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What Happened At Brent's

—BY—
LINDSEY BARBEE.



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FRANKLIN, OHIO, also 944 S. Logan, DENVER, COLO.

✓ WHAT HAPPENED AT BRENT'S ✓

A Play For Young People



✓
By
LINDSEY BARBEE ✓



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— Published by —

ELDRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT HOUSE,
FRANKLIN, OHIO DENVER, COLO.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Named in order of appearance)

NED Court Jester
ELLEN Custodian of the Royal Seal
REX His Majesty
JOE Royal Guard
ANNE Royal Scribe
BESS Keeper of the Royal Jewels
MAY Mistress of the Royal Wardrobe
ARCH Guardian of the Royal Exchequer
MRS. BRENT ... Head of Commissary Department
THE LITTLE PRINCESS

Time—Hallowe'en.

Place—Living Room in the Brent Home.

Time of Playing—About an hour and a quarter.

SYNOPSIS FOR PROGRAM

ACT I—A Hallowe'en revel—the excitement of a runaway—the thrill of a hidden treasure—and then—the Princess!

ACT II—The story of the princess—her miniature court—the finding of the treasure—and then—Rita Rose!

COSTUMES

The girls wear pretty, girlish frocks—preferably light in color; Mrs. Brent is in a simple house gown of darker hue; the little princess is more elaborately dressed in velvet and lace—with long cape and plumed hat.

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PROPERTIES

Davenport.

Three chairs—one with cushion.

Hassock.

Table with lamp, bowl of apples and ruler in drawer.

Curtains for windows.

Candelabrum for mantel.

Pictures, rugs, etc.

Auto horn for off stage.

Plate of doughnuts.

Tray of glasses and pitcher of cider.

Cape and hat for Princess.

Bible for chair and money for Bible.

SCENE PLOT



STAGE DIRECTIONS

R. means right of stage; C., center; U. E., upper entrance; up stage, away from footlights; down stage, near footlights. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

STORY OF THE PLAY

At a gay Hallowe'en party, at which Rex and Ellen Brent are hosts, the usual diversions hold sway, coupled with gay chatter in which the chief subjects of discussion are a young movie actress who stars in charming children's films and a little foreign princess who has been placed in an American school and who, supposedly, has been kidnaped by kinsmen for political purposes. Plans for coming high school days are being discussed and it is discovered that Rex, for financial reasons, must go to work, which leads to the story of the eccentric old uncle, whose home Mrs. Brent and the two children had shared and who had promised to educate them. The sudden death of the uncle without a will, with no money in bank and no apparent funds, had changed plans, and would force Rex to assume financial responsibilities; and a thorough search of the house had revealed no hiding place for the money which the old man was known to possess.

Suddenly, a knock at the door is heard, and there on the threshold stands a daintily gowned little figure, who, with the story of her disappearance fresh in their minds, is hailed by the children as the princess. Immediately the princess establishes her court; and while knighting her loyal followers, climbs upon an old deep-seated chair which had been the cherished possession of the uncle, and feels the seat give way beneath her. There, hidden below, is an old book, the uncle's Bible, and as the princess draws it out and opens it, she finds between its leaves the greenbacks which the old man had feared to trust to a bank and which he had carefully hidden away. And if this were not excitement enough, the mysterious visitor announces that she isn't the princess after all; that she had been playing a part and that, in reality, she is the movie actress whose face has been so often flashed before them.

What Happened At Brent's

ACT I.

Hallowe'en—if it's a really, truly, made-to-order Hallowe'en—should be rainy and blowy and thundery, with an occasional flash of lightning; fit weather for the naughty spirits who choose this night for their revels. Accordingly, as the curtain rises upon a darkened stage, the rain is dashing against the windows, the thunder is crashing and the lightning is flashing; and the rosy glow of the grate fire, as it brings into relief the four girls grouped before it, is all the cozier and more inviting for the contrast. In the center of the stage, three boys are stretched prone upon the floor, and one of them who answers to the name of NED is relating—in a sepulchral tone—a genuine, appropriate-to-the-day ghost story.

Ned—And as the clock struck twelve, a long, mourning cry was heard; and then—down the low dark corridor came a tall, white figure. It had a floating veil; it carried a flickering candle; and even as it glided noiselessly along there came the clank of heavy chains—

Ellen—(jumping up from her place before the fire) Stop right there, Ned, for even if it is Hallowe'en, we dont care to be scared out of our wits. (Determined to eliminate any ghostly atmosphere, she lights the lamp on the nearby table and floods the room with radiance.)

(It is a pretty, home-like room with cheerful rugs, a few good pictures, and dainty white draperies at the two windows which are at the back of the stage, and between which is a long, old-fashioned davenport. At the upper left of stage, a door leads to another part of the house, and down left is a low mantel and an open grate with simulated fire. On the mantel is an antique candelabrum with dangling, many-hued prisms. Another door at upper right opens on an outside porch and down right is a large table with lamp and books and a bowl of large red apples. At right of table is a small, straight chair; at left of table an upholstered rocking chair with hassock. Off in the upper right hand corner of the room is a large old-fashioned arm chair with a worn cushion over its cane seat. NED, JOE and REX at center are blinking at the sudden illumination, while ANNE, BESS and MAY, to judge by their relieved expressions, most heartily approve of ELLEN'S move.)

