

# The Dress Rehearsal

Jenny Sullivan

## **C**haracters

*Narrator\**

*Teacher*

*King Gwrtheyrn*

*Slave 1*

*Slave 2*

*Slave 3*

*Courtier 1*

*Courtier 2*

*Courtier 3*

*Student Magician Melfyn*

*Merlin*

*Guards with spears etc.*

\* I have given the narrator a name (Rhodri). However, it may add to the play's entertainment value if the narrator uses his/her real name. If possible the class teacher might also play him/herself, and the class year group should be inserted too, where indicated.

The play-within-the-play is my version of an 8<sup>th</sup> legend.  
The scene is the Great Hall of King Gwrtheyrn's Castle.

TEACHER: *[offstage throughout]* Right, class . . . This is absolutely the last rehearsal before Saint David's Day, and this time I want it right, OK? Now concentrate, *everyone*. Right, Rhodri? Off you go. Nice, loud voice now!

NARRATOR: *[facing audience: does not look happy. Muttering]* I think I should have been christened *Rhodri the Blooming Narrator*, that's what I think. That's all I ever get to do, that is. Play the rotten narrator. Do I ever get the chance to dress up? No. *You've got a nice loud voice, Rhodri*, they say. *You can be the narrator, Rhodri*, they say. So everybody else dresses up and I'm stuck in my school uni-

TEACHER: *[warningly]* Rhodri . . .

NARRATOR: Oh, all right, all right. *[Sighs]*  
This-is-the-story-of-why-our-flag-shows-a-red-dragon . . .

TEACHER: Slow down, Rhodri. Don't gabble.

NARRATOR: This is the story of why our flag shows a Red Dragon. Once upon a time there was a king named King Gwrtheyrn. He was not a Good King, because he had betrayed his own countrymen in battle, and many of them had been killed. Let's join his courtiers now to find out their opinion of him.

COURTIER 1: *[Courtiers all speak behind their hands, towards audience]* He is incredibly evil!

COURTIER 2: He is amazingly horrible!

COURTIER 3: He is totally wicked and cruel!

SLAVE 1: They think *they've* got problems? At least they aren't slaves, are they? At least he doesn't torture them.

SLAVE 2: And put them in dungeons.

SLAVE 3: And make them work until they drop.

KING: I'm King, I am, and everyone has to do as I say, or else! You there, slave!

SLAVE 1: Who, Sir, me, Sir? Yes, Sir? Master? Your Highness? Sire? Your Majesty? Your, Your, um – Your Terribleness?

KING: Fetch me some strawberries, now, slave! Fresh, ripe, red, juicy ones. AND some ice cream! And don't forget to grovel while you're doing it!

SLAVE 2: But, Your Magnificentness, strawberries aren't in season! There aren't any strawberries at all, not in March! And nobody's invented ice cream yet!

KING: That's no excuse! Guards! Throw them in the dungeons! Torture them until they bring me my strawberries! And you! Courtier Number Two! Invent me some ice cream! Now!

*Slaves 1 and 2 are dragged offstage, struggling, by the guards, who then return. The other slaves shake their heads, sadly. Courtier Number Two scratches his head, looks puzzled, and wanders off after them.*

KING: One is King, and One has decided that One is going to build Oneself a nice new castle.

COURTIER 1: A new castle, One's Majesty? May one ask where?

KING: One may. One is – oh, phooey. *I'm* going to build it right on top of that hill out there. So I can look down at my old castle and remember how rich I am.

*Courtier Two returns. He is carrying a large bowl marked 'ice cream'. He dips a wooden spoon into the (runny) mixture, looks into the bowl and shakes his head sadly. He glances at the King and hides the bowl.*

COURTIER 3: I'm sure it will be a very fine castle, Your Majesty.

KING: Of course it will! It will be the finest castle in all Wales. Because *I* am going to build it! *I! Me! One!* And it will be mine, all mine. Ha-ha-ha-ha ha-ha-ha-ha-haaaaah!

COURTIER1: *[behind hand, to audience]* Oh dear. He's having one of his not very funny turns again!

NARRATOR: At least he gets to *dress up* and have funny turns. Do I ever get to dress up? No, I don't. Not ever. It's always, *Rhodri, you can be the narrator*. I ask you, is that fair? Is it?

TEACHER: Rhodri! Stop sulking and get on with it!

*At this point, the missing slaves return.*

NARRATOR: *[loudly]* Oh, all right. *[More quietly but still audibly]* Don't get your underwear in an uproar. What happens next? Oh yes. So anyway, the King set his slaves to build his fine new castle on the hill. On the first day the slaves had to remove a huge rock that was blocking their way, so that they could haul all the stones and stuff up the hill to build the castle.

SLAVE 1: We worked all day, we did, from sunrise –

SLAVE 2: – to sunset. Exhausting, it was! My back was killing me! And oh! how my feet hurt!

SLAVE 3: Any normal Master would have let us have a lunch break, and maybe even coffee breaks, but not King Gwrtheyrn, oh no, not him.

