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Cast of Characters

(In order of appearance:)

PRINCESS IRENE, a little girl, and a real princess

LOOTIE, her nanny, timid and scolding, but good of heart

GREAT-GREAT-GRANDMOTHER IRENE, a very old, but very beautiful woman

A GREAT MANY GOBLINS, twisted and horrible

CURDIE, a miner's boy, brave and brash

PETER, a miner and Curdie's father, as brave as his son

SEVERAL Miners

GLUMP, a goblin patriarch

MRS. GLUMP, his wife

HELPER, their son, thick of head and strong of back

THE KING OF THE GOBLINS, not terribly bright

THE QUEEN OF THE GOBLINS, spiteful and cruel

PRINCE HARELIP, their son, who resembles his name

CHANCELLOR OF THE GOBLINS, sly and manipulative

THE KING, Irene's father, and a strong but kind ruler

SIR WALTER, chief man at arms

MEN AT ARMS

MRS. PETERSON, Curdie's mother, wise and good

VARIOUS GOBLIN ANIMALS, as twisted as their masters

SERVANTS (Optional)

IRENE AND CURDIE

adapted by Matt Buchanan

**FROM THE NOVEL *THE PRINCESS AND THE GOBLIN*
BY GEORGE MACDONALD**

Prelude

(As the audience enters the theatre, the space is pervaded by mysterious subterranean sounds, as of many creatures working with picks underground. These are the goblins, though we don't know it yet. At rise, these sounds build to a climax and then subside as the lights come up.)

Scene 1. Irene Follows a Song

(Princess Irene's bedroom. As the lights come up, IRENE is in bed, and LOOTIE sits on the edge as she tucks her in. [The setting should be suggested as simply as possible—all that is really needed is the bed itself and a stand for Irene's candle.]

IRENE. But Lootie, I'm not tired a bit!

LOOTIE. Now, don't let's have all this again, my lady. You know perfectly well it's your bedtime.

IRENE. But why do I have to have a special bedtime? I'm a princess, aren't I? Why shouldn't I go on playing if I want to?

LOOTIE. You must sleep so you can grow strong and beautiful like a princess should be. Besides, it's not safe to play in the nighttime.

IRENE. Not safe?

LOOTIE. You never know what manner of creature might be about after dark, my little princess.

IRENE. You mean goblins?

LOOTIE. Mm, yes, very likely goblins.

IRENE. I'm not afraid of goblins.

LOOTIE. Well, you should be, my lady. Horrible, nasty creatures they are, would as soon eat you as look at you.

IRENE. Have you ever seen a goblin?

LOOTIE. Mercy, no! And I don't hope to.

IRENE. Then how do you know they're horrible?

LOOTIE. Everybody knows that, little Irene. That's why we're always so careful to be in before dark, and why we lock the castle gates so tight when the sun goes down.

IRENE. Lootie, who is it sings in the night?

LOOTIE. Sings, my lady?

IRENE. In the tower. It sounds like it comes from the tower.

LOOTIE. Why, there's nothing in that tower but dust and mice.

IRENE. But I can hear her clearly.

LOOTIE. There's no one. Probably a trick of the wind. Anyway, it's your bedtime, and you'll not hoodwink me into sitting here and talking when you should be asleep. Good night, Your Royal Highness.

(And LOOTIE kisses IRENE on the forehead and exits. The lights dim as if LOOTIE has put out a lamp, but a single candle by the bedstead continues to burn. IRENE doesn't go to sleep. As soon as LOOTIE is gone, she sits up in bed, listening. We gradually become aware, very faintly, of music. It is a woman's voice, singing a beautiful, plaintive tune without words. Clearly IRENE hears it too. She gets out of bed and stands to listen harder.)

IRENE. *(With quiet determination:)* It is *not* a trick of the wind!

(She takes up the candle and sets out across the stage. Her bed fades into darkness. She moves slowly, her head cocked, trying to follow the sound of the song. Her path is meandering, with sharp turns in all directions.)

Oh, I do wish I knew the way!

(Suddenly the sound of singing is drowned out by the wail of the wind. Irene's candle blows out and she is plunged into total dark-

ness. When the wind dies down, the song is gone, replaced by the subterranean sounds of goblin picks, which cover the scene change.)

Scene 2. Irene Finds a Door

(Morning. Birds sing. The lights come up to reveal PRINCESS IRENE asleep, collapsed at the bottom of a steep stair. The lighting is such that we cannot see the top of the stair. IRENE stirs. Her face is dirty and streaked with tears now dried.)

IRENE. Lootie! Lootie! Where are you? I've had such a vexing dream. I was lost in the castle. And it was so dark. You can't imagine—oh! *(Noticing her surroundings:)* Lootie? Then it wasn't a dream. And I'm still lost.

(The same mysterious singing we have heard once before is heard again. IRENE is instantly alert, and her attitude makes it clear that the sound is coming from the top of the stair. Bravely she starts to ascend. As she does, the singing grows louder. We can now make out a small, shabby door at the top of the stair. IRENE reaches this door. She stands before it a moment, then resolutely grasps the handle and pulls it open. The music grows much louder, and a wash of bright, warm light floods out of the door. IRENE utters but one word, but with it manages to convey both astonishment and utter peace.)

Oh!

(Blackout. The song continues, covering the scene change.)

Scene 3. Queen Irene

(Grandmother's room. A small door at the rear exactly matches the one IRENE found at the top of the stair. As the lights come up this door is open and IRENE stands mesmerized in the frame. To one side, GRANDMOTHER sits on a small chair, serenely spinning at a large wheel. She is humming softly. The room also contains a lovely little wooden chest-of-drawers and a wonderfully comfortable-looking bed. A large round globe of light hovers overhead. A second door with a window in it appears to lead to the outdoors. Everything seems to be suffused with a warm, inviting glow. [This setting is necessarily

more fleshed-out than Irene's room, but it need not be elaborate. Much can be suggested with lighting.]

GRANDMOTHER. Come in, my dear, come in. I am glad to see you. Come to me, my dear.

(IRENE slowly approaches her.)

Why, what have you been doing with your eyes, child?

IRENE. Crying.

GRANDMOTHER. Why, child?

IRENE. Because I couldn't find my way down again.

GRANDMOTHER. But you found your way up. Your face is streaked like the back of a zebra. Hadn't you a handkerchief to wipe your eyes with?

IRENE. No.

GRANDMOTHER. Then why didn't you come to me to wipe them for you?

IRENE. Please—I didn't know you were here. I will next time

GRANDMOTHER. There's a good child. Come here.

(IRENE comes closer so that GRANDMOTHER can tenderly wipe her face with a fine cloth. When she is finished, she resumes her spinning.)

There. Do you know my name, child?

(IRENE shakes her head shyly.)

It is Irene.

IRENE. That's my name!

GRANDMOTHER. I know it. I let you have mine. I haven't got your name—you've got mine.

IRENE. But I've always had my name.

GRANDMOTHER. When you were born, your Papa, the King, asked me if I had any objection to your having it, and I let you have it with pleasure.

IRENE. It was very kind of you—and such a pretty one, too.

GRANDMOTHER. Oh, not so very kind. A name is one of those things one can give away and keep all the same. I have many such things. Wouldn't you like to know who I am, child?

IRENE. Yes, very much.

GRANDMOTHER. I am your great-great-grandmother.

IRENE. What's that?

GRANDMOTHER. I'm your father's mother's father's mother.

IRENE. Oh dear—I can't understand that.

GRANDMOTHER. I daresay not, but that's no reason why I shouldn't say it.

IRENE. Oh, no.

GRANDMOTHER. I will explain it all to you when you are older. But you must understand this much now: I came here to take care of you.

IRENE. Have you been here long? Did you get here yesterday?

GRANDMOTHER. I have been here ever since you came yourself.

IRENE. But I never saw you before.

GRANDMOTHER. But you shall see me again.

IRENE. You must be a queen, if you are my great big grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, I am a queen.

IRENE. I wonder why Lottie never told me.

GRANDMOTHER. Lottie doesn't know. She never saw me.

IRENE. But somebody must know you're in the castle.

GRANDMOTHER. No—nobody.

IRENE. But how do you live? What do you eat?

GRANDMOTHER. I keep poultry—of a sort.

IRENE. But who makes the chicken broth for you?

GRANDMOTHER. Oh, I never kill any of *my* chickens.

IRENE. Then I don't understand.

GRANDMOTHER. What do you eat for breakfast?

IRENE. Oh—I dare say you eat their eggs! Is that what makes your hair so white?

GRANDMOTHER. No, my dear, that's old age. I am very old.

IRENE. I thought so. Are you more than fifty?

GRANDMOTHER. Oh, ever so much older than that.

IRENE. Are you a hundred?

GRANDMOTHER. More than that. I am much too old for you to guess. Would you like to see my chickens?

IRENE. Very much.

(GRANDMOTHER rises and goes to the second door and opens it. She and IRENE stand looking out into what appears to be soft morning sunlight. A flutter of cooings and wing flaps can be heard.)

Pigeons! How lovely! Are the eggs nice?

GRANDMOTHER. Very nice.

IRENE. What a little egg-spoon you must have! Wouldn't it be better to keep hens and get bigger eggs?

GRANDMOTHER. But what would I feed them?

(GRANDMOTHER closes the door [the sounds recede] and returns again to her spinning.)

IRENE. I see! The pigeons feed themselves. They've got wings.

GRANDMOTHER. Just so. If they couldn't fly, I couldn't eat their eggs.

IRENE. Will you give me an egg to eat? Only I didn't have any breakfast, and I *am* rather hungry.

GRANDMOTHER. Someday. But now you must be getting back. Your nanny will be miserable about you. I dare say she's looking for you everywhere.

IRENE. Except here. Poor Lootie. Oh, how surprised she'll be when I tell her about my great big grand-grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER. (*Noncommittally:*) Yes, I imagine she will.

IRENE. Will you take me back to her?

GRANDMOTHER. I can't go with you all the way, but I will see you to the top of the last stair, and then you must run down quite fast into your own room. Come.

(GRANDMOTHER holds out her hand, which IRENE takes, and leads her out the door. Blackout. The sounds of goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 4. Irene Is Found

(Irene's room. As the lights come up LOOTIE is embracing IRENE fiercely, but then she holds by the shoulders and looks sternly into her eyes.)

LOOTIE. Where have you been, Princess? It's very unkind of you to hide like that. I was afraid— (*And she checks herself.*)

IRENE. Afraid of what, Lootie?

LOOTIE. Never mind. Now, tell me where you have been.

IRENE. I've been up a long way up to see my very great, huge, old grandmother.

LOOTIE. What do you mean by that?

IRENE. I mean that I've been ever so far up to see my *great*-grandmother. Oh, Lootie, you don't know what a beautiful mother of grandmothers I've got upstairs! She is such an old lady, with such lovely white hair—like silver!

LOOTIE. Oh, I dare say.

IRENE. And she lives on pigeons' eggs.

LOOTIE. Most likely.

IRENE. And she sits all day and spins.

LOOTIE. Ah, of course.

IRENE. And she's been there ever since I came—ever so many years.

LOOTIE. Anybody could have told you that.

IRENE. Why didn't you tell me then?

LOOTIE. There was no need. You could make it up all by yourself.

IRENE. What? You mean you don't believe me?

