

PLAYS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

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The Princess and the Pea

By
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From the Story by
Hans Christian Andersen

The Princess and the Pea was first presented by the Children's Theatre Company for the 1984-85 season.

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Characters:

- PRINCESS FIDELIA
- PRINCE VAL
- KING
- QUEEN
- LITTLE PRINCE (PRINCELET)
- MIDDLE PRINCE (PRINCELET)
- VOLUMNIA
- COUNSELOR
- WESTERN EUROPE PRINCESS
- KING OF WESTERN EUROPE
- LAPLAND PRINCESS
- INDIAN PRINCESS
- PRINCESS OF CHINA
- PRINCESS OF ARABIA
- THE COOK
- MAW
- GOG
- RAFE
- KING TATABUS

Ensemble includes members of the court, and royalty and servants of countries that Val travels to.

THE COURT:

This is a medieval court. The king rules by divine right, and all gladly acknowledge the power of royalty, but within the castle there is a certain informality. For everyone, from the King to the lowest servant, works. So, unless noted, all levels of society are in and out of the great hall, mingling easily.

In short, this is a castle filled with good-natured people in a superstitious agrarian society.

MIDDLE PRINCE Will you be gone long?

VAL It could be months. Years, perhaps.

LITTLE PRINCE Val? Why do you have to go?

VAL It's time for me to marry. But first I have to find a wife. (*The boys giggle.*) Not just any old wife – she's got to be a bona-fide princess.

MIDDLE PRINCE Will you kiss her?

VAL When I find her. If I find her.

LITTLE PRINCE I saw you kiss a serving girl -

MIDDLE PRINCE - I saw you kiss another!

KING This is serious business, you sprouts.

PRINCELETS Why?

KING It's the royal order of succession, do you understand? (*They shake their heads. It's time for a lesson.*) I am the king. But when I die my oldest son must wear the crown... And when he's gone, his oldest son... (*The little boys join in, chanting by rote.*) ...must wear the crown and when he dies his oldest son- (*The king nods in approval.*) – Good, you've got the idea. That's how it works. Now tell me, where do these sons of sons come from? They come along after the prince marries. It just happens, yes, that's how it works. – Ah, one thing more: he must marry a princess, of royal blood.

VAL So long as her blood is blue, it doesn't matter what the rest of her is like, a fact that's sad but true.

The Queen lifts her eyes from her needlepoint, turns around, gazes at her son ... but says nothing.

KING Princes have duties... inescapable. And that, I fear, is yours. (*He turns to his younger sons.*) A prince can't up and marry any girl –

COUNSELOR For it is written that no imposter, no counterfeit...

VAL -He means 'no fake' –

COUNSELOR ... Will do. For it is written that a counterfeit queen would bring bad luck to the whole kingdom for... for... (*He searches for the information.*) ...for sixty-seven years.

The Princelets are impressed at last.

KING That's why our wisest counselors throughout history have devised four scientific tests –

COUNSELOR - Carefully calculated –

KING -To measure if a princess is –

COUNSELOR -Or isn't –

KING -What she claims to be. Your mother took those very tests and – shall I tell you a secret?

PRINCELETS Yes! What?

KING If she hadn't passed them all... I'd have been broken-hearted. (*He beams fondly at his wife.*)

QUEEN I set my mind to passing.

He crosses to her, kisses her hand. Maw and Gog happen by with the calipers. The king takes them.

KING Now this instrument, applied to the ankle-bone of a candidate, will tell to the hundredth part of seventeen whether a girl is fit to be a queen.

QUEEN (*Still Sewing, to Val.*) One small detail it can't determine: is she kind, is she gentle, wise?

KING My dear woman –

QUEEN Well?

KING If she's genuine, she'll be all that and more – (*Gog passes with a small box. The king takes it.*) Here's another clever test. Resting inside the box is a golden needle, see? (*He takes the needle out.*) There's the hole, tinier than the eyelash of a gnat. A true princess can thread it with a spider's cobweb –

COUNSELOR - A test I myself invented long ago. I can't even see the needle, now, much less the hole.

