

Wild Orchid: A Dramatic Monologue

Bev Brenna, Nov 6, 2016

*adapted from Bev Brenna's new one-act play based on her award winning novel *Wild Orchid* (Red Deer Press, 2005; currently on CBC's website *Young Adult Novels That Make You Proud to be Canadian*). Bev gratefully acknowledges the support of the Persephone Theatre/Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre Playwrights' Unit in the development of this monologue.

Synopsis

What do leaving a beach, interpreting the writing of Harold Pinter, and looking for wild orchids in Prince Albert National Park have to do with growing up? They are all both possible and necessary, according to Taylor Jane, an eighteen year old with a perplexing mother, a difficult transition into a summer at the lake, and a future on the edge of a cliff. With echoes from Theatre of the Absurd, this drama explores the perspective of a young woman with autism in her high-stakes quest for independence, celebrating the differences among us as well as the universals we share.

Author Bio

Bev Brenna is a Saskatchewan author of over a dozen titles, recently on the Governor General's Award list and winner of an American Printz Honor Book Award. As a Professor in Curriculum Studies at the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Bev's research involves children's and young adult literature, literacy, human exceptionalities, and process drama. This monologue is an adaptation of her realistic fiction novel *Wild Orchid* (Red Deer Press/Fitzhenry & Whiteside), recently listed on CBC's *100 Young Adult Books that Make You Proud to Be Canadian*. For more information about Bev's work, see: www.beverlybrenna.com and <http://www.usask.ca/education/ecur/profiles/brenna/index.php>.

Wild Orchid

TAYLOR is an eighteen year old girl, slim and attractive in a quirky way. Her high functioning autism includes large-motor clumsiness (without flapping) and communication differences in pragmatics and prosody including occasional echolalia. She wears running shoes and a blue-jean dress with big front pockets, one of which contains a small dog-eared paperback copy of Harold Pinter's play "The Birthday Party." She is sitting on a swing at the beach. She is swinging.

TAYLOR: *(Swinging. After a pause. Speaking flatly.)*

"Anyone in their right mind would like to go to Waskesiu Lake for the summer. Anyone in their right mind would like to go to Waskesiu Lake for the summer." That is my mother talking.

(Pause.)

"Anyone in their right mind." But. It is not possible to change our minds from left to right. Not possible. Not possible. Minds do not function according to directionality at all. In fact, nobody is in their right mind at any given time. *(Pause.)* So... my opinion is my own business. I do not want to be here. And it is not wrong to feel this way.

(Pause.)

I wish she had never signed that contract. Wish she had never. Wish she had never. That contract to work at Danny's *Pizza Place*. That contract that forces us to live here at the lake for the whole summer. Because now I am stuck. Stuck, possibly forever. Just like Stanley.

(Tensely.)

"What in the world are you afraid of, Taylor? (counting the words to nine) What in the world are you afraid of, Taylor?" That is her boyfriend talking. Danny. He speaks in nines because he is a bimbo. *Bimbo. Bimbo.* My mother has said that I can't use the word *bimbo* on Danny

because *bimbo* is only a word for a woman. But until there is a word for men who are cute but dumb I am going to use the word *bimbo* (*she stares at the audience*) for everybody.

(Considering.)

Before we drove here I spent 90 minutes on the internet. I learned that Waskesiu is home to many rare varieties of wild orchid. The reason they are rare is that orchids require a kind of balance. A balance of heredity and environment. *The Yellow Lady's Slipper. The White Lady's Slipper. The Venus's Slipper. And the Small Round-leaved Orchid*, which is the rarest of all. Seeing a Small Round-leaved Orchid would be difficult but possible. Difficult. But. Possible!

(Pause.)

It is the precipice, of course. I have been afraid of it my whole life. The precipice lies ahead and I might not know it is there until I am...until the earth just falls away and I am...

(Under her breath.)

I cannot even say it.

(Pause.)

So many new things. And even one new thing—even one new thing can change everything! New bed. New pillow. New people. And I am not just talking about babies!

(Ramping up into a meltdown.)

