

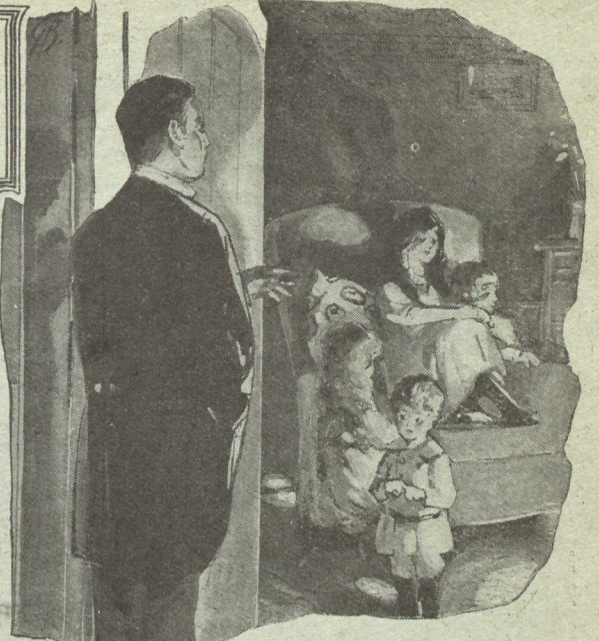


SYSTEM AND METHOD

A Fairy Play in One Act

By A. BERTRAM GREEN

Illustrated by
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MABEL, aged 11 } Orphan children
IRENE, aged 9 } living with their
CHARLIE, aged 7 } Aunt, Mrs. Jen-
BABY, aged 4 } kins.
MR. MEREDITH, Chief Clerk of the Bureau
of Commerce.
JOHN JENKINS, of the Bureau of Commerce.
MARY JENKINS, his wife.
THE FAIRY POLICHINELLE, a most unlikely
character.

SCENE:—A plainly furnished living room in John Jenkins's house. Fireplace right. Small desk near fireplace. A comfortable armchair, the only one in room, in front of fireplace. Tables, chairs and other fixings. Large clock on mantel-piece or shelf. Evening paper on table. Mabel, Irene, Charlie, and Baby discovered grouped around the fireplace. Mabel is curled up in armchair, the others lying on the floor. Mabel has just finished a fairy tale.

TIME:—Evening of the children's first Christmas Eve at the Jenkins' home.

MABEL: And the Prince married Cinderella, and they all lived happily ever after. There!
ALL: Oh, how lovely!
CHARLIE: Did the ugly sisters live happy too?
MABEL: Why, yes. They all did.
CHARLIE: Well, I don't think that fair.
MABEL: But they had to say they were very sorry, and, besides, they were punished by their feet never growing right again.
IRENE: Did it hurt to have their feet cut?
MABEL: Oh, an awful lot.
CHARLIE: I wish some one would cut Uncle's feet.
MABEL: Charlie! How dare you say such a thing! Uncle is very kind, and—and—
CHARLIE: He won't let Santa Claus come.
MABEL: Don't talk about it. Auntie says it's all for our good.
IRENE: What about the fairy god-mother, Mabs?
MABEL: Why, she used to visit them every Christmas Day.
CHARLIE: What did they have for dinner?
MABEL (who has a mind above such material considerations): Oh, everything nice you can think of.
BABY: I want a fairy.
MABEL: So do I, duxy wux, but Uncle does not like fairies.
CHARLIE: He says they're "Tommy rot."
IRENE: Yes, and we're not to waste our time on—on—
MABEL: Imaginative twaddle, I think.
IRENE: Yes, that's it.
MABEL: He says we ought to feed our minds on solid facts. I hate solid facts.
IRENE: They don't improve my mind one scrap.
CHARLIE: Nor mine.
BABY: Nor mine. (Mabel and Irene fuss over Baby and laugh at him.)
CHARLIE (sulkily, harping on his grievance): He says there is no Santa Claus.
MABEL: Oh, I don't think he can mean that. Rose Hatton says that Santa always comes to their house when she's good.
IRENE: Perhaps we're not good enough.
MABEL: I don't know. I think we are. But there! Uncle does not like Santa Claus, and so, I suppose, he does not care to come.
CHARLIE: He used to come when Mother—
MABEL AND IRENE: Hush! Hush! (A pause.)
IRENE: Perhaps, if we were to believe in him very hard—
MABEL: Let's try. Let's believe in him ever so hard. You see, Uncle does not want him, but if we want him extra much, perhaps he might come after all.

