

The Christening of Rosalys

A Pastoral play for grown-up children

*(From the book *The Fairy Doll and Other Plays* by Netta Syrett 1922)*

Characters:

-The Nurse

-The Queen

-The King

-The Shepherd Boy

-The Princess

-Prince Pompous

-Hugo

-Spirits of the Rose, the Lily—Evil Sprites—Will o' the Wisp, etc.

Scene: Part of the Palace garden. The garden stretches to the outskirts of a wood, the fringe of which touches the smooth lawn and the beds of cultivated flowers. Little paths through the wood wander mysteriously into the distance.

(Enter stage right into the garden, the old Nurse. She is in the medieval dress, and leans on a staff, walking slowly. As she comes she calls in a quavering voice.)

NURSE: Rosalys! Princess! Where are you, child? *(Muttering to herself.)* What use to call? Who knows where she is? Dancing in fairy ring, maybe...or playing with the squirrels in the forest, instead of sitting like a wise princess, there in the Palace, listening while the good Prince talks about himself.

(Enter Queen, stage Left. Though heated and disheveled, she is in royal robes, and wears her crown; she, too, is calling.)

QUEEN: Rosalys! Rosalys! *(She is followed at some distance by the King, a stout, harassed-looking little individual, who carries his train over his arm. The Queen turns angrily to him.)* Why don't you call? Do try to show some dignity! You let the girl defy you! Call at once.

KING: *(Calling feebly.)* Rosalys, my dear! Rosalys! Come here. Your mother wants you.

QUEEN: *(Angrily.)* "Your mother wants you!" So like you. Why don't you summon her at once? Tell her you forbid these antics! Command her to return this moment to the Palace, and treat the Prince with some civility.

KING: *(Mildly.)* Nothing would please me better, my dear love, if only we could find her.

QUEEN: (*With an angry exclamation.*) I have no patience! Was ever a poor mother tried like me! Nurse, I appeal to you! Was ever a princess better trained than Rosalys? Was ever a princess more perverse?

NURSE: (*Shaking her head.*) Ah, madam. 'Twas the christening—'twas the christening.

QUEEN: Yes—that was the King's obstinacy.

KING: (*Feebly.*) It was the best christening.

QUEEN: Yes, but some sprites must have got in as well. I told you not to have it in the open air.

NURSE: (*Shaking her head again.*) A princess christened in a wood! 'Twas dangerous, sire, 'twas very dangerous.

KING: Why dangerous, Nurse? The Flower fairies came—the fairies of the lily and the rose came with their gifts. What better christening could the child have had?

NURSE: Ah! But sometimes the spirits of wild woodland things come too. They enter at the baby's heart, and then it never rests.

QUEEN: I told you so. I begged that we might have it in the Palace with proper godmothers, like other folk. But no! You would not listen. It must be out of doors, with the rabbits scampering in the grass, and squirrels dashing through the branches overhead, and birds singing most rudely all the time. And besides these, who knows what sprites about? Will o' the wisps, and deadly nightshades. Oh! It's very plain the girl's bewitched—bewitched.

KING: (*Coaxingly.*) My love, I think you take the thing too seriously. The girl is not so bad. She's pretty (*chuckling*)—and she's really quite amusing.

QUEEN: Amusing! Amusing to throw away her chances as she does? Oh, you men! You drive me wild. Look how I've worked to make her pleasing even to the humblest prince. Powerful fairies to give her beauty—still more powerful fairies to check her intellect—fairies to instruct her in the art of pleasing. How does she repay me, Nurse?

NURSE: She laughs at all her suitors, madam.

QUEEN: In spite of all my warnings. Times out of number have I said to her, "Rosalys, remember this. Among princes 'tis a well-known fact that princesses have no sense of humor. Why do you confront them with the impossible? It's silly—and it only makes them angry." And even now, when at last she is betrothed, she does not heed my warning.

NURSE: No, madam. She laughs at Prince Pompous worst of all.

KING: *(With a slight chuckle.)* Well, he's very tempting—er—I mean, my love, a foolish girl—a foolish girl.

