

Princess Stew
by
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From his short story Princess Stew

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Characters

Innkeeper: dressed in peasant clothes and apron

Innkeeper's wife: dressed in peasant dress and apron

Princess: dressed in splendid traveling clothes.

Servant 1: dressed in traveling coat and hat.

Servant 2: dressed identical to Servant 1

Servant 3: dressed identical to Servant 1 and 2

Maid-in-Waiting: dressed in traveling cloak

Staging

Time: Old England, a time when princesses traveled to and from their castles in carriages. Noon

Scene: Inside a country inn. Stage center is the dining area. A long table and bench stand downstage. Stage right is entrance. Stage left is the kitchen area. A stove with a small pot on top stands against wall. A larger pot, a small kettle, and a larger kettle hang above stove. A small cutting table with a cutting knife on it stands next to stove. A shelf on the wall holds a salt shaker, carrots, potatoes, and a ceramic bowl. A pewter goblet and wooden spoon are also needed.

SCENE ONE:

At rise: INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE bustle about the dining area of their inn. They sweep and clean. They set the long table with a single goblet and wooden spoon.

INNKEEPER

The princess is coming! We'll soon be rich!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

The princess is coming! We'll soon be famous!

INNKEEPER

The princess could have picked any other inn on the highway for her noonday meal.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

But she's chosen to eat at our fine tavern. Oh, we'll soon be wealthy.

INNKEEPER

Soon we'll be the most renowned cooks in the kingdom. Everyone from far and wide will want to eat at our inn.

(Trumpets sound off stage. INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE freeze and exchange smiles.)

INNKEEPER

(straightening apron)

The princess is here! What riches we'll have!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(tidying hair)

Royalties here! What celebrities we'll soon be!

(SERVANT 1, SERVANT 2, and SERVANT 3 enter stage right. They look around room, remove hats, and bow to INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

SERVANT 1

Greetings innkeeper! Madam!

SERVANT 2

Good day, innkeeper! Madam!

SERVANT 3

A gracious hello, innkeeper! Madam! We are the princess's attendants...

SERVANT 1
Her helpers...

SERVANT 2
Her assistants. And the princess is very grateful...

SERVANT 3
Thankful...

SERVANT 1
Most appreciate of this invitation to your inn...

SERVANT 2
Tavern...

SERVANT 3
Eating establishment. The princess is very hungry...

SERVANT 1
Starving...

SERVANT 2
Famished after traveling...

SERVANT 3
Being on the road...

SERVANT 1
Riding this morning between her castles.

(PRINCESS enters stage right followed
by MAID-IN-WAITING. INNKEEPER bows and
INNKEEPER'S WIFE curtsies.)

INNKEEPER
(bowing)
Welcome Your Grace. What an honor it is to have you at our
humble inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
(gesturing toward table)
My Lady, right this way. Please have a seat over here, My
Lady.

(PRINCESS nods and sits at table.
SERVANT 1, SERVANT 2, SERVANT 3, and
MAID-IN-WAITING stand behind her.)

INNKEEPER
We've prepared a special stew especially for you, Your Grace.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
My Lady, It's a one-of a kind meal. Made from the freshest
ingredients in your kingdom, My Lady.

INNKEEPER

We'll bring you your meal at once, Your Grace.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

My Lady, we're sure you'll enjoy it. We're sure you'll say it's first-rate, My Lady.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE hurry to kitchen area and stand at stove. INNKEEPER takes bowl from shelf and holds it while INNKEEPER'S WIFE ladles in stew from the small pot.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Ah, what a delicate and refined princess she appears to be.

INNKEEPER

And no doubt, like all real princesses, she has delicate and refined taste buds.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

One kind word from this real princess about our stew and people will come from all across the kingdom to taste this special fare.

(INNKEEPER carries bowl toward table. INNKEEPER'S WIFE follows.)

INNKEEPER

And that will make us rich below belief!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

And that will make us the most famous cooks in the land!

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE stop on either side of PRINCESS. INNKEEPER places bowl before her.)

INNKEEPER

There you have it, Your Grace.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

A rich savory stew, made with our choicest stock and vegetables.

(PRINCESS tucks napkin under chin and picks up spoon. INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE exchange nods. PRINCESS dips spoon into stew bowl, raises it to lips but hesitates.)

PRINCESS

(to INNKEEPER AND INNKEEPER'S WIFE)

But... what about my servants? What are they to eat?

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE
exchange more looks.)

INNKEEPER

(to princess)

Please understand, Your Grace. We are a poor couple. And this is a modest inn. Our cupboards are almost bare.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

My Lady, it would be a great hardship on us to feed everyone here, My Lady.

INNKEEPER

Times are hard, Your Grace. Times are tough.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

My Lady, we were fortunate to find enough food to feed our one special guest.

PRINCESS

(nods slightly)

Very well.

