

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN BALL

A Play in One Act  
by Marty Grande-Sherbert

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

IGOR, *coat-check and Composite Stock Character*  
Public Domain by nature; archetype

DRACULA, *veteran vampire*  
Entered Canada Public Domain 1962

MERLIN, *wizards' wizard*  
First depicted before Statute of Anne

DR. FRANKENSTEIN, *unlikeable scientist*  
Entered Canada Public Domain 1901

ROBIN HOOD, *wealth redistribution advocate*  
First depicted before Statute of Anne

SCROOGE, *wealth redistribution target*  
Entered Canada Public Domain 1920

ALICE, *dream logic interpreter*  
Entered Canada Public Domain 1948

PETER PAN, *eternally youthful, eternally copyrighted*  
Entered Canada Public Domain 1987  
(Under permanent copyright in the UK only)

WINNIE THE POOH (A.A. Milne original), *underdressed bear*  
Entered Canada Public Domain 2006

SHERLOCK HOLMES, *world's greatest (uncopyrighted) detective*  
Entered Canada Public Domain 1980

QUASIMODO, *hidden historian*  
Entered Canada Public Domain 1935

## SCENE 1

Coatroom, Interior, Day.

*(Intro Music: "Cabaret" by Louis Armstrong, whose music has been in the public domain since 2021)*

*(The entrance coatroom to the **Public Domain Ball** is decorated for a formal occasion. IGOR shuffles around the entranceway, arranging decorations and refreshments. DR. FRANKENSTEIN enters through the front door, taking off his coat.)*

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: Why, Igor! How long has it been?

IGOR: *(mildly)* Hello, Dr. Frankenstein...nice to see you again at this year's event. I was here last year, but perhaps we didn't cross paths. *(He moves to take Dr. Frankenstein's coat and hangs it up)*

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: No? Well, all of these charity balls of ours blur together after a while, I suppose. I sit in my lab, I come to the ball, I go back to the lab...I've been living here in the Public Domain so long that it's routine. *(He admires the entranceway)* You've done quite a nice job setting things up.

IGOR: Why, thank you. I'll have to drop in once I finish with the coats and say hello—although it is a bit embarrassing when everyone here assumes I work for you.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: *(shocked)* Has that really happened? But there was no Igor in my creative work at all! I didn't even have an assistant!

IGOR: Even so, Doctor, people tend to assume. It feels like a bit of a microaggression, to be honest with you.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: I should say so...to treat a stock character like a common prop in this day and age. Well, if I come across that kind of attitude here, I promise I'll nip it in the bud. People still confuse me and my Creation, you know, so I have an idea of what that's like.

IGOR: Yes, misconceptions. But I suppose that's part of the Public Domain—when no one controls your intellectual expression, there's no one to define who you are.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: Well, yes, I suppose you're right. *(crossing the entranceway)* If there were no sacrifices associated with entering the Public Domain, like giving up control over our stories and characters, then characters from every creative work in the narrative universe would be gathering here tonight. But it's because of our charitable donations to narratives everywhere that we're here to celebrate.

IGOR: Well, it's not entirely a sacrifice...I'd say it also means there's no one to exploit us. There's a certain freedom in it. And we'll be having some new arrivals this year.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: Very exciting arrivals! I can't wait to *pick their brains*. (*Anticipating laughter*) You see what I did there, Igor?

IGOR: (*neutrally*) Yes, I see.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: I'm not sure you got it. It was a joke, about—

IGOR: About you doing mad science with brains, I understand.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: Ah. You didn't laugh.

IGOR: No, sorry. Again, I don't work for you.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: No, I didn't mean to imply—well, anyway, nice to see you again, Igor. Talk to you inside! (*Exits through the hallway, offstage*)

IGOR: (*to himself*) I don't love that guy.

(*MERLIN and DRACULA enter. DRACULA hovers just behind the door's threshold.*)

DRACULA: Would someone mind inviting me in?

MERLIN: (*waving his hands dramatically*) ENTER!

IGOR: (*taking MERLIN and DRACULA's coats*) It doesn't need to be a spell, Merlin. You can just say "come in." How are you, Dracula? Nice to see some more Public Domain veterans. Frankenstein is inside.

