

FACE TO FACE

By
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Category: Radius Typescript 2011

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Radius

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CAST

Storyteller

Two children's voices

The Garden - The family

Father owner and creator of the garden

Acer, younger son about seventeen

Arum, older son a little older

Rosa (family friend)

Lily (sister of Rosa)

The Gardeners – all ages

Holly

Clematis

Hebe

Lobelia

Phlox

Granny Smith

The City: Aristocrats & Masqueraders

Lady Ennui, Masquerader one

Lord Vane, Masquerader two

Marquis LeZard, Masquerader three

Lady Virago, Masquerader four

Lord Nocturne, Masquerader five

Lady Nocturne, Masquerader six

Servant to Lady Ennui

Here the cast is named as 21 parts but there is flexibility: it was originally performed by over 60 people and would, at a stretch be possible for a group of 12. The gardeners could be a larger group. The city of masqueraders could also be a larger group. They are intended to appear as masked aristocrats and could be from any setting where masks were common and linked with corruption, secrecy and decadence. Each masquerader is also a narrative voice. This was a distinctly "adult" group, performed by older students in the first production. The number of narrative children's voice parts could be increased. If a reduction in cast numbers is desirable the city and garden never overlap so 6 actors could double. The voice parts could be taken by gardeners.

Thoughts on the Production:

There are two distinct locations: the garden and the city. The minimum of props and scenery are required. It could be done without any scenery but with perhaps lighting suggesting leaves. Costumes should be simple and not specific to time with pale colours, cream and white, for the garden black and silver for the city. Masks are crucial to suggest menace and deception; also richness and decadence. Visually there should be a distinction between the rural innocence of the garden and the urban corruption of the town. This could be done by colour or by light and dark. Nothing sophisticated is needed. A physical theatre approach could be used, needing nothing complicated for scene changes; the actors to take on and off any props or furniture as part of the action.

The play has a number of short scenes. It was not intended that these should all be divided distinctly but should flow into each other. Lighting or short pieces of music may be used to move or establish mood where there are clear divides.

The storyteller and the children are on or at the edge of the action throughout, but not stationary. They are not supposed to echo a sleepy bedtime-story mood but are the fulcrum of the story, representing both the story, because they tell it, and the audience, because they question the story and have opinions on it.

SCENE 2: The Garden

(The Gardeners enter from all directions and begin to busy themselves with various gardening tasks. The Father walks on a little ahead of the two sons. Once they have been "named", their identity established, the brothers exit)

Storyteller: Once upon a time there was a father and he had two sons.

Voice two: Called?

Storyteller: Arum and Acer. And he had a great garden, a garden that stretched as far as your eye could see, wherever you stood in it. A garden that had in it hills ... and valleys ... and streams ... and trees ... and flowers ...and birds ...and...

Voice one: Bees?

Storyteller: *(nodding)* Yes, bees. And lots and lots of gardeners.

Father: Morning.

Phlox: Morning sir ... *(as the chief of the other gardeners, he gathers everyone round)* Come on you lot. Look lively; the boss is here. We are ready to show you the plan for the new herb garden, sir, and young Clem here volunteered to play the part of the water-feature *(various cheering hoots, whistles etc)*

Father: Excellent! Well done, Clem.

Clem: Ready Sir?

Father: Absolutely. On your marks. Get set. Flow.

(Clem stands behind a display of people [or plants] pouring water from an old watering can over the display and into a bowl. Everyone claps and murmurs, smiling and approving.)

Father: Wonderful. Now there is nothing unusual about this week as far as I can see. The weather is set to be fair.

Phlox: *(agreeing)* Just a chilly night on Friday

Father: The subjects under discussion in the Midweek Meeting will be.... *(Phlox reads from his list)*

Phlox: Lilies at their loveliest: pots or plots?

Hebe: That's me.

Phlox: Prevalent pests amongst plums and how to prevent them.

Clem: Me.

Phlox: How to succeed with succulents.

Holly: That's me.

