



# The Very Last Dragon

A Problem Comedy, with Music

Book, Libretto & Score

by

Russell Fox

# The Very Last Dragon

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*With thanks to my mother.*

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*D r a m a t i s   p e r s o n a e .*

CHORUS                    *Including Peasants, Farmer, Soldier,  
Reverend, Banker*

*The* KING

LORD HAL  
LORD BURTON                    *The King's Royal Ministers*

*The* CAREFREE PRINCESS

*Her* UNDERWORKED HANDMAIDEN

SAM [*later* SIR] SHAMBLES  
SIR LESLIE  
SIR QUILLIO                    *Spear Carriers*

SIR ERRANT

THE VERY LAST DRAGON

*S c e n e : The Kingdom of Catatonia.*

# Act One



## Act I, Scene i. The Palace Court.

*Alarum: trumpets and drums. Processional music.*

*The Throne Room of a Castle. The backdrop is a stage-painted stoneblock wall, with a great arched Window and the elevated Throne before it, upstage center. Along the side drops, tall windows palisade the two side walls. The KEYBOARD PLAYER enters from stage left, crouched and darting from the backstage to the piano bench, harriedly putting up the sheet music and pushing her hair out of her face and then freezing, poised, before she pounds the first chords. Enter in procession, from stage right, the fawning CHORUS of the royal court, anthemic:*

### HARK & HAIL

CHORUS:

Hark & hail our high and mighty  
Chief Executive Officer!  
Tho' dark the gale and nigh the lightning  
Sail on ship of state  
Evermore!

Tho' the maw of death ope' wide ahead  
Ever onward! Stay the course!

Hark & hail our high and mighty  
Chief Executive  
Officer!

*The CHORUS strews flower petals. Enter the KING, who is flanked by his Royal Ministers, LORD HAL and LORD BURTON. They are followed by the CAREFREE PRINCESS and her UNDERWORKED HANDMAIDEN. The CHORUS gathers facing the Throne as the King, majestically, sits; the CHORUS then proceeds offstage Left, humming the recessional. Exit CHORUS.*

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

*Harpichord recitativo, improvised to accompany sung dialogue in the manner of Mozartian opera:*

PRINCESS: *(At a window.)* What a beautiful morning!  
With the bluest of skies!  
Oh, I am glad  
That everything is so nice.

*(To the King:)* Oh, can't we go out today, papa?

KING: What are you thinking?

PRINCESS: I'm thinking of pic-nic-ing!  
The fields and woods, the hills and meadows,  
Streams and rills and *riv-ulets*!

KING: Lord Hal and Lord Burton  
My loyal and royal Ministers –  
What have you to say  
About a *pic-nic* today?

LORD HAL: My King, I would advise  
Most strenuously *against* it.

LORD BURTON: The situation in the Kingdom  
Most assuredly *prevents* it.

KING: *(Claps his hands.)* There you have it. No.

PRINCESS: But *why*?

*Breaking glass. From offstage left, clamor and shouting, rising. Then, from outside the windows, a braying and cacophonous reprise of the anthem, almost tuneless, parodic. The KING claps his hands. LORD HAL and LORD BURTON roll a Cannon to a stage left window, point it downward, and light the fuse. ALL put their fingers to their ears. Flashpot explosion, the Recoil of the Cannon knocking HAL and BURTON backward in pratfalls. Stunned silence. Then:*



THE VERY LAST DRAGON

PRINCESS: (At window.) Could *that* be the reason  
We cannot go out for a pic-nic?

KING: No!

LORD HAL: No!

LORD BURTON: No!

PRINCESS: Then why not?

KING: (To Ministers:) Well?

LORD HAL: My King, you could be eaten by an animal.

LORD BURTON: Your daughter here, devoured by a beast.

LORD HAL: A pic-nic is a risky thing to contemplate –

LORD BURTON: With untamed nature waiting in the – trees.

KING: Yes! That's your answer, princess. (Claps hands.) Now  
– (To Ministers:) What's for breakfast?

PRINCESS: Wait!  
But all the *bad* animals are extinct, I thought.

LORD HAL: Most, but all not.

LORD BURTON: Not all, by a long shot.

PRINCESS: Well, then – What's not?

LORD HAL: Let's start with the good news.

LORD BURTON: The progress we've made.

LORD HAL *gestures, and a movie screen is lowered. Throughout the following a power-point presentation is projected against the screen, flicking with illustrations of the itemized animals:*

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

**EXTINCTIONARY**

HAL: Exhibit "A", the Great AUK,  
A dimwitted, flightless bird,  
Waddled sea rocks by the thousands  
While it was clubbed and massacred.  
This awkward and ungainly AUK  
Nonetheless has one distinction:  
It was the first North American creature  
To be hunted to extinction.

HAL &  
BURTON: Now, as you know, the BUFFALO  
No longer roam the plains;  
The CAROLINA PARAKEET  
Is but taxiderm'd remains.  
The tame and trusting DODO  
Was bashed between the eyes;  
And the last ESKIMO CURLEW  
Has been blasted from the skies.

CHORUS: The world is our res - tau - rant,  
We kill and eat what we want.

BURTON: A third of all the world's FROGS  
Are perched upon the brink;  
The GORILLAS, off in Africa  
Could follow in a blink.  
The once abundant HEATH HEN  
Is totally extinct;  
The IBEX of the Pyrenees  
Is also gone (we think).

HAL: In North America, the JAGUAR  
Has been annihilated;  
The KIWI of the Great Lakes  
Is likewise obliterated.  
The last LABRADOR DUCK  
Has croaked its final quack;

*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

The MARYLAND and NIANGUA DARTERS  
Are never darting back.

BURTON: The few ORANGOUTANGS that still remain  
Can now hardly be counted;  
And the last PASSENGER PIGEON  
Has been stuffed, handsomely mounted.  
The QUAGGA of South Africa,  
A zebra-headed beast,  
Like the RED WOLF in America  
And STELLER'S SEA COW — are deceased.

CHORUS: The world is our res - tau - rant,  
We kill and waste what we want.

HAL: Now, all the types of TIGERS,  
Like almost all the larger cats,  
Have been destroyed or decimated  
By wiping out their habitats.  
The same thing can be said for  
The UNARMORED THREESPINE STICKLEBACK;  
And for almost every other creature  
Once we melt the polar caps.

HAL &  
BURTON: The VANCOUVER ISLAND MARMOT  
And the WHITE RHINO, now are nixed;  
Like the defunct Jamaican Monkey,  
Which was called the XENOTHRIX.  
The once-delicious YUNNAN BOX TURTLE,  
In its shell sarcophagus,  
Is as dead and gone as the ZEUGLODAN,

HAL: Whatever *that* was.

CHORUS: The world is our res - tau - rant,  
We kill and waste what we want.  
The world is our res - tau - rant,  
We kill and eat what we want.  
The world is our res - tau - rant,  
We kill and waste what we want.