LOOTIE. Did you expect me to believe you, Princess? I know princesses are in the habit of telling stories, but you are the first one I ever heard of who expected to be believed.

IRENE. (*Upset:*) But I'm not telling stories! It's all true!

LOOTIE. You dreamt it, then.

IRENE. No, I didn't! Come up with me and see if I'm not telling the truth.

LOOTIE. No, indeed. If you won't tell me where you've been all this time, well then you won't, but I have more important things to do than traipsing about the castle after nonsense. It's time for your dinner.

IRENE. Oh! How vexing! All right, then, I'm coming.

(The sounds of goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 5. Curdie

(Another day. The mountainside outside the castle. [Little or no scenery is necessary. This scene might be achieved simply by drawing a midstage traveler in front of the previous scene.] PRINCESS IRENE *is out walking with* LOOTIE.)

IRENE. Oh, Lootie, I'm so glad the sun is shining after all that rain. The whole world is so bright and shiny and clean. The sun has had his face washed.

LOOTIE. Yes, it's very pleasant, Your Highness. But we've been out here for hours and it's getting late.

IRENE. Oh, pooh! It's years yet 'til dark. Look over there! What a pretty bird!

(IRENE runs across the stage after an unseen bird. LOOTIE follows impatiently.)

LOOTIE. Please, Princess. We must be getting back. See, the shadow of the mountain has turned and we've wandered very far from the castle gates.

(And, indeed, the lighting does change as if the sun has gone behind the mountain.)

IRENE. Why all the haste, Lootie? We're perfectly safe.

LOOTIE. Not after dark. We mustn't be out here a moment longer,

IRENE. We can't help being out here a good many moments longer anyway, seeing as we've come so far.

LOOTIE. All the more reason we mustn't linger. Come on, now!

(LOOTIE takes IRENE firmly by the hand and leads her hurriedly across the stage. From somewhere, a harsh, eerie laugh.)

IRENE. Who is that laughing at us, Lootie?

LOOTIE. *(Very nervous:)* Nobody. There's nobody.

GOBLIN VOICE. Lies! Lies! Lies!

(LOOTIE casts around her in a panic. She has lost her way.)

LOOTIE. Oh dear! We've taken a wrong turning somewhere! We're lost, lost!

IRENE. What's the matter Lootie? Whose is that voice? Why are you so frightened?

(More laughter. Though she doesn't understand, IRENE is now growing frightened because LOOTIE is frightened. About the pe-

rimeter of the stage, as yet unseen by IRENE and LOOTIE, creep several GOBLINS, who wait in the shadows and laugh. It is growing darker, and continues to do so for the remainder of the scene.)

LOOTIE. What's to become of us?

(From offstage we hear the voice of CURDIE, singing rhymes. [Note: CURDIE's "singing" need not necessarily involve actual tunes or music. If the actor can sing, and music is available, he may sing his rhymes, but he may also simply chant them in rhythm.])

CURDIE'S VOICE. *(Singing:)*

Ring! dod! bang!
Go the hammers' clang!
Hit and turn and bore!
Whizz and puff and roar!

(At the sound of CURDIE's voice, the GOBLINS all stiffen, and after a few lines of verse, they melt away.)

Thus we rive the rocks,
Force the goblin locks.
See the shining ore!
Deep in mountain's core!
One, two, three—
Bright as gold can be!
Four, five, six—
Shovels, mattocks, picks!
Seven, eight, nine—
Light your lamp at mine.
Ten, eleven, twelve—
Loosely hold the helve.
We're the merry miner-boys,
Make the goblins hold their noise!

(CURDIE enters, singing merrily. He is dressed for the mines, and carries a goodly bit of the mountain about his person, but, though dirty, he is handsome and cheerful. He approaches them.)

LOOTIE. I wish you would hold your noise!

CURDIE. *(Singing:)*
Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen—
This is worth the siftin'.
Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen—
There's the match, and lay't in.
Nineteen, twenty—
Goblins in a plenty.

LOOTIE. Oh, do be quiet! Talking of goblins—you'll be bringing them down on us for sure!

(All the while he is singing cheerfully, CURDIE is also carefully scanning his surroundings, and circling IRENE and LOOTIE as if guarding them from some unseen danger.)

CURDIE. *(Singing:)*
Hush! scush! scurry!
There you go in a hurry!
Gobble! gobble! goblin!
There you go a wobblin'!
Hobble, hobble, hobblin'—
Cobble! cobble! Cobblin'!
Hob-bob-goblin!—
(A final triumphant howl:) HUUUUUH!

(And CURDIE brushes his hands together with a "that's finished then" gesture and addresses IRENE and LOOTIE.)

There! That'll do for them. They can't bear singing or rhymes. They can't sing or make rhymes themselves, see, so they hate it when other people do. *(Still scanning his surroundings:)* I saw them as I was coming down, and it's lucky I did. I could tell they were after somebody, but I couldn't see who. They won't touch you as long as I'm here.

LOOTIE. *(On her dignity:)* Why? Who are you?

CURDIE. I'm Peter's son.

LOOTIE. And who is Peter?

CURDIE. Peter the miner.

LOOTIE. *(Even more haughty:)* I don't know him.

CURDIE. I'm his son, though.

LOOTIE. And why, pray, should the goblins mind you?

CURDIE. Because I'm not afraid of them. I'm used to them, you see.

LOOTIE. What difference does that make?

CURDIE. If you're not afraid of them, they're afraid of you, that's all. That's all you need—up here, in the air, anyway. Down there *(He indicates under the ground:)* it's a different story.

IRENE. Down there?

CURDIE. In the mines. They won't always mind singing, even, down there. If you sing, they stand grinning at you, and if you get frightened and miss a word, or say a wrong one—well—

IRENE. *(Frightened but rather enjoying her fear:)* What do they do to him?

LOOTIE. Don't go frightening the princess!

CURDIE. The princess! *(Taking off his hat:)* I beg your pardon, but you shouldn't be out so late. Everybody knows that's against the law.

LOOTIE. Of course it is—and *I* shall have to suffer for it.

CURDIE. Well, it must be your fault. I hope they didn't hear you call her the princess. If they did, they're sure to know her again—they're awfully sharp.

IRENE. *(Not enjoying it anymore:)* Lootie, Lootie, take me home!

LOOTIE. *(To CURDIE:)* Don't go on like that! How could I help it? I lost my way!

CURDIE. You wouldn't have lost your way if you hadn't been frightened. I'll soon set you right. Shall I carry your little Highness?

IRENE. No, thank you, I can walk perfectly well. If you'll give me one hand and Lootie another—

(She grabs CURDIE by one hand and LOOTIE by the other.)

LOOTIE. Now, let's run.

CURDIE. No, no! That's the worst thing you can do! They'd be after you in an instant.

IRENE. I don't want to run.

LOOTIE. Nobody thinks of me.

IRENE. Yes I do, Lootie! He says they won't touch us if we don't run.

LOOTIE. But we're ever so late, and if they find out at the castle I shall be sent away for sure!

IRENE. Sent away! Who would send you away, Lootie?

LOOTIE. Your papa, the King.

IRENE. But I'll tell him it was all my fault. And you know it was, Lootie.

LOOTIE. That won't make any difference.

IRENE. Then I'll cry and beg him not to take away my dear old Lootie. Come on.

(They begin to circle the stage, CURDIE with confidence and the others warily. IRENE addresses CURDIE.)

I want to talk to you, but it's so awkward. I don't know your name.

CURDIE. It's Curdie, Princess.

IRENE. What a funny name! What more?

CURDIE. Curdie Peterson. What's your name, then?

IRENE. Irene.

CURDIE. What more?

IRENE. I don't know what more. What more is my name, Lootie?

LOOTIE. Princesses haven't got more than one name. They don't need it.

IRENE. Oh, then, Curdie, you must just call me Irene.

LOOTIE. He must do no such thing. He must call you “Your Royal Highness.”

IRENE. My Royal Highness? What’s that? No, Lootie, I won’t be called names. You once told me that only rude children call names, and I’m sure Curdie couldn’t be rude. Curdie, my name’s Irene.

CURDIE. Well, Irene, *(A glance at LOOTIE.)* I think it’s very kind of you to let me call you anything. I like your name very much.

IRENE. It’s ever so much kinder of *you* to go out of your way to see us home.

CURDIE. I haven’t gone out of my way yet. It’s on the other side of those rocks that the path turns off to my house.

LOOTIE. *(With a gasp:)* You wouldn’t leave us ’til we’re safely home, would you?

CURDIE. Of course not.

IRENE. You dear, good, kind Curdie! I shall give you a kiss when we get home.

(LOOTIE gives a hard pull on IRENE’s hand so that she loses CURDIE’s for a moment. But she quickly catches it again, because at the some moment a pair of GOBLINS creep onto the stage and begin to circle them menacingly.)

CURDIE. *(Singing:)*

One, two—

Hit and hew!

Three, four—

Blast and bore!

Five, six—

There’s a fix!

Seven, eight—

Hold it straight!

Nine, ten—

Hit again!

Hurry! scurry!

Bother! smother!

There’s a toad

In the road!
Smash it!
Squash it!
Fry it!
Dry it!
Huuuuuh!

(And he drops IRENE's hand and rushes straight at the GOBLINS, who flee in terror. Then he returns to take IRENE's hand once more. She giggles.)

IRENE. You know, Curdie, I don't know that I quite like your song. It sounds to me rather rude.

CURDIE. Well, perhaps it is—I never thought of it. It's just a way we have. We do it because the cobs don't like it.

IRENE. The cobs?

CURDIE. That's what we call them.

LOOTIE. Oh, do stop! No more talk of goblins!

CURDIE. Well, if you insist, of course I won't. Anyway, look—there's the castle gate. You're home.

(IRENE lets go of LOOTIE's hand so she can take both of CURDIE's in hers.)

IRENE. *(A little shy:)* Thank you ever so much, Curdie—

(LOOTIE pulls her hastily away.)

LOOTIE. Come along, your Highness.

IRENE. But Lootie, I promised a kiss!

LOOTIE. A princess mustn't give kisses. It's not proper.

IRENE. But I promised!

LOOTIE. He's only a miner's boy!

IRENE. He's a good, brave boy, and he's been very kind to us. Lootie, a princess must not break her word!

CURDIE. *(Forestalling trouble:)* Never mind, Princess Irene. You mustn't kiss me tonight. But you shan't break your word. I will come another time. You may be sure I will.

IRENE. Oh, thank you, Curdie.

CURDIE. Good night, Irene. Good night, Lootie.

(And he runs off happily into the night.)

LOOTIE. *(Watching him warily as he goes:)* I should like to see him.

IRENE. You will see him. You may be sure Curdie will keep his word.

LOOTIE. I should like to see him.

(She pilots IRENE off stage as the lights go down. The sounds of picks—somehow different this time—rise up to cover the scene change.)

Scene 6. The Miners

(In the mines. Several MINERS, among them CURDIE and PETER, are at work with picks at various outcrops of rock. Lighting suggests passages leading away into darkness in several directions.)

FIRST MINER. Too right, I was scared. I was all alone in the mine—as far as I knew.

SECOND MINER. Are you sure it wasn't some trick of the underground river, or some animal?

FIRST MINER. No, this was axes, mate. Like they was digging their own mines, right below ours.

SECOND MINER. What would they be wanting with mines? They never sell any ore.