DRACULA: I'm vell, thank you. (*Delicately, as he walks past offstage*) I don't love Frankenstein.

IGOR: (*nodding*) I get it.

MERLIN: Quite exciting about the new visitors, eh, Igor? I hear there will be some *magic users!* (*Rubbing hands together*) I can't wait to compare the magical styles of wizards and elves. And *another wizard!* Is Lancelot coming again this year?

IGOR: I think he had to take a rain check. Rusted armor.

MERLIN: That's a shame. Well, let me know when the newbies arrive! (*Exits*)

(PETER PAN, ALICE, and POOH enter.)

IGOR: Peter Pan. Alice. Welcome back. And ah, Winnie the Pooh. Congratulations on your U.S. debut.

ALICE: Ah, is that Winnie the Pooh? I didn't recognize you, sir. Don't you normally look somewhat different?

POOH: Oh, er, uh, yes....you see, I'm only the original A.A. Milne version of Pooh...there's another version of me who is still under copyright.

ALICE: Ah, by the, er...*mouse*-related corporation, which I take care not to name as a precaution?

POOH: That's the one.

IGOR: Yes, Pooh here has special precautions he must take this evening. He should take care not to put on a red shirt, lest his appearance become copyright infringement.

ALICE: Oh, my...would that have consequences, here? Are we being watched by some kind of Public Domain Police?

IGOR: Nothing like that, but there would be dire consequences. The Public Domain Ball is a kind of magical space, with a barrier around it, you see...only Public Domain characters are able to pass the barrier. If a character tries to pass while under copyright, they are immediately incinerated.

ALICE: Incinerated! That must be powerful magic.

IGOR: Yes, incidentally, it's also *Canadian* magic—the Ball operates under Canada's Public Domain law specifically.

ALICE: Curious! Why use Canadian magic?

IGOR: I can't say I know...something to do with whoever wrote this play, probably.

ALICE: (*thoughtfully*) That would explain it.

PETER: The Canadian magic is why I can be here, too. If it were British magic, I'd probably be in some trouble, since I still have a copyright going in the United Kingdom. That copyright belongs to a children's hospital, permanently! Although technically they only collect royalties...I still don't want to risk burning up. (*Shrugs*) Better safe than singed.

ALICE: I'd say so.

(ROBIN HOOD and SCROOGE enter, SCROOGE trying to wrestle something from ROBIN's hands)

SCROOGE: Stop! Stop this man, Igor—he's trying to rob me! He took my wallet!

IGOR: Oh, that's not really my job.

ROBIN HOOD: I thought you had learned your lesson about hoarding wealth, Mr. Scrooge. (*Waving wallet*) You don't need all of this! Think of all the people who could benefit from your wealth. Think of the orphans!

SCROOGE: What orphans?! Surely the Public Domain doesn't have its own orphanage.

ROBIN HOOD: No, I'm talking about *orphan works*—copyright-protected works with unknown or uncontactable rightsholders. The poor children are trapped outside of the Public Domain, with no one to watch over them...they need a fund to get them on their feet when they finally arrive here, and you can help us start it.

SCROOGE: Well, you could have at least *asked* me to contribute! Why do I have to stand for petty theft?

ROBIN HOOD: Theft? It's sharing. Why, that's the entire point of this Ball. What a hypocrite you are to hold onto your wealth in the Public Domain, where everything is shared! The reason we're gathered here is so that everyone has equal opportunity.

SCROOGE: Equal *creative* opportunity, not equal opportunity to steal wallets.

ROBIN HOOD: The opportunity is financial, too! People want to hold onto their publishing monopolies, keep stories copyright protected, because they think that's the only way new works will be created—with financial incentive. But after a couple of years, most of the work that went into a property is already paid...holding onto a copyright after that might as well be hoarding.

SCROOGE: Well—to play devil's advocate—there's still a *potential* for new money to be made. And there's a potential that other creators might divert the profits unfairly.

ROBIN HOOD: But how often is that *really* the case? And since when is creativity a limited resource? It's like buying out a thousand lottery tickets, when you're already set for life. Classic behaviour of the rich.