(PRINCESS sips stew and licks lips.
INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE lean
farther in to hear what she might say.)

PRINCESS

Hmmm. I see. Hmmm.

(PRINCESS sip the stew again.)

PRINCESS

Hmmmmmm. Well, well, well...

(PRINCESS whispers to SERVANT 1 who
whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to
SERVANT 3 who whispers to MAID-IN-
WAITING.)

INNKEEPER

(to MAID-IN-WAITING)

What did Her Grace say? What's her view about our stew?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Did she like it? Did she say it was delicious? Delightful? Delectable?

MAID-IN-WAITING

The princess said... the stew... needs salt.

SERVANT 3

More salt.

SERVANT 2
Additional salt.

SERVANT 1
Not enough salt.

INNKEEPER
(picking up stew bowl)
Salt, Your Grace?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
Yes, my Lady, more salt. Right away, My Lady.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE whisk off to stove. INNKEEPER'S WIFE takes salt shaker from shelf.)

INNKEEPER
(holding up bowl)
And a pinch of salt is all that's needed to make us rich.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
(salts stew)
A dash of seasoning to make us stars.

INNKEEPER
Imagine that fancy ladything wanting us to feed all her servants.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
Why ruin the reputation of our first-class inn by serving the servers.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE return to table. INNKEEPER places bowl before PRINCESS.)

INNKEEPER
There you have it, Your Grace. Your stew, freshly salted.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
My Lady, stew flavored to your liking, My Lady.

(PRINCESS nods. She dips spoon into bowl and sips stew. She makes a face and puckers lips. She whispers to SERVANT 1 who whispers to SERVANT 2, who whispers to SERVANT 3, who whispers to MAID-IN-WAITING.)

INNKEEPER
(to MAID-IN-WAITING)
Yes? Yes? Give us the word?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Did she say the stew was scrumptious? Savory? Sensational?

MAID-IN-WAITING

The princess said... that your stew...

INNKEEPER AND INNKEEPER'S WIFE TOGETHER

Yes? What did she say?

MAID-IN-WAITING

She said your stew is *too salty*.

SERVANT 3

(shaking head)

Too much salt.

SERVANT 2

An overdose of salt.

SERVANT 1

You over did it with the salt.

INNKEEPER

(picking up stew bowl)

No problem, Your Grace.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

My Lady, we'll fix it right away, My Lady.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE return to stove.)

INNKEEPER

So now what do we do to the stew?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Adding salt was easy. But removing salt is impossible.

(The couple pause to think. Finally INNKEEPER'S WIFE grabs carrots and potatoes from shelf and sets them on the chopping table

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

There's only thing we can do. We must add more vegetables and broth to our stew.

INNKEEPER

(picks up knife)

Yes! Yes! Adding more carrots and potatoes will dilute the saltiness.

(INNKEEPER swiftly chops vegetables, while INNKEEPER'S WIFE replaces small pot on stove with the large pot and dumps.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
 (dumping stew from bowl and smaller pot into large pot)
 Why not, a bigger pot? A royal endorsement means a lot.

INNKEEPER
 (still chopping)
 Chop! Chop! Chop! And what's a few more veggies to bring us fame.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
 (pours broth into pot)
 More stew to the stew to make us a fortune.

(INNKEEPER dumps a handful of vegetables into the large pot and INNKEEPER'S WIFE stirs with ladle. INNKEEPER holds bowl while INNKEEPER'S WIFE ladle in the new stew. They hustle back to the table. INNKEEPER places bowl before PRINCESS.)

INNKEEPER
 There you are, Your Grace. Less salt. Better for you.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
 My Lady, stew just the way you like it, My Lady.

(PRINCESS dips spoon into bowl and takes sip. She nods and whispers to SERVANT 1 who whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to MAID-IN-WAITING.)

INNKEEPER
 (to MAID-IN-WAITING)
 Yes? Yes?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
 Did she say it is fabulous? Fantastic? Flavorsome?

MAID-IN-WAITING
 Her grace says the stew is much better. But... a bit more salt would make it perfect.

SERVANT 3
 A dash more salt.

SERVANT 2

A touch of salt.

SERVANT 1

Just a sprinkle of salt will do it.

INNKEEPER

(picking up stew bowl)

If it's salt that's needed, Your Grace. More salt we'll add.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Anything to please my lady, My Lady.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE rush to stove.)

INNKEEPER

Add just a touch. We're almost there I can feel it.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(sprinkles salt in bowl with fingers)

There. Now I'm sure it's to her taste. Isn't it amazing how the princess can detect the slightest shift in seasoning.

INNKEEPER

No one can doubt the taste of a princess.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(laughing)

Or the tastebuds.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE return to table. INNKEEPER places bowl before PRINCESS. PRINCESS takes another sip.)

PRINCESS

(making sour face)

Oh my! Oh, dear! What have you done?

