

THE BIRTHDAY OF THE INFANTA

A Dramatic Reading

by
Oscar Wilde



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From the Fairy Tale.

It was the birthday of the Infanta of Spain. She was just twelve years of age, and the sun was shining brightly in the gardens of the palace.

The little Princess played at hide and seek round the stone vases and the old moss-grown statues. On ordinary days she was only allowed to play with children of her own rank, so she had always to play alone, but her birthday was an exception, and the King had given orders that she was to invite any of her young friends whom she liked to come and amuse themselves with her.*

From a window in the palace the sad melancholy King watched them. Sadder even than usual was the King, for as he looked at the Infanta bowing with childish gravity to the assembling courtiers, he thought of the young Queen, her mother, who had died just six months after the birth of her child.

The laughter of the children grated on his ears, and the bright sunlight mocked his sorrow. He buried his face in his hands, and when the Infanta looked up again the curtains had been drawn, and the King had retired.

She made a little moue of disappointment. Surely he might have stayed with her on her birthday. How silly of him, when the sun was shining so brightly, and everybody was so happy! She tossed her pretty head and* taking her uncle, Don Pedro, by the hand, she walked slowly down the steps towards a long pavilion of purple silk that had been erected at the end of the garden.

A procession of noble boys, fantastically dressed as toreadors, came out to meet her, and a handsome young Count led her solemnly to a dais above the arena. The children grouped themselves all around, fluttering their fans and whispering to each other, and Don Pedro and the Grand Inquisitor stood laughing at the entrance.

It certainly was a marvelous bullfight, and much nicer, the Infanta thought, than the real bullfight at Seville. Some of the boys pranced about on richly-caparisoned hobby-horses brandishing long javelins with gay streamers of bright ribands attached to them; others went on foot waving their scarlet cloaks before the bull, and vaulting lightly over the barrier when he charged them; and as for the bull himself, he was just like a live bull, though he was only made of wicker-work and stretched hide. He made a splendid fight of it, too, and the children got so excited that they stood up upon the benches, and waved their handkerchiefs and cried out: "Bravo toro! Bravo toro!" just as if they had been grown-up people.

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