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

*Harpichord recitativo:*

PRINCESS:                If all those creatures have been nixed  
                              Then why can't we have a pic-nic-s?

*The stage darkens; portentous musical accompaniment:*

LORD HAL:              Alas, one beast remains  
                              To be a problem –

LORD BURTON:        The problem of the kingdom  
                              Is the Dragon.

LORD HAL:              It eats our horses in one bite –

LORD BURTON:        It even eats our wagons!

*Bright again; harpichord:*

KING:                    There you have it. We cannot have a pic-nic  
                              When the dragon not extinct, yet. *(Claps his hands.)*  
                              Now, I'm hungry as a horse!  
                              What, I ask again, is for break-forst?

*From offstage left, again, the clamor rises. Angry shouting, chanting to the anthem theme, this time played on kazoos. Enter stage right SAM SHAMBLES, a Rustic, liveried as a ragged Messenger. He rushes onstage, butting and elbowing between the KEYBOARD PLAYER and the piano. He stands bandy-legged before the Throne, his shoulders thrown back and chest heaving, winded. When he speaks, it is with impediment: blasting his B's and popping his P's and spraying his S's, aspirating. A sputtering Bumpkin, full of earnest Bombast.*

*Without accompaniment:*

*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

SHAMBLES: My King! Outside the Palace, the Peasants are yelling for Bread! There's Barricades! Banners! Brigades of Renegades! They're helmeting their Heads with empty Bread-pans, and bucklerring their Bodies with Sandwich Boards – with *Slogans* on the Sandwich Boards! O', my King! They're prying the Paving-stones from the Streets, and smashing them against the Castle Walls! It's *raining* pavement! Cats and Dogs! Dogs and Cats! Men in Dresses! Women in Pants!

*(He takes a breath. Then:)*

In short, my King, the Populace is in open Revolt!

*Silence. Then, to harpsichord recitativo:*

KING: Hark! What do We hear?  
In the royal Ear?

*A capella, without the singing:*

SHAMBLES: Only the Truth, my King.

*Harpsichord recitativo:*

KING: What the royal Ear hears displeases us;  
These unharmonious Pleas to us –

Seize the Messenger!

*The KING claps his hands. HAL and BURTON seize SAM  
SHAMBLES.*

SHAMBLES: *(Yelling:)* I only told the Truth. I thought that was my job!

*Harpsichord recitativo:*

## A PROBLEM COMEDY

HAL:           Your message gives offense  
                  Not because you had to bring it –

BOTH:        No!

BURTON:     The offending circumstance  
                  Is the fact you did not *sing* it!

*The KING stands, his arms cradle-crossed. Then he gives a sharp gesture with one little finger, and LORDS HAL and BURTON, still ahold of SAM SHAMBLES, proceed to shove the Throne aside, so that it does not block the arched Window. HAL and BURTON stand readied to defenestrate SHAMBLES.*

## THE RULE OF THE KINGDOM

KING:        The rule of the kingdom  
                  Is when words are said, to sing them –  
                  ‘Tis the first and foremost law of all the land.

                  For ev’rything sounds sweeter  
                  Put to music, in a metre –  
                  Whether lowly grumble or the high demand.

*(At the stage apron, animated, tapping his toe:)*

                  Now– if *you* plan on complaining  
                  Just make sure you are refraining  
                  And explaining your complaint in the refrain  
                  For it’s hard to be unhappy  
                  To a tune that’s bright and snappy  
                  Going round and round in endless roundelay.

*(He swirls.)*

*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

HAL & BURTON:     The rule of the kingdom  
                          Is when words are said, to sing them –  
                          ‘Tis the first and foremost law of our great King.

                          Even grievances sound gaily  
                          When sung to a ukelele –  
                          For the sharpest barb in song doth lose its sting.

KING:                So, if *you* should have a comment  
                          You must put it in a sonnet  
                          And at least have someone hum it while you croon.

                          For the vilest of the curses  
                          Once set forth in rhyming verses  
                          Can be palatable, *when* put to a tune.

*ALL except SHAMBLES, including the CAREFREE PRINCESS and  
her UNDERWORKED HANDMAIDEN, in a vibrant round:*

ALL:                 The rule of the kingdom  
                          Is when words are said, to sing them –  
                          ‘Tis the first and foremost law of all the land.

                          For ev’rything sounds sweeter  
                          Put to music, in a metre –  
                          Whether lowly grumble or the high demand . . . .

*Sudden stop when the KING finishes a verse.  
Silence, then the KING, ominously, in spoken voice:*

KING:                I didn’t hear you *singing*.

*Awkwardly, a capella:*

SHAMBLES:         I’m sorry, my King . . . that I didn’t sing.

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

*Harpichord recitativo. In sotto voice:*

KING: Are you really sorry?

SHAMBLES: I'm really, truly sorry.

*Pause. Piano underscore; the introduction to the plaintive and lovely Princess' Aria Theme:*

PRINCESS: Have pity, Father!

HANDMAIDEN: Show mercy, my King!

PRINCESS: Stay thy hand from slaughter –

BOTH: Let him live to sing!

*The KING carefully considers, then claps his hands. Two SPEAR CARRIERS enter from the Wings and lay hold of SHAMBLES, taking custody of the Prisoner from LORDS HAL & BURTON, who brush off their hands and move downstage, to the right of the KING. Bass drumbeat and blocked piano chords, fast and thundering; the Dungeon Theme:*

KING: Take him down to the Dungeon!  
Clap him in Irons!  
Let him just sit there and stew!

Put him on ice, right  
Out of my eye-sight –  
While I decide what to do!

HAL & BURTON: Down to the Dungeon!  
Clap him in Irons!  
Where he can sit there and stew!



## THE VERY LAST DRAGON

Put him on ice, right  
Out of your eye-sight –  
While you decide what to do!

SHAMBLES *is frog-marched off the Stage by the two SPEAR CARRIERS.*  
*Abrupt shift to harpsichord recitativo:*

KING:                   At last!  
                            And now– What is for breakfast?

*If a night performance, the Stage dims and a Spotlight snaps on HAL & BURTON, who freeze in the circle of white light like vaudevillians. Ascending piano scale, glissando. Then HAL takes the intro.*

### THE BREAKFAST SONG

HAL:                    On the continent, the breakfast  
                            Is orange juice and a roll –  
                            But a continental breakfast  
                            Is not fit for one so roy-al.

BURTON:              The French can have their toast  
                            With spice and sugar sprinkling;  
                            Let the English eat boiled oats –  
                            Hardly fare fit for a King!

KING:                    But, what breakfast is for *me*?  
HAL & BURTON:        *A delicacy!*

HAL:                    Roasted mutton is a leg  
                            Most excellent!

BURTON:                And some do say that snails and such  
                            Are succulent!

