

BAD PRINCESS



*True Tales
from Behind
the Tiara*

KRIS WALDHERR
AUTHOR OF *DOOMED QUEENS*

FOR MY DAUGHTER, THEA, WITH LOVE

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DWARFS. A princess-in-distress's best hope for survival.

INTRODUCTION:

Once Upon a Time



“It’s only in fairy tales that princesses can afford to wait for the handsome prince to save them.”

— Meg Cabot, *Abandon* (2011)

Anyone familiar with fairy tales knows that most princesses lead dangerous, desperate lives. Behind the fluffy gowns and diamond tiaras, there’s usually an enemy lurking in the shadows. Snow White’s evil stepmother plots to have the princess killed when Snow becomes fairest in the land. Sleeping Beauty is cursed to drop dead once she turns sixteen. And in real life, the tragic death of Great Britain’s Princess Diana in a car accident showed that not all princesses live happily ever after.

Despite all this, many of us grow up yearning to become a princess. From the moment a little girl is born, it seems she can’t escape this princess obsession.



THE PRINCESS RULES

For many, the word “princess” implies more than just being a king’s daughter or a prince’s bride. What makes a princess special? Here are a few “rules” ransacked from fairy tales of yore:

A PRINCESS IS BEAUTIFUL.
A PRINCESS DRESSES FINELY.
A PRINCESS IS KIND.
A PRINCESS IS GOOD.
A PRINCESS IS OBEDIENT.

Any princess who breaks these rules will lose her tiara.


But why?

To uncover the answer to this question, *Bad Princess* will take you through history and fairy tales to reveal where our fascination with princesses began. We’ll look at the realities of life if you were young, female, and royal. We’ll also throw in stories of those who refused to play by the rules and really *were* bad princesses. To round things out, we’ll include the lives of duchesses, countesses, and other female nobles who didn’t reign over a country. (In other words, no queens!)

We’ll start off way back in the medieval period, when princesses really *did* live in towers, and end

up in modern times, when some kick-butt royal girls are changing the rules. We’ll see how our fascination with princesses may have taken root from fairy tales. And finally, we’ll reveal how princesses inspired businesses such as Disney and LEGO to turn our princess obsession into big bucks. Between princess-themed films, gowns, books, dolls, tiaras,

makeup kits, and accessories, princesses are *everywhere*. While these pink-hued products have encouraged the popularity of princesses as a role model for girls, others claim they've led to a "princess backlash"—a general distrust of all things feminine and sparkly. As a result, some believe princesses undermine young girls' self-esteem and independence by presenting them with an unrealistic standard of perfection, making princesses "bad" for young girls.

But are princesses in themselves *really* bad? Or were some only portrayed that way in history? Is there a way for a modern girl to reclaim this uber-feminine role model as an empowering one? Or should we just cut our losses and move on from princesses altogether? To find out, let's take a stroll through history! 

Here's the surprising truth behind the color that we most associate with princesses. Before World War II, pink was a popular color for baby boys; blue was for little girls. However, practical mamas went for all white—easier to clean in those pre-washing-machine days. More recently, the color pink has been reclaimed by women in organizations such as those that promote breast cancer awareness and the antiwar group Code Pink. Barbie® manufacturer Mattel claimed the color for its own when it chose PMS 219 pink as the trademark color for the popular doll's fiftieth anniversary in 2008. ("PMS" is an abbreviation for Pantone Matching System, a color-printing system.)





WHAT IF treason was the reason the princess was in the tower?

CHAPTER 1:

A Long, Long Time Ago



“A princess must be polite,’ she said
to herself.”

— Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess* (1905)

Our story begins with an overview of what legally makes a princess—and it’s not about the bling.

A princess is the daughter of a king and a queen. A king and a queen are the heads of a monarchy. A monarchy is a country where the right to rule is handed down from generation to generation within a single family. In Europe, the crown is often passed on through the men in the family: The king is succeeded by his son, the prince. To keep a family’s power, um, *powerful*, the law of primogeniture was applied. Primogeniture meant that a country could only pass to one male heir—no splitting lands up to give everyone a fair share. The same rules applied if you were a duke, a count, or another royal male.

Who's Who in Royalty

IN ORDER OF POWER:

EMPEROR: Wife is an empress.

KING: Wife is a queen.

PRINCE: Wife is a princess.

DUKE: Wife is a duchess.

