

Ib and Little Christina

written by
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Set to music by
FRANCO LEONI

CHARACTERS.

ACT I.

IB'S FATHER ----- MR. IVOR FOSTER.
LITTLE IB----- MISS LOUISE DOUSTE.
OLD HENRIK (Christina's Grandfather)----- MR. GORDON CLEATHER.
LITTLE CHRISTINA----- MISS ELIE Q. MAY.
A GIPSY WOMAN ----- MISS SUSAN STRONG.

ACT II.

(Fifteen years have elapsed.)

IB ----- MR BEN DAVIES.
OLD HENRIK----- MR. GORDON CLEATHER.
JOHN ----- MR. CHARLES BENNETT.
CHRISTINA ----- MISS EDNA THORNTON.
THE GIPSY WOMAN -----MISS SUSAN STRONG.

ACT III.

(Seven years have elapsed.)

IB ----- MR BEN DAVIES.
LITTLE CHRISTINA-----MISS ELIE Q. MAY.
THE GIPSY WOMAN -----MISS SUSAN STRONG.

Scene: Ib's home in Jutland.

Act I

SCENE.—*The large living room in IB's home. It is furnished poorly, but with a certain rude comfort.*

It is winter. The light is fading. A fire burns cheerfully on the large open hearth, and floods the room with warm light. Though the long bay window is seen a view of a heath, in the dusk.

IB's father is discovered, seated by table. He is working on a pair of wooden shoes, and from time to time he looks across at his son, LITTLE IB, who is seated in a big wooden arm-chair, staring into the fire.

FATHER. Little son! Ib! Of what are you dreaming?

IB. I am not dreaming. I am awake. I am looking into the fire.

FATHER. At the fire-pictures?

IB. Yes.

FATHER. What do you see?

IB. A castle

FATHER. Yes?

IB. And a dragon. I should like to fight the dragon.

FATHER (*rising, and going to LITTLE IB*). If Little Christina were shut up in the castle, eh?

IB. I would kill the dragon.

FATHER. I see a church. Two people are being married. They are you and Christina.

IB. No; you and my mother. Where is my mother? (*A log falls.*)

FATHER. See—the picture has fallen. It is nothing but ashes.

IB. Christina's mother has a grave, with grass on it. Why does my mother not have a grave?

FATHER. It is time to light the lamp. You shall help me. (*He goes to cupboard on right, and brings brass lamp to table; LITTLE IB meanwhile lights a wooden spill at the fire and turns to help his father.*)
Soon you will be able to light the lamp all by yourself. (*He takes lamp to window and sets it on the sill.*) There!

IB. Why do you always set the lamp in the window?

FATHER. Because, Little Ib, some night there may be a wanderer upon the heath, who will see the light, and it will seem to say: "Come this way! You have been cold and hungry; but this house, though it is poor, is warm and light, and you can come in and rest." And perhaps she will come.

IB. Why will the wanderer be a woman? Are all people who lose their way women?

FATHER. Indeed, no. But we men, Little Ib—you and I—must think of women first; think of them very gently, very kindly; they are weaker than we, you know. So we will leave the lamp in the window every night, and perhaps some weak woman who wants our help will see it. Hush

IB. That is a man's step.

FATHER. It is old Henrik, in his big waterproof boots.

IB. And perhaps Little Christina!

FATHER. Then you will be glad?

IB. Yes, we are betrothed.

FATHER. I see.

IB. Her grandfather cannot leave her at home by herself. She is so little.

FATHER. It is high time you were married, to look after her.

IB. It will be soon.

FATHER. And you will look after her, like a man?

IB. Yes. I shall give her all my toys, and kill all the dragons.

FATHER. That is the way!

(LITTLE IB goes to door and opens it. HENRIK enters with LITTLE CHRISTINA, whom he is carrying in his arms. He is a hale, sturdy man of sixty-five.)

HENRIK. Good evening, Ib-and Little IB.

FATHER. Good evening, old Henrik. But it is rough weather for the little one.

HENRIK. I have to bring her with me when I take the boat.

IB. Hush ! She is asleep !

FATHER. She must stay here for the night.

