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Dramatic Publishing

The King of the Golden River

Adapted by
James Still

From the book by
John Ruskin



The King of the Golden River

Drama. Adapted by James Still. From the book by John Ruskin. Cast: 6 either gender (cross gender casting permitted) with doubling, or up to 16 either gender with roles distributed. Part fairy tale, part Dickens—*The King of the Golden River* is a mysterious story that explores how greed and cruelty threaten to destroy the river and the surrounding valley. It depicts how kindness (not magic) finally restores the area to its natural beauty. In a prologue where an insensitive tour guide proudly points out nuclear reactors, complex highway systems and industrial technology, an old man angrily protests the Golden River's current environmental ruin. Although most of the tourists dismiss the old man, one young boy lingers and proves to be a skeptical, but active audience for the old man's tale of a young boy who long ago conquered his brothers' cruelties and saved the Golden River through his compassion. The heart of the play is the boy's adventure story that includes surprising characters such as the southwest wind and the king who turns the evil brothers into dark stones. The original production at the California Theatre Center was set in the American Southwest in the 1800s and theatrically used Native American rituals, sounds and images. *Two suggestive int. sets, one ext. set. Suitable for touring. Approximate running time: 70 minutes. Code: K39.*

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The King of the Golden River

Adapted for the stage by

JAMES STILL

From the story by

JOHN RUSKIN



Dramatic Publishing Company

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for Rachell, Justin and Janessa

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN RIVER by James Still premiered at the California Theatre Center (Gail Cornelison, General Director) on April 15, 1991. The production was directed by Will Huddleston. Scene Design was by Paul G. Vallergera, Costume Design by Colleen Troy Lewis, Light Design by Bill M. Rupel, Sound Design by Dirk Leatherman. The Stage Manager was Dirk Leatherman. The cast was as follows:

Tour Guide, Hans	Jonathan Rider
Old Man	Alex Fernandez
Boy, Gluck	Alison Gleason
Tourist, Schwartz	Charlie Shoemaker
Tourist, Worker, Farmer, Gold Customer, King of Golden River	Linnea D. Pyne
Tourist, Worker, Farmer, South West Wind, Policeman, Child	Xiao Yan Lu

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN RIVER

A Tour Guide
An Old Man
A Boy
Tourists
Gluck
Hans
Schwartz
Two Field Workers
Two Farmers
South West Wind
Goldsmith Customer
Policeman
The King of the Golden River
A Dog
A Dying Man
A Child

The time is the present and the past.

NOTE: In the original production, six actors played all of the roles.

(Mountainside, a clearing overlooking a valley. A tour guide is talking to a small group of tourists about local history. The group includes an old man who hangs in the back looking out across the valley. There is also a young boy who is completely bored by the tour guide's song-and-dance.)

TOUR GUIDE: Looking West, you get an almost aerial view of the bustling city of Commerce Valley. *(the Boy picks up a rock)* Don't touch that! What's interesting about this perspective is the breathtaking view of Commerce Valley's sophisticated highway system and all the intricate designs it cuts into the valley. *(they all squint out across the valley)* It's a little hazy today so you can't really see what I'm talking about but on a clear day - -

OLD MAN: It didn't always look like that.

TOUR GUIDE: What?

OLD MAN: It didn't always look like that.

TOUR GUIDE: No, that's true. Progress has done a lot of wonderful things for Commerce Valley. We are positioned perfectly for a unique marriage with the demands of the twenty-first century. Factory productivity, solid economics, thriving business, urban planning - -

OLD MAN: Pollution - -

TOUR GUIDE: Pollution...

OLD MAN: Smog - -

TOUR GUIDE: Smog...

OLD MAN: Environmental despair - -

TOUR GUIDE: Environmental - - *(stops, realizes what he's said)*

- OLD MAN: Look at all those signs. *(he points)* "Hazardous Waste Dump" "Please Don't Drink the Water" There was a time you used to be able to dip your hands into that stream and refresh yourself on a hot summer day.
- TOUR GUIDE: *(trying not to be irritated)* Yes, but we have one of the country's most technologically advanced sewage systems that cleans and purifies our drinking water and serves not only Commerce Valley but surrounding communities as well.
- OLD MAN: Did you know that this valley used to be called "Treasure Valley"? Can you imagine how beautiful a place was to have been called Treasure Valley?
- TOUR GUIDE: *(trying to include the entire group)* It's true, Commerce Valley, was, at one time in its history, known as Treasure Valley. But sir, things change.
- OLD MAN: A person used to be able to look out across that ridge and see for miles and miles.
- TOUR GUIDE: If you squint to my left - - the sun is pretty bright - - but you can almost see the construction of Commerce Valley's nuclear reactor which will supply completely safe energy for our children's generation.
- OLD MAN: Some days, *(the tourists all look at him)* the skies were so clear and the sun was so bright, you could see so far out there that you'd be looking at the back of your own head.
- TOUR GUIDE: *(assuming role of leader again)* If you listen closely, what you're hearing is the water from the Johnson River that flows into the John J. Johnson Dam - - *(he exits)*
- OLD MAN: *(raging)* John J. Johnson was a crook! The CEO of the first known company who dumped chemicals into the Golden River!

