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The Snow Child

Adapted by
TRACY WELLS

From the European folktale

Dramatic Publishing Company
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TRACY WELLS

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(THE SNOW CHILD)

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The Snow Child

CHARACTERS

HELEN (w): Mother.

ARTHUR (m): Father.

EIRA [AY-ra] (a): 12 years old; the Snow Child.

ROBIN (a): 11-13 years old; a child who befriends Eira.

NOEL (a): 11-13 years old; another child who befriends Eira.

ASPEN (a): 11-13 years old; a child who bullies Eira.

WINTER WIND (a): The spirit of winter.

FIRE (a): The bringer of flames.

SPRING BREEZE (a): The spirit of spring.

ENSEMBLE (a): At least 6 of them; they play various children, the Snow Chorus, the Spring Chorus and the Flames.

SETTING: The set can be simple or ornate. The play takes place in a small European village during winter and the very beginning of spring, so a wintry scene should be conveyed. If a cottage or buildings are present, they should appear warm and inviting. The play may occur during any time period you would like from the 1700s to modern day.

PRODUCTION NOTES

CASTING: Other than HELEN and ARTHUR, all other roles can be any gender. Genders and pronouns have been assigned for the purposes of the script, but feel free to make changes as need be. Diversity in casting is always encouraged.

ENSEMBLE: Feel free to distribute ensemble lines as needed. They should be shared among multiple actors, especially when lines are consecutive. You can (and should) sometimes have multiple actors saying the same line for added impact. There are several CHILD lines that can be spoken by ensemble members, ROBIN, NOEL or ASPEN.

COSTUMES: Helen, Arthur and the village children's costumes should reflect the time period. Eira, Snow Chorus and Winter Wind should wear whites, silvers, grays and blues; Spring Chorus and Spring Breeze should be in greens and florals; and Fire and Flames should be in reds, yellows and oranges.

MUSIC and POETRY: The play starts and ends with a recitation of the first verse of "In the Bleak Midwinter" by Christina Rossetti, who wrote it originally as a poem titled, "A Christmas Carol." Gustav Holst took the poem and composed music to turn it into a song. There is also a slightly different composition by Harold Darke. This can be sung by the SNOW CHORUS altogether or the lines divided. Alternatively, the tune can be hummed while a designated speaker or speakers recite the lines. Either way, a haunting version of the melody would work best for this piece, so feel free to play around with that until you get the appropriate tone. You could also have one tone for the opening (haunting, lonely, longing, desperate, etc.) and a different tone for the closing (hopeful, full of love, etc.). The play also incorporates poetry excerpts from "Spellbound" by Emily Brontë and "You cannot put a Fire out—" by Emily Dickinson.

The Snow Child

SCENE 1: Winter Solstice

(AT RISE: Dusk on the day of the winter solstice. It is cold and the wind blows. Snow is piled all around. A mostly constructed snowman is C. The SNOW CHORUS enters, swirling. The music of “In the Bleak Midwinter” by Christina Rossetti is heard as the SNOW CHORUS begins reciting it. They may sing or hum, dividing the lyrics as they see fit.)

SNOW CHORUS *(singing or humming/reciting).*

“IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER
FROSTY WIND MADE MOAN
EARTH STOOD HARD AS IRON
WATER LIKE A STONE
SNOW HAD FALLEN
SNOW ON SNOW, SNOW ON SNOW
IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER, LONG, LONG AGO.”

(ROBIN, NOEL, ASPEN and other children enter wearing outerwear and play in the snow—making snow angels, throwing snowballs, their laughter carrying.)

SNOW CHORUS *(cont’d).* A cold winter’s day.

On the eve of the winter solstice.

Children play in the snow.

While a mother grieves for a child she’s never had.

(SNOW CHORUS flurries away as HELEN enters wearing winter clothing over a light dress, slip or nightgown, watching sadly.)

ROBIN. Look at me! I'm an angel!

NOEL (*holding up a snowball*). I'm gonna get you!

CHILD. Try and catch a snowflake on your tongue!

ASPEN (*placing a sprig of pine on the snowman*). I just need something for the eyes.

CHILD. How do you like my snow beard?

(Dinner bells ring out. The children all look upward and listen.)

ROBIN. Time for dinner.

CHILD. Time to go.

