

*(Lights up on **Becky**, an attractive, if slightly dowdy woman in her late twenties. She stands in front of a group of unseen children. She is distraught, and is attempting to gather herself together, to keep the same cheery outlook that she presents to the kids every other day. There is something wide-eyed and babyish about her way of speaking and acting—the result of spending her entire life working with young children. There is, perhaps, though, the sense of some other kind of awareness trying to break through the child-like surface.)*

**BECKY**

Okay, people! People! People, please put on your listening ears now. Listening ears, that's right. I wanted to say something to you. I wanted to say I'm sorry. I apologize for crying out there. And for cutting your outside time short. Yes, I'm fine now. Really. No, Mackenzie, it wasn't you. I promise. No, Tyler, it wasn't you, either. Are you crying, Tyler? It wasn't you! It wasn't any of you. Please don't cry. Hey, I have an idea. Story time! Yes, how would that be? An extra-special, super-duper morning-time version of afternoon story time!

*(Starts to cry.)*

Stop it now, or you're going to make me do it again. All right? Let's do the wipe-away, okay? Everybody put on your saddest expression. Sad, sad. Sad faces. No, Max, that just looks...scary. Sad, okay? Ready? Now, wipe it away.

*(She puts her hands on her forehead and "wipes" downward, leaving a happy expression.)*

That's it. Wipe. Okay. Isn't that better? All right, then. All ready for story time? You don't look all ready. What are you missing? That's right, Sarah: hand-hugs and pretzel-feet. Hand-hugs and pretzel feet, every body! Mackenzie, Robinson, McCallister—those don't look like pretzel feet, do they? Do they? All right, then. Thank you. Ashford! Ashford! I appreciate that you want to show affection for Sarah, but while we are in day-care we are keeping our bodies to ourselves, aren't we? Yes, you may pat her arm, lightly, if Sarah doesn't mind. Ask permission, please. Ashford? All right, thank you, Sarah. That's right, Ashford. Lightly. Yes, like that.

*(She watches for a long moment, pasting on a patient smile)*

Okay. Are you finished? Then—hand-hugs. Thank you.

So. Story time. Okay, let's see...

*(She takes a deep breath)*

So. Once upon a time, it seems there was *(She makes a decision)* a princess... That's right, a princess.

Yes. McFadden? No, there is no book today. Yes, that's very true, but stories don't always come from books. Well, they come from our...brains and our hearts. Okay? Well, once upon a... Yes, Robinson? Yes, I'm sure the class would be very interested in hearing about the brain you saw, but right now I am speaking. Right now I am attempting to tell you a story, and the appropriate, respectful thing to do would be to put your hands back in a nice little hug and *listen*. Okay?

Once there was a princess named...named...well, actually she didn't have a name. That's right. She didn't have a name. She... No, she was just a princess. She didn't... Yes, Mackenzie, Princess Mackenzie is a very nice name, but it isn't this princess' name... Wait. People. People. *She didn't have a name!!* All right?

Okay. This nameless, no-name Princess. She lived in her...castle. A small castle, but it was hers. And...her whole life she had owned a precious possession. It was a...harp. A small harp. And she had always been taught to keep the harp to herself, and never show it to anyone, or...let anyone play it.

What, Alianna? No, it wasn't made of gold. And that's a very good question, sweetie, because in fact...the harp was...not pretty. It was made of...wood and...stone and... No, not stone. I don't know, but the Princess, you see, even though she thought it was her most precious possession, the Princess didn't really even think that someone else would ever like the harp.

So, she kept the harp...up on a high, high shelf in her castle room. With her beanie babies and all her friendship bracelets from 1988 to 2003. Up where she couldn't see it, and she wouldn't think about it. Even though she did still think about it. A lot.

Now, there were a few princes—not many, but a few—who came to the princess and wanted to see the harp. And she liked some of these princes, she really did. Well, *one* of them was really nice, anyway. But...they all wanted to see the harp, and even though part of her wanted to show it to them, an even bigger part of her was scared to show it to them. Because it was too precious, and...if something happened to the harp then she...she...well, she didn't know what would happen to her.

