

PRINCESS ROYAL

Florence Henrietta Darwin

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email ccx074@coventry.ac.uk

- ACT I.—Scene 1.
- ACT II.—Scene 1.

PRINCESS ROYAL

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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ROSE, MARION, *village girls.*

LADY MILLICENT.

ALICE, *her maid.*

LEAH, *an old gipsy.*

SUSAN, *otherwise Princess Royal, her grand-daughter.*

JOCKIE, *a little swine herd.*

LADY CULLEN.

Her ladies in waiting (or one lady only).

LORD CULLEN, *her only son.*

As many girls as are needed for the dances should be in this Play.

The parts of Lord Cullen and Jockie may be played by girls.

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ACT I.—Scene 1.

A village green. Some girls with market baskets come on to it, each one carrying a leaflet which she is earnestly reading.

Gradually all the girls approach from different sides reading leaflets.

Under a tree at the far end of the green the old gipsy is sitting—she lights a pipe and begins to smoke as ROSE, her basket full of market produce, comes slowly forward reading her sheet of paper. She is followed by MARION – also reading.

ROSE. Well, 'tis like to be a fine set out, this May Day.

MARION. I can make naught of it myself.

ROSE. Why, 'tis Lord Cullen putting it about as how he be back from the war and thinking of getting himself wed, like.

MARION. I understands that much, I do.

ROSE. Only he can't find the maid what he's lost his heart to.

MARION. [*Reading.*] The wench what his lordship did see a–dancing all by herself in the forest when he was hid one day all among the brambles, a–rabbiting or sommat.

ROSE. And when my lord would have spoke with her, the maid did turn and fled away quick as a weasel.

MARION. And his lordship off to the fighting when 'twas next morn.

ROSE. So now, each maid of us in the village and all around be to dance upon the green come May Day so that my lord may see who 'twas that pleased his fancy.

[*SUSAN comes up and stands quietly listening. She is bare foot and her skirt is ragged, she wears a shawl over her shoulders and her hair is rough and untidy. On her arm she carries a basket containing a few vegetables and other marketings.*

MARION. And when he do pitch upon the one, 'tis her as he will wed.

ROSE. 'Twill be a thing to sharpen the claws of th' old countess worse nor ever—that marriage.

MARION. Ah, I reckon as her be mortal angered with all the giddle–gaddle this business have set up among the folk.

ROSE. [*Regretfully.*] I've never danced among the trees myself.

MARION. [*Sadly.*] Nor I, neither, Rose.

ROSE. I'd dearly like to be a countess, Marion.

MARION. His lordship might think I was the maid. I'm spry upon my feet you know.

[*SUSAN comes still nearer.*

MARION. [*Turning to her and speaking rudely.*] Well, Princess Rags, 'tisn't likely as 'twas you a–dancing one of your Morris dances in the wood that day!

ROSE. [*Mockingly.*] 'Tisn't likely as his lordship would set his thoughts on a wench what could caper about like a Morris man upon the high road. So there.

SUSAN. [*Indifferently.*] I never danced upon the high road, I dances only where 'tis dark with gloom and no eyes upon me. No mortal eyes.

MARION. [*Impudently.*] Get along with you, Princess Royal. Go off to th' old gipsy Gran'ma yonder. We don't want the likes of you along of us.

ROSE. Go off and dance to your own animals, Miss Goatherd. All of us be a–going to practise our steps against May Day. Come along girls.

[*She signs to the other girls who all draw near and arrange themselves for a Country Dance. SUSAN goes slowly towards her GRANDMOTHER and sits on the ground by her side, looking sadly and wistfully at the dancers. At the end of the dance, the girls pick up their baskets and go off in different directions across the green. SUSAN and her GRANDMOTHER remain in their places. The gipsy continues to smoke and SUSAN absently turns over the things in her basket.*

SUSAN. They mock me in the name they have fixed to me— Princess Royal.

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GRANDMOTHER. Let them mock. I'll bring the words back to them like scorpions upon their tongues.
[*There is a little silence and then SUSAN begins to sing as though to herself.*]

SUSAN. [*Singing.*]

"As I walked out one May morning,

So early in the Spring;

I placed my back against the old garden gate,

And I heard my true love sing." {1}

GRANDMOTHER. [*At the end of the singing.*] It might be the blackcap a—warbling all among of the branches. So it might.

SUSAN. Ah, 'twas I that was a—dancing in the shade of the woods that day.

GRANDMOTHER. He'll never look on the likes of you—that's sure enough, my little wench.

SUSAN. I wish he was a goat—herd like myself—O that I do.

GRANDMOTHER. Then there wouldn't be no use in your wedding yourself with him as I can see.

SUSAN. 'Tis himself, not his riches that I want.

