

A Dorset Christmas Mummers' Play

CHARACTERS:

Old Father Christmas
Gracious King
Colonel Spring
General Valentine
Anthony, the Egyptian King
St. George
Old Betty
St. Patrick
Doctor
Captain Bluster
Room

SCENE:

The Cornmarket, Wimborne.

The actors are grouped around the performance space. Each comes forward to speak or to fight, and after falls back, leaving the stage clear for other disputants or combatants. This is the "enter" and "exit" of the mummers.

[Enter OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS]

Old Father Christmas:

Here comes I, Father Christmas, welcome or welcome not,
I hope Old Father Christmas will never be forgot.
Although it is Old Father Christmas
he has but a short time to stay I am come to show you pleasure and pass the time
away. I have been far, I have been near,
And now I am come to drink a pot of your Christmas beer;
And if it's not your best,
I hope in heaven your soul will rest.
If it is a pot of your small,
we cannot show you no Christmas at all.
Walk in, Room, again I say,
and pray good people clear the way.
Walk in, Room.

[Enter ROOM]

Room:

Make room! Make room!
God bless you all, ladies and gentlemen,
It's Christmas time, and I am come again.
My name is Room, one sincere and true,
A Merry Christmas I wish to you.
King of Egypt is for to display,

A noble champion without delay.
St. Patrick too, a charming Irish youth,
He can fight or dance, or love a girl with truth.
A noble Doctor I do declare,
and his surprising tricks bring up the rear,
And let the Egyptian King straightway appear.

[Enter EGYPTIAN KING]

Egyptian King:

Here comes I, Anthony, the Egyptian King.
With whose mighty acts all round the globe doth ring
No other champion but me excels,
Except St. George, my only son-in-law.
Indeed that wondrous knight whom I so dearly love,
whose mortal deeds the world dost well approve,
that hero whom no dragon could affright,
A whole troop of soldiers couldn't stand in sight.
Walk in St. George, his warlike ardour to display,
and show Great Britain's enemies dismay.
Walk in, St. George.

[Enter ST. GEORGE]

St. George:

Here am I, St. George, an Englishman so stout,
With those mighty warriors I long to have a bout;
No one could ever picture me the many I have slain,
I long to fight, it's my delight, the battle o'er again.
Come then, you boasting champions,
and hear that in war I doth take pleasure,
I will fight you all, both great and small,
and slay you at my leisure.
Come haste, away, make no delay,
For I'll give you something you won't like,
And like a true-born Englishman
I will fight you on my stumps.
And now the world I do defy,
to injure me before I die.
So now prepare for war, for that is my delight.

[Enter ST. PATRICK, who shakes hands with ST. GEORGE]

St. Patrick:

My worthy friend, how dost thou fare, St. George?
Answer, my worthy knight.

St. George:

I am glad to find thee here;
In many a fight that I have been in, travelled far and near,
to find my worthy friend St. Patrick, that man I love so dear.

Four bold warriors have promised me
to meet me here this night to fight.
The challenge did I accept, but they could not me affright.

St. Patrick:

I will always stand by that man that did me first enlarge,
I thank thee now in gratitude, my worthy friend St. George;
Thou didst first deliver me out of this wretched den,
And now I have my liberty I thank thee once again.

[Enter Captain BLUSTER]

Captain Bluster:

I'll give St. George a thrashing, I'll make him sick and sore,
And if I further am disposed I'll thrash a dozen more.

St. Patrick:

Large words, my worthy friend,
St. George is here.
And likewise St. Patrick too;
and he doth scorn such men as you.
I am the match for thee,
Therefore prepare yourself to fight with me,
Or else I'll slay thee instantly.

Captain Bluster:

Come on, my boy! I'll die before
I yield to thee or twenty more.

[They fight, and ST. PATRICK kills CAPTAIN BLUSTER]

St. Patrick:

Now one of St. George's foes is killed by me,
who fought the battle o'er,
and now for the sake of good St. George,
I'll freely fight a hundred more.

St. George:

No, no, my worthy friend,
St. George is here,
I'll fight the other three;
And after that with Christmas beer
So merry we will be.

[Enter GRACIOUS KING]

Gracious King:

No beer or brandy, Sir, I want my courage for to rise,
I only want to meet St. George or take him by surprise;
But I am afraid he never will fight me,
I wish I could that villain see.

St. George:

Tremble, thou tyrant, for all thy sin that's past,
Tremble to think that this night will be thy last.
Thy conquering arms shall quickly by thee lay alone,
and send thee passing to eternal doom.
St. George will make thy armour ring;
St. George will soon despatch the Gracious King.

Gracious King:

I'll die before I yield to thee or twenty more.

[They fight. ST. GEORGE kills the GRACIOUS KING]

[Enter General VALENTINE]

St. George

He was no match for me, he quickly fell.

General Valentine:

But I am thy match, and that my sword shall tell,
Prepare thyself to die and bid thy friends farewell.
I long to fight such a brave man as thee,
for it's a pleasure to fight so manfully.
Rations so severe he never long to receive.
So cruel! For thy foes are always killed;
Oh! What a sight of blood St. George has spilled!
I'll fight St. George the hero here,
before I sleep this night.
Come on my boy, I'll die before
I yield to thee or twenty more.
St. George, thou and I'll the battle try!
If thou dost conquer I will die.