QUEEN: Half an hour ago I found the Prince bristling with annoyance at her behavior at the ball last night. We shall lose him! Mark my word, he'll go. And now, when Rosalys might soothe him with a smile or two, she's nowhere to be found. *(Calls angrily.)* Rosalys! *(To King.)* Go on calling. It's the least that you can do.

KING: *(Perfunctorily.)* Rosalys!

(They go out—the Queen in front, the King lagging behind, and mopping his brow.)

NURSE: *(Leaning on her staff, and, shaking her head, mutters.)* Sometimes the spirits of wild woodland things enter the baby's heart, and then it never rests. It never rests. *(She goes out, murmuring this to herself.)*

(The sound of a pipe is heard, and down one of the paths from the wood comes a little Arcadian shepherd boy, a leopard skin over one shoulder, his head crowned with vine leaves. He plays on a pipe as he comes, and, entering the garden, seats himself and continues his music.)

(Enter presently the Princess, and, running across the grass, throws herself down near him. She wears a dress of white brocade, and her loose, fair hair falls from a little medieval cap.)

PRINCESS: *(Breathlessly.)* I heard you piping, long ago. I couldn't find you. Oh! I've fun so fast. *(Laughing.)* And Prince Pompous is in such a temper!

SHEPHERD: I do not pipe for you today.

ROSALYS: *(Surprised.)* Not for me? For whom then? *(Smiling.)* Not for my mother?

SHEPHERD: *(Laughing.)* No.

ROSALYS: Nor for the King, my father?

SHEPHERD: No, though once he heard me.

ROSALYS: Nor for my dear old Nurse?

SHEPHERD: Now, alas, she is too old.

ROSALYS: For anyone I know?

SHEPHERD: Once you knew him.

ROSALYS: (*Puzzled.*) I cannot think. No matter, he has not come.

SHEPHERD: He has so far to come. I call to him across the woods, across the hills, across the seas.

ROSALYS: (*Pouting.*) Don't call him. We don't want him. He will spoil our fun.

SHEPHERD: I *have* called. He has heard. He's on his way. He must come now.

ROSALYS: Well, before he comes, what shall we do? Will you take me to the lonely meres to watch the heron fishing? Or shall we help to pick the grapes for harvest? Or shall we go to the cave of the winds and fly with them across the sea and make great waves, and a tremendous storm? (*Restlessly.*) I should like that today! I should like to hold the hands of the winds—one on each side—and rush and rush, and shout and scream and sing.

SHEPHERD: What would Prince Pompous say?

ROSALYS: (*Vehemently.*) Even if I sang into his ear, he wouldn't know. He'd say the wind was boisterous!

SHEPHERD: You'll never hear my pipe when you are married to Prince Pompous.

ROSALYS: Not hear your pipe? Why, I have heard it all my life. Why, I have heard it in the moonlight, and danced to it under the stars. And in the sunshine I have heard it too, and followed it into the green forest, and played there with the creatures of the wood. And in the storm, and in the rain, and in the snow—

SHEPHERD: (*Shaking his head.*) You will not hear it anymore. (*Springing up.*) I must go. I do not pipe for you today.

(Goes out left, playing as he goes. Rosalys stands looking after him, perplexed and troubled. Enter, right, Prince Pompous. His name is appropriate. He is beautifully dressed, self-complacent, and at the moment very ruffled.)

PRINCE: So here you are, Princess. I have been looking for you. Can it be possible you have not heard the—er—cries of your dear parents?

ROSALYS: (*Nonchalantly.*) Oh! They often cry like that. It doesn't matter.

PRINCE: Pardon me, Princess, it means in this case that I—er—desire to speak to you.

ROSALYS: Well, now you have a splendid opportunity.

PRINCE: Er—touching the ball last night. You seemed to find Prince Charming a very interesting companion.

ROSALYS: (*Provokingly.*) I found him almost worthy of his name, which is far better.

PRINCE: (*Stiffly.*) May I suggest that your remark is scarcely worthy of a princess?

ROSALYS: Certainly you may. But you won't expect me to agree with you? If you said Princess Violetta was charming, I might deplore your taste, but I shouldn't say it was a remark unworthy of a prince.