GRANDMOTHER. You be speaking foolishness. What do you know of him—what do us blind worms know about the stars above we?

SUSAN. I see'd him pass by upon his horse one day. All there was of him did shine like the sun upon the water—I was very near dazed by the brightness. So I was.

[*The GRANDMOTHER continues to smoke in silence.*]

SUSAN. [*Softly.*] And 'twas then I lost the heart within me to him.

[*JOCKIE runs up beating his tabor.*]

SUSAN. [*Springing up.*] Come, Jockie, I have a mind to dance a step or two. [*Rubbing her eyes with the back of her hands.*] Tears be for them as have idle times and not for poor wenches what mind cattle and goats. Come, play me my own music, Jock. And play it as I do like it best.

[*JOCKIE begins to play the tune of "Princess Royal" and SUSAN dances. Whilst SUSAN is dancing LADY MILLICENT and her waiting maid come slowly by and stand watching. SUSAN suddenly perceives them and throws herself on the ground. JOCKIE stops playing.*]

LADY MILLICENT. [*Fanning herself.*] A wondrous bold dance, upon my word—could it have been that which captivated my lord, Alice?

ALICE. O no, mistress. His lordship has no fancy for boldness in a maid.

LADY MILLICENT. Immodest too. A Morris dance. The girl should hide her face in shame.

ALICE. And there she is, looking at your ladyship with her gipsy eyes, bold as a brass farthing.

SUSAN. [*Starting up and speaking passionately.*] I'll not be taunted for my dancing—I likes to dance wild, and leap with my body when my spirit leaps, and fly with my limbs when my heart flies and move in the air same as the birds do move when 'tis mating time.

GRANDMOTHER. Ah, 'tis so with she. She baint no tame mouse what creeps from its hole along of t'others and who do go shuffle shuffle, in and out of the ring, mild as milk and naught in the innards of they but the squeak.

SUSAN. [*Defiantly.*] 'Twas my dance gained his lordship's praise—so there, fine madam.

LADY MILLICENT. Your dance? Who are you then?

ALICE. A gipsy wench, mistress, who minds the goats and pigs for one of they great farms.

GRANDMOTHER. Have a care for that tongue of yours, madam waiting maid. For I know how to lay sommat upon it what you won't fancy.

LADY MILLICENT. [*Coming up to SUSAN and laying her hand on her arm.*] Now tell me your name, my girl.

SUSAN. They call me Princess Royal.

LADY MILLICENT. O that must be in jest. Why, you are clothed in rags, poor thing.

SUSAN. [*Shaking herself free.*] I'd sooner wear my own rags nor the laces which you have got upon you.

LADY MILLICENT. Now why do you say such a thing?

SUSAN. 'Twas in these rags as I danced in the wood that day, and 'tis by these rags as my lord will know me once more.

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LADY MILLICENT. Listen, I will cover you in silk and laces, Princess Royal.

ALICE. Susan is the maid's name.

SUSAN. I don't want none of your laces or silks.

LADY MILLICENT. And feed you with poultry and cream and sweetmeats.

SUSAN. I want naught but my crust of bread.

LADY MILLICENT. I'll fill your hands with gold pieces.

GRANDMOTHER. Do you hear that, Sue?

SUSAN. [*Doggedly.*] I hear her well enough, Gran.

LADY MILLICENT. If you'll teach me your dance against May Day. Then, I'll clothe myself much after your fashion and dance upon the green with the rest.

SUSAN. I'll not learn you my dance. Not for all the gold in the world. You shan't go and take the only thing I have away from me.

LADY MILLICENT. [*Angrily.*] Neither shall a little gipsy wretch like you take my love from me. We were as good as promised to each other at our christening.

ALICE. Don't put yourself out for the baggage, madam. His lordship would never look on her.

GRANDMOTHER. Gold, did you say, mistress?

LADY MILLICENT. Gold? O yes—an apron full of gold, and silver too.

GRANDMOTHER. Do you hear that, Susan?

SUSAN. [*Doggedly.*] I'll not do it for a King's ransom.

GRANDMOTHER. You will. You'll do it for the sake of poor old Gran, what's been father and mother to you—and what's gone hungered and thirsty so that you might have bread and drink.

SUSAN. [*Distractedly.*] O I can never give him up.

GRANDMOTHER. He'll never be yours to give—Dance till your legs is off and he'll have naught to say to a gipsy brat when 'tis all finished.

ALICE. Whilst my lady belongs to his lordship's own class, 'tis but suitable as she should be the one to wed with him—knowing the foreign tongues and all, and playing so sweetly on her instruments. There's a lady anyone would be proud to take before the Court in London.