CHILD. Tomorrow let's go sledding!

NOEL. Tomorrow let's build a fort!

ASPEN (*to the snowman*). Tomorrow I'll bring you a scarf.

ROBIN. I hope the snow's still here.

NOEL. It will be. It's not going anywhere.

ASPEN (*to the snowman and others*). See you tomorrow.

(The children exit, calling out a chorus of "See you tomorrow" that overlaps and echoes until HELEN is left alone with the snowman, and all we hear around us is "Tomorrow!" "Tomorrow!" "Tomorrow!")

HELEN (*sadly*). Tomorrow. (*Reaches out and touches the snowman.*) Never today. Never now. Always someday. Always maybe. (*Touches her belly, which is barren.*) They say everything happens for a reason, but what does it mean when *nothing* happens? When no matter what a mother does, she remains childless? When the ache is so deep, the longing so long, that she'd do anything to make it go away?

(HELEN slowly begins to remove outerwear, piece by piece, and drops it on the ground as the wind picks up. SNOW CHORUS enters, blowing around her; repeating their lines in a choral, echoing way, overlapping and haunting.)

HELEN (*cont'd*). Anything to be rid of the pain. (*Removes another piece.*)

SNOW CHORUS. Pain. [Pain, pain, pain ...]

HELEN. The loneliness. (*Removes another piece and touches her belly.*)

SNOW CHORUS. Lonely. [Lonely, lonely, lonely ...]

HELEN. The emptiness.

SNOW CHORUS. Empty. [Empty, empty, empty ...]

(HELEN removes the last piece of outerwear. She stands in the cold in nothing but her slip or nightgown. It's darker now. Night is upon us.)

HELEN (*anguished, pleading*). All I wanted was a child of my own! Is that too much to ask? No one would love their child more. I swear it! I would do anything!

SNOW CHORUS. Anything! [Anything, anything, anything ...]

HELEN. Anything for a child!

(HELEN falls to the ground in despair. ARTHUR enters, upset. He sees HELEN and rushes to her.)

ARTHUR. Helen! What are you doing out here? Don't you see how late it's gotten? Night has fallen.

(The SNOW CHORUS recites "Spellbound" by Emily Brontë.)

SNOW CHORUS (*eerily*). "The night is darkening 'round me,"

ARTHUR. Where is your coat? It's freezing! (*Looks around for her coat.*)

SNOW CHORUS. "The wild winds coldly blow;"

(*ARTHUR tries to get HELEN's outerwear back on her.*)

ARTHUR. Come on, Helen, let's go home.

HELEN (*refusing to stand, listless*). No.

SNOW CHORUS. "But a tyrant spell has bound me"

ARTHUR. Helen, please!

HELEN. I cannot.

SNOW CHORUS. "And I cannot, cannot go."

ARTHUR (*angrily*). Enough!

(*HELEN looks up.*)

ARTHUR (*cont'd*). Helen, this is ridiculous. You can't just sit out here and wait to die.

HELEN. Can't I?

ARTHUR. No. I won't let you.

HELEN. But I can't bear it anymore!

ARTHUR. Helen, I know how much you've wanted a child, but—

HELEN. No, Arthur. It's not the same for you. I am a mother. I have a mother's heart. These are a mother's arms. I just need a child to fill them.

ARTHUR. Maybe one day—

HELEN. It's been years, Arthur, and no child has come. You and I both know what that means.

ARTHUR. We share a life together, Helen. It can be enough. (*Takes her hands.*) I can be enough.

HELEN (*with a sad smile*). I wish that were true.

ARTHUR. What can I do?

HELEN. Nothing. There's nothing you can do. There's nothing you can say. There's just ... (*Looks down and places a hand on her belly.*) Nothing.

SNOW CHORUS. Nothing. [Nothing, nothing, nothing ...]

(*ARTHUR sees the snowman and rushes over to it.*)

ARTHUR. If we cannot make a child of our own, then let us make a snow child.

HELEN. A snow child? Arthur ...

(*During the next few lines, ARTHUR rushes around, picking up additional snow, rolling it in his hands to construct hair, limbs, etc., to add to the snowman to turn it into a more human-like child.*)

ARTHUR. It'll be great, I promise! We have plenty of snow in which to make a child, and the weather is going to hold for some time. And every day when we look out our window or walk to the market or take a turn through town square, there she'll be ... just waiting for us.

