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Dramatic Publishing

The Princess and the Pea



Adapted by Travis Tyre
from the story by
Hans Christian Andersen

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Out of the glory days of Russia, in the time of the Czars,
came a prince, a princess and a pea.

The Princess and the Pea

Comedy. Adapted by Travis Tyre from the tale by Hans Christian Andersen.

Cast: 5 to 6m., 4 to 5w., 2 either gender; extras as desired. Blending fiction with historical fact, this moving adaptation is different from any other. The sweeping tale takes place in 1860s Imperial Russia, where czars were required by law to marry women of royal Russian blood. The consequence for not following the law was losing the throne. So after his father's death, Alexi is forced by his mother, Catherine, to choose from several young empresses, but he finds flaws with each one of them. Tensions rise when strong-willed Catherine brings a vain, explosive young lady named Masha to the palace. In an attempt to escape Catherine and Masha, Alexi encounters Anya, a peasant of the streets, who has traveled to the palace with one objective—to plead for her papa, Victor, who will soon lose everything at the hands of a ruthless aristocrat named Lestalnikov. In her dramatic confrontation with the young czar, Anya explains how his laws have stolen Russia from the people. To her dismay, he refuses to help, but two comic thugs, friends of Anya and Victor, have other ideas. After a series of hilarious machinations, Alexi experiences firsthand the jarring contrast between making laws and living by them. As he confronts his fears, he realizes what his country has become and learns a surprising secret about Anya, a young woman who understands Russia in a way he's never known. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: PL5.*

*Photo: Master Arts Theatre, Grand Rapids, Mich.,
featuring (l-r) Kellan Dunlap, JD Benison and Jay Vincent.
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The Princess and the Pea

By

TRAVIS TYRE

Based on the classic fairy tale by
Hans Christian Andersen



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For
Anna Golubkova

To my wife, Elizabeth, who shows me what a woman of
spirit and honor is every day of our lives.

The Princess and the Pea was originally commissioned by the Dallas Children's Theater in 1999. Its world premiere was directed by Robyn Flatt, artistic director of DCT with the following cast:

Victor.....	Douglass Burks
Anna.....	Amy Acker
Vasily.....	Andy Long
Yakov	Steve Jones
Boris/Lestelnikov	Dennis G. W. Millegan
Alexi.....	Jo Benincasa
Catherine.....	Rosemary Kolbo
Sophia	Tricia Brockett
Masha.....	Hope Rogers, Sarah Patterson
Olga.....	Emily Hertz, Randi Hiatt
Ensemble.....	Colin Ford, Edward Hambleton Elizabeth Houston, Ester Allen

BACKGROUND

The Princess and the Pea was written around 1835 by Hans Christian Andersen, a Danish storyteller who grew up in Copenhagen, Denmark (a port city). From an early age, he heard folk stories and fairy tales from every culture. No one knows exactly what inspired him to pen the story about a pea, but its correlation to Russian culture is remarkable. Seen through Russian eyes, every element of the story makes sense, and each event has a real and profound meaning. There was, in fact, a law that required czars to be married in order to rule and to wed only from royal Russian lineage (a “true princess”). Russian folktales themselves make repeated references to a deep sense of community—an important cultural philosophy manifested in the phrase: “peas in a pod.” Russians were communal—close knit, always together—long before Communism came to the country.

This acting edition provides the full-length stage adaptation for professional and amateur productions as well as numerous activities, theatre games and instructional materials to help young learners access information and ideas about the grand historical period and characters of the play.

Out of the Glory Days of Russia
In the time of the Czars
Came a Prince, a Princess
And a Pea.

The Princess and the Pea

CHARACTERS

The cast is intended for 6 m., 5w., with an ensemble of 4 (or more) additional players to perform the roles of street people, palace partiers and water dancers.

(In order of appearance.)

DASHA: A white bird (played as a rod puppet or dancer).

BORIS: A visiting dignitary, 40s.

ANYA: A waif, 17.

ALEXI: The czar of Imperial Russia, 19.

CATHERINE: Alexi's mother, the czarina, 50s.

MASHA: A visiting princess, 17.

OLGA: A palace maid, 20s.

YAKOV: A scoundrel (pronounced *yah kōfe*), 30s.

VASILY: A scoundrel (pronounced *vah see lee*), 20s.

VICTOR: A peddler, 60s.

LESTALNIKOV: A tax collector, 30s.

ENSEMBLE: Street people, palace partiers and water dancers.

Approximate running time: 90 minutes.

Production note: Dramaturgical information on the background of the play and character descriptions are located at the back of the book.

Touring note: The play can be performed with as few as nine (9) players. To do this, Boris and Lestalnikov are played by the same man, and Masha and Dasha are played by the same woman. Also, the players who are not onstage perform the duties of the ensemble.

