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Dramatic Publishing

The boy who stole the stars

A Play for Young People
by
JULIAN WILES



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE BOY WHO STOLE THE STARS)

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THE BOY WHO STOLE THE STARS

A Play In One Act
For Four Persons and Extras*

CHARACTERS

POET an offstage taped voice
NICHOLAS ten to twelve-year-old boy
BESSIE Nicholas' grandmother
MATTHEW Nicholas' grandfather
GENEVIEVE ten to twelve-year-old girl

TIME: The present

PLACE: The porch and front yard of Nicholas' grandparents'
country home.

*Three persons costumed as one Chinese dragon.

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROLOGUE: The prologue, as described on Page 5, is optional and the play can begin with Nicholas' first entrance. The playwright cut the use of the poet from subsequent productions. The poems are provided here to give a feel to the storm, battle with the dragon, etc. Use of the poet is entirely optional. The prologue may also be simplified by using just lighting and sound effects rather than projections on screens. One possibility is a mirrored rotating ball which would throw specks of light throughout the darkened theatre. All effects should create an other-worldly, somewhat eerie feeling.

SETTING: The majority of the play takes place on the front porch and in the front yard of Bessie and Matthew's old-fashioned, modest country home. The porch is located UC. Four columns support it's roof and it has two attached front steps. The porch may also have a railing and decorative plants. An outline of the house is constructed behind the porch, with a set-in screen door that appears to lead into the house. Two rocking chairs are RC, near the porch. There is a large tree stump DR and three willow or wicker lawn chairs DL. The yard may also be embellished with trees, bushes, etc., to enhance the scene.

CHARACTERS and COSTUMES: (NICHOLAS) Bright, inquisitive and genuine. He wears "play" clothes: jeans, t-shirts, sneakers, etc., as appropriate to the scene.

(BESSIE) In her sixties, warm, calm and loving. She wears sensible shoes, cotton housedresses and cardigan sweaters or shawls as the scene warrants.

(MATTHEW) A man in his sixties or seventies. In the first half of the play, his keen intelligence is belied by a befuddled or distracted affect. Toward the latter half of the play he becomes increasingly alert with animation and insight. He wears comfortable, old (but not worn-out) clothes. Some article of clothing

may suggest his years at sea: a jacket, cap or fisherman's sweater. (He should not be a stereotypical old sea captain, however.) Matthew's "Sunday best" should be a suit with perhaps a vest and dress hat.

(GENEVIEVE) Freckle-faced. She wears "play" clothes and may be a bit of a tomboy. She can be sharp-tongued, but is actually very thoughtful and sensitive.

(CHINESE DRAGON) Should be designed as a single costume for three people. It should be as authentic, colorful, mobile and menacing as possible.

SCENE CHANGES: Blackouts, which denote scene changes, may be altered or eliminated by the use of area staging and/or lighting.

MISCELLANEOUS: Depending on sight-lines and the stage, the hammock may be put up entirely on the porch or attached at one end to a porch column and the other end offstage. Or a freestanding hammock may be used.

The battle and slaying of the dragon should be choreographed to a certain extent, within the actors' abilities, but should not appear stilted or stylized. The whole scene should be very intense, with strong, sharp lighting and sound effects.

The falling stars, which Nicholas gathers on Page 39, and that are released from a box on Page 40, should be created with special lighting effects. This need not be complex. A simple light in the box, that will illuminate the actors' faces would suffice. When the stars are released, the box lid opens. Lights in the box fade as stars on the screen or cyclorama rise. Very realistic background stars can be created by hanging tiny white Christmas tree lights behind a thin black curtain. A scrim placed in front of this will enhance the effect.

THE BOY WHO STOLE THE STARS

AS THE HOUSE LIGHTS DIM: *The eerie haunting sounds of a percussion score begin. On projection screens DL and DR and above C on the proscenium, images of stars being created, being torn apart by cosmic forces, then recreated, appear. After a few minutes, views of the Earth from space appear. From offstage, we hear the taped voice of the POET. SEE PRODUCTION NOTES.*

POET'S VOICE (*offstage*).

We are the myths of genesis
We are all that has ever been...
...all that shall ever be
We are fragments of yesterday
Splinters of shattered looking glass stars
Scattered.
Only to be gathered again,
To be stirred into stars
that shine as brief as a summer snowflake...

Not even a star can last forever
And yet, the stars are all that are forever
And the children of the stars never die.

So
Hush
Lullaby
Children of the stars
Lay down your heads upon the day

And slip away
Into the night
And be nudged and nuzzled by the starlight
Starbright
Children of the stars.

(Lights come up on the set. NICHOLAS enters R, carrying a backpack, rod and reel, baseball bat and glove, etc., obviously ready for a summer visit.)

