

The Selfish Giant

A One Act Play

by M Ryan Taylor

Based on:

The Selfish Giant by Oscar Wilde

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M Ryan Taylor
mryantaylor@gmail.com
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THE SELFISH GIANT

An OLD GIANT addresses the audience directly. The action plays out behind him as he describes it.

OLD GIANT

I once owned a large, lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the spring-time broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them . . .

Every afternoon, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in MY garden . . . but one day I came back.

I had been to visit my friend the Cornish ogre, and had stayed with him for seven years. After the seven years were over I had said all that I had to say, and I determined to return to my own castle. When I arrived I saw children playing in MY garden.

THE GIANT

What are you doing here?

The children run away.

THE GIANT

My own garden is my own garden; any one can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself.

The old giant points out the younger giant working on a wall, putting up a sign and then listening at the wall.

OLD GIANT

So I built a high wall all round it, and put up a notice-board:

TRESPASSERS
WILL BE

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OLD GIANT (cont'd)
PROSECUTED

I heard the children whispering
outside the wall on their way to
school.

TALL GIRL
Now we have nowhere to play.

SHORT BOY
We can play on the road.

SQUARE GIRL
But the road is very dusty.

GRACEFUL GIRL
And full of hard stones.

ROUND BOY
I don't like it.

GRACEFUL GIRL
Let's walk around the wall when our
lessons are over. At least we can
talk about the beautiful garden
inside.

TALL GIRL
How happy we were there.

ROUND BOY
He is a very very selfish Giant.

The Giant opens a door in the wall and shouts at the
children.

THE GIANT
AAAGH! My own garden is my own
garden; any one can understand
that, and I will allow nobody to
play in it but myself!

The children scatter.

OLD GIANT
Then the Spring came, and all over
the country there were little
blossoms and little birds. Only in
my garden it was still Winter.

The birds did not come to sing, and
the trees forgot to blossom. The

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OLD GIANT (cont'd)
people who were pleased best were
the Snow and the Frost.

SNOW AND FROST
Spring has forgotten this garden so
now we can live here all the year
round!

OLD GIANT
The Snow covered up the grass with
her great white cloak, and the
Frost painted all the trees silver.
Then they invited the North Wind to
stay with them. When he came he was
wrapped in heavy furs. He roared
all day about the garden and
rejoiced in blowing the
chimney-pots over.

NORTH WIND
This is a delightful spot; we must
ask the Hail to come on a visit.

OLD GIANT
So the old Hail came. Every day for
three hours he rattled on the roof
of the castle till he broke most of
the slates, and then he ran round
and round the garden as fast as he
could go. He was dressed in gray,
and his breath was like ice.

I sat at the window and looked out
at my cold white garden.

THE GIANT
I cannot understand why the Spring
is so late in coming. I hope there
will be a change in the weather.

OLD GIANT
But the Spring never came, nor the
Summer. The Autumn gave golden
fruit to every garden, but to my
garden she gave none.

AUTUMN
He is too selfish.

OLD GIANT
So it was always Winter there, and
the North Wind, and the Hail, and
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OLD GIANT (cont'd)
the Frost, and the Snow danced
about through the trees.

One morning I was lying awake in
bed when I heard some lovely music.
It sounded so sweet that I thought
it must be the King's musicians
passing by, but it was really only
a little linnet bird singing
outside my window.

It was so long since I had heard a
bird sing in my garden that it
seemed to me to be the most
beautiful music in the world.

THE GIANT
The Hail has stopped dancing over
my head, and the North Wind has
ceased his roaring. A delicious
smell is coming from the window. I
believe the Spring has come at
last!

The Giant jumps out of bed and looks out. Through a little
hole in the wall the children have crept in, and are sitting
in the branches of the trees.

