

Princess Stew

by  
Douglas Evans

From his short story Princess Stew  
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## Characters

Innkeeper: about 40 dressed in peasant clothes and apron

Innkeeper's wife: about 40 dressed in peasant dress and apron

Princess: about 20 dressed in splendid traveling clothes.

Servant 1: dressed in traveling coat, leggings, and hat.

Servant 2: dressed identical to Servant 1

Servant 3: dressed identical to Servant 1 and 2

Maid-in-Waiting: about 20 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 large kettle on top stands against wall. A shelf holds a salt shaker, carrots, and onions.

SCENE ONE:

At rise: INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE are bustling about the dining area, sweeping and dusting. They set the table with a single goblet, napkin, and 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 chosen any other inn on the highway for her noonday meal.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

But she's chosen ours. Oh, we'll soon be wealthy.

INNKEEPER

Soon we'll be renowned throughout the kingdom.

(Horns trumpet off stage. INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE freeze and smile at each other.)

INNKEEPER

(straightening apron)

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

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(tidying hair)

She's here! She's here! What celebrities we'll be.

(SERVANT 1, SERVANT 2, and SERVANT 3 enter stage right. They look around the room, remove hats, and bow toward the 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 servants. 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  
What an honor it is to have you at our humble inn, Your  
Highness.

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'll bring you your meal at once, Your Highness.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE  
My Lady, we prepared a special stew especially for you, My  
Lady.

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

INNKEEPER holds out a bowl, while  
INNKEEPER'S WIFE ladles stew into it  
from the kettle.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE  
(still ladling)

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  
(still ladling)  
One kind word from her about our stew and people will come  
from across the kingdom to taste this special fare.

INNKEEPER  
(carrying bowl toward table)  
And that will make us rich!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE  
(following him)  
And that will make us famous!

INNKEEPER  
(placing bowl of stew before  
PRINCESS)  
There you have it, Your Highness.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE  
A rich savory stew, made with the finest vegetables in our  
countryside.

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

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

INNKEEPER  
Please understand, Your Highness. We are a poor couple.  
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.

PRINCESS  
(nods slightly)

Very well.

(PRINCESS sips stew. She licks lips and turns to whisper something to SERVANT 1 who whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to the MAID-IN-WAITING.)

INNKEEPER  
(to MAID-IN-WAITING)

What did Her Highness 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 Highness?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE  
My Lady, right away, My Lady.

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

INNKEEPER  
(holding up bowl)  
A pinch of salt to make us rich.

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

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

INNKEEPER

There you have it, Your Highness. Your stew, freshly salted.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

My Lady, stew just to your liking, My Lady.

(PRINCESS nods. She dips spoon into bowl, takes another sip, and puckers lips. She turns and whispers something to SERVANT 1. SERVANT 1 whispers to SERVANT 2, who whispers to SERVANT 3, who whispers to the 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...the stew...was *too* salty.

SERVANT 3

(shaking head)

Too much salt.

SERVANT 2

An overdose of salt.

SERVANT 1

You over did it with the salt, sir.

INNKEEPER

(picking up stew bowl)

No problem. Please accept out apologize, Your Highness.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

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

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE whisk off to stove with stew bowl. INNKEEPER dumps stew into kettle.)

INNKEEPER

(shrugging)

So now what? Adding salt was easy. But removing salt from the stew is impossible.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(taking carrots and potatoes off shelf)

There's only thing we can do.

Add more vegetables to the kettle. Adding more carrots and potatoes will dilute the saltiness.

INNKEEPER  
(quickly chopping up  
vegetables)

Yes! Yes! Chop! Chop! Chop! We'll add more stew to the stew to make us famous.

(INNKEEPER'S WIFE adds carrots and potatoes to kettle. INNKEEPER hold up bowl)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE  
(ladling stew into bowl)

Some more veggies to make us rich.

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

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

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

(PRINCESS dips spoon into bowl and takes another sip. She nods and turns to whisper something to SERVANT 1 who whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to the 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, sir.

INNKEEPER

(picking up stew)

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

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

And as soon as the stew pleases you, My Lady, we'll name it Princess Stew, that's what we'll do, 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 in salt 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 and INNKEEPER'S WIFE return to table. INNKEEPER places bowl before PRINCESS. PRINCESS dips spoon into bowl and takes another sip.)

PRINCESS

(making sour face)

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

(PRINCESS reaches for goblet and takes a drink. Fanning her mouth with a hand, she whispers something to SERVANT who whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to the 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

Much, much, *much* too salty.

INNKEEPER

(lifting bowl)

No problem, Your Highness.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

My Lady, we'll take care of it, My Lady.

(INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE shuffle off to stove. INNKEEPER dumps stew into kettle)

INNKEEPER

(quickly chops up more carrots and potatoes)

Chop! Chop! Chop! The Princess and her fickle taste buds are driving me batty.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(adding vegetables to kettle)

But a few more veggies is all it will take to take away the saltiness. Just think how famous our Princess Stew will make us.

INNKEEPER

And *rich!* Don't forget *rich!*

(INNKEEPER holds bowl, while INNKEEPER'S WIFE ladles stew into it. INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE trudge back to table.)

INNKEEPER

(placing bowl before princess)

There now, Your Highness. All taken care of.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

My Lady, what do you have to say about our Princess Stew now, My Lady?

(PRINCESS dips spoon into bowl and takes another sip. She nods and takes another taste.)

PRINCESS

Hmm! Hmm! But...

(PRINCESS turns to whisper something to SERVANT 1 who whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to the 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 starts to speak, but INNKEEPER picks up bowl before he does.)

INNKEEPER

(stomping off to stove)

I know. I know.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(stepping after husband.)

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

INNKEEPER

(holding up bowl)

I'd like to dump this stew over that woman's royal head.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(adding salt 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 slowly return to table. INNKEEPER places bowl before PRINCESS. PRINCESS dips spoon into bowl and takes another sip. She drops spoon and spins around to whisper something angrily to SERVANT 1. SERVANT 1 whispers to SERVANT 2 who whispers to SERVANT 3 who whispers to the MAID-IN-WAITING.)

MAID-IN-WAITING

(shrugging)

Too salty



(PRINCESS dips spoon into bowl and takes another sip. She nods and takes another taste and another. She nods and sets down spoon. INNKEEPER and INNKEEPER'S WIFE exchange grins and shake hands. They lean forward to hear what PRINCESS has to say.)

PRINCESS

Innkeeper...

INNKEEPER

Yes? Yes?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

(exasperated)

Say anything, My Lady.

PRINCESS

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

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

INNKEEPER

Whatever you say, Your Highness.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

But My Lady...

(Turns and sees SERVANT 1, SERVANT 2, SERVANT 3, and MAID-IN-WAITING frowning at her.)

Right away, My lady.

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