NICHOLAS. Grandmother! Grandfather!

BESSIE *(from inside house)*. Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. I'm here, Grandmother.

(BESSIE enters from screen door on porch, followed slowly by MATTHEW. MATTHEW appears distracted. BESSIE hugs NICHOLAS.)

BESSIE. Already? You're a day early.

NICHOLAS. Yes, I know, but I couldn't wait any longer. Mom said I could come on over. You don't mind, do you?

BESSIE. No, of course we don't mind... but what about school?

NICHOLAS. Oh, I've only got one more day and I'm catching a ride tomorrow with Genevieve, you know, that bratty girl who lives down the road. They dropped me off from school.

BESSIE. Well, fine... *(There is a moment of silence and hesitation. BESSIE looks at MATTHEW. Obviously something is wrong.)* Matthew, aren't you going to welcome Nicholas?

MATTHEW. Glad to have you here, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. Thanks, Grandfather. I've brought all kinds of things for us to do... my rod and reel... I got some new lures for my birthday... and I've got the binoculars you gave me last summer and I've brought an extra baseball mitt for you.
(MATTHEW looks confused, forces a smile.)

BESSIE *(quickly)*. Yes, well, you two can talk all about that after supper.

MATTHEW. Yes, after supper. *(He wanders inside.)*

NICHOLAS. What's wrong with him, Grandmother?

BESSIE. I don't know, Nicholas. I don't know. He just says he hasn't been feeling well lately.

NICHOLAS. He seems like a rainy day.

BESSIE. Yes, I can hardly get him to eat.

NICHOLAS. Not even ice cream?

BESSIE. Not even fudge ripple.

NICHOLAS. He's probably just going through a phase, Grandmother. Grownups do that too, don't they?

BESSIE. Yes, grownups do that too.

NICHOLAS. Then he'll probably grow out of it.

BESSIE. I hope so.

MATTHEW (*from inside the house*). Bessie, I can't find my blue sweater.

BESSIE. It's right inside the hall closet where it always is.

MATTHEW. It's never been in the hall closet before. You must have put it there.

BESSIE. I better go check on him, Nicholas. Why don't you go out and play until supper, then we'll settle you into the front room.

NICHOLAS. Fine, Grandmother.

(BESSIE goes inside. NICHOLAS follows. After a moment, he bounds back outside with a baseball bat. He picks up imaginary rocks and bats them out toward the audience. After hitting a few times, he notices the first star of the evening.)

NICHOLAS. Twinkle, twinkle, little star

How I wonder what you are

Like a diamond in the sky

Stick a moon beam in your eye.

(He throws a rock at a star.)

(GENEVIEVE enters L.)

GENEVIEVE. What-cha doing, Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. Throwing a rock at a star.

GENEVIEVE. That's useful.

NICHOLAS. What's it to you?

GENEVIEVE. Nothing. How's your grandfather?

NICHOLAS. What do you mean?

GENEVIEVE. Nothing... Just that my mom said he got lost going to the grocery store and they had to call your grandmother to come pick him up.

NICHOLAS. He hasn't been feeling well lately.

GENEVIEVE. That's what my mom said, only she wasn't so polite.

NICHOLAS. I'll bet she'd talk differently if it was one of your grandfathers.

GENEVIEVE. I haven't got any grandfathers, they're both dead... before I was born.

NICHOLAS. I've only got one left.

GENEVIEVE. I'm sorry he's sick.

NICHOLAS. Me, too.

GENEVIEVE. Have you decided what you're going to do for your summer science project?

NICHOLAS. No, not exactly, have you?

GENEVIEVE. I've got a couple of great ideas floating around. I'll decide on one by tomorrow.

NICHOLAS. You're not going to make another papier-mache volcano, are you? There's still soot on the ceiling from that one.

GENEVIEVE. That was a good project. I got an "A" on it.

NICHOLAS. That's only because you cried after the principal called the fire department. The teacher felt sorry for you.

GENEVIEVE. She did not!

NICHOLAS. If you say so.

GENEVIEVE. Well, I do, so there. *(Starts to exit L, turns back.)*

Oh, I only came over to tell you that my mom said that we'll pick you up around 6:45.

NICHOLAS. 6:45? Why so early?

GENEVIEVE. When you live out in the country, Nicholas, you have to get used to getting up early. Besides, it takes a while to get to school from here.

NICHOLAS. 6:45?

GENEVIEVE. Yeah. Well, I've got to get home to supper. See you later. *(She exits L.)*

NICHOLAS *(calling after her)*. Yeah, later... make it much later.

(NICHOLAS crosses to stump, pulls out a loop of string, begins doing string tricks. MATTHEW enters from DC and wanders to his willow chair DL and sits down.)

NICHOLAS. Grandfather.