[They fight. ST. GEORGE kills the GENERAL]

St. George:

Where now is Colonel Spring? He doth so long delay,
That hero of renown, I long to show him play.

[Enter Colonel SPRING]

Colonel Spring:

Holloa! Behold me, here am I!
I'll have thee now prepare,
and by this arm thou'lt surely die -
I'll have thee this night beware.
So see what bloody works thou'st made,
Thou art a butcher, Sir, by trade.
I'll kill, as thou didst kill my brother,
for one good turn deserves another.

St. George:

Come, give me leave, I'll thee battle,
and quickly make thy bones to rattle.

Colonel Spring:

Come on my boy, I'll die before
I'll yield to thee or twenty more.
St. George, so thee and I
will the battle try.

[They fight. ST. GEORGE kills the COLONEL]

St. Patrick:

Stay thy hand, St. George, and slay no more;
for I feel for the wives and families of those men that you have slain.

St. George:

So am I sorry.
I'll freely give any sum of money to a doctor
to restore them again.
I have heard talk of a mill to grind old men young,
but I never heard of a doctor to bring dead men to life again.

St. Patrick:

There's an Irish doctor, a townsman of mine,
who lived next door to St. Patrick, he can perform wonders.
Shall I call him, St. George?

St. George:

With all my heart.
Please to walk in Mr. Martin Dennis.
It's an ill wind that blows no good work for the doctor.

[Enter DOCTOR]

St. George:

If you will set these men on their pins,
I'll give thee a hundred pound, and here is the money.

Doctor:

So I will my worthy knight,
and then I shall not want for whiskey for one twelvemonth to come.
I am sure the first man I saw beheaded,
I put his head on the wrong way.
I put his mouth where his poll ought to be,
and he's exhibited in a wondering nature.

St. George:

Very good answer, Mr. Doctor.
Tell me the rest of your miracles and raise those warriors.

Doctor:

I can cure love-sick maidens,
jealous husbands,
squalling wives,
brandy-drinking dames,
with one touch of my triple liquid,
or one sly dose of my Jerusalem balsam,
and that will make an old crippled dame dance the hornpipe,
or an old woman of seventy years of age conceive and bear a twin.
And now to convince you all of my exertions,
Rise Captain Bluster, Gracious King,
General Valentine, and Colonel Spring!
Rise, and go to your father!

[On the application of the medicine they all rise and retire]

[Enter OLD BET]

Old Bet:

Here comes I Dame Dorothy,
A handsome young woman, good morning to ye.
I am rather fat but not very tall,
I'll do my best endeavour to please you all.
My husband he is to work and soon he will return,
and something for our supper bring,
And perhaps some wood to burn.
Oh! Here he comes!

[Enter JAN or OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS]

Old Bet:

Well! Jan.

Old Father Christmas:

Oh! Dorothy!

Old Bet:

What have you been doing all this long day, Jan?

Old Father Christmas:

I have been a-hunting, Bet.

Old Bet:

The devil a-hunting is it!
Is that the way to support a wife?
Well, what have you caught to-day, Jan?

Old Father Christmas:

A fine jack hare, and I intend to have him a-fried for supper;
and here is some wood to dress him.

Old Bet:

Fried! No, Jan, I'll roast it nice.

Old Father Christmas:

I say I'll have it fried.

Old Bet:

Was there ever such a foolish dish!

Old Father Christmas:

No matter for that.

I'll have it a-done;

and if you don't do as do bid,

I'll hit you in the head.

Old Bet:

You may do as you like for all I do care

I'll never fry a dry Jack hare.

Old Father Christmas:

Oh! You won't, wooll'ee? [will you]

[He strikes her and she falls]

Oh! What have I done! I have murdered my wife!

The joy of my heart, and the pride of my life.

And out to the gaol I quickly shall be sent.

In a passion I did it, and no malice meant.

Is there a doctor that can restore?

Fifty pounds I'll give him, or twice fifty more.

[Someone speaks]

Oh I yes, Uncle Jan, there is a doctor just below,

and for God's sake let him just come in.

Walk in, Doctor.

[Enter DOCTOR]

Old Father Christmas:

Are you a doctor?

Doctor:

Yes, I am a doctor - a doctor of good fame.

I have travelled through Europe, Asia, Africa, and America,

and by long practice and experience I have learned the best of cures

for most disorders instant to the human body;

find nothing difficult in restoring a limb, or mortification,

or an arm being cut off by a sword,

or a head being struck off by a cannon ball,

if application have not been delayed till it is too late.

Old Father Christmas:

You are the very man, I plainly see,
that can restore my poor old wife to me.
Pray tell me thy lowest fee.

Doctor:

A hundred guineas I'll have to restore thy wife.
'Tis no wonder that you could not bring the dead to life.
Old Father Christmas

Old Father Christmas:

That's a large sum of money for a dead wife!

Doctor:

Small sum of money to save a man from the gallows.
Pray what big stick is that you have in your hand?

Old Father Christmas:

That is my hunting-pole.

Doctor:

Put aside your hunting-pole, and get some assistance to help up your wife.

[OLD BET is raised up to life again]

Old Father Christmas:

Fal, dal, lal! Fal, dal, lal! My wife's alive!

[The cast gather together and sing We Wish You a Merry Christmas. They exit, running off through the audience]