

# VICTORIAN GAMES

## The Bellman

In this variant on Blind Man's Buff, *everybody* is blindfolded except for one player, who carries a small bell, which he or she rings from time to time. There is much confusion and merriment as the other players attempt to capture the Bellman. Once caught by a player, the Bellman changes places with them, and so the game resumes.

## The Sea & the Fishes

This somewhat surreal sport resembles maritime Musical Chairs. All but one of the company are seated throughout the parlour. The one standing in the middle is The Sea, who asks the others to each take on the name of a particular fish (Cod, Tuna, *Etcetera*). The Sea then walks about the room, calling on each fish in turn to join him or her in this promenade. Once all the company are engaged in said activity, The Sea moves quicker, exclaiming dramatically 'The sea is troubled! The sea is troubled!' until the Sea stops and sits down suddenly, whereupon all the others must rush to secure a seat. Whosoever is last and unseated becomes the new Sea for the following round.

## Hare & Hound

The company stand in pairs, with arms linked throughout the parlour, as if in readiness for a Sunday stroll. Two are left out, the hare and the hound: the latter's objective being to chase the former with bloodhound enthusiasm, whilst the crafty hare seeks to evade being tagged by the hound, in which case the roles reverse. However, the hare may cleverly avoid capture by linking arms with one person in a pair, thus turning that pair into a three. Here the person on the *opposite* end of the three immediately assumes the character of the hound, whilst the former hunter now finds himself the quarry instead! — and so another merry chase ensues.

## Red Cap, Black Cap

This old game relies for its fun on its great rapidity. All players but one sit in a row, whilst the Questioner stands before them, giving the name of a colour to each player: Blue Cap, Red Cap, and so on. Each Cap, on hearing their name mentioned must instantly start to their feet and answer correctly with two brief lines of dialogue. The game proceeds thus:

*Questioner* (looking severe): What's this? Somebody's been at the strawberries! Was it you Red Cap?

*Red Cap* (standing): Who sir, I sir? (or: 'madam' where appropriate)

*Questioner*: Yes, sir, you sir!

*Red Cap*: No, not me sir! it was Yellow Cap. (sits)

*Yellow Cap*: (standing): Who sir, I sir? *Etcetera*.

Should a player hesitate with their response or veer from the correct line in any way, they are to be immediately eliminated from the game. Thus we continue until one final victorious Cap remains.

## Throwing up Lights

Two players secretly decide upon a word (some object in the parlour). The other players then listen to the pair conversing on that subject, their aim to deduce that word. The pair *must not mention the word itself*, but instead through their conversation shed some light upon it indirectly. Should another player believe he has divined correctly, he calls out, 'I strike a light', whispering his guess into the ear of one of the pair. If accurate, he joins in the conversation, whilst the remaining players continue in their efforts of deduction. If mistaken with his guess however, he must perform some simple forfeit (stand up, stand on one leg, etc) until either he guesses correctly, or the game is over — with everyone 'in' on the conversation.

## Fishermen

The object of this fast and furious game is to go fishing whilst avoiding having one's own fish snapped up. Each player fastens to the back of their waist a length of heavy thread, light enough to break if stepped upon. This should be just long enough to trail on the floor, and upon this loose end some small object, such as a pencil, is fastened — your fish. On the signal to commence, all the company begin to fish, but with this rule: that no arms or hands may be used to break the thread; thou shalt catch other people's fish using only the feet (with sinners paying a heavy forfeit). Once their fish is caught, only then may you pick it up with your hand - but beware as you do so! For at this moment your own may be easily taken. Players who lose their fish leave the game. The victor is the last person still in possession of their fish.

## Rejected Addresses

This is a noisy game and a merry one. All gentlemen leave the parlour, and a row of chairs is set out according to the number of men, with a lady standing behind each chair. Each of the absent gentlemen has a chair allotted to him before he enters but no indication should be given as to which chair this is — care being taken that no lady stands behind a chair allotted to her favourite, husband or beau.

The gentlemen are then invited in, one by one. As each enters, all the ladies invite him to sit on her particular chair, each assuring him that he is the one allotted to it. Each lady may use all her feminine arts, charms and wiles to tempt him into her chair. Should the victim be blandished into sitting in the wrong chair, all the ladies swoop upon him, tickling and beating him with cushions until he is forced from the room. However, should he be fortunate enough to choose the correct chair, he is permitted to stay in the room and watch the fun.

## Who's the Leader?

One of the company leaves the parlour, and the remainder secretly elect a leader. When the person re-enters the room, the leader discreetly begins to execute a simple repeated choreography (touch their nose, stand on tip-toe, etc), which his 'followers' must promptly copy in rhythm (or to music) as well as they can. The leader should vary or develop the movements with time, while the person in the middle must try to guess who the leader is. Once discovered, the old leader then leaves the room — and a new leader is chosen.

## Statues

In couples, the company dance around the room with some degree of abandon accompanied by music. When the music comes to a sudden stop, the dancers must freeze, as statues, holding their position no matter how precarious. Any couple who move or even smile are disqualified. The game resumes until but one couple remain, victorious.

## Reverend Crawley

This most gentle game has the effect of a conjuring trick in which everybody wins. You shall need at least seven or eight players, preferably more. Stand in a circle and link hands - but neither link hands with your immediate neighbours, nor both hands with the same person. This transforms the company into a human knot, your communal endeavour being to untie it: stepping over each other, crawling under arms, climbing through gaps, *Etcetera* - all without letting go of hands. The outcome is truly fantastical: the knot virtually always unties into a single ring of people holding hands in a circle.

## Love your neighbour?

All the company but one sits in a chair in a circle. The person in the middle asks someone "Do you love your neighbour?" That person may state either "No" at which point the people on each side of her must change seats swiftly. If too slow, the person in the middle may slip into one of the empty seats, forcing the unseated neighbour to the middle. Or instead, the chosen person may reply, "Yes, I love my neighbour, except those who..." (*e.g.* 'are wearing a frock'; 'wear spectacles' or 'have a timepiece upon them'). *Everyone* who fits the description must change seats at once, whilst the person in the middle tries to obtain one in the ensuing rumpus. Should they succeed, the new person in the middle continues the game in the same fashion.

## Shadow Buff

Hang up a simple bedsheet, place a single lamp on a table behind, and turn out all other lights. One person is chosen to sit before the sheet while everyone else passes by on the other side (betwixt the sheet and the lamp), the person in front having to divine each person's identity from their shadow. The others may put on turbans, or shawls, or walk lame, so as to disguise themselves in any way they choose; but if correctly identified they must pay a forfeit.