MATTHEW *(gruffly)*. Huh?

NICHOLAS. Grandfather, can I walk with you?

MATTHEW. I was going to sit.

NICHOLAS. Can I sit with you then?

MATTHEW. If you like.

NICHOLAS. The stars are pretty tonight.

MATTHEW. What?

NICHOLAS. The stars... they're pretty tonight.

MATTHEW. Yes, I suppose so.

NICHOLAS. I wonder how many there are.

MATTHEW *(with annoyance)*. How many?

NICHOLAS. Stars... how many stars?

MATTHEW. A lot.

NICHOLAS. You used to count them, didn't you, when you were on the ships?

MATTHEW. Ships...

NICHOLAS. You were a navialligator, weren't you, a great navialligator?

MATTHEW. A great navialligator...

NICHOLAS. And you knew all of the stars by name.

MATTHEW *(bitterly)*. I did once, but I've forgotten them now. There are so many.

NICHOLAS. Would you like to help me count them again?

MATTHEW. Count them?

NICHOLAS. It would make a great science project.

MATTHEW *(out front)*. Science project? *(A school bell rings and all lights go out except for a special on NICHOLAS, C.)*

NICHOLAS (*speaking to his imaginary teacher out front*). Yes, ma'am, my science project? I plan to count the stars. Ma'am? That's right... count the stars. Yes, ma'am all of them. Well, if it's all right, my grandfather will help me... my grandfather used to be a star counter himself. Ma'am? A star counter. You know, on a ship. He was a navialligator. Yes, ma'am, that's what I said, a navigator. What? Yes, I suppose I will need all the help I can get. Yes, ma'am, I'm sure it's the project I want to do.

(*GENEVIEVE enters UL and stands just behind and to the side of NICHOLAS.*)

NICHOLAS. Well, it's no worse than building papier-mache volcanos that melt before they erupt. (*GENEVIEVE clears her throat, clearly annoyed.*) I'm sorry, but... yes, ma'am... next term, first day of class. I'll be ready.

GENEVIEVE. We'll see.

NICHOLAS. Don't lose any sleep over it.

GENEVIEVE. You don't have to worry about that.

NICHOLAS. Oh, I forgot. You'll be too busy looking for crickets and frogs. Sounds like a great science project.

GENEVIEVE. It beats papier-mache volcanos, don't you think?

NICHOLAS. Not by much.

GENEVIEVE. So, you're going to count all the stars.

NICHOLAS. I thought I would.

GENEVIEVE (*erasing an imaginary board*). Why did you decide to count stars?

NICHOLAS. I thought it would be fun to do something with my grandfather.

GENEVIEVE. How is he?

NICHOLAS. About the same.

GENEVIEVE. Was he really a navigator?

NICHOLAS. He was one of the best. He even went on an expedition to the South Pole.

GENEVIEVE. No kidding.

NICHOLAS. He guided ships around the world twice, and now he can't even get home from the supermarket.

GENEVIEVE. I'm sorry I said that.

NICHOLAS. It doesn't matter.

GENEVIEVE. Yes it does. Look, we all get lost sometimes.

When I was a little kid, I remember crying my eyes out once when my mom left me alone in the shopping cart. She was only in the next aisle, but that didn't matter. I cried anyway.

NICHOLAS. But you were a kid. Kids are supposed to get lost and cry. Grownups aren't. They're supposed to have it all together, and when they don't, people think they're nuts.

GENEVIEVE. I wouldn't say that.

NICHOLAS. Your mother would.

GENEVIEVE. I wouldn't pay too much attention to my mother. I certainly don't.

NICHOLAS. You know, you can actually be funny sometimes.

GENEVIEVE. And you can actually be civilized.

NICHOLAS. Gee, thanks.

GENEVIEVE. Don't mention it. Well, I guess I gotta go.

NICHOLAS. Right.

GENEVIEVE. Bye. *(She exits.)*

NICHOLAS. Bye. Now I've done it. She likes me!

(School bell rings. Lights change back to full stage. NICHOLAS and BESSIE are on the steps at C. MATTHEW, lost in his own thoughts, is sitting in his chair, DL.)

BESSIE. Nicholas! Nicholas!

NICHOLAS. Coming, Grandmother. *(He crosses to MATTHEW, who is asleep.)* I'm afraid he's fallen asleep.

BESSIE *(touches MATTHEW on the arm)*. Matthew, Nicholas wants to say good night.

MATTHEW. Good night, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS *(giving MATTHEW a hug)*. Good night, Grandfather. See you in the morning. *(NICHOLAS exits into house.)*

BESSIE. Matthew, don't you think it's time to come in?

MATTHEW. If you want.

BESSIE. Well, it is late, Matthew.

MATTHEW. All right. All right.