QUEEN A queen needs better-than-average vision, I agree. But there are many ways of seeing that tests simply cannot test –

KING I wish you wouldn't meddle in affairs of state. (*He hands back the box; Maw crosses with a little rack containing three flasks. The king takes it.*) – Here's another good one, an accurate test of sensitivity. Each flask contains pure Attar of Roses –

PRINCELETS What?

VAL Papa means perfume.

KING Three kinds, though they look the same. But one's made from roses white a snow, one from roses golden as the summer sun, and one from velvet blossoms of rich red. Now... which is which?

The little boys sniff, and shake their heads.

PRINCELETS Can't tell. Don't know.

KING A true princess will take one sniff –

COUNSELOR -One dainty whiff is all she'll need to tell you which is which –

KING The final test – (*He takes a series of head-rings from Gog. They are held together by a little chain, and all the rings are gold except for one red one.*) -is a set of head-rings, strictly calibrated –

COUNSELOR - Call it our 'crowning achievement' –

KING If the red one fits –

COUNSELOR -Snug, but never tight –

KING - You may be sure that she’s a princess, born and bred.

QUEEN On the other hand, you may care as much about what’s inside her head -

KING My dear, enough! The sun rides high in the sky, the time has come.

QUEEN That, at least, is true. Is the wagon ready?

COUNSELOR Everything seems to be in place. We’d be best off, but I confess I’d rather sleep at home in my own bed, with my dear old woman by my side! (*Volumnia weeps, they embrace.*) Well, we must do what we must do. I’ll let you spoil me when I return, and bring me soft pillows for my head, and footstools for my feet, and lovely puddings made by your own hand for me to eat. (*He tried to kneel to the King, but his knees can’t quite bend.*)

KING Old friend, don’t kneel to me today. I’ve trusted you with my dearest treasure. Godspeed and farewell. (*He turns to Val.*) Prince Valentinus Carolus Maximus, may good fortune ride on your wagon and guide you to a true and worthy wife.

VAL Milford – Papa – I’ll do my best, for ‘we must do what we must do.’ Mama, by the time I get home I think that tapestry will be half-done.

QUEEN Take care, my son, and – wait! I forgot! (*She brings out a cloth sack and a tiny vial.*) Here, take these with you. Herbs and simples, made from good green plants I know. This, for aching bones. And this: when you’ve reached the outer corners of the earth and there’s no place left to look... drink this. It will give you courage for the long trip home.

VAL Mama—

QUEEN And don't forget: our tests are very scientific, but some things can't be measured or calibrated – *(She hugs him. The Princelets try to hold him back.)*

PRINCELETS Stay! Don't go! Take us with you! No! No!

VAL *(Going.)* Guard the castle, sprouts. ...Oh you lucky little sprouts...

PRINCELETS Why?

VAL Because you were never cursed with the sad burden of being born the first. Maw, Gog, come on, we're on our way – *(Maw and Gog start off with the wagon. Val turns and takes one last look.)* And may the fairest princess win the day! Farewell!

He goes. Lights fade out.

Scene Two: On The Road

And so they travel. The sun rises and sets many times. The terrain changes.

At their first destination, somewhere in Western Europe a king comes forth and greets the visitors with ceremony. Gifts are exchanged. His daughter is brought forth --she seems a very nice girl. Val bows, kisses her hand, then seats her on a little seat attached to the wagon (the testing stool). Maw and Gog supervise the testing paraphernalia. The ankle-bone measures correctly, the needle is threaded, the correct scent is assigned to each perfume. But alas, the red head-ring slips down to the princess's nose.

With deep regret, the counselor shakes his head. Val bows apologetically, Maw and Gog pack up, and they set off on the road again.

Somewhere in Arabia: a veiled princess is already seated in the testing stool. The ankle-bone is up to snuff, and she manages to thread the needle, but she cannot guess the scents. She shrugs off her failure, and accepts a peeled grape from one of her servants. Val and his companions depart.

