



Sample Pages from Wenceslas

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WENCESLAS

A CHRISTMAS PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



Wenceslas

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Adapted From *The Carol Good King Wenceslas*

By John Mason Neale

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Characters

2M+2W+14 Either, Easily Expandable

King Wenceslas

Queen Maryanne

Thomas

Katheryne

Sebastian (Wynnefred if female)

Beri - Page One

Meri - Page Two

Peri - Page Three

Royal Subjects (5+)

Wind Spirits (5+)

Setting

The castle of Good King Wenceslas.

The shack of Thomas and Katheryne.

The woods between the two places.

Because the play switches back and forth between locations, I would suggest that places be portrayed through small props and set pieces as opposed to large sets. For example, the only necessary set piece for the castle is King Wenceslas' throne. For Thomas and Katheryne's shack, the only necessary set piece is Katheryne's bed.

Song Notes

There is a great deal of musicality to this script whether it be in actual song or choral speaking. When the Royal Subjects, or the Wind Spirits speak in rhyme, try to emulate rhythmic talking that is closer to singing than normal speech patterns.

All the song lyrics in this play are in the public domain. They are folk tunes and the melodies should be easily accessible. You might also want to invent melodies of your own to suit the production.

The song at the top of the play is called *In Praise of Christmas* (or *Drive the Cold Winter Away*). It is a ballad from the 1700's. The melody can be found in Playford's *The English Dancing Master* (1651) or William Chappell's *Popular Music of the Olden Time*. (1859)

Sebastian's song *How Doth the Little Milk Pail* is a made-up song and he should merely begin to sing badly.

The lyrics that the Royal Subjects sing as they take down Christmas decorations are the last two lines from *Please To See the King*. They have been specifically arranged for the play and I would suggest that they be treated as the other rhythmic speaking passages as opposed to a song. The lyrics come from a traditional Welsh carol. The carol is about the ancient ritual of wren hunting on St. Stephen's day.

The lyrics sung by Sebastian at the end of the play are by Thomas Nashe (1567-1601). The name of the song is *Spring, the Sweet Spring* from the collection *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, 1600.

The scene is the throne room in the castle of Good King WENCESLAS. The stage is a bustle with SUBJECTS setting up decorations for Christmas. They sing as they work.

SUBJECTS: All hail to the days that merit more praise
 Than all the rest of the year,
 And welcome the nights that double delights
 As well for the poor as the peer
 Good fortune attend each merry man's friend
 That doth but the best that he may,
 Forgetting old wrongs with carols and songs
 To drive the cold winter away.

The time of the year is spent in good cheer
 And neighbours together do meet
 To sit by the fire, with friendly desire
 Each other in love for to greet
 Old grudges forgot are put in the pot
 All sorrows aside they lay
 The old and the young doth carol this song
 To drive the cold winter away.
 To drive the cold winter away.

All of the SUBJECTS raise a great cheer and continue with their work. A page, SEBASTIAN, steps forward from the middle of the movement.

SEBASTIAN: This is the story of a King. A King with a quandary, a dilemma, a predicament, a hitch, a –

SUBJECTS: Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN: He's got a problem. He's missing joy in his heart and he doesn't know why.

The QUEEN calls from offstage.

QUEEN: Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN: Coming M'lady! *(To the audience)* Sorry I don't have time to tell you more. You'll just have to see for yourself.

SEBASTIAN exits and the other SUBJECTS come downstage to address the audience.

SUBJECTS: Good King Wenceslas.

MEN: A great King.

WOMEN: A wise King.

MEN: A strong King.

SUBJECTS: A King... in a very bad mood.

KING WENCESLAS stomps onstage followed closely by QUEEN MARYANNE. The two walk and talk as the SUBJECTS bow low.

QUEEN: It does not behoove the King to act so sour around the holidays.

KING: I'm not being a sour. Kings cannot be sour.

QUEEN: You are doing a pretty fine imitation!

The KING exits. The QUEEN throws up her hands.

SUBJECTS: Have you seen the King?
Have you seen the King?
It really is a most amazing thing.

QUEEN: (*Clapping her hands*) All right everyone, these decorations must be hung in great haste. Great haste! (*She exits*)

SUBJECTS: Have you seen the King?
Have you seen the King?
It really is a most amazing thing.

MEN: He's growly and grumpy.

WOMEN: His words are rough and lumpy.

MEN: He hmpfts to the pages.

WOMEN: He galumps to the maids.

SUBJECTS: No one has seen him smile for days.