(PRINCESS fans mouth with hand and drinks from goblet. She whispers to SERVANT 1 who whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to MAID-IN-WAITING.)

INNKEEPER

(to MAID-IN-WAITING)

What is it? What happened?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Good gracious! Is it too good? Too yummy? Too tasty?

MAID-IN-WAITING

The princess says the stew is now *far* too salty.

SERVANT 3
 (shaking head)
 Much too salty.

SERVANT 2
 Much, much too salty.

SERVANT 1
 Way too much salt.

INNKEEPER
 (lifting bowl)
 Our fault, Your Grace.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
 My Lady, we'll take care of it, My Lady.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE rush to
 stove.)

INNKEEPER
 (chops up more vegetables)
 Chop! Chop! Chop! The Princess and her fickle taste buds are
 driving me batty.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
 (replacing large pot on stove
 with the small kettle)
 But adding more veggies to our stew will take away the
 saltiness. We'll call it Princess Stew. That's what we'll
 do.

INNKEEPER
 (dumping vegetables into small kettle.)
 Our new menu will say *Princess Stew recommended by the
 princess.*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
 We'll hang a sign out front that reads *Eat here, by royal
 approval.*

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE return
 to table with stew bowl.)

INNKEEPER
 (placing bowl before princess)
 There now, Your Grace. All taken care of.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
 My Lady, what do you say about our Princess Stew now, My
 Lady?

(PRINCESS sips stew. She nods and
 takes another taste.)

PRINCESS

Hmm! Hmm! Well, well. But...

(PRINCESS whispers to SERVANT 1 who whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to MAID-IN-WAITING.)

INNKEEPER

(to MAID-IN-WAITING)

What now? What did she say this time?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Is the stew mouth-watering? Is the stew lip-smacking? Is the stew taste-bud tickling?

MAID-IN-WAITING

The princess said almost. But it needs... more salt

SERVANT 3

More salt.

SERVANT 2

Additional salt.

(SERVANT 1 is about to speak but INNKEEPER removes bowl before he does.)

INNKEEPER

(stomping toward stove)

I know. I know.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(following husband.)

No trouble, My Lady. We'll get it right this time, My Lady.

INNKEEPER

(holding up bowl before stove)

I'd like to dump this stew over her ladyship's royal head.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(adding salt to bowl grain by grain)

One grain... two... three... four... five... six... seven... eight... nine... ten grains of salt. That's all!

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE return to table. INNKEEPER places bowl before PRINCESS. PRINCESS tastes stew and frowns. She drops spoon and whispers something angrily to SERVANT 1 who whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to MAID-IN-WAITING.)

MAID-IN-WAITING
Too salty

SERVANT 3
Too too salty.

SERVANT 2
Too too too salty.

SERVANT 1
Toooooo salty.

INNKEEPER
(picking up bowl)
Whatever.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
My Lady, most impressive taste buds, My Lady.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE return to stove. INNKEEPER'S WIFE replaces small kettle with large kettle.)

INNKEEPER
(chopping more vegetables)
Chop! Chop! Chop! Who knew the princess's taste buds could be *this* sensitive.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
(dumping stew into large kettle)
Fussy! That's what this hoity-toity royal is. Just plain fussy.

INNKEEPER
(dumping vegetables into kettle)
All the more important to get the ingredients right. We can't forget that just one kind word from that prissy princess about our Princess Stew and everyone will flock to our inn to try it.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE
(drearily ladling stew into bowl)
And we'll rich and famous.

INNKEEPER
(drearily)
Famous and rich.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE return to table and place bowl before PRINCESS.)

INNKEEPER
There, Your Grace. I'm sure we got the recipe right this time.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

My Lady, not too many vegetables and not too much salt, My Lady?

(PRINCESS sips stew. She nods and takes another taste and another. She nods and sets down spoon. INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE shake hands. They lean forward to hear PRINCESS's words.)

PRINCESS

Innkeeper...

INNKEEPER

Yes? Yes?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(impatiently)

Say anything, My Lady.

PRINCESS

Innkeeper and Madam, I believe there's now enough stew in your pot to feed my servants. Would you bring them each a bowl.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE look stunned. SERVANT 1, SERVANT 2, SERVANT 3, and MAID-IN-WAITING sit at table.)

INNKEEPER

Your Grace?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

But My Lady...

(PRINCESS whispers something to SERVANT 1 who whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to MAID-IN-WAITING)

MAID-IN-WAITING

And the princess says she'd like to eat in private.

SERVANT 3

Without an audience.

SERVANT 2

Without eavesdropper.

SERVANT 1

And she'd like you to hurry for we're all very hungry.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S make long sigh together.)

INNKEEPER

Coming right up, Your Grace.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Right away, My lady.

(PRINCESS smiles and raises goblet to servants. INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE trudge to stove, shrugging. Lights fade.)

End of play