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

HAL: But the Dragon has an Egg  
Penultimate!

BURTON: Whether scrambled, boiled or poached  
Or as – An omelette!

*Uptick, as the two SPEAR CARRIERS roll in a giant Egg from the wings.*

HAL & BURTON: One Dragons' egg roasted,  
Or boiled, braised, or broasted,  
Alone is a feast for a day!  
  
Have it soft-boiled or hard-boiled,  
Or sauteed in whale oil;  
Or dragon's egg over easy, with O.J.

KING: Can I have a side of sausage, ham or bacon?

BURTON: After a dragon's egg, all else will be forsaken!

HAL & BURTON: Whether sunny-side upwards,  
Or baked into custards,  
The egg that's a feast for a day!

ALL: The egg that's a feast for a day!

*Freeze in tableau.*

*Blackout & Curtain.*

THE VERY LAST DRAGON

**Act I, Scene ii. A Palace Boudoir**

*Enter the CAREFREE PRINCESS, in petticoat, and her UNDERWORKED HANDMAIDEN, with a handmirror. Discarded clothes, shoes, and hats are scattered about the floor and furniture of the boudoir. Harpsichord recitativo:*

PRINCESS:           *(Carefreely:)* I'm so happy that everything is so nice.

HANDMAIDEN:      *(Holding a handmirror for the CAREFREE PRINCESS, who primps:)* I'm so happy, too. Nothing could be nicer, and we haven't got a worry in the world.

PRINCESS:           What on Earth could possibly go wrong?

*Piano music begins, a bouncy melody reminiscent of a children's ballet recital. Throughout the following song the CAREFREE PRINCESS, assisted by her UNDERWORKED HANDMAIDEN, picks up various articles of clothing but discards most of them, gradually getting dressed.*

**WHAT ON EARTH COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?**

TOGETHER:          We don't have a worry in the world,

PRINCESS:          We're the freest spirits in the Kingdom.

TOGETHER:          If the world's an oyster, we're its pearls,

HANDMAIDEN:      We're sweeter than two sugar plums, and then some.

PRINCESS:          I think tonight I'll wear this gold laced ball - gown —

HANDMAIDEN:      It won't do to put just any plain old rag on —

TOGETHER:          So — What on Earth could possibly go wrong?

HANDMAIDEN:      *(Spoken:)* But Mistress, don't you think—?

PRINCESS:          I shouldn't think so! No! —

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

PRINCESS: We don't have a worry in the world,  
HANDMAIDEN: Life's a bowl of cherries and a sweet song.  
PRINCESS: We're a pair of happy, carefree girls,  
HANDMAIDEN: For what we want, we never have to wait long.

PRINCESS: No high-heeled shoes to catch the carpet shag on —  
HANDMAIDEN: No sharp furniture for stockinged legs to snag on —

TOGETHER: So — What on Earth could possibly go wrong?

HANDMAIDEN: (*Spoken:*) But, Your Highness, what about—?  
PRINCESS: What? But nothing! No! —

TOGETHER: We don't have a worry in the world,  
PRINCESS: We're the fairest flowers in the Kingdom.  
TOGETHER: People like to see us toss our curls,  
HANDMAIDEN: Except that sometimes people think we're ding - dong.

PRINCESS: What a pretty hat —  
HANDMAIDEN: But dear, you've left the tag on —  
PRINCESS: How I hope this dance and dinner doesn't drag on —

TOGETHER: Now — What on Earth could possibly go wrong?

*Offstage rumbling. The music stops; they listen.*

BOTH: What's that?

*Enter a DRAGON, fearsome & snorting & smoking.*

BOTH: *In unison:*

OH, NO! IT'S THAT NASTY OLD DRAGON!!!

*The PRINCESS and HANDMAIDEN panic and scream. The DRAGON chases them offstage. Blackout and curtain.*

THE VERY LAST DRAGON

Act I, Scene iii. The Palace Court.

*The KING, asleep on his Throne, snores. In front of him, a table with the remains of the breakfast: the giant broken eggshell, plates and goblets and cutlery. The floor rumbles, the dishes begin to clatter, and the Throne is shaken. A framed picture of a typical kingdom scene slides off the wall and crashes to the floor. The KING stirs. Enter the two SPEAR CARRIERS from opposite wings of the stage, in panic. They have a great deal of difficulty keeping their robes and helmets intact while holding onto their clumsy spears at the same time. They meet in the middle of the stage and parry frenzied, operatic exclamations.*

1<sup>ST</sup> SPEAR CARRIER: An earth-quake?

2<sup>ND</sup> SPEAR CARRIER: A flash flood?

1<sup>ST</sup> SPEAR CARRIER: A mudslide?

2<sup>ND</sup> SPEAR CARRIER: A tidal wave?

OFFSTAGE (Terrified:) The Dragon is coming!  
VOICES: The Dragon is coming!

SPEAR CARRIERS: (In unison, quaking:) THE DRAGON!

*The two SPEAR CARRIERS run to a window, gesticulate. Enter HAL and BURTON, as the KING rubs his eyes and stands. The rumbling continues.*

1<sup>ST</sup> SPEAR CARRIER: Your Highness!  
The Dragon is escaping the Castle!  
It's crashing its tail, and slashing its talons!

2<sup>ND</sup> SPEAR CARRIER: It's snorting fire and smoke –  
It's leaping across the moat!

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

1<sup>ST</sup> SPEAR CARRIER.:      My King!  
   Beneath its wing, the beast doth clutch  
   The Princess!

2<sup>ND</sup> SPEAR CARRIER:      And ‘neath th’ other batlike wing  
   Hath clapped the Underworked Handmaiden!

1<sup>ST</sup> SPEAR CARRIER.:      O’ King!  
   The Dragon is making away with them!

*The rumbling of the floor subsides. Silence.  
Then, to harpsichord recitativo:*

KING:                              Hark! What do We hear?  
   In the royal Ear?

*A capella, without the singing:*

SPEAR CARRIERS:      The Dragon –

*The KING cuts them short with a handclap. Recitativo,  
menacingly:*

KING:                              I didn’t hear you *singing*.

HAL & BURTON:      (*In song:*)  
   The rule of the kingdom  
   Is when words are said, to sing them –  
   ‘Tis the first and foremost law of all the land.

KING:                              (*Handclap.*)  
   There’s no time for that now!  
   Seize Them!

*HAL and BURTON seize the two SPEAR CARRIERS.*

**DOWN TO THE DUNGEON**

KING:       Take them down to the Dungeon!  
              Clap them in Irons!  
              Let them just sit there and stew!

              Handcuff and crack them!  
              Shackle and rack them!  
              Make sure you turn ev'ry Screw!

HAL & BURTON:     Down to the Dungeon!  
                      Clap them in Irons!  
                      Let them just sit there and stew!

                      Handcuff and crack them!  
                      Shackle and rack them!  
                      Make sure you turn ev'ry Screw!