QUEEN: (*She enters crossing the stage*) You there! Why are you standing around? Have you nothing to do? Take those platters back to the kitchen; they're not what I asked for. (*She exits*)

SUBJECTS: Have you seen the Queen?
Have you seen the Queen?
It really is a most amazing scene.

WOMEN: She's really quite a sight.

MEN: Working day and night.

SUBJECTS: Making sure everything for the holidays is right.

QUEEN: (*she enters directing a page offstage*) More to the left. A little more. A little more. Perfect. (*she exits the same way she entered*)

MEN: Have you seen the King?

WOMEN: It's a most amazing thing.

MEN: Have you seen the Queen?

WOMEN: It's really quite a scene!

SUBJECTS: King? Thing! Queen? Scene!

QUEEN: (*she enters*) What are you doing! That's wrong, all wrong! Do it again! (*she exits*)

SUBJECTS: (*whispering*) Thank goodness it's only once a year.

All the SUBJECTS scatter in a flurry of activity. The stage is empty as the KING enters tentatively making sure that no one is around. He sighs and heads for his throne.

Three pages, BERI, MERI, and PERI run on with their arms filled with garlands. They run up behind the KING.

ALL THREE: Merry Christmas your majesty.

KING: (*surprised*) What! Oh, yes. Yes.

BERI: Where would your majesty like these garlands?

MERI: They're fresh boughs.

PERI: We just finished weaving them ourselves.

BERI: Does your majesty want them around the throne?

PERI: It looks pretty bare.

KING: No! No.

MERI: Where should we put them then?

KING: You'll have to ask the Queen.

The QUEEN enters.

QUEEN: Ah, there you are. Put those over the fireplace in the dining room. Straightaway! (*she claps her hands and waves the pages away*)

ALL THREE PAGES: Merry Christmas your majesty!

The THREE PAGES bow and exit on the run. Something catches the QUEEN'S eye offstage. She moves away from the throne.

QUEEN: No, no! It's red, white, red; not white, red, white. Do it over. Everything has to be perfect.

The KING sighs and collapses into his throne, in an un-kingly manner.

QUEEN: Better. Much better. (*she turns to the KING*) Don't slouch dear.

KING: (*sitting up*) Yes Maryanne.

QUEEN: I think everything is coming together this year. This may be the best holiday season yet.

KING: (*distracted not really listening*) Aye.

QUEEN: I thought it was for naught when the horsemen trampled upon the holly that I was planning to use as the theme and main focal point for the foyer. But I feel that I have recovered splendidly. You've not yet said what you think. (*She waits for a response, but the KING is off in his own world*) Well? (*There is no response*) Peter? Peter!

KING: (*breaking out of his mood*) What? Oh, yes Maryanne?

QUEEN: You haven't told me what you think.

KING: About what?

QUEEN: About what? About this! What do you think about the decorations?

KING: It's all very nice.

QUEEN: Nice? That's all you have to say? After all of my efforts?

KING: I said it was nice.

QUEEN: But don't you see the way the presents are colour-matched? Don't you see the way the food is placed so that it creates a pattern visible only from above? I've hand-selected the music for tomorrow night's feast, and the acts as well. I've ordered the silver so highly polished you can see your face in the metal. I've made quite sure that every single solitary aspect is perfect.

KING: You've done a wonderful job my dear. You always do. It's all very nice.

During the above the SUBJECTS have snuck onstage and they hear the exchange. As the KING exits, they whisper the following.

SUBJECTS: Have you seen the King? It really is a most amazing thing.

MEN: He's growly and grumpy.

WOMEN: His words are rough and lumpy.

MEN: He hmpfts to the pages.

WOMEN: He galumps to the maids.

SUBJECTS: No one has seen him smile for –

The QUEEN interrupts, she has been silently fuming.

QUEEN: What are you all standing around for? There's too much to do to have you standing around. Get back to work! Get that garland hung! Make sure there's ivy on every door! In every window! In every crack, crevice, and corner!!!

SUBJECTS: Yes M'lady! Right away!

Everyone bows and scurries away. The QUEEN exits.

SEBASTIAN and THOMAS enter from opposite directions. THOMAS' clothes are threadbare and ragged. They are not looking where they are going and bang into each other.

THOMAS: Ooof!

SEBASTIAN: Holy St. Francis!

THOMAS: Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN: Good morrow Thomas! I haven't seen you in a million ages. Are you well? Is Katheryne well? Are you working in the castle? What's the news?

THOMAS: I am well, Sebastian, I am well. Katheryne is... the same. I'm only helping the cook during the holidays. The scraps are good.

SEBASTIAN: I would talk to the Master Servant on your behalf. You could –

THOMAS: I thank you Sebastian but I cannot leave Katheryne alone for too long and she cannot be moved. We'll manage. When she is well then I will come to you.

