

Scene 1 3

Not far from the dais, on a platform, stands "PRINCESS No. 12" dressed in standard princess attire including a small crown. Beside her is the WIZARD, the QUEEN'S confidante who, at the moment, is functioning as a sort of medieval master of ceremonies. KNIGHTS and LADIES form an attentive audience for what appears to be a formal interrogation. Prominent among them is a particularly beautiful girl, the LADY LARKEN, who seems inordinately interested in the proceedings)

MINSTREL: As a matter of fact, the day I arrived at court, they were testing Princess Number 12. A curious quiz was in progress.

WIZARD: Are you ready for the next question? *(He reads from a sheet of parchment. There is a hint of the modern tv quizmaster in his manner)*

PRINCESS: I guess so.

WIZARD: The next question concerns famous rulers. Are you quite ready?

PRINCESS: Uh-huh.

WIZARD: Well, then: name three kings. Is that clear?

PRINCESS: Yes. *(Thinks a moment)* Would you repeat the question, please?

WIZARD: Certainly. Name three kings.

PRINCESS: May I take the third king first? *(WIZARD nods "Yes")* Well, then. Three kings are . . . *(She thinks)*

MINSTREL *(To Lady Rowena)*: Is this a trial?

LADY ROWENA: No, it's the royalty test to find out if she's a real princess.

PRINCESS: King John, King Arthur, and . . . *(She thinks some more)*

MINSTREL: Does it matter if she's a true princess?

LADY MERRILL: Oh yes. If she's a true princess, we can all get married.

PRINCESS: King Ethelred.

WIZARD: That is absolutely correct! *(The KNIGHTS and LADIES applaud)*

DAUNTLESS *(In great excitement to the QUEEN as the applause dies)*: She's smart, Mama. She's the best one yet. Can I marry her now, huh? Can I, Mama?

QUEEN: No, sweetheart. *(Saccharine)* There's still one more question. *(Snaps fingers)*

LADY LUCILLE *(Sotto voce)*: This test isn't going to be fair.

LADY MERRILL: It's the law that isn't fair.

MINSTREL: Law?

LADY LUCILLE: The Marriage Law:

'Throughout the land no one may wed
Till Dauntless to the altar's led.'

(The QUEEN has picked out one of the questions. She gives it to the WIZARD who returns to the PRINCESS)

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QUEEN: What?

WIZARD: That one? You jest.

HARRY: On mine honor as a Knight, I swear she is! I have her papers right here. *(Takes out scroll and reads)* "Winnifred, Princess of Icolmkill, Guardian of the Midgard Serpent and Warden of the Ragnorok Marsh Lily. The inscription on her family crest reads: 'Tu ne cede malis sed contra audentior ito.'

QUEEN: What does that mean?

HARRY *(Thinking)*: Uh . . . roughly, it means "If at first you don't succeed—"

QUEEN *(Waving it away)*: Never mind. *(HARRY exits DOWN RIGHT)*

DAUNTLESS: You see, she is a Princess.

LADIES *(Ad lib excitedly)*: "She looks like a princess." "I know she's a princess." "She must be a princess." "At least a test, Your Majesty."

DAUNTLESS: At least a test! Mama, for me. Please!

QUEEN: All right, we'll test her. The Wizard and I will put on our thinking-caps . . . *(WIZARD crosses to QUEEN)* . . . and make up a nice fair test just as we always do and I'll prove to you that this girl cannot possibly be a princess. *(She takes WIZARD DOWN LEFT)*

1ST KNIGHT *(OFFSTAGE)*: Get her by the leg!

2ND KNIGHT *(OFFSTAGE)*: This is her leg!

QUEEN: We'll test her for . . .

WINNIFRED *(OFFSTAGE)*: That's not my leg!

QUEEN: How crude! We'll test her for sensitivity! *(To the COURTIERs)* She'll have her test *(All bow)* and she'll fail just like all the others . . . fair and square. *(QUEEN sweeps off DOWN LEFT with WIZARD)*

WINNIFRED *(Who has been pulled out of the moat)*: Fail what?

LADY ROWENA: The royalty test.

DAUNTLESS *(Coming forward, still shy)*: Every princess suing for my hand must pass a test to prove she's a real princess.

WINNIFRED: What kind of test?

DAUNTLESS: It's always highly secret.

WINNIFRED: Well, we'll worry about that later. Right now, I'd better get out of these wet clothes.

DAUNTLESS: May I show you part of the castle on the way to your room? *(He offers his arm)*

WINNIFRED: Sure. *(She takes it, and they start to cross RIGHT)*

DAUNTLESS: You're awfully nice. *(LADIES and KNIGHTS start exiting DOWN RIGHT, WINNIFRED and DAUNTLESS bringing up the rear)*

WINNIFRED: You're nicer.

DAUNTLESS: And you're good-looking, too.

