

THE STAR CHILD

adapted by Burton Bumgarner

from the story by Oscar Wilde

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Deep in the forest on a cold winter's night, an owl tells his friends about another cold winter's night when a shooting star lit up the sky, fell to the ground, and left a human child in a hollow tree. A woodcutter, who sees the shooting star, finds the child, takes him home, and rears him as a member of his family. The Star Child grows up to be a very handsome young man, but he doesn't have compassion or kindness. He mistreats the poor and the sick, he hurts the animals of the forest, and he shows no love for the family that raised him.

Eventually he loses his handsomeness becoming as ugly as his deeds. When he realizes the consequences of his actions, he roams the world as a beggar trying to undo the harm he has brought on others. Finally, he learns the meaning of the shooting star, and he becomes a great leader.

The Star Child is a delightful tale about goodness, generosity and charity.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 M, 2 F, flexible cast of 25, doubling possible.)

THE ANIMALS

**OWL
MOLE
SQUIRREL
WOLF
LIMMET (A SMALL BIRD)
WOODPECKER
TURTLEDOVE
RABBIT**

THE HUMANS

**STAR CHILD
WOODCUTTER
WOODCUTTER'S WIFE
6 CHILDREN
BEGGAR WOMAN
SOLDIER
MAGICIAN
LEPER MAN
4 VILLAGERS
EXTRAS**

PRODUCTION NOTES

The Star Child may be performed on a bare stage with various upstage platforms for the Animals. Birds rest on the tallest platforms, mammals on the ground. Owl speaks from the most prominent platform. The rest of the play is performed downstage.

The Children can double as the Villagers. Animal costumes may be as simple or as elaborate as the director wishes.

THE STAR CHILD

(AT RISE: The ANIMALS enter, shivering, and take their places on the platforms and floor. LIGHTS are dim.)

MOLE: Ah, Owl. What do you make of this weather?

SQUIRREL: It is very, very cold. Bitter cold.

WOLF: Why doesn't the government look into this?

MOLE: How could the government affect the weather?

LIMMET: The old earth is dead. They have laid her out in her white shroud.

WOODPECKER: The earth is going to be married and this is her bridal dress.

TURTLEDOVE: I can't fly. The wind is so strong it forces me to the ground.

WOLF: *(Slyly.)* Nothing wrong with the ground, dear Turtledove.

TURTLEDOVE: I agree. The ground is a fine place ... except for the snow, and the occasional hungry wolf lurking about.

WOLF: Certainly you don't mean me. I'm a gentle wolf ... with a good heart.

WOODPECKER: And an empty stomach.

SQUIRREL: Wolf is right about the cold. I don't recall a winter ever this bitter. I should be hibernating, but my nest is too cold.

MOLE: And my hole in the ground has been dug up by a nasty old badger.

LIMMET: What is it, Owl? Why is this winter so much colder than past winters?

WOLF: I tell you, this is the fault of the government, and if you don't believe me I shall eat you!

TURTLEDOVE: Please, Owl. What do you make of it?

LIMMET: Give us your honest opinion.

OWL: *(Prepares to speak, ALL hang on HIS every word.)*
The fact is ...

ANIMALS: YES?

OWL: *(Clears throat.)* The fact is, the weather has turned terribly cold.

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MOLE: But that's obvious.

WOLF: You offer that observation and yet you maintain the title of the smartest animal in the forest? I believe we should re-evaluate our methods for determining animal intelligence.

SQUIRREL: Let Owl finish, you rude wolf!

WOLF: Very well. But I still say it's the government.

WOODPECKER: Enough with the government!

LINNET: Have you ever seen a winter this cold, Owl?

OWL: Yes, I have. A long time ago. Before any of you were even born. An impenetrable blanket of snow covered the ground, the branches of the trees snapped beneath the weight of thick ice, and the waterfall in the clearing hung motionless in air. The Ice King had kissed her, and the rolling sound of the river was silenced. And finally, the foggy air covered the sunlight. I could not tell if it was night and I should be hunting, or day and I should be sleeping.

TURTLEDOVE: It sounds very much like today.

WOLF: So, what did you do, Owl? Did you hunt or sleep?

WOODPECKER: Was it day or night?

OWL: I finally decided it was night, and I left my nest and ventured over to this very tree to watch for mice.

LINNET: Ugh! I despise mice!

MOLE: Truly stupid creatures they are.

OWL: You shouldn't judge mice until you try one. They can be quite tasty.

WOODPECKER: *(To LINNET and MOLE.)* Don't divert Owl from his story!

LINNET / MOLE: *(Bowing heads.)* Sorry.

WOODPECKER: Please continue.

OWL: Yes. I was awaiting for my meal to appear when suddenly, for just a moment, the air cleared of fog and mist and darkness. *(Full STAGE LIGHTS up.)* And a shooting star fell to earth. *(Quick BLACKOUT. A FLASHPOT goes off behind a platform. Low LIGHTS return.)* And the fog and the mist and the darkness returned. But something had happened. *(OWL jumps down and crosses behind the platform.)*

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OWL: *(Cont'd.)* I flew down to the ground and found, lying in a hollow tree trunk, a human child. *(SOUND of a crying baby is heard.)* Lying on a cloak of gold and wrapped in a blanket. Around his neck was an amber chain.

LINNET: A human child?

TURTLEDOVE: That isn't possible.

WOODPECKER: Human children don't fall from the sky. Do they?

OWL: This one did.

MOLE: Wasn't the child in great danger?

SQUIRREL: From wolves? *(ALL look at WOLF.)*

WOLF: I wasn't even born yet!

OWL: Indeed, the child was in great danger. As intelligent as I am, I did not know what to do. A human child was quite out of my realm of experience or knowledge.

TURTLEDOVE: What happened next?

OWL: I was quite distraught, for no owl wishes to see any creature in danger or discomfort ...

LINNET: Except for mice.

OWL: Except for mice. I was trying to decide if I could pick up the child with my beak and fly to the village where the humans live. Suddenly, a woodcutter appeared. He had also seen the shooting star fall to earth, and he was trying to locate the spot where the star struck the earth. I must say, I was relieved to see the man, even if he regarded me as a ... *(Choke.)...vulture.*

(Other ANIMALS gag at the thought of vultures.)

LINNET: I hate vultures!

(The WOODCUTTER enters carrying an ax and a bundle of wood. He chases OWL back into the tree.)

WOODCUTTER: What is this? *(To OWL.)* You there! Go away from here! *(HE bends down behind the platform.)* What have we here?

(BABY CRIES are heard.)

End of Freeview

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