

He walks to court head down, putting him eye to eye with the jester, a dwarf. "I'm supposed to be the jolly one," quips the dwarf. "Have you heard the one about the commoner's daughter?" and he tells it.

The knight smiles beneath somber eyes.

"Well, it's not my best stuff, but you don't have to sneer!" says the dwarf, giving him a terrific kick in the knee.

The knight hobbles off, smiling.

He nods at a lady-in-waiting who he's loved, shyly, from afar. Thrilled at his sudden smile, she speaks up. "Oh, Knight, I've admired you for your gentle ways. Not like some of these jokers at court."

The knight tries to look earnest; narrows his eyes, wrinkles his forehead, giving him a truly wicked look. "How dare you leer at me like that! Sir, I've been deceived about you!" She slaps him with her fan, flounces off.

Face smarting, he limps to his appointment with the king.

"We must speak of grave matters," says the king, "so be serious."

The knight smiles.

"Wipe that smile off your face this instant!" commands the king. "I'm not doing it, your Majesty, it just happens!" "Why, the man is quite mad," fumes the king. "You're hereby banished!"

The knight goes off, wanders from kingdom to kingdom; always alone, tears streaming down his smiling face.

A PRINCESS

A princess is bored with handsome, but shallow men. I'll marry the man who moves me with his words, she announces.

Suitors are ushered into her chamber, one by one.

The first is an engineer. You're pretty, he says. Very very pretty. Is that all? she asks. Your

superstructure is truly amazing. He pulls out a diagram. Sort of like this bridge I'm building. Go build a kite, says the princess.

Next comes a farmer. Your breasts are melons, your thighs like stalks of corn, he proclaims. Rather poetic, she says, do go on. He scratches his chin. We'll sprout children like beans, live like two peas in a pod. I'm coming down with a bellyache, says the princess. Kindly take your sprouts and scam!

An astronomer appears, studying his notes. Your eyes are stars, your breasts are full moons, he reads. Trite, she says, but continue. Meteors! Constellations! Galaxies! he blurts, so excited he floats off the ground. How uplifting! How cosmic! How boring! says the princess, and he floats out the door, crestfallen.

Next comes a psychiatrist. You're a fascinating maze, says he. I've come to liberate your id. Next case, says the princess.

They keep coming, and talking, talking. Till they sound like bees or the humming of birds' wings.

One day a millionaire arrives with bundles of clinking coins. She grabs his arm, and they're off. It seems she's developed an ear for music

THE JESTER

The jester is gaunt with great, sad eyes. Give me a break, he says to a king, I'm really amusing. The king prods a lady-in-waiting, and jeers. A face like that will keep you unemployed, he says, and the court titters.

The jester moves from kingdom to kingdom, his face growing longer, his wife beginning to nag.

He comes to the court of a good-natured king. I'm a jester, he says, let me do my act. The king nods, and summons the court. The jester does his waltzing chicken routine, surely a foot stomper! But, he looks so mournful quacking, waving his skinny arms, that the entire court begins to weep. Then, the jester begins to weep.

The king blinks. What an idea I have, he blubbers, what vision! And he pronounces the jester official mourner.