

THE TWELVE DANCING PRINCESSES

A Fairytale Retold
By Dale Ahlquist

Cast of Characters

23 Females; 9 Males

<u>GUARD/EXECUTIONER:</u>	A guard and executioner of King Reginald.
<u>RUBELLA:</u>	A Servant girl.
<u>KING REGINALD:</u>	The King, father of the princesses.
<u>QUEEN NILDA:</u>	The Queen, mother of the princesses.
<u>THE DUKE:</u>	The Duke of the King.
<u>EBBY:</u>	A peasant girl.
<u>EFFY:</u>	A peasant girl.
<u>EPPY:</u>	A peasant girl.
<u>ESSY:</u>	A peasant girl.
<u>RULGA:</u>	A peasant girl.
<u>HULGA:</u>	A peasant girl.
<u>LULGA:</u>	A peasant girl.
<u>ZULGA:</u>	A peasant girl.
<u>COBBLER:</u>	A cobbler.
<u>OLD WOMAN:</u>	A mysterious old woman.
<u>LIONEL:</u>	A traveler from Longwood.
<u>ALONZO:</u>	A traveler from Nowhere in Particular.
<u>PHILO:</u>	A traveler from Somewhere Else.
<u>PRINCESS JULIET:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS JANE:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS JOHANNA:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.

<u>PRINCESS JESSICA:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS JACQUELYN:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS JILLIAN:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS JANICE:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS JENNIFER:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS JUSTINE:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS JOLENE:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS JUBILEE:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>PRINCESS SUZY:</u>	One of the twelve princesses.
<u>1st GUARD:</u>	A palace guard.
<u>2nd GUARD:</u>	A palace guard.

Scene Breakdown

ACT I

Scene 1 – Palace, Outside the Chamber of the Twelve Princesses

Scene 2 – Marketplace

Scene 3 – Palace. Outside of the Princesses' Chamber

ACT II

Scene 1 – Marketplace

Scene 2 – Palace, Outside Princesses' Chamber

Scene 3 – Palace, Inside Princesses' Chamber

Scene 4 – Secret Chamber

Scene 5 – Palace, Outside Princess's Chamber

Approximate Length

75 minutes

Time

Medieval Ages

Place

A kingdom

Scene 3

Setting: Palace. Outside of the Princesses' Chamber.

At Rise: Enter KING and QUEEN.

QUEEN

I don't know, Reginald. This challenge business does not seem a very practical solution.

KING

It's not a solution, my dear. But it will bring us the solution. And it will bring us more than that: a worthy son-in-law.

QUEEN

But really, Reginald, is it necessary to cut off their heads if they fail?

KING

We're only interested in serious suitors for our daughter's hands in marriage, Nilda. I don't want a lot of frivolous young men cluttering up the palace, wasting my time with a lot of cockamamie schemes that they dreamed up at the pub. Besides, the beheading part, that was the Duke's idea.

QUEEN

The Duke's idea!

KING

Yes, my dear.

QUEEN

Well, that *is* surprising. But I'm not at all surprised that you agreed to it so readily. You've always wanted to cut off someone's head.

KING

Why bother having an executioner if we never execute anybody?

QUEEN

It's *not* becoming.

KING

How long have I been King?

QUEEN

Oh, I don't know. Twenty-five years.

KING

And in 25 years I've never managed to find a good reason to cut off someone's head! What kind of king will the people think I am?

QUEEN

A *kind* king, Reginald. And the kind of king who wins the hearts of his people, not their heads. You will never get anyone to accept such a silly challenge.

KING

That is where you're wrong, Nilda. Someone has already accepted the challenge. He'll be here any minute to meet the princesses.

QUEEN

What?! Reginald! Why didn't you tell me?

KING

I did tell you, Nilda. I told you right now.

(Enter DUKE followed by PHILO)

DUKE

King Reginald, Queen Nilda. May I present Philo, who has accepted the terms of the challenge.

PHILO

Your Majestyes, I am honored to be here.

NILDA

Poor lad, I hope you still feel honored when your head is being paraded around on the end of stick.

PHILO

It is certainly one way of getting attention, Your Majesty.

KING

You're not from our kingdom, are you, young man?

