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THE LAST LAUGH OF THE HOLLOW CROWN



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THE LAST LAUGH OF THE HOLLOW CROWN

written by

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Synopsis

In a crumbling kingdom ruled by fear, the only man allowed to speak freely is the court jester—a limping, half-painted fool believed to be harmless. But behind the jokes hides a shattered noble, bent on revenge after his family was executed by royal decree.

As the tyrant King spirals into paranoia and his Queen grows dangerously quiet, the Jester begins a rebellion not with swords, but with performance, poetry, and truth. From whispered rumors to public mockery, he turns the kingdom's laughter against its throne. Allies rise from the ashes: a guilt-ridden general, a circle of courtiers hungry for justice, and the people themselves—ready to stand. At the heart of it all lies the Book of Blood, a ledger of every sin the King has buried.

This script play is a dark political tragedy about masks, memory, and the moment fear loses its voice. In the end, even a jester can topple an empire.

Cast of Characters

Roles can be played by any age.

KING AURELION	A ruler corrupted by fear and guilt. Desperate to maintain control.
QUEEN SELENE	His wife. Calculating, wounded, and ultimately the mastermind of the rebellion.
THE JESTER	Once a noble's child, now a crippled fool who uses laughter as a weapon. Speaks in riddles and truth.
GENERAL VERRICK	A weary warrior caught between duty and conscience.
LADY VARIS	A noblewoman with a sharp political mind. Loyal to the Queen.
LORD HALEN	A cynical old noble who allies with the rebellion.
LADY SERA	A young lady-in-waiting. Innocent and observant.
THE CHAPLAIN	A frightened priest. Silent enabler of the King's tyranny.
MARA	A rebel leader from the underground. Fierce and disillusioned.
VOICE 1	Memory/hallucination of a servant haunting the King and Jester.
VOICE 2	Memory/hallucination of a drunk guard haunting the King and Jester.
VOICE 3	Memory/hallucination of a drunk guard haunting the King and Jester.
REBEL 2	
REBEL 3	
MEREK	A hardened court official or advisor. Cold, calculated, and possibly tied to the Jester's past. Often serves as an enforcer or gatekeeper of royal will.

ENVOY	A diplomat from a rival kingdom or internal faction. Speaks with formal poise, delivering news or veiled threats that destabilize the court.
YOUNG JESTER	A child version of the protagonist seen in flashbacks or hallucinations. Symbol of lost innocence and the emotional core of the Jester’s descent.
RENARD	A sarcastic, opportunistic courtier. His loyalties are fluid, and he often navigates between opposing factions.
VILLAGER 1	A fearful towns person, wary of the court and its strange humor.
VILLAGER 2	A bold commoner, critical of the crown’s excesses.
VILLAGER 3	A supportive witness to the Jester’s influence, curious and hopeful.
GUARD 1	Stoic and loyal, represents order and military obedience within the palace.
GUARD 2	Slightly more reactive or nervous than the first, offering a subtle contrast.
COMMONER 1	A skeptical figure in the public square or court gathering.
COMMONER 2	Easily swayed by satire and court rumors.
COMMONER 3	An older, more neutral or silent presence; reflects the masses.
CLOAKED FIGURE	An enigmatic presence, possibly an assassin, prophet, or spy. Their identity and motives remain ambiguous.
PRISONER	A broken individual, possibly wrongfully imprisoned. Their presence provides moral contrast and foreshadowing.
SOLDIER	
NOBLEWOMAN	
NOBLEMAN	
CHILD’S VOICE	
GUARD CAPTAIN	

Director Notes

PREFACE

The Last Laugh of the Hollow Crown began as a meditation on the fragility of power, the cost of silence, and the strange, sharp clarity that laughter brings in times of collapse. Though set in a fictional kingdom, the world of this play echoes the political and emotional landscapes many of us navigate today.

This is a tragedy told through masks, mirrors, and memory—where the jester speaks the truth, and the throne forgets how to listen. I offer it as both warning and invitation: to question, to speak, and above all, to listen between the lines.