MARQUESS: Wife is a marchioness.

EARL: Wife is a countess.

VISCOUNT: Wife is a viscountess.

BARON: Wife is a baroness.

LORD: Wife is a lady.

After reading all this, you might be thinking, “Hey, that’s not fair! Why do boys get everything?” Well, it’s because of a little something called Salic law.

Salic law was a judicial system that sprang up around the year 500 CE from the Frankish Empire, a group of kingdoms that by then had spread across much of continental Europe. One of Salic law’s main rules stated only males could inherit land and thrones. If you were born female, tough luck.

Fortunately for girls, not all countries followed Salic law. Thanks to a technicality, Princess Alexandrina Victoria inherited the crown of Great Britain when her uncle King William IV died without a male heir in 1837. She reigned over the British Empire under the more famous name of Queen Victoria until 1901—a sixty-three-year record surpassed only in September 2015 by her great-great-granddaughter Queen Elizabeth II. And in the Netherlands, Queen Beatrix served as regent, or someone who rules over a country, for

thirty-three years before abdicating, or stepping down, in 2013 to let her son have his turn.

Even so, Salic law led to wars in countries without male heirs—if there’s no prince, who should rule? (In sixteenth-century England, this was a big reason why King Henry VIII married six times. He feared his country would fall into chaos if he died without a son—but we’ll look into this in Chapter 3.) Yet, in a strange way, Salic law made princesses highly valuable. In the absence of a prince, someone could gain a throne by marrying a king’s daughter. The film *Maleficent* depicted this situation when the decidedly unroyal Stefan wed King Henry’s daughter to become king.

But what happened if there *was* a male heir? Did this mean a princess could do whatever she liked for the rest of her natural-born, pink-hued, blue-blooded life? Nope. Instead of freeing these royal girls from their responsibilities, Salic law turned princesses and other female royals into tools to be used by their families to expand territories, forge empires, and strengthen political ties.

Bottom line: Princesses had to do what they were told—and what they were told was to put a ring on it.

SOMEDAY MY PRINCE WILL COME

Royal power is a game of connections. One certain way to make connections: marriage. After all, if you’re a king, the odds are good your enemy is going to play nice if he’s married into your family.

THE TRUTH ABOUT ROYALTY AND BLUE BLOOD

When history describes a person as possessing “blue blood,” it’s shorthand for saying, “Hey, they’re royal.” Does this mean they actually have blue-colored blood? Of course not. Here’s the strange-but-true story behind this long-established belief: If you have light-colored skin on the inside of your wrist, you might see blue veins snaking down from your palm. Does this mean your blood is blue? Nope, it’s an optical illusion: The closer your veins are to the surface of your skin, the bluer they appear.

However, this simple truth didn’t stop Spanish nobles from bragging about their *sangre azul*—Spanish for “blue blood”—in the ninth century. They used this expression to differentiate themselves from their Moorish enemies, whose darker-skinned wrists were less likely to reveal blue veins. From here the term “blue blood” spread across Europe, and came to mean a person of aristocratic ancestry.

In reality, some living creatures *do* have blue blood: lobsters, crabs, and other sea creatures. Last we heard, they’re not claiming any thrones. Yet.

And so off to the chapel the princesses were sent for the sake of their countries. Unlike Cinderella, who got lucky with her Prince Charming, most princesses were expected to wed without complaints to whomever their family decided. (True love? Forget about it!) Often the princesses were sent far from home, never to encounter their royal parents and siblings again during their lives.

Think it was easy to nab a dreamy prince or duke? Not usually. When it came to marriage, it didn’t matter if the groom was handsome, smart, or even the same age as his bride-to-be. Nor was it considered a problem

if the groom was related by blood. In some cases, this was considered desirable because it helped keep power within a royal family.

A princess's life changed once she said "I do." Often marriage would turn her tiara into a crown, making her a queen, which gained her new responsibilities in her adopted country. Most important, the princess was expected to start a family with her new husband, so there would be heirs to inherit the throne. The birth of new princes and princesses meant that royal power would continue into a new generation, bringing political stability to a monarchy.

Here's one "good" princess considered a raging success by the standards of her time:

Margaret Fredkulla (c. 1080–1130) was a princess of Sweden. Her father, King Inge I, arranged for her to marry King Magnus of Norway to ensure peace between their lands. (*Fredkulla* translates as "Peace-Maiden.") After Magnus kicked the bucket two years after their wedding, Queen Margaret left Norway. This displeased her subjects, who had expected her to remain there to keep things peaceful. But Margaret had another husband in mind: King Niels of Denmark.