Rex—Oh, pshaw, Ellen! Now, you've spoiled the story. Who ever heard of a self-respecting ghost in a brightly lighted room?

Ellen—Who wants a ghost? It's my party, Rex Brent, just as much as yours, and I'd rather have the light. So would the other girls.

Joe—Of course they would. Fraidy-cats!

Anne—(with dignity) Even if you think we're fraidy-cats, Joe, it isn't nice to tell us so—especially at a party.

Bess—(anxiously) Don't you think we'd better pull down the curtains, Ellen?

Ellen—Why, Bess, how silly! The light looks so cheerful to anyone who may be passing that it would be mean to take it away.

May—Now, go on with the story, Ned.

Ned—Not much, Miss May. You girls have spoiled it.

Ellen—(taking the bowl of rosy-cheeked apples) Then I apologize by giving you the very first apple. (As

he grudgingly takes it.) Who knows of any other Halloween stunts? (She passes the apples to the others.)

Anne—(as she rises and crosses to the small chair at the table.) Let me see. We've ducked for apples, we've told fortunes—

Joe—Fortunes! You may call them fortunes, Anne, but I call them misfortunes.

Anne—(as she seats herself) We can't help what the cards say, Joe.

Ellen—(replacing the bowl on table and sitting between Bess and May) And if the future isn't kind to you, I'm sure that it isn't our fault.

Bess—(thoughtfully) We've roasted chestnuts—

Joe—And named them for boys. Thunderation!

(Rises and goes to davenport.)

May—And we've had ghost stories.

Ned—(sarcastically) Oh, have you? I don't remember any except mine—and I wasn't allowed to finish that. (Rises and seats himself by Joe on davenport.)

Ellen—I don't suppose you girls would care to try that looking-into-a-mirror-at-midnight one, would you? (As the girls shake their heads vigorously) It's too scary.

Rex—And you wouldn't find any of us kids looking over your shoulder, either. (Rises and joins the other boys.)

Anne—(sarcastically) What nice escorts!

Joe—You're one too many for us. Wait until Arch comes, and we'll break even.

Bess—Where is Arch, anyway? (Rises and sits in large chair at table.)

Ned—Had to do an errand and couldn't make the party till late.

Rex—Bet he stopped at a movie.

Ellen—Rex! He wouldn't do such a thing when we have invited him here.

Rex—Even with a Rita Rose picture in town?

Ellen—Rita Rose! *She* isn't in town, is she?

Joe—Her latest picture is—which amounts to the same thing.

Ellen—*Oh, dear!*

Rex—It's here for a week—so don't have a fit.

Bess—What's the picture?

Rex—“The Prince and the Pauper.”

Bess—(*clasping her hands in ecstasy*) Her very best!

May—How can you say that, Bess, when you remember “Peter Pan”? I never saw anything more adorable than that—

Anne—Except “Little Lord Fauntleroy.”

Ellen—i don't know which is *my* favorite—I love them all.

Ned—You girls are sure nutty over that movie actress, Rita Rose.

May—And so are you boys. Own up to it.

Joe—(*condescendingly*) Of course we like to see her pictures—

Bess—Like to see her pictures? Well, rather. Every night in the week.

Ellen—And Rex even has a photograph of her in his room.

Rex—Well, why shouldn't I? She's like the girls we read about—not the ones we know.

Anne—She's no girl.

Joe—How do you know?

Anne—i read all about her. She's twenty-five!

Joe—(*whistling*) Gosh! but she's well preserved.

Anne—And her hair is dark and curly—just as it is in the pictures.

May—And she's small—ever so small.

Ned—I've heard something about her that beats your news all hollow.

May—What's that?

Ned—She's here.

Bess—Here? Where?

Ned—Where do you suppose? Here.

Anne—What on earth is she doing here?

Ned—Rehearsing for a picture.

Ellen—In this place?

Ned—In a place farther up the river—a whopping big estate that belongs to a New York fellow.

Bess—(excitedly) I know where it is! It has a darling little lodge at the gate—and wonderful gardens—and little tea houses like those in Japanese pictures.

Ned—That's the spot, all right. Well—if she hasn't already come, she's coming some time soon.

May—(almost in a whisper) How—perfectly wonderful!

Joe—What good will it do you girls, I'd like to know.

Bess—We may see her pass.

Anne—Or maybe meet her.

Ellen—And it will be something to know that she is near! (And overcome by the possibilities of the treat in store for them, the four lapse into silence, gaze steadfastly into space and forget that aught exists save Rita Rose.)

Rex—Gosh! It would be fun to meet her!

Joe—And to watch her act.

Ned—And to run the car for her.

(And, straightway, each one, lost in his own particular vision, forgets time and place and companions, and sees only himself, hand in hand with Rita Rose, sworn comrade, friend and ally. And, into the hushed silence of the rapt company, comes a series of short, sharp knocks and an impatient voice is heard to call, "Let me in! Let me in!")