FIRST MINER. Nobody knows, but there's plenty who'll tell you they hear 'em a digging when they stay the night in the mines. Our night's their day, you know.

SECOND MINER. What did you do?

FIRST MINER. What could I do? I stayed as quiet as I could and waited 'til the noises stopped. Which was a great pity as I only stayed late in the first place because I needed the extra money, and then I couldn't work anyway.

CURDIE. I'd have just gone ahead and worked, and let 'em go hang.

SECOND MINER. Aye, we all know you're a fearless blighter, young Peterson. Like your Dad.

(SECOND MINER slaps PETER cheerfully on the back.)

CURDIE. I've met cobs in the mines at night plenty of times. I can always drive 'em away with my verses.

FIRST MINER. But what if you can't remember them? I'm always getting mixed up.

CURDIE. I just make 'em up as I go.

SECOND MINER. There's some who say that's the best way. The cobs hates all verses, but it's new rhymes they hates most.

FIRST MINER. Well, but everyone isn't as clever as young Peterson. I could no sooner make up my own rhymes on the spot than fly to the moon. I'm never working the lode at night again, and that's a certain fact.

SECOND MINER. *(To CURDIE:)* You want to be careful yourself, young Peterson. Them rhymes of yours won't always work—especially if there's more than one of 'em. And there's some who say the noises are getting closer.

(For the first time, PETER stops working and joins the conversation.)

PETER. I've heard that, too. Any idea why?

SECOND MINER. Who can say?

PETER. It worries me. I wish I knew what they were up to.

CURDIE. Come on, Dad, you're not afraid of the cobs, are you? Cor!

PETER. Not for myself, no, of course not, Curdie. But I still wish I knew what they were up to.

CURDIE. Well, maybe I can find out. I was wanting to work through the night tonight anyway—I want to save some money to get Mother a new petticoat. Perhaps I can hear something. Can I stay, Dad?

PETER. I know you're not afraid of anything, but you will be careful?

CURDIE. Always. Promise.

PETER. Then you may. I wish I could come with you, but I have to visit the parson this evening.

CURDIE. I'll be fine. My rhymes never let me down yet.

PETER. *(With a hand on his shoulder:)* I know you will be.

(Blackout. The sounds of Goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 7. The Glumps

(Another part of the mines. A large outcrop of rock divides the stage into two unequal chambers. The larger of these is the house of GLUMP and his family. It contains various misshapen articles of furniture including a table and a large trunk. It also contains GLUMP, MRS. GLUMP, and HELFER, seated about the table having supper. Torches provide light. The smaller chamber is empty at first, but as the GOBLINS converse, CURDIE creeps into it from offstage with a small lantern and puts his ear against the wall to listen to their conversation.)

MRS. GLUMP. We'd better move, then, hadn't we?

GLUMP. There's no hurry. That wretched little mole won't be through for at least a week. He's nowhere near the thinnest spot.

MRS. GLUMP. But you're sure the lode does come through into our house?

GLUMP. Yes, but a good deal further on than he's got to yet. Now, if he were to strike more to the side here—

(He slaps the stone exactly opposite CURDIE's ear. CURDIE jumps slightly.)

Here he'd be through in no time, but he's gone on past it now. If he follows the lode it'll be days before it leads him in. Still—there's no sense in hanging around. Helfer, you must take the great chest. That's your business, you know.

HELPER. Yes, Dad. But you must help me get it onto my head. It's awfully heavy.

GLUMP. Well, it's not just a bag of smoke, I admit. But you're as strong as a mountain.

HELPER. I could carry ten times as much if it wasn't for my feet.

GLUMP. That's your weak point, I confess, my boy.

HELPER. Ain't it yours too, Dad?

GLUMP. Well, to be honest, it's a goblin weakness. Why they come so soft I've no idea.

HELPER. Especially when your head's so hard.

GLUMP. Yes, my boy. A goblin's glory is his head.

(He grabs HELPER by the shoulders and head-butts him with jocular affection.)

To think how them up above have to put on helmets and things when they go a-warring.

HELPER. But why don't we wear shoes like they do, as our feet are so soft?

MRS. GLUMP. The idea! It's not the fashion. The *King* never wears shoes.

HELPER. The Queen does, though.

GLUMP. Yes, but that's for distinction. The first Queen, you know—I mean the King's first wife—she wore shoes because she

came from upstairs. So when she died, the new one had to do it too. Said she wouldn't be "inferior."

MRS. GLUMP. It's all pride. I'm sure I wouldn't be caught dead wearing them myself. That's the only really silly thing our King has ever done, marrying a woman from up there.

HELPER. I suppose he fell in love with her.

GLUMP. Pooh! He's just as happy now with one of his own people.

HELPER. How did she die? They didn't tease her to death, did they?

GLUMP. She died when the young Prince was born.

MRS. GLUMP. There you are! *We* never do that. It must have been because she wore shoes.

HELPER. Why *do* they wear shoes up there?

GLUMP. Well, now that's a very sensible question, and I will answer it. But first I must tell you a secret.

(They close in confidentially.)

I saw the old Queen's feet once.

MRS. GLUMP. No! Without her shoes?

HELPER. How?

GLUMP. She didn't know I saw them. But here's the horrible part—she had *toes*.

HELPER. Toes? What are they?

GLUMP. It was horrible. The ends of her feet were split up into five or six pieces—like fingers!

MRS. GLUMP. How awful!

GLUMP. That's why they all wear shoes up there. They can't bear the sight of their feet.

HELPER. Well, I never knew so much before.

GLUMP. *(Dryly:)* Your knowledge is not quite universal yet. Well, as soon as we've finished our supper, we'll be up and going. *(He chuckles to himself.)*

MRS. GLUMP. What are you laughing at, husband?

GLUMP. I was just thinking what a mess the miners will find themselves in—sometime soon.

MRS. GLUMP. Why, what do you mean?

GLUMP. Oh, nothing.

MRS. GLUMP. Oh, yes you do mean something. You always mean something.

GLUMP. That's more than you do, wife.

MRS. GLUMP. But it's not more than I find out.

GLUMP. Ha! You're a sharp one. What a mother you've got, Helfer! Well, I suppose I'd better tell you. They're all at the palace consulting about it this very night, and as soon as we've got away from this thin place I'm going there to find out when it's to happen. I should like to see the likes of that young ruffian in there when—

(And he leans in and speaks so quietly that we—and CURDIE—are unable to hear more than a low rumble. CURDIE strains to hear from the other side of the wall, but we can see he can't. After a moment GLUMP leans back in his chair with satisfaction. As GLUMP continues in his normal voice, CURDIE begins carefully but very rapidly removing small stones from the dividing wall.)

So that's the plan. Those wretched overlanders won't know what hit them. Now look sharp. We've got to get packed if I'm to make it to the meeting and find out when we strike. When we—

(CURDIE drops a stone. He freezes.)

What was that?

MRS. GLUMP. It must be that one miner who stayed behind.

GLUMP. No he's been gone a good while. I haven't heard his axe for an hour. Besides, it didn't sound like that.

MRS. GLUMP. Then it must have been a stone carried down the underground river.

(CURDIE resumes his work. He has made a hole large enough to reach his hand through.)

GLUMP. I suppose. Now, hurry. After the meeting at the palace, we can come back and clear out the last of our things before our enemies return in the morning.

(CURDIE has been feeling about the floor of the house with his hand and accidentally brushes HELFER's foot.)

HELPER. Yikes!

MRS. GLUMP. What's the matter, Helfer?

HELPER. A wild beast came out of the wall and licked my foot!

GLUMP. Nonsense. There are no wild beasts in our country.

HELPER. But I felt it!

GLUMP. Up *there*, yes—up there it's swarming with wild beasts, but ours is a civilized country.

HELPER. But, Dad—

GLUMP. You hold your tongue. You're not a parrot. Here, take the chest.

(GLUMP and MRS. GLUMP between them are barely up to the task, but they eventually get the trunk balanced on HELFER's head. During the confusion, CURDIE manages to excavate a big enough hole to allow passage. The GLUMPS each shoulder a large duffle and the family makes its way out of the room and offstage. After a moment, CURDIE is through, and carefully follows them off. Blackout. The sounds of goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 8. The Goblins' plan

(The great hall of the goblin palace. [This is really just a huge natural cave, and can be suggested very simply, with perhaps a chandelier of stalactites and a few boulders around the perimeter.] When the lights come up they reveal the KING and QUEEN of the goblins, along

with their son, HARELIP and the CHANCELLOR, on a dais center, and as many additional GOBLINS as can be managed surrounding them and listening to the KING, who is making a speech. GLUMP and his family arrive at a downstage corner and join the throng, and a few paces behind them CURDIE arrives and hides by the proscenium to eavesdrop.]

GOBLIN KING. So two plans have been working together in my vast brain for our deliverance. Regardless of the fact that we were the first possessors of the regions they now inhabit—regardless also of the fact that we abandoned those regions from the loftiest of motives—regardless further of the fact that we excel them in mental ability and moral fiber as much as they excel us in stature, they look down on us as a degraded race and make us a mockery. But the time is almost upon us when—thanks to my inventive genius—we can take our sweet revenge.

(Loud and sustained cheers.)

GLUMP. May it please your Majesty—

GOBLIN CHANCELLOR. Who is it interrupts our supreme ruler?

SEVERAL GOBLINS. Glump.

GOBLIN KING. He is our trusty subject, Chancellor. Let him come forward and speak.

(Way is made and GLUMP approaches the dais.)

GLUMP. Sire, I would have held my peace, except that I think I alone know how near is the glorious moment to which you have just referred.

GOBLIN CHANCELLOR. What can you mean?

GLUMP. In all probability, before another day is past, the enemy will have broken through into my house. The partition is even now not a foot thick. This very evening I have had to remove my household effects.

GOBLIN KING. Indeed!

GLUMP. Therefore, the sooner we are ready to carry out your Majesty's great plans, the better.

(Murmured agreement from the masses.)

Furthermore—

GOBLIN KING. There's more?

GLUMP. Yes, Sire. Within the last few days I've noticed a small outbreak of water in my dining room. There must be a deep gulf in the channel of our underground river. I trust this discovery will add considerably to the immense forces already at your Majesty's disposal.

(He bows and retreats into the crowd.)

GOBLIN CHANCELLOR. The information the worthy Glump has given us might have been of considerable import, except for that *other* plan, which naturally takes precedence. His Majesty has cogitated a more fundamental and comprehensive measure, of which I need say no more. Should this first plan be successful—as who dares to doubt—then a peace, all to our benefit, will be established for a generation at least. Her relatives will not dare to attack us. Should this plan fail, we can proceed with the more crude plan to which the good Glump alludes. We will knock a channel through to our underground river and flood the mines!

A GOBLIN. Three cheers for the plan!

(Pandemonium, during which CURDIE slips out unseen. Blackout. We hear the sound of birdsong, and, if necessary, light, cheerful music to cover the scene change.)

Scene 9. Irene's King-Papa

(Outside the castle. Bright sunshine. IRENE stands with LOOTIE, peering intently into the distance.)

IRENE. I can't see him yet. Are you sure he's coming?

LOOTIE. If your King-Papa said he would come today, you may be sure that he will.

IRENE. But I want to see him now!

LOOTIE. That's as may be. You will see him when you see him.

