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Beware the Jabberwock

by Ron Nicol

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BEWARE THE JABBERWOCK

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1895-B

BEWARE THE JABBERWOCK was suggested by the poem ‘Jabberwocky’ in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*. The play can be performed by young people alone, or by combined youth and adult groups of all sizes. The text suggests that there are 3 Toves, 2 Borogroves and 2 Raths, but there is scope for additional non-speaking creatures of each kind, and lines may be re-allocated to provide something for extra characters to say. Some doubling of roles might also be possible. Although ‘he’ and ‘she’ have been used throughout, most creatures can be male or female, with the pronoun changed appropriately.

BEWARE THE JABBERWOCK was shortlisted in the Youth Section of the Drama Association of Wales One Act playwriting competition 2006 and in the Youth Section of the Scottish Community Drama Association Play on Words One Act playwriting competition 2006. The play, directed by Norma Nicol, was first produced by Glenrothes Theatre Company’s Junior Players in June 2007 with the following cast:

EMMA	Mahri Smith
LUCY	Bethan Massie
FIRST TOVE	Erryn Miller
SECOND TOVE	Stacey Miller
THIRD TOVE	Shannon McCabe
JUBJUB BIRD	Amanda Wallace
QUEEN	Chelbie McMahon
FIRST BOROGROVE	Aine Pocock
SECOND BOROGROVE	Alan McGee
FIRST RATH	Jodie McGee
SECOND RATH	Jack Sweeney
PRINCE PERCY	Matthew Bain
TUMTUM TREE	Aine Pocock
JABBERWOCK	Steven Bain
FIRST BANDERSNATCH	Eilidh Smith
SECOND BANDERSNATCH	Caitlin Massie

CHARACTERS

EMMA

LUCY, HER YOUNGER SISTER

FIRST TOVE

SECOND TOVE

THIRD TOVE

JUBJUB BIRD

THE QUEEN

FIRST BOROGROVE

SECOND BOROGROVE

FIRST RATH

SECOND RATH

PRINCE PERCY

TUMTUM TREE

JABBERWOCK

FIRST BANDERSNATCH

SECOND BANDERSNATCH

PLACE

Tulgey Wood

TIME

Storytime

For Joe, Jamie, Otto and Orin.

(SETTING: A sunny glade in a wood, surrounded by bushes. There's a sundial upstage center, several signs reading 'To Tulgey Wood' each pointing in a different direction, a small sign 'Keep Off The Grass' and a large one 'Beware the Jabberwock'.)

(EMMA and LUCY are sitting on the ground. EMMA is reading "Jabberwocky," but LUCY has fallen asleep with her head resting in EMMA's lap.)

EMMA. *(reading)* 'Beware the Jabberwock, my son! The jaws that bite, the claws that catch! Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun the frumious Bandersnatch!'

(looks down)

Oh. Lucy, you've fallen asleep! You can't think much of my reading, that's clear.

(strokes LUCY's hair)

Mind you, I'm feeling rather tired myself...

(EMMA yawns, and soon falls asleep. A head pops out from behind a tree or a bush, peers about and pops back. Another head pops out somewhere else, peers about, and pops back. Then a third. Soon heads are popping out and in everywhere – the more the better. A weird creature emerges cautiously. The FIRST TOVE. It looks carefully all round. Several other TOVES cautiously appear. The SECOND TOVE checks the sundial.)

SECOND TOVE. Brillig!

FIRST TOVE. Is it?

SECOND TOVE. Of course it is. The sundial says so, and the sun's never wrong.

THIRD TOVE. Time to gyre.

FIRST TOVE. Time to gimble!

SECOND TOVE. It is, isn't it!

THIRD TOVE. You can say that again!

SECOND TOVE. It is, isn't it!

THIRD TOVE. You just had to do that, didn't you? Just had to say it again.

SECOND TOVE. You expected me to. It's a joke.

