

THE KING STAG

Based on Carlo Gozzi's "Il Re Cervo"

Adapted by Sylvia Ashby

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DEDICATION

I am indebted to directors Suzanne Riley (Texas Tech University), Peggy Rea Johnson (University of New Hampshire) and Harlan Reddell (Monterey High School).

A special thank you to Terry Marrs, whose work inspired this script.

Sylvia Ashby

STORY OF THE PLAY

King Seren depends on the uncanny ability of a magic statue to decipher a dishonest heart while trying to pick a queen for his kingdom. He desires nothing more than a young lady who truly loves him. When he finds her he calls for a royal hunt in the forest in celebration.

The jealous Periglio is out to hunt kings and not stags. The spell of the court magician falls into the hands of the untrustworthy Periglio and he uses the spell to change the king to a stag and himself into the king. Chaos breaks out in the kingdom as all are wondering about the sudden and strange changes brought about in the king, who is actually Periglio.

Although this tale is a little darker than most fairytales, all ends rightly. About an hour.

"The play provided the audience members with humor and adventure. However, one walks away with even a deeper message - no magic can replace the wisdom of honesty and love." Heather Parker, Texas Tech University Daily.

Winner: 1993 Anne Zorino Memorial Children's Theatre Playwriting Award. Premiere production at Texas Tech University.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Flexible cast, 5 m, 4 w, 9 flexible, doubling possible

MALE CHARACTERS

KING SEREN: Of Serendipity.

PERIGLIO: Prime Minister.

MAXIM: King's staff.

LEANDRO: Maxim's son.

OLD MAN: A peasant.

FEMALE CHARACTERS

BRIGGI: Head Housekeeper.

EMMI: Brigg's niece, a maid.

ANGELICA: Maxim's daughter.

LARISSA: Periglio's daughter.

FLEXIBLE CHARACTERS

PROFESSOR MAGICO: Visiting Wizard.

MAGIC STATUE: In King's chamber.

KOVAR: Head Guard.

KENO: His assistant.

MISTRESS/MASTER OF SHADOWS: Supernatural Giant.

PARROT: Human size.

TRUFFLES: Royal Bird Catcher.

KING STAG: In Royal Forest.

SECOND STAG: In Royal Forest.

CASTING HINTS

It is effective, though not necessary, if the Professor also plays the Parrot. Magic Statue, Guards, and Stags have been played by both sexes. Stags are not realistic; each performed by a single actor, they are graceful "two-legged" creatures leaping in upright posture. Mistress/Master of Shadows can be performed by either sex. For a giant, more supernatural effect - one actor rests on the shoulders of another; this role has also been done using stilts.

Doubling so the script then requires only fifteen actors.

Professor/Parrot,

Magic Statue/King Stag

Larissa/Second Stag

CHARACTERS

A number of characters are based on the traditional types popularized for hundreds of years in Italian comedy:

PERIGLIO: Proud and envious, Periglio is Prime Minister of Serendipity. He hopes to install his daughter Larissa as Queen and take Angelica for himself. His distinctive mannerisms and favorite words need emphasis. Periglio corresponds to the traditional ambitious Tartaglia (*Stammer*).

BRIGGI: Briggi is kin to Brighella, the self-seeking underling. In this script, the character is Head Housekeeper rather than Butler. Ambitious for herself, and risen above her origins, Briggi hopes to promote her niece, Emmi.

EMMI: Despite pretensions to refinement, this saucy young maid retains her country accent. Emmi is kin to Smeraldina (*Emerald*), the classic rustic soubrette.

TRUFFLES: Now appearing as a Bird Catcher, Truffles is more commonly known as Truffaldino (*Trickster*) the merry, acrobatic buffoon. This rustic clown sings, whistles, and cavorts.

MAXIM: Maxim is one more version of the classic Pantalone, the good-natured bumbling old man full of wise words and counsel. Shakespeare's Polonius is probably a better-known model.

KING: Modest King Seren doubts someone could love him as a man rather than as king. Refined and romantic by nature, the King speaks with a more poetic, high-flown diction.

ANGELICA: Though handsome and romantic, Maxim's daughter is a forthright young lady who genuinely loves the King.

LARISSA: Periglio's daughter loves and fears her father; in love with Leandro, she has no interest in King Seren.

LEANDRO: Maxim's son, an agreeable young gentleman, is in love with Larissa.

The King Stag

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KOVAR AND KENO: Though Kovar is Head Guard and Keno his assistant, there is some good-natured competition between them.