SLAVE 1: We worked until it was too dark to see any more, and the foundations of the new castle were laid, and –

SLAVE 2: – and the walls of the new castle were just beginning to rise on the hill. Looked a treat, it did.

SLAVE 3: When we couldn't see what we were doing any more, he let us go home to bed. If you could call it bed.

SLAVE 1: It was just a hard floor. No blankets. But he did give us some supper.

SLAVE 2: If you could call it supper.

SLAVE 3: It was leftovers from his own dinner.

SLAVE 1: But he was very kind. *[Sarcastically]* I mean, he even chewed some of the food for us, first! The gristly, fatty, yukky bits.

KING: Are you lot complaining? I could arrange for you to starve, you know!

NARRATOR: He's totally horrible, isn't he? Like, really, really nasty. And STILL he gets a chance to dress up!

TEACHER: Rhodri! If I've told you once –

NARRATOR: I know, I know. Where was I? Oh, yes. Well, next morning, the King woke up and looked out of his window, expecting to see the slaves hard at work on his new castle. He stared. He could hardly believe his eyes. His castle had disappeared completely, and where the foundations and walls had been the day before, there was nothing but smooth, green grass. His slaves stood around scratching their heads and looking puzzled.

KING: Where is it? Who's got it? Who's pinched my lovely new castle? *[Glares at courtiers]* Was it you? Are you trying to be funny? Because if you are, I've got some nice cold, damp dungeons downstairs, and a very under-employed torturer!

COURTIERS: *[together, quaking]* No, Your Majesty! We're just as surprised as you are, Your Majesty. Please don't send us to the dungeons!

KING: Then come up with some ideas! Don't just stand there! Find out who did it, why don't you? Go on, think of something!

COURTIER 1: Well, Your Majesty, you could try sending for Your Magician. Perhaps he'll know.

KING: My Magician? Have I got one? Oh, yes. So I have. Right. Send for my Magician!

COURTIER 3: *[behind hand, to audience]* He might as well not have a Magician for all the good this one is. He's only a little lad. He's failed his Grade One exams three times so far, and he certainly hasn't earned his pointy hat yet! He doesn't get that until he passes Grade Ten!

COURTIER 1: Fetch the Magician! Where's the Magician?

*The Magician enters. He is very nervous and very scruffy, with large spectacles and a large, floppy flat hat that keeps falling over his nose.*

KING: *[in tones of disgust]* Are you my Magician? Good grief!

MAGICIAN: Yes, Sire. I mean, Your Majesty. Your Terribleness. Your Highness. Your, Your, Your Splendiferousness! I am. It's me. Your Magician, Your Remarkable Worshipfulness.

KING: That'll do, that'll do. Don't get carried away. I know how Magnificent I am and all that. *[Peers at Magician]* You look familiar. Do I know you? What's your name? Begins with a P? Perkins? Peebles? Peregrine? Porter? Something like that?

MAGICIAN: N-n-no, Your Highness. It's Merfyn, actually. You hired me last year.

KING: Did I? Oh, well. I hope I don't pay you too much.

MAGICIAN: No, Your Majesty. You haven't paid me anything at all yet.

KING: Good. Now, Magician, earn your pay – if I ever decide to give you any. Tell me – what's happened to my magnificent new castle? Where's it gone?

MAGICIAN: *[terrified]* I don't kn-n-now, Your Majesty. There's really only one Magician powerful enough to know things like that, Your Majesty, and that's not me. It's the one and only Great Merlin, Y-your Majesty.

KING: Merlin? Never heard of him. Send for him! Now! At once! Immediately! I want him here *yesterday*. If not sooner!

NARRATOR: Now, as I expect you know, no-one *sends for* Merlin. Merlin comes *when* and *if* he wants to, or not at all. But it just so happened that Merlin had intended to visit evil King Gwrtheyrn all along. So he put on his robe and his pointy hat (see, *he* got a chance to dress up, didn't he? No-one made HIM be the narrator, did they?).

TEACHER: *[warningly]* Rhodriiii!

NARRATOR: Yes, miss, all right, I heard you. I know, get on with it, Rhodri. Anyway, Merlin arrived, probably in a puff of smoke, with thunderclaps and stuff like that, but you'll have to imagine that bit, all right? Who do you think I am, Steven Spielberg?

MERLIN: *[disbelievingly]* You – ah – *sent* for me, I believe.

KING: *[frowning]* You sent for me, *Your Majesty!*

MERLIN: You don't need to call me 'Your Majesty'. 'Great Merlin' will do. And I didn't send for you. You sent for me. And *I* decided to come. So. What do you want?

KING: I demand to know who has taken my castle! I was building it on that hill over there, and this morning it's all gone. Disappeared!

SLAVE 1: *He* was building it? I like that!

MERLIN: *[stroking his beard and looking thoughtful]* You *demand*, do you? I see. Well, King Gwrtheyrn, I must tell you that it would be best if you built your castle somewhere else.