India: A beautiful Brahmin princess. She's short-sighted and cannot thread the needle. They move on.

Lapland: The lady in question is covered with furs, and is so roly-poly that the calipers don't make it around her ankle.

China: The princess is as gaunt as a stick and homely as a poke. The counselor takes one look at her, then at Val, who is trying bravely to hide his despair, and the old man shakes his head. Impossible! They mustn't even try, lest she win.

And so on, and so on. The princesses come thick and fast, endlessly.

The companions are very weary now. The old man falters. Val picks him up, staggering under the weights. The he remembers the little vial of herbs, takes it out and drinks deeply. Strength returns, and he leads the company out, carrying the old man in his arms. Maw and Gog are too tired to have any mishaps.

Lights fade out.

Scene Three: The Return

The great hall, afternoon.

Meanwhile, back at the castle: Rafe the jester is doing his best to cheer everyone up, but no one pays much attention. The ladies-in-waiting and the Queen are stitching at the tapestry, perhaps singing a lay, when the cook comes storming in.

COOK Your highness –

QUEEN Well, cook?

COOK I've burnt the mutton!

LADIES He's what? What did he say?

COOK (With great belligerence.) – the mutton!

QUEEN Why are you cross with me?

COOK A whole half-a-sheep gone up in smoke!

QUEEN I hope you've something else to cook in the larder?

COOK Nothing.

QUEEN Nothing?!

COOK Only some onions, a few carrots... a stale parsnip or two... a sack of dried lentils, or peas –

QUEEN That's a lot more than 'nothing'! Put it in your largest pot, add salt to taste, cover with water –

COOK Water? Water?!! I was trained, your highness, in the best kitchens of Burgundy – Water?! That's a word I don't know. In Burgundy I was taught –

QUEEN - To burn the mutton? Poor Rafe might as well be the cook for all the good you do, loading our stomachs from dawn to midnight with boiled bacon and stale sausage and dried-up blood pudding and – and burnt mutton! With never a green plant to eat!

COOK Greens are what cows and sheep eat.

QUEEN Well, since we eat cows and sheep, why don't we eat greens instead and cut out one whole step – our stomachs would be grateful! Go, make some thick pea soup – I command you, and don't burn it! (He goes unwillingly. She returns to the tapestry.) The castle is so gloomy today... bring the light closer, Volumina, my eyes aren't what they used to be.

VOLUMINA Your eyes are sharp as ever, but it's dark early today. Very queer.

QUEEN A storm's on the way, I can feel it in my bones. Ah, look, I'm almost finished with this little unicorn.

VOLUMINA What shall the tapestry be about, ma'am, when it's all done?

QUEEN I don't know... I'd like it to be filled with blooming trees, singing birds, gentle beasts, stars, moons, the sun... And there'll be some kind of celebration, with happy people dancing.

VOLUMINA We could use a good celebration, even stitched in cloth.

QUEEN You miss your husband.

VOLUMINA *(In floods of tears.)* God bless him, and Prince Val too. Where in the world are they today?

QUEEN Closer than you think – I can feel it in my bones.

VOLUMINA Alas, dear lady, if that were so! *(She blows her nose hard. A silence.)*

QUEEN Rafe, you're supposed to be the jester in this hall – jest! Jest!! Cheers us up, for our dinner's burnt and our sweet prince is wandering and we're as gloomy as the weather! *(She wipes her eye with a corner of the tapestry. Rafe juggles – and the balls fall splat on the floor. He looks down at them in remorse, and tries to retrieve them.)* That wasn't exactly what I had in mind; perhaps a funny dance? *(He tries and falls. His tumble is too painful to be funny.)* Oh dear, you'd better think of something else. *(The King enters with papers. Rafe is thinking)* Perhaps a joke?

RAFE A joke, yes, that would be... Uh... eh.... aha... Why did the peacock cross the road?

KING *(Exasperated to the Queen.)* Not the peacock story again!? *(But he feeds Rafe the line.)* Why did the peacock cross the road? *(Silence.)* Rafe? Well?