KING:       This *could* be a tragedy!  
              I need a strategy!  
              Crisis, catastrophe looms!

              I need better surveil-i-lance!  
              Suspend habeas cor-pe-us!  
              For toward us approaches our dooms!

HAL & BURTON:     Down to the Dungeon!  
                      Clap them in Irons!  
                      Make sure you turn ev'ry Screw!

                      Handcuff and crack them!  
                      Shackle and rack them!  
                      Torture until they turn blue!

KING:       Now!

## A PROBLEM COMEDY

*Harpichord recitativo:*

LORD HAL:           Your ev'ry wish, we shall obey  
                          Without a doubt, or undue delay –

LORD BURTON:       But first, exalted Eminence,  
                          Your subjects seek an audience.

*At the behest of LORDS HAL & BURTON, the CHORUS files out from behind the stage and lines up in front of the apron. Included among them are a FARMER, a SOLDIER, a REVEREND, a BANKER, and several assorted LUCKLESS PEASANTS. A lively piano vamp commences, the CHORUS and soloists chanting, led on and conducted by HAL & BURTON.*

### THE DRAGON IS THE PROBLEM OF THE KINGDOM

PEASANTS:   The Problem of the Kingdom is the Dragon,  
                  The Dragon is the Problem of the Kingdom.  
                  The Problem of the Kingdom is the Dragon,  
                  The Dragon is the Problem of the Kingdom.

FARMER:      The Dragon is the Problem of the Kingdom,  
                  It tramples cows and crops beneath its feet.  
                  If it wasn't for the ugly, nasty Dragon,  
                  Us luckless folks would have enough to eat.

HAL &  
BURTON:       It's the root of plague and pestilence and famine;  
                  The Dragon Is the Problem of the Kingdom.

PEASANTS:     The Dragon is the Problem of the Kingdom,  
                  The root of plague and pestilence and famine.

SOLDIER:      The Dragon is the Problem of the Kingdom,  
                  Its armored plates, like toothpicks, snap our arrows.  
                  We can't, with present weapons, kill the Dragon,  
                  Its fi'ry breath burns up our fellow soldiers.



*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

HAL & BURTON: Its bark is worse than bites from France and England;  
The Problem of this Kingdom Is the Dragon.

PEASANTS: The Dragon is the Problem of this Kingdom,  
The root of plague and pestilence and famine.  
Its bark is worse than bites from France and England;  
The Problem of this Kingdom is the Dragon.

REVEREND: It rots the moral fibre of our children,  
Who play at games pretending they're all dragons.  
Its power and its flashy ways mislead them,  
And turn them into truants, rogues, and hoodlums.

HAL & BURTON: Its gluttony and slothfulness are wanton;  
The Dragon is the Problem with this Kingdom.

PEASANTS: The Dragon is the Problem with this Kingdom,  
The root of plague and pestilence and famine.  
Its bark is worse than bites from France and England;  
The Problem with this Kingdom is the Dragon.

Its gluttony and slothfulness are wanton;  
The Dragon is the Problem with this Kingdom.

BANKER: As I have said in boardrooms 'cross this nation,  
The capital we'd otherwise be leading  
Is tight because collateral & business ventures pending  
The Dragon's fangs may suddenly be rending.

HAL & BURTON: It hits our bottom lines  
And pinches off our profit margins;  
The Problem of this Kingdom is the Dragon.

PEASANTS: The Dragon is the Problem of this Kingdom,  
The root of plague and pestilence and famine.  
Its bark is worse than bites from France and England;  
The Problem of this Kingdom is the Dragon.  
Its gluttony and slothfulness are wanton;

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

The Dragon is the Problem with this Kingdom.  
It hits our bottom lines and pinches off our profit margins;  
The Problem of this Kingdom is the Dragon.

BANKER: As I have said in boardrooms ‘cross this nation —

REVEREND: It rots the moral fibre of our children —

SOLDIER: We can’t, with present weapons, kill the Dragon —

FARMER: It tramples cows and crops beneath its feet!

ALL: One Thing we all agree on:  
The Dragon is the Problem of the Kingdom.  
The Problem of the Kingdom is the Dragon,  
The Dragon is the Problem of the Kingdom.

The Dragon is the Problem of the Kingdom.

The Dragon is the Problem of the Kingdom.

The Dragon is the Problem of the — KING!

*The music ceases, and the LUCKLESS PEASANTS begin to chant.*

PEASANTS: THE DRAGON IS THE PROBLEM OF THE KING!  
THE DRAGON IS THE PROBLEM OF THE KING!  
THE DRAGON IS THE PROBLEM OF THE KING!  
THE DRAGON IS THE PROBLEM OF THE KING!

*The KING tries to look dignified as the LUCKLESS PEASANTS continue their chanting. Ominous horns, timbrels and tabors, and a church organ underscore the KING’S majestic spoken delivery.*

*Recitativo:*

THE KNIGHTING OF SIR LESLIE, QUILLIO,  
AND SAM SHAMBLES

KING:           Our Kingdom has been ravaged  
                  By a great and terrible Dragon!  
                  It eats our horses in one bite,  
                  It even eats our wagons:

                  Thus, We now call for volunteers,  
                  The bravest in the land,  
                  For he who delivers the Dragon's ears  
                  Shall win our daughter's hand!

                  Let those who boast that they are best,  
                  Stout-hearted, swift with Sword,  
                  Step forward and accept this Quest,  
                  And kneel before your Lord!

LORDS HAL & BURTON *surreptitiously exit. After a long pause,*  
*the 1<sup>ST</sup> SPEAR CARRIER, hereinafter known as SIR LESLIE, steps*  
*forward.*

LESLIE:        I, Leslie of Shopshire, do accept the Quest!  
                  *(He kneels before the KING.)*

KING:           Leslie, think hard, ere you take up this test,  
                  How you'll handle yourself in a row.  
                  The Dragon's the thing at the end of this Quest,  
                  It isn't toothpaste, you know!

LESLIE:        I know!

*The 2<sup>ND</sup> SPEAR CARRIER, henceforward known as SIR QUILLIO,*  
*steps forward.*

QUILLIO:      I, Quillio of the Mucklands, do accept the Quest!

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

*(He kneels before the KING.)*

KING: Quillio, think, ere you take up this test,  
Lest in battle you pale and sicken.  
The Dragon's the thing at the end of this Quest,  
It isn't the job for a chicken!

QUILLIO: I know!

LORDS HAL & BURTON *have unostentatiously re-entered with SAM SHAMBLES, who is shackled and manacled.*

SHAMBLES: Aw, what the Hay— as I always say —  
When I fall into thistles and brambles;  
The Dragon I'll can, and win the Princess's hand,  
Sure as my name's Sam Shambles.

