

Scene from *The Winter's Tale*

The Winter's Tale is all about a jealous king and his innocent queen, a message from the gods, a princess abandoned on a deserted shore, a prince that falls in love with a shepherdess, a statue that comes to life, and a BEAR!! Sound like a fairy tale to you? Sorry—there are no fairies (although one of the characters in the scene below is called a witch). Even without fairies, *The Winter's Tale* is still one of Shakespeare's most magical plays. Here is a scene for you to perform.

Speaking parts:

Lord

Paulina, the Queen's attendant

Antigonus, Paulina's husband

Servant

King Leontes

Non-speaking parts:

Other lords and attendants

Act 2, scene 2 (cut)

King Leontes has accused his pregnant wife of being unfaithful to him and thrown her into prison. While in prison, the innocent Queen has a baby girl. Her lady-in-waiting Paulina decides to take matters into her own hands and confronts the king with his daughter.

Enter Paulina with the baby

Lord. You must not enter.

Paulina. Fear you his tyrannous passion more, alas, than the Queen's life?

Antigonus. That's enough.

Servant. Madame, he hath not slept tonight, commanded none should come at him.

Paulina. I come to bring him sleep. I come with words as medicinal as true.

Leontes. What noise there, ho?

Paulina. No noise, my lord, but needful conference for your highness.

Leontes. How? Away with that audacious lady! Antigonus, I charged thee that she should not come about me.

Antigonus. I told her so, my lord, she should not visit you.

Leontes. What? Canst not rule her?

Paulina. From all dishonesty he can: in this, he shall not rule me. Good my liege, I come from your good queen.

Leontes. Force her hence.

Paulina. Let him that makes but trifles of his eyes first hand me. But first I'll do my errand. The good queen hath brought you forth a daughter; here 'tis; commends it to your blessing.

She lays down the baby

Leontes. Out! A mankind witch! Hence with her, out o' door! Traitors! Will you not push her out? Take it up I say; give it to the crone.

Paulina. Forever unvenerable be thy hands, if thou tak'st up the Princess.

Leontes. This brat is none of mine. Hence with it, and together with the dam, commit them to the fire.

Paulina. It is yours. Behold, my lords, although the print be little, the copy of the father, eye, nose, lip, the very mold and frame of hand, nail, finger.

Leontes. A gross hag! [*To Antigonus*] Thou art worthy to be hanged that wilt not stay her tongue.

Antigonus. Hang all the husbands that cannot do that feat, you'll leave yourself hardly one subject.

Leontes. Once more take her hence. Out of the chamber with her! Away with her.

Paulina. I'll pray you do not push me, I'll be gone. Look to your babe, my lord, 'tis yours. *She exits.*

Leontes. Thou traitor, has set thy wife to this. My child? Away with it.

Antigonus. I did not sir.

Leontes. You're liars all. You sir, come you hither. What will you adventure to save this brat's life?

Antigonus. Anything, my lord, I'll pawn the little blood which I have left to save the innocent—anything possible.

Leontes. It shall be possible. Swear by this sword thou wilt perform my bidding.

Antigonus. I will, my lord.

Leontes. Bear it to some remote and desert place, and there leave it, without more mercy to its own protection. Take it up.

Antigonus. Come on poor babe, some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens to be thy nurses! Wolves and bears, they say, casting their savageness aside, have done offices of pity. *He exits.*