To his credit, Niels recognized that Margaret was smarter than he was. He encouraged her to rule Denmark in his place, giving her power over all she surveyed. If that wasn't fabulous enough, Margaret gave birth to two princes, one who survived to inherit the Danish throne after his parents' deaths.

Let's break down Princess Margaret's queenly life: arranged marriage. *Check*. Moving around from country to country. *Check*. Creating peace.



Check. Ruling a kingdom. *Check.* Providing the king with heirs to his throne. *Double check.*

Was Margaret happy? Who knows? On parchment, she was praised because she did right by Denmark as its ruler. However, no matter how fancy the gowns, or respected the crown, a medieval girl toiling in the fields probably wasn't that aware of the nitty-gritty of Margaret's royal situation.

But then things shifted on the “who wants to be a princess” front. *One reason: some musicians called troubadours.*

THE TROUBADOURS: ALL SINGING, ALL TRAVELING!

Let’s close our eyes and time-travel back a thousand years to the eleventh century. It’s an era when girls tucked their hair beneath headdresses called wimples, and boys wore dress-like tunics instead of T-shirts. There are no electronics, no cable TV. No airplanes or Wi-Fi. Even so, some things remain the same: Music makes people happy.

Enter the troubadour. Not only did these talented musicians write and compose their own songs, they also performed them. To gain new audiences, they moved from village to village—or castle to castle—crooning tunes to appreciative crowds. Because many troubadour songs were written down, their music survives to this day. They sang in a variety of styles about everything from the adventures of the Crusades to the trials of true love. Their music even encouraged listeners to kick up their heels and dance.

A popular song subject was the *princesse lointaine*—“distant princess”—a sublimely beautiful royal lady the composer was totally crushing





Monsieur Emo Musician Dude.
The Ed Sheeran of his time.

on. In most cases, the troubadour never even laid eyes on the *princesse lointaine* before penning his lovesick songs in her honor. Her reputation was enough to enflame his eternal devotion.


In a way, these songs could be viewed as the first instance of princess publicity. They served to spread the idea of what a princess should be—an exquisitely beautiful girl—in the same way *People* magazine does today for starlets.

One troubadour, Jaufrè Rudel, really bought into the whole *princesse lointaine* thing. His unnamed biographer wrote that Rudel:



“. . . fell in love with the countess of Tripoli, without seeing her, for the praise he heard of her from the pilgrims who came from Antioch; and he composed many songs about her with remarkable melodies but less beautiful verses.”

The *princesse lointaine* who inspired Rudel to write songs of “less beautiful verses” was *Hodierna of Tripoli* (c. 1110–1164), a princess of Jerusalem. The princess gained the title of countess when her father, King Baldwin II of Jerusalem, married her off to Raymond II of Tripoli. The marriage was complicated at best. Hodierna had three sisters who schemed behind the scenes with her. In addition, Raymond grew jealous that the countess liked someone else more than him—and that other men *really* liked her in return. After all, Hodierna was reputed to be beyond gorgeous.



The History Behind the Story: Greek Hits and Myths

Though princesses have been around for as long as there have been monarchies, chances are girls way back when didn't yearn to be pretty-in-pink like they do today. One possible reason: Old-time tales of princesses usually didn't end happily. Ancient Greece seemed to specialize in hard-luck princess myths. For example, Princess Danae, a princess of the Greek city of Argos, was walled up in a tower just like Rapunzel. The reason? Her father, King Acrisius, had been warned that Danae's future son would kill for Acrisius's throne. This was only the beginning of the princess's adventures. Thanks to the divine intervention of the god Zeus, who fell in love with her, Danae gave birth to a healthy boy, Perseus. Instead of sending his grandson a gift, King Daddy locked Danae and baby Perseus inside a wooden chest and threw them into the sea. Danae and Perseus survived against the odds to fulfill the prophecy—proof you can't outsmart destiny.

In another Greek myth, Princess Ariadne was abandoned on an island by her boyfriend, Theseus, after rescuing him from a labyrinth inhabited by the Minotaur—a half-man/half-bull monster. Though Dionysus, the god of wine and good times, eventually fell in love with Ariadne, the princess never recovered from Theseus's betrayal. If that wasn't bad enough, some claim that later Perseus (remember him?) killed Ariadne in battle after he became king. However, the poet Homer wrote that Artemis, goddess of the hunt, killed Ariadne with an arrow because the princess was too heartbroken to live without Theseus.