SEBASTIAN: I will count on it.

The QUEEN'S voice is heard from offstage.

QUEEN: Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN: (*calling out*) Coming M'Lady! I must be off. Merry Christmas Thomas.

THOMAS: And to you as well.

SEBASTIAN and THOMAS run off in opposite directions.

The ROYAL SUBJECTS enter and come downstage to address the audience.

SUBJECTS: Thomas is a man, who lives far from the scene
 Far must he walk through weather cruel and mean.
 He'll take care of his wife, no matter what the strife
 No matter how desperate their problems seem.
 Katheryne is a maid, who is confined to bed
 Many months has illness fast remained in stead.
 The coughing makes her sore, as she watches for the door
 That will bring Thomas to her, swiftly led.

The scene changes and the ROYAL SUBJECTS exit. The lights come up on the small shack of THOMAS and KATHERYNE. KATHERYNE is ill and in bed. THOMAS enters bringing in a cold blustery wind.

KATHERYNE: Thomas? Thomas is that you?

THOMAS: I'm right here.

KATHERYNE: It's so late.

THOMAS: The wind was a hard taskmaster tonight. I took one step forward and it blew me four steps back. The wind and I danced as such all the way home.

KATHERYNE: I wish you did not have to go all the way to the castle for work.

THOMAS: I wish the same. But see what I have brought. The cook was very kind.

THOMAS brings a small bag to her and sits on the side of the bed.

KATHERYNE: Bread and cheese.

THOMAS: And a bit of ham as well.

KATHERYNE: And apples too! We must save this for tomorrow night. We'll have our own feast, just as good as what they are serving the King and Queen.

THOMAS: I wish it could be more. You're shivering.

KATHERYNE: Not too much. This blanket keeps me warm.

THOMAS: This blanket is threadbare and worn.

KATHERYNE: Aye, but it will do me well.

THOMAS: How are you feeling?

KATHERYNE: Better. I think I'm getting better. *(She coughs. It's harsh and raspy.)*

THOMAS: If only we could get a good fire and some good food into you. You'd be up in no time. I know it.

KATHERYNE: I'm perfectly content. *(THOMAS picks up the small bag and takes it off the bed. He turns away from KATHERYNE.)* Thomas? What is the matter?

THOMAS: I have nothing to offer this Christmas but some food scraps.

KATHERYNE: Have I asked for anymore?

THOMAS: Never. It's just that... another year has come and gone and we are unable to celebrate.

KATHERYNE: We have each other.

THOMAS: I know. But I would like to give you so much more. I wish for one year I could give you something. *(He sighs)* I wonder what they are doing up at the castle. I saw them setting up for the feast. It's supposed to be very grand.

KATHERYNE: And wherefore did we not receive our invitation? Are we not as grand as any Lord and Lady?

THOMAS: It must have been lost.

KATHERYNE: I can just imagine it all. Was the castle so beautiful?

THOMAS: Decorated from top to toe.

KATHERYNE: Wouldn't that be lovely to see.

THOMAS: One day you will.

KATHERYNE: If I close my eyes, I can be there right now. *(she closes her eyes)* Oh yes, I see everything! Isn't it beautiful? Thomas, close your eyes.

THOMAS: Katheryne...

KATHERYNE: Close your eyes. *(he does)* Can you see it?

THOMAS: Katheryne I can't...

KATHERYNE: Look, a roaring fire right in front of you. I can feel the heat on my toes. Oh! Watch out for flying sparks. And the walls are covered in greenery and candlelight. The table groans under the weight of all the good food. And the smells. Tell me what you smell.

THOMAS: Ummmmm, let me think. Roast goose.

KATHERYNE: And turkey.

THOMAS: And ham. All on the same table.

KATHERYNE: Plum pudding.

THOMAS: Gravy. And potatoes.

KATHERYNE: Baked apples – too many to count. And look! Here come the King and Queen. Aren't they lovely?

On the other side of the stage, the KING and QUEEN enter with their SUBJECTS. This should all be very happy and lively (Especially the KING) as it is imaginary.

KING: Merry Christmas to all!

SUBJECTS: Merry Christmas your majesty!

KING: You are all welcome to eat and drink till you burst! Warm your hands by our fire till the heat does turn your cheeks to a rosy glow.

QUEEN: There are presents aplenty under the tree for each and every one of you.

KING: Wassail! Wassail to one and all!

SUBJECTS: Wassail!

THOMAS & KATHERYNE: Wassail! Wassail!