SETTING

Late winter 1860.

The play takes place in and around the lush Winter Palace, situated along the Neva River in St. Petersburg, Russia, the major port and capital of Imperial Russia. The Winter Palace is the palatial home of the czars and their families. A thick forest surrounding the palace empties onto a slum in the poor district of Ostrovich.

The play is in two acts with one intermission.

Blackouts are minimal. Scenes should move smoothly from one to the other.

SCENES

Act I:

Prologue: The woods outside the Winter Palace. Early morning.

Scene 1: The Winter Palace. A moment later.

Scene 2: Ostrovich Street. Early afternoon.

Scene 3: Another part of Ostrovich street. A moment later.

Scene 4: The woods. Evening.

Scene 5: The Winter Palace. Same evening.

Scene 6: The palace garden. A moment later.

Act II:

Scene 1: Ostrovich Street. The next morning.

Scene 2: The Winter Palace. Evening.

Scene 3: The woods. Same evening.

Scene 4: The Winter Palace. Late evening.

Scene 5: The shipwreck. Anya's dream.

Scene 6: The Winter Palace. The next morning.

Scene 7: The palace garden. Wedding day.

The Princess and the Pea

ACT I

Prologue

(The woods outside the Winter Palace. Early morning. In darkness, the sounds of birds along a shoreline mix with joyous music. As the morning sun rises, DASHA flits fluidly through the space. A moment later, a menacing blackness sweeps in. The wind howls. DASHA, in dance, feels the storm. A shaft of light reveals BORIS, a plump, well-dressed dignitary. DASHA dances furiously as he speaks. Violent waves and rising voices crash around him.)

BORIS. So many years ago. I remember like it was yesterday. We sailed to St. Petersburg, me and my baby daughter, but on the Neva, the great river, a blizzard came upon us. It crashed down with might and fury. Wind blew strong, the snow fell hard and water splashed across the decks until it broke the ship in two.

(A loud crash of wood creaks then snaps. DASHA freezes in shock. Silence. Soft music begins.)

BORIS *(cont'd)*. When I woke up on the shore, all the faces around me said no one survived. I pleaded for someone ... anyone ... to take me to her. But my daughter was gone from me. Every year, I return to this spot. Because I know she is alive. I know in my heart she lives. I am again in St. Petersburg to look for her. I will find her. I will find my daughter ...

(The morning sun pierces through the trees. DASHA rises. An onion-domed church appears in the distance. ANYA

enters, playing and dancing with DASHA, her bird. Lights reveal ALEXI, the young czar of Russia, in the palace garden. He watches for a moment, entranced by ANYA. He calls out, surprising ANYA and DASHA. They exit.)

ALEXI. Wait!

(Lights cross fade into the main palace area. ALEXI runs inside from the garden.)

Scene 1

(The throne room of the Winter Palace. A moment later. A dining table, several chairs and perhaps a fireplace adorn the room. A main entrance opens into this interior room, another door leads to the palace hallways and French doors [or other elegant doorway] lead out to the palace garden.

CATHERINE, the czar's mother, paces in a terrible panic. ALEXI enters from the opposite side in search of his coat, boots and hat, which he hurriedly puts on.)

CATHERINE. Alexi!

ALEXI. Mother! What are you doing here?

CATHERINE. What are *you* doing here? You're supposed to be meeting with the Duma.

ALEXI. Not now. Where's my coat?

(ALEXI runs around looking.)

CATHERINE. We have to deal with this—*(Holding up a letter.)*

ALEXI. Can it wait? *(Rushing to get his coat and hat on.)*

CATHERINE. No, it cannot! We are in a crisis, Alexi. Things are moving very fast against you. Against us!

ALEXI. Hold this.

(ALEXI hands her the hat while he puts his coat on.)

CATHERINE. What are you planning to do about it?

ALEXI. About what?

CATHERINE *(handing him the letter)*. About this!

ALEXI. A piece of paper?

(ALEXI gets the hat on and runs to a mirror.)

CATHERINE. It's from the Duma! They insist that you obey the law. The czar must marry someone of royal Russian blood, a true princess, or give up the throne. You have three days, or they'll come right through those doors and take all this away.

ALEXI. They're bluffing.

CATHERINE. If you think that, you don't know them.

(ALEXI runs to the garden but trips when he sees ANYA in the audience. She leaves quickly.)

ALEXI. Hey! Come back! *(Returning inside, disappointed.)*

CATHERINE. What is out there?

ALEXI. Nothing now. What were you saying, Mother?

(ALEXI takes off the coat, boots and hat and puts them back.)

CATHERINE. We're in a desperate situation. You're about to lose your place as the czar of Imperial Russia, and I'm about to lose my mind!

ALEXI. Don't worry so much, Mother.

