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Dramatic Publishing



A FULL-LENGTH PLAY

The Prince and the Pauper

by

ANNE COULTER MARTENS

Adapted from the book

by Mark Twain



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER)

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THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER
A Full-Length Play
For Twelve Men, Eight Women, and Extras

CHARACTERS

EDWARD.....*prince of England*
TOM CANTY.....*a street urchin*

In the Palace

LADY JANE.....*Edward's cousin*
LORD HERTFORD.....*his uncle*
BUMBLE.....*his whipping boy*
LADY GWEN.....*a lady-in-waiting*
GUARDS]*attendants to Edward*
PAGE BOYS]

In the City

MRS. CANTY.....*Tom's mother*
BET.....*his sister*
OLD BIDDY.....*a beggar woman*
GIRL]
FIRST FELLOW]*street people*
SECOND FELLOW]
MILES HENDON.....*a gentleman*
HERMIT.....*a madman*
MRS. HOBBS.....*a landlady*
MRS. BENTLEY.....*a shopper*
CONSTABLE]
JAILER]*minions of the law*
Townspople, street rabble, prisoners.

PLACE: *London.*

TIME: *1547.*

ACT ONE

Scene One

SCENE: Near the palace gate, morning. This scene may be played in front of the curtain or may be an area scene with lights. At C is an ornate gate, painted gold. There may be a suggestion of an iron fence on either side of it. An ornate design in black on cardboard will give the effect of a palace fence and gates. The gate is guarded by a GUARD who walks back and forth. A few poorly dressed people, perhaps a man, a woman and a girl, come in L and pause, staring at him and at the gate. A rough-looking man comes in R and stares. Following him comes TOM CANTY, dressed in rags, his untrimmed hair falling down over his eyes. He approaches timidly.

TOM. Is this the palace?

GUARD. What do you think?

MAN. Sure is, matey.

GUARD (to group). Be off with you, rabble! (The others mutter among themselves, taking a few steps backward.)

(EDWARD the prince, richly dressed and with a plumed hat, enters L on the upstage side of the gate. TOM moves forward and presses his face against the gate.)

MAN. The prince!

OTHERS. Long live the prince!

GUARD. Off, I say! (The others back away as he nears them menacingly, then scurry L. He turns back and sees TOM.) Mind your manners, beggar! (Taking TOM by the arm, he whirls him around. As TOM falls down, the others laugh and go out L.)

TOM. I did nothing but look, sir. (Gets up.)

GUARD. Get back to your hovel. (Pushes TOM.

EDWARD, who has been watching, is incensed by this. He comes to the gate, angry.)

EDWARD. How dare you use the boy like that!

TOM (in awe). Your Grace! (Bows, going down on one knee.)

GUARD. Your Highness, it's forbidden for the likes of him to loiter.

EDWARD. Not even the poorest subject of my father the king should be treated so!

TOM. Please be merciful. I came here hoping I could catch a glimpse of the prince.

EDWARD. You see me now.

TOM. I'm greatly honored.

EDWARD. Rise. (TOM does so.) Do I look as you expected?

TOM. Much more grand, your Grace. (The GUARD resumes his pacing back and forth.)

EDWARD. The gate is locked.

TOM. Of course.

EDWARD. You can't get in.

TOM. I didn't expect to.

EDWARD. And I can't get out.

TOM. But surely . . .

EDWARD. The prince of England is not allowed on the streets alone.

TOM. I thought a prince could do anything he chose.

EDWARD (considering). I'm of a mind to issue a command . . . Yes, I shall. (Shouts.) Guard! Open

the gate and let him in!

GUARD (shocked). The beggar?

EDWARD. You heard me.

GUARD. As your Highness wishes. (Unlocks the gate and opens it.) You . . . in here! (Surprised and fearful, TOM goes through the gate, falling on his knees before EDWARD. The GUARD locks the gate and paces again.)

EDWARD. Up! (TOM rises.) You wanted to see me? Now I want a look at you.

GUARD. Your Highness, shall I summon your attendants?

EDWARD. It won't be necessary. (GUARD resumes pacing. To TOM:) You live near?

TOM. Oh, no. I walked a long way.

EDWARD. Perhaps you'd like to rest awhile?

TOM. Thank you, my prince.

EDWARD. What's your name?

TOM. Tom Canty, an it please your Grace.

EDWARD. Would you like to see my quarters?

TOM. Of course.

EDWARD. Then come with me. (Starts L, but TOM hesitates.) Come. Your prince commands. (He goes out L. Bewildered, TOM follows him out. The GUARD looks after them in amazement.)