(Trumpet fanfares.)

IRENE. Lootie! He's come! He's come!

(The KING strides on, possibly from the audience, trailed by several MEN-AT-ARMS, among them SIR WALTER. IRENE runs to him and he catches her up in his arms.)

KING. My how you've grown, my Princess!

IRENE. That's because you've been away so long, Papa.

KING. I have, and for that I am sorry, but a King must ride with his soldiers, and little princesses are not safe on campaign.

IRENE. I know, Papa. I'm not angry a bit—only sad when you go. And very proud, too, of course.

KING. No sadder than I. But you've got me all to yourself for now, and I you. What would you like to do first?

IRENE. Well—

(IRENE, suddenly shy, gazes at her own shoes, hesitating.)

KING. A ride 'round the lake on my charger? A game of chess in the orchard?

IRENE. I think—I should like you to take me to see my great old grandmother.

KING. *(Gravely:)* What can you mean?

IRENE. I mean Queen Irene who lives up in the tower—the very old lady, you know, with the long silver hair—

(The KING stares uncomprehendingly.)

You know she's there, don't you?

KING. *(Quietly:)* No.

IRENE. Then it must all be a dream. I half thought it was, and now I'm nearly sure. Besides, I couldn't find her the next time I looked.

KING. Come, my child. We'll have a walk in the garden together.

(LOOTIE and the MEN-AT-ARMS leave them alone. They stroll slowly arm in arm across the stage, silently at first, but then the KING speaks.)

You and your nanny were out late one evening, Irene.

IRENE. Yes, Papa. It was all my fault, and Lootie was very sorry.

KING. I must speak to Lootie about it. You mustn't be out unprotected after dark.

IRENE. Please don't speak loud to her, Papa! She's been so afraid of being late ever since! It was only a mistake for once.

KING. Once might be too often. But I will be kind to her for your sake. Still, I am uneasy about your safety.

IRENE. But I've got my huge big grandmother. Oh, won't you come and see her?

KING. *(Humoring her:)* She hasn't invited me, you know. Great queens do not choose to be visited without leave asked and given. *(Growing serious:)* Be that as it may, I think I'll leave my men-at-arms here when I go, *(He strokes her hair.)* to protect that which is most precious to me.

IRENE. Must you go?

KING. I'm afraid I must, and soon. But I'll be back as soon as I can. Always believe that, Irene.

IRENE. I do, Papa. I do.

(Blackout. Light, cheerful music if necessary to cover the scene change.)

Scene 10. Curdie's Plan

(Curdie's house on the mountain. [All that is needed here is a wooden table and stools or chairs around it.] When the lights come up, CURDIE, PETER, and MRS. PETERSON are finishing a simple but hearty meal.)

PETER. Well, we know pretty much what this famous second plan is.

CURDIE. They mean to knock through from the underground river and flood the mine.

PETER. (*Nodding.*) And given time, we can prevent that by filling up that branch of the mine with stone. Apparently we have time, because—

CURDIE. They mean to try something else first.

PETER. And we have no idea what. Have you heard nothing more?

CURDIE. No, Dad. But they're up to something—*that I have* seen.

MRS. PETERSON. I wish you wouldn't encourage the boy to spend the night in the mines, with those horrible cobs.

CURDIE. I'm perfectly safe, Mother.

MRS. PETERSON. Wandering about in their houses and their hallways. You could get lost!

CURDIE. I almost did that first time. But I've got a secret weapon now.

MRS. PETERSON. A secret weapon to keep from getting lost?

CURDIE. You remember that story you used to tell me when I was smaller, about Hop-o'-My-Thumb? And how he dropped pebbles behind him to leave a trail back?

PETER. How can you follow a trail of pebbles in a mine?

CURDIE. I don't but it's the same thing. See, whenever I cross over into the cobs' part of the mountain, I tie my pickaxe to one end of this ball of twine.

(He produces a large ball of dirty twine from his pocket.)

Then I just pay the twine out as I go, and follow 'er back when I leave.

PETER. Brilliant!

MRS. PETERSON. It still sounds very dangerous to me.

CURDIE. But Mother, it's important.

PETER. The boy's right. You have no idea how much damage those twisted creatures could do if we can't find a way to stop them. Our Curdie might just be the hero who saves everybody. Now, what have you learned?

CURDIE. Well, as I say, I haven't been able to overhear anything more, being afraid to get too close to cobs in groups.

MRS. PETERSON. I daresay.

CURDIE. Oh, I'm really not afraid for myself—I can handle any old cob—but if they discover they're being watched—

PETER. Right. Best to stay invisible.

CURDIE. Well, for days and days all I learned was a lot of useless facts about goblin homelife. Like their pets. They've got all manner of tame creatures living with them, and each one is more horrible than the next. I saw a dog with a head like a pumpkin, and a cat—a normal-sized cat, but with six-foot long legs. And everything else you can imagine. But none of that helps. But then yesterday I heard a whole lot of 'em digging away with pickaxes and shovels.

PETER. Getting ready to flood the river?

CURDIE. No, that's just it. This was in an entirely different part of the mine. It's hard to be sure, down there in the dark, but I think—I *think* they're digging in the direction of the castle.

(Blackout. The sounds of goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 11. Irene Pricks Her Thumb

(Princess Irene's bedroom. IRENE sits on the edge of the bed, working a small needlepoint hoop. LOOTIE sits behind her, brushing out her hair.)

IRENE. Lootie, when is my King-Papa coming back? It's been just ages.

LOOTIE. His Majesty has important work, Princess. But I'm sure he will come to you as soon as he can. He's very worried about you, you know.

IRENE. I know—I only wish I knew why.

LOOTIE. Now, don't you go worrying too, Princess. You're perfectly safe in the castle, with your Papa's men-at-arms guarding everything so careful.

IRENE. I *know* I'm safe—ouch!

LOOTIE. Whatever is it, my lady?

IRENE. I've pricked my thumb! I've run the needle right into it!

LOOTIE. Let me see. (*Looking carefully:*) Yes, well, I daresay it hurts, but I imagine it will be better before you're married. (*IRENE giggles.*) Look, there's but one drop of blood.

IRENE. But it really hurts!

LOOTIE. You'll just have to try thinking about something else.

IRENE. Lootie, *why* are those men guarding the castle so carefully? Has anything happened?

LOOTIE. Naught but a lot of superstitious nonsense if you ask me. Nothing a princess should be worried about.

IRENE. But *I'm* a princess, and I *am* worried about it. At least, I'm wondering about it. (*Distracted:*) Lootie, my hand *really* hurts!

LOOTIE. Well, if it will take your mind off your finger, I'll tell you. But you must promise not to worry.

IRENE. I'll try my very hardest.

LOOTIE. Well, there are some as say strange creatures have been seen at night in the castle garden.

IRENE. What kind of creatures?

LOOTIE. Nobody knows, but they say as how they're not natural.

IRENE. How, not natural?

(IRENE is clearly in increasing pain, and she begins to rock back and forth with it, though still interested in LOOTIE's tale.)

LOOTIE. Now, mind, I think it's all a lot of imaginings in the dark. But one fellow says he saw a dog or a wolf staring in a window.

IRENE. That's not so odd.

LOOTIE. But this man—it was one of your men-at-arms, as a matter of fact—swears the beast's head was at least twice too big for its body, and had a face like a jack-o-lantern!

IRENE. Ooh, how hideous.

LOOTIE. And there's others who have seen other misshapen creatures. Legs too long or too short for bodies, bodies too small or too large for heads, tiny bears with the heads of rabbits, cats with three tails—

(She breaks off because it has become impossible to ignore IRENE's suffering. She grabs IRENE's hand to examine it.)

Why, child, your hand's swelled up like a ripe turnip!

IRENE. Oh, Lootie, I can hardly bear it!

(LOOTIE touches IRENE's forehead.)

LOOTIE. And you're burning up! You've gone and got an infection for certain!

IRENE. I really don't feel well at all, Lootie.

LOOTIE. Now, don't you worry. You just lie down and try to sleep, and I'll go for the doctor.

IRENE. Oh, do hurry. It hurts!

LOOTIE. Try and sleep, then you won't feel it.

(LOOTIE settles IRENE in bed with a cloth on her head, extinguishes the lamp [leaving Irene's candle] and exits, muttering to herself.)

Mercy me, I do hope the doctor is in the castle!

(IRENE tries to sleep, and perhaps she does, but she tosses and turns fitfully. After a few moments, we hear the same beautiful singing that called IRENE from her bed once before. She sits up and listens for a moment, then she's out of bed, candle in hand, following the voice offstage. Blackout. Grandmother's music rises up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 12. The Second Visit

(Grandmother's chamber. GRANDMOTHER sits spinning exactly as before. As the lights come up, she calls out.)

GRANDMOTHER. Come in, Irene!

(IRENE enters and draws near.)

Come in, come in, my dear. Can you tell me what I am spinning?

IRENE. No. Please—I thought you were a dream. Why couldn't I find you before, Great-Great-Grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER. That you're hardly old enough to understand. But you would have found me sooner if you hadn't come to think I was a dream.

IRENE. Oh.

GRANDMOTHER. I'll give you one reason you couldn't find me. I didn't want Lottie to know I was here.

IRENE. But you let me tell her.

GRANDMOTHER. But I knew she would not believe you. If she saw me sitting here spinning, she wouldn't believe me.

IRENE. Why?

GRANDMOTHER. She couldn't. She would rub her eyes and go away and say she felt woozy, and then say it was all a dream.

IRENE. *(Ashamed:)* Just like me.

GRANDMOTHER. Not *just*, Irene. *You* came again. Lottie would not have come again. She would have said, no, no—she'd had enough of such nonsense. You haven't told me what I'm spinning.

IRENE. Because I don't know. It's very pretty stuff.

GRANDMOTHER. I am spinning this for you, my child.

IRENE. For me? What am I to do with it, please?

GRANDMOTHER. That I will tell you by and by. But first I will tell you what it is. It's spider's web. My pigeons bring it me from

over the great sea. There's only one forest in the world where the spiders live who make this particular kind—the finest and strongest in the world.

(IRENE puts out a hand to touch the thread but winces as she does.)

Why, child, you have hurt your hand!

IRENE. Yes, on a needle. Lootie says it's got infected.

GRANDMOTHER. You sit right here.

(GRANDMOTHER gets up and seats IRENE on the stool. She rummages through the chest of drawers for a moment and comes up with a little jar of ointment.)

This will help almost at once.

(GRANDMOTHER kneels in front of IRENE and tenderly applies the ointment to her hand.)

IRENE. Oh, it smells lovely!

GRANDMOTHER. How does that feel?

IRENE. Oh, Grandmother, it's much better already!

(GRANDMOTHER touches her forehead.)

GRANDMOTHER. I think your fever's down a little too. But I think just to be safe you'd better stay with me tonight, so I can watch over you.

IRENE. Oh, thank you.

GRANDMOTHER. And now for my gift to you.

(She takes up the tiny ball of thread she has been spinning and places it carefully into IRENE's hand. It is no bigger than a large walnut.)

There you are.

IRENE. *(Wonderingly:)* Is this *all* your spinning?

GRANDMOTHER. Ever since I came here. There's more there than you think.

IRENE. How pretty it is. What am I to do with it, please?

GRANDMOTHER. Patience, child.