NARRATOR: As you can imagine, this did not please the King at all: he was not a Happy Bunny. In fact, he was furious!

KING: You what? How dare you? If I want to build my castle on top of that hill, I shall build my castle there, and nobody's going to stop me!

NARRATOR: Want to bet?

TEACHER: That isn't in the script, Rhodri.

MERLIN: Yesterday, you made your slaves move a huge rock from the bottom of the hill. Two or three of them got squashed, and several broke arms and legs, and some pulled muscles, but you didn't care, did you? Anyway, where that rock was, there is now a vast lake, which is deeper than you can imagine. The answer to your problems lies at the bottom of that lake. Which is, of course, full of water. And unless you get to the root of the problem, you will never build your castle. The root of your problem is, as I said, at the bottom of the lake.

KING: Then I shall empty it!

SLAVE 2: He means, *we* shall empty it, of course. We shan't see *him* outside paddling around with his trouser legs rolled up, carrying a bucket, shall we? Oh, no. It'll be –

KING: Get on with it, you lot, or it's dungeons and torture for you.

SLAVE 1: And whips and chains and red hot irons and stuff, too, I expect. Honestly, it's so jolly unfair. And I bet there won't be any coffee breaks!

KING: The only breaks you'll get are the sort that are set in plaster! I said, get on with it, if you know what's good for you!

NARRATOR: So the slaves, who *did* know what was good for them, set to with their buckets and worked from sunrise to sunset, and then by the light of flaming torches, far into the night until the lake was emptied. When at last it was dry, at the very bottom of the lake they discovered two vast, sleeping dragons: one that was as white as snow, and one that was as red as fire.

KING: Dragons. Well, goodness me. Tomorrow, when it's light, I'll get my guards to chase them away. Or maybe my slaves. They're cheaper.

NARRATOR: Dawn came, and the sun rose. As soon as the last drop of water had dried on the dragons' scales, they woke up and began to fight. They fought ferociously all day, and at sunset, the white dragon lay vanquished and dead on the dry bed of the lake. The red dragon had won the battle. It was a bit like Wales and England in the final of the Six Nations, really.

TEACHER: Thank you, Rhodri. That isn't in the script, either.

MERLIN: There. The White Dragon is dead. The battle is over.

KING: No, it isn't, you stupid man! How can the battle be over when there's still a dragon left to kill?

NARRATOR: Then, Merlin got really, really angry . . . No-one calls Merlin stupid!

MERLIN: *[looking furious]* King Gwrtheyrn, listen to me, and listen carefully. The dragon that has been killed was a magical symbol of your own terrible cowardice. It stands for your dreadful behaviour. You betrayed your own

people to the enemy, which is the worst thing any King can do. You don't deserve to be King. Let the White Dragon's death be a terrible warning to you.

KING: I don't believe a word of it! Who do you think you are, coming here handing out warnings! How dare you?

MERLIN: I dare, King Gwrtheyrn, because I am the Great Merlin of Wales. And I am here to warn you that if you don't go away, right now, and never come back, the Red Dragon will kill you, just as it killed the White Dragon. There is no room in Wales for traitors and cowards. Run away, Gwrtheyrn, while you still have legs to run . . .

KING: Oh. Well, if you're going to put it like that . . . The Red Dragon will kill me, you say?

MERLIN: It will chomp you into chump chops and barbecue the bits.

KING: That sounds quite a permanent kind of killing, to me. And sort of painful, too. I don't like pain, unless it's other people's. Maybe you're right. I – um – perhaps I *should* take a bit of a holiday. A LONG holiday. A long, long holiday far, far away from here. *[Sighs]* The neighbourhood's gone downhill anyway. Magicians and Dragons move in, and all the nice personages move out.

COURTIER 1: What idiot told him he was a nice personage?

KING: Don't get too clever, Number One – I haven't gone yet! Slaves!

SLAVES: *[together]* Yes, Your Majesty?

KING: Pack my suitcase.

SLAVE 1: With pleasure, Your Majesty. *[Behind his hand to audience]* His mother didn't teach him to say 'please', either, did she?

*A suitcase is brought and the King, slinking, exits, cheered loudly by his waving slaves and courtiers. The suitcase has a large destination sticker. This should be chosen for local effect!*

NARRATOR: When the horrible, evil, cruel, cowardly King –

KING: *[offstage]* I heard that!

NARRATOR: So what? You aren't in the play any more! As I was saying, when the horrible, evil, cruel, cowardly, wicked and very rude and ill-mannered King had gone, Merlin built himself a fortress exactly where the King had planned to build his own. He called it Caer Fyrddin – Merlin's Fortress – which is now known to us as Carmarthen.

And from that day onward, the Welsh flag has always shown a fiery Red Dragon on a green and white field.

*Slaves 1 and 2 enter, bearing the Welsh flag outstretched. They creep up behind the narrator and drape it over his head and round his shoulders like a cloak.*

TEACHER: *[laughing]* There you are, Rhodri! You got dressed up after all! Well done, Year . . . That was a really good rehearsal!