(The tourists run off as the Old Man is ranting. The Old Man mutters to himself. The Boy returns, looks at the Old Man.)

BOY: What's the Golden River?

OLD MAN: The Golden River is what that water used to be called before it became unsafe even for fish to live in it.

BOY: Are you making this up?

OLD MAN: I know that it's hard to believe, but there was a time when that valley was not the color of concrete but was green and fertile. It was surrounded by snow-covered mountains which melted into rushing waters that descended into rapid waterfalls.

BOY: Get out of town.

OLD MAN: One of these waterfalls fell westward, over the face of a crag so high, that when the sun had set and all below was darkness, the beams still shone full upon this waterfall, so that it looked like a shower of gold.

BOY: Is that why everyone called it The Golden River?

OLD MAN: *(pleased)* That's only PART of the reason.

BOY: *(hooked)* What was the other part?

OLD MAN: It's a long story.

BOY: *(simply)* Tell it.

OLD MAN: *(confident, ceremonial)* There was something strange about Treasure Valley. The clouds were drawn so constantly to the snowy peaks and rested so softly above the valley, that in times of drought and heat, when the rest of the country was burning up, there was STILL rain

in the little valley. O! The crops were so abundant, and its hay stacked so high, and its apples so red, and its grapes so blue, and its wine so rich, and its honey so sweet - - that it was a marvel to everyone who saw it. We - - they - - called it Treasure Valley.

BOY: *(caught up)* Cool.

(the stage is filling with laborers who work in the fields)

OLD MAN: Treasure Valley belonged to three brothers. Hans:

HANS: *(an ugly man with overhanging eyebrows and small dull eyes half-shut, yells)* Kill everything that doesn't pay for its dinner! *(he shoots a gun and a blackbird falls dead)* Peck-peck-pecking the fruit. Won't have it.

OLD MAN: Schwartz:

SCHWARTZ: *(an ugly man with overhanging eyebrows and small dull eyes half-shut, yells)* Kill everything that doesn't pay for its dinner! *(he scatters poison around from a gunny sack marked "Poison")* Crick-crick-crickets eating the crumbs from my kitchen floor. *(the cricket sounds stop)* Won't have it!

(field Workers enter and approach Schwartz and Hans)

WORKER 1: Excuse me, sir - -

SCHWARTZ: Get back to work.

WORKER 1: We need to rest, sir. We've been working without a break since before sun up and now the heat - -

SCHWARTZ: Get back to work.

WORKER 2: Excuse me, sir - -

HANS: Get back to work.

WORKER 2: It's high noon, sir and we still haven't had lunch. You can't expect us to work without - -

HANS: Get back to work.

WORKER 1: Excuse me, sir - -

SCHWARTZ: Get back to work.

WORKER 1: Sir, we've been working your fields for a week now and we still haven't received any money...

SCHWARTZ: *(dismissing)* You'll get your money.

WORKER 2: With all due respect sir, we have children to feed and - -

HANS: So feed them! Just don't do it on my time!

WORKER 2: Sir - - you promised that at the end of one week - -

HANS: *(dismissing)* You'll get your money.

WORKERS 1 & 2:
We can't work without pay.

SCHWARTZ: What are you saying?

WORKER 1: We're saying, sir, that without pay, we're...

HANS: *(dismissing)* You'll get your money.

WORKER 2: We had an agreement.

SCHWARTZ: Are you accusing US of double-dealing?

WORKER 1: We simply want what is ours.

HANS: *(dismissing)* You'll get your money.

SCHWARTZ: Over my dead body! They're fired! You're fired! All of you! Now get out!

WORKER 2: Wait a minute!

SCHWARTZ: Out out out! Ungrateful bunch of peasants! Out!

WORKER 1: *(appealing to Hans)* Sir? Please, our money...

HANS: Put it on our bill.

HANS & SCHWARTZ:
 OUT! *(they throw the two Workers out)*

OLD MAN: And the third brother:

SCHWARTZ & HANS:
 GLUCK!!!

(a boy of 12 runs on polishing a large gold mug. He is completely opposite from his brothers in appearance and temperament)

OLD MAN: *(to the audience)* Gluck was the youngest and different from his brothers the way gold is different from concrete.

GLUCK: Good morning!

SCHWARTZ: I'd like to know what's so good about it.

GLUCK: Well look around you! Have you ever seen a more beautiful valley?

SCHWARTZ & HANS: Don't start up again, Gluck.

HANS: What work have you done this morning, little brother?

GLUCK: Well, I cleaned your shoes.

