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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

THE THWARTING OF BARON BOLLIGREW

by Robert Bolt

SAMUEL FRENCH

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CHARACTERS

(*in order of their appearance*)

STORYTELLER
THE DUKE
HIS KNIGHTS
SIR DIGBY VAYNE-TRUMPINGTON
SIR GRACELESS STRONGBODY
SIR PERCIVAL SMOOTHELY-SMOOTHE
SIR OBLONG FITZ OBLONG
JUNIPER
CAPTAIN
JASPER, 15TH BARON BOLLIGREW
SQUIRE BLACKHEART
PEASANTS
MEN-AT-ARMS
LORD MAYOR
OBIDIAH, a peasant
MAGPIE
A SECRETARY
DR MOLOCH
MAZEPPA
THE DRAGON
A CORPORAL
A COOK
DRUMMER and **CYMBALIST**

The action of the play
takes place on a bare stage

ACT I

The curtain rises on a stage which is dark except for a single spot down centre, in which stands the **STORYTELLER**. *He wears something unique, to set him apart.*

STORYTELLER A long time ago – in the days when dragons were still common – there lived a Duke. And whenever news was brought in of a dragon ravaging some part of the country the Duke sent one of his Knights away in shining armour to deal with it. After a few weeks the Knight would return with the tip of the dragon's tail to prove that he had killed it. Dragons are excessively vain, and when the tips of their tails are cut off they die, of mulligrubs. The return of the Knights would be announced like this:

A fanfare sounds. The lights come up, revealing a stage bare of scenery except for drapes and a cyclorama. At a round table sit the **DUKE** *and the* **KNIGHTS**. *The* **DUKE** *is an elderly, well-fed aristocrat, well-meaning and indolent. He wears civilian garb, fairy-tale period. The* **KNIGHTS** *wear armour, except for* **JUNIPER**, *who wears less magnificent civvies than the* **DUKE**. *They wear surcoats bearing the Royal Strawberry. The seat on* **DUKE***'s left is vacant, and other empty ones are to be seen round the table.*

(moving to one side and announcing) Sir Digby Vayne-Trumpington!

TRUMPINGTON *enters.*

DUKE Ah, there you are, Trumpington. Glad to have you back. Got the tip of the dragon's tail?

TRUMPINGTON *places the bright blue tail-tip on the table. The* **DUKE** *inspects it.*

Not very big, is it?

TRUMPINGTON It was not a large dragon, Your Grace, no; but singularly vicious.

FIRST KNIGHT They can be tricky, those little blue beggars.

There is a murmur of agreement.

DUKE Not complaining, Trumpington. We can't all be St Georges, can we?

While **TRUMPINGTON** *sits, there is a fanfare.*

STORYTELLER Sir Graceless Strongbody!

There is a pause all looking off expectantly.

DUKE *(indulgently)* Likes to make an entrance, Strongbody... *(The pause continues. Less indulgently)* Call him again.

STORYTELLER Sir Grace...!

STRONGBODY *enters dragging a huge green tail. Murmurs of appreciation and then polite clapping come from the* **KNIGHTS**.

DUKE I must *say,* Graceless! I think we'll have this stuffed, gentlemen. How d'you do it?

STRONGBODY *(gruffly)* Oh, usual methods, ye know.

DUKE Aha – "Deeds not Words", the old Strongbody motto.

There is another fanfare.

STORYTELLER Sir Percival Smoothely-Smoothe!

SMOOTHE *enters.*

DUKE Good show, Smoothe; back on time as usual. Find your dragon?

SMOOTHE *puts down two red tail-tips.*

Good Lord, *two* dragons!

SMOOTHE No, Your Grace, one dragon with two tails.

DUKE Well I never saw such a thing in my life. Gave you a bit of trouble I dare say?

SMOOTHE *(sitting)* Not really, Your Grace. It seemed to be confused.

DUKE Ah, modest, modest. I like that, Smoothe, like it. Well now who's missing? *(Looking at the vacant seat to his left)* Oh, Oblong. Not like him to be late. Well we'll just wait for Oblong, gentlemen, and then I have a little announcement to make, yes...

There is another fanfare.

STORYTELLER Sir Oblong Fitz Oblong!