*(He stumbles to his knees in front of the KING.)*

KING: Shambles, do think, ere you rise to this test,  
Of the Dragon's great hunger and thirst.  
But with Leslie and Quillio along for the Quest,  
You probably shant do much worse.

SHAMBLES: You betcha! *(Belches.)*

KING: As no other soldiers have risen to fight,  
The King of this Kingdom shall make these three Knights.

*The KING very ceremoniously touches each of their shoulders in turn with a sword:*

KING: I dub thee Sir Leslie, The Chartreuse Knight.

I dub thee Sir Quillio, The Lemon Liver'd.

I dub thee Sir Shambles, The Last Knight.

## THE VERY LAST DRAGON

SHAMBLES: (*Flinching and touching his shoulder:*) OUCH!

KING: Our Kingdom has been ravaged  
By a great and terrible Dragon!  
It eats our horses in one bite,  
It even eats our wagons!

Now, you three are our mightiest Knights,  
The best and very bravest;  
So help us out of these terrible nights,  
And slay the beast and save us!

Now — GO SLAY THE DRAGON!

PEASANTS: (*Taking up the chant:*)

GO SLAY THE DRAGON!  
GO SLAY THE DRAGON!  
GO SLAY THE DRAGON!  
GO SLAY THE DRAGON!

*The KNIGHTS stand and do a smart about-face. They march to the apron of the stage, halt, and chant in chorus.*

### CHANT OF THE BENIGHTED KNIGHTS

KNIGHTS: All for naught, and naught for all!  
To hunting dragons we are called!  
We hope it won't rain, we hope it won't snow,  
Whoa, no; whoa, no.

KING GO SLAY THE DRAGON!  
& PEASANTS: GO SLAY THE DRAGON!  
GO SLAY THE DRAGON!  
GO SLAY THE DRAGON!

KNIGHTS: (*Turning and marching to the wings:*)

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

High & low, high & low,  
A - hunting dragons we must go.  
We hope it won't rain, we hope it won't snow,  
Whoa, no; whoa, no.

ALL: GO!

*Exeunt* KNIGHTS.

*Curtain.*

*Two stage hands cross the stage with a white bedsheet that has the words SCENE IV painted on it. They turn and re-cross the stage, displaying the other side of the bedsheet, THE DRAGON'S LAIR, and exeunt.*

*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

**Act I, Scene iv. The Dragon's Lair.**

*The DRAGON is sleeping, stretched across the entrance of the DRAGON'S Lair. The CAREFREE PRINCESS and her UNDERWORKED HANDMAIDEN are perched atop two gigantic eggs, prisoners. Recitativo:*

PRINCESS:           We should escape now, while he's sleeping—  
                          While the Dragon sleeps and dreams and snores.

HANDMAIDEN:       We can't escape! Not e'en by creeping!  
                          The Dragon sleeps in front of yonder door.

PRINCESS:           It's been three days. I wonder why  
                          That mean, ferocious Dragon hasn't feasted on us yet.

HANDMAIDEN:       Don't give him any ideas, dummy!

*The DRAGON stirs. After a tense second, the CAREFREE PRINCESS retorts in a whisper.*

PRINCESS:           Dummy?

HANDMAIDEN:       Sorry.

PRINCESS:           It's okay. We're under a lot of stress.

HANDMAIDEN:       Thanks for understanding. You really are a princess.

PRINCESS:           If friendship 'twas a custard pie,  
                          Tis now the pudding's to be proved.

HANDMAIDEN:       Our friendship's thick and sweet— Oh my!  
                          I think the Dragon moved!

*The DRAGON raises its head, drowsily.*

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

PRINCESS: Whatever shall we do?

HANDMAIDEN: A lullaby! The savage beast, to soothe!

PRINCESS: Look! A guitar!

*The Princess points to a guitar, in a heap of baubles and treasure.*

Oh, please sing to me the lullaby  
you sing to me, at home!

*The HANDMAIDEN retrieves the guitar, plays and sings. Piano underscore, sotto:*

**BEDTIME STORY**

The children have knelt at their beds,  
Their prayers are over now;  
And may they sleep, their souls to keep –  
At least until the morrow.

But the ghosts still speak through heatpipes,  
If you listen in the night;  
And the thieves will creak upon the stairs  
And vanish with the light.

So sleep ye now, my Princess,  
Do not listen for these things;  
They are just the wind that rambles,  
And the timbers settling.

And the night does have its solace,  
For in the dark I can pretend:  
That I am with my Princess,  
And in my bed again.

*Slow to Black, with the PRINCESS and the DRAGON snoring.*



THE VERY LAST DRAGON

Act I, Scene v. The Greenworld. Midnight, at a Stream.

SIR QUILLIO, SIR LESLIE, and SIR SAM SHAMBLES *sleep, or at least pretend to sleep, beside the glowing coals of a campfire. When the approaching clop of a galloping horse becomes faintly audible, SIR QUILLIO leaps up and throws more wood on the fire. SIR LESLIE sits up in panic. SIR SHAMBLES wakes reluctantly, annoyed. Melodramatic lute:*

SHAMBLES: What is the matter? What do you hear?

LESLIE: Somebody's coming, and coming quite near.

QUILLIO: I heard it, too – so 'tis not a dream–  
Something approaches, across yonder stream!

LESLIE: Could the Dragon be hunting for someone — Of course, us?

SHAMBLES: Try not to be silly– Dragons never ride horses!  
*(Shambles goes back to sleep.)*

LESLIE: If 'tis not the Dragon, beast loosed from its lair,  
Then what rides by night, by stallion or mare?

QUILLIO: If I had that answer, Sir Leslie so fair,  
My sword would be scabbarded, not ready to tear!

LESLIE: *(His voice tremor'd, lilting:)* Could. it be a terrible tiger,  
Or bear?

QUILLIO: *(Quaking:)* I doubt it is either–  
But Hark! Who goes there?

ERRANT: *(From offstage, across the Stream:)*  
How do I get across the Stream?

LESLIE: You're already across the Stream!

## A PROBLEM COMEDY

*Enter SIR ERRANT, who mimes riding, fords the stream and dismounts. He looks at the two KNIGHTS, now cowardly pouting. His tone is conciliatory, calming, and sly.*

ERRANT: Oh, what is the matter, ye wandering knights?  
What are yer problems? yer pressures? yer plights?

LESLIE: We're questing to kill off the Very Last Dragon,  
And to tell you the truth, we fear we'll be eaten.

ERRANT: Alas, I too am hunting the Very Last Dragon,  
And, as there's no other, it must be the same one.  
For by day and by knights, the Dragons are slain,  
And the Dragon we seek's the sole one that remains.

QUILLIO: If the Dragon we seek is the last that remains,  
Then let us join forces, swap stories, give names!