[*SUSAN turns away with a movement of despair. The GRANDMOTHER begins to smoke again. LADY MILLICENT fans herself and ALICE arranges her own shawl.*]

GRANDMOTHER. I could do with a little pig up at our place if I'd the silver to take into the market for to buy him with. [*A silence.*]

GRANDMOTHER. And I could do with a pair of good shoes to my poor old feet come winter time when 'tis snowing. [*Another silence.*]

GRANDMOTHER. And 'twould be good not to go to bed with the pain of hunger within my lean old body—so 'twould. [*SUSAN turns round suddenly.*]

SUSAN. I'll do it, Gran. I'll do it for your sake. 'Tis very likely true what you do say, all of you. I'd but dance my feet off for naught. When he came to look into my gipsy eyes, 'twould all be over and done with.

LADY MILLICENT. Sensible girl.

ALICE. 'Tis time she should see which way her bread was spread.

SUSAN. Come, Jockie, come ladies—come Gran—we'll be off to the quiet of our own place where I can learn her ladyship the steps and capers.

GRANDMOTHER. [*Rising and pointing to an advancing figure.*] You'd best make haste. The mice be a-running from their holes once more—t'wouldn't do for they to know aught about this.

SUSAN. Let us go quickly then.

[*The GRANDMOTHER, SUSAN, LADY MILLICENT with ALICE and JOCKIE go out as a crowd of village girls come on to the green, and laughing and talking together, arrange themselves to practise a Country Dance.*]

End of Act I.

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ACT II.—Scene 1.

Groups of village girls are sitting or standing about on the green. A dais has been put up at one end of it.

MARION. How slow the time do pass, this May Day.

ROSE. Let's while it away with a song or two.

[They all join in singing. At the end of the song the gipsy comes slowly and painfully across the green, casting black looks to right and to left. She is followed by SUSAN, who appears weighed down by sadness.]

ROSE. Good afternoon, Princess Royal Rags. Are we to see you cutting capers before his lordship this afternoon?

MARION. Get along and hide your bare feet behind the tree, Royal. I'd be ashamed to go without shoes if 'twas me.

SUSAN. O leave me alone—you be worse nor a nest of waspes – that you be.

GRANDMOTHER. *[Turning fiercely round.]* Us'll smoke them out of their holes one day—see if us do not.

[They pass over to the tree where the GRANDMOTHER sits down and SUSAN crouches by her side.]

Presently they are joined by JOCKIE. The girls sing a verse or two of another song, and during this LADY MILLICENT, enveloped in a big cloak, goes over to the tree, followed by ALICE, also wearing a long cloak and they sit down by the side of SUSAN.

MARION. *[Pointing.]* Who are those yonder, Rose?

ROSE. I'm sure I don't know, Marion—strangers, may be.

MARION. O my heart goes wild this afternoon.

ROSE. Mine too. Look, there they come.

[The Music begins to play and old LADY CULLEN, followed by her lady companions, comes slowly towards the dais, on which she seats herself.]

LADY CULLEN. Dear me, what a gathering to be sure.

HER LADY. Indeed it is an unusual sight.

LADY CULLEN. And O what a sad infatuation on the part of my poor boy.

HER LADY. The war has been known to turn many a brain.

LADY CULLEN. And yet my son holds his own with the brightest intelligences of the day.

HER LADY. Only one little spot of his lordship's brain seems to be affected.

LADY CULLEN. Just so. But here he comes, poor misguided youth.

[LORD CULLEN comes slowly over the green, looking to right and to left. He mounts the dais and sits down by his mother, and the music plays for a country dance. "The Twenty Ninth of May." The girls arrange themselves, and during the dance LORD CULLEN scans each face very eagerly. The dance ends and the girls pass in single file before the dais.]

LORD CULLEN. No, no—that was not the music of it, that was not the dance—not a face among them resembles the image I carry in my heart.

LADY CULLEN. *[Aside.]* Thank goodness. May that face never be seen again.

[A fresh group come up and another dance is formed and danced.]

LORD CULLEN. *[At the end of it.]* Worse and worse. Could I have dreamed both the music and the dance and the dancer?

LADY CULLEN. *[Soothingly.]* I am sure this was the case, my dear son.

LORD CULLEN. *[Rallying.]* I heard her voice singing in the forest before ever she began to dance. It was the sweetest voice and song I ever heard. *[Looking around.]* Can any of these maid, sing to me, I wonder?

MARION. *[Steps forward.]* I only know one song, my lord.

[LORD CULLEN signs to her to sing, and she stands before the dais and sings a verse of "Bedlam."]

LORD CULLEN. *[Impatiently.]* No, no—that is not in the least what I remember. *[Turning to ROSE.]* You try now.

ROSE. I don't sing, my lord—but—*[Indicating another girl in the group]* she has a sweet voice, and she

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knows a powerful lot of songs.

[A girl steps out from the others and sings a verse of "The Lark in the Morn."]