— Frank Amaya, Author

STAGE NOTES

TONE:	Gothic, poetic, and sharp.
STAGING:	Minimalist, with versatile use of light and sound. Symbolic over literal.
LIGHTING:	Candlelight, harsh contrast. Red for executions. Bells signify the JESTER.
PROPS:	The Crown, The Book of Blood, and the Gallows as central symbolic elements.
COSTUMING:	Evolving outfits— QUEEN’s regality turns battle-worn; the JESTER’s motley fades and smears.
SOUND:	Haunting bells, whispers, crowd murmurs, chants, ghostly voices.

PRIMARY SPEAKING ROLES (15)

These are major and mid-tier characters with distinct identities and arcs:

King Aurelion
Queen Selene
The Jester
General Verrick
Lady Varis
Lord Halen
Lady Sera
The Chaplain
Mara
Renard
Merek
Envoy
Prisoner
Cloaked Figure
Young Jester

RECURRING/MINOR ROLES (7)

These can be doubled by ensemble actors:

Guard 1
Guard 2
Villager 1
Villager 2
Villager 3
Commoner 1
Commoner 2
Commoner 3

(Note: Depending on staging, you can collapse “Villager” and “Commoner” into a general ensemble of 3–6 people.)

FLEXIBLE ENSEMBLE ROLES

These can be voiced offstage or doubled:

Citizens / Chorus
Voices / Ghosts

These parts are fluid and abstract, meant to represent the kingdom’s soul, memory, and unrest. You can cast 4–6 ensemble performers to play multiple background and vocal roles.

MINIMUM CAST ESTIMATE

With doubling: ~12–14 actors (a few actors playing multiple roles, esp. in the ensemble)

Full casting without doubling: ~20–23 actors

ACT I

Scene 1 - "The Court of Painted Lies"

Setting: A faded throne room. Cracked marble, wilted banners. The throne stands tall, gold flaked.

At Rise: COURTIERS whisper in shadows. The KING does not sit on the throne— he looms beside it. Enter the JESTER, limping, bells deadened, face half painted. A hush falls.

KING AURELION

You're late, fool. The sun bowed to me before you did.

THE JESTER *(bowing)*

I was busy laughing at the moon, Your Grace. She told better jokes than your council.

(A few COURTIERS chuckle— nervously. Silence snaps tight.)

KING AURELION

Mind your tongue, or I'll hang it from the gates and let the ravens quote your wit to peasants.

THE JESTER

Then let them weep at the punchline, sire. For a kingdom ruled by fear needs a chorus of crows. And I— I sing like sin.

(Pause. The KING eyes him coldly.)

KING AURELION

You speak too much.

THE JESTER

You listen too little.

(A tense silence. The QUEEN shifts in her chair.)

QUEEN SELENE

Why do we keep this cripple? He limps through our court like bad news on parade.

THE JESTER

(to her, smiling with venom)

My lady, bad news walks straight. It's only truth that limps.

(Murmurs ripple. The KING steps forward.)

KING AURELION

Say your piece, then begone.

THE JESTER

(taking center stage, mock solemn)

Very well. Today's performance is called: *"The Man Who Mistook His Crown for God."* A tragedy. In three acts.

Act One: He conquers with fire.

Act Two: He drowns in gold.

Act Three: He is devoured— not by enemies, but by those who loved him, and learned to hate him well.

KING AURELION *(coldly)*

Enough.

THE JESTER

(low and smiling)

Oh, but we've just begun.

(The KING grabs him by the collar.)

KING AURELION

What are you?

THE JESTER

(dead calm)

The mirror you can’t break. The truth you can’t bury. The jester who watched his family burn and painted a smile with their ash.

(Gasps. The KING lets go. Long silence.)

KING AURELION

You are dismissed.

THE JESTER

(he bows)

Of course, Your Majesty. But remember— every king needs a fool. To remind him he is not a god… Just a man with better clothes and worse nightmares.

(He limps away.)

(Curtain)

Scene 2 - "The Queen's Chamber"

Setting: A cold, opulent chamber laced with candlelight. Moonlight spills across the floor.