SCROOGE: I still don't see how that excuses—

(Suddenly, SHERLOCK HOLMES rushes in with a panic, interrupting the conversation.)

SHERLOCK: Igor!! Forget about whatever everybody's talking about!! Lock the doors immediately, It's an emergency!!

IGOR: Hm, alright. *(Bolts the front door.)* I mean, everyone's here anyway.

SCROOGE: What's all this? Who are you?

ROBIN HOOD: Yes, what emergency? Why would you lock us all in?

SHERLOCK: Sherlock Holmes, world's greatest detective. And I'm afraid I've just witnessed a murder.

## SCENE 2

Ballroom, Interior, Day.

*(All ball guests—IGOR included—are seated or standing around the ballroom, facing SHERLOCK at the front of the room. The ballroom is decorated with several classic couches and chairs, banners in support of the Public Domain, and a banquet table. There is an **open window** on one wall and a **chimney** in the room. A **red t-shirt** is draped over one of the chairs.)*

SHERLOCK: I'm sorry that we've all had to begin the gathering this way, everyone. Yes, you heard me right—there's been a murder. I'm afraid I can't let anyone leave until we've solved this case.

DRACULA: This is just terrible. Vat a vaste.

MERLIN: Of blood, I assume, not potential creativity.

DRACULA: Vell, yes, but I thought it would be rude to say.

FRANKENSTEIN: *(Looking around, somewhat to himself)* Does anyone find it a bit chilly in here?

*(POOH nods, shivering.)*

ROBIN HOOD: And who are you to stop us from leaving, again?

SCROOGE: Yes, shouldn't we wait for the authorities to arrive instead of leaving you in charge?

SHERLOCK: While I appreciate your concern, gentlemen, I am an inspector from Scotland Yard. I'm more than qualified—

PETER: Well, we're actually in Canada, Sherlock. UK law doesn't apply for me here, why should it for you?

ALICE: Also, I'm not a gentleman. (*Looking around*) Now that I think of it, why is this event such a boys' club? Anne of Green Gables didn't even come. Curious.

SHERLOCK: (*annoyed*) Well, I'm sorry—look, unless you can come up with any public domain Canadian detectives in the next hour, or unless some author decides to rewrite me as a woman, I'm just going to have to do, if that's alright.

ALICE: Oh, that might actually be quite fun! I hope someone does do that.

SHERLOCK: In *any* case, I witnessed the murder of this year's newcomers as I was riding into the Public Domain. The newcomers were in a carriage next to me, and just as we crossed the magical threshold that divided the copyrighted from un-copyrighted works...the poor things were incinerated.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: Now hold on—first of all, I've been here a while, so I'm a bit out of the loop. Who are these newcomers, exactly? Can't we be a little more specific?

SHERLOCK: I'm afraid not, doctor. *Because* they were incinerated, we know that these guests are still protected under copyright—their tickets must have been stolen before they could confirm their Public Domain status. I can't be sure that the same hasn't happened for some of us as well, so we can't risk invoking their intellectual property lest we meet the same fate.

SCROOGE: Good lord. ...well, could we get a hint?

SHERLOCK: I'll say that they were, uh...a band of fantasy adventurers who once delivered a ring in a rather arduous fashion.

(*PETER, POOH, DRACULA and ALICE react with obvious recognition, while everyone else looks at each other oblivious.*)

SCROOGE: That actually doesn't help at all.

POOH: I have a feeling some of our veteran guests might not have access to the culture outside this magical barrier...

ALICE: Well, "ring" was all you really needed to say anyway.

DRACULA: Sadly, I never got to see ze movies.

MERLIN: All I knew was that there was a wizard. I was so looking forward to meeting him.

SHERLOCK: Anyway, that's not the important part! What's important is that we have here a deliberate blockage of characters from the Public Domain at a time when the narrative world needed them most. Thousands more characters could have had their tickets stolen in a similar fashion. And as a character who was only just able to arrive on the scene, I say we have to get to the bottom of it.

POOH: Yes, I wish I could have met some newcomers...I'm new in the U.S. public domain, you know, and it gets lonely. Bother, it is cold in here. Could someone close the window?

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: (*attempting to close the window*) It's jammed for some reason.

