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Dramatic Publishing

STORIES GONE WILDE

by
JAMES ZAGER

Based on a collection of stories for children

by
OSCAR WILDE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(STORIES GONE WILDE)

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Stories Gone Wilde was first presented as *Stories from a Garden* at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in the spring of 2000 by the Department of Theatre at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

CAST

GIANT Andy Gershenzon
GARDNER Jeremy Harrison
STUDENT Dennis Schnell
NIGHTINGALE Elizabeth Schumann
DUCHESS Crystal Dickinson
INFANTA Anjali Thawani
FANTASTIC Daniel Kitz
ROCKET Tony Fiorentino
HAPPY PRINCE Joel Singerman
SWALLOW Dennis Schnell & Elizabeth Schumann

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director James Zager
Stage Manager/Dramaturg Grace Godwin
Assistant Director/Dramaturg Heather Stafford
Set Designer Mike Carnahan
Costume Designer Brenda Phelps
Properties Designer Beth Maslowski
Sound Designer Christopher Plummer
Lighting Designer Yasmeeen Shorish
Make-up/Hair Designer Lisa Lillig
Technical Director Ben Lampman

Author's Note:

There are a couple of things to note about the play as you read it. The transitions are all pieces of Image Theatre and are hard to do justice to with words alone, so let your imaginations soar. In addition, the play is cyclical, representing a day, a year, and a life. We start the play at dawn, then move through the day, and the seasons, as the stories deal with childhood (Winter/Daybreak), adolescence (Spring/Morning), coming of age (Summer/Afternoon), adulthood (Fall/Evening), and finally sacrifice and loss (Winter/Nightfall), before returning to the dawn and a new beginning.

STORIES GONE WILDE

Scene Breakdown

Transition 1 – “The Gathering”
The Selfish Giant
Transition 2 – “Young Love”
The Nightingale and the Rose
Transition 3 – “Creation of the Fantastic”
The Birthday of the Infanta
Transition 4 – “The Parade”
The Remarkable Rocket
Transition 5 – “Family Collage”
The Happy Prince
Epilogue – “Renewal”

List of Primary Characters

Giant
Gardener
Student
Nightingale
Duchess
Infanta
Fantastic
Rocket
Happy Prince
Swallow

Ensemble Roles

(Can be divided among the Primary Characters or played by additional actors)

Child 1, 2, 3, 4

Chorus A & B

Girl

Count

Squibs

Bengal Lights

Screamers

Catherine Wheel

Fireball

Worker

Frog

Kid

Beggar 1, 2

Match Girl

Spirits

In each story the lines marked as “A SPIRIT” should be divided equally between the entire ensemble since they are, as a group, the storytellers.

STORIES GONE WILDE

Transition 1 – “The Gathering”

(The space is an abstracted garden consisting of low platforms of various sizes and shapes surrounded by flowerbeds—also of various sizes—the flowerbeds are made up of colorful children’s toys such as pinwheels, fabric streamers, whirligigs, Slinkys, and the like—there are a number of benches that can be moved into new positions for each story and near the center of the space there is a large round reflecting pool.

At the top of the show the flowerbeds are covered with large pieces of white fabric cut into the shapes of huge snowflakes. Music begins. The ensemble members enter silently and begin to explore the space. The actors are dressed in contemporary clothing in neutral colors—bright costume pieces are added to this basic look whenever an actor takes on a specific character. The actors are drawn one by one to the Reflecting Pool—they kneel around it and as one they gaze into their reflection. A moment.

Lights shift as the “SPIRITS” of the garden flow into the ensemble members. The SPIRITS rise up as a group and move energetically to various spots as the music fades.)

The Selfish Giant

ALL. “The Selfish Giant.”

A SPIRIT. Every afternoon, as they were coming home from school, the children would go and play in the Giant’s garden. The Giant had been gone for seven years, but the children didn’t know that...because they were only six.

A SPIRIT. It was a lovely garden. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. And what games the children played!!

(SPIRITS as CHILDREN rush into the garden and play.)

A SPIRIT. And then, one day, the Giant came back.

(Sound of a Jet Landing. Giant Music plays. The GIANT is created. The GARDENER rushes the CHILDREN away as the GIANT stalks on.)

GIANT. I’m home.

GARDENER. It’s wonderful to have you back in the garden, Your Hugeness!

GIANT. Good to be back in my garden.

GARDENER. Yes, Oh Magnificent Large One.

GIANT. How are my yellows?

GARDENER. Almost ready, as are your greens, your blues and your violets.

GIANT. Good. I saw children...

GARDENER. How was the Cornish ogre?

GIANT. Fine.

GARDENER. Fine?

GIANT (*thinks*). Yes...fine.

GARDENER. Interesting...

GIANT. I saw children in my garden! What were they doing here?

GARDENER. Playing.

GIANT (*outraged*). *What?*

GARDENER (*stammering*). But I sent them away.

GIANT. My own garden is my own garden. Any one can... (*GIANT searches for the word.*)

GARDENER. "Understand"?