KING: For it is Christmas and a time of joy and celebration.

QUEEN: Let us dance!

Music begins to play. The KING and QUEEN and all the SUBJECTS dance.

KATHERYNE: Can you hear the music? Beautiful! Oh Thomas! Dance with me.

THOMAS: Are you up for it?

KATHERYNE: I am, oh I am! I want to dance.

THOMAS: But what about our clothes?

KATHERYNE: Pish pish Master Thomas! You of course are wearing a royal blue doublet and I have a shimmering gold sheath made especially for the occasion.

THOMAS: (*bowing*) M'Lady, would you care to dance?

KATHERYNE: (*with a curtsey*) Why thank you, M'Lord.

The music swells up and THOMAS and KATHERYNE begin to dance. They laugh and dance and fall over each other. They imitate the movements that the SUBJECTS make.

KATHERYNE starts to cough. The lights change and the music stops. The KING, QUEEN, and the SUBJECTS exit. THOMAS guides KATHERYNE back to the bed.

KATHERYNE: Thank you Thomas.

THOMAS: Are you all right?

KATHERYNE: Perfectly well. I am feeling better all the time.

The light fades. The scene switches back to the castle. It is now the next night, Christmas Day. The KING sits alone on his throne in a foul mood. There is the sound of music and laughter offstage as the feast takes place.

SEBASTIAN tentatively enters and bows before the KING.

SEBASTIAN: Sire, her highness would like to know why his majesty has left the feast. Is his majesty stuffed to the gills and left the table post haste for fear that he would pop open like a Christmas cracker?

KING: I'm not hungry.

SEBASTIAN: Ah. I see. There was too much food to choose from, wasn't there? His majesty's stomach was paralysed with all the choices to be made!

BERI runs in. She bows to the KING.

BERI: Her highness would like to know if his majesty would like a bowl of mead.

KING: No.

SEBASTIAN: Tell her highness that his majesty thanks her a thousand times for her utmost kindness in offering, but he would not like a bowl of mead.

BERI bows and exits on the run.

SEBASTIAN: Now, where we were? Ah yes, why is his majesty so glum, so sad, so low, so down, so morose, so...

KING: Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN: It's Christmas! Time for cheer. Time for eating, singing, dancing, laughing, presents, and lots and lots of cheer! His majesty really should be at the feast though. Hard to have cheer here all by yourself. Never fear. Can you hear them singing? I think they've started the chorals. (*he listens for a moment then joins in, in full force*) La, la, la, la, la, la...

KING: That's enough Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN: Yes Sire, should I be serious Sire?

KING: You should be quiet if you wish to stay.

MERI runs in. She bows to the KING.

MERI: Her highness would like to know if his majesty would like a steaming bowl of mead.

SEBASTIAN: A steaming bowl of mead! How delightful! There's not a better drink in all the world than a bowl of steaming hot...

KING: No.

SEBASTIAN: Tell her highness that his majesty thanks her a thousand times for her utmost kindness in offering, but he would not like a steaming bowl of mead.

MERI bows and exits on the run.

SEBASTIAN: Perhaps Sire could tell me, a lowly page, what is bothering his great self.

The KING grunts but says nothing.

SEBASTIAN: I believe I am a very good listener.

KING: You talk too much to be a good listener.

SEBASTIAN: True but has his majesty never seen anyone as entertaining as I? Why just last week Countess Belinda said that my acrobatics made her laugh so hard she squirted mead, not steaming thank goodness, out of her nose. Just the other day Duke Winchester supposed that my rendition of How Doth the Little Milk Pail made his eyes cross. Here let me sing now. *(he begins to sing in a gross falsetto)*

KING: *(Laughing)* All right, all right, you win. You win. Just please sit down.

SEBASTIAN: Anything his majesty wishes. *(there is a moment of silence)*
Are we just sitting Sire?

PERI runs in. She bows to the KING.

PERI: Her highness would like to know if his majesty would like a steaming bowl of mead with a twist of nutmeg, or perhaps a cinnamon stick.

KING: No.

SEBASTIAN: His majesty loves cinnamon.

KING: I do not want anything!

SEBASTIAN: Tell her highness that his majesty thanks her a thousand times for her utmost kindness in offering, but he would not like a steaming bowl of mead, and wishes neither twist nor stick.

PERI bows and exits on the run.

SEBASTIAN: If a lowly page may say so, his majesty will not be able to avoid her highness for too much longer.

KING: Let me ask you something. (*waving his arms about*) What do you feel about this?

SEBASTIAN: What?

KING: These trappings, these garlands, the mounds of colour-matched presents.

SEBASTIAN: It's Christmas. It is always like this.