BABY: I want Santa.
MABEL: There, you shall have him, precious—perhaps. No, you shall have him. I am sure he will come. Now, boys and girls, all together. He shall come.
ALL: He shall come. (A sound is heard off stage.)
MABEL: Listen!
IRENE: Oh, it's him.
(Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins heard off stage.)
JENKINS: You are most forgetful, Mary. I am always speaking to you about it.
MABEL: Oh, it's only Uncle.

(Enter Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins. Jenkins is a well fed, slow minded, fretful man, very self-important and very selfish. Mrs. Jenkins, small, pretty in a faded way, inefficient. She is much in awe of Mr. Jenkins. They have evidently been shopping. Mrs. J. carries the parcels.)

JENKINS: Why are the children not in bed, Mary?

MARY: They will go right away.
JENKINS: It's much past their hour. They must have sleep. Look at me. I have plenty of sleep. Look at you. Up to all hours. Past eleven when you were home from that church meeting last Thursday. If you want to see those people, why don't you see them in the day time?
MARY: I have so little time, the children and the house—
JENKINS: Stuff and nonsense. All you want is System and Method. How do you think I would have obtained my position without System.

MARY (wearily). I think I will put the children to bed, John. (Children are kissed on forehead by Jenkins, and exit with Mary.)
JENKINS (sits in armchair, finds book on it): Nothing put away. What's this—Fairy tales—Faugh! Against my express orders. Well, I'll have a word to say about that. (Takes account book from desk, works on same.) Another column wrong. Will she never learn to add? What's this—twenty-five cents for Moving Picture Show! Extravagance, unpardonable extravagance. Blots, erasures, the worst set of books I've ever seen. What's this—Christmas presents \$1.75! Well, of all—

(There is a distinct pause. At first Jenkins continues to work. Then his head falls, and he appears to doze.)
MARY (off stage): All right, dears, I'll try. (enters) John, the children are so anxious to have Santa Claus. Don't you think we might?
JENKINS: What's that?
MARY: I've got the presents, and they would be so delighted.
JENKINS (heavily): Do I understand that you desire to encourage the children in a belief of the absurd Christmas myth?
MARY: Well, John, I—
JENKINS: No!
MARY: But, John, it's their first Christmas since—
JENKINS: I said "No!" I am in the habit of meaning what I say.
MARY: Very well, John. (Sighs, gets work basket I.)
JENKINS: While we are on the subject of Christmas, I want to go over these accounts with you. (He does not move from his position. She rises, crosses stage, and stands leaning over his chair.)
JENKINS: As usual the totals are all wrong.
MARY: Oh, and I tried so hard. I went over it twenty times, and it never comes out the same.
JENKINS: Stuff and nonsense. System is what you want. System and Method. And look at these blots.
MARY: Baby knocked my arm.
JENKINS: Oh, yes. Always an excuse. How

do you think I would have got on if I had made blots and excused myself. System. Say "System."

MARY (meekly): System.
JENKINS: Now, what do you mean by spending my hard earned money on Moving Picture Shows and presents for the children?

MARY: It was money you gave me for a new hat, but I thought—

JENKINS: Then spend it on a new hat. The children are expense enough. I want these children brought up without extravagant notions. I'll give them a good education, feed and clothe them, but nothing more. You take those presents back.

MARY: Very well, John.

JENKINS: I want the children brought up on System and Method. I will not have fairy twaddle stuffed into their heads. Look at this book. Where did it come from?

MARY (looks at fly leaf): "With Santa's lovingest love to his dear little Rose." I think Mabel's school friend, Rose Hatton, must have lent it to her.

JENKINS (sneeringly): "With Santa's lovingest love to his dear little Rose." I can't understand Hatton allowing such nonsense. He's a good business man. Plenty of System. But he has a weak spot somewhere. I flatter myself that I have no weak spots. He's soft. I'm hard all over.

MARY: I think you are, John.

JENKINS: What's that? Well, understand that the children are to have no more of such twaddle. They are to be brought up on System and Method.

MARY: Yes, John. No doubt it is quite wise, but do you think they will be happy?
JENKINS: Happy? They'll get used to it, and be thankful afterward.

(A pause.)

MARY: John, did you never believe in fairies?
JENKINS: What nonsense are you talking now?

MARY: When you were a child, John, did you not believe in fairies.

JENKINS: My mother used to tell me a lot of twaddle. She wanted to make me a fool, but I developed myself. Now I am what I am, respected by my superiors, feared by my subordinates. I'm a rising man.

