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Dramatic Publishing

Hans Christian Andersen's

The Princess and the Pea

Fairy tale adapted by
Paul A. Lavrakas



The Princess and the Pea

**AATE/Unpublished Play Reading Project
Award Winner**

Fairy tale. Adapted by Paul A. Lavrakas. From the story by Hans Christian Andersen. Cast: 3m., 2w., 1 either gender, or 6m., 6w. This is a theatrical version of the familiar and beloved tale, told with gentle humor. Princess Astrid finds she has been lured from her home by Gustav the Troll as a prospective bride for the bookish Prince Eric. Although this feisty princess has no interest in either marriage or princes, she spiritedly takes a series of tests to prove that she is “a real princess.” Despite the plotting of the oily courtier, Osric, Astrid and Eric are drawn to each other out of respect for the other’s stubborn individualism. However, before there may be a proper happy ending, Astrid must pass a final test. *Simple unit set. Fairy tale costumes. Approximate running time: 55 minutes. Code: PF7.*

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THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA

Fairy tale adapted by
PAUL A. LAVRAKAS

From the story by
HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN



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(THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA)

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THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA was written under a commission from the Birmingham Children's Theatre, Birmingham, Alabama, James W. Rye, Managing Director. It premiered there on January 11, 1989, directed by Deirdre Kelly Lavrakas, sound design by Kim Peter Kovac.

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THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PRINCE ERIC

PRINCESS ASTRID

KING OLAF THE MILD

QUEEN ULRIKA

GUSTAF, A TROLL

OSRIC, A COURTIER

RUNNING TIME: Approximately 55 Minutes

Unit Set

THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA

SCENE ONE

(The Main Hall of the Palace. Fireplace center rear. PRINCE ERIK is searching through trunks and other traveling gear. QUEEN ULRIKA silently watches him, occasionally writing in a notebook. KING OLAF enters. The QUEEN whispers in his ear.)

- KING: I don't believe it. You can't mean it. He can't really mean it.
- PRINCE: I mean just what I said. I don't want to get married.
- KING: But, Erik, I thought you wanted to get married more than anything in the world.
- PRINCE: I changed my mind.
- KING: He's changed his mind! Our son has returned from a journey- -a very expensive journey- -throughout the whole wide world searching for a princess to marry. . . .
- PRINCE: Princesses! I met dozens of princesses!
- KING: And you didn't find one you liked?
- PRINCE: Not one.
- KING: It was that friend of yours. He probably frightened the poor girls away. I mean, who takes a troll along when looking for a bride.
- PRINCE: It's lucky I took him. When I was starving in the Desert of Bones, he found us food. When we were cornered by bandits, he found an escape. He's the best friend I ever had. The only friend!

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- KING: Know what the problem is? You're worn out- -and hungry. Want a pear?
- PRINCE: No. . . (*KING tosses him a pear.*) . . . thank you.

(QUEEN rings a little bell, stands up, clears throat and reads from her notebook.)
- QUEEN: My heart is bursting, full of joy
To gaze upon my darling boy.
For three long years you've traveled wide;
We welcome you home with love and pride.
- KING: Your mother doesn't say much, but it's always worth hearing. Nonetheless! What do you plan to do now?
- PRINCE: Read. I didn't find a bride, but I did find the most wonderful books.
- KING: Read, read, read. Know what your problem is? None of these real live princesses were as good as the ones in your books.
- OSRIC THE COURTIER: (*Offstage*) Get a move on, Troll. (*Enters pushing before him GUSTAV THE TROLL who is carrying boxes of books.*) It grieves me that your most glorious majesties were forced to wait so long, but this nasty beast refused to hurry.
- TROLL: Touch me again, son of a flea bitten badger, and I'll gnaw your knees.
- OSRIC: This thing, this troll threatened me. Me, your majesties' most loyal servant. Have him whipped. Now!
- TROLL: Whip me, you pusillanimous, porridge-faced partridge? Try it and see what happens.
- OSRIC: Keep back, troll.

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TROLL: There's nothing tastier than a nice, soft human- -raw!
Which part do I nibble first? Ooooh, that looks yummy!

OSRIC: You're going to stop him- -aren't you?

PRINCE: Well, Osric, it **is** lunchtime.

(A furious chase as TROLL pursues OSRIC around the stage. OSRIC jumps to safety on top of trunks.)