KING: Why?

SEBASTIAN: Why?

KING: Why does it have to be like this? Why do we have to do it this way? Is this the only way the season can be celebrated?

SEBASTIAN: I don't know Sire.

KING: What would happen if all of this went away? Would Christmas no longer exist? Would we stare at our shoes because there would be nothing to open or talk about?

SEBASTIAN: I wonder if his majesty didn't eat some bad goose and it is playing tricks with his mind.

KING: Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN: Sire, as a lowly page, I have the greatest respect for his utmost-on-high majesty, and I would never question anything that came out of his mouth... it's just a rather sobering thought for such a happy time.

KING: If the time is happy, why do I not feel happy?

The QUEEN enters. SEBASTIAN bows.

QUEEN: Thank you Sebastian, you may go.

SEBASTIAN: Yes M'Lady. May I just say that...

QUEEN: Now.

SEBASTIAN: Right away M'Lady.

SEBASTIAN exits.

QUEEN: Peter. It does not behoove the King to sulk in the throne room.

KING: I am not sulking. Kings cannot sulk.

QUEEN: You are doing a fine imitation of a sulk. It's hard to enjoy oneself when the King is scowling at you.

KING: I do not scowl.

QUEEN: Peter, we have guests. They are waiting for you.

KING: I know, I know. I'm sorry.

QUEEN: Don't be sorry, be happy.

KING: Yes, Maryanne.

The KING and QUEEN exit.

The lights change. It is the next day. The SUBJECTS enter moving slowly and somewhat sullenly. They are taking down the decorations.

SUBJECTS: Old Christmas is past, Twelfth Night is the last.
And we bid you adieu, great joy to the new
Old Christmas is past, is past, Ah Christmas is past
Twelfth night is the last, the last,
Ah Twelfth night is the last
And we bid you adieu, adieu, Ah we bid you adieu.
Great joy to the new, the new, Ah great joy to the new
Old Christmas is past, Twelfth Night is the last.
And we bid you adieu, great joy to the new.

SEBASTIAN enters.

SEBASTIAN: Ah well, over again for another year.

BERI, MERI, and PERI enter, dragging their garland.

SEBASTIAN: What's the matter with you three? You look as if you were dragging a weight of stone.

ALL THREE PAGES: (*wailing*) Oh Sebastian!

BERI: It's so tragic.

MERI: So awful.

PERI: So sad.

SEBASTIAN: What is?

ALL THREE PAGES: It's over, it's all over.

SEBASTIAN: True. But that is what happens when a day comes to an end; it's over.

BERI: But we...

MERI: Didn't even get a chance...

PERI: To enjoy it.

ALL THREE PAGES: We were too busy!

SEBASTIAN: Perk up! Do you want the King to see you with your faces so low?

ALL THREE PAGES: No.

SEBASTIAN: Do you want the Queen to see you with your chins on the ground?

ALL THREE PAGES: No.

SEBASTIAN: Then up you get! Turn those frowns upside down! Change your tune and hop to it.

ALL THREE PAGES: Aye, aye, captain!

The three run offstage sluggishly.

SEBASTIAN: Aye, aye, aye. Thank goodness it's only once a year. I can't take much more of this.

The QUEEN enters. She looks more down-in-the-dumps than the pages did.

SEBASTIAN: *(with a quiet groan)* Holy St. Francis.

QUEEN: Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN: Yes M'Lady?

QUEEN: Have you seen the King?

SEBASTIAN: No M'Lady.

QUEEN: Find him will you? He's still in a mood. *(calling offstage)* Don't drag that garland on the ground!! *(she exits)*

SEBASTIAN: I don't know why. Christmas is over, he should be happy.

SEBASTIAN exits. The ROYAL SUBJECTS come forward to address the audience.

SUBJECTS: The wind is harsh and bitter so,
How does it kean and moan
For any house of sticks and straw,
The walls would weave and groan

Full glad am I that I am in,
Instead of out this day
For any man that steps through snow,
May soon be blown away.

The scene changes back to the shack. It is much darker and colder. KATHERYNE is racked with coughs. THOMAS sits by her side; he gives her a cup of water.

KATHERYNE: Thank you Thomas.

THOMAS: I cannot leave you like this.

KATHERYNE: I will be just fine.

THOMAS: Are you sure?

KATHERYNE: Yes.

THOMAS: All right. (*he prepares to leave*) I will not come back until I have enough fuel to make you the largest fire. There are woods on the other side of the castle. I'll go there.

KATHERYNE: Oh, how far away that is.