RAFE Because he... I mean, he was supposed to – sire, what was it you wanted to know? I forgot the question. *(The court groans. Rafe begins to cry.)*

QUEEN There, there...

RAFE I know, I know, I'm a terrible failure! But I received the finest training at the Schola Comedica in Milan. (*With some nostalgia.*) It was wonderful, fanciful sort of school... pratfalls and slapsticks and... great juicy tarts flying through the air into student's faces... (*He sighs.*) I used to laugh myself silly at the way they all carried on. The antics!

KING (*Mutters to himself.*) What ails this kingdom?

QUEEN Two of the ailments, milord, are a cook who can't cook and a jester who's no laughing matter. Never mind, the wind is blowing in a new direction, I feel it in my bones. (*The dogs start barking outside.*)

KING Ah, those bones! (*He kisses her cheek.*) Sometimes, my dear, I think you might really be a witch. (*She starts to protest.*) A white witch, a good witch – say what's that racket? Hey? Has someone swum the moat? Guards?

The Princelets come running in, mad with joy.

PRINCELETS Mama! Papa! We saw them, they're coming, they're coming!

KING What are you two yelling about?

PRINCELETS The guards have lowered the drawbridge!

QUEEN It's Val, isn't it?

PRINCELETS They've come home! They're here!

The door flies open. Val and the counselor enter, followed by Maw and Gog, dragging the cart. In an instant they are surrounded by everyone, hugging, kissing, talking at once. Finally Val notices the little brothers. He lifts each of them up in the air.

VAL I can hardly lift you – you've grown!

VOLUMNIA My sweet old man! (*Of course she weeps, nearly drowning him.*)

KING Well, my boy, did you have good luck?

VAL Good luck out ran us, though we chased it to the four corners of the earth.

COUNSELOR Once I was sure we'd fall over the edge, that's how far we travelled. (*Volumnia gasps at the thought.*) We went everywhere, we tried and tested all we could find, and sad to say –

VAL There wasn't one. At this rate, I'll never find a wife.

The whole court seems to slump dejectedly.

QUEEN You both look frozen to the bone, and tired. Cook? Cook! Is that soup ready?

VAL May, Gog, unpack this infernal wagon and get it out of here – I'm sick of the sight of it!

Pandemonium follows. Maw and Gog try to unload the wagon. They get in more and more trouble, and the court's laughter becomes bigger and bigger as they try to complete their assignment. Val plays with his brothers. The scientific instruments return to the places in the hall, and they stay in sight.

KING Oh, my ribs ache – Maw, I beg you – Gog, stop immediately – you're too funny!

The court tries to sober up.

VAL As servants they leave something to be desired, but their antics made our journey lighter.

Maw and Gog look at each other, bewildered. Cook enters with a pot of soup. Val and the counselor are served, and Volumnia pulls off her husband's boots, as...

QUEEN There was supposed to be mutton, but – (*A rumble of thunder outside.*)

KING You got home just in time. (*Another rumble, louder than the first.*)

QUEEN Make sure the doors and shutters are fastened against the wind.

KING We're in for quite a storm –

The wind rises suddenly. A lightning flash, and a crash of sound. Objects scatter and blow through the room. The little boys hide under the table, Volumnia quakes, people rush about. The following lines are ad libbed as everyone runs around.

QUEEN - And the tower chambers, don't forget to cover the windows and...

KING - Not fit for man or beast, thank God you're home...

VAL - Couldn't bear to be away for one more night, so we made the last part in one day...

COUNSELOR - Get to put my head on my own pillow and sleep in my own bed at last...

Everyone talks at once, but not much can be heard. There is a huge crash of thunder, and rain beats down on the castle walls. In a temporary calm there is a banging on the castle's door.

Then the gale starts up again. Everyone looks at each other, afraid. The banging is heard again. All cringe, but finally the King squares his shoulders and marches to the door, the rest cower behind him, except for Val, who is staring into the fire, oblivious.

