



The Castle of the Faithful Wives

Readers Theater Play Script and Performance Notes

AUTHORS: Wendy Lees, **COUNTRY:** Germany, **GENRE:** Comedy



CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

Lady-in-Waiting / also Madame Treasurer

Royal Tax Collector

Nobleperson #1

Duke of Weisenberg

Nobleperson #2

King Konrad III

Queen Gertrude

Court Attendant #1

Court Attendant #2

Court Attendant #3

King's Soldier #1

King's Soldier #2

King's Soldier #3

Guard

Duchess Uta

Citizen #1

Citizen #2 (female)

Citizen #3

Citizen #4

Messenger

Children of Weisenberg

If there are performance notes, they can be found on the pages following the script

Scene 1 – Royal Court of King Konrad and Queen Gertrude

[**Stage set:** The stage is divided in thirds. The first area presents the royal court of KING KONRAD and QUEEN GERTRUDE. In the middle is the gate to the Castle of Weisenberg, and the gate area is further partitioned with one area presenting outside the gate and the other area presenting inside the gate. On the final third, the interior of Weisenberg Castle is presented. (See **Performance Notes** for further suggestions on the three stage sets.)]

[At the opening of the play, all players onstage are frozen. KING KONRAD and QUEEN GERTRUDE sit on two thrones, made with large, decorated chairs with high backs. LADY-IN-WAITING stands beside QUEEN GERTRUDE's throne. Next to QUEEN GERTRUDE is ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR. KING'S SOLDIER #1, KING'S SOLDIER #2, and KING'S SOLDIER #3 (together, called "SOLDIERS") are beside KING KONRAD's throne, with KING'S SOLDIER #1 being the closest, then SOLDIER #2, then KING'S SOLDIER #3. COURT ATTENDANT #1, COURT ATTENDANT #2, COURT ATTENDANT #3 and COURT ATTENDANT #4 (together, called "COURT ATTENDANTS") stand in small clusters loosely forming an arc across the rest of the stage. In the center of the stage, NOBLEPERSON #1 holds out a small bag of coins. NOBLEPERSON #2 stands behind NOBLEPERSON #1.]

[NARRATOR stands in one of the far front corners of the stage.]

NARRATOR:

Hello, everyone. The play you are about to see is "The Castle of the Faithful Wives." It's a German legend. A legend tells a story from something that really happened. This story really happened many centuries ago, in the year 1140.

[NARRATOR steps forward.]

NARRATOR:

(clears throat) Long ago, in the time of your *(each time the word "great" is uttered, the Narrator raises a finger, counting eight "greats")* Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-

LADY-IN-WAITING:

(unfreezing, to Narrator) Oh, come on! I may be a Lady-in- Waiting, but there's a limit to how long even I can wait! Can't you speed this along?

ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR:

(unfreezing, to Narrator) Yes, please! As Royal Tax Collector, I have the first line in this play. And if we don't hurry up, I might forget it.

NARRATOR:

No problem. *(to audience)* All of you just imagine I said "Great" twenty-nine times, when referring to your Great... etcetera, etcetera, etcetera... Grandparents.

LADY-IN-WAITING:

You could just say, “almost a thousand years ago.”

NARRATOR:

We’ll never get this play started if you keep interrupting.

LADY-IN-WAITING:

(annoyed) Sor-RY! Just trying to be helpful.

[LADY IN WAITING and ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR refreeze.]

NARRATOR:

(to Lady-in-Waiting, emphatically pronouncing the capitalized words) ALMOST A THOUSAND YEARS AGO...

LADY IN WAITING:

Was that so hard?

NARRATOR:

As I was saying ... In those days, each Duke had his own castle. Not as big as a King’s castle, of course, but a castle just the same. It had a drawbridge and everything. Farmers gave their produce to the Duke, and the Duke paid taxes- or "tributes", as they were called back then- to the King. *(clears throat)* Ah! Here’s *(gestures to the Duke)* the Duke of Weisenberg *(pronounce: WISE-en-berg)* He’s come to pay his tribute to King Konrad the Third.

[All players on stage unfreeze. DUKE OF WEISENBERG enters the stage, and stands in wait several feet behind NOBLEPERSON #1. NOBLEPERSON #1 bows or curtsies to KING KONRAD and QUEEN GERTRUDE, drops a bag of coins in ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR’S open palm, and exits. ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR shakes the tiny bag of coins by his or her ear, sighs contentedly at the sound of the money, and places the bag on a small table where other small bags of money are already sitting.]

ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR:

Next!

NARRATOR:

Really? You were worried about forgetting that line?

[Heads of all on stage dramatically turn to NARRATOR. During the conversation that follows between NARRATOR and ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR, all other characters’ heads on stage follow back and forth between the speakers, as if watching a tennis match.]

ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR:

It’s a lot of pressure having the first line, okay?

NARRATOR:

Technically, I had the first line.

ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR:

Yeah, but it's not like what the narrator says actually counts in a play.

NARRATOR:

(upset) Says who?

ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR:

Says me, and everyone. But whatever...

LADY-IN-WAITING:

Still waiting over here...

ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR:

AS I was saying. *(loudly and dramatically, raises hand next to mouth, so it looks like shouting)*
NE-EXT!

[NARRATOR sits down on small chair in an out-of-the-way corner of the stage, folding hands in lap, and looks on at the play.]