Rex—(starting up) It's Arch!

Ellen—(running to him) Don't let him in this door, Rex. He's probably soaking wet.

Rex—(opening the door) Beat it around to the front door. Mother will open it. (As he closes the door.) Pretty welcome for a fellow, I must say.

Joe—Too bad if we kids can't say what we want to each other by this time. How long has it been since we started out together?

Ned—Long enough to have our last tussle with arithmetic and grammar. Gosh—but I'll be glad to get into high school.

Joe—Who won't? Going to try out for football, Rex?

Rex—(after a pause) I won't be there to try.

Ned—What do you mean?

Rex—Just what I say. I'm not going to high school.

Joe—And why, I'd like to know?

Rex—Because—I've got to work. (As he crosses to door at left.) I'll hunt up Arch and hurry him along. (Exit.)

(For a moment there is a painful silence. Then Ellen steps forward and with an effort volunteers an explanation.)

Ellen—Boys, you mustn't talk high school to Rex. It makes it all so hard when he can't go, too.

Bess—But, Ellen—why can't he go? I thought that your uncle—

Ellen—(perching on the arm of Bess's chair) Everybody thinks that uncle left us money. But if he did, we haven't been able to find it.

May—But the home—

Ellen—Oh, that's ours, of course—we're his only relatives. But we can't live without money—so that's why Rex has to work.

Joe—(coming to center and standing with his hands in his pockets) Wouldn't his money be in the bank?

Ellen—Uncle didn't believe in banks. (*Pauses.*) He always hid his money.

Anne—(*excitedly*) Then—it may be hidden in this very house! Have you looked?

Ellen—(*smiling wearily*) Looked? We've looked everywhere.

Ned—(*who has joined Joe and stands with his arm about his shoulder*) It seems funny that he didn't tell you about any hiding place—

Ellen—He tried to tell us *something*, just before he died. But it was too late.

Joe—(*reflectively*) He was a nice old fellow—always good to us kids.

Ellen—Uncle was a dear. We miss him dreadfully, and we can't bear even to use his old chair now that he's gone. (*She points to the old chair at upper right of the stage.*)

Ned—(*excitedly*) Have you looked in the cellar? In stories, the treasure is always hidden in a chest, way off under the beams in the darkest part of an underground passage.

Ellen—(*shaking her head*) There isn't any chest in our cellar; and anyway we've looked—just everywhere—in every crack and corner—and even in the fruit room.

Joe—What about the attic? An attic is always a bully place.

Ellen—We've been all through the attic; we've even taken up some of the planks in the floor, thinking there might be a box underneath.

May—(*turning around and facing the fireplace*) I know! It must be in the fireplace. Don't you remember how the mysterious paper always tells you to count so many bricks to the right—so many up and down—so many to the left—

Ellen—But there isn't any mysterious paper—and anyway, the fireplace has all been torn apart. Nothing's there.

Anne—But there *must* be some place you haven't looked—there just *must* be. (*Starts up.*) And we've just got to find it.

Bess—Indeed we have. You'll help—won't you boys?

Ned—You bet we will. (*Emphatically.*) Rex Brent is going to high school with us.

Ellen—(*clapping her hands*) How splendid of you to say so! It makes me feel so much happier about everything. (*And at this moment, the door at upper left opens and Rex enters with Arch.*)

Arch—Hello, everybody! (*Immediately, all but May crowd around him and gaily greet him.*)

May—I'm too lazy to get up Arch. Come over and sit by me. (*As he laughingly obeys, Bess and Anne, together with Joe and Ned, repair to the davenport while Ellen sits left of table with Rex on the arm of her chair.*)

Ellen—Anybody who is late to a party ought to give an account of himself.

Arch—I had to go on an errand. Didn't Rex tell you?

Ellen—The errand didn't take all this time, did it?

Arch—No—but—(*hesitates.*)

Ellen—But—what?

Arch—You couldn't expect me to miss all the excitement.

Joe—What excitement?

Arch—Town's pretty well stirred up.

Ned—Over what?

Arch—(*impressively*) People standing on corners—hanging out of windows—talking—and yelling—and—

Anne—Tell us this minute!

Arch—Shouldn't wonder if the whole neighborhood would turn out to help hunt.

Bess—Hunt what? (*Angrily.*) It's mean of you not to tell us.

Arch—(teasingly) How do you know that there's anything to tell?

Rex—Stop your kidding, Arch, and give it to us straight.

Arch—Well, the row's all about the little foreign princess who was put at that big school not far from here.

Ellen—(excitedly) The Manor school.

Arch—Just so. Well—she's escaped.

Ellen—Escaped? How could she?

Arch—How do people usually escape?

Bess—And why should she?

Arch—How should I know?

Anne—Why she has her own maid who is never supposed to leave her—

May—And she is dreadfully important; has a little kingdom all her own—

Ellen—With oodles of money—and a castle—and—

Joe—Who on earth is this princess?

Arch—Ask the girls. They seem to know all about it.

Ned—Is it a joke of some kind?