SIR OBLONG FITZ OBLONG *enters sadly. He is short, plump, with a pink innocent face topped by a tonsure of white hair. He is pedantic and almost priggy, and wears silver armour.*

DUKE There you are, Oblong; mission accomplished?

OBLONG Yes, Your Grace.

DUKE Got the tail?

OBLONG Yes, Your Grace.

DUKE *(kindly)* Well perk up, man. Whatever's the matter?

OBLONG *(producing a tail)* It was a very small dragon. Your Grace. Small and, er, pink. I don't think it can have been fully grown. It meant no harm I'm sure. *(He regards the small pink tail on table, then takes a handkerchief from the sleeve of his armour and blows his nose)*

DUKE Now Oblong, we all know how you feel about animals, and I'm sure respect you for it. *(He looks round)*

There is a murmur of confirmation from the **KNIGHTS**.

But – Duty First, eh?

OBLONG *(bracing)* Yes, Your Grace. *(He sits left of* **DUKE***)*

DUKE That's it. *(Patting* **OBLONG***'s shoulder as he sits)* Never knew an Oblong hold back in the face of duty. *(Briskly)* Now, Juniper my dear chap, read the next item on the agenda will you?

JUNIPER Er, "Activities for the coming Season", Your Grace.

DUKE Exactly! *(Rising)* Gentlemen, a happy announcement: There *are* no activities for the coming season. These *(the tails on the table)* were the last dragons in the Dukedom. Thanks to your untiring efforts over the years our peasantry may now reap their harvests – and pay their taxes – without interference. Our townsfolk can make their profits – and pay their taxes freely. And in short, there isn't a blessed thing for us to do.

The **KNIGHTS** *rise and congratulate one another noisily shaking hands, patting backs, etc. The hubbub dies and they all sit.*

OBLONG How perfectly splendid, Your Grace.

DUKE Isn't it, isn't it?

OBLONG Now we can move on somewhere else.

DUKE *(faintly)* Er, "move on", Oblong?

OBLONG Yes, Your Grace.

DUKE Whatever for?

OBLONG *(mildly puzzled)* To succour the poor and needy, Your Grace. Up North, for instance – dragons, barons, goblins. Having a very thin time of it up North, the poor and needy.

DUKE But my dear fellow – the climate!

OBLONG Well, South, then, Your Grace.

SMOOTHE *(gently)* May I say something, Your Grace?

DUKE Smoothe! Yes! Please, please.

SMOOTHE Well gentlemen, we've put this district into some sort of shape – and it's not been easy as you know. It seems to me we've earned a breather.

DUKE Earned a breather. Well said, Smoothe. Late lie-in in the morning. Bit of jousting in the afternoon perhaps. Substantial supper; jolly good game of musical bumps and off to bed. *(Appealing all round)* Where's the harm in that?

A murmur of considered agreement.

I'll put it to the vote. Democratic procedure – can't say fairer than that, Oblong. All those in favour of the programme just outlined, please say "Aye".

ALL BUT OBLONG Aye!

DUKE Thank you. All those in favour of moving on, to wild, wet, baron and dragon infested areas, please say "Aye".

OBLONG Er, Aye.

DUKE *(cheerfully)* Well there it is, old man. You're outvoted.

OBLONG *(diffident)* Under the terms of our Charter, Your Grace, I *think* a vote on this subject has to be unanimous. Nobody must disagree.

DUKE *(weakly)* That right?

JUNIPER *(looking at the Charter on the table)* I'm just looking... Yes, here it is, Your Grace, Clause Seven. *(He passes the Charter to the* **DUKE***)*

DUKE Well... *(Petulantly)* Very ill-judged Clause, I would say. Now what?

JUNIPER If we can't agree, Your Grace, we must refer the matter to the Royal Court.

STRONGBODY *(gloomily)* And we know what they'll say...

OBLONG I'm sorry to be the fly in the ointment, gentlemen, but to succour the poor and needy – dash it all gentlemen, it's our Knightly Vow!

At this, All look uncomfortably at the table. The small pink tail twitches slowly in the silence. **ALL** *look.* **OBLONG** *is distressed.*

Oh dear; Your Grace, would you mind...

DUKE *(testy)* Yes, yes, take it away if it upsets you: take them *all* away.

OBLONG *rises and picks up the tails.*

OBLONG *(muttering; embarrassed)* 'Scuse me, gentlemen – I – *(He moves to go, then turns. Apologetically)* – er – oh dear...

