

The Selfish Giant

by Oscar Wilde



Every afternoon, as they're coming home from school, some children go and play in the Giant's garden.

It's a lovely large garden with soft green grass. There are beautiful flowers like stars on the grass. And there are 12 peach trees that in spring are full of delicate pink and white flowers, and in autumn have rich fruit. The birds sit in the trees and sing sweetly and the children often stop their games to listen to them.

'How happy we are here!' they say to each other.

One day the Giant comes back after visiting his friend the Cornish ogre. When he arrives he sees the children playing in his garden.

'What are you doing here?' he shouts in a very angry voice and the children run away.

'My own garden is my own garden,' says the Giant, 'and no one can play here.' And he builds a high wall all round it and puts up a noticeboard.



He's a very selfish Giant.

Now the poor children have nowhere to play. They try to play on the road, but the road is very dusty and full of hard stones, and they don't like it. They often walk around the high wall when school is over and talk about the beautiful garden.

Spring comes and all over the country there are little flowers and little birds. But in the garden of the selfish Giant it's still winter. The birds don't want to sing in it as there are no children, and the flowers don't grow. But the Snow and the Frost are happy.

'Spring doesn't like this garden so we can live here all year,' they say. The Snow covers the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost paints all the trees silver. They invite the North Wind to stay with them. All day he roars about the garden and blows the chimneys down.

'This is a lovely place,' he says, 'we must ask the Hail to visit.' So the Hail comes. Every day for three hours he rattles on the roof of the castle until he breaks most of the slates. Then he runs round and round the garden as fast as he can go. He's dressed in grey and his breath is like ice.

'I don't understand why spring is late this year,' says the selfish Giant while he's sitting at the window looking out at his cold white garden. 'I hope the weather changes soon.'

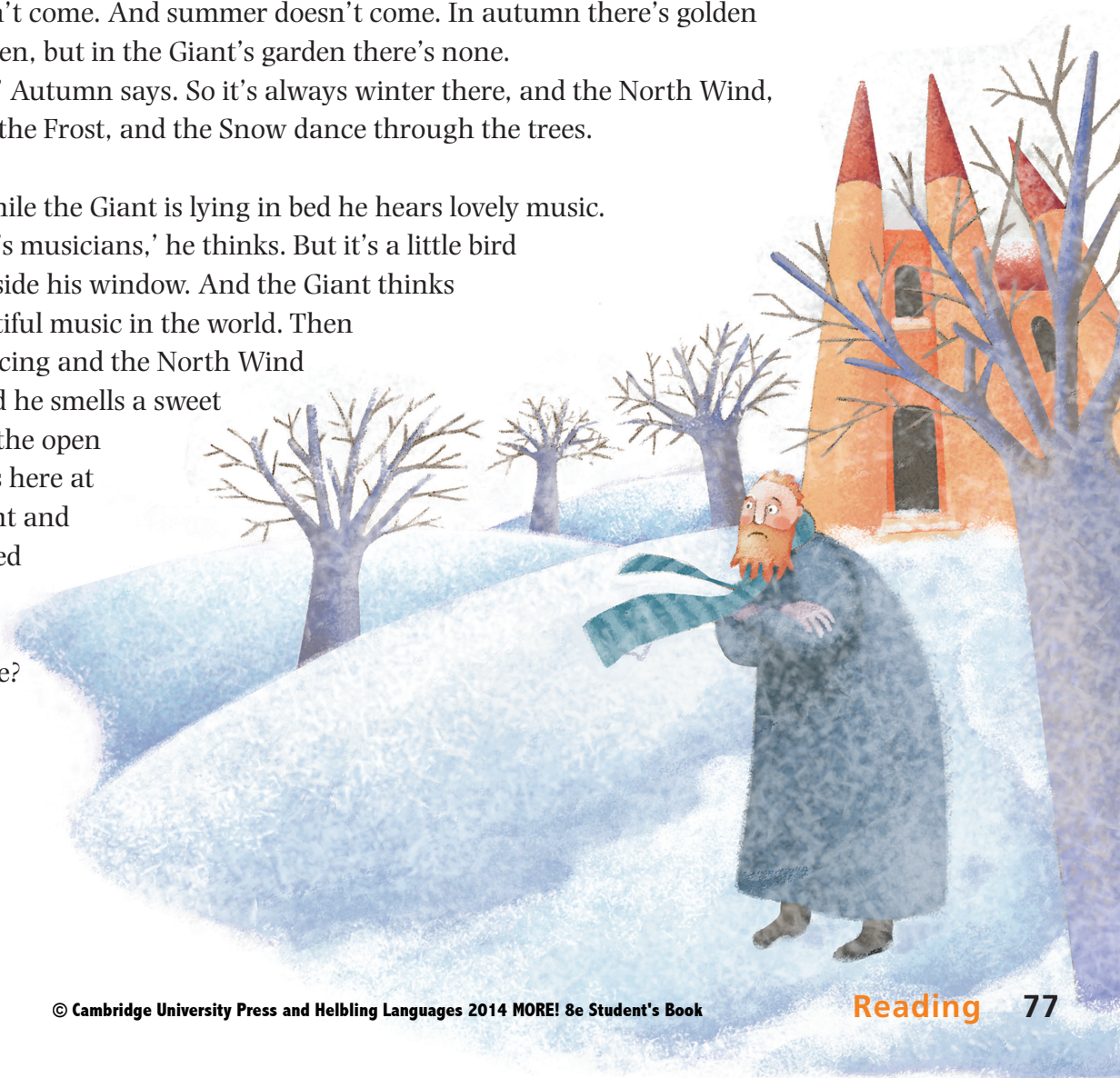
But spring doesn't come. And summer doesn't come. In autumn there's golden fruit in every garden, but in the Giant's garden there's none.