HENRIK. I had to take a load to Herning.

FATHER. But you must not go home to-night.

HENRIK *(setting LITTLE CHRISTINA in big chair and loosening her wrap)*. If you can keep us?

FATHER. What do you say, Ib?

IB. I will look after Little Christina.

FATHER *(to HENRIK)*. I will come and help you get the things from the boat. *(He goes to door.)*

HENRIK. But the children—my little Christina?

FATHER. We can leave her with Ib, He will take care of her. *(As HENRIK goes to door.)* They are betrothed !

HENRIK. Has it come to that?

FATHER. Yes, indeed. *(They both look at the children with an amused smile. Then go out together, and shut the door.)*

(LITTLE IB is kneeling by the side of the arm-chair in which LITTLE CHRISTINA is sitting fast asleep. He rises and walks across the room on tip-toe to the cupboard, opens it, and takes out a few wooden toys. One of these is an ugly figure, and he puts it back in the cupboard. Then he comes back on tip-toe to LITTLE CHRISTINA, and is arranging the toys at her feet, when she awakes. She looks round, and then speaks.)

LITTLE CHRISTINA. Ib!

IB. (*looking up*). You are awake?

LITTLE CHRISTINA. Where is my grandfather?

IB. He has gone down to the boat with my father. They will come back very soon.

LITTLE CHRISTINA. My feet are cold.

IB. Take off your shoes and stockings. I will warm them. (*He helps her to take off her shoes and stockings.*)
You are to stay here to-night.

LITTLE CHRISTINA. No. I must go home.

IB. Would you not like to stay here with me ?

LITTLE CHRISTINA (*warming her toes*). Yes; but I must go home. My stocking is hanging up at home. I shall lose all my presents if I stay here.

IB. We will hang it up here. See—(*he hangs up one of her stockings over the fire-place*). Santa Claus will come here. You will not be frightened of him?

LITTLE CHRISTINA. No. Is his beard very long? (*She begins to go to sleep again.*)

IB. Yes. But he is not fierce, like the dragons. And I should kill the dragons! What is that? (*He turns and stares at the door, which is opening very slowly. LITTLE CHRISTINA is asleep.*)

(A GIPSY WOMAN enters, and stands in the doorway. She wears an old red cloak over her poor dress. The hood falls back from her beautiful face. She carries a rude staff in her hand. LITTLE IB stares at her as though fascinated. She speaks to him softly.)

GIPSY. Are you alone, little one?

IB. Little Christina is here—but she has fallen asleep again.

GIPSY. Your father?

IB. He has gone down to the boat. He will be back soon. You will see him.

GIPSY. Believe that, Little IB. And if you tell any one of my coming, I can never come again!

GIPSY. No, Little IB. (*She has closed the door.*)

IB. How do you know my name?

GIPSY. I must not tell you. And you must not tell your father, nor any one, that I have been here.

IB. Very well. I can keep a promise; but Little Christina is too small—only, you see, she has fallen asleep again, and has not seen you. But as you will not wait to see my father, I know what to do. You have been cold, and tired, and hungry—but here you can rest and be warm. (*He places a chair for her.*)

GIPSY. No, Little IB.

IB. Have you not been cold and hungry ?

GIPSY. Yes ! (*She takes him in her arms.*) So cold—so hungry! But now I am warm and satisfied!

IB (*astonished*). Without eating or going near the fire?

GIPSY. Yes, Little IB.

IB. Then you are not a real woman. You must be a Fairy Woman! (*He sits on table and stares at her.*)

GIPSY. Believe that, Little IB. And if you tell any one of my coming, I can never come again!

IB. Have you brought presents for our stockings?

GIPSY. Will you love me if I have?

IB. Yes, because I love Little Christina; and I want my presents to go into her stocking. She has no mother, though her mother has a grave, while mine—

GIPSY. See. It is all I have. These three nuts.

IB. Are they fairy nuts?

GIPSY. Yes, Little IB.

IB. Then they contain beautiful presents. Has this one a carriage and two horses?

GIPSY. Yes, Little IB.

IB. Then that will be for Little Christina. And has this a silk dress, and stockings, and a necklace?