At Rise: The QUEEN sits before a mirror, removing her jeweled crown with trembling fingers. A maid brushes her hair in silence. Footsteps. Enter the JESTER, quieter now, mask removed, face hollow. His limp heavier in solitude.

QUEEN SELENE

(not looking at him)

You shouldn't be here.

THE JESTER

And yet, here I stand. Like regret. Like rot. Like memory.

(The maid freezes, unsure. The QUEEN waves her away. She exits quickly.)

QUEEN SELENE

You mock your betters even in whispers. Do you never tire of the tightrope?

THE JESTER

(slowly approaching)

A tightrope is safer than the floor, Your Grace. Down there… snakes.

(She turns to him now. Her eyes tired but sharp.)

QUEEN SELENE

You always speak in riddles. What do you want?

THE JESTER *(softly)*

To remember your voice. Before it drowned in silk and secrets.

QUEEN SELENE

Do not toy with me. You forget your place.

THE JESTER

On the contrary— I never forget. Not the screams. Not the flames. Not the night your husband signed my family into ash.

(Silence. The QUEEN stands. Her tone drops— no longer royal, but real.)

QUEEN SELENE

You think I wanted that?

THE JESTER

You watched it.

QUEEN SELENE *(quietly)*

I was seventeen. Powerless. He gave me a crown and took everything else.

(A beat. The tension fractures, something deeper bleeding between them.)

THE JESTER

Then take it back.

QUEEN SELENE *(startled)*

What?

THE JESTER

Take back what he stole. Your voice. Your fire. Join me.

QUEEN SELENE

(laughs bitterly)

Join you? The broken fool who dances for scraps?

THE JESTER

No. The architect of an ending.

(He steps closer. Too close. A breath between them.)

THE JESTER

He will fall. With your help or without it. But if you want to wear the crown, truly wear it— not as a prisoner, but as a queen… then say the word.

(A long silence. She searches his face. Something in her eyes— fear… or longing?)

QUEEN SELENE

You don’t know what you’re playing with.

THE JESTER

(smiling, haunted)

I do. I just stopped being afraid of the fire.

(He exits. She stands alone, watching the candle flame waver. Her reflection stays seated, eyes frozen in glass.)

(Curtain)

Scene 3 - "The Whispering Throne"

Setting: The royal throne room. Dim, hushed.

At Rise: The KING sits alone, the throne looming behind him like a specter. A goblet of wine rests in his hand. The air is stale with silence. Enter LORD VERRICK, the KING's most loyal— yet weary— general, with cautious steps.

KING AURELION

(without looking up)

Tell me, Verrick— Do ghosts age?

GENERAL VERRICK

(bowing stiffly)

Ghosts, sire?

KING AURELION

I saw one. Tonight. It wore bells. And smiled.

GENERAL VERRICK

The Jester, you mean?

KING AURELION

(finally looks up, sharply)

He is no fool. He knows things he should not. Says things he should not. He dances between truth and treason with the grace of a man who's lost everything.

GENERAL VERRICK

Just words and powder, my King. A cracked doll for the court's delight.

KING AURELION

A cracked doll does not bleed truth. He speaks with the venom of a man wronged. And I do not recall the wound.

GENERAL VERRICK *(carefully)*

There are many wounds in your shadow, Your Grace. Not all of them yours to remember.

(The KING stands, swaying slightly. He paces slowly.)

KING AURELION

He stirs something in them. The courtiers. The cooks. Even the Queen— She looked at him tonight with…softness.

KING AURELION

A softness I haven't earned in years.

GENERAL VERRICK *(tensing)*

Then have him killed. Quietly.

KING AURELION

(stops cold)

Would that silence him? Or crown him a martyr? A dead fool speaks louder than a living one.

(He raises his goblet, then pours it out onto the cold stone floor. It splashes dark and final.)

KING AURELION

No. Not yet. Let him speak. Let him dance. And when the people laugh loudest— That's when I'll cut out his tongue.

(He returns to his seat. A faint smile twitches on his face— half-mad, half-measured.)