GIANT. Un-Der-Stand that. And I will allow no one to play in my garden but me.

A SPIRIT. And so the Giant built a high wall all around the garden and put up a notice board.

(SPIRIT puts up a sign that says "Notice Board.")

A SPIRIT. "Trespassers will be prosecuted."

GIANT. No kidz.

A SPIRIT. It was a very selfish Giant. So, now the poor children had nowhere to play.

CHILD 1. We tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones.

CHILD 2. We would stand outside the high wall when our lessons were over and talk about the beautiful garden inside.

CHILD 3. How happy we were there.

A SPIRIT. Then the spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Yet in the garden of the Selfish Giant, it was still winter.

GIANT. Where are my yellows? My blues, my greens, my vi-o-lets?

GARDENER. Spring has forgotten this garden, Your Bigness.

A SPIRIT. You see, the flowers did not care to bloom in it, as there were no longer any children there to see them. Once a beautiful flower poked its head out from the grass, but when it saw the notice board it was so sorry for the children that it slipped back into the ground again, and went to sleep.

GIANT. I can not...

GARDENER. "Comprehend"?

GIANT. ...Com-Pre-Tend why the spring is so late in coming. I hope there will be...

GARDENER. "A"??

GIANT. *A* change in the weather.

A SPIRIT. But the spring never came, nor the summer. The autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant's garden gave none.

CHILD 4. It was too selfish!

A SPIRIT. So, it was always winter in the Giant's garden. A long...cold...tiring winter.

(SPIRITS echo "long" and "cold" and "tiring." GIANT falls asleep. A child creeps to GIANT and checks to see if it is asleep and...it is! Dance Mix music plays as CHILDREN dance wildly about. GIANT wakes up.)

GIANT. Has the spring come at last?

A SPIRIT. When the Giant awoke it saw a most wonderful sight. The children had crept into the garden. The garden was so happy to have the children back that the flowers burst through the snow to greet them.

(CHILDREN reveal the flowerbeds.)

GIANT. Wait!!!

(CHILDREN stop.)

GIANT. How selfish I have been. Now I know why the spring would not come here. *(Raising hand like a child.)*
Oh! Oh!

GARDENER *(calling on the GIANT like a teacher)*. Giant?

GIANT. Because the children could not get in!

GARDENER. Correct!

GIANT. Take down that sign. I will knock down the wall and my... *(Corrects itself.)* our garden shall be the children's playground forever...and ever...and... *(Thinks.)*

ALL. EVER!!

(CHILDREN rush to GIANT and hug and tickle it.)

A SPIRIT. The Giant really was very sorry for what it had done.

END

Transition 2 - “Young Love”

(Thunder peals, followed by sounds of rain. SPIRITS scatter, hiding from the rain. Schmaltzy love song begins. SPIRITS cross into space improvising various stages of romantic relationships and entanglements, exiting after they find a partner or are spurned. In the end, the STUDENT meets the GIRL, she flirts with him for a moment, then exits.)

The Nightingale and the Rose

ALL. "The Nightingale and the Rose."

STUDENT. She said that she would dance with me if I brought her a red rose, but there is no red rose.

A SPIRIT. From her nest atop the old willow tree, the Nightingale heard him and she looked out through the leaves and wondered.

STUDENT. No red rose. Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched.

NIGHTINGALE. Here at last is a true lover. Night after night have I told his story to the stars, now I see him.

CHORUS A. His hair is dark as the hyacinth blossom, and his lips are red as the rose of his desire.

NIGHTINGALE. But passion has made his face like pale ivory.

CHORUS B. And sorrow has set her seal upon his brow.

STUDENT. There is a ball tomorrow night and my love will be of the company. If I bring her a red rose, she will dance with me till dawn. If I bring her a red rose, I shall hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there is no red rose, so I shall sit lonely, and she will pass me by. She will have no heed of me, and my heart will break.

NIGHTINGALE. Here indeed is the true lover: he suffers. What is joy to me, to him is pain.

CHORUS A. Surely love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the marketplace. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold.

STUDENT. The musicians will sit in their gallery, and play upon their stringed instruments, and my love will dance to the sound of the harp and the violin. She will dance so lightly that her feet will not touch the floor. But with me she will not dance, for I have no red rose to give her.

(STUDENT starts to weep.)

CHORUS B. Why is he weeping?

CHORUS A. He is weeping for a red rose.

CHORUS B. For a red rose, how very ridiculous. *(They laugh.)*

A SPIRIT. But the Nightingale understood the secret of the Student's sorrow, and she sat silent and thought about the mystery of love.

(Flying Music begins. The NIGHTINGALE dances through the garden.)

A SPIRIT. Suddenly she spread her wings for flight and soared into the air. She sailed across the sky, and passed through the grove like a shadow.

A SPIRIT. In the corner of the garden stood a beautiful rosebush. The Nightingale flew over to it and lit upon a spray.

