

# THE DAY BOY AND THE NIGHT GIRL

A Play

Based upon stories by George MacDonald

by  
Matt Buchanan



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## CHARACTERS

MR. RAYMOND	A gentleman poet.
PHOEBUS	The day boy.
LUNA	The night girl.
JIM	A sick child.
NANCY	A sick child.
FARGU	A huntsman, Phoebus's guardian.
NURSE	Female.
CHILDREN	In the hospital.
WALTHO	A witch.
CREATURES	Of the forest and the plain.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

This is a play that appears on paper to require vastly more technical resources than it really does. In fact, it is the ensemble of actors who create most of the environment for the story, and so tech can actually be quite simple. Since this is a play about light, obviously some control over the lighting is necessary--we must be able to clearly tell the difference between night and day—but most theatres can handle this. If you have a cyclorama, you can use it to help with this effect, but since the whole thing is technically taking place in the hospital room, if all you can do is dim the lights that shouldn't take away from the story. There is a great deal of description of lighting effects in the stage directions because some theatres will have the resources to create them, but the play can work without them. Similarly, sound effects are very important, because you will not be building a river or trees, nor can you bring a herd of buffalo onto the stage. But, if you choose, all of the sound can be generated live by the actors in the ensemble. (For example, they can stamp their feet to create the stampede and whistle or call to simulate the sounds of wild animals.) Indeed, the ensemble could even create a sort of musical accompaniment to the emotional high points—such as the explosion of Phoebus's fear of the dark—by drumming on the floor or echoing lines.

**COSTUMES:** The children in the hospital can be dressed in simple pajamas or hospital gowns. The period of the hospital scenes is pretty much up to the director and the designer. To me, it feels Victorian (though the story is actually a little more modern than that) but you could probably set it in the present as well, which might make finding costumes easier, though there's nothing particularly difficult anyway. The world of the story is even more wide open. Fairy tales, it seems to me, don't really have a period. I'd avoid making Waltho look like a stereotypical witch, but otherwise, the sky's the limit. I see Phoebus as rather Greek—a pastoral hero—but apart from avoiding anything obviously of today, the director and designer will want to find their own vision for both of the main characters. The creatures of the forest and plain should not be dressed up as animals in the Disney way. Simple dark clothing, with perhaps some strips or wisps of fabric hanging to move in the air, will work best.

**SET:** This play requires very little set. All that is needed for the hospital room are a few beds and maybe some IV hookups or other paraphernalia that you can probably borrow. The world of the fairy tale really requires no set at all, though you may want to create some levels for visual interest. Probably the most difficult set element is Luna's lamp. If you have the technology available, the easiest way to achieve this would be to project an image or gobo onto the rear cyclorama, but a "practical" lamp can be made fairly easily. Party stores sell paper "Japanese lanterns" that are intended to be hung over light bulbs. Many of these are too colorful, but you should be able to find a light yellow one—or indeed "reverse engineer" one and make your own any color you like. And don't forget that since the lamp—like everything in Mr. Raymond's story—is imaginary, you don't necessarily need anything at all. The actress could "see" the lamp in just the same way that she "sees" the trees and the stars. The same can be said for the river, but you could also create one by having members of the ensemble spread and agitate a piece of sheer blue fabric, or, if you have the technology, you could create a projection.

*The Day Boy and the Night Girl* was developed at the University of Texas at Austin, and read publicly for the first time in 1995.

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**AT RISE:** *An orphans' hospital. A few hospital style beds at one downstage corner are all that's necessary to suggest the setting. The rest of the stage is bare—it will become the world of MR. RAYMOND's story. It is nighttime, and bedsteads, wheelchairs and hospital apparati cast coldly animate shadow-creatures over the huddled forms of sleeping CHILDREN. Suddenly one child, JIM, is awake and screaming.*

JIM: No! Where am I?!

*(Instantly, a little girl, NANCY, is out of bed and comforting JIM, who clings to her for life.)*

NANCY: It's all right. The dark can't hurt you.

JIM: I had the dream again, Nancy! Don't let the darkness get me!

NANCY: Go to sleep, Jim.

JIM: You won't leave me, will you?

NANCY: I'll stay right here, I promise. Go to sleep.

*(NANCY cradles JIM's head in her lap. HE is soon quiet and sleeping. NANCY remains with him, finally drifting to sleep herself, and the two are still, entwined. The lighting changes to indicate the advent of day. A few faces emerge from their cocoons. In some, health has begun to appear in a twinge upon the cheeks and a doubtful brightness in the eyes, just as out of the winter the spring comes in buds and crocuses. Others remind us of snow and keen winds, more than of sunshine and butterflies. JIM awakens to find himself secure in NANCY's arms. HE squirms from her embrace, waking her in the process.)*

JIM: Nancy! Get out of my bed!