ROBIN HOOD: So does this mean that all the characters from—this ring-related franchise—are gone from the narrative universe forever? This is monumental inequity!

IGOR: No, I feel we should clarify—as intellectual beings, we characters cannot technically *die*. We are merely creative expressions, after all. We have certain defined characteristics, but we do not really *exist* unless we are expressed by a creator. Therefore, nothing can cause us to *stop* existing—but our expression can be suppressed.

ALICE: Ah, I'm familiar with this kind of logic. We're manifestations, collections of attributes, rather than true people. So while the newcomers "died" in an allegorical sense, they can still appear in their copyrighted works at some other time as long as they aren't stopped? I assume they'll reappear again, in some other location, outside our little Public Domain bubble. (*To Sherlock*) Are we to assume, however, that unless we get them new tickets in time, these characters *will* stay out of the Public Domain forever?

SHERLOCK: No, that shouldn't be possible—unless intellectual rights are permanently given over to someone, like Peter's were in the UK, the copyright term *must* expire at some point. It seems that our culprit didn't intend to *remove* our guests from the ball, but merely *delay* their arrival. (*Thoughtfully*) But why?

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: (*Still struggling with the window a bit, before finally giving up*) Well, literally dead or not, getting incinerated must not have been a pleasant experience. And speaking of unpleasant experiences, I'm sorry I can't get this window closed. It really is chilly in here, and this poor bear-type-creature isn't even dressed.

(*He gestures to POOH, who is glancing mournfully at the red shirt, resigned.*)

SHERLOCK: Be that as it may, we need to rule out anyone with an alibi in this crime. I suppose none of you saw or heard from the newcomers before we arrived, other than me.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: Not only did we not see them, most of us don't even know them. Why, I was in the public domain before their intellectual property was even created.



SCROOGE: I'm in the same situation. Solid alibi.

ROBIN HOOD: Right. Raise your hands if you were in the public domain before the newcomers existed.

(*DR. FRANKENSTEIN, ALICE, ROBIN HOOD, and SCROOGE raise their hands.*)

SCROOGE: So we're all innocent!

DRACULA: (*defensively*) Well, hold on. I recall meeting them, but that was years ago. I haven't been outside the public domain since 1962.

ALICE: The last time I was outside was 1948...but I suppose it *could* have been me...a mirror version of me, perhaps. Still, did these travelers even have the tickets back then? How long ago were they sent?

IGOR: Well, this ball celebrates copyrighted characters entering the public domain—that means their copyright terms have expired. The public domain has always existed, but copyright laws defining an expiry term first existed in Canada after the Statute of Anne in 1710. Ever since then, we've sent out tickets automatically.

MERLIN: The Statute of Anne! Yes, I remember that well...old Robin Hood and I were here before we started even holding these Balls. At that time, the Public Domain was mostly comprised of folkloric figures and fairy tales, you know, that kind of thing. I recall Hansel and Gretel used to hold wonderful banquets.

ROBIN HOOD: I also seem to remember that there were some issues getting people their tickets after a few years? They always seemed to show up too early.

IGOR: Yes, copyright terms changed a while after the Statute of Anne...Canada officially joined the Berne convention as its own country in [1924], which changed the term of expiry to a period of life of the author plus 50 years.

ALICE: Is the Burn Convention why guests started getting incinerated? It seems an odd thing to have a convention for.

MERLIN: That's *Berne*, spelt B-E-R-N-E. It's the city where the thing was held, as far as I'm aware. Not too sure—I get most of my news via magic portal these days, and the reception is terrible.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: Ah, I remember that Berne Convention! I was in the Public Domain at the time. As I understand it, all these countries across the world wanted to harmonize their copyright terms. It also seemed to be involved with trade agreements related to any kind of patent—odd to think that I myself could be considered in the same trade deals as one of my inventions.

DRACULA: Ah, trade is very important. So a character like me could, for example, haff himself transported to England in a coffin while retaining intellectual property rights.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: Well...that's a bit specific, but yes, I suppose.

SHERLOCK: So the term of expiry has been life plus 50 years ever since the Berne convention, Igor?

IGOR: As far as I'm aware...although, I hear word from some channels that there might be some talk about changing it again...trade and copyright are linked through the TRIPS agreement, so there's a business involved there.

