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Prin

A Play

Andrew Davies

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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PRIN

First presented at the Lyric, Hammersmith, on 23rd August, 1989 with the following cast:

Prin	Sheila Hancock
Dibs	Susie Blake
Boyle	Paul Copley
Walker	John Michie
Kite	David Howey
Melanie	Victoria Worsley

Directed by **Richard Wilson**
Designed by **Julian McGowan**
Lighting by **Kevin Sleep**
Movement by **Geraldine Stephenson**

The play subsequently transferred to the Lyric, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, presented by Robert Cogo-Fawcett for Lyric Hammersmith Productions and Showstarters with the following cast:

Prin	Sheila Hancock
Dibs	Susie Blake
Boyle	Paul Copley
Walker	John Michie
Kite	David Howey
Melanie	Susie Lindeman

Directed by **Richard Wilson**
Designed by **Julian McGowan**

Other plays by Andrew Davies published by Samuel French Ltd:

Going Bust

Rose

Thermal Underwear

CHARACTERS

Prin, aged 58

Dibs, aged 39

Walker, aged 32

Kite, aged 48

Boyle, aged 43

Melanie, aged 20

The action of the play takes place in Prin's room

ACT I Monday morning

ACT II Monday afternoon

Time—the present

ACT I

Prin's room at college. Monday morning

There is a large desk and a window

Prin sits, not at the desk. She is smoking and reading the previous day's "Observer". Dibs stands looking out of the window

Prin (*after a few moments*) God Almighty. (*After a moment; reading from the paper*) "It may be easy enough for a mother just to keep on dishing out food and clean T-shirts and hoping that they'll come in by morning. But a father, mediating as he does between the world and the family, has to have an Attitude to What's Going On."

Pause

Are you there? Anyone at home?

Dibs You know I'm here, Prin.

Prin That's a relief. I thought your soul might have left your body. Just popped out for a little flight around the playing fields.

Dibs (*turning*) Oh, that's nice. I wish it could. "Hallo, Mr Blackbird, how are you today?" "And who in tarnation might you be?" (*The blackbird sounds like Uncle Remus: Dibs is good at imitations*) "Oh, I'm Dibble's soul, just out for a little trip to see the world!" "Well you just better get right on back into her pretty little head, there's company at home and someone wants to talk to you."

Prin turns her head slowly and gives her a long withering stare

Sorry.

Prin Fifteen years of Early Language Acquisition have rotted your brain.

Dibs Yes, I s'pose they have, rather. Sorry.

Prin (*conceding*) That blackbird wasn't bad.

Dibs (*pleased*) Did you like him? He's a new one.

Prin Ration his appearances. Once a month should be sufficient.

Dibs All right.

Prin Dr Bile, on the other hand, we find we need at least once a week.

Dibs All right.

Prin Well then?

Dibs Not now, Prin.

Prin "I am not in the vein." eh? You little prima donna.

Dibs Not a job lot, anyway.

Prin turns and looks at her again

Prin No; definitely not a job lot.

What she is expressing is love. They hold the look, then Dibs turns to the window again

What did you think of it? Did you read it?

Dibs What?

Prin This. Father mediating as he does between the world and the family.

Dibs Yes. I did read it actually.

Prin What did you think of it?

Dibs Bit iffy.

Prin You thought it was a bit iffy.

Dibs Well in point of fact it was pretty naff, really.

Prin You've been talking to the students again. I will not have you talking to the students, you keep picking up these nasty little infections of the vocabulary.

Dibs Sorry. Actually I thought it was disgraceful.

Prin And you were right. D'you know I *taught* that girl *for two years in the sixth form*?

Dibs Yes, we do all know that, Prin.

Prin God knows why I admit to it, it doesn't reflect well on me at all. She was silly then and she's sillier now. Her concept of gender roles is fixated at the level of Ladybird books circa nineteen fifty. Jane helps Mummy in the kitchen. Peter helps Daddy with the car. Father mediates between the world and the family. She deserves five years hard labour.