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(steps forward) Do you mean me? *(points with thumb to Nobleperson #2, behind)* Or this guy?

ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR:

Yes, you. You, the Duke of Weisenberg and your lovely money bag are up next!

[With palm open flat, ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR makes a beckoning gesture by rapidly closing and opening his fingers.]

[NOBLEPERSON #2 backs into the crowd.]

[DUKE OF WEISENBERG plunks down a coin bag, much larger than the ones sitting on the table, into ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR's hand. It makes a jangling sound as the bag is set down. ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR's hand drops at the weight of the coin bag.]

ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR:

Not bad! Not bad at all. *(leans over the bag of money, seems to breathe it in contentedly)* Ahh!
(to the audience) Gotta love it.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(turns and bows to King Konrad) Your Majesty, it is an honor to see you.

KING KONRAD:

Of course. And how do you and yours fare at the Castle Weisenberg?

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

I can't complain.

KING KONRAD:

(gesturing to the bag of coins) No shortage of gold or silver in your treasury, I see.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

Thankfully, no.

KING KONRAD:

(jovially) Good times for us both.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

So it is. *(moving over to Queen Gertrude)* And my Queen, you don't look a day older than when you were a princess, if you don't mind my saying so.

[DUKE OF WEISENBERG bows deeply to QUEEN GERTRUDE. As DUKE OF WEISENBERG does so, he makes a sweeping gesture with his right arm, and the tips of his fingers brush against one of the Queen Gertrude's shoes.]

KING KONRAD:

(stands and points to the Duke of Weisenberg, fuming mad) How dare you insult my Queen Gertrude in this way!

QUEEN GERTRUDE: What's wrong, my dear? I thought the Duke's words were ever so complimentary!

KING KONRAD:

The Duke! When he bowed before you, his hand touched your shoe!

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

What? It did?

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

It did?

COURT ATTENDANT #1:

It did?

KING KONRAD:

Yes, we all saw it.

COURT ATTENDANT #2:

We did?

[Note- for the next few lines the word “CROWD” refers to anyone onstage who is not KING KONRAD or QUEEN GERTRUDE.]

[CROWD turns to each other in confused murmurings.]

COURT ATTENDANT #3:

Did you see it?

COURT ATTENDANT #4:

See what?

COURT ATTENDANT #3:

The Duke touched the Queen’s shoe.

COURT ATTENDANT #4:

And a very pretty shoe it is!

COURT ATTENDANT #2:

(taps head of Court Attendant #4) No, dingbat! No one can touch the Queen! Even her shoe!

COURT PERSON #3:

Everyone knows that!

COURT ATTENDANT #1:

Well, I’m sorry to say, I didn’t see it.

COURT ATTENDANT #2:

Me, neither.

KING KONRAD:

(loud & threatening) We all saw it!

[CROWD is instantly quiet.]

KING KONRAD:

We saw it! Didn't we?

[CROWD changes its tune, now emphatically agreeing with KING KONRAD.]

COURT ATTENDANT #1:

Absolutely!

COURT ATTENDANT #2:

Indeed!

COURT ATTENDANT #3:

Without a doubt!

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

With all due respect, Sire. Even if I did touch the Queen's shoe, it was most unintentional. (*to Queen Gertrude*) My Queen. (*to King Konrad*) My King. I'm truly sorry for any offense my carelessness may have caused.

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

There now, Konrad. The Duke of Weisenberg has apologized. Let's just forget it ever happened, shall we?

KING KONRAD:

It's too late.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

What do you mean, "too late"? Was I supposed to apologize before I even knew there was anything to apologize FOR?

[CROWD chuckles quietly at DUKE OF WEISENBERG's retort.]

KING KONRAD:

You think you're so smart! The Duke of Weisenberg, indeed. They should call you UNWISE-en-berg!

[CROWD gasps dramatically, each one holding one hand over his or her mouth.]

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

What did you say?

KING KONRAD:

(*emphasizing each syllable*) UNWISE-en-berg.

[CROWD gasps again.]

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(*sternly*) Take that back!

KING KONRAD:

(*mocking*) "Take that back."

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

Well, if THAT's how it's going to be (*snatches the money bag out of Royal Tax Collector's hand*) I WILL take it back. All of it! (*to Queen Gertrude*) A thousand pardons, my Queen, for my inadvertent shoe shine. But I am taking my bag of tribute and going home!

[DUKE OF WEISENBERG storms offstage.]

ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR:

(*gazes longingly off stage, sighs loudly*) Oh, tribute . . . how I miss you already. Your malodourous (pronounce: muhl-OH-der-us) metallic smell. Your melodious (pronounce: muh-LOAD-ee-us) jangling. How sweet it is. (*sighs loudly*) WAS.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(*from offstage*) And don't expect the people of (*emphasizing each syllable*) WISE-en-berg to pay taxes to the Crown EVER again!

[CROWD gasps again.]

[ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR faints dramatically, collapsing onto to ground, landing partially on top of LADY IN WAITING's foot. His being on her foot is not obvious to the audience, however. It is just a set up for a later joke/line.]

KING KONRAD:

(*calls offstage*) Oh yeah!? 'Il see how he likes it when my soldiers surround his castle for an all-out siege! No one gets away with not paying tribute to THIS crown! (*to audience*) NO ONE! Mark my words.

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

Konrad, is this really necessary?