GIPSY. Yes.

IB. Then that will be for Little Christina. And this one?

GIPSY. There is nothing in that but black earth.

IB. Then I will keep that.

GIPSY. The Black Earth—perhaps that is best of all!

IB. The best of all ? I do not think that, or I should give it to Little Christina.

GIPSY. Now I am going.

IB. (*slipping down from table*). Will you come again?

GIPSY. If you tell no one that I have been.

IB. I promise.

GIPSY. God bless and keep you, Little Ib

IB. And Little Christina?

GIPSY. And Little Christina!

She goes out. LITTLE IB. stands without moving, and watches her as she passes the window. Then he turns, and takes the two nuts which he has left upon the table. He looks at them, wondering. Then he walks on tip-toe over to the fire-place, and looks at CHRISTINA, to see that she is still sleeping. He then carefully drops her two nuts into her stocking. He looks at his own nut, and shakes it, and looks at it again. As he sits down at CHRISTINA'S feet, looking at his nut, the

CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II

The same Scene. Fifteen years have lapsed. It is again winter, and the light is fading. The stage is empty.

IB, now a young man of three or four and twenty, passes the window. He opens the big door, and stands in the porch kicking the snow from his boots. Then he enters, and closes the door. He carries a small wood axe in his hand, and upon his back is slung his wood-basket, filled with logs. He hangs the basket in its place by the fire; tends the fire; and then sharpens his axe on a whetstone. His demeanour has the air of a man who is much alone; but his face has an expression of quiet contentment. Having sharpened his axe, he is handing it in its place when the door opens, the GIPSY WOMAN stands in the doorway.

GIPSY. May I enter?

IB. Surely.

GIPSY. Are you alone?

IB. Yes; quite alone.

GIPSY. Your father?

IB. Is in Heaven.

GIPSY. May I sit?

IB. Here, by the fire. (*She goes and sits in the big chair by the fire.*) Have you lost your way?

GIPSY. No. I have been this way once a year for fifteen years. I have looked through the window, but you have never been quite alone till now.

IB (*after looking at her curiously*). It is time to light the lamp. (*As he goes to cupboard for the lamp, the Gipsy rises and lights a spill at the fire, and turns to assist him.*) I have grown used to lighting the lamp all by myself. (*He sets the lamp in the window.*)

GIPSY (*sitting again by the fire.*) Why do you place the lamp in the window?

IB. Because some night there may be a wanderer upon the heath, who will see the light, and it will seem to say, "Come this way! You have been cold and hungry, but this house is warm and light, and you can come in and rest." And perhaps she will come.

GIPSY. She? Why should the wanderer be a woman? Are women the only ones who lose their way?

IB (*again looking curiously at her*). That is an echo of something I have heard before. (*After a pause.*) My father taught me to think of women first; to think of them very gently, very kindly. "They are weaker than we," he said—when I was a child. And he used to set the lamp in the window. And in all I can I do as he did.

GIPSY. You loved your father?

IB. He was father and mother to me.

GIPSY. Then she, when you were quite little, died?

IB. Yes. I do not know where.

GIPSY. Then you have no sorrow for her!

IB (*going and sitting by table*). Except that she lies away from his side—alone in the black earth.

GIPSY. The Black Earth—that is the best of all.

IB. Have I spoken with you before?

GIPSY. Fifteen years ago, Little IB.

IB. You are the Fairy Woman! Who gave the wishing nuts!

GIPSY. Yes.

IB (*smiling*). And they are coming true—slowly but surely. Little Christina—

GIPSY. She was your little betrothed.

IB. Yes. Now she is Little Christina only to me and her old grand-father. But she is still my betrothed.

GIPSY. And faithful?

IB. Even though I am so poor, and she was born to good luck. (*He has taken a needle and thread from the drawer of table, and is mending one of his fur gloves.*) She has been away two years. She went to the rich innkeeper's at Herning, many miles west from here. She assists the landlady in the housekeeping, and the people treat her as their own daughter. So she has the fine clothes the nuts promised her.

Gipsy (*rising and regarding him earnestly*). And you? What have you?