PRINCE: That would be quite a different matter.

ROSALYS: Of course it would, because Violetta, though a good girl—(*Pauses mischievously.*)

PRINCE: You do not gather my meaning, Princess. There are certain things not unbecoming in princes which in princesses are unseemly.

ROSALYS: (*With an air of great interest.*) How do you know?

PRINCE: Leave all that to me, my child. A prince is always a safe guide about such matters.

ROSALYS: Why? I have known some really quite silly princes.

PRINCE: (*Importantly.*) A prince is a prince for all that.

ROSALYS: (*With an air of curiosity.*) Have you a Scotch ancestor by any chance?

PRINCE: (*Huffily.*) You wander from the point.

ROSALYS: (*Teasingly.*) Don't you find that delightfully feminine? Seriously, my Prince, it *is* nice of you to be so jealous. If you go on in this way, I shall certainly fall in love with you.

PRINCE: (*Hastily.*) Jealous? Never! Jealousy is an unworthy passion. I was merely looking at the matter in the abstract.

ROSALYS: (*Reflectively.*) I think that's what is the matter with you.

PRINCE: I do not like your mood, Princess.

ROSALYS: (*Obligingly.*) I'm sorry, but I can change it in a moment if you wish. I have an enormous number of them.

PRINCE: I was coming to that. Now a princess of many moods—

ROSALYS: *(Sympathetically.)* Must be very annoying to a prince with none.

PRINCE: *(Modestly.)* I think I may say you will always find me the same.

ROSALYS: *(Encouragingly.)* Oh no, no! You mustn't take a gloomy view.

(The Prince looks at her with disapproval, and at the moment the voices of the King and Queen are again heard, calling, the Queen angrily, the King feebly, Rosalys! Rosalys! The Nurse follows them.)

Enter the Queen, right. Her manner changes instantly to smiling sweetness.)

QUEEN: *(Playfully to King, who wearily follows her.)* Ah! Here they are, the naughty, sly ones! Billing and cooing, while we called in vain. Well! Well! Well! Love's young dream, my dear. We'll leave them to it.

PRINCE: Madam, you err. I grieve to say you err. With much reluctance, and some pain, I here renounce the honor of your daughter's hand. *(To King.)* I leave her, sire, to some happier prince, more fortunate in pleasing her than I have been. *(He makes a sweeping bow to the King and Queen and Rosalys, and goes out in a dignified manner.)*

QUEEN: *(Impulsively.)* Stop, Prince! *(She makes a movement to follow him.)*

KING: *(Retaining her.)* My love!

QUEEN: *(Turning furiously to Rosalys.)* Unworthy child. And now he'll go and marry Princess Violetta—a plain girl, and her mother a detestable woman...Oh! I have done with you! A prince that ever princess envied, a solid prince, a prince with a good income, thrown away! Recklessly thrown away before my eyes, before the eyes of all the Court! After all my plans, after my sleepless nights, after incessant work. I've done with you! Do what you please! Be clever if you please—it's useless to disguise it any longer. I wash my hands of you. *(To King.)* Come with me! If I leave you here, you'll side with her. Come at once, I say!

(She sweeps away, followed by the King. Rosalys has seated herself on a bench. She keeps her eyes fixed on the ground during the Queen's address. When her parents have gone, she turns to the Nurse between laughter and tears.)

ROSALYS: Well! He's gone. Ought I to be sorry, Nurse? He bored me so. *(Sighs.)* And yet to settle down and be a queen would save a lot of trouble. Why can't I, Nurse? Why don't I?

NURSE: The christening, Rosalys—the christening!

ROSALYS: Is that what it is? Is that why I want the stars out of the sky—the sun out of heaven? Is that why I want—blue roses?

NURSE: Yes, but one can learn to do without them. One can learn to forget even that the sky has stars, or that there is a sun in heaven.

ROSALYS: But I don't want to, Nurse!

NURSE: Ah! You're but young. Wait, wait! *(Listening.)* The Queen is calling me. I must go. Stay here, Princess. I should avoid my lady mother yet awhile, if I were you.

(Nurse goes out. Princess, looking after her, first laughs a little, then suddenly breaks into tears. She gets up and wanders disconsolately way, Left.)