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE

Scene Two

SCENE: A room in the palace. It is a few minutes later. At UC is a small dais and on it a gilded high-back chair. At UR is a standing screen hung with brilliant tapestries or lengths of patterned silk or velvet. A small cabinet with doors is near the wall UL. Beside the wall L is a tall standing mirror.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: EDWARD and TOM come in L.

EDWARD. Do you like it? (Tosses his plumed hat on the dais.)

TOM (awed). A room in the palace!

EDWARD. Part of my private quarters. (Pauses beside the dais.) So your name is Tom Canty? (Absently, he stoops and plays with a large gold disk which is lying there, spinning it on its end.)

TOM. Yes.

EDWARD. And where do you live?

TOM. On Offal Court, an it please you, sir.

EDWARD. An odd place, it sounds. (Aware of playing with the disk, he considers a moment, then opens a door in the cabinet and puts it there.) You have parents?

TOM. A mother and a sister. Old Bidy, too. But she's no relation. She lets us sleep on her floor.

EDWARD. On the floor? (Sits in his chair.)

TOM. With some straw and an old blanket.

EDWARD. Is it as comfortable as a bed?

TOM. I've never slept anywhere else, sir, so I don't know.

EDWARD. I've often wondered about the lowly subjects of my father the king, but you're the first I've ever talked to.

TOM. You do me honor.

EDWARD. It's sometimes lonely here. My father's ill, and my uncle looks after me. And there's my cousin the lady Jane and sometimes Lady Gwen. Except for them and the servants, I'm usually alone. Tell me, do your mother and Old Bidy treat your servants well?

TOM (surprised). We have no servants.

EDWARD. Then who helps you undress at night? And dresses you when you rise?

TOM. No one, sir. I sleep in what I'm wearing now.

EDWARD. You have no other garments?

TOM. Pray, sir, why would I need more? I have only one body.

EDWARD (laughing). Your pardon, I didn't mean to laugh. Tom, you speak well. You've had schooling?

TOM. The good priest Father Andrew has taught me how to read and write.

EDWARD. You know Latin?

TOM. A little, sir.

EDWARD. Strange, how different our lives. Do you have pleasant times at this Offal Court where you live?

TOM. Good enough, when I'm not hungry. We see Punch and Judy shows and sometimes we boys run races, or swim in the river and spatter each other with water, and dive and shout and tumble . . .

EDWARD. If only I could do that once! Go on.

TOM. Sometimes we play in the mud, fairly wallow in it, your Grace.

EDWARD. It sounds wonderful. If I could wear clothes like yours and revel in the mud just once, with no one to rebuke me or forbid, I would almost forego my crown.

TOM. And if I could wear just once such satin clothes as you have on, just once . . .

EDWARD. You'd like it? Then it shall be done. (Gets up.) Tom, get behind that screen. I'll change with you for a few minutes. (Takes off his satin jacket.)

TOM. But, your Grace . . .

EDWARD. Quickly! This is a game I'll enjoy before anyone comes to stop me. (TOM goes behind the screen. In a moment his ragged coat is tossed on the top of it. EDWARD throws his satin jacket behind the screen.)

TOM. Your Grace doesn't mind wearing my old rags?

EDWARD. This is fun. Hurry! (Unbuttons his shirt. There is a tap on the door offstage UL.) Someone comes! (Goes quickly behind the screen.) Be very quiet! (The tap is repeated.)

JANE (offstage). Edward, may I come in?

(After a pause JANE enters. She is a lighthearted girl about his age. She has a chess set.)

JANE. Edward? (Looks around, then puts the chess game on dais. There is another tap on the door.) Enter!

(The LADY GWEN, an understanding girl in her twenties, comes in with a bowl of nuts.)

GWEN. I thought the prince might like some nuts to

crack and nibble on. (Puts bowl on dais.)

JANE. He's not here at the moment.

GWEN. I thought you were to play chess with him----

JANE. At ten, he said. He must have changed his mind. (When their backs are to the screen, EDWARD and then TOM peek over the top, then duck down.)

GWEN. Are you going to wait?

JANE. Better not. He'll send for me if he wants to play.

GWEN. Maybe he's out in the garden. The queen won't need me till the afternoon, so shall we look?

JANE. Gwen . . .

GWEN. Yes?

JANE. Sometimes I think the prince is lonely.

GWEN. That's often true of royalty. (After a pause.) Jane, dear, sometimes I think you're lonely, too.

JANE. Not when you keep me company. I'm always glad when the queen doesn't need you.

GWEN. We mustn't say such things. (There is a knock on the door UL.)

JANE. Come in!

