

URSULA

by

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CHARACTERS

Ursula.....The Princess, a bear
Wanda.....nurse/witch
Kenrick.....The King, Ursula's father
Munro.....a prince
Maira.....Munro's mother

Scene 1: (Ursula, the princess, a young woman, very well dressed, the interior of a lavish castle reception hall, a gold throne on a dais beautiful carpets, a chandelier with many candles, fancy windows, stone floors, etc. Doors downstage, stage left & stage right. The Princess goes from door to window to door, etc., obviously trying to get out, but they are all locked, and she can't do it. Enter Wanda, door, stage right.)

Wanda

You'll never get out that way. All the doors and windows are locked tight. The king has seen to that. You cannot open them. They are sturdy beyond your strength to break them, and the king has ordered that all possible exits stay locked.

Ursula

I'll break out if I have to. I will! My father can't keep me prisoner forever.

Wanda

No, you won't. Believe me you won't. You can't because the doors and windows are secure. And you won't because King Kenrick is your father. He is protecting you.

Ursula

From what is he protecting me? There is no threat, no danger.

Wanda

The world is hard. It has more trouble than you know. Evil lurks among the good. A child such as you cannot discern the difference. You look like a woman, but you are a baby.

Ursula

I'm seventeen. I'm not a child.

Wanda

No, you're not a child in your body, but your knowledge is slight. King Kenrick has kept you sheltered and protected.

Ursula

I'm not a criminal. Why am I kept prisoner? Dungeons are for thieves and scoundrels.

Wanda

The King loves you. He wants to keep you safe.

Ursula

I can't take it any more. I see no one but you, my father, the cook, occasional visitors. I'm bored, and some wildness in me rebels.

Wanda

Wildness, do you say?

Ursula

Indeed, wildness. When I look in the mirror I see a girl, but, in truth, I am a wild beast. This lovely castle (sweeping gesture) is my cage. I long to break out of my cage and run through the forest, sleep in a cave, bathe in the river, get my food and drink where I can, answer to no man, certainly not my father.

Wanda

Your father is the King.

Ursula

And my jailer!

Wanda

I think I can help you.

Ursula

Will you?

Wanda

Yes, I will. I will give you two gifts, an enchanted bear skin and a magical wheelbarrow. Ask the King for them, and I will enchant them to give you what you want. When you don the bear skin it will bond itself to you. You will become a bear. And when you climb into the wheelbarrow and say the magic phrase the wheelbarrow will take you wherever you want to go.

You'll do this for me?

Ursula

Yes I will.

Wanda

What must I do in return?

Ursula

Nothing. You owe me nothing.

Wanda

Why are you doing this for me?

Ursula

Because I love you. From the day you were born I have loved you.

Wanda

(Blackout)

Scene 2:

(Same as Scene 1, a lavish room in the castle. Ursula is still rattling doors and windows. Enter King Kenrick stage left. He stands and watches her.)

Kenrick

What are you doing?

Ursula

When are you going to let me out of my prison?

Kenrick

What are you talking about? Ursula, my girl, (expansive gesture) this beautiful home, this palace I provide for you. Who can boast of such a lovely home? You have everything here. You lack nothing. Furniture made by artists. Precious paintings. Thick rugs. You are served food on golden plates by servants without number who wait on your every need. Your clothing is fitted to your form by a skilled seamstress. You sleep on the softest down subtly scented of woodland flowers. You want for nothing in my palace, this mansion, this heaven on Earth. You are treated like a princess. You *are* a princess. What is wrong with you? Why are you complaining? You should thank me for giving you all this, everything that you have.

Ursula

Yes, I am grateful, but I still want to get out of here because, father dear, my king, my master, my jailer, I am a virtual prisoner. What good are all these luxuries if I can't leave when I want to, do what the poorest peasant in the land can do, walk through town, browse in the market, enjoy the forest, swim freely in the river? I have done nothing wrong. Why am I a prisoner? It's unfair!

Kenrick

It's for your own good.

Ursula

It does me no good. I want to hear birds sing.

Kenrick

I am protecting you.

Ursula

I don't need protection.

Kenrick

You do.

From what? Ursula

Evils of the world! Kenrick

Father, please! Ursula

The world has more trouble than you know. Kenrick

I'm seventeen. I'm not a child any more. Ursula

Exactly my point! A young woman is in danger. Kenrick

You are stifling me. Ursula

It is my duty to keep you safe. Kenrick

I need a life. Ursula

I do what I do as your father and king. Kenrick

You won't listen to reason. At least grant me this boon: I need two things to soften my unhappy incarceration, a bearskin and a wheelbarrow. The pelt of a large bear with the head intact, cleaned and cured in the sun and a large wheelbarrow with polished wooden handles and a well-greased, smooth rolling wheel. Ursula

These are odd requests. A bearskin and a barrow? Kenrick

Wanda the nurse has told me to ask for them. Ursula

Kenrick

Wanda?