CATHERINE. They want to know what you will do.

ALEXI. I want them to leave me alone.

CATHERINE. I'm quite sure they will. After they strip you of your throne. *You* must marry. The law is clearly on their side.

ALEXI. It's an old law.

CATHERINE. It's tradition.

ALEXI. That's just another word for old! I won't be forced into anything.

CATHERINE. It is the way things have always been.

ALEXI. They want more power, and they're using old laws to get it.

CATHERINE. So what! You're not going to change their minds.

ALEXI. I'll change the law. And not just that one. Everything that's always been will be no more. I'll do something so big, so important, that they'll be forced to see things my way.

CATHERINE. What will you do?

ALEXI. I haven't worked that out yet.

CATHERINE. Alexi, you are young. You don't know how weak, how vulnerable, you are. They have control here. They will destroy you, if you let them.

ALEXI. I expect them to try to ruin my life, but do you have to help them?

CATHERINE. My son. I'm trying to save your life, our lives. *(Pause.)* That's why I've taken matters into my own hands.

ALEXI. Mother, what have you done?

CATHERINE. For the past month, you've seen every princess in Russia. And you've turned them all away.

ALEXI. Of course. They're boring, silly, desperate, needy and consumed by things! I want to talk about other things besides things!

CATHERINE. Alexi! You have drained us down to one last choice. She's coming here tonight.

ALEXI. But, you said there weren't any more.

CATHERINE. Well, there's one. She's Maria Yurievna Varushnya. She goes by Masha. And she'll be arriving just about ...

(Loud doorbell rings. More loud banging on the door.)

CATHERINE (*cont'd*). She's the one, Alexi. I know these *things*.

(*MASHA appears, bejeweled from head to toe. OLGA stumbles in, loaded down with luggage.*)

ALEXI. Does she have to knock so loud?

OLGA. And with my head!

(*MASHA is quite used to being waited on.*)

MASHA. Hurry up! Get the rest of my bags. Move, move, move!

OLGA. Yes, madam.

(*OLGA lets the bags tumble and goes to get more.*)

MASHA. Wait! My dresses are to be cleaned every day.

OLGA. Yes, madam.

(*OLGA frantically swats MASHA's dress with a feather duster.*)

MASHA. Not while I'm in them! (*Yelling at the top of her voice.*) Why am I not being greeted properly? Oh! If I have to walk another step, I'll faint dead away. Dead, I say. My father would not like me dead.

(*ALEXI is on the other side of the room.*)

ALEXI. Are you kidding, Mother!

CATHERINE. She's-the-one. Keep saying it. She's-the-ONE! (*Glides over to MASHA.*) Masha, dear. Welcome to St. Petersburg and our humble Winter Palace.

MASHA. Dearest Czarina ... (*To OLGA.*) Now this is more like it.

CATHERINE. How was your trip?

MASHA. Well, I made it. With no help from her.

CATHERINE. Olga, make our guest comfortable for the banquet tonight.

MASHA. You're very kind. *(To OLGA.)* I'm the guest of honor.

CATHERINE. We've ALL been waiting for you. Noblemen and dignitaries will be arriving soon.

(ALEXI exits unnoticed.)

MASHA. Yes. About the czar? Where is he?

CATHERINE. In a most anxious state. To meet you, of course.

MASHA. Why don't I see him?

CATHERINE. Oh, he's here. Please, sit. Make yourself comfortable. Alexi!

(MASHA passes up the suggested seat and sits on the throne.)

CATHERINE *(cont'd)*. Yes, dear. That'll be fine. *(Runs after ALEXI.)*

MASHA. When you see the czar, tell him I'm his last hope. The only one left.

OLGA. Yes, madam.

(MASHA gets up to inspect things. She wipes a long white glove along the table or mantle. It is as white as it was before.)

MASHA. Ew! This place is disgusting. I'll have to use the entire national treasury to fix all this. Now, take me to my room, little maggot.

(OLGA is loaded down as they exit. Lights come up in the audience as the scene changes to outside.)

Scene 2

(Ostrovich Street. Early afternoon. A slum in St. Petersburg. An ENSEMBLE of townspeople passes by on the street, some stopping to buy beets and cabbage from peddlers.)

Music plays as VASILY and YAKOV pretend to be peddlers and try myriad ways to pick pockets but get caught every time, receiving slaps and punches. After a moment, BORIS enters with a map in hand. He is lost.)

YAKOV. Look, Vasily!

VASILY. Don't say my name!

YAKOV. A tourist—

VASILY. Mmm. Let me do the talking. And don't say my name.

BORIS. Excuse me, young man. Do you know where I might find a street called Ostrovich?

(A street sign saying "Ostrovich Street" hangs nearby. Every time BORIS looks in the direction of it, YAKOV covers it with a broom.)