KING: I say there, Troll, that's no way to behave.

TROLL: It's how trolls behave. Grrrrrrrrrrrr!

PRINCE: Gustav, stop playing. Please?

(TROLL snarls at OSRIC then helps PRINCE sort through his books.)

KING: Son? Some of these princesses must have been nice.

TROLL: No! They were terrible.

OSRIC: No one asked you.

TROLL: Grrrrrrrrrrrr!

QUEEN: *(Rings her bell.)*

The mourners will weep, the bells will toll
For the fool who tried to bully a troll.

(OSRIC exits in a huff.)

TROLL: Since he's gone, I'll settle for that pear.

KING: This troll thinks he owns us!

PRINCE: I'm going to look at my new books.

KING: But you have to tell us about these princesses!

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- PRINCE: Alright. As you know, I left home three years ago searching for a real princess to be my bride
- KING: Of course. A real princess: the daughter of a king and a queen.
- PRINCE: Yes. I mean, no. I mean- -I mean something different. Something about her that only I can see.
- TROLL: Exactly!
- KING: What something?
- PRINCE: When I meet her I'll know.
- TROLL: Exactly!
- PRINCE: Well, I visited many strange and distant lands. First, we journeyed to the Frosty Kingdom where the snow falls all through the year and icicles long as daggers hang from the men's beards. The king's palace is made of blocks of ice and the gates are guarded by huge white bears.
- KING: Brrrrrrrr!
- (TROLL takes objects from trunks and dresses up to mimic each princess the PRINCE describes.)*
- PRINCE: And then I saw her- -the Princess of the Frosty Kingdom! She was straight and tall as an ash tree and her golden hair fell to her feet. She glided toward me on jeweled skates. She was flawless.
- TROLL: *(In a cold, distant voice.)* How kind of you to come to gaze upon my perfect beauty. You are not perfect- - merely acceptable.

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- KING: (*To the QUEEN.*) Our son, not perfect!
- TROLL: If we marry, I will let you look upon my glorious face once a day. That will make you happy.
- PRINCE: Then she skated away. And I fled as fast as I could. Her heart was cold as ice.
- KING: You did the right thing, my boy.
- PRINCE: I thought a princess from a warmer climate would be the answer, so we set out for Aman-el-Oman, the land where the sun never sets and snow falls only in dreams.
- TROLL: Trolls are not warm weather creatures!
- PRINCE: Gustav, just play your role. There I met a princess with hair and eyes black as. . .
- TROLL: Licorice!
- PRINCE: . . . a starless night. She walked like a tigress on the hunt. She was enchanting.
- TROLL: (*As princess.*) My prince, you are as handsome as you are wise, strong as you are good. As your wife I would live only to make you happy.
- KING: This one I like.
- PRINCE: We took walks, played with her pet monkey and gazed at books with pictures that danced. And then. . .
- TROLL: You are so young and strong, not like that weak old fool my uncle the Emperor. Perhaps, one evening we could invite him for a walk along the Golden Cliffs, and then a small shove in the back and- -I will be queen and you my king!

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- PRINCE: She was beautiful. She was vicious.
- KING: They couldn't have all been heartless or cruel.
- PRINCE: The princess of Kalachistan was very sincere. . . remember her?
- TROLL: The one who thought taking a bath was bad for your health. Nice girl- -smelled like a troll.
- PRINCE: And so we traveled all the way to Cathay- -land of a million golden temples, magic misty valleys and more people than leaves in the forest. And- -ah!- -the princess Liu Ling who walked on teeny tiny feet without a sound. She was wondrous.
- KING: What was wrong with her?
- PRINCE: She walked without a sound. She poured tea without a sound. She never made any sound. Except one.
- (TROLL giggles. Again and again.)*
- Tell me, Liu Ling, what's your favorite food? *(Giggle.)*
Do you prefer dogs or cats? *(Giggle.)* She was sweet, she was gentle- -she was boring.
- KING: So your journey was a waste.
- PRINCE: Oh, no. I brought you presents. Here, father, from Cathay.
- KING: Wonderful. Most useful. What is it?
- PRINCE: Wind it up and it scratches your back.
- KING: It tickles!
- PRINCE: And mother, this is for you. From Mysterium, a book that talks. Gustav found it.

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(QUEEN opens books. Her face is illuminated from below.)

VOICE OF BOOK: I am yours.