(GRANDMOTHER goes to the little chest of drawers and takes out a ring.)

Give me your hand.

(IRENE holds out her hand and GRANDMOTHER slips the ring onto her finger.)

IRENE. What a beautiful ring! What is the stone called?

GRANDMOTHER. It is a fire-opal.

IRENE. Am I really to keep it?

GRANDMOTHER. Always.

IRENE. Oh, thank you, Grandmother! It's prettier than anything I ever saw. I will take such care of it! But—

GRANDMOTHER. What?

IRENE. What am I to say when Lootie asks me where I got it?

GRANDMOTHER. *You will ask her where you got it.*

IRENE. I don't see how I can do that.

GRANDMOTHER. You will, though. You'll see when the time comes.

(She takes the little ball of thread from IRENE's other hand and returns it to the little chest of drawers.)

IRENE. But—I thought you spun it for me!

GRANDMOTHER. So I did, my child. And you've got it.

IRENE. Have I done something to make you angry, Grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER. No, my dear. But you must understand that no one ever gives anything to another, properly and really, without keeping it. That ball is yours.

IRENE. Oh! I'm not to take it with me! You are going to keep it for me!

GRANDMOTHER. You *are* to take it with you. I've fastened the end of it to the ring on your finger.

IRENE. (*Looking hard:*) I can't see it.

GRANDMOTHER. Feel—a little way from the ring, towards the cabinet.

IRENE. Oh, I *do* feel it! But I still can't see it.

GRANDMOTHER. The thread is too fine for you to see. Now you can imagine how much spinning that took, even though it seems such a little ball.

IRENE. It's very wonderful. But what is it for?

GRANDMOTHER. Listen to me very carefully. If ever you find yourself in great danger or distress—as I sadly fear you soon shall—you must lay your finger upon that thread and follow it wherever it leads you.

IRENE. Oh, how delightful! It will lead me to you, grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, but it may seem to you a very roundabout way indeed, and you must not doubt the thread. Of one thing you may be sure—while you hold it, I hold it too.

IRENE. Thank you, Grandmother! Oh!

(She suddenly leaps up.)

GRANDMOTHER. What is it, child?

IRENE. Here I have been sitting all this time in your chair, and you standing! I beg your pardon!

GRANDMOTHER. Sit down again, Irene. Nothing pleases me better than to see anyone sit in my chair.

IRENE. How kind of you.

GRANDMOTHER. It makes me happy.

IRENE. (*Gazing fascinated at her ring:*) Won't the thread get in somebody's way and be broken, if one end is fast to my ring and the other in your cabinet?

GRANDMOTHER. You will find that all that arranges itself. But now I think you must sleep, if you are to be well in the morning.

IRENE. I feel ever so much better, but I *am* very tired.

GRANDMOTHER. Come along, then. You will find the bed very comfortable indeed, and I will watch over you as you sleep.

(She leads IRENE to the bed, removes her shoes, and tucks her in tenderly. She blows out a candle or two, but the shining globe overhead continues to shine. She sits on her stool.)

IRENE. Aren't you going to put out your moon?

GRANDMOTHER. That never goes out, night or day. In the darkest night, if any of my pigeons are out on a message, they always see my moon and know where to fly.

IRENE. How can they see it through the walls?

GRANDMOTHER. When I choose, I can make the lamp shine through the walls.

IRENE. But if somebody besides the pigeons were to see it they would come to look what it was and find you.

GRANDMOTHER. All the better for them. But it doesn't happen more than about five times in a hundred years that anyone does see it. Besides, nobody could find this room unless I pleased.

(She moves to the bed again.)

And I'll tell you another secret: if that light were to go out, you would fancy yourself lying in a bare attic, lying on a heap of old straw—and you wouldn't see any of the pleasant things you see now.

IRENE. How strange!

GRANDMOTHER. Yes. And it's not everyone who can see it at all.

IRENE. How is it that I can?

GRANDMOTHER. It is a gift born with you. One day I hope everybody will have it.

IRENE. I hope it will never go out.

GRANDMOTHER. I hope not. But sleep, little Irene. You are safe with me.

(She leans to kiss IRENE's forehead.)

IRENE. I do feel so. Good night, Grandmother.

(Blackout. The sounds of goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 13. Captured

(The chamber of the goblin Royal Family. [Again, this can be presented very sketchily, and mostly with light.] The GOBLIN KING, GOBLIN QUEEN, and HARELIP sit around a fire. The GOBLIN CHANCELLOR sits a bit further out. CURDIE crouches partway up a pile of rock by the perimeter, unseen by the GOBLINS.)

HARELIP. That will be fun!

GOBLIN QUEEN. I don't see why you should think it such a grand affair.

GOBLIN KING. You must remember, my dear—he has got the same blood in him. His mother—

GOBLIN QUEEN. Don't talk to me about his mother! You encourage his unnatural fancies. Whatever belongs to that mother ought to be cut out of him.

GOBLIN KING. You forget yourself, my dear!

GOBLIN QUEEN. If you expect me to approve of such course tastes, you will find yourself mistaken. I don't wear shoes for nothing.

GOBLIN KING. You know, that reminds me, dearest. For as long as we have been married, I have never seen your feet—only those solid granite shoes of yours. I think you might take your shoes off when you go to bed! They positively hurt me sometimes.

GOBLIN QUEEN. I will do as I like.

GOBLIN KING. You might do as your own hubby wishes you.

GOBLIN QUEEN. I will not. My shoes are a mark of distinction. As long as I am Queen, I will sleep in my shoes. It is my royal privilege.

GOBLIN KING. Oh, all right. But, about our plan. It's no good accusing my son of unnatural tastes. This is no whim of Harelip's—it's a matter of State policy. He's only gratified to be sacrificing himself for the public good. Isn't that right, Harelip?

HARELIP. Of course. Only it will be nice to make her cry. I'll have the skin taken off between her toes, and tie them up 'til they grow together. Then her feet will be like everyone else's and she won't have to wear shoes.

GOBLIN QUEEN. Do you mean to suggest that *I've* got toes?!

GOBLIN CHANCELLOR. Your Royal Highness possibly requires to be reminded that you've got three toes yourself—one on one foot and two on the other.

GOBLIN QUEEN. Ah-ha!

GOBLIN CHANCELLOR. It seems to me that it would be a popular gesture—to endear you to your people and show them that you are truly of the people—if you were to perform upon yourself the comparatively slight operation which, in a more extended form, you so wisely suggest for your future princess.

GOBLIN QUEEN. Ha! Ha! Ha!

(All of the GOBLINS laugh heartily at HARELIP's expense. Just then, CURDIE loses his footing and comes tumbling into the chamber—not, however, dropping his pickaxe. The GOBLINS leap to their feet.)

GOBLIN KING. *(In a fury:)* What right have you in my palace, mole?

CURDIE. *(Respectfully:)* The right of necessity, Your Majesty. I've lost my way.

GOBLIN KING. How did you get in?

CURDIE. By a hole in the rock.

GOBLIN QUEEN. But you are a miner! Look at your pickaxe!

CURDIE. I—er—I found it lying on the ground.

GOBLIN KING. You will oblige me by walking out of my dominions at once!

CURDIE. Certainly—if Your Majesty will give me a guide.

GOBLIN KING. I'll give you a dozen.

CURDIE. One will be sufficient, thank you.

(The GOBLIN KING gives a sort of howling roar, which instantly calls a large contingent of GOBLINS into the chamber. They surround CURDIE menacingly. He grips his pickaxe tighter.)

Keep back!

A GOBLIN. Oh, look! The mole thinks he has teeth.

A GOBLIN. What do you think you're going to do with that pickaxe, mole?

CURDIE. If you don't keep back—this!

(He strikes the nearest GOBLIN a crushing blow to the head, but the pickaxe only glances off with a hollow sound.)

A GOBLIN. Ha! You'll have to do better than that! Our heads aren't so soft as yours, you know!

CURDIE. *(Singing:)*

Ten, twenty, thirty—

You're all so very dirty!

Twenty, thirty, forty—

You're all so thick and snorty!

(The GOBLINS fall back a little when the song starts—but only a little.)

'Thirty, forty, fifty—

You're all so puff-and-snifty!

Forty, fifty, sixty—

Beast and man so mixty!

A GOBLIN. Why, them's no real words at all!

A GOBLIN. That won't work, you know!

(But it does seem to be working to a degree. The GOBLINS don't run away or even back off, but neither do they come closer—and their faces contort in discomfort.)

CURDIE. *(Singing:)*

Fifty, sixty, seventy—

Mixty, maxty, leaventy!

Sixty, seventy, eighty—

All your cheeks so slaty!

Seventy, eighty, ninety—

(But CURDIE is stuck for a rhyme. The GOBLINS close in.)

A GOBLIN. Now you're in for it, mole! Get him!

CURDIE. No! Leave me alone! Get off!

A GOBLIN. Hold him, lads!

(The GOBLINS quickly knock CURDIE down and pin him to the floor. The GOBLIN CHANCELLOR strides over to him and takes charge.)

GOBLIN CHANCELLOR. That's just about enough of that. We'll have to lock him up someplace—who knows how much he heard of our plans. *(To CURDIE:)* Come on, you—on your feet.

(The GOBLIN CHANCELLOR heaves CURDIE roughly to his feet and prepares to lead him off. But CURDIE has heard the magic word.)

CURDIE. Feet! That's it!

GOBLIN CHANCELLOR. What's that?

CURDIE. Your heads may be hard as granite, but your feet aren't!

(With that, CURDIE stamps hard on the GOBLIN CHANCELLOR's feet. The CHANCELLOR howls in pain and leaps about from foot to foot, releasing CURDIE's arm. CURDIE begins randomly stamping on as many goblin feet as he can reach, with similar results. Soon the GOBLINS, including the KING and HARELIP, are rapidly retreating from the room. CURDIE whoops and howls with pleasure as he mows his way through them. But then, suddenly,

all the rest are gone and he finds himself face to face with the QUEEN—in her granite shoes.)

GOBLIN QUEEN. Ha! You don't scare me, mole!

(CURDIE stamps on her foot, but it appears to hurt him more than her.)

CURDIE. Ow!

GOBLIN QUEEN. Didn't reckon on shoes, did you? Take that!

(And the QUEEN brings her stone-shod foot down on CURDIE's. CURDIE cries out and is instantly lame. The QUEEN then wraps her arms around him and carries him unceremoniously to a corner of the cave where there is a small hole in the rock. She thrusts him roughly in and heaves a great boulder in front of the opening.)

That ought to hold the likes of you!

(The GOBLIN KING, the GOBLIN CHANCELLOR, and HARELIP re-enter.)

GOBLIN CHANCELLOR. Excellent work, Your Majesty!

GOBLIN KING. Absolutely brilliant, my dear.

HARELIP. How long can he live in there?

GOBLIN KING. Oh, not long, I shouldn't think. These sun people are poor, feeble creatures. I've been told they eat two or three times a day! I imagine a week of starvation ought to finish him off.

GOBLIN QUEEN. If I may offer a suggestion?

GOBLIN KING. The wretch is entirely at your disposal, my dear. He's your property—you caught him. *We* could never have done it.

GOBLIN QUEEN. Well, it seems to me a shame to waste fresh meat.

GOBLIN KING. What waste? The very notion of starving him implies that we're not going to give him any meat.