HELEN (*with a sad smile*). She?

ARTHUR. Oh, yes! Can't you see her? (*As he places hair.*) A beautiful head full of curls that frame her angelic face like a halo. (*Sculpting her face.*) Two eyes that shine brightly as we read her stories and sing her songs. A tiny button nose that wrinkles when she laughs or when we tickle her? A wide mouth that stretches into a smile so big each time she sees us. (*Steps back to admire his work.*) She's beautiful. Don't you think?

SNOW CHORUS. Beautiful. [Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful ...]

HELEN (*stands and crosses to ARTHUR*). She's the most beautiful snow child I've ever seen.

ARTHUR (*putting his arm around HELEN*). And she's all ours.

SNOW CHORUS. Ours. [Ours, ours, ours ...]

(*HELEN shivers.*)

ARTHUR. Darling, you're cold.

HELEN. Not *so* cold.

(*HELEN steps back. SNOW CHORUS surrounds her; protective.*)

ARTHUR (*picks up her coat*). Here, put on your coat and let me get you back inside.

HELEN. I can't leave her.

SNOW CHORUS (*protecting HELEN*). Leave her! [Leave her, leave her ...]

ARTHUR. She's not real, no matter how much we want her to be. She's made of nothing more than water that's formed into tiny crystals. Not flesh and blood and bone, but snow and ice. Cold. Frozen.

SNOW CHORUS. Frozen. [Frozen, frozen, frozen ...]

HELEN. Can't you see? *I'm* frozen! Frozen in a place where time stands still. Where nothing can move forward. Where no matter what I do, this is where I always am. This is all I'll ever be.

(*HELEN breaks through the SNOW CHORUS and crosses to the snow child.*)

HELEN (*cont'd*). If she can't be real, then *I* don't want to be real.

(HELEN falls at the feet of the snow child, clutching it. The wind picks up. SNOW CHORUS begins to swirl around, blocking ARTHUR as he tries to reach her.)

SNOW CHORUS. Real. [Real, real, real ...]

ARTHUR. Please, Helen, come home with me! This is madness.

HELEN. I'm sorry, Arthur.

ARTHUR. You're going to die out here. *We're* going to die out here!

SNOW CHORUS. "The wild winds coldly blow;"

HELEN. Then leave me.

ARTHUR. I can't leave you!

HELEN. I won't go.

SNOW CHORUS. "And I cannot, cannot go."

ARTHUR. This can't be happening. This can't be real!

SNOW CHORUS. Real. [Real, real, real ...]

ARTHUR *(looking up at the sky)*. I hear you howling, winter wind, and yet you have nothing helpful to say. Either use your icy breeze for good or take it away and leave my wife and me in peace!

(ARTHUR throws his coat and his body over HELEN as the sound of wind picks up. SNOW CHORUS swirls and crosses to usher in WINTER WIND. Neither HELEN nor ARTHUR see her, though her presence is felt.)

WINTER WIND. Who dares summon the Winter Wind on the night of the winter solstice?

SNOW CHORUS *(indicating HELEN and ARTHUR)*. Them! [Them, them, them ...]

WINTER WIND. And what do they want from me?

SNOW CHORUS (*indicating the snow child*). Real. [Real, real, real ...]

WINTER WIND. Ah, I see. This couple is barren. Their home is without the warmth and love only a child can bring. They are anxious. Desperate. And they want my help. (*Crosses to ARTHUR.*) A husband who wants nothing more than to give his wife everything her heart desires.

(WINTER WIND uses her magic and the help of the SNOW CHORUS to whisk ARTHUR away from the snow child and place him nearby, limply. WINTER WIND steps closer to HELEN.)

WINTER WIND (*cont'd*). A wife, but not a mother, hoping for a child ... and if none comes ... wishing for death.

(WINTER WIND uses her magic and the help of the SNOW CHORUS to whisk HELEN away and place her beside ARTHUR. WINTER WIND picks up HELEN's discarded outerwear as she chants.)

WINTER WIND (*cont'd*). Some mittens. A scarf. Discarded in the snow. (*Puts the hat and scarf on the snow child.*) Protecting those we love from the winter winds that blow. (*Steps to the side, summoning the SNOW CHORUS.*) But winter winds do come to aid a sad husband and wife. (*Raises her arms.*) Now, with ancient winter magic, bring this snow child to life!