The king opens the door. Outside stands a girl, shivering, awash in water, water streaming from her hair. She is clinging to the door jamb for dear life, to prevent her being blown away. She opens her mouth and says something, one word, but no one can hear her at all. Then the wind gathers up all its force and blows her inside. The king closes the door and the noise level drops.

QUEEN Poor girl!

KING Look at her, like a drowned mouse!

COUKSELOR Hot tea!

QUEEN Hot soup!

KING (To the girl.) What were you doing on such a night? Where do you come from? Who are you?

VAL Give her a chance to get warm, Papa –

GIRL I'm... I'm...

Before she can get the words out, she spirals to the floor in a dead faint. Val picks her up.

PRINCELETS Is she dead?

VAL No, see? She's trembling with the cold. Poor girl, poor lost wanderer...

They wrap her, carry her to a chair by the fire. Volumnia rubs her hands and feet while the Queen brings out a little flask.

QUEEN If I can force a little of this down her – (She puts the flask to the girl's lips.)

VAL Will she be alright?

QUEEN See? The color's coming back into her cheeks. Distilled essence of Gilly-flower and dock leaves, with just a touch of flax for warmth. It's my own recipe, very effective...

KING I wonder who she is?

VAL Poor little thing, my heart... my heart goes out to her.

QUEEN Does it? We'll let her sleep tonight. Tomorrow she'll tell us... what we need to know. Meanwhile...

A roll of thunder. The lights dim. All the night long, the servants tiptoe in and out of the room, taking peeks at the girl as she lies sleeping in the chair. They whisper and they wait for morning. The lights fade to black.

Scene Four: The Awakening

The great hall, the next morning.

The hall looks a lot brighter – sun is out, and the place is filled with morning sounds. The queen is helping Volumnia wind some skeins of wool, and the king wanders throughout, studying scrolls and issuing orders to a scribe who follows at his heels. The Princelets rush in, shrieking, chased by their big brother. The ladies try to hush them. Val catches up and grabs each by his collar.

VAL Got you at last!

PRINCELETS Help! Torture! Let go, let go!

VAL Madame Mother, do these dreadful fiends belong to you? (*Her mind is elsewhere. She nods absently.*) They've been spoiled in my absence, sad to say. Guess what they've done?

QUEEN (*Distracted*) Yes, dear.

VAL They woke me up this morning –

QUEEN That's nice, dear.

VAL - By pouring cold water on my head –

QUEEN That's nice dear.

VAL I'll have to discipline them – someone in this house must! (*He gets them both in headlocks. They squeal.*)

QUEEN (*Looking up at last.*) What did you say? (*A beat. Val suddenly releases his brothers.*)

VAL Is she awake yet?

QUEEN Whom do you mean, dear?

VAL The... uh... that girl, that girl who blew into our house last night, is she awake? Is she alive?

QUEEN Alive, awake, and none the worse for wear. She had three bowls of porridge for breakfast. I like a girl with a healthy appetite.

The girl is standing in the doorway.

GIRL I could have eaten four, I was that hungry! *(They all turn in surprise.)*
May I come in?

The Queen takes her hand and leads her in. Val keeps his distance, hovering nervously. Now that she's dry, she's quite pretty. There isn't a lot that's ethereal about her, no coyness. She's rooted in the earth, the same way the Queen is. She has a ravishing smile. Although her gown was once fine, it has seen much wear and tear. There is a hole in the toe of her little shoe.

The Princelets hide shyly behind their father's skirts. Val quite simply adores her, but if he could hide, he would join his brothers.

KING Well, well, young lady, let me look at you... *(He inspects her. To the Queen.)* Much prettier than she looked last night. *(To the girl.)* Glad you're feeling fit. Now, if it's not too much to ask... your name?

THE GIRL Fidelia.

VAL *(Rapturously, to himself.)* Fidelia... Fidelia...

FIDELIA I'm the third daughter of King Tatabus.

VAL Fidelia...

KING King Tatabus, King Tatabus... I don't recall his name. Where-?