IB. Well, I am to marry Christina. But my nut has come true, only the other day—"out of the black earth." It is most strange. I did not know what you meant at the time—but of course you did not mean it.

GIPSY. What?

IB. This is what happened. I was ploughing my field, and the plough-share struck against something which I fancied was a fire-stone. Then I saw glittering in the black earth a splinter of shining metal which the plough had cut from something in the furrow. It was this armlet. The plough must have disturbed a Hun's grave.

(*He has taken from the drawer an ancient armlet, which is carefully wrapped in a handkerchief.*)

It is gold.

GIPSY. Or is it copper? How can you tell the difference—till it is tested?

IB (*smiling*). Well, it is pleasanter to think of it as gold, and I am not going to sell it; for I mean it as a wedding present for Christina. (*He is replacing it in the drawer when he hears a step.*) Hark!

GIPSY (*rising quickly*). I will go

IB. No; you are not rested. It is old Henrik Christina's grandfather.

GIPSY. I am rested. I will go before he sees me—

IB. He will not see you, for he is almost blind, poor old man. The lamp does not guide him. But he knows this path. He is sure to be bringing me some bit of news about Christina. It is sure to be a piece of luck, and you shall hear it, as you gave me the lucky nuts! Stay there.

(She stands back in the far corner by the window. Ib opens the door. Old HENRIK appears in the doorway.)

IB. Come in! I know what has brought you ! You have news of Christina.

HENRIK. Yes. I have news of her.

IB *(guiding the old man to chair by fire)*. And it is some new piece of luck for her, is it not?

HENRIK. Yes—I believe so.

IB *(with a smile at the GIPSY WOMAN)*. I knew that. She was born to be lucky.

HENRIK. Yes.

IB. Did she send you a letter? But your eyes could not have read it—

HENRIK. She came herself. She has come home.

IB. Come home? But has she given up her situation ?

HENRIK. She is thinking of doing so—perhaps.

IB. Then it is for something better. She is sure to be right in what she does.

HENRIK. But she wished first to ask you—your advice.

IB. That is kind of her. Why did you not bring her ? I will come over.

HENRIK. She 'asked me to tell you. She will do just what you say.

IB. I am not clever about business. But she will be sure of true-hearted interest from me.

HENRIK. You have always been her great friend—even when you were little children.

IB. Yes; even then we called ourselves betrothed.

HENRIK. As little children; and so you grew up, almost side by side, until she went away—and now she is a young woman, and you are a man. You are no longer little children. Do you understand? *(The GIPSY WOMAN silently goes out.)*

IB. No. I—

HENRIK. I am an old man, and very soon I shall go—where my sight will be given back to me. And when I look down upon my child, shall I see her happy?

IB. It is little that I can do—it is little that I can give her—but my love.

HENRIK. Ib, there is some one who offers her love, true love—and other things as well;—comfort, luxury; he is the son of the rich innkeeper. He loves Christina, and has asked her to marry him.

IB. What has Christina said?

HENRIK. She is asking you. She would not answer for herself.

IB. She would not answer for herself?

HENRIK. She is asking you.

IB *(after a short pause)*. As Little Christina did not answer for herself, I can answer for her. She must not refuse this good fortune.

HENRIK. She remembers how you used to call yourselves "the betrothed " as little children.

IB. Ah! but little children play with toys that are bound to get broken. And if we keep our old broken toys locked up in a cupboard, it makes us smile to look at them when we are grown up.

HENRIK. Can you smile over this, Ib? Is it true? I cannot see your face to judge.

IB. Yes; it is true. There have been no promises between me and Christina since we were little. It is beautiful in her to send to me as if there had been. But she must not refuse this good fortune—tell her so from me. *(He sits.)*

HENRIK. Will you tell her so yourself?

IB. Yes.

HENRIK. She is outside.

(A pause.)

IB *(at length looks up and speaks)*. I will call her. *(He goes to door, and stands with his hand on the latch.)*
"We men, Little Ib, must think of women first; think of them very gently, very kindly—they are weaker than we, you know." *(He opens the door and calls: Christina!)*

(CHRISTINA enters; she is a pretty young woman, and is smartly dressed. She takes both of Ib's hands in her own.)