(WINTER WIND uses her magic and the help of the SNOW CHORUS to dismantle the snow child. In its place is EIRA, dressed all in white, except for the mittens and scarf and a pine sprig in her hair. WINTER WIND looks at EIRA.)

WINTER WIND (*cont'd*). Go, my child, and warm this couple's heart.

(*Perhaps WINTER WIND kisses EIRA's head and exits. SNOW CHORUS encircles HELEN and ARTHUR, waking them.*)

SNOW CHORUS. Child. [Child, child, child ...]

(*SNOW CHORUS exits as ARTHUR wakes up and sees HELEN.*)

ARTHUR. Helen! (*Rushes over to HELEN.*) The cold was too much for her! (*Takes off his own coat and puts it on HELEN, trying to warm her.*) Please, Helen. Don't leave me! I need you.

HELEN (*waking*). What ... what's going on?

ARTHUR. Oh, thank goodness! (*Helps HELEN sit or stand.*) I thought—

EIRA. You thought she was dead.

(*HELEN looks over at EIRA, shocked. ARTHUR doesn't notice, his attention firmly on HELEN.*)

ARTHUR. Yes, that's true. (*Taking HELEN's hands.*) But you're not dead. You're here, with me.

EIRA. With both of us.

ARTHUR. That's right. With both of u— (*Turns quickly to look at EIRA.*) Who ... who are you?

EIRA. I am Eira.

ARTHUR. Eira. I don't know any child in the village named Eira. Do you?

HELEN. No.

(HELEN and ARTHUR cross to EIRA.)

ARTHUR. This is a small village. We know all the children that reside here, and we've never seen you before.

EIRA. That's because I just got here.

HELEN. But it's the middle of the night!

ARTHUR. And there's been a snowstorm.

EIRA. That's right.

HELEN *(taking a step closer)*. Eira ... did the snowstorm bring you here?

EIRA. Yes.

HELEN. But ... how?

EIRA. I don't know.

HELEN *(noticing the scarf, reaching out)*. Is that ...

EIRA *(touching the scarf)*. Oh ... is this yours?

(EIRA starts to take it off, but HELEN stops her.)

HELEN. No. Keep it. It's cold out, and you need it to keep warm.

EIRA. I don't need anything to keep me warm. But I'll wear it if you want me to, Mother.

HELEN *(shocked)*. Mother? *(Looks back at ARTHUR, who rushes to stand by her side.)*

EIRA. Well, aren't you?

HELEN. I ... I don't know how I could be.

ARTHUR *(looks around)*. What's going on, here? Is this some sort of joke?

EIRA. I don't know much ... how I got to this village ... why I'm here. But I know one thing— *(Takes ARTHUR's hand and smiles.)* You are my father. *(Takes HELEN's hand and smiles.)* And you are my mother.

HELEN. Her skin ... it's white as snow.

ARTHUR (*looking down at EIRA's hand*). And so cold.
We've got to get her inside before she freezes!

(*ARTHUR starts to pull EIRA offstage, but EIRA stops.*)

EIRA (*suddenly scared*). No!

(*SNOW CHORUS enters.*)

HELEN (*rushing to EIRA*). What is it my sweet girl?

SNOW CHORUS. "A tyrant spell has bound me."

EIRA. I cannot go inside.

SNOW CHORUS. "And I cannot, cannot go."

ARTHUR. But you have to! You'll catch your death out here
if you stay.

EIRA. I won't. I promise.

ARTHUR. You are just a child. You don't understand the
ways of the world. We are your parents—you said so,
yourself—and you must listen to us.

EIRA. I won't be your child any longer if I go inside.

ARTHUR (*flabbergasted*). That doesn't make any sense!

HELEN (*realizing*). The snow child! (*Crosses to remnants
of the snowman, then looks back at EIRA.*) That was you,
wasn't it? You're our snow child—the one Arthur made for
us. That's why you can't go inside ... or you'll—

ARTHUR. Don't say it!

EIRA. That's right.

HELEN. Then we'll just have to make a place for you to stay
out here.

EIRA. Yes, please! Father will help us, won't you, Father?
(*Smiles and takes ARTHUR's hand.*)