(LORD HERTFORD enters, looking rather worried.)

HERTFORD. The prince?

JANE. In the garden, we think.

GWEN. Anything important, my lord Hertford?

HERTFORD. I came to cancel his morning appointment with the king.

GWEN (anxiously). Then his Majesty's not any better?

HERTFORD. He's very ill. His physicians have forbidden him any visitors.

JANE. Not even Edward?

HERTFORD. Not today. (Goes L.) I'll find his

Highness and tell him. (There is a small sound as if a shoe is dropped. He whirls, hand on his sword.) What was that?

JANE. One of the pages in the corridor? (HERTFORD goes out UL.)

GWEN. The king's illness worries me.

JANE. It's a worry to us all. If . . .

GWEN. I know. Edward's so young----

JANE. Come on, let's think of something cheerful!
(They go out UL. The screen shakes a bit.)

EDWARD (behind it). If you'd pushed this screen over, there'd be a fine fuss and clatter.

TOM. Please excuse it, your Grace.

EDWARD. Ready now?

TOM. Quite ready, sir.

EDWARD. Let's have our parade! (Comes out from behind screen wearing Tom's old clothes and cap. His longish hair is pulled down over his forehead, almost hiding his eyes, and he is gleeful.) Come see! Edward, the prince, now looks like a pauper! (TOM comes from behind the screen wearing Edward's clothes. His hair is now pushed back from his forehead in the style formerly worn by EDWARD. Slowly, as if unable to believe all this, he goes to stand before the tall mirror. EDWARD joins him there and they stare at their reflections for a moment in silent amazement.) What do you make of this?

TOM (nervously). Don't ask me. It frightens me----

EDWARD. But I see it, too. We look so much alike, it's as if no change were made at all!

TOM. I never thought to see myself in such fine clothes.

EDWARD. When I look at myself in the mirror . . .
I see you!

TOM. And when I look, I see his Grace, the prince!

EDWARD. Wait, very often I wear a sword. Get it from the anteroom and see how you like the effect.

TOM. Anteroom?

EDWARD (pointing R). That way. (As TOM rubs his arm.) Something wrong with your arm?

TOM. Nothing--the guard threw me to the ground.

EDWARD. Go buckle on that sword. (As TOM goes R.) I'll make sure the guard never does such a thing again. (TOM goes out R. EDWARD goes L, clapping his hands and calling.) Page!
Page!

(A PAGE enters, bowing as he comes.)

EDWARD. Summon the guard from the palace gate!
(Now the PAGE looks up. When he sees EDWARD his mouth falls open and his eyes grow big with shock. Hastily he goes out of the room. Now EDWARD goes back to the mirror, pulling his hair lower over his eyes, adjusting Tom's cap to a different angle on his head. Pleased with himself, he jumps up in the air, then whirls around the room, jumping gleefully on dais and crying out with pleasure.)

(As he is doing this the GUARD comes in U L and stares for a moment in disbelief. Then he dashes toward EDWARD, grabbing him by the collar and pulling him toward L.)

GUARD. Be off, you crazy rubbish!

EDWARD (outraged and struggling). How dare you lay a hand on me!

GUARD. I'll not have his Highness tormented by the likes of you!

EDWARD. Let go, I say!

GUARD. Give orders, will you? (Shoves EDWARD.)

EDWARD. I am the prince!

GUARD. Out you go, scum!

EDWARD. You'll be sorry for those words! I'll tell
the king, my father . . .

GUARD (tightening his grip). Balmy little beggar!
Outside! (Takes the struggling Edward out L.)

(When they have gone, TOM comes in R buckling on
a small sword.)

TOM. See, your Grace . . . (Looks surprised that
EDWARD is not there. Then he sees Edward's
plumed hat on the dais and goes to the mirror
to try it on.) Ah, your Grace! (Bows elabo-
rately to himself.) How very grand you look!
(Poses, practicing putting a hand on the sword
and doffing the hat for a low bow. There is a
knock on the door. Alarmed, he moves R.)

(The knock is repeated and JANE comes in.)

JANE. May I come in? (Makes a little curtsy.)

TOM. I . . . I . . . yes, of course. (Backs away
from her.)

JANE (concerned). What's wrong, my prince?

TOM. It was in fun . . . no harm was meant . . .

JANE. You're frightened! Surely not of me, your
own cousin.

TOM (getting down on one knee). Be merciful, my
lady. I'm no prince, but only poor Tom Canty
of Offal Court.

JANE (startled). Edward! What's happened?

TOM. The prince knows I meant no wrong.

JANE. My Lord, you must not kneel to me.