(The Shepherd's pipe is heard, and presently he emerges from the wood, dancing down the path. After a moment a young man breaks through the trees, following. He is tall and strong, and he wears the dress of a hunter—a knife at his side, and a spear in his hand. The boy goes on playing, and the newcomer seats himself and watches him.)

HUGO: Who are you, shepherd boy?

SHEPHERD: *(Nonchalantly.)* I don't know.

HUGO: Where do you come from?

SHEPHERD: From Arcady.

HUGO: *(Thoughtfully.)* I, too, was once in Arcady.

SHEPHERD: Yes; that is why you heard my pipe.

HUGO: I did not mean to follow. I'm going to the Palace. Young rascal with your pipe, you've made me lose my way!

SHEPHERD: But here begins the Palace garden.

HUGO: *(Starts, and looks about him.)* Can it be? *(AS though gradually remembering.)* It is so long ago—and yet—Yes!—Yes! *(Eagerly pointing)* there is the tree I climbed to hide her doll, that I might see her storm and rage. In that wood we shared the games of hares and birds. Here, on this lawn—*(Amazed.)* Why, shepherd boy, we played with you!

SHEPHERD: *She* has not forgotten *me*. It's *you* she has forgotten!

HUGO: *(With determination.)* I will remind her.

SHEPHERD: You may not like her now. None of the princes like her.

HUGO: *(Laughing.)* She has not altered, then?

SHEPHERD: No, and she will not alter. Evil sprites as well as fairies came to the christening.

HUGO: *(Thoughtfully.)* I know—I know.

SHEPHERD: Today is eighteen years since all the spirits came to yonder wood, where she lay sleeping in her cradle. *(Nodding towards the wood.)* They are all there now. Every year they come to dance about the spot. My pipe will call them. Would you see?

HUGO: *(Gravely.)* Yes—call them all.

(The Shepherd plays on his pipe, and from the wood emerges a throng of beings, some beautiful, some wild and mischievous, some evil-looking. They take hands, and dance together in wild confusion. Presently two spirits step from the crowd. They are both beautiful. One is the Spirit of the Rose, and the other the Spirit of the Lily. They sing.)

(Together.)

Rose and Lily, Lily and Rose,
We met at the christening of Rosalys.
Then, as she lay in the whispering wood,
Each of us gave her a kiss.

LILY:

I am the Lily;
I give you my whiteness,
Give you my gold for your shining hair;
Give you my grace for your slender body.
Trust me, Baby, you shall be fair!

ROSE:

I am the Rose;
I give you my sweetness,
Give you my red for your cheeks and mouth;
Give you my color, my life, my power.
Baby, rocked by the wind of the south!

(Together)

This we sang when we met at the christening,
Met at the christening of Rosalys;
Child with the name of roses and lilies,

Each of us gave you a kiss.

(Will o' the Wisp and an evil sprite sing.)

Will o' the Wisps,
And Spirits of Evil,
We met at the christening of Rosalys;
Hand in hand we danced round her cradle,
Each of us gave her a kiss.

(All the spirits.)

Wildness and beauty,
Terror and goodness,
Met at the christening of Rosalys;
Child with the name of roses and lilies,
All of us gave you a kiss.

(Dancing wildly together, the spirits fade away into the wood.)

HUGO: *(To himself.)* Yes, my poor little Princess. It makes things difficult when the fairies come to the christening!

SHEPHERD: You can yet go back. Many princesses, I am told, still have the usual godmothers.

HUGO: *(Laughing.)* You are precious, boy! Though you were born two thousand years ago, do not on that account presume to teach your elders.

SHEPHERD: Then I will call the Princess. *(Puts his pipe to his lips, and goes fluting towards the wood, where he is lost to sight.)*

(Enter the Princess, Left, looking about her as though following the music. She stops short at the sight of Hugo.)

HUGO: *(Rising and looking at her fixedly. Speaks at last in a soft voice.)* I thought the Lily fairy had come back.

ROSALYS: *(At first puzzled, understands and smiles.)* Do you think so now?

HUGO: No.

ROSALYS: Why not?