PHILO

No, I am not, Your Majesty.

KING

Where are you from?

PHILO

Somewhere Else.

KING

Somewhere Else? A place I have always longed to visit.

DUKE

King Reginald, the hour is growing late. We must begin the task at hand.

KING

Yes, yes. But let's begin with a more pleasant task. The twelve princesses must be anxious to meet this brave young man.

QUEEN

Well of course they are! After all, if all goes well and he solves the mystery of the shoes, he will get to choose one of them to be his wife — and his queen.

KING

Well, let's get them out here. Juliet, Jane, Johanna, Jessica, Jacquelyn, Jillian, Janice, Jennifer, Justine, Jolene, Jubilee!

QUEEN

Reginald! They can't come out all at once! And you forgot Suzy!

KING

(Striking his forehead)

Suzy!

QUEEN

Let us begin with our eldest daughter. Princess Juliet.

(Enter JULIET. She and PHILO bow to one another.)

JULIET

Pleased to meet you.

PHILO

The pleasure is mine, Princess.

JULIET

You are very courageous to accept this challenge. My sisters and I truly wish you every success. We hope that you will solve this strange mystery once and for all.

PHILO

Thank you, Princess.

JULIET

We also hope that one of us will prove to be worthy of your love and devotion.

PHILO

I can't imagine that will be difficult, Princess.

QUEEN

Juliet, darling. Why don't you introduce each of the other princesses?

JULIET

Yes, mother. May I present my sister, Princess Jane.

(Enter JANE. She's tall. She stops and looks at PHILO.)

JANE

I was expecting you to be taller.

JULIET

Jane!

JANE

Sorry, sorry. I was...*hoping* you would be taller.

JULIET

Jane!

JANE

Sorry, sorry. Pleased to meet you.

PHILO

Pleased to meet you, Princess.

JANE

Do you have any brothers who are taller?

JULIET

Jane!

JANE

Sorry, sorry. I...I am sure you are very brave...and I hope you solve the mystery...and someday you will probably be a great king...even if...you're...not as tall...as, say...me.

JULIET

Jane! That's enough. Next, we have the Princesses Johanna and Jessica. They are twins.

(Enter JOHANNA and JESSICA, who bow together)

JOHANNA

I just want you to know that I won't ask for much. Just quiet nights together by the fireside.

JESSICA

As long as you throw a fancy dress ball every week.

JOHANNA

What my sister is saying is that she has no class.

JESSICA

What my sister is saying is that she has no social life.

JOHANNA

What my sister is saying is that she has no grace.

JESSICA

I just want you to know that I will make no demands on you. Just a simple stroll together in the garden each evening.

JOHANNA

As long as you build her a palladium with a reflecting pool.

JESSICA

What my sister is saying is that she has no taste.

JOHANNA

What my sister is saying is that she has no ideas of her own.

JESSICA

What my sister is saying is that she has no brains whatsoever.

JULIET

Johanna! Jessica!

JOHANNA and JESSICA

Choose me! Don't choose her! Choose me!

JULIET

(Escorting them aside and crossing back towards door to chamber)

Next, we have Princess Jacquelyn and Princess Jillian. Also twins.

(Enter JACQUELYN and JILLIAN. They start talking at the exact same time. Then stop and start again at the same time. Then they stop and wait for the other, and then both start again, and so on.)

JACQUELYN and JILLIAN

I'm so... I just... sorry...you go... no you...I hope...sorry...I'd...Do you...What...

(JULIET comes and stands between them and puts one hand over each of their mouths, then she releases her hand JACQUELYN's mouth, keeping the other hand on JILLIAN's mouth)

JACQUELYN

(Pouring forth)

I'm so excited to meet you. Your life must be so thrilling. Otherwise how could you be so daring? I'd love to hear of your many adventures. I'm sure you've had incredible episodes at every turn. You've probably done everything. Like sailing across the ocean where there are waves seven times taller than the ship and a giant octopus comes out of the water and wraps one of its arms around the mast and breaks it off like a toothpick and starts sucking the ship to pieces with all of the suction cups on all of his arms but then his head gets cracked open by a bolt of lightning and you're up to your neck in octopus ink and you haven't even left the port yet, and—