PROFESSOR MAGICO: A very able and stylish magician, this famous wizard is a bit smug and vain about his gifts and accomplishments.

PARROT: An incarnation of the Professor, this role can be played by the same actor or by another actor wearing a colorful parrot headpiece.

MISTRESS/MASTER OF SHADOWS: A giant supernatural figure, mysterious and powerful, she has a strong, booming – perhaps amplified – voice. With dramatic light and sound effects, she appears out of the shadows, perhaps wearing fantastic make-up or partial mask.

MAGIC STATUE: See Notes for creating Magic Statue. A gift from Professor to Seren, this Statue has the amazing ability to smile when anyone tells a falsehood. The Statue also laughs silently, then resumes its regular impassive expression.

STAGS: Both are dressed in leotards, tights, and horns. The King Stag is marked with a white “K” on the forehead. The Second Stag is smaller of the two. Both bound gracefully across stage. A half-mask would be useful if these roles are doubled.

OLD MAN: A feeble old peasant, he has lost most of his hearing and vision. Old Man totters on, speaking with an uneducated country accent.

SCENE SYNOPSIS

SCENE ONE: Professor Magico presents King Seren with two magical gifts. One is a Magic Statue which smiles when anyone tells a lie. Seren can now choose a wife who truly loves him. To secretly test that love, he begins a unique – often comic – competition. Proud, envious Prime Minister Periglio hopes to marry Angelica and install his own daughter Larissa as Queen. When Maxim's daughter Angelica is chosen, he vows revenge.

SCENE TWO: During a royal hunt, Periglio persuades the King to reveal the Professor's second secret – The Magic Mantra. This spell allows someone to change into another's form. Through deception, Periglio persuades Seren to switch into the body of the King Stag.

SCENE THREE: The royal wedding is scheduled for that night, but Angelica and others are disturbed by the King's behavior: Though he looks the same, he now acts in a harsh and abusive manner – with the characteristics of the Prime Minister. As punishment, Professor was changed to a Parrot; the Parrot now helps Angelica restore justice and marry her true King. Empowered once again as Professor Magico, he renounces his magic for wisdom.

PLACE: Once upon a time in the kingdom of serendipity.

TIME: Divided into three scenes, the action of the play is continuous, running under an hour.

SCENERY: Scene One takes place in the Palace; Scene Two in the Royal Forest; and Scene Three returns to the Palace. Apron or curtain scenes facilitate these transitions. If desired, this script can be produced with virtually no scenery. In the original production, the set consisted of an upstage platform backed by flats representing a palace archway. Hinged, these flats opened into arching trees to create the Forest; the flats were opened and closed by servants. In another production, while the throne and statue were shifted off, a drop was flown in for Forest. However, the Forest can be staged without a special background.

MAGIC

“Magic Statue” is created by an actor with makeup and head cap who sits inside a large, box-like pedestal. The box conceals the actor’s body; only the head shows – as if resting on a base. Marble-like or gold makeup can be used. The actor smiles on cue; the smile in the opening scene should be broad enough and held long enough to gain audience’s attention. Depending on the scene, the Statue’s reactions vary with smirks or outright laughter. A muted horn produces the sound of mocking laughter, an effect which works well in the Emmi scene. A more genteel sound works in the Larissa scene. A sound/light effect each time King looks to Statue helps focus attention on the Statue’s responses. Shortly before “smashing the bust,” the King – about to cover the Statue – holds up a shimmering cloth. While he masks the Statue, the actor who performs the Statue substitutes a bust which the King covers with cloth. This substitute can be devised in various ways. For example, cover an inflated balloon with papier-mâché; the King strikes the balloon with his sword (Or knocks it into the wings, depending on placement.) Here’s another method which works well: Take a piece of greenware (from craft store.) pottery with long-necked upper half and a spherical lower half. Turn the piece upside down, attaching the neck to a board with hot glue; reversed, the pottery now has a head-like shape. A piece of Styrofoam can be added to round out the “head.” The board is placed below, inside the pedestal; on cue, the actor moves the board – with attached pottery – to the top of the pedestal. With either method, the shards fall to the floor with a clatter, much to the shock of the audience. Appearance and disappearance of “Professor’s book” depends on facilities. If flies are not available, Mistress simply seizes the book from Professor in Scene One and returns it in Three.

Another effect involves decorating Professor’s book and cloak with ultraviolet paint which glows in the dark as play opens. Depending on how “Mistress of Shadows” is fashioned, she can appear in the final scene, or her voice-over is used.

End of Freeview

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