

THE BIG PICTURE

a play for the stage

by David Farn

Copyright: David Farn 2000

All rights in this play are strictly reserved
and application for performance etc
must be made before rehearsal to
David Farn, 1 Mowbray Terrace, Grasswell
Houghton-le-Spring, Tyne & Wear, DH4 4DU
e: davidfarn2014@yahoo.co.uk

If you intend to use recorded music in a public performance,
you will need to investigate the legal rights to do so.

Published by David Farn, 2024

Printed by Gilpin Press, Houghton-le-Spring

Synopsis

This is the story of how, in the year 2000, an unnamed Royal Prince, on an official visit to the North East, slips his body guard and goes walkabout in South Shields. There he meets a local girl, Tracy, from a council estate, and they have a night of ... well, we'll draw a veil over that. But in the morning, Tracy doesn't want her Prince to leave. And neither does her strange, silent brother, Lenny.

Meanwhile, down on his luck tabloid photographer, Jeff, has got wind of this unlikely romance and has come to South Shields to get his Big Picture. He's staying across the street from where the action is, and where a Press siege has got the Prince cornered. However, Jeff's fierce landlady, Brenda, is exploiting the situation for all it's worth. Then, as the siege drags on, Brenda softens towards her lodger, who brings a breath of something new to her bleak life.

The Big Picture is a hilarious and touching look at what happens when our romantic dreams collide with harsh reality.

A note: It would be treasonable to say that this Prince-and-the-Pauper story is a *true* one. Why wasn't it all over the news at the time, you may well ask? Well, sometimes embarrassing stories like this get hushed up.

But here's a thing. In the year 2000, the then Queen Elizabeth and the rest of the Royal family all declined the offer of free tickets to the opening night of the original production of the play. Need we say more?

The Characters

Jeff

A freelance tabloid photographer, up from London and down on his luck. He's in his forties and divorced. Always a gambler and a drinker, a charmer who lives on his wits, Jeff senses that this stakeout might provide the Big Picture he has been searching for: a money-making Royal bonanza.

Brenda Stone

Also in her forties, Brenda has had a hard life with a demanding, disabled husband and wayward son, and it shows in her unsmiling face and harsh, unsympathetic manner. She lives on a council estate and is a cleaner at the local pub. But the arrival of Jeff, who seems to come from another place – a world of celebrity photographs – awakens a gentler side to her nature.

The Prince

Aged around eighteen. The endless parade of Royal duties hangs heavy on this spirited young man, and he chafes against them. On an official visit to open a new hospital wing in the North East, he slips his bodyguard and, incognito, goes for a night on the town. During which excursion he meets Tracy. But going AWOL has consequences. Plus, the Prince has a secret, which the Family don't want him to divulge.

Tracy Watson

The same age as the Prince, Tracy has had an impoverished life on a South Shields council estate and works in a shoe shop. But that hasn't stopped her from dreaming of better things. A modern Cinderella, for years she has followed the adventures of the Prince, keeping a scrapbook of his doings. And now, while on a visit to her home town, he has singled her out for a night of passion. But will the shoe fit?

Lenny Watson

In his twenties. Brother to Tracy, he has shared her bleak, loveless life. Perhaps it is this that has made him speechless: a silent, intimidating presence? In any event, he is no lover of the Royals, and in fact harbours Republican sympathies, which come into play when the Prince unexpectedly falls into his hands. And yet, inside Lenny's threatening exterior, Brenda thinks she may have the key to a lost, gentler nature.

The Setting

Half of the play is set in the bedroom of a council house in the North East, where Brenda lives. The other half of the play is in a similar room: Tracy's bedroom, on the same estate. They are, in some ways, mirror images of each other, and the action switches between the two rooms. In the original production, this was achieved with a simple composite set and lighting changes. The time is the year 2000, when the Prince was a very eligible young man.

THE BIG PICTURE

The Big Picture was first produced in 2000 by The Customs House, South Shields.

The original cast and creative team were:

Jeff	David Tarkenter
Brenda Stone	Jane Holman
Tracy Watson	Grace Stillgrove
The Prince	Simon Hedger
Lenny Watson	Ian Cunningham

Director	David Farn
Lighting	Paul Tague
Sound	Jeff Crowe
Stage manager	Chris Allen
Assisted by	Geoff Ramm
Set design	David Farn
Properties	Steve Walsh

Thanks to Ray Spencer and all the staff at The Customs House, South Shields. *The Shields Gazette* for help with publicity and props. Also Shiela Graeber.

Review

‘The idea behind the play is fresh and new ... it’s fun and up-to-date and will keep even the most miserable people with a smile on their face.’

Leah Shaw, *South Shields Gazette*.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A Spring morning. The year is 2000. The bedroom of a council house in South Shields. There are pictures of boy bands on the walls. Items of makeup and clothes are strewn untidily about.

JEFF, a Londoner in his forties, still in his coat, is peering out of the window. BRENDA STONE, around the same age, is hastily tidying the room.