FIDELIA South, beyond the great mountains, that's where our kingdom lies. Wild marjoram grows on the hills there. It perfumes the air. Olives grow there, and the wine is red.

KING Never heard of the place. Never heard of King Tatabus.

FIDELIA My father's a scholar, as well as a king.

COUNSELOR Ah, a scholar! Of Greek? Latin? Arabic?

FIDELIA Astronomy. (*A new word to the inhabitants of this kingdom.*) Father studies the stars. That's what took us so far from home. He wanted to study the northern sky.

KING What a quaint idea –

VAL A lovely idea – for a trip, I mean.

KING Where is he then, this Tatabus?

FIDELIA As our caravan was crossing a mountain pass two days south of here, the earth suddenly grew sick –

COUNSELOR The earth 'sick'? What can she mean?

FIDELIA The ground began to tremble, the rocks started to dance, and all at once the earth heaved and collapsed! I clung for dear life to a little tree that grew out of a rock – the noise was fearful! When it stopped I opened my eyes and... the earth had split open! My father – the whole caravan – had disappeared down the crack –

QUEEN My poor orphan!

FIDELIA No, my father's safe, I'm sure. He's a resourceful sort of man.

QUEEN Yes, but –

FIDELIA He's safe. He fell through that crack in the earth. (*She picks up a ball of wool.*) He fell through to the other side. Father's in China, I expect.

KING Absurd! That is absurd!

FIDELIA But whether he'll even get home again, that's another matter. In China, the stars in the sky are different.

KING Absolutely absurd! Young lady, I don't wish to upset you, but the earth is built like this piece of parchment – (*He holds up a piece of parchment.*) – thicker, of course, with a crust of dirt and grass, but if your father –

FIDELIA - King Tatabus –

KING - Fell through that crack, he's floating down below here,
somewhere. He's gone for good.

FIDELIA *(Respectful, but firm.)* Your majesty, the earth's as round as a marble
– *(Dead silence. She holds up the wool ball and demonstrates.)* You're
here. My kingdom is here. China's here. *(She pokes through with
her finger.)* That's where father will come out, and he'll land on his
feet!

KING Young lady—

VAL --King Tatabus will get back home. I've been to China, so I know.

FIDELIA Oh. You're very kind, do you live here?

QUEEN My son, this is my son: Prince Valentinus Carolus Maximus.

COUNSELOR --The Fifth—

QUEEN Prince Val. And this is the Fourth, my husband and my king. *(The
King bows, but he's unnerved by her ideas.)* And under his robe, two
little imps who belong to us. Ori and Ari. They'll greet you in their
own good time. *(To her husband.)* My dear, I need to speak to you.

KING Well?

QUEEN About something.

KING Speak, then.

QUEEN Privately.

KING Well? Well?!

QUEEN Yes, that's it! About the well! *(She starts to pull him off.)* The well – aha, the master mason has finished the new well. He wants you to inspect the stonework –

KING New well? Now? *(By now they are off.)*

QUEEN Now. Immediately. *(A beat.)*

VOLUMNIA Husband?

COUNSELOR Wife?

VOLUMNIA I've got to talk to you.

COUNSELOR Nothing like a good talk!

VOLUMNIA Now.

COUNSELOR Good. Talk, old woman. I still have ears.

VOLUMNIA Not here.

COUNSELOR Why not? I just sat down –

VOLUMNIA Down... down! That's it! It's about those feathers – the eiderdown – *(She starts to pull him out.)* I need your advice about the eiderdown.

COUNSELOR Volumnia, I don't know a thing about feathers – what do you mean? *(They are off.)*

VOLUMNIA It's time you learned.

Most people have left the great hall, except for Rafe, Val, Fidelia and the Princelets. Rafe, desperate to please, tries to spin a plate. It crashes to the floor. No one takes any notice, so he crouches dejectedly by the fire. Silence. Then...

VAL Well. *(A beat. She nods expectantly.)* Yes indeed.

FIDELIA Oh, I agree completely!

VAL Do you?