OBLONG *exits with the tails, watched by all.*

JUNIPER Well, there goes the late lie-in.

STRONGBODY And the joustin'.

TRUMPINGTON And the musical bumps.

JUNIPER And the substantial suppers.

FIRST KNIGHT *(uneasy)* Got a point there, you know, about the Knightly Vow.

DUKE Yes, yes; capital creature; heart of gold; but...

SMOOTHE But inclined to be dogmatic, Your Grace.

DUKE Exactly.

SMOOTHE I think I see a possible solution.

ALL *raise their heads and look to* **SMOOTHE.**

Supposing Oblong were to leave us. On a mission. A mission to – say – the Bolligrew Islands.

DUKE The Bolligrew Islands!

FIRST KNIGHT I say, that's a bit steep.

TRUMPINGTON D'you think he'd go?

JUNIPER It's worth trying. Your Grace might have him appointed a Royal Knight Errant.

DUKE And then when he'd gone we could put the matter to the vote again and – er...?

JUNIPER And nobody would disagree!

DUKE Unanimous vote, as required by our Charter!

SMOOTHE Exactly, Your Grace.

DUKE *(solemnly)* There's no doubt, gentlemen, the Bolligrew Islands *need* a Knight Errant.

JUNIPER Unquestionably.

DUKE And Oblong is the obvious choice.

FIRST KNIGHT That's true.

DUKE I dare say he'll be very happy there.

SMOOTHE *coughs warningly.* **OBLONG** *enters.*

Oblong my dear chap, what would you say to the idea of a mission to the Bolligrew Islands?

OBLONG I should say it was a very *good* idea, Your Grace! When do we start?

DUKE Well, we were thinking of a – more of a – one man mission, you know.

OBLONG Oh. Me?

DUKE Yes. Smoothe here suggested you.

OBLONG *(sharply)* Very good of you, Smoothe. I'm not going.

DUKE "Not", Oblong?

OBLONG No! The Bolligrew Islands! That's where Baron-Bolligrew lives – the one that pulled down the church!

DUKE *(shocked)* Did he really? I didn't know that.

OBLONG Well he did. And there's that dragon in the Bolligrew Islands too.

SMOOTHE A very *poor* specimen, I believe.

OBLONG It isn't. It's one of those black ones with red eyes.

FIRST KNIGHT *(uncomfortably)* It's a bit steep, you know.

SMOOTHE Quite right, quite right. We ought not to persuade Sir Oblong.

OBLONG *moves to his chair but is stopped by Smoothe's next words.*

It is a pity, though. I understand that Baron Bolligrew hunts.

OBLONG *(sharply)* Hunts?

SMOOTHE *(looking up in mock surprise)* Er, hunts, yes.

OBLONG *(suspiciously)* What does he hunt?

SMOOTHE *(looking to the* **DUKE***)* Pretty well anything, they say.

DUKE Foxes.

SMOOTHE *(nodding)* Foxes, bears—

TRUMPINGTON Deer—

JUNIPER Badgers—

OBLONG Oh the villain!

SMOOTHE *(offhand)* Hares, of course – little, trembling hares…

OBLONG It – really it makes one's blood boil!

SMOOTHE Your Grace, if Sir Oblong *were* going on this mission I expect His Majesty would make him a Royal Knight Errant, don't you?

DUKE Couldn't refuse. And then you could wear the purple robe, you know, with the Royal Coat of Arms and so on. I think Oblong would look well in purple, don't you, Juniper?

OBLONG *(taken with it)* Really? I must say – hares and badgers you say?

SMOOTHE Oh anything.

OBLONG The perfect brute! Your Grace, I'll go.

DUKE Excellent conclusion to a good morning's work, gentlemen. How about a little refreshment?

STORYTELLER Lemonade and ice cream on the South Terrace!

DUKE Meeting adjourned!

The **DUKE** *and* **KNIGHTS** *exit, rolling the table with them. The lights go out, except for the single spot centre as the* **STORYTELLER** *moves below it.*

STORYTELLER So Sir Oblong was appointed a Royal Knight Errant and at length –

A brown paper parcel is thrown on from wings and caught by the **STORYTELLER**.

– a parcel from the King's Court arrived at the Duke's Castle *(He opens the parcel)* containing Sir Oblong's purple robe.