KING SOLDIER:

The Duke must be taught a lesson.

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

Over a shoe?

KING KONRAD:

Watch me. (*yells offstage*) Soldiers!

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

(*stands right beside King Konrad's throne, taps King Konrad on shoulder*) Uh, we're right here.

[KING'S SOLDIER #2 stands next to KING'S SOLDIER #1, and KING'S SOLDIER #3 is beside him/her. KING KONRAD turns to face the SOLDIERS. KING'S SOLDIER #2 smiles and waves enthusiastically.]

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

(chill and laid back) 'Sup?

KING KONRAD:

(sweeps his arm around the stage in an all-encompassing gesture) All of you, leave us!

[Everyone rushes off, except the unconscious ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR and LADY IN WAITING.]

[As NOBLEPERSON #2 leaves, he/she sets a small bag of money on ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR's head.]

KING KONRAD:

(to Lady-in-Waiting) Well, what are you waiting for?

LADY-IN-WAITING:

(looks down at Royal Tax Collector) He's on my shoe.

[QUEEN GERTRUDE stands up from her throne. She lifts the coin bag off the ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR's head, then helps roll THE ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR off of LADY-IN-WAITING's foot.]

[LADY-IN-WAITING points to herself, then to offstage with her thumb, as if asking QUEEN GERTRUDE if she should leave. QUEEN GERTRUDE nods. LADY-IN-WAITING points to the collapsed ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR. QUEEN GERTRUDE nods. LADY-IN-WAITING rolls ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR off the stage. Actor in the role of ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR can help by barrel rolling, while not making it obvious that he/she is assisting his/her removal.]

KING KONRAD:

(yells off to the side at the Narrator) And you there, what are you still doing here?

NARRATOR:

Me?

KING KONRAD:

Yes, you! You're part of this play, aren't you? Get off the stage.

NARRATOR:

(bends right arm, puts hand in a fist, and quickly pulls her/his elbow down in a celebratory gesture) Yes! I'm part of the play! I knew it!

[NARRATOR exits, gleefully.]

[DUKE OF WEISENBERG peeks out from behind the curtain, puts his hand to his ear, indicating that he is eavesdropping.]

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(to audience) SHH!

KING KONRAD:

Soldiers! Come quickly!

[SOLDIERS #1, #2 & #3 enter and come to attention.]

SOLDIER #1:

You called, sire?

KING KONRAD:

We're laying siege to UNWISE-en-berg.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(alarmed, to the audience) Uh-oh!

[DUKE OF WEISENBERG quickly ducks off stage.]

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

Who?

KING KONRAD:

(slowly) UNWISE-en-berg.

[SOLDIERS #1, #2 & #3, together called "SOLDIERS," look at each other and shrug.]

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

(sits back down on her throne) He means Weisenberg. The Duke of Weistenberg's castle.

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

Oh!

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

Cool place.

KING'S SOLDIER #2:

Road trip!

KING KONRAD:

Assemble the troops. We march at dawn!

[SOLDIERS march off in the other direction.]

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

My Lord, stop for a moment? Don't you think this may be a bit of an over-reaction?

KING KONRAD:

(touches his forehead with one of his hands as if he has a headache) We cannot allow it! Today, the Duke of Weisenberg brushes your shoe. Tomorrow, he may try to grab the whole kingdom. *(points with one finger into the air)* We must nip this in the bud!

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

Oh, for goodness sake! The fellow was paying us tribute. LOTS of it! Now he's taken his money bag and stormed off in a huff. And next the two of you are going to get into a siege-thing? Why go there?

KING KONRAD:

It's a point of honor!

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

I don't see the honor. Or the point!

KING KONRAD:

The POINT is, we MUST surround the Duke's castle. A King never goes back on his word. If I call "siege" and then I say "never mind," no one will take me seriously ever again.

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

And they'll take us more seriously when they find out the siege of Weisenberg started over a shoe?

KING KONRAD:

I didn't expect you to understand!

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

You were right. I don't!

KING KONRAD:

Tomorrow we march and surround the Duke's castle. No one will be able to get in or out of it. Sooner or later, the people in the castle will have to surrender!

[KING exits.]

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

(takes her shoes off) Well, don't expect me to join you. My feet are killing me.

[QUEEN GERTRUDE exits with shoes in hand.]

Scene 2 – The gate of Castle Weisenberg

[Stage set: as in Scene 1.]

[GUARD stands at the “gate”. (See Performance Notes for more detail.)]

[DUKE OF WEISENBERG rushes onstage.]

GUARD:

(calls down to Duke of Weisenberg) Hark, who goes down there?

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

It’s me. The Duke.

GUARD:

Ah, I didn’t recognize you. You look so much shorter from up here. *(looks behind him, hand to mouth, in a gesture to amplify voice)* Open the gate! Our Duke has returned.

[The gate door is opened and DUKE OF WEISENBERG enters through it into the courtyard. (See Performance Notes for more detail.)]

[CITIZENS enter into the courtyard from the other side of the stage, murmuring among themselves. The DUCHESS UTA approaches to greet DUKE OF WEISENBERG. She carries a basket with a cloth cover. DUKE OF WEISENBERG holds the bag of tribute behind his back.]

DUCHESS UTA:

(quick kiss on the cheek) Why dear husband, you’re home early. I thought you were staying overnight with all the other Dukes at King Konrad’s castle for the usual tribute feast.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

There was a change of plans.