DRACULA: Ah, like an agreement to take a "trip" away from Transylvania?

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: You're very stuck on that, aren't you?

IGOR: TRIPS stands for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

ALICE: Wouldn't that be... "traipr"?

SHERLOCK: I see...I see. This all forms a certain picture in my mind. Ladies and gentlemen... *(takes out a pipe, lights it)* Thank you for giving me the information you can on this case. I shall now— *(blows into the pipe, to find that it produces bubbles instead of smoke)* —well good Lord! Has my pipe always been...silly?

IGOR: We've all been a little silly since we got here, don't worry—it comes with being a Public Domain character. You can be portrayed in all sorts of ways.

SHERLOCK: Well, I'm not sure I like it...as I was saying, though, I shall now retire to a private room and deliberate. I'll be back once I have an idea of what to do next. Until then, just...uh. Sit pensively. I shall return!

*(SHERLOCK rushes offstage to deliberate.)*

*(The other characters sit in silence for a beat.)*

ALICE: ...do I look pensive enough?

### SCENE 3

Side office, Interior, Day.

*(The small side office in the building contains a desk, a chair and a lamp. SHERLOCK, who is now a woman, is standing over a notebook on the desk. A door to the ballroom sits on one side.)*

SHERLOCK: Very well. Let's go over the facts of the case. *(Blows pipe-bubbles, paces the room)* Who is the most likely to have stolen or tampered with the tickets? Most of the guests here have been in the public domain so long that it's hard to see a motive.

Peter Pan might have access to the copyright-protected world in the UK, but that hardly applies here...and then there's Pooh. He's just barely arrived in the US Public Domain, so there may be something there. Could it be that he's in cahoots with some other copyrighted works? Or more sinister yet, with the *other* Winnie the Pooh? It's possible, but that puts him at so much risk...and how could he steal those tickets *right* before the Ball without any clothing to conceal them in? It seems unlikely.

But that means we run out of options. And the only other guest who has been outside the public domain recently is...*(pauses, thoughtfully)* Myself. *(Carefully)* Now, Sherlock, let's consider every possibility...could it be that *I* was the one to cause this? Conan Doyle's estate is a famously litigious one, after all. Why, as I was leaving for this ball, I recall that they were moving to sell licenses for the character of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself. Is it inconceivable that they might be involved in some sort of alliance with the estate of these newcomers? Or that I played a part in it?

*(Considering)* Surely though, I would have some *memory* of being involved...then again, I am now a character in the public domain. I used to know which of my characteristics were copyrighted by the estate, but now they're all up for grabs...I never know what I'll do next! I could be acting in ways that I had never conceived of before...I mean, look at this pipe! It's positively whimsical. Also, I'm fairly certain that I've already been rewritten as a woman.

*(Sitting down at the desk)* But no—if my narrative was involved in a copyright grab, I would have been incinerated as well—and so would anyone here, for that matter. There's no way that someone could be in cahoots with the killers without removing themselves from the public domain. More than that, they'd have to cover their tracks. Remaining here as a copyrighted character after such a crime would be a red flag. *(Thinking)* A red flag...

*(Has a realization, stands up)* Oh, that's it! Why, I've been looking at this all wrong! *(Looks to the door, rushing to it)* I only hope I'm not too late!

*(SHERLOCK exits to ballroom)*

#### SCENE 4

Ballroom.

*(All other characters remain in the ballroom, some eating food from the banquet table. Louis Armstrong plays ambiently in the background.)*

SHERLOCK: *(enters)* Everyone, I think I've cracked the case—oh, you're all just having the banquet now.

ALICE: Well, you were taking a while in there. You look lovely, by the way.

SHERLOCK: Oh, thank you. You were right, this woman business is rather fun. But that's not the point. Everybody stop eating and turn that music off.

*(The music stops.)*

DRACULA: *(disappointed)* We were just about to get to "Vat a Vonderful World."

SHERLOCK: Forget about that! We missed a crucial clue in investigating this case. Where's Winnie the Pooh?

POOH: *(emerges, shivering)* Here I am...trying to stay away from the window.