OBLONG *enters into the spot, and is assisted into the robe by the* **STORYTELLER**.

Sir Oblong put it on and he found a berth on a ship—

The **CAPTAIN** *enters carrying a "mast and sail."*

—which was making the short but dangerous passage to the Bolligrew Islands.

The **CAPTAIN** *and* **OBLONG** *traverse the stage, there is a lightning flash and a thunderclap, in cover of which the* **STORYTELLER** *exits.*

The lights come up.

OBLONG These are the Bolligrew Islands are they, Captain?

CAPTAIN Yus. 'orrible aren't they? See the ruin up there? That's the church Baron Bolligrew pulled down some years back.

OBLONG He's a difficult man to get on with, I believe.

CAPTAIN 'Orrible. That's not the worst of it neither.

OBLONG No?

CAPTAIN No. See that 'illside; all black and smoky like?

OBLONG Oh yes.

CAPTAIN Dragon.

OBLONG I beg your pardon?

CAPTAIN Dragon done it. Breathin' fire like. 'Orrible.

OBLONG Doesn't Baron Bolligrew do anything about it?

CAPTAIN Not 'im. 'Untin's all 'e cares about. 'Untin' and grindin' the faces of the poor. Reg'lar terror. You thinkin' of settlin' 'ere?

OBLONG Er, well I was, yes...

CAPTAIN Wouldn't live 'ere for a million pounds myself. 'Ere we are 'owever. If you'll just stand on one side, sir. Ava-a-a-ast! Bel-a-a-ay! *(He pulls a cord, the sail furls)* There you are sir, now you can go ashore and... *(There is a crash of a shotgun offstage)* Look out! 'Ere 'e is.

JASPER, 15TH BARON BOLLIGREW *enters, carrying a twelve-bore shotgun. He is small but burly, with a red face and black whiskers; choleric and selfish but with the fascination of childish greed. He is anachronistically dressed in a loud check jacket, bowler hat, breeches, gaiters. He walks deliberately to the others. Accompanying him is* **SQUIRE BLACKHEART**, *huge and stupid. He wears black armour topped by enormous black plumes. He moons stolidly throughout the interview, chewing his moustache.*

BOLLIGREW Missed 'im. You Captain Asquith of the ship *Winkle?*

CAPTAIN Yes, my lord.

BOLLIGREW You brought me a new whip?

CAPTAIN Yes, me lord.

BOLLIGREW New spurs?

CAPTAIN Yes, me lord.

BOLLIGREW New boots?

CAPTAIN Boots, me lord?

BOLLIGREW Yes, boots. Me new ridin' boots.

CAPTAIN They didn't say nothin' about no boots, me lord.

BOLLIGREW Ho, didn't they?

CAPTAIN No, me lord.

BOLLIGREW Well you go back and get 'em.

CAPTAIN *(glancing fearfully back at the "voyage" just made)* But me lord...

BOLLIGREW Don't argue with *me,* Asquith. Just turn your ship round and get me boots.

CAPTAIN Yes, me lord.

The **CAPTAIN** *hoists sail and exits to more thunder and lightning, watched by* **ALL.**

BOLLIGREW Insolent beggar! Who might you be?

OBLONG Oblong fitz Oblong.

BOLLIGREW Gentleman?

OBLONG Yes?

BOLLIGREW Me friend, Squire Blackheart.

BLACKHEART 'D'you do?

OBLONG How...

BOLLIGREW Knight Errant, eh?

OBLONG Yes. *(Modestly)* A recent appointment.

BOLLIGREW Knight Errant, Blackheart.

BLACKHEART *grunts and nods gloomily.*

BOLLIGREW D'you hunt?

OBLONG Well, as a matter of...

BOLLIGREW I do.

OBLONG Yes, I hear you're a keen sportsman, Baron.

BOLLIGREW Keen sportsman. Right. *(Lugging out an enormous gold watch).* See that? "Presented to the Master of Bolligrew Hounds" – that's me, of course "as a mark of admiration and gratitude, by the Chairman of the Hunt Committee". Handsome timepiece, eh?

OBLONG Lovely. Who is the Chairman of the Hunt Committee?

BOLLIGREW I am. Solid gold that watch. Had to evict three or four entire families to pay for it, didn't we, Blackheart?

BLACKHEART Mm.