BESSIE. What's wrong?

MATTHEW. What do you mean?

BESSIE. You're brooding, Matthew. I've lived with you long enough to know that something's wrong.

MATTHEW. And I've lived with you long enough to know when you're starting to nag.

BESSIE. I'm not nagging, Matthew, but you're not yourself.

MATTHEW. None of us stay the same very long. Look at Nicholas growing in leaps and bounds. He's a ball of fire, growing up so fast.

BESSIE. Is he too much for you, Matthew? We don't have to keep him all summer.

MATTHEW. No, no, let him stay.

BESSIE. I'm glad. You two have always had such special summers. I tell you what. Why don't you let me fix you two a picnic lunch and you can go fishing tomorrow. You haven't been fishing in ages.

MATTHEW. You trying to get me out of the house?

BESSIE. Well, it wouldn't do you any harm... moping around like you've been doing.

MATTHEW. I'm not moping. I just don't have the energy I used to.

BESSIE. Well, neither do I, but I'm not ready to be put out to pasture.

MATTHEW. Here we go again. You'd think I was the laziest man ever born, to hear you talk. I worked a good sixty years on this place. Made you a good home. I'm tired, Bessie, and I'm tired of being made to feel guilty for being tired.

BESSIE. I don't mean to make you feel guilty, but you don't get enough exercise.

MATTHEW. I'm not a spring chicken. Why don't you realize that? Do this... do that. "Why don't you go fishing? Why don't you take a walk down to the bog? Why don't you..." I'm tired of "why don't you."

BESSIE. I know you're not twenty-five anymore, Matthew. But what I keep telling you is, that just because you're old doesn't mean that you've got one foot in the grave. But people our age who don't eat well and don't get any exercise are digging their own graves.

MATTHEW. Don't be so morbid.

BESSIE. That's like the pot calling the kettle black.

MATTHEW. You're like a broken record... nag, nag, nag.

BESSIE. I'm only nagging because I care about you.

MATTHEW. If you cared about me you'd leave me alone.

BESSIE. Matthew, we've never been this far away. It's like I don't know you anymore.

MATTHEW. Maybe you never did.

(BESSIE, stunned, slowly retreats inside, trying to hide her tears. Lights fade to black for several moments. As lights rise again, NICHOLAS is throwing his baseball up, catching it and counting.)

NICHOLAS. ...forty-two, forty-three, forty-four, forty-five...

(BESSIE enters from house with bowl full of string beans to be snapped.)

BESSIE. And what are you doing, young man?

NICHOLAS. Playing catch with the sky.

BESSIE. Who's winning?

NICHOLAS. Well, I've missed twice. And so far, the sky has thrown it back every time.

BESSIE *(sitting in rocker)*. I see. What have you been doing all day?

NICHOLAS *(sitting on step)*. Let's see. This morning I played catch with the sky, of course. Then I got my rod and reel out and practiced casting. Then I played catch some more. Then we had lunch and I took a nap, and I played catch some more... and I got my marbles out and practiced... and we ate supper and I played catch some more.

BESSIE. You've been busy.

NICHOLAS. I suppose. Grandmother, do you think there are more hours in the day out here in the country?

BESSIE. I don't think so.

NICHOLAS. It sure seems like it. Grandmother?

BESSIE. Yes.

NICHOLAS. Do you think... I mean, have I done something wrong?

BESSIE. What do you mean?

NICHOLAS. Well, Grandfather seems to be mad at me.

BESSIE. Oh, I don't think he is.

NICHOLAS. He sure snapped at me at breakfast when I asked him if we could go fishing.

BESSIE (*smiling, to reassure him*). Your grandfather hasn't been sleeping too well lately, Nicholas, and it makes him kind of cranky in the morning. I'm sure, when he feels better in a day or two, he'll take you fishing.

NICHOLAS. I don't care about the fishing so much. I'd just like to be with him. He doesn't seem to want me around.

BESSIE. Oh, it's not that, Nicholas. People sometimes need to be alone. Your grandfather just needs some time to be by himself. Let's just give him some time and he'll be his old self again.

NICHOLAS. Do you really think so, Grandmother?

BESSIE. Certainly... certainly.

NICHOLAS. Do you think that it will be tomorrow?

BESSIE. I don't know if it'll be tomorrow, but in a day or so.

NICHOLAS. But he's been by himself all day today. I haven't spoken to him since this morning... and he didn't say anything at lunch or supper. It's spooky.

BESSIE. Oh, don't say that.

NICHOLAS. I'm sorry.

BESSIE. You just need someone to play with. I know we old folks aren't much company. Would you like to have a friend come out and visit?

NICHOLAS (*quickly*). No.

BESSIE. You certainly enjoyed Jonathan last summer.