SHERLOCK: Yes, that's exactly the issue! Has anyone stopped to consider the jammed window in this room, and the effect it's had on our naked friend here? What's more, I'm sure Pooh himself has realized that the only thing he has to keep him warm is dangerously off-limits...*(walks over to pick up the red shirt onstage)* This copyright-restricted red shirt!

SCROOGE: I never even noticed that.

SHERLOCK: It was placed here *sneakily*...in the hopes that Pooh would wear it. Isn't that right, Pooh?

POOH: Well, I was thinking about it.

SHERLOCK: It seems to me that I've been going about this case the wrong way all along. I assumed that the newcomers had their tickets *stolen*, so that they were robbed of their rightful place in the Public Domain this year. But what I didn't consider, until Igor explained that business about the terms of expiry and the tickets, was that this might have to do with something bigger than any of us characters—with the very laws that govern the Canadian Public Domain themselves. *(Walks over to hand the red shirt to FRANKENSTEIN)*

Frankenstein? Could you use your scientific knowhow to examine this shirt? I have a feeling we'll find something within.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: Uh...sure. (*Examining the shirt, Frankenstein finds and reveals a small camera hidden inside, to the room's surprise*) Oh? What's this?

SHERLOCK: I thought we'd find something. (*Takes the camera, revealing the Disney and Middle Earth Enterprises logos on its side*) Look at this.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: (*leaning in to read*) Middle Earth Enterprises? What on earth does that mean?

PETER PAN: Why, isn't that the newcomers' rightsholder? They make quite a profit in the UK...and look, there's the Disney logo, too!

SCROOGE: What are rightsholders' names doing on a camera in the Public Domain?

DRACULA: And vat's a *camera*?

SHERLOCK: I can explain what a camera is later, Dracula. The point of essence here is that yes, this camera which has apparently been surveilling us the whole time bears the logos of two major rightsholders. One of them holds the rights to our newcomers' intellectual property, while the other nearly incinerated Pooh in a copyright claim before our very eyes.

This brings us to the crucial piece of the case that we were missing all along—we had assumed, not looking at the bigger picture, that the newcomers simply had their tickets stolen by another *character*. But it's clear now that the incineration of the newcomers was caused by a *change in copyright law itself!* A change on a scale large enough that these properties themselves were involved!

ROBIN HOOD: Good lord, it's some kind of conspiracy!

IGOR: And that means that it wasn't just the newcomers that were affected...

SHERLOCK: ...but *every single character slated to enter the Public Domain this year!* Precisely, Igor. We have no idea how many others might have met the same fate tonight.

SCROOGE: Why, that's practically mass murder!

ALICE: Allegorically, of course.

POOH: So...what does this mean?

SHERLOCK: It means that nobody in this room was responsible for tonight's crime—and that the blame rests with forces beyond our control.

MERLIN: And have we some method of peering into this mysterious legal world? Or is there nothing we can do now? When will I ever get to meet that wizard?!

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: (*shaking head*) Unfortunately, science is nowhere near close enough to creating a device that can successfully penetrate the fourth wall.

SHERLOCK: So we can only speculate...giving the information we have so far, though, I'm willing to bet that this change in law has *something* to do with a copyright grab. We all know how possessive rightsholders like this...(*gesturing at camera*)...can be. Perhaps there was profit to be made.

ROBIN HOOD: Given the two logos at once, I wouldn't be surprised if these two companies were working together...Disney is always using new narratives. They've used mine.

MERLIN: Aye, and mine.

ALICE: Mine too.

POOH: And me, of course...

SHERLOCK: Precisely. I wonder if this plan was an attempt to cozy up and purchase some more intellectual property. (*Shakes head, incredulous*) To think that there's such an effort to keep some of us away from this place.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: It's a bit unfair, if you think about it. I mean, there are so many great creative works people have made with me and old Dracula here.

DRACULA: Yes, we've become so much more popular, been adapted in so many ways...people may make fun of us, but zey celebrate us as well. I veep for those who cannot enjoy such a luxurious life.

SCROOGE: Loathe as I am to admit it, I also quite enjoy seeing my story performed so often...imagine if all those children's plays got hit with lawsuits every Christmastime. Those ghosts would come back for vengeance all over again.