(JULIET places her other hand over JACQUELYN's mouth, and then takes her hand from JILLIAN's mouth)

JILLIAN

(Also gushing)

Or what we really want to hear about is an excursion deep into the jungle with man-eating plants and flowers you can sleep in, and how you can tell the difference so you don't fall asleep inside a man-eating plant, or even better, about climbing a mountain that goes up past the clouds where the snow is ninety feet deep and your eyes freeze shut when you blink, and your words freeze inside your mouth, or even better, something about those barren, howling deserts with camels and sand monkeys and mirages of cool waterfalls and—

(JULIET covers JILLIAN's mouth, and then uncovers both of their mouths, and the twins and begin to talk at the same time and stop for each other)

JACQUELYN and JILLIAN

And great big...sorry...the time... sorry...or when...sorry...you go...no you....sorry...What about...oh....I....

(JULIET covers both their mouths)

JULIET

Next. Princess Janice and Princess Jennifer. *Also* twins. Though you would hardly know it.

JENNIFER

(Offstage)

My hair is not right! This dress will never do. These shoes do not fit! And they don't go with anything! The old shoes looked better than these!

(While she is ranting, JANICE enters, with her nose in a book)

JULIET

Janice! Where's Jennifer?

JANICE

(Not looking up from book)

She's not ready.

(Pauses. Looks up at PHILO.)

Pleased to meet you.

PHILO

What are you reading? Romance? Poetry?

JANICE

Physics.

PHILO

Physics. Just...physics?

JANICE

Specifically, the effect of heat radiation and light refraction on the density of alloyed and refined metals.

PHILO

Sounds like a hot topic.

JANICE

(Pulling out sword that was previously hidden and holding it up to PHILO's throat. Everyone else gasps and steps back.)

More to the point...a sharp topic. I have developed a nearly unbreakable sword. This is only the prototype.

(She turns it around and offers him the handle)

I want you to have it. I hope it will help you. And I hope you will come back and tell me how it performs.

PHILO

If the sword does not fail me, I will not fail the sword. Thank you, Princess.

JENNIFER

(Offstage)

Unbelievable! Where are my silver barrettes?!

JANICE

(Leaning closer to PHILO)

I know where her silver barrettes are. They have been melted together with steel to make this sword blade.

JENNIFER

(Rushing in, flustered, looking very glamorous in spite of her complaints)
I'm terribly sorry to have kept you waiting.

PHILO

Not at all, Princess.

JENNIFER

I had hoped at least to look presentable for you! Instead, I'm a complete fright! You'd think I dressed for cleaning the stables!

PHILO

You look very nice, Princess.

JENNIFER

Ah, you're too kind, you're too kind. But I really did want to please you. You deserve better than this. If only I had the chance to dress properly for you, properly for this occasion, you would have seen how nice I really *can* look. Instead of like a scarecrow.

JULIET

Jennifer! Honestly! Next, we have Princess Justine and Princess Jolene. Also twins.

(Enter JUSTINE and JOLENE)

JULIET

Justine is something of a poet.

JUSTINE

(Dramatically)

Behold! Behold! Behold!
He comes like a gallant knight of old
To take up the challenge, ready to try,
Ready to fight, ready to die,
Ready to face the heartless heath,
The ogre's claws, the giant's teeth,
The dragon's blasting burning breath,
And all the violent colors of death
Blood of scarlet, gore of orange
Caves of black...

(Pauses)

What rhymes with orange? Anyone?

PHILO

Perhaps the gore could be a different color?

JUSTINE

Gore could be purple. But what rhymes with purple?

PHILO

Or perhaps we could even do away with the gore altogether?

JUSTINE

Or...make something rhyme with gore...Or!

PHILO

Or what?

JUSTINE

“Or” rhymes with “gore”!

(To herself)

“Scarlet blood, orange gore, black caves...or...or...or.”

JULIET

And Jolene is something of an artist.