GOBLIN QUEEN. I'm not so stupid as that. What I mean is, by the time he is starved there will hardly be any meat left on his bones.

GOBLIN KING. (*Laughing:*) Well, my dear, you may have him whenever you like. I don't fancy eating him myself—he's sure to be tough.

GOBLIN QUEEN. No, to eat him ourselves would be to honor him, instead of punishing him. But why should we deprive our poor creatures of a treat? Our little dogs and cats and pigs and bears would enjoy him very much.

GOBLIN KING. You are the best of housekeepers, my dear! So be it. We'll starve him for a day or two—just to make him tamer—and then our pets can feast. After all, he deserves it. Think what damage he might have done, and what he might have overheard.

GOBLIN QUEEN. Don't think of it, since he's no longer a danger. I'm tired. I'm going to bed.

HARELIP. It's not even bed-time!

(From within his prison vault, CURDIE sings:)

CURDIE'S VOICE.

Go to bed,
Goblin, do.
Help the queen
Take off her shoe.
'If you do,
It will disclose
A horrid set
Of sprouting toes.

GOBLIN QUEEN. (*Furious:*) What a lie! But we'll see how funny you think you are when you're food for our dogs! Harelip, go to bed!

HARELIP. I'm going.

GOBLIN QUEEN. (*To the KING:*) Come on!

(They exit. Blackout. The sounds of goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 14. Irene Is Well

(Irene's room. As the lights come up, LOOTIE is just entering the room, where IRENE sleeps. At the sound of her footfall, IRENE awakes.)

IRENE. Good morning, Lootie.

LOOTIE. My angel! I've been that worried—the doctor is nowhere to be found. How is it?

(She puts a hand to IRENE's forehead.)

Why, your fever's gone!

IRENE. I feel fine, Lootie, really.

LOOTIE. *(Looking at her hand:)* And the swelling's gone as well. You'd never know there ever was a needle.

IRENE. It doesn't hurt at all now.

LOOTIE. It's a miracle. I don't know what I'd have done if you'd gone really ill. I don't want to lose you, princess.

IRENE. I'm not planning on being lost, Lootie, darling. Not ever.

LOOTIE. How your ring does glow this morning, Princess—just like a fiery rose!

IRENE. Does it Lootie? *(As if a memory is just out of reach:)* Who gave me the ring, Lootie? I know I've had it for a long time, but where did I get it? I don't remember.

LOOTIE. I think it must have been your mother gave it you, Princess, but really, for as long as you have worn it, I don't remember that I ever knew.

IRENE. I will ask my King-Papa the next time he comes. Oh, I do hope it will be soon.

LOOTIE. As soon as may be, I'm sure, Princess. And now, as you're feeling so much better, I'll be getting your breakfast.

(LOOTIE exits. IRENE gets out of bed and puts on her shoes, which lie neatly by the bed. She is merrily swinging her feet when there is a sudden, very loud sound from outside the room. It is clearly an ani-

mal cry of some kind, but it does not sound exactly like any known animal. IRENE, badly frightened, jumps up onto the bed and backs against the wall at its head. [Or the bedstead, if there is no wall.]

IRENE. *(Calling out:)* Lootie?

(No response. Another cry, this one closer and from another direction. IRENE casts about her as if surrounded and looking for an opening.)

Grandmother! I need you!

(She puts her hand to her ring, then appears to find the “thread” leading from it. Placing her finger carefully on the “thread,” she follows it down off of the bed, and, by a rather roundabout route, off-stage. Just as the lights go down, we see a pair of horrific, misshapen ANIMALS creep into the bedroom.)

Scene 15. The Thread

(Outdoors. [This very short transitional scene might be played before the main drape whilst the following scene is being set behind it.] Bright sunlight. IRENE enters at one side of the stage, following her “thread.”)

IRENE. But where are we going, Grandmother? This isn't the way to your tower at all! What are we doing out here?

(The thread meanders about the stage, so as to lead IRENE slowly towards the opposite side.)

But Grandmother—that is the mountain. I'm not supposed to be on the mountain alone! Where are you leading me? I can't—

(She stops, hesitating, debating with herself.)

Oh—either I trust you or I don't. *(Pause.)* I do.

(She follows the “thread” off. Blackout.)

Scene 16. Irene to the Rescue

(The chamber of the goblin Royal Family. The chamber is empty, except for CURDIE, whom we cannot see, as he is still imprisoned in the hole covered by the boulder. IRENE enters very cautiously with a small lantern, still following her “thread.” It leads her up to the very stone that seals CURDIE in, and then seems to disappear behind it. IRENE doesn’t believe it at first, and tries to find a way that the thread can be understood another way, but she always comes back to the same place.)

IRENE. How vexing! Grandmother, what can you mean, leading me into this horrible cave and then just leaving me here! Well, if I can’t go forward, at least I can follow the thread back out.

(But when she tries, it proves impossible. Every time she tries to follow the thread backwards, it seems to disappear, and she can’t find it. Each time she follows it forward, it leads her to the same seam where it disappears behind the boulder. In frustration, she picks up a small stone and smashes it against the boulder several times, making quite a considerable noise. Suddenly we hear a defiant CURDIE begin to sing from the other side of the boulder.)

CURDIE’S VOICE.

Jabber, bother, smash!
You’ll have it all in a crash.
Jabber, smash, bother!
You’ll have the worst of the pother.
Smash, bother, jabber!—

IRENE. *(Astonished:)* Curdie! Is that you?

CURDIE’S VOICE. Irene? Little Princess Irene?

IRENE. It is! It’s Curdie!

CURDIE’S VOICE. Hush, hush! Speak softly!

IRENE. But you were singing quite loud!

CURDIE’S VOICE. Yes, but they know *I’m* here. They *don’t* know you’re here. Why are you? How did you come here?

IRENE. My great-great-grandmother sent me, and I think I know why. You can't get out, can you?

CURDIE. No. The cobs put me in here. I've tried pushing this rock out of the way, and I can feel it move a little, but I'm not heavy enough to roll it away.

IRENE. Perhaps if I were to push from this side.

CURDIE. I couldn't ask a princess to be hauling boulders in the mine!

IRENE. You haven't asked—I've volunteered. Besides, my grandmother's thread brought me all the way down here to help you.

CURDIE. Well, I don't know what you mean by that, but if you're determined to do it—

IRENE. I am.

CURDIE. Then there's no time to lose. Are you ready?

(IRENE positions herself to push.)

IRENE. Ready!

CURDIE. One—two—three!

(IRENE [and, we presume, the unseen CURDIE] strain hard. For a moment it looks as if they won't do it, but then the stone rolls out of the way. CURDIE tumbles out after it, and he and IRENE end up in a heap on the floor, laughing joyfully. After a moment, CURDIE becomes serious.)

You've saved my life, Irene!

IRENE. Oh, Curdie, I'm so glad! Let's get out of this horrid place as fast as we can.

CURDIE. That's easier said than done.

IRENE. Oh, no—it's quite easy. We have only to follow my thread. I'm sure it's going to take us out now. Come on.

(And she is off almost at a run, following the "thread.")

CURDIE. Where are you going? That's not the way out! That's where I couldn't get out!

IRENE. I know that, but this is the way my thread goes, and I must follow it.

CURDIE. You're talking nonsense! I can't understand you at all!

IRENE. Come *on*, Curdie!

(And she exits.)

CURDIE. Wait! You'll get lost! Oh, bother!

(He follows her off. Blackout.)

Scene 17. The Queen's Shoe

(Somewhere inside the mountain. [This short transitional scene might be played before the main drape whilst the following scene is being set behind it.] The GOBLIN KING and QUEEN lie asleep near one side of the stage, but we shouldn't notice them yet. IRENE and CURDIE enter from the other side, with IRENE in the lead, still cautiously following her "thread," and CURDIE behind with the lantern.)

IRENE. Now, stick close to me Curdie. I knew you couldn't get lost in that narrow passage, but here in this wide place—

CURDIE. I can't understand it. How did you find your way in to me?

IRENE. I told you already. By keeping my finger on grandmother's thread, as I am doing now.

CURDIE. You don't mean you've got the thread there?

IRENE. Of course I do. I've told you so ten times already. There—you feel it for yourself.

CURDIE. *(Really trying:)* I feel nothing. There's nothing there, Irene.

IRENE. What can be the matter with your finger, then? I feel it perfectly, though it is very fine.

CURDIE. Well, I can make nothing of it.

IRENE. Never mind. Wait 'til we get out. Oooh—look! Shhh!

(IRENE *has seen the GOBLIN KING and QUEEN lying asleep. The QUEEN clutches Curdie's pickaxe in her arms as she sleeps.*)

(*Whispered:*) The thread leads right past them!

CURDIE. This must be the Royal Bedchamber. Stop a minute. Hold the torch, but don't let it fall on their faces. That's *my* pickaxe.

(*CURDIE creeps up to the sleeping GOBLIN QUEEN and carefully works his pickaxe out of her grasp. He eyes her protruding feet, still in her stone shoes. On an impulse, he removes one [she does have toes!] but then she grunts and turns in her sleep and he jumps back.*)

One'll have to do it. Let's get out of here!

IRENE. Follow me! Well be safe now.

CURDIE. How can you be sure?

IRENE. Because my grandmother is taking care of us.

CURDIE. That's all nonsense. I don't know what you mean.

IRENE. If you don't know what I mean, what right do you have to call it nonsense? Come on!

(*They exit. Blackout.*)

Scene 18. Curdie Meets Grandmother (Sort Of)

(*Grandmother's room. But this time it looks very different. The spinning wheel, chair, bed, chest-of-drawers etc. are all gone. In their places, a broken wagon-wheel, an old wine cask, a pile of dirty straw, and a broken wooden crate. If any other set decoration exists it should be of the same character. The room is empty of people. A knock on the door. After a moment, IRENE opens the door and enters with CURDIE. She crosses joyfully to the wine cask and addresses the air above it as if GRANDMOTHER were sitting on the cask.*)

IRENE. Yes, I'm safe Grandmother. And look—I've brought Curdie.

(*Pause. IRENE listens a moment, and moves to sit on the cask, as if sitting in Grandmother's lap. She looks up to where her face would be.*)

I'm sure he *is* a good boy, Grandmother—only he wouldn't believe what I told him. That's why I've brought him along.

(Pause.)

Yes, Grandmother, I dare say you're right. But he'll believe me now. Won't you, Curdie?

(CURDIE has been standing this whole time with his mouth hanging open, staring in astonishment at IRENE.)

CURDIE. Er—

IRENE. Make a bow to my grandmother, Curdie.

CURDIE. I don't think that's very funny.

IRENE. I'm not trying to be funny, only Grandmother *is* a queen, you know.

CURDIE. I don't see any grandmother.

IRENE. Not see any grandmother, when I'm sitting in her lap?

CURDIE. No, I don't, and you know I don't.

IRENE. Don't you see the lovely fire of roses, and the beautiful blue bed, and the light hanging from the roof like the moon?

CURDIE. I see a barrel and some junk and a heap of musty straw. I see a big, bare attic, and a ray of sunlight coming through a hole in the middle of the roof and shining on your head. You're making sport with me, Princess, and after what we've been through today I don't think it's very kind.

IRENE. But don't you hear my grandmother talking to me?

CURDIE. I hear a lot of pigeons, that's all. I think you had better drop this and go down to your room like a good girl.