PRINCE: The book will speak only to whoever opens it first.

KING: *(To QUEEN)* maybe it will tell you how to find him a wife.

PRINCE: There is no bride for me. I shall live alone. . . forever.

(PRINCE exits.)

KING: You haven't been eating right. Take a pineapple!
(TROLL grabs pineapple and exits.) The poor boy. To live alone. Without a companion. Without love.

QUEEN: *(Rings her bell.)*
When standing by pond or brook
We beckon fish with wriggling bait.
So let us now cast our hook,
Be still, hope hard- -and wait. *(Exits.)*

KING: Wait? If he doesn't marry he can never be king. It's the law. What then, eh! *(Exits after QUEEN.)*

(TROLL enters. Makes sure he's alone, then begins his song and dance. Melody from "Entrance to the Hall of the Mountain King" from Peer Gynt Suite.)

TROLL: Let the rain come pouring down
Pouring down, pouring down
Let the rain come pouring down
And make the thunder crash.

(TROLL looks up at the sky. Nothing happens.)

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Soak the ground in a mighty storm
Mighty storm, mighty storm
Soak the earth in a mighty storm
And see the lighting flash.

(This time thunder rolls, wind howls and rain pelts.)

This time the trolls will win!

(TROLL exits. Storm rages.)

SCENE TWO

(The Main Hall. Later, about midnight. The storm continues. Loud insistent knocking at the door. The KING enters.)

KING: Listen to the wind. And that thunder! Some poor soul is getting soaked. What if it's a bandit trying to trick us? I say, who's there? *(Louder knock.)* Alright, I'm hurrying.

(KING opens the door revealing PRINCESS ASTRID.)

PRINCESS: My name is Astrid and I am a real princess.

KING: What? Can't hear you.

PRINCESS: *(Shouts)* I am a real princess!

KING: Come inside before you wash away. *(She enters.)*
That's better. Now, you were saying?

PRINCESS: I am a real *(Begins to sneeze)*. . .a real. . . .a real . . .

KING: Princess?

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PRINCESS: Yes, that's it.

KING: That won't do you any good here. My son hates princesses.

PRINCESS: I am a princess. A very wet one, who's catching an awful cold.

KING: Stand by the fire, dear. Oh, I'm afraid it's out. Things never work quite right around here. My goodness, your retinue!

PRINCESS: My what?

KING: Retinue. Your ladies in waiting, pages, footmen, seamstresses, the men who carry the trunks filled with those warm clothes I'm sure you want. Can't leave them outside. They'll drown.

PRINCESS: I have no retinue.

KING: No retinue! ?

PRINCESS: As a matter of fact, I came alone.

KING: Where are your bags? Your clothes, your shoes, your jewels. . . .

PRINCESS: Only what I'm wearing.

KING: One small suitcase? *(She shakes her head.)* You are the strangest princess- -and I've heard of some very strange ones lately. Where are you from?

PRINCESS: Far away.

KING: That's helpful.

PRINCESS: I am a real princess.

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KING: You still need dry clothes. We have enough pale young people around here as it is. I'll see what I can find. Mustn't wake the servants or they get cranky. Odd girl. Pretty, but odd.

(KING exits.)

PRINCESS: *(Sneezes and shivers.)* Why did I come here? Why did I leave my warm home, where I could have hot chocolate and cinnamon toast anytime I wanted. Princess! I used to be a princess. Now, I'm a beggar. Why did I come here?

(TROLL enters, unseen by the PRINCESS.)

TROLL: The green frog hops into the golden well. *(The PRINCESS gasps and recoils.)* The green frog hops into the golden well.

PRINCESS: The monkey rings the silver bell. **You're the one! ?**

TROLL: Not so fast. Show me the coin.

(The PRINCESS wears half a coin on a ribbon around her neck. The TROLL matches it to half a coin he has.)

The pieces fit! You are the princess I have waited for.

PRINCESS: You're my guide? ! When my old nursemaid told me to make this journey and gave me that coin and taught me the code, I didn't think I was looking for a troll!

TROLL: Why not? She's a troll. It was our plan to get you here. Old Nanny Troll! If she was here, I'd kiss her right on her big crooked nose.

PRINCESS: I journeyed all by myself to this foreign land because I was supposed to find adventure. But, all that's happened is I've caught pneumonia. Where is my adventure, you wicked troll?