*Music. SIR ERRANT breaks into song, with SIRS LESLIE & QUILLIO providing the backing vocals. SIR SHAMBLES rolls over, covers his head with a pillow. By the end of the song, the three unsleeping KNIGHTS are doing a can-can dance routine.*

### WHIP-SONG OF THE ERRANT KNIGHT

ERRANT: My name is Sir Errant,  
I think it's apparent,  
My business is dragons— to slay.

And when pauper or tyrant  
Asks for my appellant,  
I look in his eyes, and I say—

My name is Sir Errant,  
I think it's apparent,  
My business is dragons— to slay.  
I track down their nests  
And I scramble their eggs,  
Or make eggs over easy, with O.J.

*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

LESLIE: My name is Sir Leslie,  
I wear prints of lime paisley,  
I hunt butterflies in the field.  
  
But if some ugly dragon,  
Should rap on my noggin,  
To that dragon I'll cry out to yield.

ERRANT: I think it's apparent  
That you're a knight errant,  
Your business is dragons— to slay.

ERRANT  
& LESLIE: We like dragons roasted,  
Or boiled, braized, or broasted,  
A dragon's a feast— for a day.

*(Can-can dance.)*

QUILLIO: I was knighted Sir Quillio,  
Knight of the bright yell-e-ow,  
And quest for my manhood— to prove  
  
That if some dragon punches me,  
Kicks me, or crunches me,  
Never a nerve shall I move.

ERRANT  
& LESLIE: We think it's apparent  
That you're a knight errant,  
Your business is dragons— to slay.

All: We eat eggs for breakfast,  
Roast legs for a re-past  
Of dragon— a treat any day.

ERRANT: We three are knights Errant,  
We think it's apparent,  
Our business is dragons— to slay.  
  
And when peasant or soldier  
Asks us our order,  
We look in his eyes, and we say—

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

ALL:           We're the Knights of the Errant,  
                  We think it's apparent,  
                  That our business is dragons— to slay.

                  Whether sunny-side upwards,  
                  Or baked into custards,  
                  A dragon's a treat any day.

*Offstage rumbling begins. The KNIGHTS at first cock their ears, then put their ears to the ground as the rumbling becomes progressively louder. SHAMBLES rouses, rubs his eyes.*

ALL:           What, ho?

LESLIE:       An Earth-quake?

QUILLIO:     A flash flood?

ERRANT:      A landslide?

*Enter the DRAGON; fearsome, as before.*

KNIGHTS:    *(Knees knocking, in fright:)*    THE DRAGON!

*SIRS LESLIE, QUILLIO & ERRANT bolt and exit, but SHAMBLES conceals himself behind a piece of shaped stage flattage which has been painted to resemble a SHRUB. The DRAGON, a huge, green, and ugly beast, makes menacing gestures at the two retreating KNIGHTS. Once the DRAGON believes itself to be alone, however, it does not need to appear fearsome. The Stage darkens. Spotlight. Music begins, and the DRAGON begins to sing. The song is mournful at first, but it soon picks up, and the DRAGON accompanies the tempo with a sort of soft-shoe.*

THE VERY LAST DRAGON

DRAGON:

What do you do when you're a dragon,  
And it happens that you are the very last?  
What do you do when you're a dragon,  
In a world where dragons are a thing of the past?

It's a weighty and a great respons-ibil-i-ty,  
Needing all a dragon's wits, and its agil-i-ty-

Oh, what do you do when you're a dragon?  
You drag on, and on, and on, and on, and on.

Oh, what do you do when you're a dragon,  
And the dragon fam'ly's coming to an end?  
You may be the one and only living dragon,  
But you don't have any other dragon friends.

Now, the dinosaurs are washed up and they're his-tor-y  
Because they didn't solve this very scary mys-ter-y—

Oh, what do you do when you're a dragon?  
You drag on, and on, and on, and on and on.

*(Interlude & soft-shoe.)*

Oh, what do you do when you're a dragon,  
And it happens that you are the very last?  
What do you do when you're a dragon,  
In a world where dragons are a thing of the past?  
It's a solemn and a great respons-ibil-i-ty,  
Needing all a dragon's smarts and ingenu-i-ty —  
Oh, what do you do when you're the  
— very last dragon?

You drag on, and on, and on, and on, and on.

## *A PROBLEM COMEDY*

*The DRAGON finishes with a flourish and bows, perhaps reprising the second verse as an encore. When the music stops the DRAGON holds its pose and SHAMBLES, now standing up behind the DRAGON, takes a handkerchief from his breast pocket. He wipes a tear from his cheek and blows his nose, then ducks behind the shrub when the ensuing honk causes the DRAGON to rear about. SHAMBLES darts offstage, but the DRAGON prefers to bask in its applause and does not follow.*

**Curtain & Intermission.**

*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

Act Two

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

**Act II, scene i. The Palace Throne Room.**

*Spotlight rises on Lords HAL & BURTON, tophatted, cravatted, in tails. Much rubbing of palms, back-slapping and glad-handing, vaudevillian posturing.*

**ACCORDING TO PLAN**

HAL: Young Hal and Master Burton,  
To finest schools were sent;  
And being duly dutiful  
To the finest schools they went

Where they charmed all of their teachers,  
Of the bullies, not one scoffed –  
For Masters Hal and Burton  
Most promptly bought them off.

BURTON: As lads, our Hal and Burton  
Their schooldays put behind;  
And being both quite fortunate  
Stuck out, fortune to find

Establishing a partnership,  
They drew up legal terms;  
And then went into business as  
The Hal & Burton Firm.

HAL & BURTON: First, we  
Buy up all of all of the factories  
Until we have monopolies  
Then ship production overseas  
And pay the help a few rupees

BURTON: And yen! And pesos, rubles, yen!





*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

BURTON:                   Such bries! Bordeaux and roquefort cheese!

HAL:                        From roughnecks to the depot clerks –  
All need the gas to get to work;

BURTON:                  So when they have a buck to spend

HAL & BURTON:        Well, then we sell it right back to them!

HAL:                        And for every thousand bucks they spend  
Lords Hal & Burton get a grand!

BURTON:                  So great! So grand!

HAL & BURTON:        And that's all according to plan!

*Spotlight blacks.*

THE VERY LAST DRAGON

Act II, scene ii. Outside the Dragon's Lair. Dawn.

*Offstage clopping, like galloping. Enter KNIGHTS, marching in skip-step. They cross the stage to the opposite wing, turn and cross the stage again, and turn again and proceed to stage center, where they stop.*

**MARCH OF THE BENIGHTED KNIGHTS**

KNIGHTS: We stomp and tromp  
Through the woods and swamps,  
All yelling a hearty 'HEY!'

This path we beat  
With thundering feet,  
To keep all the bears away!

The woods are full of  
Bears and wol-oves  
Hungry for a snackette!

All beasts of prey  
We keep at bay  
By raising such a racket!

*Drumbeat, for marching:*

SHAMBLES: *(Speaking:)* You know, we don't have to sing all the  
time. I mean, we're out of the Kingdom,  
now.

