

~~ers change clothes and ready themselves for the next story as needed. When they are almost ready, MR. FITZPATRICK enters above, carrying his book as always, and addresses HEIDI, who is nearly dressed to play a part in the next story.]~~

MR. FITZPATRICK:  
Heidi, will you marry me?

HEIDI:  
No, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

[MR. FITZPATRICK slowly sits, opens his book, and reads.]

MR. FITZPATRICK:  
Once upon a time there was a princess who wouldn't laugh.

~~[Three ROYAL DANCING COUPLES come forward. The PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH threads her way through them, writing in her journal with a feather pen. She is followed by her doting father, the FATHER OF THE PRINCESS, carrying her chair.]~~

## THE PRINCESS WHO WOULDN'T LAUGH: PART ONE

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:  
Darling Journal, today my idiot father held a ball in my honor. It was so stupid.

[She sits. The ROYAL DANCING COUPLES chant gleefully and dance madly.]

ROYAL DANCING COUPLES:

*You gotta kick, open, side to side!*

*You gotta kick, open, side to side!*

*You gotta turn round, touch the ground,  
Side to side!*

*[They continue to dance under the following.]*

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:

Princess, won't you have something to eat?

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH [*glumly*]:

There are people starving in the world.

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:

Well . . . won't you dance with us a little?

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:

There are people who are lame.

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:

Won't you smile at least?

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:

The world is terrible.

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:

Oh princess, the world is perfectly delightful!

*[The ROYAL DANCING COUPLES stop dancing and jump into their  
partners' arms. They are maddeningly cheerful.]*

ROYAL DANCING COUPLES:

It's perfectly delightful!

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:

Won't you give a little smile?

ROYAL DANCING COUPLES:

It's just delightful!

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH [*writing in her journal*]:

So I told them:

[*She addresses the ROYAL DANCING COUPLES.*]

I wouldn't smile for all the gold in the mountains, I wouldn't laugh for all the treasure in the sea. Not if you fastened every star in the sky into the hems of all my gowns. Not if the muses themselves came to sing to me, nor if the philosophers and poets of the world were to write for me. You can take the charm of the ocean and the plains and the meadows in springtime, and you can take the sound of the larks and the sparrows and the scent of the grass and shove it all in a box. This kingdom will blacken and crumble and everything in it will wither and die and everyone here and their children and their children's children and their children's children's dogs and cats and goldfish and fuzzy little rabbits will be cold and buried and rotten and decomposing with maggots crawling out of their eyes before I consent to laugh, because I know what the world is really like.

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:

Oh,

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS AND ROYAL DANCING COUPLES:  
You don't mean that!

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH [*writing in her journal*]:  
Everybody said. So then my stupid father goes

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:  
I know!

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH AND HER FATHER:  
Let's have a contest!

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:  
Whoever can make my daughter laugh, or even smile, she may wed.

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:  
Whatever. Like I am so totally, totally sure. So I go: Agreed.

[*The ROYAL DANCING COUPLES disperse. The three men become the SUITORS, preening on the side; the three ladies become three LADIES-IN-WAITING.*]

But if a suitor tries to make me laugh and doesn't succeed, we cut off his head.

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:  
Well, sounds fair enough to me!

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:  
So now they're coming, like I can hardly wait.

[*She closes her journal.* FIRST LADY-IN-WAITING, standing up on the stairs, announces SUITOR NUMBER ONE.]

FIRST LADY-IN-WAITING:

Suitor Number One: Sir Andrew.

[SUITOR NUMBER ONE enters. This section of the play is improvised, and the performers may do whatever they want. The following descriptions are only suggestions. The LADY-IN-WAITING should use each of the performers' real names in her introductions.]

SUITOR NUMBER ONE [*entering and blowing a big kiss to the PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH*]:  
Good evening! Great to be here!

[SUITOR NUMBER ONE enthusiastically, but very awkwardly, tells some jokes along the lines of "Why was six afraid of seven? Because seven eight nine." The FATHER OF THE PRINCESS does his best to laugh generously at everything, but the PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH is immovable. When she has heard enough, she interrupts.]

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:

Thank you, thanks a lot. Thanks for coming in.

[*The two other LADIES-IN-WAITING pull SUITOR NUMBER ONE off to the side. The FIRST LADY-IN-WAITING places a cone painted like the sky over his head. One of the other LADIES-IN-WAITING drops a red ball on the ground. Blindly, SUITOR NUMBER ONE gropes around for the red ball, catches it, and goes off to sit, beheaded, on the ground.*]

FIRST LADY-IN-WAITING:

Suitor Number Two: Herr Schmidt.

SUITOR NUMBER TWO *[coming forward]*:  
Greetings from your future husband!

*[He pretends to trip and falls on the floor. He jumps up and dusts himself off and points to the floor.]*

King, you ought to get that fixed!

*[The FATHER OF THE PRINCESS plays along, laughing genially. SUITOR NUMBER TWO now introduces himself and improvises a series of self-narrated "interpretive dances" with titles made up every night, including, perhaps, "Walking Through the Garden of Whispers" or "Too Many People Standing in a Row." All of them are atrocious. The FATHER OF THE PRINCESS is puzzled.]*

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:  
Uh huh, thanks. Bye-bye now.

*[SUITOR NUMBER TWO meets the same fate as his predecessor.]*

FIRST LADY-IN-WAITING:  
Suitor Number Five Hundred Sixty-Eight: Señor Dave.

*[SUITOR NUMBER FIVE HUNDRED SIXTY-EIGHT introduces himself and does his best to amuse the PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH by doing various ill-advised imitations of animals—a lizard, a chicken, and so on. The FATHER OF THE PRINCESS finds him absolutely hilarious.]*

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:  
Great. We'll be in touch.

*[SUITOR NUMBER FIVE HUNDRED SIXTY-EIGHT meets the same fate as the others.]*

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:

Next.

FATHER OF THE PRINCESS:

Darling, I'm afraid we've run out.

*[Music. Transition. The family disperses. MR. FITZPATRICK enters and goes toward the floorboards where the CHILD is buried. The PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH enters writing in her journal.]*

### THE PRINCESS WHO WOULDN'T LAUGH: CONCLUSION

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:

Darling Journal,

MR. FITZPATRICK *[knocking on the floorboards]*:

Heidi?

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:

I was thinking today about those horrible girls I used to hang out with. How rotten they were. How rotten the whole world is.

MR. FITZPATRICK:

Heidi?

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:

I doubt that I shall ever laugh again.

*[HEIDI emerges from the floorboards, still wearing her CHILD costume.]*

HEIDI:

Mr. Fitzpatrick—

MR. FITZPATRICK:

Why won't you marry me?

*[The PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH notices them.]*

PRINCESS WHO WON'T LAUGH:

Marry you? *[She begins to giggle.]* Marry you?

*[She is overcome by uncontrollable, wild laughter.]*

Why would anyone ever marry you?

*[She runs up the stairs shrieking with laughter.]*

Darling Journal, I saw the funniest thing today!

*[She exits. HEIDI and MR. FITZPATRICK look at each other. HEIDI exits and MR. FITZPATRICK sits center, in a chair by a lamp, holding his book. The THIRD BLIND QUEEN enters with her surviving SON, now grown. The FIRST BLIND QUEEN enters above. The SECOND BLIND QUEEN sits by the wardrobe below. The AMBASSADOR enters.]*