Dibs Mm. Right. Two years before the mast, with fifty lashes a day and keelhauling on Sundays.

Prin I am being absolutely serious. The Secretary of State for Education sees no case at present for raising the salaries of teachers. "I am well aware that there are shortcomings in teacher supply", he said, "but distressingly large numbers of people still seem prepared to use the State system rather than go private, and we wouldn't want to be seen to be encouraging them."

Dibs He didn't say that, did he?

Prin More or less, more or less. It's like Ethiopia you see. Enough people seem to want to be Ethiopians as it is, so we shouldn't send them any aid, it only encourages them.

Dibs He didn't say *that*.

Prin He implied it. What's so fascinating out there?

Dibs Nothing.

Prin A likely tale.

Dibs They're coming back from early training.

Prin Ah. Back from the morning gallops. Their long manes tossing gently in the breeze, a light sweat shimmering on their glossy flanks, no doubt?

Dibs Bit far to see, Prin.

Prin In these matters one sees what one wishes to see. One sees what one feels to be there. The light sweat will be shimmering on the glossy flanks, don't you worry. Some things, thank God, don't change.

The intercom on her desk bleeps

Describe them to me.

Dibs Aren't you going to pick up?

Prin Describe them to me.

Dibs Well ...

It bleeps again. Prin answers

Prin Principal. *(Pause)* No, of course I can't. I'm in conference till ten, then I'm addressing the finalists. I have a very full day. *(Pause)* All right, I'll give him five minutes at ten forty-five, if it's so frightfully urgent. *(She puts down the receiver)* Bile.

Dibs Oh.

Prin Wonder what *he* wants now.

Dibs Well. Er, in point of fact ...

Prin In point of what?

Dibs Um, Prin ...

Prin Oh, never mind him, let's think about pleasant things while we have the chance. Who's been out for the dawn gallop? How are they looking, Dibs?

Dibs Well. Little Betty Brain, bouncing up and down like a yoyo ... Maggie Savage ... black sweatband round her forehead and her T-shirt says "No".

Prin Good.

Dibs That wispy one with the old-fashioned face I can never remember the name of ... long jumper.

Prin Garment or event?

Dibs Both.

Prin Melinda Peebles.

Dibs Oh, yes.

Prin Who else?

Dibs Why don't you come and look for yourself?

Prin I don't need to. Go on.

Dibs Oninka Small.

Prin Good.

Dibs And Julie Cinnamon and that's the lot.

Prin Ah. Julie Cinnamon. Your favourite.

Dibs I don't have favourites, Prin.

Prin You *don't have favourites*? Are you telling me that you have totally lost all your powers of fine discrimination?

Dibs No, I'm not telling you that, Prin.

Prin I am glad to hear it. Where would you be now if I didn't have favourites?

Dibs No idea.

Prin Don't be *airy* about it, little Dibs. I have a very good idea. I picture you on a coach, Dibs, a coach in a traffic jam in a slum, on its way to some dreadful gritty wasteland municipal playing fields on the edge of the dead city, overlooked by ravaged tower blocks and gasometers. The coach would be full of small-eyed foul-mouthed tattooed inner-city schoolgirls. Some would be fighting, some singing, some making provocative, meant-to-be-heard comments about your clothes, your habits, and your

imagined private life, which would indeed need to be imagined. Not one of these girls would have a crush on you. These unhealthy fixations are happily much rarer in co-educational schools, and in any case, all the free-floating fantasies would be scooped, so to speak, by the fair curly-haired colleague, twenty years your junior, who sits merrily prattling by your side.

Dibs She sounds interesting.

Prin Not a chance. She's happily married to a junior manager in the Halifax Building Society, and is also conducting a *liaison dangereuse* with the . . . yes, with the *woodwork* master, the one with the shavings clinging like paper curlers to the hair on his muscular forearms.

Dibs Oh.

