

THE STORY OF THE SADDEST PRINCESS

Based on a Play by Ana Ripka

Characters: The King, The Fool, The Counselor, The Teacher, The Princess, The Marshal, The Emperor, The Queen, The Comber Woman, The Bearded Man

ACT 1 SCENE 1

SFX BELLS RINGING

1 King: Today, a daughter, a princess, an heiress to
2 my Kingdom is born. I command my courtiers
3 and counselors to search the land for the
4 best teacher for my daughter. Remember!
5 Seek not the ordinary, for only the best
6 teacher can instruct my daughter as to what
7 is truly important: The precise knowledge of
8 what is bad and what is good in this world.
9 History tells us how the threat of darkness
10 is constant. We must be ever vigilant if our
11 Kingdom is to be protected from that which is
12 bad. And so the princess must learn, above
13 all else, the difference between --

14 Fool: Bad and good! Bad and good! Bad and good!

15 King: Yes, thank you, Fool! With my pronouncement
16 complete, this assembly is adjourned.
17 Counselor, call the guards to the palace
18 court so that I might observe their training!

19 Counselor: Yes, your majesty!

MUSIC TRANSITION

ACT 1 SCENE 2

20 King: I have not counted the days since I ordered a
21 search for my daughter's teacher, but I know
22 they are many. Counselor, have you anything
23 to report?

24 Counselor: Your majesty, the kingdom has been searched
25 high and low for the wisest teachers to
26 fulfill your wishes. Three candidates have
27 been brought for your consideration.

28 King: Call them here, quickly!

29 Counselor: Yes, your majesty! (claps his hands) Summon
30 the teachers to the throne room!

MUSIC FANFARE FOLLOWED BY FOOTSTEPS

31 Teachers: (3 simultaneous greetings) Your majesty!

32 King: I have but one question for you. How may my
33 child be educated in order to tell - with
34 certainty and without delay - bad from good?
35 (pause) Speak quickly!

36 1ST: Your majesty, I think that good can be
37 distinguished from bad only after serious and
38 careful reflection. To discern whether a
39 thing is a good thing or a bad thing can take
40 a lifetime of contemplation.

41 2ND: I think, your majesty that good and bad
42 derive from the movement of the stars above
43 us. They decide the destiny of our world and
44 it's luck or ill luck. Watch the stars and
45 all knowledge is yours.

46 (3RD Teacher begins laughing)

47 King: Something amuses you?

48 3RD: Oh, forgive me, your majesty, but upon
49 hearing the silly chatter of these fellows, I
50 could not help myself. What use stars and
51 lengthy reflections, gentlemen? His majesty
52 desires the Princess to recognize bad from
53 good at a mere glance, with her own eyes.

54 King: That is right, teacher. You understand
55 correctly.

56 3RD: And it can be done, you majesty. Allow me to
57 explain. Bad is different from good as the
58 color black is different from white. I can
59 teach pupils to recognize good and bad in
60 such a way that when their lessons are
61 complete, they will see the whole of the
62 world, and the good and bad in it,
63 represented by only these two colors: White
64 or black.

65 King: Hmm ... Simple and clever. How long will
66 this take?

67 3RD: Ten years, your majesty.

68 King: It is decided. From this day forward, you
69 shall be my child's teacher.

70 3RD: I am honored, majesty.

71 King: But bear this in mind: The princess' studies
72 take precedent above all else. She must not
73 be distracted or weakened by vanity or
74 gaiety. Therefore I command that she live
75 without gew-gaws or lace, no useless little
76 toys, baby songs or silly poems, and without
77 face powder, lipstick or mirror. And as of
78 tomorrow, she shall see no one but you.
79 Remember: Good and bad. Black and white.
80 That shall be the entirety of her learning
81 for ten years.

82 3RD: I understand, your majesty. Your suggestions
83 will help perfect my method. I shall return
84 first thing in the morning to collect the
85 princess. (Exits)

86 Fool: (low) Naught but black and white for ten
87 years? (normal) Your majesty, please, allow
88 me to visit with your delicate child before
89 the morrow. You know how fond of her I am.

90 King: As am I, fool! I will cover her with a
91 blanket this evening and tell her "good night"
92 for the last time. It is a terrible sacrifice
93 I make for the future of this kingdom.

94 Fool: Please, your majesty. Ten years. I will
95 miss her terribly.

96 King: Quiet Fool! Counselor, take a message to my
97 soldiers in the East to be ready for my
98 inspection. I leave tomorrow!

99 Counselor: Yes, your majesty!

MUSIC TRANSITION

ACT 1 SCENE 3

100 Fool: (sighs) Here I am. Alone again. Everyone off
101 learning to use the newest armor and the even
102 newer weapons. Everyone, except the teacher, of
103 course. He will come through that door in a
104 moment, the door that leads to the tower rooms,
105 the door that is always locked and guarded. But
106 I wait here because perhaps today, when that
107 door opens, I will again catch glimpse of the
108 princess! Like the three other days I've
109 managed such a glimpse over the long years since
110 she was taken through that door. Oh, how I
111 wished to call out to her ... but I dared not
112 for fear of the King's wrath.

SFX DOOR OPENS

113 Fool: I see the teacher! And! ... and ... (sigh)

SFX DOOR CLOSES

114 Fool: If only I could wander the countryside and
115 make merry with the people ... a dance, a
116 bawdy song to earn my meals, that is what I
117 should do. But I cannot leave the palace.
118 (sighs) Oh, why on Earth should a king need a
119 fool?

