

The Play

THE WIDOW, THE ORPHAN AND THE WILLOW TREE

Feast

30th Sunday / Year A
A Memorial Service

Characters

Narrator
Willow Tree

Orphan
Widow



Props

Green material to drape over the willow tree's arms.
A bouquet of forget-me-nots beside the tree.

Also needed

A musician.

Suggestions

This story can be used in communities struggling with grief and loss. We have used it at memorial liturgies and AIDS services. We employed a saxophone off stage to improvise "theme music" for the three characters—mellow and swaying for the tree, mournful for the woman, brash for the orphan. A piano would work just as well. The orphan is a male, but this is not required by the story. The widow could be a widower.

Begin with the Narrator at the pulpit. The person playing the Tree is in the center with his or her back to the congregation, arms extended, green material draped over his or her arms.

Running Time

10 minutes.

NARRATOR

*The Tree
gently sways.
We hear its
mellow theme.*

*We hear the
widow's theme
if it is available.*

The widow enters.

*She takes a flower
and holds it
to her chest.*

*She reaches
upward, only to
collapse back down.*

*The orphan strides
in, angry fists
clenched, arms
folded, his theme
brash behind him.
He is lost.*

Once upon a time and far, far away, there was a strange and forgotten place known as the Land of Loss. The Land of Loss is lost, in fact, as no one can remember exactly where it is. In the Land of Loss there is only one tree, of course; it is a willow tree, a weeping willow. What other kind of tree would grow in the Land of Loss other than a weeping willow? There are no smiles in the Land of Loss . . . everyone is so sad or angry because of what they have lost. Beside the willow tree in the Land of Loss grows only one kind of flower, of course; it is a forget-me-not . . . for there is hardly a person who could forget what he or she has loved and lost.

There was, in the Land of Loss, a young widow, who had found her way to Loss after her husband had died. They had been childless, and she loved him more than life itself. When he died, her grief was so great that she could no longer speak. Her voice had become buried deep within her under the weight of her sorrow. Each day she would come to the willow, weeping, and although she could not speak, her tears sang a song of such sadness and sorrow that if you heard it, your own heart would break. Each day she would pick one flower, one forget-me-not, and hold it to her heart. The flower would listen to her voiceless prayer. In her grief the widow would rise, her arms and hands reaching outward, turning around and around, reaching higher and higher, but always there was no one to fill the emptiness, to heal the pain.

There was also in the Land of Loss an orphan, who didn't know how he had come there. He couldn't remember much at all. He couldn't remember a mother, and he had forgotten his father. And, he was angry. You'd always see him seething, scowling, his arms wound tight over his chest. He would never speak with anyone and thought to himself:

ORPHAN

Gesturing to her.

*He ends up right of
the tree, takes an
angry pose and
freezes.*

NARRATOR

*The Tree slowly
turns to face the
congregation.*

The willow's theme.

*She moves to the
left side of the tree;
cradled by the tree
she sleeps.*

WILLOW

*The tree embraces
her in its left limb,
holding her close.*

NARRATOR

*The orphan is drawn,
still clenched,
to the tree.*

ORPHAN

*Incredulous, but
curious.*

How did I find my way here to this crazy place where everyone is crazy like that widow. Look at all these people, weeping like that willow tree. I'm glad I'm not like her or all the rest of these losers. (*Proudly*) I've never shed a tear in my life. I just want to get out of here, but I can't remember how I got here in the first place.

Now, one of the strangest things about this weeping willow—a secret that no one knew—was that the tree had a spirit And sometimes the tree would come to life—twisting and turning, the life within it barely contained. If you looked real close, you would see the soul of this tree. God had planted this tree, you see, to help the people of Loss' Land, to find what they had lost, to let go of their pain, and to return home. When this willow saw the widow and the orphan, each in pain, he devised a plan.

The willow began to sing a song. It was the most beautiful melody that anyone had ever heard in the Land of Loss. The widow was drawn to the tree by its song, which so reminded her of the one she had loved that she thought her heart would break into a thousand pieces. As she listened, she fell into a deep sleep, and in her sleep she heard a voice:

My daughter, why are you so sad? I know your grief comes from having loved much. I cannot give back to you the one you have lost. My flowers have heard the prayers of your heart—a heart filled with love; you are capable of loving still. God is answering your prayer even now, for there is someone who needs the love you so long to give.

The orphan boy, too, had heard the willow's music and could not resist.

Now there's music coming from that tree!

NARRATOR

*The willow
embraces the
orphan in its
right limb,
cradling him close.
The orphan sleeps.*

WILLOW

My child, why are you so angry? I know your anger comes from being hurt so much, from being so alone. I cannot give back to you those whose love you've never known. Your prayer comes from a heart that is broken, and God is answering your prayer even now, for there is someone who will love you, will take you to herself and show you the love you so long to have.

NARRATOR

*The willow shivers,
absorbing the pain.*

*The orphan falls to
one knee, hands to
face, sobbing.*

(Slowly here.) The willow tree felt the pain, the love and loss of the orphan and the widow in its embracing branches. The tree began to shudder and tremble, its limbs taking the burden of loss from those it embraced. And the willow wept. Its tears fell on the orphan, washing him free of his fear and anger, and the boy wept for the first time in his life.

The widow saw the orphan weeping and put her arms around him as a mother embraces a son. The tears of the tree washed away her fear and her sorrow, and she spoke for the first time.

WIDOW

*She puts an arm
around him,
lifting him up.*

Come, my child. Come home to me.

NARRATOR

*They exit together
down the center.*

No more needed to be said. The mother and child left the Land of Loss together . . . a place where there is only one tree that grows, the weeping willow, and where the only flower is forget-me-not.