IB. You should not have waited outside. Did you not know what I should say?

CHRISTINA. No; I was not sure. We used to call ourselves betrothed.

IB. As little children. We used to play with little toys then. Look!

(He brings an old broken toy from the cupboard.)

CHRISTINA. You have kept them? All these years? Poor broken things!

IB. It makes me smile to think of the little childish thoughts that made them seem so beautiful.

CHRISTINA. It almost makes me cry. Ib, you are smiling—but are you sure?

IB. Yes, dear, sure—quite sure. You should not have waited out there alone.

CHRISTINA. Ib, I was not alone.

(A silence. Then IB speaks.)

IB. Ask him to come in.

CHRISTINA. Dear Ib! *(She turns towards the door.)*

IB. Little Christina—you do love him?

CHRISTINA. Yes, Ib, I love him.

IB. I am very, very glad. Call him.

(He puts the toy back in cupboard. CHRISTINA opens door and calls "John!" He enters.)

CHRISTINA. John, this is Ib—with whom I used to play.

JOHN. She has told me of you.

IB. We were brother and sister.

JOHN *(to CHRISTINA)*. I wish I had known you then.

CHRISTINA. Then perhaps I should not have loved you!

IB *(to CHRISTINA)*. Do you remember the wishing-nuts?

CHRISTINA. Wishing-nuts? *(They speak together.)*

JOHN (to HENRIK). Had we not better go home? It is growing late.

CHRISTINA (to JOHN). My wishing-nut promised me a carriage and two horses.

JOHN. And you shall have them. But it is time to go. *(He goes to door.)*

CHRISTINA. I am ready. *(To IB.)* But what was your nut to be?

IB. Something out of the black earth—and here it is. *(Getting armlet from drawer).* Little Christina—this is for you—my wedding present. *(He hands it to her.)*

CHRISTINA. But it is beautiful. It is too good. *(JOHN comes down.)*

IB. Too good? It is all I have.

JOHN. What metal is it?

IB. I do not know. But if it is only copper—try to believe it is gold.

CHRISTINA. I do believe it is gold. I will keep it—always.

(HENRIK has risen and bids IB good-night. IB bids HENRIK and JOHN good-night; then turns to CHRISTINA. JOHN leads HENRIK out; IB and CHRISTINA are left alone.)

IB. Good-bye.

CHRISTINA. Why good-bye? It is a black word.

IB. No. It is a golden word. It means "God be with you."

JOHN *(heard without)*. Come, Christina!

CHRISTINA. I am coming. God bless you, brother IB. *(She kisses him.)*

IB. God bless you, Little Christina.

(She goes out, turning back with a smile and a wave of the hand. IB stands looking after her. The bells of a sleigh are heard, the sound dying in the distance. Then IB closes the door, and walks slowly towards the fire, as he passes the table he folds the handkerchief which held the armlet, and puts it back in the drawer—then he speaks to himself).

The black earth—it is the best of all for me. The black earth.

(The door opens, and the GIPSY WOMAN stands in the doorway.)

GIPSY. Ib!

IB. You heard everything?

GIPSY. Not everything. But I understood.

IB. The black earth. You were right—it is best of all.

GIPSY. No; I was wrong. This is winter. The spring is coming.

IB. Leave me alone now. *(He is sitting crouched in the big chair.)*

GIPSY. All alone?

IB. Yes.

(Snow has begun to fall outside.)

GIPSY. Your mother should be here now.

IB. She was given the black earth; it is best. -

GIPSY. Perhaps she looking down on you, longing to speak.

IB. I could not listen to any voice from heaven, yet.

GIPSY. Think of her voice as she spoke on earth.

IB. I cannot remember it.

GIPSY. Then—God bless you, Ib!

IB. And little Christina.

The GIPSY WOMAN goes out, and is seen passing the window as the

CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT III.

The same Scene.—Seven years have elapsed.

It is Spring. The scene is flooded with golden light. The big door is wide open, and flowers brighten the porch. A fire burns cheerfully. It is midday. The stage is empty.

The GIPSY WOMAN passes the window, and comes to the door. She is holding the hand of a little girl. She enters the room cautiously, leaving the child standing in the porch.