IRENE. But, Curdie!

CURDIE. If you won't come down, I'll go without you. I think that will be better anyway, for I'm sure nobody who met us would believe a word we said to them. I don't expect anybody but my own father and mother to believe me. *They* know I wouldn't tell a story.

IRENE. And yet *you* won't believe *me*, Curdie?

CURDIE. I can't, and I can't help it.

(CURDIE starts to exit.)

IRENE. Oh, Grandmother, what should I do?

(There is a pause, while CURDIE waits for her to accompany him down, and she "listens.")

CURDIE. You're not coming, are you?

IRENE. No, Curdie, my grandmother says I must let you go. Turn to the right when you get to the bottom of the stairs—

CURDIE. *(Rudely:)* Oh, I don't doubt I can find my way without you, Princess—or your old granny's thread either.

IRENE. Oh, Curdie!

CURDIE. I wish I had gone home at once. I'm very much obliged to you.

(He turns on his heel and storms out the door. Blackout. We hear Grandmother's music, rising up to cover the scene change.)

Scene 19. Mrs. Peterson's Story

(The Peterson house. CURDIE, PETER, and MRS. PETERSON are seated at dinner as before.)

MRS. PETERSON. And what happened after that?

CURDIE. What do you mean?

MRS. PETERSON. You'd escaped from those horrible goblins. You ought to be happy, but I've never seen you more gloomy.

PETER. And you don't talk about that lovely child as you ought.

MRS. PETERSON. She saved your life—at considerable risk to her own. Yet somehow you don't seem to think much of it.

CURDIE. She talked such nonsense. And she told me a pack of things that weren't a bit true, and I can't get over it. I can't bear liars, especially when they do it to make sport of me.

PETER. But are you really sure she lied?

CURDIE. She must have done!

MRS. PETERSON. Listen, Curdie. You confess that there's something about the whole affair that you don't understand?

CURDIE. Of course, Mother. I can't understand how a girl who knows nothing about the mountain, or even that I was shut up in it, should come all that way alone, straight to where I was—and lead me back out as well, when I shouldn't have known a step of the way.

MRS. PETERSON. Then you have no right to say what she told you was not true.

CURDIE. But Mother—

MRS. PETERSON. She did get you out, and she must have had something to guide her. Why not a thread as well as a ball of twine? There is something you don't understand, and her explanation may be the right one.

CURDIE. But her explanation is no explanation at all, and I can't believe it!

MRS. PETERSON. That may be only because you don't understand it. Now, I don't blame you for not being able to believe it, but I do blame you for thinking such a child would try to deceive you. She told you all she knew.

PETER. Count on it, my boy.

MRS. PETERSON. Until you had found a better explanation, you might at least have been more sparing in your judgment.

CURDIE. (*Ashamed:*) That's what something inside me has been saying all along.

MRS. PETERSON. Of course it is.

CURDIE. But what about the old grandmother? That's what I can't get over. To take me up to an old garret, and try and convince me it was a beautiful room with blue walls and silver stars and who knows what all! She might at least have got some old woman up

there to pass off as her precious grandmother, but there was no one, Mother. No one at all!

MRS. PETERSON. Did she speak as if she saw these things herself?

CURDIE. You'd have thought she really meant and believed every word of it—and none of it was true! It's too bad of her!

MRS. PETERSON. Perhaps some people can see things others can't, you know. I think I will tell you something I once saw myself—only perhaps you won't believe me.

CURDIE. Oh, Mother! Surely I don't deserve that! Of course I'll believe *you!*

MRS. PETERSON. But what I'm going to tell you is very strange, and if you were to say after hearing it that I must have been dreaming—

CURDIE. Do tell me, mother. Perhaps it will help me to think better of the princess.

MRS. PETERSON. That's why I'm tempted to tell you. But before I do, I should tell you that there have always been rumors about the King's family. All good, mind you, but very strange. There's something more than common there, Curdie. But here's my story: One night I had been to the mine to take your father some supper, and I set off alone home. It was quite dark, but I knew the way, of course. I got on perfectly well for a while, but when I got to that little place where the path makes a sharp turn around that big rock, I suddenly found myself surrounded by half a dozen goblins—the first I had ever seen. One of them blocked the path and they all began tormenting and teasing me—it makes me shudder to think of it even now.

CURDIE. If only I had been with you!

MRS. PETERSON. I was afraid they were going to tear me to pieces when suddenly a great white light shone upon me. A broad ray, like a shining road, came down from a large globe of silvery light, not very high up—indeed, not so high up as the horizon, so it could not have been a new star or the moon or anything. The goblins were dazed for a moment, and I thought they were going to run

away, but they started in on me in a moment. But at that very moment, down the path from the globe of light came a bird, shining like silver in the sun. With its wings straight out it shot sliding down the slope of the light. It looked to me like a white pigeon, but whatever it was, when the goblins caught sight of it coming straight down on them, they took to their heels and scampered away, leaving me safe, only frightened.

CURDIE. Cor!

MRS. PETERSON. And as soon as it had sent them off, the bird went gliding up the light, and the moment it reached the globe, the light disappeared, just as if a shutter had been closed, and I never saw it again. But I had no trouble with the goblins after that night.

CURDIE. How strange!

MRS. PETERSON. Yes, it was strange. But I can't help believing it, whether you do or not.

PETER. It's exactly as she told it to me the very next morning.

CURDIE. You don't think I'm doubting my own mother?!

MRS. PETERSON. There are other people in the world quite as well worth believing as your mother, Mr. Curdie. There are mothers far more likely to tell lies than that little girl.

CURDIE. But princesses have told lies before as well.

MRS. PETERSON. Not princesses like that child. She's a good girl—I'm certain of it. Count on it—you will have to be sorry for behaving so to her.

CURDIE. I'm sorry now.

MRS. PETERSON. You ought to go and tell her so, then.

CURDIE. I don't see how I could manage that. They wouldn't let a miner boy like me have a word with her alone, and I couldn't tell her in front of that nurse of hers. She'd ask no end of questions, and I don't know how many of them the princess would like me to answer.

MRS. PETERSON. You may be right, there,

CURDIE. But I may have a chance before long. In the meantime, I mean to do something for her—to repay her for saving my life. I think the princess is in very great danger.

PETER. What do you mean?

CURDIE. Father, I think I know now what the cobs are planning. I know *where* they're digging to—and I think I know *why*. Listen—

(The three put their heads together to listen to CURDIE's story as the lights go down. The sounds of goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 20. Lootie Is Rude

(Irene's room. She is asleep in bed. LOOTIE stands over her bed. Several MEN-AT-ARMS, among them SIR WALTER, also look on. Additional SERVANTS should also be present if available. IRENE opens her eyes.)

IRENE. Are they gone?

LOOTIE. *(Very brittle:)* Are who gone?

IRENE. Those horrible creatures! Are they gone?

LOOTIE. You naughty, naughty little princess!

IRENE. What?

LOOTIE. How could you do it? How could you get under the covers like that, and make us all think you were lost?

IRENE. But I—

LOOTIE. And you kept it up all day, as well! It's anything but fun for us, you know, hunting all over the castle, thinking the most horrible things have happened.

IRENE. But I didn't do that, Lootie, I—

LOOTIE. Don't tell stories!

IRENE. *(Her bewilderment turned to anger:)* Then I shall tell you nothing at all.

LOOTIE. That's just as bad.

IRENE. Just as bad to say nothing as to tell stories? I will ask my Papa about that. He won't think so. And I don't think he will like you to say so.

LOOTIE. (*Shaking her:*) Tell me directly what you mean by it!

IRENE. When I tell you the truth, you accuse me of telling stories. It seems I must begin telling stories before you will believe me.

LOOTIE. You are very rude, Princess.

IRENE. *You* are so rude, Lootie, that I will not speak to you again until you are sorry. Why should I, when I know you will not believe me?

LOOTIE. You deserve to be punished for your wickedness!

IRENE. (*To SIR WALTER, very formal:*) Sir Walter, I do not think my Papa would wish me to have a nurse who speaks to me as Lootie does. If she thinks I tell lies, she had better either say so to my Papa or go away. Will you take charge of me until my King-Papa comes? I will ask him to come as soon as he can.

SIR WALTER. (*With a deep bow:*) With the greatest pleasure, Princess. I shall send my servant at once, on the fastest horse, to tell your King-Papa that Your Royal Highness desires his presence. When you have chosen one of the under servants to wait on you, I will order the room cleared.

(LOOTIE bursts into tears and slowly collapses into a corner. IRENE takes pity on her.)

IRENE. I think, Sir Walter, that I will keep Lootie. But I put myself under your care. (*Addressing the assembly:*) Will you all please go away? I am quite safe and well, and I did not hide myself for the sake of amusing myself or of troubling my people. Lootie, will you help me to dress?

(Blackout. The sounds of goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 21. Captured Again

(Outside the castle. Night. The MEN-AT-ARMS, including SIR WALTER, stand guard. [There should be at least two or three MEN-AT-ARMS, and there may be up to six if the actors are available. The lines can be distributed amongst them. There need not necessarily be any scenery at all, as the dialogue makes the location clear. This scene could easily be played before the main drape.])

SIR WALTER. Don't let down your guard, lads. We've a princess and a castle to protect.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. Protect 'em from what? 'Swhat I want to know.

SIR WALTER. From any and all dangers. You know the orders as well as I do.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. The old King must love his little princess a powerful lot.

SIR WALTER. Well, it stands to reason. She's all the old man has left. Her mother died in childbirth.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. Seen any of them queer creatures this night? Right give me the creeps, they do, for all that they never seem to do no harm.

SIR WALTER. I don't know that. The princess claims that two of them entered her chamber the other day and near frightened her into a decline.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. Aye, well, the princess claims a lot of things, come to that.

SIR WALTER. *(Sighing:)* I can't deny it. Still, she's a good lass at heart, for all her fancies.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. Shh!

(He holds up a hand for silence, and gestures with his head towards one side of the stage. One of the MEN takes up his crossbow and fires a bolt off the stage. A voice cries out in pain.)

VOICE. Ow! Cor!

(The MEN-AT-ARMS spread out, and, communicating silently through gestures, approach an unseen target just offstage. Suddenly one of the MEN-AT-ARMS dashes off the stage and comes back with a struggling CURDIE.)

CURDIE. Hey! Get off me!

A MAN-AT-ARMS. It's a boy! I thought it was one of those demons!

SIR WALTER. What are you about here, boy?

(CURDIE'S CAPTOR shakes him violently.)

CURDIE. About to have a little rough usage, apparently.

SIR WALTER. Impertinence will do you no good. You have no business here in the King's grounds. If you don't give a true account of yourself, you shall hang for a thief.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. What else could he be?

CURDIE. Let me go! Please, you must! The princess—

SIR WALTER. *(Suddenly very alert:)* What about the princess?

CURDIE. I—I don't know whether I can trust you.

SIR WALTER. *(Haughtily:)* We are the King's own men-at-arms!

CURDIE. Well, I will tell you all about it—if you promise to listen and do nothing rash.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. Well, I call that cool! He'll tell us what mischief he was about, *if* we promises to do as he pleases! Ain't that nice?

CURDIE. Will you listen? I was up to no mischief—

(But CURDIE has fainted.)

A MAN-AT-ARMS. He's fainted!