KING AURELION

Let's see how funny he is… without breath.

(VERRICK bows again, concealing the unease behind his practiced composure.)

GENERAL VERRICK

As you command… Though I wonder what it will cost.

(He exits. The KING remains, alone. Somewhere beyond the chamber— soft and distant— bells jingle.)

KING AURELION

(to the air)

I know you’re listening, clown. Keep laughing while you can. The crown has teeth.

(Curtain)

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ACT IV

Scene 1 - "The Sound of Stone Cracking"

Setting: The Queen's war room— once a music hall, now repurposed. Maps cover the piano. Nobles, commoners, guards— all gathered. Some wear armor, others wear dirt. Candlelight flickers like firelight.

At Rise: At the center: the QUEEN, standing tall in black and silver. Beside her: the JESTER, cloaked, his paint fresh, but one eye smudged— like a tear. VERRICK leans over the maps, circling positions.

QUEEN SELENE

How many gates are watched?

GENERAL VERRICK

Three. We've bribed the inner guards. Only the Red Hall remains loyal.

THE JESTER

(flicking a dagger in his fingers)

Then we leave them loyal. To a corpse.

LORD HALEN

The people chant your name in the streets. The butcher, the seamstress, the scholar… Even the orphans sing songs of the Fool.

THE JESTER

I'm flattered. But songs don't stop swords.

QUEEN SELENE

We don't need to stop the sword. We need to take its hand before it swings.

(She walks to the map. Taps a circle.)

QUEEN SELENE

The chapel tower. That's where we make the final cut.

(Murmurs. Confusion.)

LADY VARIS

Why the chapel?

(smiling faintly)

Because that's where the Crown was *blessed*. And where it will be *cursed*.

QUEEN SELENE

(hard voice)

We'll announce it tomorrow. An open gathering. A speech. A reckoning.

GENERAL VERRICK

He'll send assassins.

(The QUEEN opens a box. Inside: pages of the Book of Blood— hundreds of them. Copies. Handwritten. Ready to fly.)

QUEEN SELENE

We don't kill the King. We let *his sins do it for us*.

(She holds up a page.)

"Order #107: Execution of Healer's Family. Accused: No Trial. Signed by Royal Hand." Let the people *read* what they've bled for.

(She turns to the JESTER.)

Will you speak beside me?

THE JESTER *(quietly)*

Only if I'm allowed to laugh when it hurts.

QUEEN SELENE

It’s all going to hurt.

THE JESTER

Then I’ll be hilarious.

(They stand together before the crowd. The QUEEN and The JESTER. Two halves of a crown broken and reforged.)

QUEEN SELENE

Tomorrow… we take the palace. Not with fire. But with mirrors.

(Curtain)

Scene 2 - "The Throne Whispers Back"

Setting: The throne room— now abandoned, rotting. Windows shattered. Curtains torn. Bloodstains on marble. The throne itself is cracked.

At Rise: The KING sits slouched in the throne, crown tilted. Candles flicker weakly. A goblet rolls across the floor. Echoes of laughter bounce faintly from unseen corners. He is alone— or believes he is.

KING AURELION

(to himself)

They all want something. A piece of gold. A drop of favor. Even the fool wanted fire. But I gave him a stage. He should've danced.

(He stands, wobbles. Sword in hand. Looks around wildly.)

KING AURELION

Where are you?! Where is my court?! Where is my son?!

(Silence. Then the faint sound of bells.)

KING AURELION

(He freezes. His voice drops to a whisper— raw.)

I heard you laughing in the walls. In my sleep. In the ink. You wore my face. You wore *her* voice.

(He stumbles toward a broken mirror. Stares into it. Sees… something.)

KING AURELION *(quiet)*

There you are. My reflection. Not a king. Not a god. Just a scared boy who learned to burn things to feel warm.

(He raises his sword and points it at the throne.)

KING AURELION

That seat killed more than I ever did. It whispered lies and promises. It taught me that silence is safer than mercy.

(He lowers the sword. Sits. Breathing heavy. Then—)

KING AURELION

But they don’t understand. The fool. The Queen. The people.