Bess—Joke? Not much. She's Princess Margheretta of some little bit of a kingdom somewhere way off.

Anne—And she's an orphan—

May—And she's just twelve years old—

Bess—And she's been at the Manor school ever since September.

Rex—What nonsense! Why should a real foreign princess come to America to be educated?

Ellen—Just because it *is* America. She's always had an American governess, she speaks English perfectly, and the prime minister or whoever acts as her guardian, decided that she should have a year at an American school. (Decisively.) I read all about it.

Arch—That's straight goods, fellows. She *is* a real princess—she's at this school—and now she's lost.

Joe—Lost? You said she's escaped.

Arch—Well, isn't it the same thing?

Ned—I should say not. She could be lost without wanting to be—but she couldn't very well escape without having some hand in it.

Bess—(*dreamily*) The Manor school is the most wonderful place. It has a riding academy—

Anne—And a little theater all its own.

May—And the cunningest ball room you ever saw.

Ellen—How heavenly! Why should she want to escape?

Ned—(*gloomily*) It's school. Isn't that reason enough?

Arch—I should say so. Nobody could blame her for asking to be kidnaped.

Bess—Kidnaped?

Arch—Kidnaped is what I said.

Joe—First she had escaped—then she was lost—and now she is kidnaped. You are some story teller.

Arch—Well, everybody seems to think that she's kidnaped.

Anne—Who did it?

Arch—The old guy who's running the kingdom for her. If she can be put out of the way it goes to him.

Bess—(*tragically*) Put out of the way?

Arch—(*importantly*) Put out of the way is what I said.

May—You mean—killed?

Arch—I shouldn't wonder.

Ellen—Oh, how perfectly dreadful!

Arch—That's the usual method of getting rid of people who stand in the way, isn't it?

Anne—That's what happened to Prince Arthur.

Bess—And to the little boys in the tower.

Ellen—(jumping up suddenly, much to the disturbance of Rex's equilibrium) Oh—it just mustn't happen to the little princess!

(At this moment, Mrs. Brent enters with a pile of plates.)

Mrs. Brent—Isn't it just about time for Rex and Ellen to bring the doughnuts and cider? (As Rex and Ellen leave the room, the boys rise.) Or am I interrupting some very special Hallowe'en rite?

Anne—Not a bit of it. We're just excited over the fate of the little princess—that's all.

Bess—Have you heard what happened, Mrs. Brent?

Mrs. B.--(as she passes the plates) I've just heard. Perhaps it isn't so bad as it's rumored—for stories are so often exaggerated. (To May.) Can't you find a chair, my dear?

May--I love to sit by the fire. (Pauses.) But I am getting a little cramped. (Rises and goes to chair right of table.)

Mrs. B.--Aren't you all glad tonight that you are plain, everyday children with no coronets to bother you?

Anne—(slowly) Oh—I don't—know. Being a princess would be—oh, so wonderful!

Mrs. B.—Even if the princess had the misfortune to be lost on a dark and stormy Hallowe'en? (As Rex and Ellen enter, the former with a tray filled with glasses and the latter with a plate of doughnuts.) Sit down, boys; for the doughnuts and cider are coming your way. (Rex and Ellen serve the boys and girls.) And I shall be near enough to replenish any plate which happens to need it. (Exit.)

(Rex and Ellen place the plate and the tray upon the table. Amid great chatter and laughter, the girls and boys resume their former positions. Arch sits on the arm of Ellen's chair and Rex draws the hassock to May's feet.)

Ellen—I believe I'm outgrowing Hallowe'en customs. They don't seem a bit thrilling any more.

Arch—That's because they are silly.

Ellen—Then what sort of a celebration would you choose?

Arch—A sure-enough, honest-to-goodness ghost—

Ned—In a way-off, deserted old house, where there's been a murder.

Bess—(*shuddering*) Ugh! You're crazy about ghosts, Ned. I'd rather meet a crooked old witch with a pointed hat, a black cat and a broom stick.

Ned—There ain't no such animal.

Anne—And I should like to change all the ugly little Hallowe'en devils into pretty, sparkly fairies.

Joe—Well, I choose to have an adventure—a real adventure—like being out in a storm, rescuing somebody from falling from a precipice, saving her life—and—

May—Saving *her* life? So, you'd want the somebody to be a girl.

Joe—No fun in rescuing a boy.

May—(*mockingly*) Rita Rose, maybe!

Joe—Sure! It would be corking to rescue Rita Rose.

May—It would be corking enough just to meet her.

Joe—And, of course, after I'd rescued her she'd want me for leading man. Dead easy stunt. How would you like to see *my* face flashed all over the screen?

May—We just couldn't stand it, Joe—nobody could stand it. (*Leans over to Rex.*) Did you ever hear of *anybody* being so silly?

Rex—I never did.

Joe—You're just mad because you didn't think of it first.

Rex—Not much. I could celebrate Hallowe'en a lot better than that.

Joe—(*jeeringly*) How—I'd like to know.

Rex—By coaxing some good-natured witch to tell us where uncle's money is hidden.