BOLLIGREW Blackheart does all the evictin' work round here. *(Replacing the watch)* Well. Give you a day tomorrow if you like. We're after a badger.

OBLONG Baron Bolligrew, I do not hunt!

There is a short silence.

BOLLIGREW Doesn't hunt, Blackheart.

BLACKHEART *grunts and nods gloomily.*

BOLLIGREW *(to* **OBLONG***)* Afraid of horses, very likely.

OBLONG *(stiffly)* Some of my best friends are horses...

BOLLIGREW Feller's potty, Blackheart.

BLACKHEART Hey!

BOLLIGREW What?

BLACKHEART Magpie.

BOLLIGREW *raises his gun.* **ALL** *follow a flight of an unseen bird above, then* **OBLONG** *"accidentally" steps backwards onto* **BOLLIGREW***'s foot.* **BOLLIGREW** *roars and the gun roars.* **BOLLIGREW** *hops, furious, watched apprehensively by* **OBLONG.** **BLACKHEART**, *oblivious, continues to watch the flight of the bird, offstage.*

BOLLIGREW *(eyeing* **OBLONG** *narrowly)* Did you do that on purpose? He did that on purpose, Blackheart.

BLACKHEART *(lowering his gaze to* **BOLLIGREW***)* What?

BOLLIGREW He trod on my toe. *(Still eyeing* **OBLONG** *narrowly)* Now, look here, Oblong, if you don't 'unt, what've you come for?

OBLONG *(searching his armour for the paper)* I have my instructions somewhere. *(Putting on his spectacles)* It's all pretty run-of-the-mill stuff. *(Clearing his throat)* Item: rebuild Bolligrew Island Church. Item: Restore justice to Bolligrew Island Magistrates Court. Item: Suppress Bolligrew Island Dragon.

BOLLIGREW *listens with mounting indignation but now laughs.*

BOLLIGREW Suppress...? Feller's goin' to suppress the dragon, Blackheart!

BLACKHEART *grins, the grin broadens, he breaks into guffaws.*

BOLLIGREW And – and – restore justice to – to the Magistrates Court!

BOLLIGREW *and* **BLACKHEART** *hold on to each other, helpless.*

(to **OBLONG***, wiping his eyes)* Here, here – you like to see the Court in session?

OBLONG At the earliest opportunity, Baron.

BOLLIGREW Nothing easier. *(He takes a whistle from his pocket and blows)*

The **RAGGED PEASANTRY** *enter. They are barefoot, and dressed in ragged clothes of sacking. Two* **MEN-AT-ARMS** *follow, with a bench which they put down. They wear conventional medieval costume, surcoats bearing the golden toad of the* **BOLLIGREWS**. *Last comes the* **LORD MAYOR**. *He is a timid man, wearing slightly less ragged peasant costume, with shoes, and topped by a waistcoat and his Chain of Office.*

Ready, Blackheart old man?

BLACKHEART Ready when you are, my dear feller.

BLACKHEART *and* **BOLLIGREW** *sit.*

There you are, Oblong. Court's in session.

OBLONG *sits.*

BOLLIGREW What the blazes do you think you're doing?

OBLONG I am taking my seat on the Bench, Baron.

BOLLIGREW And who the blazes gave you a seat on the Bench?

OBLONG My Royal Commission gives me a seat on the Bench, Baron.

BOLLIGREW Oh. *(Recovering)* Well that's all right. We don't mind, do we, Blackheart?

BLACKHEART Don't we?

BOLLIGREW No. Loyal subjects of His Majesty, Blackheart and me, Oblong – hope you'll notice that. Right – first case!

The **MEN-AT-ARMS** *seize a diminutive* **PEASANT**.

FIRST MAN-AT-ARMS First case!

PEASANT *(fearfully)* Here, my lord.

SECOND MAN-AT-ARMS First case present, my lord!

BOLLIGREW What's the charge?

FIRST MAN-AT-ARMS On the last day of last month, my lord, at about tea-time, prisoner was seen to prevent a horse from eating a double row of runner beans in 'is garden.

BOLLIGREW Oh. But look here, why *should* he let horses eat his runner beans?

FIRST MAN-AT-ARMS *(slightly shocked)* 'Twas your horse, my lord.

BOLLIGREW Was it! Guilty!

OBLONG *Not* guilty!