FIDELIA Valentinus Carolus Maximus, I think you must be very shy. Tell me –

VAL - Anything! You have only to ask –

FIDELIA Well then: is there something in this room? A wild wolf pup, or lion cub?

VAL Two of them.

FIDELIA I hear them growling under the table. Are they dangerous?

VAL They've got a terrible weakness for apples. Apples make them tame. Look – *(He polishes an apple, places it on the floor near the table. She does the same.)* Now if we wait patiently... *(A pause.)* The weather's fine today.

FIDELIA Not a sign of rain. *(A small hand creeps out and grabs an apple.)*

VAL Not a sign of snow. *(The other apple disappears.)*

FIDELIA Snow? I've only heard about snow. I'd like to see that, some day.

Rafe picks up a stringed instrument, starts to play softly, a plaintive tune.

VAL Next winter – we'll have snow.

FIDELIA That's so far away. Heaven knows where I'll – *(She can't finish the thought, tries to overcome her sadness.)* Can you walk in it?

VAL What?

FIDELIA Snow. *(Giggles from under the table.)*

VAL Yes, and roll in it, and make snow angels, and slide down hills on it – you're sure you've never seen it? *(She shakes her head.)* Stay till next winter. Please? Mama and her ladies will make you fur boots.

FIDELIA Good, I've walked a hole in these, I've gone so far from home...
*(She starts to weep silently. One of the Princelets crawls out from his lair
and moves next to her. He leans against her.)*

VAL You've tamed one beast, Fidelia, without lifting a finger. You must
be a magician, or a witch. *(The other Princelets crawls out, sits on her
other side, patting her shoulder.)* You've tamed us all. But witches
can't cry. Look, little beasts, there are tears on the lady's lashes.
Like diamonds, only dearer.

Fidelia jumps up, moves away. Nervously she picks up the ball of wool and tosses it in the air.

FIDELIA No matter, no matter... *(One of the boys hands her a handkerchief.)*
Girls cry sometimes.

MIDDLE PRINCE So do boys.

FIDELIA It's only that I'm far from home. *(She holds out the ball of wool again.)*
You're here, my castle's over here...

*Suddenly she drops the ball, but still holds onto the loose end of the strand. Val picks up the ball.
What follows is an unconscious dance between them, which Rafe accompanies.*

VAL A round world – such a strange idea! But she's a strange girl,
brothers. You could travel from one edge of the earth to the other –
(He glances at the map of the flat earth.) – and never meet another like
her, nor one you'd like so well. *(He moves around her in a circle.)*
Fidelia, listen, the world has no more value than this ball of wool –
(He circles her again.) ...unless that which we treasure... *(And again,
a smaller circle.)* ...she whom we treasure... *(Unknowingly he has
wrapped the wool around her. They are very close now.)* ...is entwined in
our life, thus.

*At this opportune moment the King charges into the hall and the music stops. Val drops the ball
of wool.*

KING Has anyone seen my hourglass? You can't put anything down in
this castle without it walking away – What's this?

VAL We were only...

MIDDLE PRINCE ...we were playing! *(He picks up the ball of wool.)*

KING Yes, but what were you playing?

LITTLE PRINCE We were playing catch. *(He fields the ball.)*

KING Splendid. And you haven't seen my hourglass? *(They shake their heads. The King leaves, talking to himself as he goes.)* Everything in the place has legs! Where can it have gone?

The King is gone, but the mood is shattered. Fidelia disentangles herself, and prowls around the room.

FIDELIA Such a friendly room, this is, with such curious objects. Look at your mother's needlework! See? There's a little unicorn. I've seen a real one. I petted it. *(She picks up the little box with the golden needle, and opens it up absent-mindedly.)* I never learned to sew, my mother died when I was too young to hold a needle... such little things, aren't they? *(She casually threads the needle.)* Perhaps I could take a tiny stitch or two, without hurting anything? *(It dawns on Val that she has actually threaded the needle. Fidelia takes a few stitches.)* Oh, I'm not good at this! *(She puts the needle back in the box, and absently picks up the calipers.)* My father taught me other things: algebra, the names of the stars... *(She measures her waist.)* ...circumferences, areas, perimeters... *(She fits the calipers around her ankle-bone.)* ...all kinds of number-secrets that princesses in our kingdom must know...