(There is a moment's pause; then May pats him encouragingly on the shoulder.)

May—Don't you worry, Rex. You're coming back to school next year—I just know it.

Ned—You bet you are, old fellow.

(From without comes the distressed honk of an automobile. Ellen places her plate on the table and goes to the window, followed by Arch.)

Ellen—It's a dreadful night. *(Peers out the window.)* I wonder if a machine is stalled. *(Turns around)* Oh, I just can't help thinking of the little princess—out in all this rain—lost—unhappy—and—

(There is a rap at the door—a very decided rap. The children gaze at each other in surprise.)

Arch—I'll go.

(As he opens the door, a picturesque figure steps over the threshold—a dainty maiden with golden curls, a large plumed hat and a rain-spattered cape over a rich velvet dress. For a moment she stands irresolute.)

Ellen—*(gasping with excitement)* The—little—princess!

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

(The scene is the same—for only a moment of time has elapsed.)

The Princess—*(hesitatingly, as she gazes at the bewildered faces.)* May—I—come—in?

Ellen—*(meeting her)* Oh, please do. *(pauses)* We're so surprised to see you that our manners seem to have left us.

Princess—(laughingly) No wonder you're surprised. I'm surprised myself.

Ellen—You see, we've just been talking about you.

Princess--About me?

Ellen—Everybody's talking about you tonight.

(Timidly, *Ellen* takes the hand of the *Princess*, and leads her to the center of the stage. The boys and girls having placed their plates and glasses in the windows and on the table, group excitedly about them.)

Princess—What is everybody saying about me?

Ellen—That you were kidnaped.

Princess—Kidnaped?

Ellen—From the Manor school, you know.

Bess—(eagerly) Were you?

May—Or did you run away?

Anne—And how did you get here?

Princess—Oh, dear! Which question shall I answer first?

Rex—Maybe it's safer for you not to talk.

Ned—And not to let anyone know just who you are.

Princess—And do you know just who I am?

Ned—Why, you're *Princess Margharetta*, of course.

Joe—We guessed that from the first.

Ellen—And we've been wondering just how it all happened.

Princess—How what happened?

Ellen—Why, your escape.

Princess—(looking anxiously around the circle) Are you—all—my—friends?

Arch—You bet we are! I've locked the door and I just dare anyone to get you out of this room.

Princess—How splendid! Then I'll tell you all about it.

Rex—(drawing out the chair at left of table) Please sit down. You're tired.

Princess—(crossing to fireplace) May I have the chair—over here? I'm cold—and wet—

Ellen—Of course you are. I'll take your cape and hat, and you can warm yourself.

(Ellen carefully places the cape and hat on theavenport as Rex draws the chair in front of the fire. The Princess seats herself.)

Princess—(holding her hands to the flame) Oh, how good it feels! (As they all stand awkwardly about) Won't you all sit down?

Ned—In story books nobody sits down while a princess is in the room.

Princess—But this isn't a story book and unless you let me be one of you I cannot feel at home.

Ned—We will do just as you say.

Princess—Then—sit down!

Ned—Here, Bess— (And he pulls the unresisting Bess to the chair which stands at the right of the table.) This belongs to you. (As Bess seats herself, with Anne perched on the arm of her chair, he sprawls at their feet)

Arch—And here's a throne for May. (He pushes the old, unused chair from the upper right of stage to left of table.)

Joe—(dragging the hassock to center) And one for Ellen.

(As the two girls laughingly seat themselves, Arch perches on the arm of May's chair, while Rex and Joe sit at the princess' feet.)

Bess—But it doesn't seem quite right to treat a princess just as we treat each other.

Princess—But, I am not a princess—tonight. (Pauses.) And if you won't promise to forget that I am one—at other times—I won't—(Pauses.)

Rex--Won't what?

Princess--(smiling) Well, I won't play.

Ned--You mean that you won't tell the story?

Princess--Exactly.

Ned--Then--fire away.

Princess--Where shall I begin?

May--'Way 'way back--when you were in your palace.

Princess--(thoughtfully) My palace! It doesn't make me happy to remember my palace.

Anne--Why, I should think a palace would be wonderful to live in!

Princess--(shaking her head) Not when it has cold, gray walls and long dark passages, where--sometimes--there is--murder.

Anne--Oh! Oh!

Princess--In one room there is a blood stain that won't wash off.

Ellen--How perfectly awful!

Princess--And the picture gallery is full of staring, mocking eyes that follow me as I walk along.

Bess--Poor little princess!

Princess--And when I sit in the big, gloomy dining room, I imagine that there are ghosts all about me; and, sometimes--I hear voices in the darkness--and laughter--and--

May--Oh, don't tell us any more. Please!

Princess--(sadly) So, you see, people who wear coronets aren't always happy.

Joe--(in awe-struck tones) Do you wear your coronet all the time?

Princess--Oh, dear no! It's stupid and heavy--and I hate it.

Ned--Weren't you pretty glad to come to America?

Ellen--And to the school? It's such a beautiful school.

Princess—It's been the very happiest year of my life.

Rex—Year? Why I thought you just came in September.