BOLLIGREW Squire Blackheart, what do you think?

BLACKHEART Guilty. Definitely.

BOLLIGREW That's two to one. Seven days bread and water and – let's see, prisoner aren't you the one with the strawberry bed?

PEASANT I 'ave got a few strawberry plants, my lord, yes...

BOLLIGREW Good – and a fine of three baskets of strawberries. You can deliver them to the Castle – back door, mind – after you've served your sentence. Next case.

MAN-AT-ARMS Here, my lord.

BOLLIGREW You?

MAN-AT-ARMS Yes, my lord.

BOLLIGREW But that's one of your men, isn't it Blackheart?

BLACKHEART *(affixing a monocle)* It is. It's my Second Huntsman.

BOLLIGREW Who's had the blazin' impudence to charge this man?

LORD MAYOR *(timidly determined)* Er, me, my lord.

BOLLIGREW You Lord Mayor? Well, I can only say that I'm surprised.

LORD MAYOR My lord, if you feel that my bringing the case is in any way disrespectful, of course...

BOLLIGREW *(holding up a solemn hand)* This is a Court of Law. Case is brought now, Lord Mayor, and must just go forward for an impartial hearing. So let's hear whatever cock-and-bull story you've cooked up.

LORD MAYOR Well, yesterday morning, my lord, I was in my sweet-shop when I saw this fellow coming along the High Street with a number of dogs.

BLACKHEART Hounds, Lord Mayor. We call 'em hounds.

LORD MAYOR Hounds. Thank you. *(He clears his throat, then continues to* **BOLLIGREW***)* He came into my shop, took down a jar of best quality humbugs and gave them to these hounds...!

BLACKHEART *(his brow clearing)* Oh that's all right, Lord Mayor! Wouldn't do 'em any harm. Hounds like humbugs. Often noticed it myself.

LORD MAYOR *(querulous)* Very well, Squire; if you can afford to give your hounds best quality humbugs at fourpence a quarter, very well. But my point is this – do you think your man paid for them? He did not. *(Shrill)* He never does!

BOLLIGREW *(weakly)* Blackheart, I don't think I can be followin'. Is he suggestin' that your man should *pay* for his humbugs?

BLACKHEART That your point, Lord Mayor?

LORD MAYOR It is, Squire, yes.

BLACKHEART Seems to be a deuced ugly spirit about, old man.

BOLLIGREW Well I—I'm dumbfounded, Blackheart. I leave it to you.

BLACKHEART Case dismissed.

BOLLIGREW Yes? Very well, then. Lord Mayor, I personally take the gravest possible view of this incident. But in the light of my colleague's recommendation to mercy and your

hitherto excellent record, I will dismiss you with a caution. Next case!

OBLONG But this is scandalous!

BOLLIGREW *(nodding; humbly)* You're probably right, Oblong. I tell you frankly, I'm too soft-hearted to be a good Magistrate. *(jovially)* Ah—it's you, Bobblenob. Brought me money?

OBIDIAH No, my lord. *(He kneels)* Mercy...

OBLONG Will somebody please tell me the circumstances of this case?

BOLLIGREW Ah yes. The circumstances my dear chap are as follows. About ten months ago this man, Obidiah Bobblenob, wilfully and maliciously chucked half a brick through one of my greenhouses...

OBIDIAH No my lord! Beg pardon my lord, but I didn't, really I didn't!

BOLLIGREW You see the sort of chap he is, Oblong; thoroughly hardened character: refuses to admit it even now. Without the slightest provocation he pitches a brick through my greenhouse. And what did I do? I fined 'im a pound. One miserable pound. I think you'll agree I was lenient.

OBLONG How do you make your living, Obidiah?

OBIDIAH I'm an egg-painter by trade, sir. I sells 'ard-boiled eggs in the market, with designs and funny faces painted on them in different colours.

BOLLIGREW And a very profitable line it is, as I expect you know!

OBLONG Then did you pay your fine?

OBIDIAH No sir, I couldn't!

OBLONG Why not?

BOLLIGREW It's a funny thing is that. It seems he had his eggs all ready for market, and the night before some hooligan

broke into his cottage and smashed 'em up. That's right, isn't it, Bobblenob?

OBIDIAH *(whispers)* Yes, my lord.