DUCHESS UTA:

(sees the money in the Duke’s hand and cuts off the Duke) Darling, isn’t that our tribute bag for the King and Queen?

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

It was.

DUCHESS UTA:

"Was"? What’s going on?

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(gestures to all) People of Weisenberg, gather ‘round. I have a few announcements to make.

[CITIZENS gather around DUKE OF WEISENBERG.]

[GUARD starts to climb down to be among them.]

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(to Guard) You...might want to stay put. Keep an eye out... (*speaking, drifts off*)

GUARD:

For what, my Duke?

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

Just keep an eye out.

GUARD:

Right. (*climbs back up*)

CITIZEN #4:

What's he doing back a day early?

CITIZEN #3:

Announcement of some kind.

CITIZEN #4:

Good or bad?

CITIZEN #3:

He doesn't look happy, I'll say that.

CITIZEN #1:

I don't like the sound of this.

CITIZEN #2:

I can't see! You're standing in my way!

CITIZEN #1:

Move, then!

CITIZEN #2:

I still can't see!

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

Citizens, friends, family...I have good news, and some not-so-good news. The good news is... the Castle of Weisenberg will no longer have to pay tribute to the crown.

[CROWD responds with a mix of clapping and cheering. "Hooray!" "Yay!" "Wow!" "Did you hear that!" "That's fantastic!" "No way!" Some hand-clapping high-five's.]

DUCHESS UTA:

Three cheers for my husband, the Duke of Weisenberg! Hip, Hip...

CROWD:

Hooray!

DUCHESS UTA:

(lifts arm above head in a double-fist bump gesture) Hip, Hip...

CROWD:

Hooray!

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(speaks in a rush) The bad news is Weisenberg Castle will be under siege before breakfast.

DUCHESS UTA:

Hip, Hip, H— WHAT?

[CITIZENS, in fear, pull CHILDREN close to them. Again, the following lines are said quickly.]

CITIZEN #4:

Under siege?

CITIZEN #3:

What did he say?

CITIZEN #1:

I thought he said something about breakfast.

CITIZEN #2:

Can someone move? I still can't see!

DUCHESS UTA:

My dear, a siege by the King? I think we deserve an explanation.

[NARRATOR enters.]

NARRATOR:

The Duke of Weisenberg told everyone what had happened during his visit to the royal palace.

[DUKE OF WEISENBERG pantomimes mouthing words silently: his arrival, his placing the money in the ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR's hands, bowing to the KING KONRAD, and then bowing to the QUEEN GERTRUDE, touching the DUCHESS's shoe to mimic his accidental brush with the QUEEN's shoe, shrugging his shoulders, mimicking an angry KONRAD.]

NARRATOR:

(continuing) ... and how the King had called him ...

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(distinctly pronounces each syllable) UNWISE-en-berg!

[CROWD gasps dramatically.]

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

Obviously, I took back our tribute and returned here.

DUCHESS UTA:

I don't blame you! We would have all done same thing.

[CROWD murmurs in agreement]

CITIZEN #1:

That's right!

CITIZEN #2:

Indeed we would have!

CITIZEN #3:

The nerve of that King Konrad!

CITIZEN #4:

Served him right, it did!

CITIZEN #3:

Showed him a thing or two!

DUCHESS UTA:

We'll get through this together! Madame Treasurer, how is our treasury?

MADAME TREASURER:

Excellent! Stacked floor to ceiling with gold, silver, and copper.

DUCHESS UTA:

And our food pantry?

MADAME TREASURER:

Even better! Stocked with goodies on every shelf.

DUCHESS UTA:

And our (*whispers loudly*) “secret tunnels”?

[CROWD whispers to one another: SHHHHH!]

DUCHESS UTA:

We’ll show the King how UNWISE he was to think he could lay siege on our castle! With our secret tunnels, we’ll be able to restock our food pantry stocks all we want. We can hold out as long as it takes!

[KING’S SOLDIERS march onstage.]

DUCHESS UTA:

That was quick.

[CITIZENS of Weisenberg huddle. SOLDIERS march up to the castle wall/gate.]

NARRATOR:

The people of Weisenberg quickly organized their messengers to escort their merchants safely out through their (*whispers*) SECRET TUNNELS.

GUARD:

(*to Soldiers, points off in the distance*) Look, a fire-breathing, two-headed purple unicorn!

[KING’S SOLDIERS look around them, talking quickly.]

KING’S SOLDIER #1:

No way!

KING’S SOLDIER #2:

Where?

KING’S SOLDIER #3:

I’ve never even seen a ONE-headed unicorn!

[CITIZENS and MESSENGER sneak offstage. Give GUARD a “thumb’s up” signal.]

KING’S SOLDIER #1:

I don’t see anything.

KING'S SOLDIER #2:

Me, neither.

GUARD:

You don't? Oh, I forgot, only the wisest people, like those of WISE-en-berg, can see magical creatures.

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

BumMER.

[KING KONRAD enters.]

KING KONRAD:

(to soldiers) How goes the siege, my soldiers? No doubt just the sight of the King's army is enough to make the Castle surrender immediately!

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

Uh, well, ...

SOLDER #2:

They're still in there.

KING KONRAD:

Have they at least raised their white flag?