SCHWARTZ: Good.

GLUCK: And scrubbed the floors.

HANS: Good.

GLUCK: And washed the dishes.

SCHWARTZ & HANS:
Good.

GLUCK: And fed fruit to the blackbirds - -

HANS: What!?!

GLUCK: And crumbs to the crickets - -

SCHWARTZ: What!?!

GLUCK: *(frightened)* And I polished the gold mug papa left for me. *(Schwartz grabs the gold mug from Gluck's hands and tosses it to Hans in a game of "Keep Away")* No! Please! Schwartz! *(Hans finally throws the mug as hard as he can offstage)* Hans!

SCHWARTZ: He's always got his head in the clouds...

HANS: Always talking about beauty and splendor...

SCHWARTZ: You're too easy on him...

HANS: He doesn't listen to you either...

SCHWARTZ: Doesn't understand a thing about progress...

HANS: He certainly doesn't have a head for business...

(Gluck - - as the Boy - - turns to the Old Man)

BOY: Why were they so mean to Gluck?

OLD MAN: Well, *(thinking)* they cared about different things. Anyway, that summer was very wet but as usual, Treasure Valley had plenty of sun to soak up all the rain and it was another bountiful harvest for the three brothers. It was a different story for the neighboring farms. Their crops failed and farmers from all around were forced to buy corn from the three brothers.

(Inside the house, Schwartz and Hans are feasting at the table. There is gold heaped on the floor. Two Farmers are trying to buy food from Schwartz and Hans)

FARMER 1: But that's twice as much as we paid for it last year.

SCHWARTZ: *(not looking up from his dinner)* You want it bad enough, you'll pay the price.

HANS & SCHWARTZ:
GLUCK!!!

FARMER 2: You don't know what it's like to watch your haystacks float down flooded rivers.

SCHWARTZ: Pity.

FARMER 1: Or to have your grapevines cut to pieces by hail the size of apples.

HANS: Pity.

FARMER 1: Or to watch your corn be killed by a black blight.

SCHWARTZ & HANS:
Pity.

FARMER 2: I don't see why our misfortunes should make you rich.

SCHWARTZ: Instead, you think your misfortunes should make me poor?

FARMER 1: That's not fair.

HANS: Fair?

SCHWARTZ: Fair has nothing to do with it.

HANS: This is business.

FARMER 1: It's a lousy business then!

SCHWARTZ: Where else are you going to find any corn this year? Not in YOUR fields. You want corn, we have corn.

FARMER 2: It's not something we WANT. It's something we NEED.

FARMER 1: We have to eat.

SCHWARTZ: You eat, you buy. You want it, you pay for it.

FARMER 1: And if we don't pay for it, our families starve.

HANS: Details.

FARMER 1: This is no way to treat your fellow man.

SCHWARTZ: *Technicalities.*

(they throw the two Farmers out the door and return to their meal. A child appears at the door)

CHILD: My mother is very sick and we have no money. I'm begging you.

HANS & SCHWARTZ:
GLUCK!!!

GLUCK: *(tries to be tough, imitates his brothers:)* You want it, you pay for it. *(Suddenly Gluck grabs some corn and runs to the door giving it to the child.)* Run!

HANS & SCHWARTZ:
Gluck, Gluck, Gluck...

SCHWARTZ: How old are you, Gluck?

GLUCK: Almost 12.

SCHWARTZ: How many times have we told you: everything, one way or another, has to pay for what it eats.

GLUCK: He was a starving child - -

HANS: And how many times have we talked about running this farm efficiently?

GLUCK: A hundred times.

SCHWARTZ: A million times.

HANS: A billion times.

SCHWARTZ: A trillion times!

GLUCK: But we never give a penny to charity. We have all this gold *(he kicks some gold on the floor)* and we don't do anything with it.

SCHWARTZ: You want us to do something with it?

GLUCK: Yes.

SCHWARTZ: We can sleep in it.

HANS: We can dream in it.

GLUCK: You can suffocate in it.

SCHWARTZ: We can swim in it.

HANS: We can bathe in it.

GLUCK: You can drown in it.

SCHWARTZ: We can smell it.

HANS: We can taste it.

GLUCK: You can count it.

SCHWARTZ: The important thing is that we know that it's here.

GLUCK: Important to WHO?

HANS: Important to US.

GLUCK: Important to YOU. But what good is it?

SCHWARTZ: It's ours. That's as good as it gets.

GLUCK: Ours? But what about all those people out there? People need some encouragement or they stop dreaming.

HANS: Encouragement?

SCHWARTZ: Have you been reading fancy books again instead of doing your work?

GLUCK: People need to know that "what's what" is not always "what's bad." They need to know that "ours" is "theirs," that "yours" is "mine." They need to know that this (*he holds up a bag of grain*) is not this (*he holds up a piece of gold*) and that we are them and they are us and Treasure Valley is THE WORLD!