(Voice rising now, desperate and cold.)

KING AURELION

You can’t rule with love. Love *shifts*. Love *asks* things. But fear? Fear stays where you put it.

(He takes the crown from his head. Stares at it. Weeps silently— no sobbing, just tears falling onto gold.)

KING AURELION *(soft)*

Why did you crown me? Why didn’t someone stop me?

(A shadow flickers behind him— possibly imagined. A girl’s laugh. A boy’s cry. Ghosts of all he silenced.)

KING AURELION

You think I’m afraid?

(He stands one last time, holding the crown like a skull.)

KING AURELION

Let them come. Let them drag me through the streets. Let them spit on my name. But they will never forget it.

(He raises the crown as if to throw it— then freezes. He looks down at it again. Slowly, he places it back on his head… like a noose.)

KING AURELION *(whispers)*

They'll never forget me.

(Blackout)

(Curtain)

Scene 3 - "Ashes on the Balcony"

Setting: The chapel tower, now empty. The crowd has dispersed. The gallows have been dismantled. The sun sets in bloodred streaks.

At Rise: The QUEEN leans on the stone balcony, arms bare, crown in her hand. The JESTER sits on the steps behind her, half his paint rubbed off. They don't speak at first. Just breathe.

QUEEN SELENE

It's quiet. I forgot what that sounded like.

THE JESTER *(soft)*

It won't last.

QUEEN SELENE

No. But it's real.

(She looks at the crown. Turns it in her hands.)

Do you want it?

THE JESTER

(shakes his head)

I already wore one. Mine rang when I walked.

(She almost smiles. Almost.)

QUEEN SELENE

You were never a fool.

(A silence. The wind brushes through broken glass.)

QUEEN SELENE

He knelt. But I don't feel peace.

THE JESTER

Peace is a luxury. Truth is a weight.

QUEEN SELENE *(quiet)*

And what do we do now?

(The JESTER rises. Stands beside her. Looks out at the city below.)

THE JESTER

We build something that doesn’t need gallows to breathe.

QUEEN SELENE

And if we fail?

THE JESTER

Then we die with our eyes open. And they’ll call *that* the beginning.

(She places the crown on the stone ledge. Leaves it there.)

QUEEN SELENE

Let them crown themselves. I’m done bleeding for gold.

(She leans her head briefly against his shoulder. He doesn’t move.)

THE JESTER

Stay with me. Just until the sun goes.

(She nods. They stand in silence, the city stretched out before them, the past burning quietly behind.)

(Curtain)

Final Movement - "The Tower of Mirrors"

Setting: The chapel tower. The highest point in the kingdom. Stained glass glows red in the morning sun.

At Rise: The QUEEN stands at a balcony, overlooking a vast square packed with people— commoners, nobles, soldiers who no longer know who they serve. Pages from the Book of Blood flutter down like ash. Behind her, the JESTER waits, face fully painted— half black, half white. The crowd murmurs, then quiets. The QUEEN steps forward. Her voice is calm. Unshaking.

QUEEN SELENE

You were told this was a kingdom. A place of order, of grace. But what you were given— was a graveyard.

(A page drifts past. A child catches it.)

QUEEN SELENE

The crown fed on silence. And silence fed on your sons, your daughters. We have the names. We have the orders. We have the *truth*.

(She holds up a page.)

No more whispers. Let the dead speak aloud.

(The JESTER steps forward now. The crowd murmurs.)

THE JESTER

Once upon a lie… There was a king who called himself holy. He sat on a throne of bones and wondered why his dreams bled.

(Scattered applause. The crowd is shifting— not just watching, but listening.)

THE JESTER

I was his fool. And fools tell jokes. But this one's real. Knock knock.

CROWD

(some repeating)

Who's there?

THE JESTER

Justice. And it doesn't laugh.

(Suddenly— shouts at the back of the square. The CROWD parts. GUARDS appear. And with them— the KING, armored, wild-eyed, alone. The CROWD recoils. Some bow instinctively. Most don't.)

KING AURELION

Treason. This is treason.