SFX FOOTSTEPS APPROACH

120 Teacher: Because they are fashionable nowadays, Fool.

121 Fool: As perhaps teachers are not?

122 Teacher: We shall see. My task -- ten years in the
123 making -- nears its end.

124 Fool: The Princess' learning is complete?

125 Teacher: Indeed. And, if I may say so, she is
126 perfectly trained.

SFX KING AND ENTOURAGE RETURN

127 Teacher: Ah! I hear the King's return. The time of my
128 reward is at hand. Step aside. Out of my way!

SFX FOOTSTEPS OFF

129 Fool: (low) I fear not a child made, but a wind-up
130 toy, or marionette.

131 Teacher: (Hurrying) Your majesty! Please wait! I
132 have news.

133 King: Speak quickly, teacher!

134 Teacher: As the Princess turns ten on the morrow; it
135 is time to introduce her to the royal court.

136 King: Fine. But bring her early. I leave to review
137 my Western army by midday.

MUSIC TRANSITION

ACT 1 SCENE 4

138 Teacher: Behold, your majesty, the personification of
139 wisdom! Flesh and blood from your flesh and
140 blood, education from my education!

(Fool approaches running)

141 Fool: (breathing hard) Oh, it's so good to see you
142 Princess! And ... and do you see, in your
143 honor I wear my most colorful suit.

144 King: Take care, fool, do not frighten her!

145 Teacher: Oh, no, do not worry! The princess is not
146 easily frightened.

147 King: So I see. That is good. But can she
148 distinguish bad and good when she looks
149 about?

150 Teacher: Exactly as promised, your majesty. The
151 princess sees bad as black and good as white.
152 She sees no other color.

153 Fool: No colors? Then I wear my suit in vain.

154 King: Cease your chattering, Fool, we are
155 discussing more important matters! Teacher,
156 we must test her.

157 Teacher: Of course, your majesty, the Princess is
158 ready.

159 King: My child, look about the hall as you have
160 been taught and tell me if in this royal
161 court you see bad men.

BEAT

162 King: Well, Princess, what did you see?

163 Princess: There is one.

164 King: I knew it! A venomous snake, a traitor who
165 will betray us to our enemies! Point him out
166 at once!

167 Princess: I cannot.

168 King: Unacceptable! Teacher, something is wrong.
169 Perhaps she is not fully trained?

170 Teacher: No, your majesty, I dare say she is my most
171 brilliant pupil. During the last ten years
172 she saw no one but me. I think she is
173 embarrassed under the eyes of so many.
174 Surely there is another test?

175 King: Perhaps ... Yes, I shall entrust to her a
176 sentinel's post in my glorious army. Once a
177 day, an hour before the sun sets, she will
178 climb the tower, look about, and discover
179 what menaces the peace of our kingdom.

180 Fool: May I accompany her? Please, please, please!

181 King: As long as you are out of my way, fool, and
182 do not distract my daughter from her duties,
183 do what you wish.

MUSIC TRANSITION

ACT 1 SCENE 5

184 Fool: (breathing hard, winded) Wait for me,
185 princess! Oh, how quickly she moves ... why
186 she's already atop the tower, looking through
187 a field glass. (tops stairs) My, how sprightly
188 you are! Why, I could hardly keep up. But
189 please keep that to yourself. Nobody must
190 know the fool has grown old! (laughs alone and
191 stops embarrassed). Do you ever laugh?

192 Princess: Laughing is a waste of time.

193 Fool: A waste of time ...?

194 Princess: And your chattering wastes my time. What are
195 you doing? Why did you cover the field glass
196 with your palm? I must view the kingdom.

197 Fool: Do you really see?

198 Princess: Of course, I see very well.

199 Fool: I mean is it true? Everything you see is
200 either white or black?

201 Princess: Of course. Why do you bother me with such
202 questions?

203 Princess: What are you doing? How dare you pinch my arm?!

204 Fool: Oh ... I'm sorry! I just wanted to make sure
205 you were still flesh and blood, that the
206 teacher had not tricked us, taking a real
207 live girl and giving back something else.

208 Princess: There are others who are not flesh and blood?

209 Fool: Yes. The tin ones; they talk and sing and
210 move, wound by a key. And the wood ones that
211 dance and frolic at the end of a string.

BEAT

212 Fool: Tell me something about yourself.

213 Princess: Idle talk is a waste of time.

214 Fool: (finishing with her) Waste of time. Yes.
215 Well, what do you consider not to be a waste
216 of time?

217 Princess: Distinguishing the bad from the good.

218 Fool: Only that? (sad) You are not the child my
219 mind's eye missed for so long ... stupid,
220 stupid fool! (He cries.)

221 Princess: What are those drops on your cheeks?

222 Fool: Tears. Have you never cried?

223 Princess: Once when I was very little ... but crying is
224 a waste of time. All that distracts one from
225 the white and the black is a waste of time.

226 Fool: That is so sad. (pause) Oh, look, the sun has
227 set. Your duties are done for today,
228 princess. Come, let us return to the palace.

229 Princess: Wait! Fool, the (unclear on the word) tears
230 ... when the white light touched them as it
231 set behind the mountains, I noticed something
232 ... for just a moment ... something different
233 than white or black.

234 Fool: That is good. I will collect my tears in a
235 little bottle for you. Let them be a tool
236 for you to learn by.

MUSIC TRANSITION

**If you are interested in reading more or staging this
script contact: anaripka_cluj@yahoo.com**