Princess—(*hastily*) It seems a year. That's what I mean.

Arch—Then—why have you run away?

Princess—Because—because—(*lowering her voice*) There's a plot against me.

Joe—(*excitedly*) A plot!

Ellen—The prime minister?

Princess—(*blankly*) The prime minister?

Ellen—Isn't he the one who would rule the kingdom if—if—

Princess—If I were out of the way? Exactly. He's my uncle.

Bess—Your own uncle?

Princess—(*complacently*) Oh, yes. Being a relative doesn't mean anything—at court.

May—And he would really—kill you?

Princess—He'd love to do it.

Ned—Gosh—but that's tough luck.

Princess—I've a friend here—an old servant—who knew my father—and my mother. When I came—he came. He's very loyal.

Rex—(*excitedly*) Go on with the story.

Princess—And yesterday, he heard—no matter how—that my uncle was planning to steal me away.

Arch—How could he?

Princess—I don't know. But he always does what he plans to do.

Princess—He'd hide me away—and pretend to hunt for me—oh, he's clever—and then, after a time the throne would be his.

Joe—(*angrily*) It's a darn shame.

Princess—(tossing her head) But I've tricked him.

Ned—Tell us.

Princess—For tonight—Leon—he's my friend, and he's a chafffeur—waited for me near the school. I slipped out from study hall—and we got away.

Ellen—Without anybody seeing you?

Princess—Yes. While they were hunting for us—we hid; and now, we're on our way.

Rex—Where?

Princess—That's for Leon to say. Just out there—(pointing off stage) the car came to a stand-still. I saw your light—and while he went for gasoline—I hurried here. (Pauses.) I'm glad I did.

Ellen—And we're glad. (excitedly.) We'll hide you here—all night.

Princess—Oh, no! That wouldn't do. Leon will be back in a little while and then we must hurry on our way.

Arch—Suppose they catch you.

Princess—They won't.

Arch—But, if they did?

Princess—Well—I'd go back to school, I suppose. Next week I'd try again—and—(laughing as she bends forward) .this next time I'd expect all of you to help me.

Rex—You bet we would.

Princess—What a lot of loyal courtiers you are!

Bess—(suddenly) Let's have a court—a play court—right here—with you for Queen.

May—(clapping her hands) Oh, splendid! Will you, Princess?

Princess—The very thing. Then, if I ever see you again—

Anne—Don't say "if." We must see you again.

Joe—(who has been gazing steadfastly at the princess) I've seen you before.

Princess—In the school yard, perhaps.

Joe—I've never been near the school.

Princess—Then, perhaps, my picture. It was in the paper.

Joe—No, I never saw it in the paper.

Princess—Then I just happen to look like somebody you know.

Joe—No—I've seen *you*. I'm sure of it. (*Puzzled.*) But I can't think where.

Princess—Why bother about it?

Joe—Oh, it will come to me. Those things always do. (*Pauses.*) Anyway, I've seen you before.

Ned—(*impatiently*) You're dreaming, Joe. Come back to earth.

Ellen—And to Margharetta's court. (*Pauses.*) We are anxious for your orders, Princess.

Princess—Then you shall have them. Let me see. (*After a moment.*) I'll make you all my ladies-in-waiting. (*Laughs.*) And I don't even know your names.

May—I'm May.

Bess—And I'm Bess.

Anne—And Anne.

Ellen—And Ellen, at your service.

Princess—Then, Lady May— (*May rises and stands before her.*) I name you Mistress of the Royal Wardrobe. (*With a wave of the arm*) Pass on. (*May crosses to upper left of stage.*)

Princess—Lady Bess, (*As Bess comes to her*) you shall be Keeper of the Royal Jewels. (*Bess joins May.*) And, Lady Anne. (*Anne stands before her.*) Our Royal Scribe. Pass on. (*Anne joins the others.*) And, as for you, Lady Ellen, (*Ellen rises.*) I make you Custodian of the Royal Seal. (*Ellen joins the other girls.*)

May—(*anxiously*) Oughtn't we all to curtsy? Or to do something, Princess?

Princess—(*as she rises and faces them*) You shall take the oath of fealty. (*Very solemnly.*) Do you, Lady May, and you, Lady Bess, and you, Lady Anne, and you,

Lady Ellen, solemnly promise to heed our royal word, to serve our royal purpose and to attend our royal person?

(An awkward silence ensues. The ladies-in-waiting gaze questioningly at each other.)

Ned—*(disgusted)* Can't you talk?

Ellen—We do, Your Majesty.

(Very stiffly and self-consciously, the new ladies-in-waiting make their curtsies.)

Princess—*(as she walks to the table)* Now, if I am to bestow the accolade upon you boys, I need a sceptre.

Rex—*(following her)* There's nothing around here that looks like a sceptre. *(Suddenly.)* Would a ruler do?

Princess—*(dubiously)* Yes—it would, I suppose. *(Rex, diving into the table drawer, produces the necessary ruler.)*

Ned—*(as the princess holds it stiffly)* Looks like a school to me, 'Teacher.