THIRD TOVE. I'm not very good at jokes.

FIRST TOVE. Stop gribing, you two! The sun's out! Come on, Toves, let's gyre and gimble!

THIRD TOVE. Wait! There's somebody here.

(The TOVES gather round EMMA and LUCY. The FIRST TOVE reaches out cautiously and gently pushes EMMA, who stirs but doesn't wake. The SECOND TOVE prods LUCY, who wakes and sits up. LUCY and the TOVES stare at each other for a moment or two until the TOVES quickly exit wherever possible. LUCY shakes EMMA, who wakes.)

LUCY. Emma! I saw something. They looked like badgers, but I don't think they were.

EMMA. You imagined it. It's that poem about slithy toves gyring and gimbling in the wabe...

LUCY. And the mome raths and borogroves. I remember.

EMMA. Come on, it's getting late and we ought to go home. It's this way, I think...

(EMMA and LUCY exit. The TOVES peep out cautiously from their hiding places. EMMA and LUCY re-enter. The TOVES withdraw.)

LUCY. This is where we started.

EMMA. Oh. Well – maybe it's this way...

(They exit. The birds have stopped singing. The TOVES peep out cautiously from their hiding places then withdraw as EMMA and LUCY re-enter.)

LUCY. It's the very same place again. Come on, Em, own up. We're lost, aren't we?

EMMA. Everything's changed somehow, and these signs are all pointing in different directions. And we don't want to go to Tulgey Wood – we're already in it and we want to get out of it.

LUCY. (*reading the sign*) 'Beware the Jabberwock'. Why do we have to beware the Jabberwock?

EMMA. I think it means 'beware *of* the Jabberwock'.

LUCY. I know that, silly, but why should we beware? Oh. That's the one in the poem, isn't it? With jaws that bite and claws that catch? Or is that the Jubjub Bird?

JUBJUB BIRD. (*off*) Jubjub! Jubjub! Jubjub!

(*The light dims as a dark shadow crosses upstage from right to left. The JUBJUB BIRD.*)

LUCY. Oh, look! What a strange bird. Couldn't we...?

EMMA. No we couldn't! The creatures in this wood might be dangerous.

LUCY. Beware the Jabberwock!

EMMA. No, Lucy. The Jabberwock doesn't really exist –

LUCY. Then why's this sign here?

(*A small round QUEEN enters right. She's out of breath and looking very worried.*)

QUEEN. Oh our goodness! Oh, our beard and whiskers!

(*While EMMA's attention is on the QUEEN, LUCY exits unobtrusively upstage left.*)

EMMA. Excuse me, could you help us?

QUEEN. Awfully sorry, can't stop. Busy, busy. Oh, our beard and whiskers!

(*The QUEEN rushes across the stage and exits left.*)

EMMA. Wait! Oh, she's gone. We'd better go too. Lucy! Where are you? Oh no, the silly girl must've gone after that bird.

(*EMMA exits left. The TOVES enter.*)

FIRST TOVE. They've gone. We can gyre and gimble in peace...

(*The BOROGROVES enter right.*)

FIRST BOROGROVE. Right then, you Toves, move on. No gyring and gimbling here. The wabe is ours.

FIRST TOVE. No it isn't.

SECOND TOVE. (*raising its fists*) We'll fight you for it.

FIRST BOROGROVE. We refuse to stoop to fisticuffs to defend what's undeniably our own property.

SECOND TOVE. (*dancing about with fists raised*) Come on! Put up your hands.

SECOND BOROGROVE. We don't have hands.

FIRST TOVE. Scared, eh?

SECOND BOROGROVE. Yes – I mean, no, of course not.

SECOND TOVE. (*dancing about belligerently*) Put 'em up, put 'em up! Come on, put em up!

SECOND BOROGROVE. Now look here...

(*As the SECOND BOROGROVE steps forward, the SECOND TOVE takes fright and dodges behind one of the others.*)

THIRD TOVE. Look out! They're coming back! They're coming back!