LORD CULLEN. Not that. Mine was a song to stir the depths of a man's heart and bring tears up from the fountains of it.

[He leans back in deep dejection—and at this moment LADY MILLICENT and ALICE come forward.]

LORD CULLEN. *[Eagerly.]* I seem to know that russet skirt—those bare, small feet. *[Standing up quickly.]* Mother, look at that maid with the red kerchief on her head.

LADY CULLEN. Some sort of a gipsy dress, to all appearance.

LORD CULLEN. *[Doubtfully.]* The skirt she wore was torn and ragged—that day in the forest. She had no gold rings to her ears, nor silken scarf upon her head—But this might be her dress for holidays.

[JOCKIE advances and begins to play the tune of "Princess Royal."]

LORD CULLEN. *[Eagerly.]* That is the right music—O is it possible my quest is ended!

[LADY MILLICENT and ALICE, standing opposite one to another begin to dance—slowly and clumsily, and in evident doubt as to their steps. LORD CULLEN watches them for a moment and then claps his hands angrily as a sign for the music to stop. The dancers pause.]

LORD CULLEN. This is a sad mimicry of my beautiful love. But there lies something behind the masquerade which I shall probe.

[He leaves the dais and goes straight towards LADY MILLICENT, who turns from him in confusion.]

LORD CULLEN. From whom did you take the manner and the colour of your garments, my maid?

[LADY MILLICENT remains obstinately silent.]

LORD CULLEN. *[To ALICE.]* Perhaps you have a tongue in your head. From whom did you try to learn those steps?

[ALICE turns sulkily away. JOCKIE comes forward.]

JOCKIE. I'll tell your lordship all about it, and I'll take your lordship straight to the right wench, that I will, if so be as your lordship will give a shilling to a poor little swine—herd what goes empty and hungered most of the year round.

LORD CULLEN. A handful of gold, my boy, if you lead me rightly.

[JOCKIE leads the way to the tree where SUSAN is sitting. She stands up as LORD CULLEN approaches, and for a moment they gaze at one another in silence.]

GRANDMOTHER. You might curtsy to the gentleman, Susan.

LORD CULLEN. No—there's no need of that, from her to me. *[Turning to JOCKIE and putting his hand in his pocket.]* Here, my boy, is a golden pound for you—and more shall follow later.

[He then takes SUSAN'S hand and leads her to the foot of the dais.]

LORD CULLEN. Will you dance for me again, Susan?

SEVERAL OF THE GIRLS. *[Mockingly.]* Princess Royal is her name.

MARION. *[Rudely.]* Or Princess Rags.

SUSAN. 'Tis all took out of my hands now, I can but do as your lordship says. Jockie, play me my music, and play it bravely too.

[JOCKIE places himself near her and begins to play. SUSAN dances by herself. At the end of her dance LORD CULLEN leads the applause, and even the ladies on the dais join faintly in it. He then takes SUSAN by the hand and mounts the dais with her and presents her to his mother.]

LADY CULLEN. *[Aside, to her companion.]* I wonder if the young person understands that my poor boy is a little touched in the brain?

LORD CULLEN. Here is your daughter, mother.

[LADY CULLEN and SUSAN look at one another in silence. After a moment SUSAN turns to LORD CULLEN.]

SUSAN. I'm a poor ragged thing to be daughter to the likes of she. But the heart within of me is grander nor that of any queen, because of the love that it holds for you, my lord.

[LORD CULLEN takes her hand and leads her to the front of the dais.]

LORD CULLEN. We will be married to—morrow, my princess. And all these good people shall dance at our wedding.

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MARION. [*Springing up.*] And we'll do a bit of dancing now as well. Come, Jockie, give us the tune of "Haste to the Wedding."

ROSE. That's it. Come girls –

LADY MILLICENT. [*To ALICE.*] I pray he won't find out about me.

[*The old GRANDMOTHER has come slowly towards the middle of the green.*]

GRANDMOTHER. Ah, and my little wench will know how to pay back some of the vipers tongues which slandered her, when she sits on her velvet chair as a countess, the diamonds a–trickling from her neck and the rubies a–crowning of her head. Her'll not forget the snakes what did lie in the grass. Her'll have her heel upon they, so that their heads be put low and there shan't go no more venom from their great jaws to harm she, my pretty lamb—my little turtle.

[*The music begins to play and all those on the green form themselves for the dance. LORD CULLEN and SUSAN stand side by side in front of the dais, and the GRANDMOTHER lights a pipe and smokes it as she watches the dance from below. At the end of the dance LORD CULLEN, leading SUSAN, comes down from the dais and, followed by LADY CULLEN and her ladies, passes between two lines of girls and so off the stage. The girls follow in procession, and lastly the GRANDMOTHER preceded by JOCKIE, beating his drum.*]

[*Curtain.*]