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

Not yet. But Sire, you just missed a fire-breathing, five-headed purple unicorn!

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

I thought he said a fire-breathing, TWO-headed polka-dotted unicorn.

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

Whatever. We all missed it. The thing is, only wise people like those in WISE-enberg can see magical creatures.

KING KONRAD:

WHAT?! I suppose you'd believe a headless orange unicorn nearly galloped on my toe when I first arrived!

KING'S SOLDIER #2:

Whoa! Sorry I missed that!

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

Intense!

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

Uh, Sire. If it was headless, how did you know it was a unicorn?

KING KONRAD:

(clears throat) Just stay with your post.

[KING KONRAD exits.]

[SOLDIERS pantomime chatting among themselves. They do not notice MESSENGER, CITIZENS scurry in and out of the tunnel carrying scrolls, baskets of fruit or baked goods and bags of money.]

NARRATOR:

The siege went on for months. But the people in the Duke's castle were managing pretty well. Until one day...

[KING'S SOLDIER #2 and KING'S SOLDIER #3 have been sleeping on the ground during NARRATOR's lines, while KING'S SOLDIER #1 kept watch. KING'S SOLDIER #2 and KING'S SOLDIER #3 wake up and stretch.]

KING'S SOLDIER #2:

Another day with nothing to do. How long before this siege ends?

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

They should have surrendered weeks ago.

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

Laying siege is so-o-o-o last season. And the season before that. And the season before that.

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

And we STILL haven't seen any unicorns!

KING'S SOLDIER #2:

(yawns) This whole siege-thing is growing old.

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

I know. How 'bout a game of I-Spy?

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

I-Spy? That didn't come along until the 20th century and we're only in the 10th.

KING'S SOLDIER #2:

I'm too bored to worry about technicalities. Let's play anyway.

GUARD:

(*calling to Soldiers*) Fellows! Remember to keep your eye out for that purple unicorn riding a firefly. Coming from over THERE! (*points offstage; Soldiers pivot their heads to that direction*) I'm taking a bathroom break. (*climbs down and exits stage*)

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

No unicorn! Well, let's play the game.

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

I'll go first. I spy something (*looks down at his shirt*) GREY.

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

Your shirt.

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

Hmm. Let me try again. I spy something (*looks up at the sky*) blue.

KING'S SOLDIER #2:

The sky?

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

You guys are amazing. (*looks at the hills*) Something GREEN.

SOLDIERS #1 and KING'S SOLDIER #2, together:

The grass!

KING'S SOLDIER #2:

Look, let me try. I spy something... invisible.

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

How can you spy something invisible? You need to pick something between obvious and impossible like...

[MESSENGER emerges from behind the wall just as KING KONRAD enters the stage. MESSENGER is holding a scroll.]

KING KONRAD:

Look! That's a messenger from Weisenberg. He's sneaking out! Gadzooks – do they have some sort of hidden secret tunnel?

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

A secret tunnel! A perfect "I Spy" pick, Your Majesty!

KING KONRAD:

Soldiers, quit playing games! Seize him/her!

[KING'S SOLDIER #2 and KING'S SOLDIER #3 grab MESSENGER.]

KING KONRAD:

So that's how the people in the castle have lasted this long! *(to King's Soldier #1)* You, go tell the rest of my army we have some tunnels to seal off.

KING'S SOLDIER #1:

Yes, Sire. *(rushes off stage)*

KING KONRAD:

That Duke isn't clever enough to fool me! *(to Soldiers)* Let him go.

[SOLDIERS release MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER:

You're setting me free?

KING KONRAD:

Yes. Only to deliver a message to the unlucky souls inside.

MESSENGER:

What message?

KING KONRAD:

Tell that Duke of yours that his *(makes airquotes with fingers in the air)* "secret" tunnel will be sealed off now, for good. If he surrenders, I will let the women and children go free.

MESSENGER:

And the men?

KING KONRAD:

(drags a finger across his throat while making a slicing sound) Vzzzzt.

MESSENGER:

Yes, Your Majesty.

[MESSENGER scurries away through the tunnel.]

GUARD:

(returns from bathroom break, speaks casually) What did I miss?

NARRATOR:

A lot! And by the magic of theater, several weeks have passed since you asked that question. Things are not looking good for the people of Weisenberg now. Take a look for yourself.

Scene 3 – Inside the Duke of Weisenberg's Castle

[**Stage set:** This is the far end of the stage. Two nice chairs are on stage. If you have a backdrop, it indicates castle walls. DUCHESS UTA sits in one of the chairs.]

DUCHESS UTA:

How is our treasury?

MADAME TREASURER:

(two coins in hand, rubs them together between fingers) We have barely two coins to rub together.

DUCHESS UTA:

And our food pantry?

MADAME TREASURER:

(holds out a handful of dried beans) This is it. Doesn't even amount to a hill of beans. Literally.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

Perhaps it's time to consider...

[KING KONRAD and KING'S SOLDIERS enter.]

KING KONRAD:

(from outside the gate, calling up to the Guard) Still no white flag? You people of Weisenberg are as stubborn as they come! No one responded to my first message. They will NOT ignore my second!

[KING KONRAD hands a note tied with a ribbon around a rock to KING'S SOLDIER #1, who passes it to KING'S SOLDIER #2, who passes it to KING'S SOLDIER #3, who goes to pass it on to someone off stage.]