OLD GIANT
In every tree I could see a little
child. The trees were so glad to
have the children back again that
they had covered themselves with
blossoms, and were waving their
arms gently above the children's
heads. The birds were flying about
and twittering with delight, and
the flowers were looking up through
the green grass and laughing. It
was a lovely scene, only in one
corner it was still Winter. It was
the farthest corner of the garden,
and in it was standing a little
boy. He was so small that he could
not reach up to the branches of the
tree, and he was wandering all
round it, crying bitterly. The poor
tree was still quite covered with
frost and snow, and the North Wind
was blowing and roaring above it.
'Climb up! little boy,' said the
Tree, and it bent its branches down

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OLD GIANT (cont'd)
as low as it could; but the little boy was too tiny. It was then that my heart melted.

THE GIANT
How selfish I have been! Now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever and ever.

OLD GIANT
I was really very sorry for what I had done. So I crept downstairs and opened the front door quite softly, and went out into the garden. But when the children saw me they were so frightened that they all ran away, and the garden became Winter again. Only the little boy did not run, for his eyes were so full of tears that he did not see me coming. So I stole up behind him and took him gently in my hand, and put him up into the tree. And the tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them round my neck, and kissed me.

When the other children saw that they came running back, and with them came the Spring.

THE GIANT
It is your garden now, little children.

OLD GIANT
I took a great axe and knocked down the wall. And when the people were going to market at twelve o'clock they found me, yes *me*, playing with the children in the most beautiful garden they had ever seen. All day long we played, and in the evening the children came to bid me good-bye.

(CONTINUED)

TALL GIRL

Now we have somewhere to play.

SHORT BOY

This is so much more better than
the road.

SQUARE GIRL

Yes, the road is so dusty, and the
dust makes me sneeze.

GRACEFUL GIRL

And the grass is so much nicer than
all those hard stones.

ROUND BOY

I like all the flowers.

GRACEFUL GIRL

And the trees.

TALL GIRL

How happy we are all here. Thank
you, Mr. Giant.

ROUND BOY

Yes thank you. You are a very very
nice Giant.

THE GIANT

But where is your little companion?
The boy I put into the tree.

GRACEFUL GIRL

I don't know.

ROUND BOY

He has gone away.

THE GIANT

You must tell him to be sure and
come here tomorrow.

TALL GIRL

I don't know where he lives.

SQUARE GIRL

I've never seen him before.

THE GIANT

But I wanted to thank him. When he
kissed me on the cheek I felt as
though a great weight had been
lifted from my heart.

(CONTINUED)

SHORT BOY

I'm sorry, but I don't think he lives around here.

OLD GIANT

Every afternoon, when school was over, the children came and played with me. But I never saw again the little boy who I loved. Oh, how I would like to see him again!

I've grown old and feeble waiting. I cannot play about with the children any more, so I sit here in my armchair, and watch the children at their games, and admire my garden. I have many beautiful flowers, but the children are the most beautiful flowers of all.

(Getting up and looking out the window.)

I no longer hate the Winter. It is merely the spring asleep. The flowers are resting.

(Suddenly he rubs his eyes in wonder, and looks and looks.)

What marvelous sight is this? In the farthest corner of the garden . . . a tree covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches are all golden, and silver fruit hangs down from them, and what is this? Can it be? Oh! Can it be? He has come back! He has come back!

The OLD GIANT leaps down the stairs, into the snowy garden and to the grassy patch where the child is standing. When he draws close to the child and examines him, his face grows red with anger.

OLD GIANT

Who? Who hath dared to wound thee? Your hands. Your feet. Who hath dared to wound thee? Tell me, that I may take out my big sword and slay him.

CHILD

Nay! but these are the wounds of Love. They are necessary.

OLD GIANT
(Falling to his knees.)
Little child, who art thou?

CHILD
(Smiling.)
You let me play once in your
garden, today you shall come with
me to live in my garden which is
in Paradise.

The Child climbs into the OLD GIANT's arms. The winter melts
away before them as they walk into an ever expanding garden.