VASILY. Of course. It is not far.

BORIS. Good.

VASILY. Do not worry.

BORIS. Then please, show me the way.

VASILY. I am here to help, Mister ... your name?

BORIS. I am Boris.

VASILY. Come, Mister Boris. We sit. We talk. We find Ostrovich.

BORIS (*his feet ache*). I'm so glad to hear you say that! I've been walking all day and night, and there is not one chair to be found anywhere. It's impossible.

(VASILY knocks YAKOV to his hands and knees.)

VASILY. But it is possible. Presenting—a chair!

BORIS. That's not a chair.

VASILY. It *is*.

BORIS. Nonsense. It's a person. It looks like a person ...

(VASILY sits on YAKOV, who moans.)

BORIS *(cont'd)*. And it acts like a person.

VASILY. Yes, but a very important person. He's a chairperson.

BORIS. You are toying with me.

VASILY. Please, Mr. Boris. It is perfect for you. Sit.

(VASILY nudges YAKOV over to BORIS. YAKOV resists.)

BORIS. Excuse me. I must go.

VASILY. But. Please. Sit.

BORIS. I said good day!

VASILY. You want to get to Ostrovich, yes?

BORIS. Indeed I do.

VASILY. But you are tired.

BORIS. Indeed I am.

VASILY. So, sit. And rest *(Easing BORIS onto YAKOV.)* It is comfortable, yes?

BORIS. Ah. Aaah. Oh, yes. *(Getting comfortable.)* Quite comfortable.

(YAKOV groans. VASILY kicks him.)

VASILY. Don't worry about a thing. Take your time.

BORIS. Oh, you were so right. This is a most comfortable chair. *(Pats YAKOV.)* Please, join me.

(YAKOV moans. VASILY joins BORIS.)

VASILY. Is nice, eh? Please, let me take your shoes. *(BORIS lets him.)* Later, we discuss the fee.

BORIS. Fee? What fee?

VASILY. Three rubles.

BORIS. For what?

VASILY. For renting my chair.

BORIS. Are you serious?

VASILY. Are you sitting?

BORIS. Not any more! (*Jumping up.*) I am going to Ostrovich!

VASILY. But you don't know where it is—

BORIS. Get out of my way.

(VASILY tries to contain BORIS, managing to get his hands into BORIS' coat. He and the uncooperative BORIS go 'round and 'round. YAKOV scurries away.)

BORIS (*cont'd*). No one charges to sit on a person.

VASILY. Yes, they do!

BORIS. No, they don't!

VASILY (*panicking*). I said they do!

BORIS. That doesn't change a thing—!

VASILY. Sit on the chair! (*Pushes BORIS to sit.*)

BORIS. I don't want to!

(They scuffle. VASILY pulls the coat over BORIS' face and removes a long bag from his pocket. YAKOV scoops up BORIS' shoes, and VASILY and YAKOV run away.)

BORIS. Police! I've been assaulted! My shoes have been assaulted! Catch those thieves.

(BORIS pulls out a whistle and blows incessantly. He hobbles after VASILY and YAKOV. Lights fade.)

Scene 3

(Another part of Ostrovich Street. A moment later. Buildings are crammed tightly together along the upstage wall. The onion dome of a church is visible in the background. VICTOR, a peddler, strolls through the audience toward the

stage. He wears a coat and carries many objects: a small stool, a birdcage, a load of sticks, a knife, a small hammer and more birdcages. As he speaks, the cages twitter.)

VICTOR. Ah! We are fortunate today, yes?! I am alive another day to see the birds, the trees, the churches! I am Russian, and this is my Russia!

(DASHA enters, chirping loudly.)

VICTOR *(cont'd)*. Dasha? You're back? I sold you yesterday *(Listening to the chirps.)* Sorry. No food. I have nothing.

(VICTOR finds his spot and unloads his cargo. ANYA strolls in.)

ANYA. Papa! I have the greatest news!

VICTOR. Anya! Say good morning to Dasha!

ANYA. Dasha? Didn't you sell her yesterday?

VICTOR. I sell her every day!

ANYA. Papa, I did it—! I saw him!

VICTOR. Who did you see?

ANYA. The czar! He's so ... beautiful, Papa. Amazingly beautiful—

VICTOR. Beautiful, eh? So, how did you run into him?

ANYA. I was running *away* from him!

VICTOR. Because he's so beautiful?

ANYA. I didn't want him to see me.

VICTOR. Why not? You two should live in the Ural Mountains and be beautiful together.

ANYA. Papa—I'm serious.

VICTOR. So am I. How many birds did you bring?

ANYA. Oh, I forgot! I'll go back and get 20!

VICTOR. Bring as many as you can. We need every one.

ANYA. Is something wrong, Papa?