Prin That's where you'd be if we didn't have favourites. Dibs, you'd be an ordinary teacher in an ordinary state school. Not a deputy principal at one of the last and best of the independent Colleges of Education.

Dibs We are not independent Prin.

Prin We allow the LEA to foot the *bill*, Dibs, but apart from that we do what we damn well like. Well naturally. And all this *is* yours, Dibs, with a very nice cottage in the Cotswolds for weekends as well.

Dibs Not to mention the privilege of daily bullying and abuse from one of the finest intellects of her generation.

Prin Oh I say. Well, quite. Not to mention that.

Dibs It's all right. I know why you're being so foul to me.

Prin Do you?

Dibs Yes I do.

Pause

Prin Well, if you're refusing to stake a claim, I'll certainly nominate Julie Cinnamon as my favourite for this year. There are several interesting things about Julie Cinnamon. I've been looking at her file. I was pleased to see that one's impression of balance and symmetry are borne out by the figures. D'you know her measured IQ is precisely equal to her weight in pounds?

Dibs Is it now?

Prin Mm. A hundred and forty-one. Her height is five foot ten and a quarter. I do love that little extra quarter inch, don't you?

Dibs Quite indifferent to it, in point of fact.

Prin I don't believe a word of it. You're a fiend for detail.

Dibs What's her reach then?

Prin Her what?

Dibs Her reach. (*She extends both arms sideways*) Wingtip to wingtip.

Pause

Prin Quite long enough, I should imagine.

Dibs I know why you're doing this.

Prin Do you. "Her pure and eloquent blood Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought, That one might almost say, her body thought."

Dibs You said that to me once.

Prin I said it to you just now.

Dibs I mean, you said it about me.

Prin And now I'm trying it out on Julie Cinnamon.

Pause

Dibs I've been . . . I've been hoping we could have a talk.

Prin We are having a talk.

Dibs I mean a real talk.

Prin Oh, one of those, a real old-fashioned let your hair down heart-to-heart, eh?

Dibs If you like.

Prin Mind-to-mind a bit too taxing for us, is it? You tried to start a conversation at the breakfast table, didn't you?

Dibs Yes, I did, I'm sorry.

Prin Silence and *The Guardian* until the second cigarette.

Dibs They didn't deliver *The Guardian*.

Prin We had yesterday's *Observer*. Transgress one boundary, you'll transgress them all. Bear it in mind.

Dibs Actually . . . in point of fact . . . that's what I wanted to talk about. Crossing boundaries.

Prin You crossed one this morning all right. What the hell was that we had for breakfast?

Dibs Oh, that. Er, "Fruit 'n' Fibre".

Prin *What?*

Dibs "Fruit 'n' Fibre". (*As if to excuse it*) Kelloggs make it.

Prin "Fruit . . . 'n' . . . Fibre". I see. (*She pauses*) Some sort of symbolic gesture, was it, little Dibs? A homely metaphor for our relationship? Plump little sultana peeping shyly from the *roughage*?

Dibs Not at all.

Prin It tasted like the sweepings of the factory floor.

Dibs (*sharply*) What would you know about the sweepings of the factory floor?

Prin What would either of us know?

Dibs Look, I'm sorry. It was just an idea, the "Fruit 'n' Fibre". There's no need to make so much of it. All right?

Prin Nothing is without significance.

Dibs Well if you want to know I just couldn't face grilling the kippers this morning.

Prin (*softening*) Little Dibs. Little Dibs. If you can't face up to a pair of kippers, what can you face up to in this cruel world.

Dibs (*playing the game*) I know, I know, it's so shaming. But it was their glum faces, Prin. So resigned to their fate, you know? And one of them turned his sad ole eye to me, and said: (*Scottish accent, good, as before*) "Dae it to us quick, Miss Dibs, we ken fu' well ye widnae wanta see us suffer. We understand it is nae personal." (*After a pause*) God. I am a grown woman. Why can't I say what I want to say? I sometimes wish you wouldn't call me Little Dibs, Prin.

Prin But you are Little Dibs. What else would I call you?

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