THOMAS: I won't go if you –

KATHERYNE: Nonsense! You must go and I will consider myself well-contented until your return.

THOMAS: I will hurry as fast as I can. Are you sure you are all right?

KATHERYNE: Go Thomas, go!

THOMAS: Farewell.

He exits. KATHERYNE buries her face in her hands.

The lights change. It is cold and dark. The stage is empty. The WIND SPIRITS enter, blowing forcefully around the stage.

On the other side of the stage lights come up on THOMAS. He struggles through the wind and the trees. He is shivering with cold as the wind howls and holds him back.

WIND SPIRITS: The night is cold and long and dark
This man is all alone
How far away from fire's spark
How far away from home.

Where doth he travel? We do not know
 His footsteps lost inside the snow.
 The night is cold and long and dark
 This man is all alone
 How far away from fire's spark
 How far away from home.

At this point WIND SPIRITS physically prevent THOMAS from moving forward. They should use their voices to make wind music – something sorrowful and in a minor key. THOMAS should try to move through the bodies, but the way gets slower and slower. The WIND SPIRITS continue to make their sound, as THOMAS is forced offstage.

The lights change. On the opposite side of the stage, the KING is staring out his window, which looks straight out at the audience. SEBASTIAN enters and approaches him.

SEBASTIAN: Your majesty! The Queen has had the castle turned inside-out looking for you.

KING: I have been here all afternoon.

SEBASTIAN: Here? But this window only looks out on the forest.

KING: Aye.

SEBASTIAN: And it is getting dark. Soon his majesty will not be able to see the forest at all.

KING: Look at that tree Sebastian. Do you see it?

SEBASTIAN: Yes, Sire.

KING: It has no garland, no wreaths, no bows, nothing! And yet it is still beautiful.

SEBASTIAN: Sire, if a lowly page might say so, Christmas is but once a year. Why does it trouble his majesty so much?

KING: Who's that?

SEBASTIAN: Pardon, Sire?

KING: There's a man, outside at the edge of the forest.

Lights come up on the opposite side of the stage. THOMAS enters. He is barely moving as the WIND SPIRITS flash around him.

THOMAS: So cold... so cold.

KING: What is that man doing?

SEBASTIAN: It looks as if he is gathering firewood.

KING: The village is on the other side of the castle. What is he doing there?

SEBASTIAN: He doesn't look to be having a good time with it.

KING: Why would that man need to leave his home to gather firewood the day after Christmas? Surely the fire still blazes after his feast last night.

SEBASTIAN: (*very uncomfortable*) The Queen is in a state, your majesty. Perhaps I had best go and tell her you are found safe and sound.

SEBASTIAN turns to go.

KING: Sebastian I asked you a question.

SEBASTIAN: It's not my place; I am just a lowly page...

KING: Answer me.

SEBASTIAN: It's not my place to tell his majesty about his subjects.

KING: What do you mean? Are you telling me I do not know what goes on in my own kingdom? That I do not know the problems of my people? That I am not a good King?

SEBASTIAN: NO! Of course not, his majesty is a very good King, a great King!

KING: Then what are you saying?

SEBASTIAN: Well... I... the Queen...

KING: Speak, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN: Not all of his majesty's subjects enjoy Christmas on the same level as... not all of them can afford to celebrate as we do here at the castle. Some have larger thoughts to tend to than the setting of the roast goose... not that I would disparage her highness in any way in regards to her attention to detail.

KING: Why do I not know of this? I should have known. I should know about the trials and tribulations of this kingdom.

SEBASTIAN: If a lowly page could comment, it would be hard to notice if one sat brooding on his throne all day, not that his majesty should be charged of that crime.

KING: No, that's exactly what I have been doing. I have been steeped to my eyeballs in my mood that I could not even look past my nose.

The focus shifts back to THOMAS and the WIND SPIRITS.

WIND SPIRITS: The cold wind wraps around him so
 No shelter from the weather
 The cruellest and the sharpest blow
 We carry him together.
 Two steps forward, one step back
 Hands and face are bitter cracked.
 The cold wind wraps around him so
 No shelter from the weather
 The cruellest and the sharpest blow
 We carry him together.

*THOMAS is turned so that he faces the audience.
 SEBASTIAN gives a gasp.*

SEBASTIAN: Thomas!

KING: Do you know him?

SEBASTIAN: He is a friend of mine; he does odd jobs for the cook.

KING: Does he not work? He looks a strong man.

SEBASTIAN: His wife is very ill Sire. He does not wish to leave her side for too long. Things must not be well if he is out this far.

KING: Where does he live?

SEBASTIAN: Underneath the mountain.

KING: But that's ten leagues away, at least!

