathers. Well, it's not in the best of taste.

FEATHERS (*almost beside himself*): Sir, I beg you to believe me when I say I had no idea the chairs were going to behave like that!

PRINCE: All right, Feathers. Sit down, man, and let's get on with tea.

FEATHERS (*meekly*): Yes, Your Highness. *(Pulls up chair to table so that he can pour out, and sits down. Chair immediately squeaks loudly. FEATHERS jumps up in a terrible fright and knocks over chair. The PRINCE and PRINCESS laugh, and the three BROWNIES, peeping from behind the curtain, can hardly contain their mirth.)*

PRINCE: Ha, ha! Did you forget you'd put a squeak into that cushion too, Feathers? How did you like it?

FEATHERS: It's very q-q-q-queer! I don't like it at all.

PRINCE (*taking hold of cushion on FEATHERS' chair, and also of cushion on another chair*): Well, let's throw these out of the window too.

FEATHERS (*sadly*): Oh, my best cushions!

PRINCE: Now, let's have some tea. I'm thirsty.

FEATHERS (*picking up teapot*): I'll give you some. Oh, bother! I've forgotten to make it, in all this upset!

PRINCESS: And it looks to me as if the kettle has gone off the boil. The fire wants poking up.

FEATHERS: I'll see to it. The kettle will soon boil. *(He gets up and goes to fire. Takes poker and pokes with it. Immediately another loud squeak is heard and FEATHERS drops the poker in fear. PRINCE and PRINCESS stare, then laugh heartily at FEATHERS' face. The BROWNIES behind the curtain keep peeping out at intervals, and laugh silently in enjoyment.)*

FEATHERS: The p-p-p-poker squeaked!

PRINCE: Yes—we heard it. Poke the fire again, Feathers.

FEATHERS: Oh, Your Highness, I daren't. I'm frightened!

PRINCE: Go on—poke it again. You must get the kettle to boil, you know. You can't ask people to tea and then not give them any.

(FEATHERS gingerly picks up poker and pokes fire again, but drops it at once when it squeaks.)

FEATHERS: The k-k-kettle's b-b-b-oiling now, I think. I'll m-m-make tea. (*Takes hold of kettle very warily as if he thought it also might squeak, but it doesn't. Pours water into teapot on table, then replaces kettle.*)

PRINCESS (*getting up*): Let me pour out tea for you, Feathers. It's a woman's job to do that. Sugar and milk for you? (*Takes up teapot and begins to pour into a cup. A loud and piercing squeak is heard at once. PRINCESS gives a cry and drops teapot on to table. The crash makes the PRINCE jump up with a start, and the tea splashes over FEATHERS.*)

FEATHERS (*holding his arm and hopping about room in pain*): Oh, my poor arm! It's scalded! It's scalded!

(*BROWNIES peep out and seem on the point of bursting with laughter.*)

PRINCE (*sternly*): This is getting beyond a joke. Everything seems to squeak here. Well, out of the window the teapot goes! Oh, and the poker too! (*Throws both out of window. Loud crash heard off.*)

FEATHERS (*in horror*): My best teapot!

PRINCE (*sitting down again*): I'm getting tired of this tea-party. Nothing to drink! And I don't expect we'll get anything to eat either!

FEATHERS (*rushing to table*): Yes, Your Highness, there's plenty to eat.

(*PRINCESS has sat down again and FEATHERS takes two plates to her, one of sandwiches, one of cakes. As she takes a sandwich the PRINCE leans forward and takes a cake. Two loud squeaks immediately heard. The PRINCESS at once drops her sandwich with a cry, and the PRINCE throws his cake straight at FEATHERS, who drops the two plates in dismay.*)

FEATHERS (*crying*): Boo-hoo-hoo! I don't know what's happened to everything! Boo-hoo-hoo!

PRINCE (*seriously and sternly*): Now look here, Feathers, something is wrong here. Either *you* planned all this, or some one else did.

FEATHERS: Oh, Your Highness, *I* didn't, I do assure you!

PRINCE: Well, have you any enemies? Have you ever done any one a bad turn?

FEATHERS: No, never, Your Highness, never!