*Pause.*

ERRANT: *(Singing:)*  
  
All pledged are we,  
In fealty,  
Sworn to a King, emphatic:

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

That, per our oath,  
Our words be quoth  
In syllables i-am-bic

LESLIE:                   We sing these in  
                              Such a terrible din  
                              That bears run from the racket!

KNIGHTS                 But, if prints we saw  
*EXCEPT*                Of a Dragon's paw –  
SHAMBLES:              We're duty bound to track it!

DRAGON:     *Low, thundering roar.*

QUILLIO:     Hark!

LESLIE:       What?

QUILLIO:     Hark!

ERRANT:       What?

QUILLIO:     Hark, I say!

SHAMBLES:    *(Shrugs)* Okay, already.

ERRANT:       *(Ear to the ground. Then, in recitativo:)*

                  The wind, sloughing –  
                  It must be nothing.

*Knights resume the march, singing:*

KNIGHTS:                We stamp and tramp,  
                              'Til we last encamp  
                              To hoist a trusty flagon –

## THE VERY LAST DRAGON

*A tremendous, shrieking roar. A moment of silence, punctuated by a thundering drumbeat.*

KNIGHTS:                    THAT MUST BE THE DRAGON!

*Enter the DRAGON.*

KNIGHTS:                    IT IS THE DRAGON!

*The KNIGHTS, except SHAMBLES, quail before the DRAGON, which snorts and roars at the entrance of its lair. The DRAGON stamps a clawed paw, and the KNIGHTS tremble. They flee offstage, pursued by the DRAGON, all exiting stage left, except for SHAMBLES.*

*The PRINCESS and HANDMAIDEN emerge from the dark lair, rubbing their eyes. They see SHAMBLES, approach.*

PRINCESS:    We're grateful, Sir Knight, if this be a rescue—

HANDMAIDEN:    But prithee, pray tell, who in th' heck are you?

*A forlorn wooden flute and a strummed guitar accompany SIR SHAMBLES as he takes center stage and sings. Eventually, the PRINCESS and HANDMAIDEN provide accompaniment.*

### THE BALLAD OF SIR SHAMBLES

SHAMBLES:            There is a knight  
                              Who rides day and night,  
                              And is known as the good knight, Sir Shambles.

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

And in any quest  
He's the bravest and best,  
And many's the road that he rambles.

Like all of the other knights,  
He went hunting for mean, ugly dragons to fight.  
And, after the dragon he'd smite,  
The eggs of the dragon he'd scramble.

It chanced one day  
In the knightly way  
That Sir Shambles was off' went to amble

He came upon  
The Very Last Dragon,  
And he hid in the thickets and brambles.

The Dragon sang of its sorrowful plight,  
And its song touched the heart of our errant knight.  
Sir Shambles sat down to consider what's right,  
And resolved to be somewhat more humble.

Now, the other knights  
Look for dragons to smite,  
And they slaughter the dragon that stumbles.  
But Sir Shambles thinks  
That with dragons extinct,  
We'd miss how they make th' Earth rumble.

For dragons aren't such an awful bad lot,  
True, they thunder and plunder what men ha'e got—  
But without them, romances would have lousy plots,  
And let's face it— Most people are numbskulls.

*Musical interlude.*

There is a knight  
Who rides day and night,  
And when dragons he finds on his rambles

*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

He bands their legs,  
And he hatches their eggs,  
And from dragons' paws pulls thorns and brambles.

For dragons now are a species endanger'd,  
They're hated, and hunted, fair game for a stranger.  
But someone must champion their cause,  
guard their mangers-

The Knight of the Dragons –  
Sir Shambles!

*The music fades. The PRINCESS and HANDMAIDEN are visibly moved.*

PRINCESS:           Wow. I never thought –  
I never really looked at it that way before.

HANDMAIDEN:       He really hasn't hurt us.

PRINCESS:           Maybe he just needed somebody to sit on these eggs.

HANDMAIDEN:       He *is* kind of cute – When he's sleeping.

PRINCESS:           Come on! We may not have a moment to lose!

*Hurried exit stage left. Curtain.*

## A PROBLEM COMEDY

### Scene iii. The Beast's Field of Battle.

*The Dungeon theme. Enter, from stage right, the KNIGHTS and the DRAGON, battling across the apron of the stage in front of the curtain. Sword blows, slings and arrows, the DRAGON roaring and yelping. The KNIGHTS get the better of the fight, and the DRAGON stumbles to its knees, goes down. The music stops.*

*Enter, from stage right, SHAMBLES, the PRINCESS, and HANDMAIDEN.*

*The DRAGON struggles to rise, falls heavily. SIR ERRANT raises sword to slay the DRAGON, but SHAMBLES draws his own blade and checks ERRANT's swing.*

*Black.*

### Scene iv. The Palace Throne Room

*The curtain rises on the Throne Room, the KING agitated and pacing fitfully. Outside the palace, the POPULACE is in open revolt: commotion and chanting outside the windows, the occasional crash of a bottle smashing against the castle walls. Lords HAL & BURTON man the Cannon at the stage left window, aimed downward into the crowd.*

KING: Shut them up!

*HAL & BURTON light the fuse, put their fingers in their ears and the Cannon explodes. The two Lords are knocked on their backsides by the recoil. Silence.*

KING: Much better.

*Besieged, the KING steps downstage, as HAL & BURTON move a wide meshed screen in front of him. He addresses the POPULACE.*



**THE PLATITUDES**

KING:                   I am the Regent of this Land,  
                              The Admiral of its Seas;  
Defender of the Faith, commanding  
                              All I oversee.

                              As Captain of the Ship of State,  
                              In seas a-storm or swampish –  
I stand this watch, and stand up straight,  
                              ‘Til mission be accomplished.

HAL & BURTON:       As Captain of the Ship of State,  
                              In seas a-storm or swampish –  
                              He stands his watch, and stands up straight,  
                              And mission is accomplished!

KING:                   The fearsome Dragon shall not pass  
                              Our flag shall never flag –  
                              Its colors must hold hard and fast  
                              And never run nor sag!

                              Exceptional! Defend we shall!  
                              For freedom isn't free –

HAL & BURTON:       And the price that must be paid is to  
                              The Hal & Burton Company.

*A cabbage is thrown from the pit, hits the screen; then another and another. Tumult, bottles smashing again.*

*Then the houselights slowly rise as SHAMBLES leads the DRAGON on a rope down the center aisle of the theater. The tumult subsides. The DRAGON is porcupined with arrows, limping. The PRINCESS and the HANDMAIDEN are on either side of the DRAGON, assisting it to walk. The bedraggled KNIGHTS bring up the rear. The procession halts before the flustered KING.*

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

KING:                   What are you waiting for? Knights! Slay the Dragon!

