

Shusha and the Story Snatcher

By Shirley Barrie

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Here's a perfect play to entertain young children and encourage them to read. Shusha wants an adventure like the one in her new book. Then the Story Snatcher, with his flapping ears and honking nose, grabs her story and descends to his underground lair. Shusha's doll, Shareen, comes to life and gets the audience to help, acting as trees or a tunnel onstage, or providing wind and hooting owl noises from their seats. After magical and comic adventures they recover Shusha's book.

Any songs in the play are designed to be made up by the company of actors. About 30 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 m, 2 w, 1 flexible)

SHUSHA: Female.

SHAREEN: Female doll.

STORY SNATCHER: Male.

TREE: Minor role, flexible gender.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

Shusha and the Story Snatcher was first produced by the Tricycle Theatre in London, England in 1984. The cast included Janet Steele, Josephine Welcome and Ben Onwukwe. The play was directed by Joan Ann Maynard and designed by Miki van Zwanenberg. Stage manager was David Toneri and Magic Adviser was the Great Kovari.

Shusha and the Story Snatcher

(The ACTORS enter and introduce themselves to the audience using their real names. They get the audience to tell them their names - all at once. They teach the audience the song, perhaps getting them to clap as well.)

CAST: *(Sing.)*

YOU CAN DO IT
IF YOU TRY
AND WE WILL HELP YOU
BY AND BY.

(The OTHER ACTORS disappear, leaving SHAREEN still singing with the audience. She realizes that the music has stopped. Looks around.)

SHAREEN: Oh - they've gone. It must be time to start the play.

(SHE moves to her first position and becomes an inanimate doll. SHUSHA enters. She has three bean bag balls which she is trying to juggle. She does this very badly. When she sees the audience watching her, she tries harder, but with not much success.)

SHUSHA: I give up. I just can't do it.

(SHE tosses the balls over her head in the direction of SHAREEN who catches them and puts them in her pocket before returning to her inanimate pose.)

SHUSHA: *(Cont'd. To audience.)* Well I'm glad you're here. It gets so boring here all on my own. Well - *(Noticing Shareen.)* there's her. But she's just a toy. I call her Shareen. I think that's an exciting name. Not like mine. Shusha. Yuk. It's like I'm always being told to be quiet. You know. Shush - a. Shareen's all right to cuddle up with at night but she's no fun to play with.

SHUSHA: *(Cont'd.)* Here. Let me show you something. *(SHE drags SHAREEN towards the audience and pulls up her leg.)* There - you see. *(She points at the place on the leg that has been stitched up.)* This is where I did an operation on her. And all her stuffing started to come out. She's all right now. My gran sewed her up. *(SHE carelessly flings SHAREEN aside.)* Doing operations on Shareen was fun, but my gran told me I wasn't to do it anymore. I'm not allowed to do anything exciting. Not like what happens in stories. Do you like stories? I do too. Adventure stories 'specially. Because they're really exciting, and there's danger. *(If the audience suggests other reasons why stories are good she can incorporate them.)* Hey - I just remembered. I've got a new story. I'll go and get it, okay? Then I'll read it to you. *(She starts to go, but stops.)* I can read, you know. Well - sometimes I have to look at the pictures, but I know some of the words. I'll get it.

(SHE exits. SHAREEN holds the inanimate position for a moment., then she goes into a "coming to life" routine which is accompanied by ratchet-type noises. She manages to get herself upright and then to wave her arm. She smiles.)

SHAREEN: Hello. *(Reacts to the audience response.)* Oh. You can hear me? *(Moves.)* And you can see me move? Oh good. *(Walks forward, stiffly doll-like.)* I'm so glad. You see, Shusha doesn't believe I'm real anymore. We used to have wonderful adventures together, but not now. Hey - I just thought of something. She can hear you and see you, can't she? And you can hear and see me - so maybe - you could help me to talk to her sometimes. D'you think you could do that? Oh, that's great!

(In her excitement SHE takes out the three balls and begins to juggle with them. She does it a bit stiffly, but well. But she's interrupted by...)

STORY SNATCHER: *(Puts his head out of the closet.)*
Adventures! Did I hear somebody talking about adventures?!

SHAREEN: Oh dear.

(SHE immediately goes inanimate - dropping two of the balls. The STORY SNATCHER enters. He is colorfully dressed, his costume reminiscent of book covers. He has a very large hooked nose and enormous blue floppy ears.)

SNATCHER: I did, didn't I? Eh? Eh! I heard somebody talking about adventures. I heard somebody talking about a story, didn't I? Oh yes, I did. That's why I've got these big ears. *(The ears flap.)* To pick up any talk of stories. Even whispers. 'Specially adventure stories. Ugh!!!! It doesn't matter if you don't want to tell me where the story is. Suit yourselves. My ears hear any rumors of stories, *(They flap.)* and then my nose smells them out. *(He sniffs and his nose HONKS.)* And I smell a story now. Oh yes, I do. *(He sniff/honks again.)* A really strong story smell. If I'm clever, I'll be able to snatch it. Just like I've snatched all the other stories. They're horrible things. Shouldn't be allowed. I'm going to destroy them all. 'Cause I'm the Story Snatcher. *(His nose HONKS.)* I'm sure I smell a story. *(To someone in the audience.)* Are you hiding one? Well - there must be one somewhere because my nose is never wrong.

(HE flaps his ears, honks his nose and exits. SHAREEN comes to life again with appropriate noises.)

SHAREEN: Oh dear, oh dear. A Story Snatcher who wants to destroy all the stories in the world! And Shusha's coming back with a story. Disaster!

(SHE throws one of the balls up in the air in despair. SHUSHA, running in with her storybook, has the book knocked out of hands by the ball. Shareen freezes.)

SHUSHA: *(Picks up the ball.)* Who threw this at me then? No - it couldn't have been Shareen. She's - *(SHE notices that Shareen has moved.)* And I never left Shareen there. You're playing tricks on me. *(SHE drags the doll back to where she'd left her.)* Someone's been here. Who was it? *(Picking up on the answers from the audience.)* A what? You're making that up. Just to trick me. Just like you moved Shareen and threw the ball at me.

(The Story Snatcher's HONK is heard from offstage.)

SHUSHA: *(Cont'd.)* Who made that noise? That's rude. I'm not going to read my story to anybody who makes rude noises and who won't be quiet. *(Another HONK.)* Don't do that! *(Yet another HONK.)* I mean it. That's disgusting. You're rude and horrible - all of you.

(The STORY SNATCHER enters. His eyes focus on the book. He sneaks up, snatches it and escapes as SHUSHA carries on.)

SHUSHA: *(Cont'd.)* ...and too noisy and I won't read you my story. I'm going to get my book and go. *(SHE goes to pick it up.)* It's gone! My story's gone!

(Once again SHE listens to the audience. She could say "There's no such thing as a story snatcher.")

SHUSHA: *(Cont'd.)* Well - tell me what he looked like then. *(In her urgency to get the information right, SHE gets it wrong.)* Let's see if I've got this right. He's very tall and dressed in book covers and he's got a blue nose that wags and big ears that honk. No? Isn't that what you said? *(SHE listens again.)* Okay, I've got it. I've got it. He's got a blue nose that honks and big ears that wave... *(Listens once more.)* Now I've got it. He's dressed in book covers, he's got a big pink nose that honks and big blue ears that wag - and he's got my story. Well, he can't do that. I'm going to get it back. Right now. Where did he go? Right.

End of Freeview

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