(He approaches the tower stairs. No one stops him. No one follows.)

KING AURELION *(shouting)*

This is my voice. This is my land. You kneel before *her*? Before a Fool?!

(He reaches the platform. Silence. He looks at the QUEEN. At the JESTER. He sees what he feared most— they are not afraid.)

QUEEN SELENE

Your time is over.

KING AURELION

I am the Crown!

THE JESTER

(stepping forward)

Then wear it to your grave.

(He hands the KING a page. The KING takes it— his own signature. His order. The one that killed the JESTER's family.)

KING AURELION

(reading, shaking)

This… This was necessary.

THE JESTER

So is your ending.

(A beat. The QUEEN steps forward, addresses the crowd.)

QUEEN SELENE

This is not a coup. This is a reckoning.

(To the KING, gently but firmly—)

QUEEN SELENE

Kneel. And the people will decide your fate.

(A silence so deep it aches. The KING trembles. Looks out over the crowd— no longer his. Finally… slowly… he kneels.)

(The crowd exhales. Some cry. Some cheer. Some simply stand, stunned.)

THE JESTER

(quietly to the KING)

You ruled with fear. And now… you'll live with it.

(Curtain)

ACT V

Scene 1 - "The End of the Joke"

Setting: A chamber below the palace— once a wine cellar, now a holding room. Bare stone walls. A wooden chair. A single torch.

At Rise: The KING sits alone, unshackled but watched. The QUEEN enters with the JESTER. She wears no crown. He wears no paint. Only eyes that have seen too much.

KING AURELION

(looking up)

Come to see the animal in its cage?

QUEEN SELENE

No. We came to listen.

KING AURELION

(laughs bitterly)

Now you care what I say?

THE JESTER

Now we want to know *if* you can say anything… without lying.

(A silence.)

KING AURELION

I killed to build peace. I silenced traitors. I burned corruption before it could spread.

(He looks at them.)

You think that's a crime?

QUEEN SELENE

No. We think it's familiar.

THE JESTER *(soft)*

But you forgot something.

KING AURELION

What?

THE JESTER

Peace built on bones… shakes every time the wind blows.

(The QUEEN steps forward, slowly.)

QUEEN SELENE

We're not here for vengeance. We're here for the people. They want justice. And justice is choice.

(She turns to the JESTER. He nods. She opens a sealed scroll.)

QUEEN SELENE

These are your options:

1. Exile. Far from the kingdom. No title. No name. You vanish.
2. Trial. Open. Honest. And bloody.
3. Death. Quiet. Immediate. Chosen by your own hand.

(The KING stares at the scroll. Then at them.)

KING AURELION

You think this makes you better?

THE JESTER

No. It makes us *done*.

(A long pause. The KING slowly looks down. Weighs it. Finally… he points.)

KING AURELION

Exile.

(The QUEEN seals the scroll again.)

QUEEN SELENE

So be it. You leave at dawn.

(She turns to go.)

KING AURELION

(to the JESTER)

You won.

THE JESTER

(without turning)

No one won.

(They leave. The KING is alone. Again. He stares at the chair, then the torch. Slowly… he begins to laugh. Quiet. Cracked. Real.)

Final Scene – "Epilogue"

Setting: The palace steps, weeks later.

At Rise: The QUEEN addresses a crowd. The JESTER stands beside her in plain clothes. The gallows have been dismantled. The throne room is now a library. The people are quiet—not afraid. Listening.

QUEEN SELENE

This is not the end. There are no ends. Just lessons. — And names that will never again be erased.

(She steps back. The JESTER steps forward— no paint. Just truth.)

THE JESTER

Once upon a lie, a kingdom laughed while it died. But when the masks fell, when the stage cracked, the fool stood up—and told the truth.

(He bows.)

THE JESTER

Now you decide what comes next.

(He looks at the QUEEN. She nods. Together, they walk back into the palace. The doors close behind them. The crowd watches. Then, one by one—)

CROWD *(softly)*

Long live the crownless.

(Blackout)

(Curtain)

(The End.)



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