WINNIFRED: You're better looking. And nicer, too. *(All others have exited by now)*

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LARKEN: But, the Queen has ordered me . . .

WINNIFRED: Never mind what the Queen has ordered. (WINNIFRED *helps* DAUNTLESS *slide chair into place*) Just sit here.

LARKEN: But, Your Highness . . .

WINNIFRED: Oh, sit down. Now then, what's this all about?

LARKEN: I'll just go out on the parapet and stand there naked and catch a chill and die and that'll show him.

DAUNTLESS: Show him what?

LARKEN: He'll be sorry . . .

DAUNTLESS: Who?

LARKEN: Horrible Harry . . .

DAUNTLESS: You mean big, nice Harry?

WINNIFRED: Just a minute. (*Carefully*) What did you do to him? (LARKEN *very slowly comes back to life. She turns to WINNIFRED*)

LARKEN: What did I do to *him*?

WINNIFRED: Well, you must have done something. You're talking the way I did once when I was afraid to go home because I'd given my little brother a bloody lip. (DAUNTLESS *pulls away from her. She speaks to DAUNTLESS with an airy wave of the hand*) It was an accident. (*He is reassured*)

LARKEN (*Evasively*): We had a little disagreement.

WINNIFRED: So you decided to run away?

LARKEN (*Defending herself*): He said some perfectly horrible things to me.

WINNIFRED: Oh . . . I see. Well, in that case, I guess you were right. I guess about the only thing you can do is . . . pack up and . . . get out. Unless, of course . . . you just go to him and say you're sorry. Listen, that Harry is a wonderful boy . . . and he really loves you. Why, we were on the road for two weeks and he never laid a finger on me.

LARKEN: Oh, Your Highness!

WINNIFRED: Now, you just get into something pretty that shows you're a girl and patch things up with him. Oh, and Larken — try and act a little helpless — men don't like girls that are too strong.

DAUNTLESS: I do!

LARKEN: Dear, dear Princess, I don't know how to thank you! If . . . if it's a girl, I'm going to name her Fred! (*Exits*)

DAUNTLESS: What if it's a boy?

WINNIFRED: Dauntless, you'd better go to bed. And leave the history book.

DAUNTLESS: I'm positive you're going to pass Mama's test tomorrow. (*No reaction*) Well, I'm pretty sure . . . If you don't . . . I'll understand. (*He leans down, kisses her and goes out up*)

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- DAUNTLESS: She's going to get cold sleeping on that bare table. I'd better take her up to her room.
- QUEEN: Dauntless, wait . . .
- DAUNTLESS: What should I wait for, Mama?
- QUEEN: To give this matter proper consideration . . .
- DAUNTLESS: She passed the test — and I have to take her up to our room.
- QUEEN: I said wait!! Now you listen to your Mother. Throughout this *heartbreaking* business of trying to find a true princess, I have never nagged, never interfered, and never expected one solitary word of sympathy.
- DAUNTLESS (*Sotto*): Shh, Mama. She's asleep.
- QUEEN: But I will not stand by and watch you throw yourself away on this little nobody.
- DAUNTLESS: Mama, quiet!
- QUEEN: I mean look at her: she may have passed the test, but I must say I've never trusted anyone who had those shifty eyes or that mean little mouth or . . .
- DAUNTLESS (*Shouts*): I told you to SHUT UP!! (*The QUEEN is struck dumb — literally dumb. Her mouth hangs open but no words come out. The JESTER jumps up on a table*)
- JESTER: It happened . . . it happened: The Prophecy! "The mouse devoured the hawk . . ."
- HARRY (*Watching, fascinated, as QUEEN helplessly flaps her jaw trying to talk*): Look . . . look . . . the Queen can't talk! (*Now the KING begins working his mouth as well as the QUEEN*)
- KING: I . . . I . . . I . . .
- JESTER (*Excitedly, to KING*): What?
- KING (*Beaming*): I can!
- JESTER (*Throwing his cap in the air*): The King talks!
- KING (*To QUEEN*): And I've got a lot to say . . .
- DAUNTLESS: Well, good night. (*The QUEEN grabs his arm as he starts for WINNIFRED*)
- KING (*Pushing QUEEN away*): Unhand the boy! (*To DAUNTLESS*) Go ahead. (*DAUNTLESS goes to WINNIFRED*) Now you asked for it, Aggravain, and you got it. From now on when I say hop, I want you to hop. Hop! (*She hops*) Skip! (*She skips*) Jump! (*She jumps and exits DOWN LEFT, hopping, skipping and jumping*) Hop! Skip! Jump! (*The KING follows her out, giving orders and the WIZARD rushes out after him. The center banquet table revolves, revealing the bed. During the finale, the JESTER climbs the ladder, lifts the top mattress, and from under it removes: the MINSTREL's lute, SIR HARRY's helmet, his own be-ribboned staff, a*