JEFF Where is it?

BRENDA *(pointing)* There. With the purple curtains.

JEFF Oh.

BRENDA What's the matter?

JEFF It's not much of a view.

BRENDA We're not a hotel.

JEFF You're asking five star rates, though.

BRENDA Look, if you don't want it -

JEFF I didn't say that. This your daughter's room?

BRENDA Our Vicky. I'll put her in with our Lee.

JEFF Look, if this is going to be a big upheaval -

BRENDA Do you want the room or not?

JEFF No.

BRENDA Not good enough for you, are we?

JEFF I just think you're asking too much.

BRENDA Too much? I've seen them, your lot, photographers. Knocking on doors, waving wads of money.

JEFF I'm freelance. I haven't got wads of money.

BRENDA You'd better go, then.

JEFF makes to go, but hesitates.

BRENDA Thought you were going.

JEFF returns to the window.

JEFF You see that? That is a restricted view. There's a tree in the way.

BRENDA So? You've got those big – camera – things, haven't you?

JEFF Yeah, I've got a telephoto lens. What I haven't got is a *chain saw*.

BRENDA Suit yourself!

JEFF I will! (*again hesitating*) Look, if I went to the theatre, and they gave me a seat behind a pillar -

BRENDA (*interrupting*) The *theatre*!

JEFF Yeah, it's like the telly, only you can't switch it off. Like I was saying, if I was behind a pillar, I'd expect a discount. That would be reasonable. Do you see what I'm saying?

BRENDA says nothing, staring him out. After a moment, we hear a distant knocking at the front door. BRENDA looks out of the window.

BRENDA (*calmly*) Somebody else at the door. One of your lot. Must have heard the rumour. The Prince and the girl off the council estate. Must be worth something, a picture like that. Front

page stuff, I'd say.

BRENDA gives a little wave.

BRENDA Looks like *he's* interested in our window.

JEFF Shit. Are you gonna let him in?

BRENDA Might do. He's got a better car than you. Better dressed too.

JEFF But has he got a chain saw?

BRENDA Better manners, as well, by the look of him.

The knocking is repeated.

JEFF Alright, I'll take it!

BRENDA Oh, will you? Well, I think the rent might have gone up now.

JEFF What!

BRENDA That'll be another twenty.

JEFF Oh, for god's sake!

Again, the knocking, more insistent now.

BRENDA (*calling*) Just coming!

JEFF I'll take it!

BRENDA Cash up front.

Defeated, JEFF takes out his wallet. Blackout. End of Scene 1.

Scene 2

TRACY WATSON's bedroom. The same moment.

TRACY's room is similar to the one in Scene 1, except that the walls are covered in pictures of The Prince. The room is normally clean and tidy, though just now there is a scattering of clothes on the floor. The curtains – the purple ones – are closed.

THE PRINCE is sprawled on the bed, wearing only boxer shorts. He is about eighteen years old. His clothes are on the floor, where he threw them last night. His mouth is open and he is snoring. Despite this, TRACY is standing over him, in her nightie, obviously besotted. TRACY is the same age as THE PRINCE.

TRACY Look at him. Isn't he gorgeous? I can't believe it, The Prince! He could have any woman he wanted, but he chose me! I'll wake him up with a kiss, like in the story. Except, I think it's the other way round in the story.

Before TRACY can do so, PRINCE wakes with a yawn.

PRINCE Oh my god! My head! (*registering the strange bed*) Where the -? (*and the strange woman*) Who the -?

TRACY Good morning. (*with a curtsy*) Your Highness.

PRINCE What? (*remembering*) Oh, yes! Yes, of course, yes. Erm -

TRACY Tracy.

PRINCE Tracy! Yes, I remember. You work in a travel agents -

TRACY Shoe shop.

PRINCE Shoe shop! That's it. (*noticing the photographs*) You've got pictures of me. All over the walls. (*groggily inspecting them*) I must have seen these last night?

TRACY You did.

PRINCE I thought it was a dream.

TRACY (*indicating the bed*) We had other things on our minds.

PRINCE (*remembering*) Ah. So we did.

TRACY I've got all your pictures. (*pointing*) That's you at Balmoral. Sandringham. Buckingham Palace. Peterlee -

PRINCE Christ, it's like waking up inside your own ego.

TRACY And I've got pencil cases, mugs – I even got this limited edition chamber pot. (*producing it*) The Royal throne.

PRINCE Not one of the Palace's better ideas.

During the next, PRINCE is gradually overcome by a wave of nausea.

TRACY When I heard you were coming to open that hospital wing, I got the day off. And I was there in the crowd. At first, I couldn't get near. Then suddenly I was at the front. And I waved to you. And you smiled at me, such a smile! And then you leaned towards me, and said into my ear – I could hardly believe it was happening – you said -

PRINCE I think I'm going to be sick.

PRINCE retches into the chamber pot.

TRACY (*smiling*) It's alright. I'm your number one fan.

Blackout. End of Scene 2.