These are the kinds of pizza I do not like: salami, mushroom, pepperoni, vegetarian, bacon, chicken, pineapple, ham, anchovie, artichoke, bean sprout, caviar, crayfish, eggplant, oyster, scallops, shrimp, zucchini, goat cheese and dandelion greens!

(Anguished. Pulls from her pocket a copy of "The Birthday Party.")

Stanley would not do well here. Stanley would not do well here! Stanley never grew up. In Harold Pinter's play "The Birthday Party" Stanley should be an adult but he is not. He is stuck. Stuck in Meg's boarding house, stuck in his bedroom, stuck in *afraid*. Even cornflakes scare him.

(In a small, choked voice.)

Just like I am stuck here. Stuck on this swing. This swing. This swing.

(Puts the play back into her pocket.)

Once I took a questionnaire on an autism website. It was supposed to help identify personality traits. The first question was, "When you go to the beach, do you want to:

a. Lay down your towel and stretch out in the sun; b. Kick off your sandals and run into the waves; c. Get off the beach as soon as possible." Of course I picked "c." I got a total of 85 points out of 100 for my answers, and at the end of the quiz everyone with over 75 points gets a message that says... "*Congratulations, you definitely have autism.*"

(Somewhat proudly.)

I got the message.

(Pause.)

If I stay on this swing, I will be just like Stanley.

(Swings.)

If I stay on this swing, I will be just like Stanley!

(Pause.)

I will never see an orchid from here. Orchids do not grow on beaches. Seeing a Small Round-leaved orchid in the woods would be...an achievement. An adult kind of achievement.

(Pause.)

I think I could do it. It is about time.

(Pause.)

First I would need to get off this swing and get off this beach. Then the woods.

(Stands up. Takes a few clumsy steps away from the swing.)

But ...but there might be...what if there is a precipice dropping away into... And that makes everything... Difficult. Too difficult? Too difficult? Difficult. Difficult but possible. And if I locate a Small Round-leaved Orchid, it would be... exhilarating. *Sophisticated*. Stanley would wonder...Stanley would wonder if orchids were both possible and necessary. I think—I think they are! I think that orchids are both possible and necessary.

(Pause.)

Possible and necessary. Even though I am afraid. Even though. Even though.

(Pause.)

If I don't want to be like Stanley. If I don't want to be like Stanley...

(Pause. Touches the play in her pocket.)

I think Stanley has autism but he does not want to deal with it.

(Pause.)

I do not want to be a child forever. I know what I have to do. Even if there is a prec...

I am not going to think about that. Or falling. Or all that pizza.

(Speaking matter of factly.)

Because I do not have to eat it. I do not. I do not have to eat Salami. Mushrooms. Pepperoni.

Vegetarian... bits. *(Pause.)* Bacon. Chicken. Pineapple. Ham. Anchovies. Artichokes. Bean

sprouts. Caviar. Crayfish. Eggplants. Oysters. Scallops. Shrimp. Zucchini. Goat cheese. Or Dandelion Greens. Get off this beach. Then the woods. "Put your best foot forward." That is my grandmother talking.

(Taylor looks down at her feet, putting one forward, and then the other, walking in a diagonal line towards the edge of the stage.)

But they are identical in terms of quality. Flexible structures of bones, joints, muscles, soft tissues. The forefoot with its phalanges and metatarsals, the midfoot with the pyramid of bones that creates the arch, the hindfoot that forms the ankle. Identical components that vary from left to right in minute ways. But not quality. Quality is clearly the same from right to left. So...no matter which foot I use, it will not be the wrong one. First off this beach. Then into the woods. One step after another. Beach. Woods.

(She moves closer to the edge of the stage. Becoming stronger all the time. Speaking defiantly.)

Salami. Mushroom. Pepperoni. Vegetarian. Bacon. Chicken. Pineapple. Ham. Anchovie. Artichoke. Bean sprout. Caviar. Crayfish. Eggplant. Oyster. Scallops. Shrimp. Zucchini. Goat cheese. And Dandelion Greens.

(Pause.)

I do not have to eat any of them. And if I come to the precipice...

(Looking down over the edge of the stage, but not retreating)

If I come to the precipice. I will just—I will just have to---I will just have to keep my balance.

(She puts out her arms to balance herself and keeps walking. Exit.)

The End