KING KONRAD:

What are you waiting for? A purple unicorn to deliver it for you? Throw it to the guard so we can be done with this.

KING'S SOLDIER #3:

Head's up! *(throws note to the Guard, who catches it)*

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

What does it say?

GUARD:

(to Duke of Weisenberg) The same thing as last time—a demand that we surrender—except with a deadline of nightfall. Otherwise he plans to burn Castle Weisenberg to the ground!

[CROWD has mixed gasps of horror and sadness: “Oh no!” “This is it!” “We’re done for!” “Waaah!”]

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(to the Duchess) You and the rest of the women gather the children and whatever you can carry with you. There is no time to delay.

DUCHESS UTA:

(interrupts) What did you say? Are you surrendering?

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

It’s time to face reality. The King will never allow the men to walk out of this alive, but at least you and the children can survive.

DUCHESS UTA:

Say, I’ve got an idea! *(louder, to Crowd)* Someone get me a quill and ink. I will write back to the King with our reply.

[Random hand from behind the curtain sticks out with an ink bottle and quill. DUCHESS takes it.]

DUCHESS UTA:

Thank you!

[Hand gives “Thumbs up” sign and pulls back behind the curtain. DUCHESS writes reply on the back of KING KONRAD’s note. Ties it back around the rock and throws it to GUARD.]

DUCHESS UTA:

(to Crowd) We must be strong! Come, everyone. We must ready ourselves for the inevitable (pronounce: in-EHV-it-uh-bul).

[GUARD climbs up the ladder. Everyone else inside Weisenberg exits the stage. Outside the castle gate, QUEEN GERTRUDE, LADY-IN-WAITING and COURT ATTENDANT #1 enter quietly, behind KING KONRAD and SOLDIERS. When GUARD throws note, QUEEN GERTRUDE catches it.]

KING KONRAD:

Gertrude, what are you doing here? I thought your shoes prevented you from making such a journey.

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

My regular shoes, yes. But these boots are made for walking.

[QUEEN GERTRUDE raises skirt enough to expose her boots. LADY-IN-WAITING does the same.]

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

(hands note to King Konrad) I believe this message is meant for you.

[KING KONRAD undoes ribbon. Reads note with everyone gathered around him, peering over into the note.]

LADY-IN-WAITING:

Wow. *(pause)* Beautiful penmanship.

KING KONRAD:

(reads) "We, the women of the castle, humbly realize that our fate is in your hands. We ask only that you allow us to leave at sunrise tomorrow with our children and whatever we can carry on our backs. For this we entreat you and submit our lives to your mercy." Harumph! Pretty words, is all that is. I will concede nothing!

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

Really, Konrad. They agreed to surrender. She's just asking for the women to be allowed to leave with whatever they can carry on their backs.

KING KONRAD:

Oh, very well. *(calls up to Guard)* We accept the Duchess's terms of surrender. Just be quick about it.

GUARD:

I believe they are ready.

[GUARD climbs down. As DUKE OF WEISENBERG enters, everyone outside the wall freezes. DUKE OF WEISENBERG gazes sadly at the castle and rubs his hand on the wall. He pats GUARD on the shoulder.]

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(to Guard) It's time, then. Lower the gate!

[GUARD lowers the gate. DUCHESS UTA enters stage, carrying sacks. She pauses at her husband. They squeeze each others' hands with somber looks on their faces.]

DUCHESS UTA:

Hop on!

[DUKE OF WEISENBERG climbs ladder slightly to get in a position so DUCHESS UTA can give him a piggyback ride. CITIZEN #2 enters the stage and GUARD gets on her back.]

DUCHESS UTA:

Let's go!

[Everyone on the exterior the castle unfreezes. DUCHESS UTA with DUKE OF WEISENBERG on her back exit first. Followed by CITIZEN #2 and GUARD. Then all other women and men of Weisenberg exit similarly, with CHILDREN heavily and comically overloaded with supplies so that the women can carry the men.]

KING KONRAD:

What is the meaning of this?

NARRATOR:

I believe this is the people of Weisenberg surrendering under the terms you agreed to, Sire. The women and children were free to leave with whatever they could carry on their backs. And that happens to be their husbands!

KING KONRAD:

Why this is... this is... HILARIOUS! (*breaks into laughter*)

[SOLDIERS, QUEEN GERTRUDE, LADY IN WAITING laugh as well.]

[When CITIZENS of Weisengerg see that KING KONRAD, SOLDIERS, QUEEN GERTRUDE, and LADY IN WAITING are laughing they, too, laugh.]

KING KONRAD:

Duchess Uta.

[CROWD is instantly silenced when the KING KONRAD speaks.]

KING KONRAD:

Duchess Uta. This surprise looks like something you would do. Am I right?

DUCHESS UTA:

(*speaks with the strain of carrying the Duke of Weisenberg*) Maybe ...

KING KONRAD:

Go ahead, put him down.

[DUCHESS lets down the DUKE.]

KING KONRAD:

I promised you could leave safely with whatever you carried out on your backs. And a King never goes back on his word.

[DUKE OF WEISENBERG and MEN climb off of the WOMEN's backs.]

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

Thank you, Sire. Whew!

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(bows to King) We are grateful, Sire. And if I may say, we'd be especially grateful if you didn't burn down the Castle Weisenberg. If I may say so, Sire. *(bows)*

KING KONRAD:

I'll consider it. And what do you offer the crown for my generosity?