Clem: *(considering Holly approvingly)* You look pretty juicy to me already.

Phlox: Please keep your comments on other people's general succulence to yourself.

Father: Now is there any other business we should discuss on Wednesday?

Lobelia: Tubers.

Father: Of course. Thank you. Tubers. *(All join in as if this is Lobelia's mantra, heard often "Can't live with them. Can't live without them".)* Thanks as ever for all the hard work. You know how much I appreciate it. If anyone needs me, I'm spending the next few days with the apples.

(Exeunt)

SCENE 3: A house in the Garden

Storyteller: The Father's garden is full and alive, even in the coldest season, but now it is autumn and the blossom turns into fat fruit and the seeds fall with new promise.

Voice one: What's it like to be *in* the garden?

Storyteller: There are tall trees to gaze up at and small trees to clamber over.

Voice two: And medium trees to climb? That's what I'd like.

Storyteller: With long, sturdy branches to hold many boys. There were trees in the garden with leaves that kept rain out, big and broad as umbrellas and you could sit under them and feel safe and dry. And there were trees with leaves that were little and which moved on the branches in the wind so they made the sound of fluttering like wings. And with some trees their leaves let light in and you could sit under them and look up and they were like clear, green glass and the light would drip through them onto your eye like water; splashings of sunshine.

Voice two: Meanwhile, back at the story ...

(Arum enters with two scarves, some books and a chair and begins to make calculations in one of the books)

Storyteller: Meanwhile, back at the story, the Father's sons lived their lives in the life of the garden but they did not feel the same about it. In fact, they did not feel the same about many things, or so they thought, and this led them to occasional outbursts of the aggression that seemed always on the boil, bubbling inside them, punctuated by silences that were more full of anger than their quarrels.

Voice one: *(knowingly)* Brothers!

Storyteller: Yes, brothers.

(Enter Acer)

Acer: You're up late and Dad's not in his room. Where is the old man?

Arum: Our father is perfectly fine.

Acer: Whenever you call him that you make him sound like someone we should pray to.

Arum: *(with calm sarcasm)* I wouldn't dream of suggesting you show Dad even the minimal amount of respect. Why break the habit of a lifetime? Especially when he seems to prefer your indifference.

Acer: Don't be ridiculous. We all know who's the black sheep around here. Back to my original question. Where is Dad? It's the middle of the night ... it's practically morning, it's almost three.

Arum: He couldn't sleep and he came down and put on his coat and said he was worried about the apples and he's gone off to check for frost.

Acer: How could you let him go wandering off in the cold and dark on his own? If I'd done such a thing I'd never have heard the end of it.

Arum: How typical that your concern so quickly comes back to something to do with you. How did Dad in the cold become you, the victim?

Acer: I was worrying.

Arum: Is it absolutely obligatory to quarrel? Only I'm quite busy.

(Enter Rosa with more large account books and a chair. She settles down to work.)

Rosa: This is the last of them I think but we need to update the spring planting lists when we've finished these figures.

Acer: Why is everybody up anyway? What are you doing?

Arum: The accounts.

Acer: *(mocking)* Oooh. Sums. How good you are!

Arum: *(mocking back)* Oooh. Sarcasm. How witty you are!

Acer: Well, I'm going to find Dad.

Arum: Take his scarf. He'll be cold by now (*gruffly*) And you can borrow mine.

Acer: Thanks.

(*Exit*)

Rosa: Really you two sometimes argue as if you were about five.

Arum: He agitates me and my mouth takes over. I can't say anything right.

Rosa: Don't you think he feels the same way? That he can't say anything right for you?

Arum: He isn't trying to say anything right for me. He despises me. I am everything he considers to be worthless.

Rosa: He envies you.

Arum: How do you know that?

Rosa: I watch him when you talk and I just know.

(*Enter Lily with mugs of tea*)

Lily: Tea.

Arum: (*smiling*) You're a gem. (*recollecting himself*) I mean, thanks. Thanks to you both really. You shouldn't have to be up so late.

Rosa: What are friends for if not to stay up all night doing calculations?