'He's too selfish,' Autumn says. So it's always winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow dance through the trees.

One morning while the Giant is lying in bed he hears lovely music.

'That's the King's musicians,' he thinks. But it's a little bird that's singing outside his window. And the Giant thinks it's the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stops dancing and the North Wind stops blowing, and he smells a sweet perfume through the open window. 'Spring is here at last,' says the Giant and he jumps out of bed and looks outside.

What does he see?



The children are coming into the garden through a little hole in the wall and they're sitting in the branches of the trees. A little child is sitting in every tree. The trees are happy to have the children back and are full of flowers. The birds are singing and the flowers are looking up through the green grass and laughing.

But in one corner it's still winter. There's a little boy standing in the far corner of the garden. He's small and he can't climb into the branches of the tree. The little boy is crying and the poor tree is still covered with frost and snow, and the North Wind is blowing around it.

'Climb up, little boy,' says the tree.

When the Giant sees the boy, he feels sad.

'I am so selfish!' he says. 'I want to put that poor little boy in the tree. I want to knock down the wall. My garden is the children's playground now.'

The Giant comes downstairs and opens the front door. He goes into the garden. But when the children see him they're frightened and they run away, and the garden becomes winter again. Only the little boy doesn't run. His eyes are full of tears and he doesn't see the Giant coming. The Giant walks over to him and takes him gently in his arms and puts him into the tree. The tree fills with flowers and the birds come and sing in it, and the little boy puts his arms around the Giant's neck and kisses him.

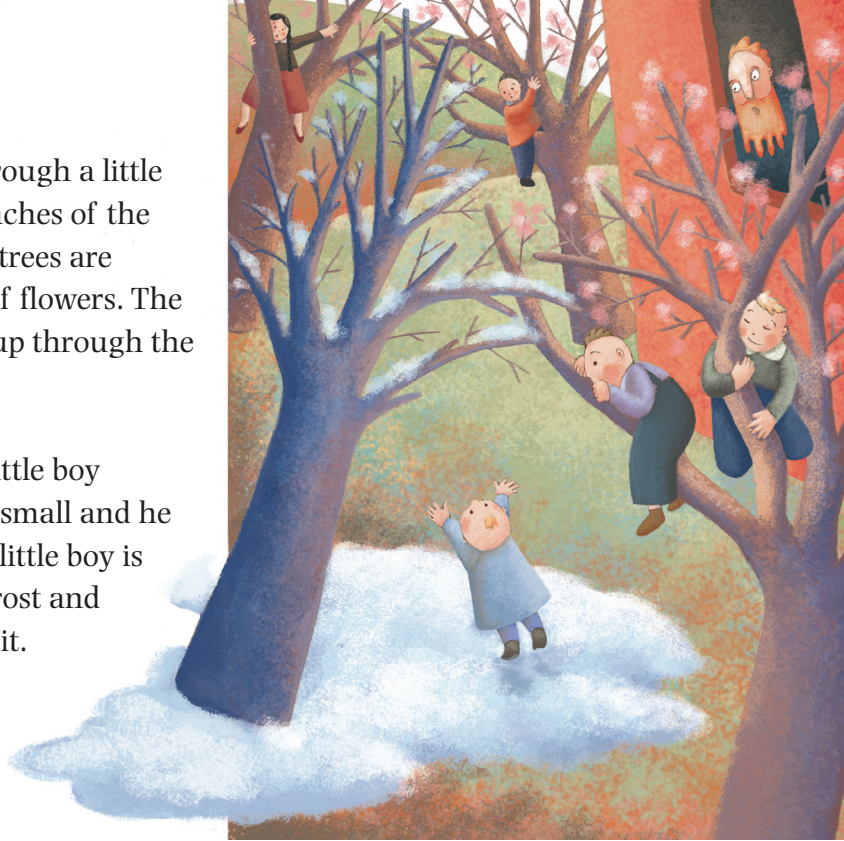
When the other children see that the Giant isn't wicked, they run back.

'It's your garden now, little children,' says the Giant and he knocks down the wall. The children play in the garden all day and in the evening they come to the Giant to say goodbye.

'But where's your little friend?' he asks. The Giant loves the little boy.

'We don't know,' answer the children.

'I hope he comes back tomorrow,' says the Giant.



Every afternoon, when school is over, the children come and play with the Giant. But the little boy never comes back. The Giant is kind to all the children, but he still thinks of his little friend and he feels sad.

Years pass, and the Giant gets old and tired. He sits in a big armchair and looks at the children in the garden.

'I have many beautiful flowers,' he says, 'but the children are more beautiful than all the flowers.'

One winter morning he looks out of his window. He doesn't hate winter now because he knows that the flowers are resting.

He can't believe what he sees. In the corner of the garden there's a tree covered with lovely white flowers. Its branches are gold and there's silver fruit on them. The little boy he loves is standing under the tree.

The Giant runs downstairs and goes into the garden. He hurries across the grass. When he's close to the child, he becomes very angry. And he says, 'Who hurt you?' He can see marks on the child's hands and marks on his little feet.

'Who hurt you?' shouts the Giant. 'Tell me.'

'No!' answers the child. 'These are the marks of love.'

'Who are you?' asks the Giant.

And the child smiles at the Giant and says, 'You let me play in your garden. Today you're coming with me to my garden.'

And when the children run into the garden that afternoon, they find the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white flowers.