Ursula

She knows my anguish.

Kenrick

What will you do with a bearskin and a wheelbarrow?

Ursula

It is obvious, father.

Kenrick

I see no use for these things in my palace.

Ursula

Here, in my prison, I can drape the bearskin on my shoulders and carry useless treasures from room in my wheelbarrow. I can warm my body when stone walls pull out my blood's heat. I can amuse my mind with childish transportation games when solitude threatens me with madness. Perhaps, in these items, some magic will save me. Do you understand, father? Do you now?

Kenrick

Alright, Ursula. If it eases your anguish I will coddle your whim. You shall have what you wish to have.

Ursula

Thank you, father.

Kenrick

Although, for the life of me, I do not ken your capacious caprice.

(Exit Kenrick.)

Scene 3: (The same as Scenes 1 and 2, a room in the castle. Enter Wanda, stage right. She inspects the bearskin and wheelbarrow, picks up the bearskin.)

Wanda

This is good. This pelt is from a noble beast. The bear has both power and wisdom, and when you put it on it will do more than just disguise you. The spirit of the bear will flow into you and you will in part become the bear.

(She hefts the handles of the wheelbarrow.)

This wheelbarrow is unlimited mobility. Wherever you want to go, there it will take you. You want the northern snow, the ice, the pure, white cold, and there you are. Anywhere you want. The steaming tropics, the desert sere, Cathay, the hills of Rome, Paris, St. Petersburg, Spain. Anywhere. Just climb into this wheelbarrow. It will convey you to the land of your heart's desire.

Ursula

Thank you, Nurse. Thank you, thank you, thank you. You are my hero! All I want is to leave these silent castle walls, my home, my prison. It's plush crimson carpets suck me down into nothingness. I am nothing. I am nobody.

Wanda

And so you shall leave. Come here, my princess, come to me.

(She drapes the magic bearskin over Ursula's shoulders.)

I give you the strength and wisdom of the bear. Do you feel her power?

Ursula

(She strokes the bearskin.)

Yes. Yes, I think I do.

Wanda

Climb into the wheelbarrow.

(Wanda steadies the wheelbarrow as Ursula climbs into it and stands up in it. Ursula raises up her arms. She seems to grow taller and stronger.)

Wanda

Where do you want to go?

Ursula

Take me to the forest. The trees, the black soil, the smell of fertility and life! Stones and roots, running water, cool breezes, creatures large and small. Freedom. Take me there! I want freedom!

(Blackout.)

Scene 4:

(In the forest, enter Prince Munro, stage right. He is dressed for hunting, carries a bow and quiver of arrows over one shoulder.)

Munro

The bear! I'll kill the bear before this day is done. It's a fierce, big beast whose saber claws, no doubt, can rip me in two if I allow it.

(Ursula stands in a far corner of the stage, wearing the bearskin.)

There! There it is! There!

(Hounds bay. The Prince fits an arrow to his bow, bends the bow, takes aim.)

Ursula

Stop! Stop!

Munro

(Amazed to hear a bear speak, he lowers his bow, then he brings it back up, bends it further and cocks the arrow.)

What?

Ursula

Stop! What are you doing? Don't shoot me! Call off your dogs!

Munro

How can you speak?

(In a commanding voice, to the dogs.)

Randolph! Nipper! MacDuff! Down, now! Down!

(The dogs stop their noise.)

Ursula

With my mouth. With my brain. What do you think? The same way you speak.

Munro

But you're a bear! You're a beast! No! It's impossible! Bears don't speak.
(He prepares to shoot, again.)

Ursula

Stop! Don't kill me! I'm not a beast!

(Munro hesitates again.)

Ursula

Take me home with you. I'll help you. I'll clean your house and cook your meals. I'll be your companion.

Munro

Will you?

Ursula

Yes, I will. You'll like it, I promise you.

Munro

Will I now?

Ursula

Yes, you will. I promise. Where do you live?

Munro

I live in a palace. My father is a king.

Ursula

(Aside.) Hah!

(To Munro.) That's a coincidence! I know palaces and kings.

Munro

How can you know palaces and kings? You're a beast. You live in the forest.

Ursula

I mean by reputation, that's what I mean. I have heard of palaces and kings. Your reputation extends to the forest. We all know your father is king.

Munro

And you speak with understanding! You are an outstanding bear, indeed! Your form and carriage bear witness to some nobility. Your look is pleasing. Your speech is clear and bears witness to some intelligence and wit. For a bear.

Ursula

Will you take me home? I'll be your bear.