MARY: Yes, John, of course you're getting on, but—

JENKINS: But what? Of course, I'm getting on. Now this Reform Government is returned, they'll be clearing out all the dead heads. Shall I be cleared out? I fancy not. I should like to see the Department without me. But that miserably inefficient fellow, the Chief, faugh—he's trembling for his job. You see, I'll be in his chair before many days. Then, I'll wake 'em up.

MARY: I'm so sorry for poor Mr. Meredith.

JENKINS: Just like a woman. You ought to be glad I get my step. Why, I may hear of it at any time. As to Meredith, he has no more System and Method than—than you. He published a book of children's poems once, and I should not be surprised to hear that he believes in your precious fairies. Ha! Ha! I'd like to see any one make me believe in them.

(Mabel appears in the doorway. She has her night dress on.)

MABEL: Auntie, will you please come to Baby for a moment. He's crying for Santa and the Fairies.

JENKINS: Let him cry.

MARY: I'll go to him. (Exit with Mabel.)

JENKINS: Santa and the Fairies. Faugh! It makes me tired. Why should any one want to believe in such tomfoolery as fairies?

(As he is talking the Fairy Polichinelle comes in front of him. She carries a grey silk wrap, her robe of invisibility, and a wand.)

FAIRY: Ah! There he is, the beast! Now, to assume my robe of invisibility. (Puts on cloak.)

JENKINS. I should like some one to make me believe in fairies. (Fawns.) I should very much like some one to make me believe—

(Fairy raps his knee with her wand.)

JENKINS: Hello—

(He feels knee, looks round, then closes his eyes again. Fairy raps other knee. He feels other knee, looks round very much surprised. Gets up, examines ceiling, but finally settles himself for a doze. Fairy raps his right knee a second time. This time he catches the wand. Fairy snatches it away.)

JENKINS: Well, I'll be—jiggered! Mary, if you're playing me any tom fool tricks, I'll—

FAIRY (throwing off robe): It's not Mary. I did it. I'm a fairy, and you're a horrid, disagreeable, ugly old frump. (Assumes robe.)

(Jenkins rubs his eyes, looks hard at her without, of course, seeing her, then rubs his knee.)

JENKINS: Well, of all the extraordinary—I was never rouled that way before. I must see a doctor. Extraordinary hallucination. (Fairy raps knee.) There it is again. (Fairy raps knee.) I must concentrate my will power. I am quite normal. I feel nothing. (Fairy raps knee.) Oh! This is simply an hallucination. (Fairy appears.) Go away! You're an hallucination.

FAIRY (indignantly): I'm not!

JENKINS. I say you are. You're probably the piece of cheese I ate for dinner.

FAIRY: How dare you? I'm not!

JENKINS: You are. You're a figment of my imagination.

FAIRY: You particularly disagreeable old man! I'll condescend to argue with you. First, you have no imagination. Second, it's insulting to call me a figment. (Pinches him.) Does that feel like imagination?

JENKINS: Perhaps she's right. Look here. What do you mean by bobbing up and down like that, and hitting me? Hitting me indeed.

FAIRY: It's no use being grouchy. I wanted to wake you up.

JENKINS: Impertinence. Now, if this is some scheme for getting a subscription out of me, it won't go. My wife attends to that.

FAIRY: Yes, I know, and you refuse her the money to do it with. No. I don't want a sub. You'll give to everything you can find of your own free accord later.

JENKINS: I will not. Perhaps you're a book agent. You'll waste your breath in asking me to buy books at a dollar down and a dollar a month. And, go home and get properly dressed. Disgraceful!

FAIRY: Oh, don't worry your little brain. You really have quite an ordinary brain, you know. I've told you already. I'm a fairy!

JENKINS. Stuff and nonsense. Now, look here. How did you get in?

FAIRY: Through the key hole.

JENKINS: Talk sense. State your business and go away.

FAIRY: I'm afraid I can't go until you've become a very different man to your present self. But I'll state the first part of my business. You bought some stock this morning.

JENKINS: I suppose some one in the office told you that. Well, I did.

FAIRY: You think you bought fifty shares of Northern Pacific.

JENKINS: I know I did. What's more, it's risen two and a half points, and I shall clear a tidy profit. System and Method.

FAIRY: Well, as a matter of fact you actually bought five hundred shares of Southern Pacific, and it's dropped sixteen points. Look at your broker's confirmation. If I'm wrong, I'll go away.

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