HUGO: Because of the sprites in your eyes.

ROSALYS: *(Laughs.)* Who are you?

HUGO: I am a Discoverer.

ROSALYS: But are you a prince?

HUGO: *You* must be a discoverer now.

ROSALYS: That's rather a good idea.

HUGO: *(Calmly.)* I am full of them.

ROSALYS: *(With dignity.)* You are trespassing, as I suppose you know.

HUGO: That is one of my best ideas.

ROSALYS: *(Weakly.)* What have you come for?

HUGO: For you.

ROSALYS: *(Gasping.)* But I don't know you!

HUGO: That doesn't matter. No one knows anyone. But if you mean you've never seen me before—Oh! You silly child!

ROSALYS: *(Stares at him incredulously, then whispers):* Hugo!

HUGO: *(Smiling.)* Yes. I was the forester's little boy. I'm his big boy now.

ROSALYS: Do you remember how we used to play—and how I screamed and fought because at last they would not let me see you anymore?

HUGO: But I told you I should come back one day, and take you to my kingdom. Did you forget?

ROSALYS: Your kingdom? I didn't know you *had* a kingdom.

HUGO: *(Rather grimly.)* I've made one. Come! *(He holds out his hand.)*

ROSALYS: *(Drawing back.)* Oh! But this is ridiculous.

HUGO: *(Shrugging his shoulders.)* We'll discuss it, if you please. But it's waste of time.

ROSALYS: *(Agitatedly.)* I don't in the least know what you're like now. You were a very annoying little boy, I remember.

HUGO: You were a most exasperating little girl—and I'm sure you haven't improved. On the whole I think my risk is greater than yours.

ROSALYS: *(Firing up.)* You are not polite!

HUGO: *(Readily agreeing.)* No.

ROSALYS: I don't think you're a young princess's ideal at all.

HUGO: I'm quite sure I'm not. Think how you would hate me if I were. *(He looks at her and laughs.)* Don't be a humbug, darling.

ROSALYS: *(Looking down at the points of her shoes.)* You'd be shocked if I wasn't.

HUGO: A Discoverer is never shocked. He makes too many discoveries.

ROSALYS: I don't think I should be *bored* with you.

HUGO: Come! That's something.

ROSALYS: *(Sighing doubtfully.)* Should I find blue roses in your kingdom?

HUGO: *(Gently.)* No. But there will be nothing to prevent you from looking for them.

ROSALYS: You wouldn't think me mad?

HUGO: No. I shall know you can't help it—because the fairies came to your christening. Come!

ROSALYS: *(Hesitating.)* But how shall we get there?

HUGO: Have you forgotten the river at the back of the wood? —our river, with its reeds and willow-herbs? My boat is there. Come! We will glide between the lilies and forget-me-nots, and reach the sea, and then at last my kingdom, where you and I will reign.

ROSALYS: *(Hesitating.)* Oh! But I—

HUGO: *(Suddenly goes close and kisses her.)* Will you come now?

ROSALYS: *(Shyly.)* Yes.

(Hugo puts his arm around her, and is turning towards the wood when the spirits surround them, and, taking hands, for a moment encircle them, dancing, laughing, and singing.)

Wildness and beauty,

Terror and goodness,
Met at the christening of the Rosalys;
Child with the name of roses and lilies,
All of us gave you a kiss.

(They fade away Right and Left, and at the entrance to the wood stands the shepherd boy. He turns, and piping as he goes, leads the way. Hugo and the Princess follow, and are presently lost to sight. As they go Hugo sings.)

HUGO'S SONG

At early dawn we climbed the hill,
Rosalys and I;
The trees stood silent in amaze
To see us passing by.

For we had met a shepherd boy,
A shepherd with his flute;
To hear the melodies he played,
The very birds were mute.

The very birds were mute; the hares
Sat watching in the grass,
The butterflies with outspread wings
Flew near to see us pass.

At early dawn we climbed the hill,
Rosalys and I;
The Shepherd lad was with us
When the sun rose in the sky.

He's with us, now the splendid sun
Floods all the world with light;
He'll stay, till with a crown of stars
And gentle step, comes night.