BOLLIGREW Mm. So you see, Oblong, when the next Court came round he couldn't pay. However, I wasn't disposed to be hard on him – the Bobblenobs have lived on the estate for generations. Pretty little house Bobblenob lives in – got a pond in the garden, hasn't it, Bobblenob?

OBIDIAH Yes, my lord.

BOLLIGREW Yes. *(Briskly)* So all I did was to add another pound to the fine, and leave it at that. *(He smiles complacently at* **OBLONG**, *as one expecting approval)*

OBLONG So then he owed you *two* pounds.

BOLLIGREW *(calculating)* Er, one and one – two. Yes exactly two pounds.

OBLONG And then what?

BOLLIGREW Well, Oblong, it's an extraordinary thing but the same thing happened again.

OBLONG So he couldn't pay the fine again.

BOLLIGREW Exactly—

OBLONG So you added another pound—

BOLLIGREW Making three.

OBLONG And then it happened again.

BOLLIGREW You're right, my dear chap; it did!

OBLONG And it's gone on happening ever since.

BOLLIGREW My dear Oblong, what a brain you must have!

OBLONG And who is the mysterious "hooligan" who breaks in and smashes Obidiah's eggs every day before market day, so that he can't pay his fine on Court day?

BOLLIGREW I've no idea. Have you Bobblenob?

OBIDIAH *(after a fractional hesitation)* No my Lord.

BOLLIGREW Well now: It's nine so far so today makes it ten. Nice round number. Ten pounds next Court, Bobblenob. Let's see, there's a market tomorrow morning, isn't there? We'll have a special Court for you that afternoon. And see what you can do at the market, there's a good chap.

OBIDIAH *(whispers)* Yes, my lord.

BOLLIGREW That's it. I'm relying on you, Bobblenob to save me from a painful duty. *(He digs* **BLACKHEART** *in the ribs and laughs)*

BLACKHEART *stares at him woodenly.* **BOLLIGREW** *stops laughing, turns to* **OBLONG**, *sighs.*

I'm wasted on Black'eart, I really am. Well – last case?

MAN-AT-ARMS *Last* case, my Lord!

BOLLIGREW Court will rise!

BOLLIGREW *and* **BLACKHEART** *rise, then* **OBLONG.**

And you can all clear off.

All except **BLACKHEART**, **BOLLIGREW** *and* **OBLONG** *exit hurriedly, the* **MEN-AT-ARMS** *taking the bench.* **BOLLIGREW** *takes a cigar from his pocket and lights it.*

(insolently) Got the picture?

OBLONG I have indeed.

BOLLIGREW *(nodding sympathetically)* There's nothing *you* can do here, Oblong. Go back where you came from, eh?

OBLONG Baron, Squire – I wish you good day. *(He turns to go)*

BOLLIGREW Oblong!

OBLONG *turns.* **BOLLIGREW** *approaches, pointing at him, warningly.*

I've a short way with Knights Errant.

OBLONG Well, I've a fairly short way with Barons. Good day.

OBLONG *exits.* **BOLLIGREW** *looks after him thoughtfully. He turns and looks at* **BLACKHEART.** **BLACKHEART** *is mindlessly gazing over the audience, sucking one end of his moustache.* **BOLLIGREW** *approaches him.*

BOLLIGREW Blackheart. *(Handing him a cigar)* Have a cigar.

BLACKHEART Mm? Oh, thanks. *(He takes the cigar)*

BOLLIGREW *(lighting his cigar)* We shall have trouble with that feller, Blackheart.

BLACKHEART Little fat feller just now?

BOLLIGREW That's the one. He, er—

He takes **BLACKHEART** *by the elbow; they patrol downstage, smoking cigars.*

He fancies himself as a bit of a fighter for one thing.

BLACKHEART *(interested)* Oh?

BOLLIGREW Mm. Didn't you notice how he kept lookin' at you?

BLACKHEART No?

BOLLIGREW Oh.

BLACKHEART *(anxiously)* How was he lookin' at me?

BOLLIGREW Well you know, like he thought you were a big bag of wind.

BLACKHEART What?

BOLLIGREW Mm, you know – like he thought you were a big feller but not much good in a scrap.

BLACKHEART He didn't!

BOLLIGREW He did. I wondered how you could put up with it. "How does Blackheart put up with it," that's what I kept wonderin'. I mean it's not the thing, is it, for a gentleman to put up with that?

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