(*The TOVES disappear as EMMA enters left.*)

EMMA. Lucy? Is that you? Oh!

FIRST BOROGROVE. Can't you read the signs, young lady? Keep off the grass.

EMMA. But there's grass everywhere. I can't help walking on it.

FIRST BOROGROVE. Just because you can't doesn't mean you wouldn't if you could, so you should even if you can't.

EMMA. I beg your pardon?

FIRST BOROGROVE. You can beg my pardon all you like, but I'm not going to argue legalities and technicalities with an inferior creature like you.

EMMA. Inferior creature!

FIRST BOROGROVE. Do you deny you're an inferior creature?

EMMA. I should think I do!

FIRST BOROGROVE. You only think so? Don't you know?

EMMA. Of course I do!

FIRST BOROGROVE. You might think you know, you might even know you think, but you obviously can't read because the sign says 'Keep Off The Grass.' And don't stare. It's rude to stare.

EMMA. You're staring at me. Aren't you being rude?

FIRST BOROGROVE. I could be much ruder than this if I tried.

EMMA. Please don't, you're quite rude enough as it is. Who are you, anyway?

FIRST BOROGROVE. We're The Borogroves. I expect you've heard of us.

EMMA. Of course. I'm pleased to meet you, Mr Borogrove – or is it Mrs Borogrove?

FIRST BOROGROVE. *The* Borogroves. Don't you know what '*The*' means? *The* Borogroves. The *original* Borogroves.

EMMA. (*holding out her hand*) Pleased to meet you.

FIRST BOROGROVE. Don't come too close! Who knows what diseases you might be carrying. And there are fleas, of course.

EMMA. I don't have fleas.

FIRST BOROGROVE. Maybe you do and maybe you don't –

EMMA. I don't!

FIRST BOROGROVE. Don't interrupt! Know your place, young lady, and mind your tongue!

EMMA. Well I never!

FIRST BOROGROVE. I'm not surprised you haven't, if that's your attitude.

(*The FIRST BOROGROVE turns its back and sulks.*)

SECOND BOROGROVE. Please don't take offence. I'm delighted to make your acquaintance.

EMMA. (*holding out her hand*) Pleased to meet you. Oh – you don't have hands...

SECOND BOROGROVE. No matter. Bowing is a much superior method of greeting.

(The SECOND BOROGROVE bows. EMMA returns the bow. The SECOND BOROGROVE bows again. EMMA starts to bow in return but then realises that these formalities could go on for ever.)

EMMA. I wonder, have you seen my little sister Lucy anywhere? I've lost her.

SECOND BOROGROVE. How very careless. Have you enquired at the Lost Property Office?

EMMA. No, I haven't. Where is it?

SECOND BOROGROVE. Nobody's seen it for ages, but as your sister's Lost Property, that's where you should enquire.

EMMA. But I don't know where to find it.

SECOND BOROGROVE. If you knew where to find it, it wouldn't be the *Lost* Property Office, would it?

EMMA. *(exasperated)* But that doesn't make sense!

SECOND BOROGROVE. Nothing makes sense in Tulgey Wood. It's much more fun that way. You'll get used to it.

EMMA. I don't want to get used to it. I want to go home – as soon as I've found my sister. I wonder if you'd mind telling me where I am?

SECOND BOROGROVE. Well, this is the exact centre of the wood. It's called the wabe.

EMMA. The wabe? Why?

SECOND BOROGROVE. Because it stretches way before us, and way behind us, and way beyond us in every direction, of course. Just follow the signs and when you can't see them any more you'll know you're out of the wood.

EMMA. But they all point in different directions. Which path should I take?

(The FIRST BOROGROVE has had enough of sulking and decides to intervene.)

FIRST BOROGROVE. My dear child! You can't take any of them. They don't belong to you!

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