(*BROWNIES peep out and shake fists.*)

PRINCE: Well, the matter will have to be looked into. It needs thinking about. Get me a cigarette, Feathers. I certainly can't believe *you* would play these tricks on us just when you were expecting to be made Sir Feathers and have a big mansion to live in, much gold, and many servants.

FEATHERS (*bringing box of cigarettes and matches from mantelpiece*): Oh, Sir, are you really going to reward me in such a generous way?

PRINCE (*taking cigarette, putting it into mouth, striking match*): Yes, Feathers. I and the Princess are—— (*Two loud squeaks heard. PRINCE flings away box of matches and throws cigarette out of window in a rage. BROWNIES peep out from curtain, almost crying with laughter. The PRINCESS catches sight of them. They see her looking and go back immediately, looking scared.*)

PRINCESS: Feathers, who is hiding behind that curtain?

FEATHERS: (*looking at curtain, which is now perfectly still*): Nobody, Your Highness!

PRINCE: Well, *I* thought I saw it moving once or twice. (*Gets up, goes to curtain, pulls it aside and discovers the BROWNIES, all crouching together, looking distinctly frightened.*)

PRINCE (*pulling them out by their collars*): And what are you doing here? Do you know these Brownies, Feathers?

FEATHERS (*taking one scared look at them, and then sitting down and covering his face with his hands*): Yes, I know them. Oh, dear me, oh, dear me!

PRINCESS: Perhaps *they* know something about all these squeaks, Feathers?

PRINCE (*sternly*): Stand in front of me, Brownies, and answer my questions. Did you put these squeaking tricks all over the place?

JINKS: Y-y-y-es, Your Highness. They were squeaking seeds.

PRINCE: Squeaking *seeds*! Wherever did you get them from?

HEYHO: Why, when we were making the whistling seeds for your canaries, we made a mistake, and the first lot of seeds squeaked instead of whistled.

PRINCESS: Whistling seeds for our canaries! Whatever do you mean?

TUPPENY: Well, Madam, we made some fine whistling seeds, came all the way to your land, and gave them to the canaries that wouldn't sing. Mr. Feathers, here, promised to give us fifty pieces of gold if we made the canaries sing, but he tricked us and gave us only pennies instead. So we came to his cottage this afternoon to play tricks on him for a revenge; but we didn't know *you* were coming to tea or we wouldn't have.

PRINCE (*turning to FEATHERS, who is still sitting with his face in hands*): Feathers, I thought you said you had *taught* the canaries to sing.

(*FEATHERS makes no answer except a deep and mournful groan.*)

PRINCE: And you were going to get a fine reward for nothing. You are a deceitful, miserable trickster, Feathers!

(*FEATHERS groans again.*)

HEYHO (*delighted*): Yes, that's what *we* said to him! Wretched, miserable creature!

PRINCE (*turning suddenly on HEYHO*): And what do *you* mean by playing all these silly tricks I should like to know? Why didn't you come and make your complaint to *me*! *I'm* the one to punish my servants, not you!

BROWNIES (*trembling, and falling on their knees*): Oh, forgive us, Your Highness. Do forgive us!

PRINCESS: You'd better forgive them, Prince. After all, they did make our canaries sing.

PRINCE: Very well. They shall be forgiven, but not a penny more shall they get. They have spoilt any reward by their foolish and spiteful tricks. As for you, Feathers, you'll remain keeper to the canaries. No *Sir* Feathers for you, now! Be off with you, and give the birds their tea!

FEATHERS (*almost falling over himself in his anxiety to get out of the room*): Yes, Your Highness, yes, yes, yes . . . (*Goes out.*)

PRINCE (*to BROWNIES*): And you can go too, and don't let me see you here again playing tricks! If you'd come to me instead of trying to punish Feathers yourselves I'd have given you your just reward—fifty pieces of gold.

HEYHO (*sadly*): So we haven't made our fortunes after all!

TUPPENY (*as he goes out*): Never mind! We've had a bit of fun! I've *never* laughed so much in all my life! (*All bow to PRINCE and PRINCESS and go out.*)

(As curtain falls a trilling, warbling noise is heard—the canaries in the distance.)

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Six Enid Blyton Plays* by Enid Blyton]