The Lady or the Tiger?

a drama in one act by
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adapted from the short story by
Frank Stockton

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STORY OF PLAY

A long time ago in a mythical kingdom, a king, known for his cruel nature, finds out that his daughter, the princess, is in love with a common courtier. After much thought he devises a sinister punishment for the young man, as well as for his own daughter. The young man is to be brought to a public arena and forced to choose between two doors. Behind one door is life and marriage to a lady who is a sworn enemy of the princess. Behind the other door is certain death from a ferocious tiger. The princess finds out what is behind each door and plans on signaling the young man. Which will she choose for him? The answer is not as clear as you may think.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

2m, 2w, 9 or more flexible

PRINCESS: Daughter of the king.

YOUNG MAN: In love with the princess.

LADY: An enemy of the princess.

KING: A tyrannical king of a mythical kingdom.

COURTIERS 1-5

HERALDS 1 and 2

GUARDS 1 and 2

EXTRAS: As the royal court.

SETTING

The Lady or the Tiger? is set in a mythical kingdom in the distant past. The play may be performed on a bare stage with a downstage bench and an upstage throne. Two doors mounted to movable flats may be used in the final scene, or the doors may be indicated as being offstage left and right. Although told with humor, the king is an evil man and his court and guards should always be in fear of him.

THE LADY OR THE TIGER?

(AT RISE: The PRINCESS and the YOUNG MAN are seated on the bench.)

PRINCESS: When I'm with you all of the cares and fears of the world simply vanish. I feel such peace and joy.

YOUNG MAN: I've never known anyone so beautiful. *(Kneels in front of HER.)* I have grown to believe that you are the love of my life, Princess. I don't believe I could live my life without you.

PRINCESS: *(Hesitates.)* I ... I ... don't know what to say.

YOUNG MAN: Say you love me.

PRINCESS: Oh, I love you all right. It's just ... well ...

(The LADY enters upstage right, folds her arms across her chest and watches the TWO in disgust.)

YOUNG MAN: You're a princess. The daughter of the king. And I'm a courtier. Is that what you're trying to say? *(PRINCESS slowly nods yes.)* My father was a soldier. A hero in the king's army. Surely your father would take notice of that. Surely he would approve of me.

PRINCESS: He would approve of you all right. If he knew you. And as long as you stayed away from me.

YOUNG MAN: But how could I stay away from you?

PRINCESS: *(Stands and crosses downstage.)* I'm afraid if we are to continue seeing each other it must be in secret.

YOUNG MAN: NO! We must declare our love openly!

PRINCESS: That's not a good idea.

YOUNG MAN: Because you seek your father's approval?

PRINCESS: That's part of it. He's not only the king, with absolute power over everyone in kingdom, but ... not to put down my father ... well ... he's not all that good when it comes to patience and understanding. As his only daughter, I am the apple of his eye. He's made it clear that I'm only to have the very best. And that includes a husband of the best background and position.

YOUNG MAN: And what of my background and position? I have education and social skills. I'm articulate and charming, and I'm very clever.
PRINCESS: You are very clever. I was first attracted to your cleverness.
YOUNG MAN: And I have good table manners. I know which fork to use for a salad and which spoon to use for soup. I can order from a menu in four different languages, and *(Excited and proud.)* I can eat slugs without gagging!
PRINCESS: *(Appalled.)* Slugs?
YOUNG MAN: You know, snails with garlic.
PRINCESS: They are called escargot. Not slugs.
YOUNG MAN: Slugs. Snails. Escargot. Same thing.
PRINCESS: But if you think of them as slugs you WILL gag. *(Holds HER stomach.)* And so will I.
YOUNG MAN: What can I do to impress the king?
PRINCESS: I fear there is nothing you can do.
YOUNG MAN: Then what will become of us?
PRINCESS: *(Embraces HIM.)* I don't know. But I DO know that you are the love of my life. I cannot lose you!

(LADY approaches. PRINCESS and YOUNG MAN quickly back away from each other.)

LADY: *(Slyly.)* So, here you are, Princess. With a young man ... and no chaperone. How did you manage to get away from the palace?
PRINCESS: *(Nervously.)* Oh, I just felt like taking a walk. Lovely day, isn't it?
LADY: Depends on how you look at it.
YOUNG MAN: I should be running along.
LADY: Yes. I'm sure they'll miss you wherever it is you work.
YOUNG MAN: *(Defensively.)* I work for the king!
LADY: Don't we all?
YOUNG MAN: I happen to be a translator in the royal library!

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