ROBIN HOOD: But what can we *do* about it? What is the source of this madness? Should we launch a campaign against large copyright holders? Frighten them into silence?

IGOR: I'm afraid it's not that simple. As I tried to explain before, copyright term laws are also affected by international trade. Even people outside of the publishing world have stake in the

game...there was the TRIPS agreement with the World Trade Organization, but also another agreement. I can't seem to recall which it was...

*(QUASIMODO emerges from the chimney, crawling out of it. He has a French accent.)*

QUASIMODO: The Canada, United States and Mexico Agreement.

*(Everyone startles)*

SCROOGE: GOOD LORD, WHO ARE YOU?

QUASIMODO: *Je m'apelle Quasimodo.* From Notre Dame.

PETER PAN: Have you been hiding in there the whole time? And you just never came out?

SHERLOCK: *(addressing the room)* This had better be the last surprise of the night.

QUASIMODO: Apologies, I just never felt the need to say anything until now...I find enclosed spaces more comfortable. I thought you all might want to know the name of that other agreement...I happen to be an expert in copyright and international trade. And yes, the two are very related.

You see, long ago, my creator Victor Hugo campaigned to harmonize copyright around the world so that characters like me would retain our copyright in other countries. It was part of the eternal, how you say, *balance* between the rights of creators and the rights of those who enjoy creative works. But after TRIPS, copyright became connected to all kinds of trade...it was an economic move to have the same copyright terms as countries you do business with.

The new agreement with the States and Mexico requires a 70 year period before entering the public domain, instead of the 50 year period under the Berne Convention. And so Canada decided to comply.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN: That was quite a speech. We got your whole backstory.

ROBIN HOOD: So it is motivated by profit...but politics as well.

IGOR: Politics that I'm not sure any of us can control from behind the fourth wall. It seems that if Canada decides to enter into these agreements, and extend the copyright, there's nothing we can do to stop them.

QUASIMODO: Alas, yes. What began as a quest to secure rights for authors like mine has become a quest to tighten holds on all kinds of patents around the world. I have long wondered what is to be done. Also, can I have some of this buffet?

IGOR: Of course. Help yourself.

*(QUASIMODO goes to eat at the buffet, generally ignoring the rest of the group)*

ROBIN HOOD: Well, I can't just give up. Even if we can't directly affect these decisions, we can at least become more aware of how they work, can't we?

ALICE: We could teach others as well...through telling our own stories, perhaps. I wonder if that's what we're doing right now.

SCROOGE: In my old business days, I'm ashamed to say I might have looked into this as an opportunity...I'm sure there are many connections for publishers, estates and such. But that's the problem, isn't it? These powerful people know more than we do about the law. Why, they've done this right under our noses.

SHERLOCK: We probably could have seen this crime coming if we knew where to look. We took the public domain for granted, perhaps.

MERLIN: And in the process, we lost a great wizard for 20 additional years! Oh, how I wish I could speak with him...you know, I wonder if I could open a wizard's portal to communicate across the fourth wall. Get some internal information, you know. Stay updated on copyright cases.

PETER PAN: We could review them every year at this Ball. Make it an annual tradition.

POOH: And someday, maybe I'll be reunited with the other version of myself...even if it will make me feel terribly underdressed.

SHERLOCK: May we all be reunited in the public domain someday, everyone. And let's use the rest of tonight to honor the memory of those we lost...in twenty years, we can show the world how missed they were.

ROBIN HOOD: Hear, hear! *(Raises a glass)* To the public domain!

ALL: To the public domain! *(Make a toast)*

*(Ball guests mingle as the play ends and lights dim. Outro music: "I Guess I'll Get the Papers and Go Home" by Louis Armstrong.)*

*FIN*



## References

*While the play above was written to be entirely within the public domain, so that it can be performed, read and shared without restrictions, the knowledge required to make it an educational resource about copyright came from experts and writers who should be attributed here. Attribution is not legally required of public domain works, but it is an integral part of most Creative Commons licenses and part of an “open” intellectual commons. As the writers and researchers associated with these resources are—unlike many classic authors—still alive, references help to facilitate respect for the writers’ work and to create knowledge networks and access points for readers.*

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