Princess—*(as she seats herself in the chair left of table)* Then for that joking remark, young fellow, I shall dub you Court Jester. Bring up the hassock. *(Ned obeys.)* Now, kneel. *(He kneels.)* Sir Edouard—*(striking him lightly on the shoulder)* Arise. Your cap and bells will come later on.

Ned—*(as he rises)* How can I be a Knight and a Court Jester at the same time? *(Crosses back of table.)*

Princess—That isn't worth discussing. We need a Court Jester, and that's all that matters. Next. *(As Arch kneels.)* Your name? *(He whispers it.)* Sir Archibald—*(she gives him the accolade.)* Be thou the guardian of our Royal Exchequer. *(He rises and stands at her left.)*

Joe—*(whispering to Rex)* What's that?

Rex—Money, you nut?

Princess—This seat is too low—it makes it awkward for me. I'll stand. *(And suiting the action to the word, she throws aside the cushion and climbs upon the chair.)*

Joe—My turn. (*Kneels on the hassock.*) My name's Joe.

Princess—(*bending over and touching his shoulder with the ruler*) Arise, Sir Joseph. And proffer me the vow that you will be our constant protector and Royal Guard.

Joe—(*fervently*) You bet I will. (*Stands back of her chair.*)

Princess—(*gaily, as Rex kneels before her*) Last knight of all, what shall I call you?

Rex—Rex, Your Majesty.

Princess—(*as she touches him on the shoulder*) Then, Sir Rex—(*hesitates*)—but, no—you can't be that, for Rex means king. (*Suddenly. Then, suppose I make you a king and share my throne with you? (Flourishing the ruler.)*) Arise, King Rex.

(*And King Rex arises, a little more hastily than his royal title deserves; for at this crucial moment, a dull, ripping sound is heard, and the Princess, after a wobbly effort to keep her balance, topples ungracefully against him.*)

Princess—Oh—oh—oh! I've broken your chair. My foot went right through the seat—and I'm afraid it's ruined.

Ellen—(*hurrying to her, followed by the other girls, who stand around the back of the chair.*) It doesn't matter, really it doesn't—for we don't use the chair, and—

Princess—But it *does* matter, and I'm—oh, so sorry about it.

Rex—But it wasn't your fault—the old thing was just about ready to fall apart. Hop up, again, and give me my crown.

Princess—(*as she looks closely at the chair*) It's broken only in one place. Perhaps it *can* be mended.

Rex—I'm sure it can. Don't worry.

Princess—But—look! Something's under the seat—hidden.

Joe—(leaning over) By Jove, there is, sure enough.

Rex—Push back the torn place, Joe. (Shoves has-sock to front of stage.)

Princess—And let me take hold of—whatever it is. (A moment's pause.) Why, it's a book!

Ellen—(breathlessly) It's uncle's Bible!

Princess—(coming down stage) It is a Bible. How very strange for it to be hidden—there. (Girls and boys group on either side of her, with Rex at her right and Ellen at her left.)

Rex—Open it, please.

(As the princess opens the book, there, across the page, lies a banknote.)

Princess—It's—it's money! (In an awe-struck voice) Why, it's a thousand dollars.

Arch—Hooray—ray—ray! It's the hidden money!

Ned—Didn't I say that something would happen?

Ellen—(excitedly, as the girls clap their hands) Turn another leaf. (And the princess turns another leaf)

Princess—(in amazement) Another thousand dollars! (As she turns over other leaves.) And there's more—lots more—on almost every page! (To Rex.) Oh, what does it mean?

Rex—It means school for me.

Princess—School?

Ellen—And—oh, so many other things!

Princess—I don't understand.

Ellen—It's my uncle's money, Princess; and we've been looking for it everywhere.

Princess—It's been hidden—here?

Rex—All this time. (Pauses.) My wish has come true.

Princess--(puzzled) What wish?

Rex—That some good Hallowe'en witch would show me where the money was hidden.

Princess—Am I a witch?

Rex—I'd rather think of you as a fairy—a good fairy—

Ellen—Who has brought us happiness.

Princess—(softly) It's very wonderful to be able to bring happiness to anyone.

May—Why, you've brought it to every one of us to-night.

Anne—And if we could draw a magic ring around you, we'd never let you go.

Joe—I don't know anything about a *magic* ring—but I'm pretty sure of one way we can keep her. Come on—let's join hands—and—

(With much laughter, they grasp hands and circle gaily around the princess as she stands with the book in her hands. Suddenly she pushes her way through the circle, lays the book upon the table and stands at lower right of stage.)

May—(following with Bess) Why, Princess—what's the matter?

Bess—Have we been too noisy?

Anne—Oh, I hope we haven't offended you in any way. (Stands with Ellen at lower left of stage.)

Ned—(coming back of girls to the princess' right) You see, we think you're bully.

Joe—(at center) You bet we do.

Rex—(as he and Arch cross to Anne and Ellen) And if you ever need any help you can just count on every one of us. Isn't that so, Ellen?

Ellen—Oh, indeed it is! And mother will want to thank you for all you've done. (Starts to door.) I'll call her.