Munro

Will you serve and amuse me? Will you restrain yourself from eating my hounds and smashing my throne?

Ursula

I will.

Munro

Can you dance?

Ursula

I'm a good dancer, but you'll not make me into your circus bear, Oh no! Not that! But I do promise to help and amuse you. That will have to do.

Munro

(He stows his arrow and lowers his bow.

He extends to her a gloved hand.)

Fair enough! Although a dancing, talking bear *would* amuse me greatly. But I'll be satisfied! No doubt I'm the only man with an outstanding bear such as you. Come, follow me. We'll go the palace to get you some porridge and a soft nest in which to rest.

(Exeunt together.)

Scene 5:

(A lavishly appointed room in Prince Munro's castle, which bears an uncanny resemblance to King Kenrick's castle. Ursula is doing housework, sweeping, dusting, polishing. She wears her magic bearskin, an apron, a kerchief. Enter, separately, Queen Muira, stage right, and Prince Munro, stage left. They meet, center stage, and embrace. Ursula continues to work. The magic wheelbarrow sits unobtrusively in a corner)

Munro

Mother, you look lovely!

Muira

Thank you! And you? It's good to have you back. You're looking hale and hardy. Forest air! The hunt was good, I take it.

Munro

Three grouse, a big buck deer, and....(sweeping gesture towards Ursula)...my bear, my lovely talking bear.

Ursula

(She curtsies to the Queen.)

My Lady.

Muira

You are a good bear, an industrious bear.

Ursula

Thank you madam. You are kind. I do my best.

Muira

None of these lazy maids, you. Not hid in the scullery eating sweets. You did well with this particular bear, my son.

Munro

I could not bear it to bear home a stupid bear, mother.

Muira

She is clever enough, for a bear.

Munro

And a good worker too. She tells me she can dance, though I've yet to see it.

Muir

I'm glad you brought that subject up.

Munro

Work?

Muir

Dancing.

Munro

Dancing?

Ursula

Dancing?

Muir

Dancing. You're a man now, my son, a mature man who's seen more than a score of summers. It's time to plan the the Grand Royal Debutantes Moonlight Ball. It's time for gentlemen and gentle ladies to meet. It's time for you to find a princess who may one day take my place as queen. We must have a ball.

Munro

Yes, mother. I can see that.

Ursula

I'd like to go to the ball.

(Munro kicks Ursula.)

Ursula

Ouch! Why did you do that?

Munro

You're a bear! Don't put on the airs of a princess!

(Ursula growls at Munro, and she starts to charge towards him, but she restrains herself, picks up her broom and goes back to work, grumbling.)

Munro

I've taken my bear out of the forest, but I've not taken the forest out of my bear, I see. A bear at a ball, indeed!

Ursula

Is that so outrageous?

Munro

Yes. Yes, it is.

Ursula

Go then! Go waltz with silly, empty headed girls who'll serve you fripperies for breakfast. I hope you're very happy! Your heirs shall be geese!

(She starts cleaning again, with spiteful, angry motions.)

Muir

Aren't you being rather hard on her? She seems to be a rather good bear.

Munro

And that is exactly my point. Ursula may be an outstanding bear, but she is a bear. I've no time for this foolishness. I'm going to the stables to see about the horses.

(Exit Munro, stage left.)

Muir

Horses and bears!

Ursula

(Aside.)

I want to go to the ball. I'll ask the Queen. I'll beg her if I have to.

(Ursula kneels before the Queen.)

Your Majesty!

Muir

Bear.

Ursula

Your Majesty?

Muir

Yes, Bear?

Ursula
Your Majesty, the ball.

Muir
The ball?

Ursula
Yes, Your Majesty, the ball. I want to go to the ball. I must go to the ball.

Muir
My dear, the ball is for young men and women of high estate. You're not of high estate, you're a bear, and, for all I know, you may even be an old bear. I've no way of judging that. You may be a very old bear with many cubs. Who knows?

Ursula
Your Majesty, please, the ball. I want to go. I feel I must go.

Muir
It's not suitable! Debutantes will be decked in gorgeous gowns, and the men dressed to the nines. The best musicians in the kingdom. A feast one can never forget. How can there be a bear at the ball? It just won't do, my dear.

Ursula
And dancing?

Muir
Of course!

Ursula
I can dance. I'll show you.

(Ursula strips off her apron and kerchief and dances. She is graceful. The dance is beautiful. At the end of her dance she again kneels before the Queen.)

Ursula
I can dance, and I love to dance. Please let me go to the ball. I'll do no harm, I promise.
A bear will only watch them twirl and spin
She'll try her best to not destroy their joy
To do no harm at the ball will be her whim
Not bear it's for but for a girl and boy