SEBASTIAN: Yes Sire.

*The focus shifts to THOMAS and the WIND SPIRITS.
 The WIND SPIRITS moan as they move around
 THOMAS.*

THOMAS: I have never been so cold. But I will bring back a fire to Katheryne. I will do it!

The focus shifts back to the KING and SEBASTIAN.

KING: *(muttering to himself)* This is not right. This is not right.

SEBASTIAN: Sire? Sire?

The lights change and perhaps distorted music begins to play. The following takes place in the KING'S head as he ponders the situation. The characters should be greatly exaggerated and not real.

The KING moves to centre stage. The QUEEN enters and begins to circle the KING.

QUEEN: I thought it was for naught when the horsemen trampled upon the holly that I was planning to use as the theme and main focal point for the foyer. But I feel that I have recovered splendidly. You've not yet said what you think.

THOMAS breaks away from the WIND SPIRITS and begins to circle the KING. The WIND SPIRITS moan, and also circle the KING.

THOMAS: Please Sire, won't you help us? Don't you recognize us? We're your subjects too, Sire.

KATHERYNE enters and begins to circle the KING.

KATHERYNE: Ohhhhhhhh it's cold. It's so cold. The wind blows right through to my bones. There's no place to get warm, only cold.

SEBASTIAN begins to circle the KING.

SEBASTIAN: It's not my place to tell his majesty about his subjects.

THOMAS: It's so cold.

QUEEN: Peter? Peter? What do you think?

The THREE PAGES enter and circle the KING.

THREE PAGES: It's over. It's all over and we didn't get a chance to enjoy it!

THOMAS & KATHERYNE: It's so cold.

QUEEN: What do you think Peter? What do you think? Peter? Peter?

SEBASTIAN: It's not my place to tell his majesty about his subjects.

All of the ROYAL SUBJECTS enter and circle the KING. They begin to sing the song from the top of the play.

SUBJECTS: All hail to the days that merit more praise
 Than all the rest of the year,
 And welcome the nights that double delights
 As well for the poor as the peer...

All the characters come in closer and closer to the KING. All of the characters talk on top of each other, building to a crescendo.

QUEEN: (*continue repeating*) Peter, Peter, Peter, Peter...

THOMAS: (*continue repeating*) help us, help us, help us, help us...

SEBASTIAN: (*continue repeating*) my place, my place, my place, my place...

KATHERYNE: (*continue repeating*) so cold, so cold, so cold, so cold...

THREE PAGES: (*continue repeating*) over, over, over, over...

All at once the voices stop and the lights change. Everyone but the KING and SEBASTIAN leave the stage.

The KING is standing almost in a daze.

SEBASTIAN: Sire? Sire?

KING: Sebastian, fetch my cloak.

SEBASTIAN: It's too late for a walk Sire.

KING: Fetch me my cloak and a roast pig and a flask of ale and anything else you can carry. And logs, pine logs — as many as will fit in my arms. What do I need with it all? What does it matter if the presents are colour-matched if this man must walk ten leagues just to warm his hands? We will watch them eat until they can eat no more. What are you standing here for?! Go!

SEBASTIAN: Right away Sire!

KING: Wait! You won't be able to carry all that by yourself. I'll come with you.

The QUEEN enters.

QUEEN: Carry all what by yourself?

KING: Ah Maryanne.

SEBASTIAN: (*bowing low*) Your highness, I have found the King. He is safe and sound, as you can see.

QUEEN: Yes I can. You may go Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN: (*bowing again*) Yes M'lady.

KING: Fetch my cloak Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN: Yes Sire. (*he turns to go and is stopped by the QUEEN*)

QUEEN: It's much too nasty for a walk Peter. There's no need for the King's cloak Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN: Yes M'Lady.

KING: I'm not going for a walk. I'll meet you in the kitchen, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN: Yes Sire.

KING: And bring my cloak.

QUEEN: The kitchen? Wherever are you going?

KING: Out. Go Sebastian.

QUEEN: Stay Sebastian.

KING: Go!

QUEEN: Stay Sebastian. Don't you move one muscle till I know what's going on. Where are you going?

There is a moment of silence. SEBASTIAN teeters between moving to go and staying. The KING takes in a deep breath and faces the QUEEN.

KING: I don't like the way we celebrate Christmas. It seems to be all about the way the castle looks and everyone is run off their feet and no one enjoys themselves.

QUEEN: I enjoy myself.

KING: Do you?

QUEEN: I enjoy knowing that everything looks nice.

KING: But there's no heart to it. There's no... I'm going to the village.

QUEEN: The village? Don't be ridiculous.