Princess—(raising her hand) Wait—just a moment. (*Ellen turns.*) What would you say if I should tell you that I'm not really the princess?

Ellen—But you are the princess.

Joe—You must be.

Arch—(scornfully) Can't you see that she's joking?

Princess—I'm not joking. (*Pauses.*) For I'm not the princess.

May—But you said—

Princess—Yes, I said—lots of things.

Bess—And the chauffeur—and your uncle—

Princess—And the palace—and all the rest of it.

Anne—How could you have known all this unless you were the real princess?

Princess—At the present moment the real princess is safe in the Manor school. (*Comes down stage right of center.*)

Ellen—What do you mean?

Princess—That she was found shortly after the story of her kidnaping was spread abroad.

Ned—Found—where?

Princess—In the little lodge at the gate of the school.

Arch—What was she doing there?

Princess—Having tea with the keeper's wife. By this time she is safe in bed—where she ought to be.

May—How do you know all this?

(*Bess and May cross to the table.*)

Princess—Because I was near by when she was found.

Ned—And—so—you're just make-believe?

Princess—Just make-believe. I'm a fraud.

Rex—I don't care what you are—you're bully!

Princess—Then, can you ever forgive me for deceiving you?

Bess—What made you do it?

Princess—My gasoline *did* give out—my chauffeur *did* leave me here—and when I found you thought me the princess—I couldn't help playing the part.

Joe—Then—*who are you?*

Princess—Can't you recognize me, Joe? You *have* seen me before—all of you have seen me before.

May—Have we, really?

Princess—Suppose I should remove these golden curls—it's only a wig, you know—and show you that my hair is dark and curly.

Joe—Go on.

Princess—And, suppose I should dress—well—as Peter Pan?

May—(*ecstatically*) Oh-h-h!

Princess—Or, as—Lord Fauntleroy.

Joe—(*shouting*) You're Rita Rose! (*Stands at her left.*)

Princess—(*laughing*) I'm Rita Rose!

(*There is a moment's silence. Bess leans against the table for support; May sinks into the chair left of table; Ned drops upon the hassock. Auto horn sounds outside.*)

Arch—You *can't* be.

Princess—Oh, yes I can—much more easily than I can be the princess.

Anne—But you're dressed like a little girl.

Princess—Why shouldn't I be? (*Anne comes to her.*) I'm a little girl in the picture I'm rehearsing, and what's more, I'm a little princess.

Arch—You're rehearsing—here?

Princess—Just up the river. Tonight it was late when we finished, so I didn't stop to dress, but threw a cape over my princess gown, and hurried off. (*Pauses.*) Now, will you forgive me?

Joe—*Forgive you?* Why, having Rita Rose is lots better than having a princess.

Princess—*(as she glances at the girls)* I'm afraid that all of you don't feel that way.

May—Well—of course it *was* romantic to have a real princess—

Bess—*(sighing)* And, we'll never again have the chance of being ladies-in-waiting.

Anne—*(indignantly)* But think of the chance to have Rita Rose all to ourselves.

Ellen—And just remember what she has found for *us*.

Ned—Girls are such geese! What good would a princess do us, anyway?

Rex—*(gloomily)* What good will Rita Rose do us? *(Crosses back stage.)* She'll be going in a minute—and we'll never see her again.

Princess—*(turning)* Oh, yes you will! Don't think that you're getting rid of me quite so easily. *(Holds out her right hand.)*

Rex—You mean— *(takes her hand.)*

Princess—That I refuse to give up my new-found friends all of a sudden. *(Takes Joe's hand.)*

Joe—You'll come back?

Princess—Oh—lots of times. And some day you shall all go out where I am rehearsing and watch the picture, and have tea with me afterwards.

May—*(as they stand in thrilled silence.)* Isn't it all wonderful?

Bess—More wonderful than having the princess—

Ellen—But she is the princess—*our* princess—she'll always be our princess.

(Again, from without, comes the honk of an automobile, this time, sharp, urgent and prolonged.)

Princess—There's Leon. (*Laughing.*) You see, Leon is his name.

Ned—Must you go?

Princess—I must. Will one of my knights bring my hat and my cape? (*A frantic dash results in Arch bearing away the desired raiment.*) And my Court Jester shall see me to the door. (*Arch folds the cape around her.*) While Sir Joseph and King Rex must act as my body guard to the car. (*The boys station themselves on either side of the door as Arch opens it.*)

Ellen—(*coming close*) Then, it isn't goodbye—is it, Rita Rose?

Princess—(*as she places an arm around her*) Never goodbye—for friends.

Anne—(*on the other side*) And it's been such a wonderful Hailowe'en.

May—(*by Anne*) With rain, thunder and lightning, and—

Bess—(*by Ellen*) With a hidden treasure—

Anne—With somebody lost—

May—(*dramatically*) And somebody found—

Ellen—And then, just when everybody was most excited—

Princess—A strange thing did happen at Brent's.

(*Laughingly, she runs from them, takes Arch's outstretched hand, and goes through the open door, followed by the merry boys. Ellen closes the door, and the four girls rush to the window and peer eagerly out.*)

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