NANCY: *(groggily)* You had a nightmare. You were afraid.

JIM: Well, I'm all right now. Go away!

*(HE shoves her out of his bed, and SHE scrambles into her own, burrowing under the covers to catch a few more moments of sleep. Just then a teeming whirlwind of a NURSE blows into the room, checking up—smiling at some, feeling the foreheads of others, and waking those who are slow to greet the morning. On her way out, SHE nearly blows over MR. RAYMOND, who has just arrived.)*

NURSE: Oh! Excuse me, Mr. Raymond! How lovely to see you again. The children do love it when you visit. *(blushes)*  
And so do I.

*(The NURSE sweeps out of the room, and MR. RAYMOND watches her go. HE is tall and dark, and every inch a gentleman. Kindness sparkles in his eyes, which almost always seem on the point of a wink. Every CHILD in the room knows him, and HE has a personal smile for each of them.)*

MR. RAYMOND: Good morning, children! I trust everyone slept well?

CHILD: Nancy slept in Jim's bed again.

*(Some giggles, perhaps an "oooh!")*

JIM: She got afraid. She gets afraid sometimes.

MR. RAYMOND: *(Smiling knowingly at NANCY, who has offered no protest.)* Nothing to be ashamed of in that, surely. Anyone can be afraid of the dark.

NANCY: *(a private smile for Jim)* Especially in this place.

JIM: I am sorry Nancy gets so frightened. But she is a girl, after all.

MR. RAYMOND: That's important, is it?

JIM: *(nods)* It's okay for Nancy to be afraid. But not me. A man should be brave.

MR. RAYMOND: I know some girls who are very brave indeed.

NANCY: There's nothing bad about being afraid, Jim.

JIM: You shut up.

CHILD: *(to MR. RAYMOND)* Tell us a story!

ALL THE CHILDREN: Oh, yes! Please do! *(etc.)*

MR. RAYMOND: *(sitting on one of the beds)* What sort of a story?

NANCY: A true story.

JIM: A fairy tale.

MR. RAYMOND: Well, let's see. (*thinks for a moment*) I can't think of a true story at the moment, so I'll tell you a sort of a fairy tale.

CHILDREN: Hooray! Awe nuts! (*etc.*)

*(The more ambulatory CHILDREN pile onto the bed and surround MR. RAYMOND like hungry chicks clamoring for a worm.)*

MR. RAYMOND: It popped into my head just now, as a matter of fact, and if it turns out pretty well, I'll write it down, and get somebody to print it for me, and then you can read it whenever you like.

NANCY: Then nobody has ever heard it before?

MR. RAYMOND: Nobody.

ALL THE CHILDREN: Oh! A brand new story! (*etc.*)

MR. RAYMOND: Everything will be almost as new to me as it is to you. I'm not even sure of some of it myself. (*Before beginning, MR. RAYMOND looks about at the eager faces. As the tale unfolds, lighting changes begin to reveal the world of the story.*) Once upon a time, long ago, there was a very wicked woman.

JIM: Was she a witch?

MR. RAYMOND: Well, yes, I suppose you might call her one. You see, Waltho had a wolf in her mind. If you looked her straight in her eye, you could see the wolf. You felt your heart turn to ashes and your blood to water.

NANCY: What color were her eyes?

MR. RAYMOND: When she was angry, they flashed blue. When she hated anybody, they shone yellow and green. What they looked like when she loved anybody, I don't know—I never heard of her loving anybody but herself. (*winks at a CHILD*) And I don't think she could have managed that if she hadn't got used to herself. Well, Waltho wanted to know all about everything. She cared for nothing in itself—only for knowing it. (*growing mysterious*) So she conceived an experiment.

JIM: An experiment?

MR. RAYMOND: First, she stole two newborn babies and carried them off to her castle.

JIM: She stole them?

NANCY: They were orphans like us!

JIM: What did she want them for?