KING: I'm going to see how my subjects are faring. Go Sebastian, fetch my cloak. Now!

SEBASTIAN: Yes Sire. (*he exits on the run*)

QUEEN: Peter, you're the King. You just can't go traipsing off to the village by yourself.

KING: Sebastian will go with me.

QUEEN: It's freezing cold out there. The wind has been howling all day. You can't go out.

KING: I can and I must.

The KING starts to exit. The QUEEN holds onto his sleeve.

QUEEN: The village will still be there tomorrow. Go in the morning; go when you have the sun to guide you and not the moon. Go tomorrow.

KING: *(he turns and kisses the QUEEN on the cheek)* Farewell.

The KING exits.

QUEEN: Peter!

The lights change. During the following, these four scenes can be seen simultaneously on the stage.

1. KATHERYNE in her bed.
2. THOMAS walking home.
3. SEBASTIAN and the KING walking to the shack.
4. The QUEEN standing by the window, waiting for the KING.

KATHERYNE is in her bed, shivering from the cold. She rocks as she tries to keep herself warm.

KATHERYNE: He is safe. He is safe. He will return. He is safe.

On the other side of the stage, the QUEEN stands with a shawl over her shoulders as if she is looking out a window. She is waiting for the KING. BERI, MERI, and PERI enter.

ALL THREE PAGES: Your highness?

QUEEN: *(startled out of her thoughts)* What? Oh yes, what is it?

BERI: Did your highness...

MERI: Want to supervise...

PERI: The packing up of the decorations?

QUEEN: Oh. No... No. You just look after that.

ALL THREE PAGES: Yes M'Lady. *(they start to walk away and turn back)*
Your highness?

QUEEN: Yes?

ALL THREE PAGES: Would you like a cup of mead?

QUEEN: No. *(she gives a small smile)* No, thank you.

BERI, MERI and PERI exit. The QUEEN goes back to looking out the window. On another part of the stage, THOMAS is seen walking very slowly.

THOMAS: I'm almost home Katheryne.

KATHERYNE talks to herself.

KATHERYNE: He will come home. He will be here.

THOMAS: I will make it home.

KATHERYNE: He will make it home.

The focus shifts to SEBASTIAN and the KING. Their arms are full and they are both carrying sacks. The wind blows them about. They walk very slowly.

SEBASTIAN: Never a colder day have I seen than today. I fear my nose will fall off, it is so chilled.

KING: One foot in front of the other. We'll make it.

SEBASTIAN: How can you see where you are going in this wind?

THOMAS: I am almost home. Bah! Never have I been so cold.

QUEEN: *(shivering and drawing her shawl tighter)* It's so cold. I hope they are all right.

KATHERYNE: *(Drawing her blanket tighter. She says her line at the same time as the QUEEN.)* It's so cold.

The WIND SPIRITS dance among all the characters, causing them to feel the cold.

WIND SPIRITS: Two steps forward, one step back
Hands and face are bitter cracked.
Who else dares to cross us so
We will drive them to their knees

Watch them walking, slower, slow
We will take them with great ease.

KING: Tell a story Sebastian. It'll make the time pass faster.

SEBASTIAN: My brain is froze I think, Sire.

KING: Thaw it out then. We need something to take our minds off the cold.

SEBASTIAN: I'm sure his majesty knows that today is St. Stephen's Day. The day after Christmas. Did you know it was a wren that betrayed Stephen? He was hiding in the bushes. The Roman soldiers were looking and searching and searching and looking. Stephen was well hid, and it looked as if he was going to get away. When all of a sudden, a wren lit upon a branch right beside Stephen's head. The wren began to sing and chirp so loudly it startled the soldiers and they headed right towards the sound. Stephen was not pleased I can tell you.

The WIND SPIRITS blow again and all of the characters react to the cold.

WIND SPIRITS: Who else dares to cross us so
We will drive them to their knees
Watch them walking, slower, slow
We will take them with great ease.

SEBASTIAN: Sire, I don't think I can go on. I can't feel my feet.

THOMAS: (*says this at the same time as SEBASTIAN*) I can't feel my feet.

KING: Keep moving Sebastian.

KATHERYNE: (*to herself*) Keep moving Thomas.

THOMAS: I must keep moving.

SEBASTIAN: I can't. I cannot see my hand in front of my face. I'm afraid.

KING: Hold fast to my cloak. Walk in my footprints. Step strongly boy.
We will get there by and by.

SEBASTIAN: There is another story about the wren being the King of all birds.

All the characters join in telling the story. They are in their own worlds, each telling the story to themselves to pass the time.



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