Yes, Tyler? Yes, that's right. That's exactly what it was—a *magic* harp, and...well, it seems—she believed this, anyway—that the Queen had put a spell on her when she was very little. That's right, a spell, a terrible spell. And the spell was...that if something happened to the harp—if anything happened to the harp—the Princess wouldn't be special anymore. She wouldn't be anything.

And also she was scared that the princes wouldn't like the harp, and that maybe they were only being nice to her so she would let them see the harp, and play on the harp, and if they saw the harp and didn't like it then they wouldn't want to be nice to her anymore.

So she...kept the harp high on its shelf, and the princes... Well, they went away. All of them, eventually. Which told the Princess that she had been right all along. They only wanted the harp, and without the harp they didn't really care about the Princess. Even the really nice prince.

But she couldn't ever really stop thinking about the stupid harp. I mean, the magic harp. Hand-hugs! Hand-hugs, McAllister! Jacob! What? No, it's not a boring story. It's not a boring story, and any inside time we spend complaining or squirming or demonstrating inappropriate behavior will be taken out of our outside time. Do we want that? No, we do not. Yes, Ashford. Thank you, Ashford. I don't think it's a boring story, either.

All right. Now, here is the thing. She had also heard something very bad about harps—about her harp. She'd heard some women on T.V.—um, wise women of...royal T.V.—say that if you don't...that if she didn't...play on her harp, that if she never showed it to anyone, that...well, that it would do terrible things to her brain. I don't know what things, Robinson. I don't know what kind of things, except that she would...slowly go crazy. She would be a crazy, ugly old Princess, alone in her castle with her cold, dusty harp.

Then, one day a new prince came along. And he wasn't necessarily the most handsome prince, or the nicest prince, but he didn't seem to care that the Princess was old. And he began to take the Princess to dinner at various, expensive places around the...kingdom, and even though he wasn't the handsomest or the nicest prince the Princess had met, she's thinking she should just go ahead and let him play the stupid thing and get it over with. And in fact she decided that was what she was going to do, but then a friend of hers told her that this prince, in fact, is also married to a different princess in a different castle.

Yes, McAllister, that can happen. Yes, it *is* possible. It happens *all the time*. Apparently.

*(She begins to struggle with tears again.)*

So. What was the Princess to do? The prince came to see her in her castle, and she had so many decisions to make and she was angry and sad and lonely and confused and finally she just said...what the heck.

*(Pause.)*

She...unveiled the harp. Let him play it.

What, McFadden? What did it sound like? What...a wonderful question. What did it sound like. It didn't really...sound like anything. She just lay there, listening for something, but... And then, when he was finished playing it, he left. It was just as she'd

feared. He didn't like the harp. Or, once he had the harp, he had no reason to see the Princess anymore...

Yes, Tyler? Yes, that is the ending. Yes. It *is* a terrible ending, isn't it? What if...the Princess threw herself into the moat? That's what she does. Wouldn't that be better?

*(Looks around her, startled.)*

Okay. Okay. She doesn't have to do that. I'm sorry. Please don't cry, Mackenzie. She won't throw herself in the moat. But...I just don't know what else she should do. What...? Robinson? Hmm. If she killed the Queen, would it lift the spell? Yes. Yes, I think it would. And I think that's a very clever idea, but it wouldn't be very nice. MacAllister? Find another Princess to be her friend. Well... *(Nods as though she's considered that possibility)* That is a thought.

Max? Wait, people. Max was saying something. What, Max? She should get a guitar. Well, I don't know if that would... I'm sorry, an *electric* guitar.

*(Thinks about it. A revelation.)*

Yes, you know what, Max? That's exactly what she did. She threw that old harp away and she...started over again, with a shiny new electric guitar. And she never told the Queen anything about it. And...she threw away all her beanie babies and her friendship bracelets and...okay, no—she *gave* away the beanie babies, to all her dear, little friends. And then she left her little friends, and moved far away where no one knew her, and learned to play her guitar. And one day, she learned how to make the loudest, most beautiful music anyone had ever heard.

The end.

Go on. I see Miss Ashleigh coming. Go on out. She'll let you play outside. Go on. That's right. Go.

*(She kneels, talking to an invisible child.)*

What, Ashford? Yes. Yes, I think it's a really good story, too. *(She kisses him.)* Goodbye.

*(She watches the children leave as the lights fade.)*