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

(bows again) Your Majesty, on behalf of the good people of Castle Weisenberg, please know we have every intention of resuming tribute payments to the Crown.

KING KONRAD:

That's moving in the right direction.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

Uh, we're good then?

KING KONRAD:

And your people will fight for the Crown if need be.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

We shall indeed. So we're good?

KING KONRAD:

We're good.

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

Glad to hear it, my Liege (pronounce: LEEGE).

KING KONRAD:

Yep, this castle will NOT be burned. But it will be renamed.

DUKE OF WEISENBERG:

To what?

KING KONRAD:

"The Castle of the Faithful Wives."

DUCHESS UTA:

That does have a nice ring to it.

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

Doesn't it, though?

KING KONRAD:

(*to Queen Gertrude*) You didn't know I had a bit of poet in me, did you?

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

You're full of surprises, my dear.

[KING KONRAD and QUEEN GERTRUDE hold hands.]

NARRATOR:

Do you remember at the beginning when I told you this is a real story? The women who carried their husbands on their backs were called, in German, Weibertreu (pronounce: VIE-ber-troy). If you went to Germany today, you could visit the very castle from a thousand years ago. The castle has survived, and so has its name: "The Castle of the Faithful Wives."

[If you have a curtain, close it now. If you do not, fade the lights. If you have no stage lights, all actors come on stage and bow to the audience.]



Performance Notes for The Castle of the Faithful Wives

THREE WAYS THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS CAN UTILIZE THIS PLAY

1. Students can read the play aloud while sitting in the classroom. Ask the readers to skip all bracketed stage directions. You may prefer to rotate your actors to give all students a chance to read the speaking parts.
2. Students can perform the play in the classroom. Clear an area that can be used as the stage. Have the audience sit on the floor in front of the stage. Students in the play can make simple costumes and/or sets as described below. When the scene change, the characters "on stage" simply walk to the back of the room where they wait until their next appearance "on stage."
3. Students can perform the play on stage. Refer to the production notes that follow. Ask the actors to enter from the back of the room and move through the audience as they approach the stage.



COSTUMES

- NARRATOR— Perhaps a nice shirt and slacks, a nice blouse and skirt, or a nice dress.
- DUKE, KING, ROYAL TAX COLLECTOR, NOBLEPERSONS— Dark colored pants, ideally rolled up to mid-calf to reflect the pant-style of the age; solid color button-up shirts in rich colors such as purple, golden yellow, red or royal blue. KING should also wear a crown.



- **QUEEN, LADY IN WAITING, DUCHESS, and NOBLEPERSONS**— Long dresses or skirts with a solid color blouse in a rich hue such as purple, dark pink, or turquoise. **QUEEN** should wear a tiara or crown and nice shoes, preferably brightly colored or sparkly. Can be high heels or flats. For Scene 2, **QUEEN** and **LADY IN WAITING** should wear boots.
- **CITIZENS & MESSENGER**— Boys can wear blue, black, dark green, brown or grey sweatpants, rolled up to mid-calf and button-down shirts in light colors such as white, tan, light blue or light grey, and dark colored vests. The girls can wear long skirts in any solid color and blouses in light colors such as white, light blue, light yellow, cream, and lavender. Hair can be down, in a ribbon or held back in a scarf.
- **SOLDIERS & GUARD**— Solid grey clothing. Optional: breastplates drawn on cardboard, and costume knight helmets. Cardboard swords and shields, painted silver.



PROPS

Scene 1

- Bags of money for those paying their tributes. These can be made from handkerchiefs or pieces of fabric, gathered into a small sack and tied at the top with twine or yarn. (Make the **DUKE OF WEISENBERG'S** bag larger than the others.) You can fill the bags with fake money, real coins, or marbles, for weight and sound. Optional: You can paint dollar signs on the bags.

Scene 2

- Baskets of fruit, vegetables, pastry and breads for **WEISENBERG** citizens to carry back and forth through the tunnels.
- Rolled scroll of parchment paper tied twine around it for **MESSENGER** to give to **KING KONRAD**.
- Blankets for **SOLDIERS**.



Scene 3

- Two coins for CITIZEN 2.
- Handful of dried kidney beans for CITIZEN 3.
- Stuffed bags for to WEISENBERG CITIZENS carry out when surrendering.
- Parchment paper tied around a rock (or fake rock) with a red or purple ribbon for KING KONRAD to pass off to SOLDIER #3 to throw.
- Bottle of ink for DUCHESS UTA. This can be represented by a small jar painted black.
- A feather quill for DUCHESS UTA. This can be represented by a fake feather with the tip painted black.
- Piece of paper for DUCHESS UTA to “write” note on.



SETS

To make scene transitions easy, the stage can be dividend into three sections. If you want, you can create a backdrop that show the three locations, or you can just rely on set pieces. The three locations are:

- 1) The Royal Court of King Konrad and Queen Gertrude, on one side of the stage.
- 2) The gate of Castle Weisenberg, in the middle of the stage
- 3) The Interior of Castle Weisenberg, on the other side of the stage.

Scene 1— The Royal Court of King Konrad and Queen Gertrude, on one side of the stage. If you do make a backdrop, you can paint this section to show the inside of a castle, with stone walls, royal portraits, and ornate castle windows, wish sashes and draperies.