VAL *(To himself.)* Princesses... she's a princess! *(He pulls the calipers off her ankle, and peers at it in disbelief.)*

FIDELIA But he didn't teach me to sew or weave. *(She picks up the little rack containing the flasks of perfume.)* As for domestic things, I'm as ignorant as these wild beasts, here. *(She smiles at the little boys, uncorks a flask, and sniffs at it.)* Oh dear, I'd better have your handkerchief again. *(She mops her eyes with it.)* White roses always make my eyes red. I'll cork it up again.

VAL *(He is beside himself with excitement. He opens his mouth to call the King, but his voice cracks.)* Papa... papa...

PRINCELETS
God bless you.
God bless you.
God bless you.

FIDELIA
It's a funny thing about red roses, they always make me sneeze. Once in our rose garden, I almost blew off my father's crown while we were standing next to a red rose tree.

VAL *(Finds his voice and bellows.)* Papa! Mama, get in here! Papa, hurry!

Fidelia opens the third flask. She takes a deep whiff, smiles, buries her nose in again. The King and Queen arrive, breathless.

FIDELIA
That's better. Yellow roses, roses the color of the morning sun. Their odor is the sweetest... here, you try it. *(She holds the flask out to Val. Other members of the court rush in.)* Isn't it lovely? *(She realizes they're all staring at her.)* Is something wrong? What have I done? *(Val takes the head rings and slowly approaches her.)* You're all acting so queer – what are you doing with those? *(Val raises the ring above her head.)*

VAL
I shan't hurt you, Fidelia, only hold still. *(He slips it onto her head.)* A perfect fit. *(The entire court sighs with relief.)* Papa, this is the one, this is my princess, this is it! Her.

QUEEN
My dear, I'd better explain what's going on. *(She takes Fidelia aside, whispering. The King looks skeptical.)*

VAL
Papa, she passed every last test!

KING
You're quite sure?

VAL
Ori? Ari? Tell him –

PRINCELETS
It's true, it's true!

KING Why am I still suspicious? She could turn out to be just another girl from the wrong side of the moat. How can I be sure?

QUEEN She passed with flying colors, fair and square. If you start raising obstacles now – My dear, it’s just not fair!

VAL *(To Fidelia.)* She told you? *(Fidelia nods.)* I knew it all the time, and best of all –

FIDELIA Yes?

VAL I didn’t care a fig if you were or weren’t royal.

KING One final test, to set my mind at ease? Consider, please –

QUEEN - But –

KING - She’s a nice enough girl, that’s clear, but a mistake would bring us all sixty-seven years of misfortune.

QUEEN Perhaps you’re right. How will you test her?

KING I hadn’t thought... that is, I thought... that you might invent a new examination, you’re clever, with such a rich imagination.

Val looks helplessly at Fidelia. The Queen stands deep in thought. Everyone waits.

QUEEN Let me see...

FIDELIA *(To Val.)* Don’t fret, it’s perfectly all right. Sometimes, Prince Val, our parents do know best. Besides, I’ll have these two rascalions to cheer me on. *(The two giggle, and come to her.)* But which is which? This is Ori and that’s Ari? Or have I got it backward? How do you tell? I vow, they’re as alike as two peas!

A bell goes off in the Queen’s head. She silently mouths the words ‘two peas.’ Her face lights up.

QUEEN That’s it! Eureka! Listen, I know what to do!

VAL What?

QUEEN That's a secret, especially from you.

She whispers in the King's ear. He nods. The lights begin to fade.

VAL Fidelia, if I should lose you now –

FIDELIA *(She puts her fingers against his lips.)* Hush, hush... Fate can't have brought me so far for no good reason, that I know. *(She grins at the little boys.)* Beside, I've got to stay and see the snow!

Lights fade out.