



The Selfish Giant

by Oscar Wilde
(abridged)



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Every afternoon, as they were coming home from school, the children used to play in the Giant's garden.

It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach trees that in the spring time broke into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games to listen to them. "How happy we are here!" they cried to each other.

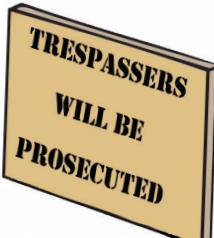


One day the Giant came back from visiting his friend the Cornish ogre and when he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden.

"What are you doing here?" he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away.

"My own garden is my own garden," said the Giant; "anyone can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself."

So he built a high wall all round it, and put up a notice board:

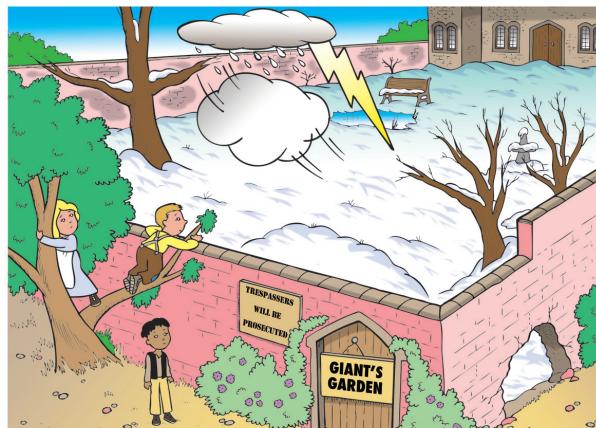


He was a very selfish Giant.

The poor children now had nowhere to play and they stood outside the high wall and talked about the beautiful garden inside.

Then the Spring came. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant it was still winter. The birds did not sing in it as there were no children, the flowers did not bloom and the trees forgot to blossom.

Only the Snow and the Frost were pleased. "Spring has forgotten this garden," they cried, "so we will live here all the year round." The Snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost painted all the trees silver. Then they invited the North Wind to stay with them. He came wrapped in furs, and roared all day about the garden, and blew the chimney pots down.



"This is a delightful spot," he said, "we must ask the Hail on a visit." So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then ran round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice.

"I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," said the Selfish Giant, as he looked out at his cold white garden; "I hope there will be a change in the weather."

But the Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant's garden she gave none.

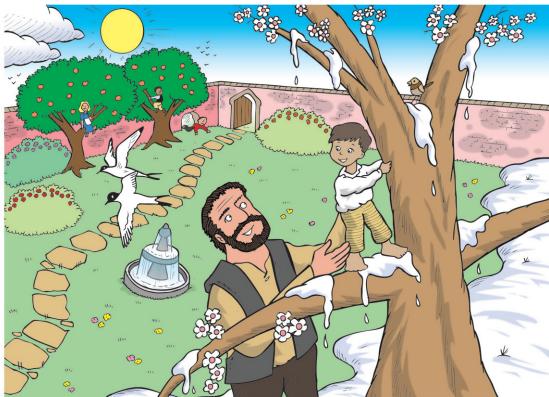
"He is too selfish," she said. So it was always Winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees.



One morning the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It was only a little linnet singing outside his window, but it was so long since he had heard a bird sing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring, and a delicious perfume came to him through the open casement. "I believe the Spring has come at last," said the Giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out.

What did he see?

He saw a most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall the children had crept in, and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. In every tree that he could see there was a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's heads.



It was a lovely scene, only in one corner it was still winter. It was the farthest corner of the garden, and in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up to the branches of the tree, and he was wandering all round it, crying bitterly. The poor tree was still quite covered with frost and snow, and the North Wind was blowing and roaring above

it. "Climb up! little boy," said the Tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could; but the boy was too tiny to reach.

The Giant's heart melted as he looked out. "How selfish I have been!" he said; "now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever." He was really very sorry for what he had done.

So he crept downstairs and went out into the garden. But when the children saw him they were so frightened that they all ran away, and the garden became winter again. Only the little boy did not run, for his eyes were so full of tears that he did not see the Giant coming. The Giant stole up behind him and took him gently in his hand, and lifted him into the tree. The tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy flung his arms round the Giant's neck, and kissed him. And the other children, when they saw that the Giant was not wicked any longer, came running back, and with them came the Spring.

"It is your garden now, little children," said the Giant, and he took a great axe and knocked down the wall. When the people were going to market at twelve o'clock they found the Giant playing with the children in the most beautiful garden they had ever seen.

All day long they played, and in the evening they came to the Giant to bid him good-bye.



"But where is your little companion?" he said: "the boy I put into the tree."

"We don't know," answered the children; "he has gone away."

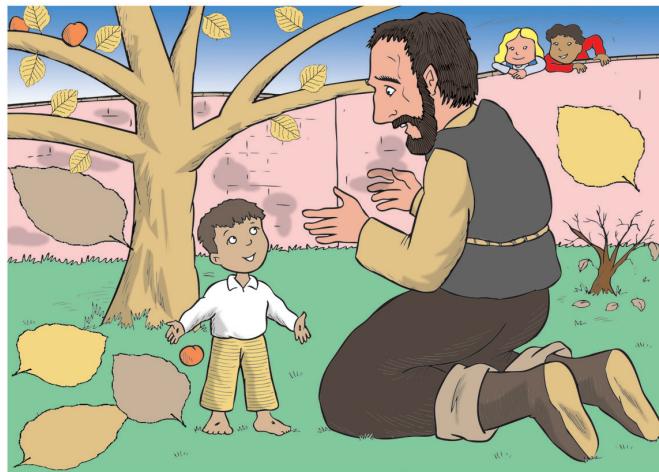
"You must tell him to be sure and come here tomorrow," said the Giant. But the children

said that they did not know where he lived, and had never seen him before; and the Giant felt very sad because he loved him best.

Every afternoon, when school was over, the children came and played with the Giant. But the little boy whom the Giant loved was never seen again. The Giant was very kind to all the children, yet he longed for his first little friend, and often spoke of him. Years went by, and the Giant grew very old and feeble. He could not play about any more, so he sat in a huge armchair, and watched the children at their games, and admired his garden. "I have many beautiful flowers," he said; "but the children are the most beautiful flowers of all."

One morning he looked out of his window and rubbed his eyes in wonder, for there, in the farthest corner of the garden was a tree quite covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches were all golden, and silver fruit hung down from them, and underneath it stood the little boy he had loved.

In great joy, the Giant ran out into the garden. But as he came closer to the child his face grew red with anger, and he said, "Who hath dared to wound thee?" For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.



"Who hath dared to wound thee?" cried the Giant; "tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him."

"Nay!" answered the child; "but these are the wounds of Love."

"Who art thou?" said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child. And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, "You let me play once in your garden, to-day you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise."

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.

"...you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise"



Illustrations by Andy Robb
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