(Flying Music ends.)

CHORUS A. Give her a red rose and she will sing you her sweetest song.

A SPIRIT. But the rosebush shook its head.

CHORUS B. My roses are white, as white as the foam of the sea and whiter than the snow upon the mountain.

CHORUS A. One red rose is all she wants.

NIGHTINGALE. Only one red rose.

CHORUS A. Is there any way by which she can get it?

CHORUS B. There is a way, but it is so terrible that I dare not tell it to you.

NIGHTINGALE. Tell it.

CHORUS A. She is not afraid.

CHORUS B. If you want a red rose, you must build it of moonlight and stain it with your own heart's blood. All night long you must sing to me and your life blood must flow into my veins and become mine.

NIGHTINGALE. That is a great price to pay for one red rose.

CHORUS A. Life is very dear to all.

NIGHTINGALE. Yet love is better than life.

CHORUS A. And what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?

(Rose Creation Music begins. The NIGHTINGALE kneels in front of the rosebush.)

CHORUS A. She shall do as you ask.

NIGHTINGALE. Be happy. Be happy, you shall have your red rose.

CHORUS A. She will build it out of moonlight and stain it with her own heart's blood.

(STUDENT sighs, crosses to NIGHTINGALE and begins to sketch.)

STUDENT. I do not understand what you are saying to me. This bird has form, that cannot be denied. But has she got feeling? I am afraid not. In fact, she is like most artists; she is all style, without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others. *(STUDENT scratches out the picture he's been sketching and tosses the sketchbook down.)* Art does not mean anything, or do any practical good. *(STUDENT lays on bench to sleep.)*

A SPIRIT. And he lay down and began to think of his love; and after a time, he fell asleep.

CHORUS A. And when the moon shone in the heavens the Nightingale began to sing.

(Throughout the next section the NIGHTINGALE dances, collecting moonlight and bringing it to the rosebush.)

CHORUS A. All night long she sang, and her life blood ebbed away from her. And on the topmost spray of the rosebush, there blossomed a marvelous rose.

(Lights come up on rosebush.)

CHORUS B. Pale was it, at first, and silver as the wings of the dawn.

CHORUS A. Hurry, little Nightingale, or the day will come before the rose is finished.

(Rosebush glows pink.)

A SPIRIT. So the Nightingale pressed on...

CHORUS B. Hurry, little Nightingale, or the day will come before the rose is finished.

(Rosebush glows crimson.)

CHORUS A. Look, the rose is finished.

(NIGHTINGALE takes rose to STUDENT, returns to rosebush and collapses.)

A SPIRIT. And as the morning dawned, the Student awoke.

STUDENT. Why, what a wonderful piece of luck! Here is a red rose! I have never seen any rose like it in all my life. It is so beautiful that I am sure it has a long Latin name. *(STUDENT takes rose to GIRL.)* Wait! You said you would dance with me if I brought you a red rose. Here is the reddest rose in all the world. You will wear it tonight next to your heart, and as we dance together it will tell you how I love you.

GIRL. A red rose? I'm afraid it will not go with my dress.

(GIRL walks away laughing. STUDENT looks after her.)

STUDENT. What a silly thing love is! It is not half as useful as logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of the things that are not going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical. *(STUDENT tosses rose aside.)* And, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to philosophy and study metaphysics.

A SPIRIT. So the Student returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read.

(The SPIRIT picks up the rose and offers it to the NIGHTINGALE, she takes it, slowly rises, and walks off.)

END

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

When directing *Stories Gone Wilde* it is best to leave a great deal of the spectacle of the show to the audience's imagination. These are fantastic stories and one can never hope to fully realize onstage the incredible worlds that live effortlessly within our own heads.

Sets:

Levels work well for the show but are not required. The reflecting pool/mirror and the flowerbeds made of children's toys are vital but should be quite simply realized in a highly artistic manner.

Props:

Use only what is absolutely necessary. This keeps the focus on the characters and the stories being told. Whenever possible create the props, such as the masks or the swallow puppet, out of materials used by kids—cardboard, construction paper, watercolors, crayons, papier-mâché, etc.

Costumes:

Each actor should have a basic “Spirit” look which should be in neutral tones and in most cases can come from the actor's own wardrobe. To delineate the actual characters in a story the addition of a simple costume piece is sufficient, for example, a bandana for the Gardener or a sash for the Happy Prince.

Lighting:

Lighting can be as spare or as complex as you desire. The play can be done successfully in an open space with natural

lighting as well as in a fully functional theatre. Again simplicity is key; the lighting should support the storytelling and not become the event itself.

Sound/Music:

As you see from the text a great deal of music is called for and while I sometimes specify the type of music the actual selections I leave up to you. I feel that the music should be chosen to fit your audience and should support the feeling or mood of a particular scene or transition.

Overall Approach:

Finally, a sense of playfulness throughout, especially from the Spirits, makes the production a joy to watch. This is storytelling at its best so feel free to explore your inner child.