MR. RAYMOND : Half a moment, and you'll know. (*with a special glance at JIM*) The first child was Phoebus. Just as the sun rose, he opened his eyes. Waltho decreed that Phoebus should never know darkness. He never slept during the day, and he never woke during the night. Waltho watched against shadows as if they were living things that could hurt him. (*The lighting gradually changes to focus on the entire stage. It grows very bright, as in the midday sun. Upstage, for a brief moment, we see WALTHO raising an infant high above her head, as if presenting it to the sun as an offering.*) All day Phoebus basked in the splendor of the sun. He ripened like a peach. (*PHOEBUS is seen running across the stage, laughing and soaking in the sunshine. HE comes to a stop center-stage, and leans his head back to take the sun full in the face. JIM stands up on the bed, watching fascinated.*) Now, surrounding Waltho's castle were the finest hunting grounds in the world. Great herds of buffalo roved about the plains. The woods swarmed with wild creatures. (*We may see some swiftly moving CREATURES cross the frontiers of the stage.*) Phoebus's guardian, Fargu, taught him to shoot, and soon he was the fiercest hunter on the plain. (*FARGU runs on and touches PHOEBUS's arm. The two circle the stage to come up behind some unsuspecting – and unseen – beast. The imaginary hunt continues through the following.*) Waltho had laid but one command on Fargu. The boy should never, never be allowed out after sundown. (*The light begins to change to dusk, and PHOEBUS and FARGU, with a furtive glance at the sky, hurry offstage. JIM watches PHOEBUS go, disappointed. HE continues to stare after him during the following. Mysterious CREATURES move furtively across the stage.*) But one might as soon hold a tawny-maned lion as Phoebus. Fargu feared that it would not be long before Phoebus was tempted to follow the more mysterious animals who lived in the woods and came out in the night.

NANCY: But what about the other baby? Was it a girl?

MR. RAYMOND : You're absolutely right. But Waltho had very different plans for Luna. With the help of her trusted nurse, Falca, Waltho brought her up entirely in darkness. (*We hear a baby's plaintive cry. Dimly lit, we see WALTHO hurrying across the stage carrying the baby in her arms, covered from head to foot with dull cloths.*) She decreed that the girl should never see any light but what came from her dim alabaster lamp. She slept during the day, and woke only in the night.

*(A yellowish pool of weak light reveals LUNA in her chamber. SHE is playing quietly with bits of cloth.)*

JIM: (*wide-eyed*) Was she afraid?

MR. RAYMOND: She didn't know to be. But she was a prisoner, even if she didn't know it. She was kept in a cavern in the darkest part of the castle, and no one but Waltho and Falca knew she was there.

***(LUNA rises and moves to take up a book. SHE glances lovingly at its pages, and hugs it close to her. NANCY moves close to LUNA, entering the scene with her, but invisible to her. SHE watches LUNA, fascinated.)***

NANCY: How lonely!

MR. RAYMOND: Luna managed to coax Falca into teaching her the letters, and bringing her a few books to read. There was one thing, however, which moved and taught her more than all the rest: the lamp that hung from her ceiling. ***(We see the lamp burning in the ceiling, and MR. RAYMOND and the CHILDREN seem also to see it, and to stare longingly at it. It seems to grow, if not brighter, then bigger as they gaze at it. MR. RAYMOND slowly moves to join NANCY, gazing at the light from within the scene.)*** It was always lit, and she loved its soft light. She would sit for hours gazing up at the lamp, and her heart would swell as she gazed. When she found her face wet, she would wonder how she could have been hurt without knowing it. ***(wipes a tear from NANCY's face; smiles)*** For Luna, her lamp was the most wonderful thing in the world.

***(There is a pause as everyone worships the light. It fades out slowly, then fades up brightly to become the sun. LUNA has gone. With a whooping cry, PHOEBUS sweeps in with his bow, in pursuit of a terrified herd of buffalo which we hear but may not see. HE is followed at a safe distance by FARGU, who carries a spare quiver. During this scene NANCY and MR. RAYMOND return to the bed.)***

PHOEBUS: Ha, ha! Run, you cowardly beasts! You shall not escape me! Fargu! ***(FARGU hands him an invisible arrow, which HE quickly fits and looses. HE watches as the arrow finds its target.)*** There!

FARGU: ***(out of breath)*** Well shot, young Sir! Only I wish you wouldn't dash into the herd like that! You might have been killed.

PHOEBUS: Bah! You worry too much. Am I not the fastest runner and the surest shot on the plain? Can any man best me?

FARGU: Perhaps no man can. But you may learn that there are creatures more deadly than Phoebus.

PHOEBUS: But none more brave!

FARGU: It is true you are never afraid. But there is more to bravery than that.

PHOEBUS: Bah!

***(As PHOEBUS casts about for something else to hunt, a shadowy CREATURE is seen slinking across the back of the stage. Instantly alert, PHOEBUS takes FARGU's arm and freezes. HE speaks in a tense whisper. The CREATURE freezes at the first sound.)***

PHOEBUS: Fargu! What animal is that?

FARGU: I cannot say, young Sir. Perhaps it is a leopard. Best to leave it alone.

PHOEBUS: Bah!

***(Very slowly, PHOEBUS removes his hunting knife from his belt. Then, lightning-quick, HE springs forward. But HE is not fast enough, and his quarry vanishes. Disappointment is replaced by awe as PHOEBUS stands helplessly watching the CREATURE running from him.)***

PHOEBUS: Fargu! I am not the fastest creature on the plain! How he did run! A leopard, is it?

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