SIR WALTER. *(Examining him:)* It's loss of blood. You hit him with your crossbow. He's badly hurt.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. Good enough for him. Save us the trouble of hanging him.

SIR WALTER. No. I don't know what it is, but I almost believe he's not a thief. In any case, since we don't know, he must be cared for. Bring him inside. We'll patch him up as best we can.

(As he is picked up, CURDIE revives a little, and cries out deliriously.)

CURDIE. Hurry! The princess! The cobs! The princess!

A MAN-AT-ARMS. Delirious. He don't know what he's saying.

CURDIE. Don't guard the walls! Guard the cellars! Guard the dungeons!

A MAN-AT-ARMS. See that? What fool would guard the dungeons, when there ain't nobody bein' kept in 'em? He's raving, he is.

CURDIE. The dungeons! The danger is below! Below!

(And he's carried off.)

SIR WALTER. *(Calling after those carrying CURDIE:)* And mind you lock him up securely as well! We don't want him wandering the castle!

(Blackout. The sounds of goblin picks rise up, covering the scene change.)

Scene 22. The King Returns

(Outside the castle. The KING and IRENE are walking in the grounds. It is just growing dark. IRENE ponders her ring curiously, as if half remembering.)

IRENE. Please, Papa, can you tell me where I got this pretty ring? I can't remember.

(The KING is silent a moment. A secret smile plays about his face.)

KING. It was your Queen-Mama's.

IRENE. And why isn't it hers now?

KING. She doesn't need it anymore.

IRENE. Why?

KING. She's gone where all those rings are made.

IRENE. When will I see her?

KING. *(A tear in his eye.)* Not for some time yet.

IRENE. But are you crying, Papa?

KING. No, no. I'm just happy to see my little Irene.

IRENE. Oh, I'm so glad you've come.

KING. How could I stay away when they told me that my Irene wanted me?

IRENE. I'm glad.

KING. And now I think we'd better be getting inside.

IRENE. Oh, please, just a few more minutes! I want you all to myself for just a little while more.

KING. *(Smiling:)* But it's not safe in the grounds after dark. Sir Walter has told me some very strange tales.

IRENE. What kind of tales?

KING. Let's just get us inside, my dear.

IRENE. *(Stamping her foot:)* Oh, I do wish someone would tell me what everyone is so afraid of! I'm not a baby anymore, you know!

(The KING studies her with new interest.)

KING. You know, you're right. I think maybe you are old enough to know the dangers of the world. Listen—

(At this moment SIR WALTER enters.)

SIR WALTER. I beg your pardon, your Majesty *(Seeing IRENE:)* — Your Royal Highness. Your Majesty, I think you'd better come. That young scalawag we caught prowling the gardens the other night is finally awake.

IRENE. What young scalawag?

SIR WALTER. He's got quite a tale to tell, Your Majesty.

KING. Indeed.

SIR WALTER. I can scarcely believe it. He *may* be simply raving. I dare say he is. But there's something about him, Sire. I think he just might be telling the truth.

KING. I'll come. *(To IRENE:)* My dear, let's go in and find Lootie. We'll have to finish our talk another time. *(To SIR WALTER:)* Take me where he is.

(They exit. Blackout. The sounds of goblin picks rise up, louder than before, covering the scene change.)

Scene 23. Invasion

(A room in the castle. CURDIE sits on a simple cot, with one or more MEN-AT-ARMS watching him warily. His shoulder is heavily bandaged and he is weak. The KING stands and strides about as he listens to CURDIE's tale.)

CURDIE. You've just got to believe me, Your Majesty! I'm telling the truth!

A MAN-AT-ARMS. How dare you remain seated in the presence of his Majesty?

(CURDIE starts to struggle to his feet, but the KING holds up a hand to stop him.)

KING. Don't be absurd! Can't you see the poor lad's injured? *(To CURDIE:)* Go on, young man. I'm listening.

CURDIE. Thank you, Sire. Well, as I was saying, I been spying on the cobs 'most every night, trying to find out what they're up to.

KING. Alone?

CURDIE. Mostly. I'm not afraid of them for myself, you see. Only they're obviously planning something, and now I know what it is.

KING. *(Not believing, yet not disbelieving either:)* I see.

CURDIE. A tunnel! They're digging a tunnel! And it's almost finished.

KING. And what for? Where to?

CURDIE. I couldn't tell at first, but I've found out. The tunnel goes under the castle. They're coming here!

KING. What?

A MAN-AT-ARMS. That's ridiculous!

CURDIE. No it isn't! They're coming here—and they could be finished tonight!

A MAN-AT-ARMS. And what would a bunch of goblins want to do that for?

CURDIE. They're after the princess—as a wife for their horrid Prince Harelip!

KING. What? *(To the MEN-AT-ARMS:)* Find the princess at once, and keep her safe!

(Suddenly there is a very loud noise, as of a great fall of rock. We hear confused shouting from offstage.)

VOICES. Goblins! Demons! The cellar's collapsed! Help! *(Etc.)*

(A group of GOBLINS rushes onto the stage. The MEN-AT-ARMS and the KING draw their swords and confront the GOBLINS, who are armed with pickaxes and shovels. A brief standoff.)

KING. How dare you violate my castle, you twisted vermin?

A GOBLIN. A little less of the “twisted vermin,” from you. Show some respect to your betters!

A MAN-AT-ARMS. Insolence! Take that!

(The KING and the MEN-AT-ARMS attack. But the goblins' thick hides and rock hard heads protect them, and the battle looks to be going their way until CURDIE joins the fray.)

CURDIE. Their feet! Hit their feet! It's their weak spot!

(And he leaps from the bed, cradling his injured arm but stamping madly with his feet. He sings.)

One, two,
Hit and hew!
Three, four,
Blast and bore!

(The others catch on and begin stamping on feet as well. This, in combination with CURDIE's rhymes, gradually drives the GOBLINS back—with many angry shrieks and cries.)

Where 'tis all a hole, sir,
Never can be holes:
Why should their shoes have soles, sir,
When they've got no souls?

(The GOBLINS are driven from the stage. The MEN-AT-ARMS follow them off. The KING shouts a command as they go.)

KING. When you've driven them back to their filthy tunnel, blow the powder magazine to seal it off!

(The KING and CURDIE are left alone. Both sit heavily on the cot, exhausted. The sounds of shouting GOBLINS die down. After a moment, there is a muffled explosion. A MAN-AT-ARMS enters.)

MAN-AT-ARMS. The goblins are gone, Sire. We've blown up their tunnel. They shan't be coming back in here that way.

KING. Very good. Please find out how many are injured.

(The MAN-AT-ARMS salutes and exits. The KING puts his hand on CURDIE's uninjured shoulder.)

It's all thanks to you that we're all safe.

CURDIE. I'm just glad someone finally believed me.

KING. And only just in time, too. But don't blame them too much. Sometimes it can be very difficult to believe what we cannot understand.

CURDIE. *(Ashamed:)* Oh!

KING. What is it? Your wound?

CURDIE. Oh, I'm just as bad. I didn't believe *her* either.

KING. Who?

(LOOTIE bursts in.)

LOOTIE. The Princess! The Princess! She's gone!

(And she falls to the floor, sobbing at the KING's feet. Blackout. Sounds of goblin laughter, harsh and cruel, rise up to cover the scene change.)

Scene 24. Curdie to the Rescue

(The chamber of the goblin royal family. The GOBLIN KING, GOBLIN QUEEN, and HARELIP sit gloating at IRENE, who sits in the center, her hands tied and a burlap sack over her head and shoulders. The GOBLIN QUEEN still has only one stone shoe.)

HARELIP. I caught her myself! That means she's mine, right?

GOBLIN KING. Of course it does.

GOBLIN QUEEN. Though why you should want her—

GOBLIN KING. That was the plan all along. Once you are married, the King of the sun-people will have to do what we want.

GOBLIN QUEEN. Or he'll never see his precious princess again!

HARELIP. Let me look at her!

(And he pulls the bag off of her head. She stares defiantly at him.)

Well, hello, wife! *(Getting in her face:)* What's the matter, dearie? You should be honored. You're going to marry a prince!

(No response.)

Mother, she doesn't cry! Why won't she cry?

GOBLIN KING. *(To QUEEN:)* You must admit, my dear, it was a brilliant plan. Much better than that other plan, to flood the mines.

GOBLIN QUEEN. If you say so, husband.

GOBLIN KING. That old goat of a sun-King will be do whatever we say.

IRENE. (*Quietly:*) That's a lie.

HARELIP. It speaks!

GOBLIN KING. (*Furious:*) What did you say?

IRENE. (*Brave in the face of fear:*) I said it's a lie. My Papa will never agree to marry me to—that. (*HARELIP flinches.*) He'll never do what you say.

GOBLIN KING. Oh, I think he will—when we tell him what we'll do to his precious only daughter if he don't.

IRENE. You'll do nothing! My Papa will rescue me. And my Curdie!

GOBLIN QUEEN. Your Curdie! That little mole!? Ha! Some hope! (*Getting in her face:*) You will never see that boy again as long as you live!

HARELIP. (*Chortling:*) If you live that long!

CURDIE'S VOICE. Another lie!

GOBLIN KING. What the—

(CURDIE, the KING, and the MEN-AT-ARMS storm the chamber. As the GOBLIN KING and QUEEN face off against the MEN-AT-ARMS, HARELIP snatches up IRENE and makes for an exit.)

HARELIP. Come on, my dear—you're with me!

CURDIE.

Prince Harelip's only saving grace,
Is he can hide his ugly face!
Beneath the ground in cavern dim—
Where no one has to look at him!

(The sound of CURDIE's verse freezes HARELIP in his tracks. He puts his hands to his ears, releasing IRENE, who runs into the arms of the KING, as the GOBLIN KING and QUEEN are still circling the MEN-AT-ARMS. CURDIE hurls HARELIP to the ground, draws a sword and stands pinning him to the ground with the point to his throat.)

CURDIE. (*Shouting:*) Stop it or he dies!

HARELIP. Mom! Dad!

(The GOBLINS lower their weapons and freeze. All eyes are on CURDIE.)

CURDIE. Put 'em on the floor!

HARELIP. Do as he says! Don't let him hurt me!

(Grudgingly the GOBLINS put their weapons on the ground.)

CURDIE. That's very smart, *(Ironically:)* Your Majesties. Now, here's what's going to happen. We're going to walk out of here and back up to our world, and you are going to stay down here. You will never bother the princess or any of her people again.

HARELIP. Of course not! Of course not!

CURDIE. Irene's friends are more than a match for you lot. We've proved it three times. If you ever come near her again, we'll be there, and you'll wish you hadn't. Are we agreed?

HARELIP. Yes! Yes!

CURDIE. Your Majesties?

(Pause. CURDIE jabs the point of his sword a little harder into HARELIP's throat.)

HARELIP. Mom! Dad!

GOBLIN QUEEN. Very well! Agreed!

GOBLIN KING. *(With a crafty look:)* Agreed!

CURDIE. And just in case you were thinking of that *other* plan of yours—

GOBLIN KING. *(Innocently:)* Other plan?

CURDIE. —that's out. My father and his friends have been working day and night filling up that passage by the underground river with stone and earth. If you try to flood the mines, all the river will wash back into your own world!

GOBLIN QUEEN. We should have eaten you when we had the chance.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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