Lesson learned by the girls of ancient Greece: Princesshood leads to imprisonment, abandonment, and, worst of all, seasickness.

From here, it's easy to connect the dots: Rudel probably heard those wild stories about Hodierna's beauty. This caused him to fall hard for Her Royal Majesty. He composed songs in her honor. They included verses such as: "*Distant are the castle and tower where she lies with her husband . . . my mind is over there near her.*" Some even claim he traveled to Tripoli to declare his devotion to his *princesse lointaine*, using the Crusades as his excuse.

After all this drama, did the troubadour and the princess who inspired his music live happily ever after? Did they even meet?

Rudel's biographer offers the story that they *did* meet—but as Rudel was breathing his last. You see, he'd fallen dangerously ill while traveling to the Holy Land. Though everyone thought Rudel was a goner, they brought his body to an inn and managed to collect Hodierna from her jealous husband.

In a scene like something out of *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hodierna rushed to her never-before-seen troubadour admirer:



“. . . and took him in her arms, and he knew she was the Countess, and recovered consciousness, and praised God and thanked Him for having let him live to see her. And so he died in his lady's arms.”

Most conclude this story is fanciful at best—but it's a good one. History states that Hodierna ruled in Raymond's stead when he was killed


in battle; the crown was passed to her son, Raymond III, when he came of age.

However, in the case of *Joan, Lady of Wales and Lady of Snowdon* (1191–1237), it turned out her husband was right: She *was* a bad princess.

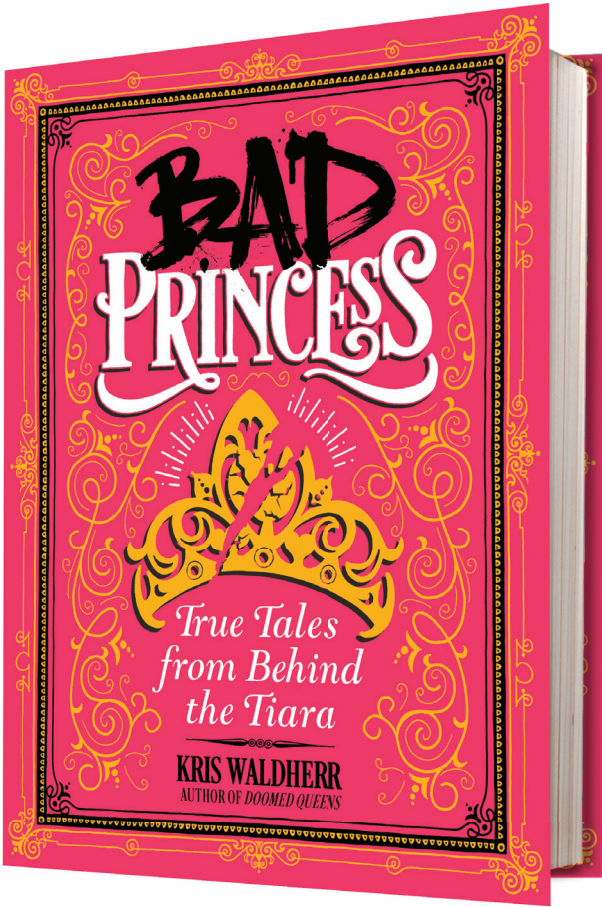
Joan was the out-of-wedlock daughter of King John of England; evidence suggests her mother might not have been blue-blooded. Despite Joan's uncertain status, her father deployed her as he would any princess: He arranged for her to marry Llywelyn the Great of the neighboring kingdom of North Wales.

For the first twenty-five years of their marriage, all seemed well: Joan gave birth to an heir and did all the good royal-wife stuff. But then she did something unexpected: She fell in love with William de Braose the Younger, a nobleman. When the two of them were caught kissing in the queen's chambers in 1230, their forbidden love was no longer a secret.

It wasn't pretty. The court was shocked. Llywelyn was furious. Yet his treatment of Joan was far gentler than expected—perhaps a quarter century of marriage meant something after all.

Llywelyn had Joan locked away in another part of the castle. William's fate was not nearly as kind: He was hanged to death. 

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