*Sirs ERRANT, LESLIE, and QUILLIO listlessly draw their swords.*

PRINCESS:             WAIT! DON'T HURT THAT DRAGON.

KING:                   Why not?

PRINCESS:             Because the Dragon never laid a paw on us!

HANDMAIDEN:         We were captured, but that Dragon never laid a claw on us!

PRINCESS:             He's not that bad a dragon!

HANDMAIDEN:         So please, please don't kill him:

*Pause.*

LESLIE:                That's true.

QUILLIO:              'Tis true.

ERRANT:               It is.

*The KNIGHTS scabbard their swords. The KING appears indecisive.*

HAL & BURTON:         Look— Like we told you before—

*Piano vamp:*

HAL & BURTON:         The Dragon Is the Problem of the Kingdom,  
The root of plague and pestilence and fam—

THE VERY LAST DRAGON

SHAMBLES: Wait! Cut the music and knock off the song. I've got something to say, and this is important!

*The music stops. SHAMBLES steps in front of the DRAGON.*

SHAMBLES: Look— Admit it— They're right. The Dragon really hasn't done anything all that bad. And dragons will probably become extinct if we kill this one. Maybe a living, breathing dragon is better than an extinct dragon. Maybe we have no right to make dragons extinct! What about future generations of kids who will never see a dragon? What about all the terrific things that dragons could teach us? And maybe – Just maybe it would be morally wrong to kill off one of our fellow creatures!

KING: Maybe, but . . .

KING &  
LUCKLESS  
PEASANTS  
& HAL  
& BURTON: *(After a short pause:)* NAW!

KING: *(To Hal & Burton:)*

You two! Make ready to take aim, and fire!

HAL & BURTON *pull the Cannon out of the side window, wheel it around to face the DRAGON. Not incidentally, the backsides of HAL & BURTON are now to the open window.*

KING: Ready! *(HAL strikes a match.)*  
Aim! *(BURTON aims the cannon.)*

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

SIR SHAMBLES, *interposing himself between the DRAGON and the Cannon, raises his shield. The PRINCESS, and then the HANDMAIDEN, break away from the DRAGON and stand with SHAMBLES.*

PRINCESS:            WAIT!

Have pity, father.  
Show mercy, my King!  
Stay thy hand from slaughter –  
Let him live to sing!

*HAL's match goes out.*

**PRINCESS' ARIA**

I  
Never thought that I'd  
Ever take the side  
Of a thing so thunder full

But I  
See something in its eye  
Old as earth and sky –  
An understanding wonderful.

How could I have neither seen nor heard  
But somehow always known;  
What, awakened to a wider world,  
I'm touched and told and shown.

So my  
Heart shall ere abide  
Always at the side  
Of this beast so blunder full

*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

For I  
Know deep down inside  
Under that hard hide  
Another heart as vulner'ble.

And since now must be the time of man,  
To man I must avow:  
That all this is something magical  
Entrusted to us now.

Have pity, father.  
Show mercy, my King!  
Stay thy hand from slaughter –  
Let him live to sing!

*Awestruck silence.*

KING: FIRE! (*Pause.*) Hal & Burton – FIRE THAT GUN!

*HAL strikes a match and torches the fuse as BURTON aims the Cannon at the DRAGON. The KING frantically gesticulates for them to hurry. HAL & BURTON, their backs to the open window, put their fingers in their ears. The Cannon explodes and the recoil knocks HAL & BURTON backwards and through the open window, defenestrating them. Exeunt the Royal Ministers LORDS HAL & BURTON.*

*Pause.*

*SHAMBLES, the PRINCESS, and the HANDMAIDEN turn to look at the DRAGON, which is unharmed. Then the KING sinks to his knees and a bowling ball rolls out from under his cloak.*

PRINCESS: (*In disbelief.*) He called to 'fire.'

*A PROBLEM COMEDY*

HANDMAIDEN:       *(Approaching to comfort her:)* Yes.

PRINCESS:           . . . And so was struck down, upon his own command.

HANDMAIDEN:       By his own hand. *(Pause.)* But more truly, by his mouth – that made the order stand. *(Pause, frustrated.)* Must we still rhyme everything?

PRINCESS:           Is – dead the King?

SHAMBLES:          *(Kneeling at the fallen KING)* The King, Princess, is dead.

HANDMAIDEN:       And you are Queen.

PRINCESS:           . . . I thought I should feel something .

SHAMBLES:          *(Having approached the QUEEN:)* You don't?

*Faint and solemn musical Underscore:*

PRINCESS:           How am I to make, sudden, this thing sensible?  
That dulls the senses like a dream, dissembling –  
Yet bids me speak, as critics would, in trembling  
At such dramatic turn, sharp and improbable.

A Queen must, from the first, be honest  
Or else alights upon her, th' single filament  
That cobwebs into lies, and un-truths consequent;  
Ensnaring, 'til our problems are beyond us.

And so, first it must be said, that I feel nothing  
An' th' glands and loins and limbs that did beget me  
Can no more pull a bowstring taut, arrow'd, to prick –  
And Caesars, kaisers, czars, tycoons, and kings  
That postured and pronounced, dead and impotent be  
To decry that th' Crown, this hour crown'd –  
Decreases a picnic.

QUILLIO:           The King is dead!

*THE VERY LAST DRAGON*

LESLIE: Long live the Queen!

*The fawning CHORUS, again, anthemic:*

**HARK & HAIL**

CHORUS:

Hark & hail our high and mighty  
Chief Executive Officer!  
Tho' dark the gale and nigh the lightning  
Sail on ship of state  
Evermore!

Tho' the maw of death ope' wide ahead  
Ever onward! Stay the course!

QUEEN: *(Self-possessed:)* Enough!

*The CHORUS, cued, quiets. ERRANT approaches the QUEEN, kneels.*

ERRANT: The late King, my fair Queen, decreed  
To all in this brave Land:  
That he who delivers the Dragon's ears  
Should win his daughter's hand!

QUEEN: And so the first rule of this new crown'd Realm  
I do announce, repealing all  
Former and contrary Promulgations,  
Laws, Commands, Proscriptions, Dictums, Canons,  
Doctrines, Dogma, Protocols, Pronouncements,  
Maxims, Axioms, Codes, Precepts, and Ordinances:

The Dragon's life is hereby – spared!

## *A PROBLEM COMEDY*

*The DRAGON looks quizzically about as he is surrounded by the cheering assemblage.*

Our second rule, quite like the first,  
Repeals a Quirk and capricious Whim  
Of our late Sovereign:

We shall have no more – unnecessary – rhyming!

*ALL cheer, and exeunt, in procession.*

**CURTAIN.**

*The CURTAIN CALL is a full cast reprise of THE VERY LAST DRAGON, the final bow taken by the two people who have played the DRAGON, fore and aft, now separated and respectively costumed.*

**FINAL CURTAIN.**