Lily: I love it when it's stopped being late and it's begun to be early.

Arum: (*looking at her*) Do you?

Rosa: Let's get on with it. The accounts Fifteenth entry, May the second

(*Exeunt, taking chairs, books, mugs*)

SCENE 4: The Garden

(*The Father walks in the garden. He is looking at the apple trees. Enter Acer wearing one scarf and holding another*)

Father: You did not need to come and find me. I'm quite all right.

Acer: I was going to say it's really late and we were worried but I just realized it's really early. It will be sunrise soon.

Father: I love this time. It's dark and there are stars, so many stars and where that pale grey line is soon there will be a bit of light, a golden line, thin, bright, daybreak. It's my favourite moment. A knife-edge between light and dark.

Acer: I like twilight better. Same thing, but softer.

Father: You are so like me.

Acer: I don't think I am.

Father: You sometimes say just what I'm thinking. We think of things in the same way.

Acer: I'm not sure that's true Dad. Arum's like you but not me.

Father: You're both my sons. What's up?

Acer: I'm feeling ...

Father: Yes?

Acer: Well, a bit restless.

Father: What kind of rest do you need? Shady rest? Sunny rest? Lying by pools rest? That's one thing about the garden being gigantic – there's every kind of rest you could possible want.

Acer: When I said restless I didn't mean I want that kind of rest. I need to get away. I ... I don't want to be here anymore.

Father: Acer.

Acer: I didn't mean to blurt all this out right now. I want ... It's so hard to say it ... right out loud. The thing is Dad, I

Father: Acer, just tell me. What is it that you want?

Acer: I was going to ask. (*More emphatic*) I was going to *tell* you that I want to go away. That I'm *going* to go away.

Father: Where to?

Acer: Away from the garden. I want time in the city. I want time with other people. New people. People I haven't known since I was born. I want something new. I want to be excited and surprised. I want to be someone else. Someone else, not this boy in the garden. Not ... your son in your garden. And to do that I need to be somewhere else.

Father: Somewhere away from us?

Acer: Yes.

Father: Acer, listen. You think the city is the “somewhere else” in your imagination where everything is an adventure, where everything is new and everything is better than here.

Acer: I know there’ll be excitement and energy and things will be buzzing and things will be unpredictable and unreliable and *///* be like that. I won’t be still any more. I’ll be moving, moving, moving. I’m going to go. You can’t stop me.

Father: I will not hold you if you don’t choose to stay. I cannot. I would not. You know I’m not like that.

Acer: There’s something else.

Father: Yes?

Acer: *(wincing but continuing)* I was thinking I will need something to get me going. Help me fit in. And I was wondering ...how much there’ll be for me ... later.

Father: Later?

Acer: I mean ... when you...when you die. *(The words come out in a rush now.)* I was wondering how much there’d be for me when you died.

Father: Ah ... Everything will be divided between you and your brother.

Acer: I was thinking you could give it to me now. I’d like it now.

Father: I would need to break up things The garden ...

Acer: I don’t want that. I’m not interested in the garden. You’ve got other money. You’ve got savings. You’re rich Dad, we all know that. I don’t want your garden; I want your money.

Father: I have saved for you both. I need to talk to Arum about this.

Acer: You’ll do it though, won’t you Dad? I’m just asking for what will be mine later and to ...

Father: *(finishing for him)* To get out of here.

Acer: Exactly. You asked and it just came out. I’m feeling so much better. Wahoo! Wahoo! *(More childlike than before, excited, relieved, letting out a long breath)* Hey. And Dad! Look! There it is your gold line. The sun’s coming. Soon be morning.

Father: Yes.

Acer: Shall we go in? Let's go in now. Arum's doing accounts with the girls.

Father: A little while. Be in for breakfast

Acer: OK. *(He walks a little and turns back)* and Dad ... thanks loads ... appreciate it. Really do. Thank you. *(Remembering, he puts the scarf he bought round his father's neck)* Thank you.

(They exit in opposite directions)