JOLENE

Pleased to meet — Wait! Hold that pose right there! What an amazing profile! Have you ever had anyone paint your portrait? Your chin is absolutely outstanding. All of your features are! Your eyes are like two glass orbs that contain whole worlds inside of them. Your face just begs to be put on the canvas. Or even better: a statue. Something that is true from all angles. No. That would leave nothing to the imagination. A painting would be better. I was right the first time. But! Too much paint, too much color, might hide your essence rather than reveal it! Simple black and white! That’s it! Even better: white chalk on black paper. Virtue and light in the foreground. Darkness and wrong in the background where it belongs. White is a color, you know.

PHILO

Yes, I’ve heard that said somewhere.

JULIET

And then Princess Jubilee.

(Enter JUBILEE, who is sweet and shy and almost mystical. Almost.)

QUEEN

My little Jubilee.

JUBILEE

(staring intensely at PHILO)

I hope you won’t think less of my father for putting you through this challenge.

PHILO

I think the challenge...is very challenging indeed.

JUBILEE

I hope you won't think less of my father if he cuts off your head.

PHILO

I'm sure I won't be doing any thinking at all if he cuts off my head.

JUBILEE

(Pauses)

I hope you won't think less of any of my sisters for wanting you to choose one of them.

PHILO

I...could hardly think less of them for that.

JUBILEE

(Pauses)

I hope you won't think less of me if I were to become your wife.

PHILO

(Pauses. Unsure.)

Whatever do you mean, Princess?

JUBILEE

(To JULIET)

Whatever do I mean, Juliet?

JULIET

Princess Jubilee means that execution...and marriage are much alike. They are both final.

KING

Well, there you have them. My twelve lovely daughters. Twelve beautiful princesses to choose from.

QUEEN

Reginald!

KING

Yes dear?

QUEEN

You forgot Suzy!

KING

Suzy! Why do I always forget Suzy?

QUEEN

I don't know, Reginald, but you always do. Perhaps it is because you gave her such a difficult name. It is not distinctive like the names that *I* chose for the other girls.

JULIET

And finally, the twelfth princess. Princess Suzy.

(Enter SUZY. She and PHILO look at each other and are caught in a long stare. It is clearly love at first sight.)

JULIET

Suzy! Say something!

SUZY

(To PHILO)

Please. Please don't do this, good sir. Please don't accept the challenge.

PHILO

There is nothing that will stop me from accepting the challenge.

SUZY

But the risk is too great.

PHILO

The risk is nothing compared to the reward.

(They continue to stare until the DUKE interrupts. He prompts RUBELLA to enter with a tray of cups.)

DUKE

King Reginald, it is time for the princesses to retire and for the challenge to begin.

KING

Very well. Good night, Princesses!

PRINCESSES

Good night, Father.

QUEEN

Good night, my dears.

PRINCESSES

Good night, Mother.

KING

And good luck, Philo.

PHILO

Thank you, Your Majesty.

DUKE

Philo, you will take your place beside the door of the chamber. And in the morning, we shall hear your solution to the mystery.

(Princesses start to exit. While RUBELLA is waiting for them, holding her tray, she crosses to PHILO and offers him a cup.)

RUBELLA

Here. For you.

PHILO

What is it?

SUZY

(Crossing to PHILO, taking the cup from RUBELLA and handing it to PHILO)

It is a cup of cider. Cider made here in our kingdom. It is a special treat that we enjoy every night. Please have a cup.

PHILO

I would be delighted. Even more delighted if you would stay and drink a cup with me.

SUZY

I...

RUBELLA

Princess!

SUZY

I...I cannot stay. I must say good night.

PHILO

I understand. Perhaps another time.

SUZY

Yes. I certainly hope so.

PHILO

As do I.

Philo? SUZY

Yes, Princess? PHILO

Please be careful. SUZY

I...I didn't get here by being careful. PHILO

Promise me. Promise me you'll be careful. SUZY

Of course, Princess. I promise. PHILO

Princess! RUBELLA

I'm sorry. I must go. SUZY

Good night. PHILO

(He takes the cup, and all exit. He drinks the cup and sits down beside the door, looking around. The lights go down and a spotlight is on PHILO. Slowly he grows drowsy, and then lies on the floor and falls completely asleep. Then the door opens and we see the feet of the princesses stepping by him through the spotlight.)

BLACKOUT