Two thrones sit on stage. These can be any high back chairs. There is also a small side table or stool to hold the bags of money and a small stool or folding chair for NARRATOR.

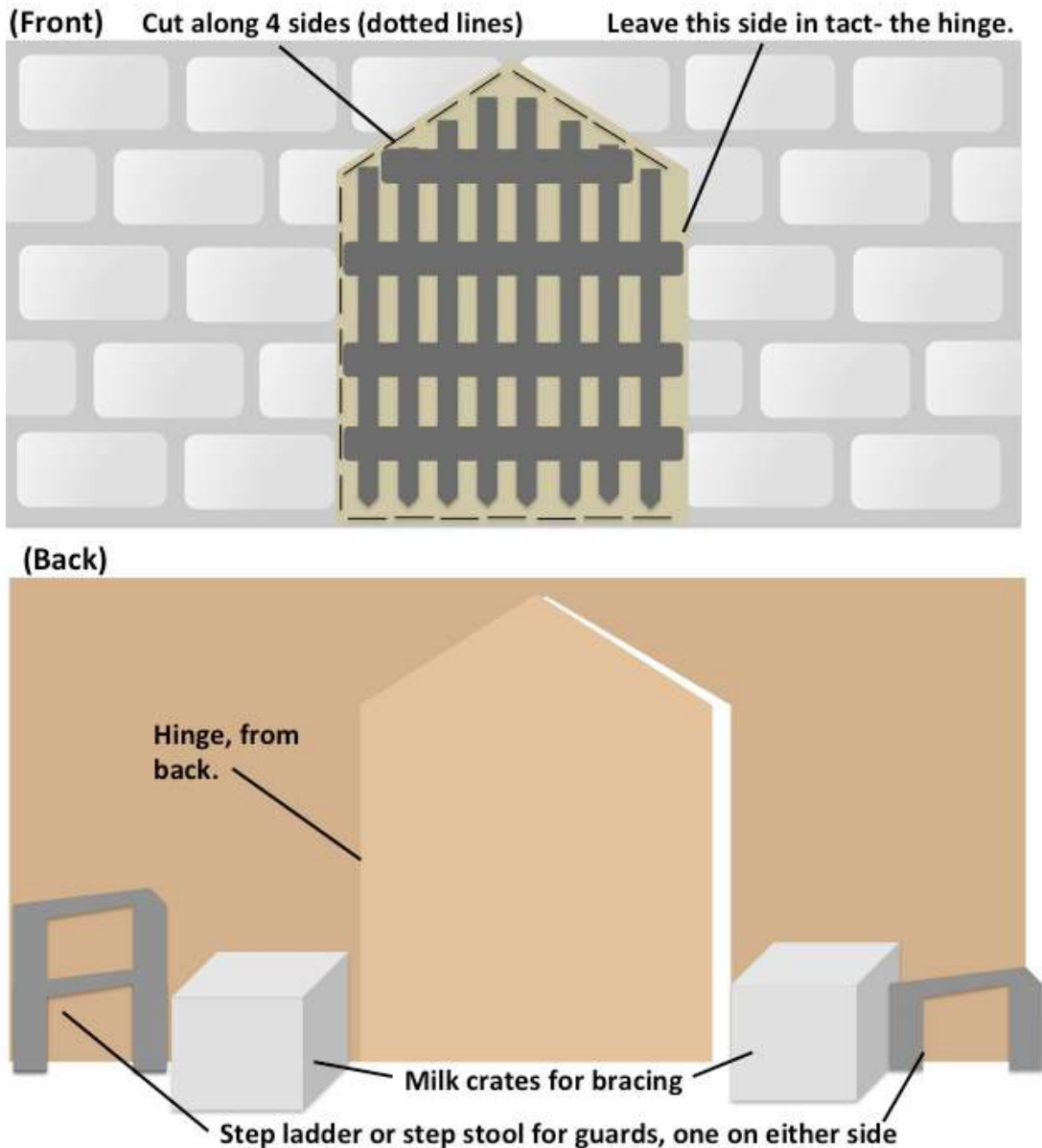
Scene 2— The gate of Castle Weisenberg, in the middle of the stage. If you do make a backdrop, you can paint this section to show rolling green hills, trees (at least one of which is an apple tree), and two modest castles atop of the hills at opposing ends of the backdrop.

The wall of the castle can be made from cardboard, such as a flattened large appliance cardboard box, and can be propped up against milk crates in the back, in



order to hold it up. Paint the cardboard gray and use a sponge, dipped in light gray paint, to make the stones. The gate can be painted onto the wall, and cut out, leaving only a hinge. On the back side of gate, there should be stepstools or something sturdy and tall for GUARDS to stand on.

See below:



Note: The gate should be placed on stage on a slight angle, in order to establish the area outside the gate and inside the gate. Action takes place in both areas.



Scene 3— The Interior of Castle Weisenberg, on the other side of the stage.
If you do have a backdrop, you can paint this section to show large bronze or brown stones to indicate the inside of the castle. It should be simpler than that of the KING and QUEEN.

Two nice chairs are on stage.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

***Physical Activity**— At the end of the play, the DUCHESS and WOMEN of Weisenberg give the MEN piggyback rides. Anyone playing the DUCHESS or one of the WOMEN should be capable giving a brief piggyback ride.