GIPSY. Wait there, Little Christina. Come—there is no one here. Come—there! *(She places her in the big chair.)* Hush! *(She stands by chair, hiding the child, as Ib enters from the inner room.)*

IB. You!

GIPSY. Yes.

IB. It has always been in the winter that you have come.

GIPSY. For seven years. Every winter since she went away I have brought you news.

IB. Evil news. Every winter—evil news. Tidings to fit the season of bitter frost and cruel winds. Tidings of misfortune and disappointment that have nipped the flower of her prosperity. Tidings of improvidence, of sorrow, and of sickness. This you have brought me every winter.

GIPSY. But this is the spring-time.

IB *(bitterly)*. The time of a new life!

GIPSY. Yes. A new life—a young life—to begin again.

(There is a meaning in her tone which causes IB to turn and regard her earnestly.)

IB. It is good news—at last?

Gipsy *(very solemnly)*. It is good news, Ib—at last.

IB. She is dead! Christina is dead?

GIPSY. She is dead, and she lives again. The black earth was best, after all.

IB. Yes ; the black earth. Best for her and best for me. *(He sinks into a chair.)*

GIPSY. Not for you—not yet. This is the spring-time.

IB. Not for me. It is always winter with me. It was spring-time once—when we were children. Then came the winter; there was no summer, no autumn, only winter. Oh, if we could be little children again, I and Little Christina!

(The GIPSY WOMAN goes to him, as he bows his head upon his arm. She very gently lays her hand upon his shoulder. He raises his face, as she points to LITTLE CHRISTINA.)

GIPSY. The spring has come again—see!

IB. Little Christina!

(He goes and kneels by the child.)

GIPSY. You and Little Christina! She can stay here? Always?

IB. I am all alone.

GIPSY. And lonely. And she—Little Christina—is lonely.

IB. My Little Christina!

GIPSY. I will make things ready before I go. *(Exit into inner room.)*

IB. Little Christina, are you tired and hungry?

CHRISTINA. Yes. And my feet are cold.

IB. We will warm them. We will look for pictures in the fire—castles and dragons! You will not be frightened of the dragons?

CHRISTINA. Will you kill them?

IB. Yes. Every one! Now sit still and watch the fire.

CHRISTINA. I want some toys.

IB. Toys? *(He goes across to cupboard, and gets the old toys.)* See—these are all I have, and they are broken. I wonder if you and I can mend them?

CHRISTINA. They are beautiful.

IB. Beautiful? Have you any toys of your own, Little Christina?

CHRISTINA. I have this. *(She shows him the golden armlet, which is hung round her neck by a ribbon.)*

IB. This!

CHRISTINA. It is gold. I am to keep it always. I am sleepy.

IB. It is from looking at the fire. *(He takes her on his lap.)* Have you seen any pictures yet?

CHRISTINA. There is a church—and people being married.

IB. I wonder who they are?

CHRISTINA. Me and you. *(She kisses him.)*

(The GIPSY WOMAN enters.)

GIPSY. It is ready for her. I will take her to bed before I go. It will be you who will give me news now, when I pass this way.

IB. You will pass this way?

GIPSY. Yes—I am a wanderer! I will pass this way, every spring-time.

IB. This is the spring-time. The time of a new life.

GIPSY. Yes; a tender little life it is now. But you will love it and shelter it.

IB. I am a man, and all alone, but not lonely now; I have my Little Christina at last. But I must work for her. She should have a mother to stay at home with her. Will you stay?

GIPSY. Stay here? With you?

IB. And be her mother—and mine.

GIPSY. Yours?

IB. You see, I must be Little Ib again, to play with her, and give her all my toys. We will both call you "Mother." It will be the new life. (*He has set the big chair for CHRISTINA at the table, and goes to bring another plate and the food.*)

GIPSY. Springing out of the Black Earth!

IB. You will stay—mother?

GIPSY. My son-my little Ib! God bless you, little Ib!

IB (*with a smile*). And Little Christina!

They sit down to their simple meal. CHRISTINA has folded her hands for grace, and as the others do likewise the

CURTAIN FALLS.