

Your Family Arts Center

DALLAS CHILDREN'S THEATER

TUCK EVERLASTING

Based on the book by Natalie Babbitt

SYNOPSIS

Act I (45 minutes)

It's a hot August day near the village of Tregap. Mae and Angus Tuck are on the way to see their boys, Jesse and Miles, after ten years apart. But, the Tucks are hiding a big secret, and, because of this secret, Angus is wary when Mae decides to go in to the woods to meet their sons. Mae is determined and rides off (playing her music box on the way) while Angus stays behind and rests.

Ten-year-old Winnie Foster desires to escape her life, stuck being watched so closely by her grandmother. She befriends a toad in her yard and reveals she plans to run away tomorrow. Just as she turns to go back in her house, a stranger approaches Winnie. He's curious about a family that used to live in the area. Winnie's grandmother comes out and the stranger questions her, too, until she hears music coming from the woods on their property. She's heard this music before, long ago, and believes it to be elves in the woods. The stranger seems excited to hear the music, as well. Once the stranger departs and her grandmother goes inside, Winnie takes the toad and runs away to discover the origin of the music.

Deep in the woods, Winnie is amazed by the beauty around her. She hears something and stumbles upon a handsome boy drinking from a stream. He says his name is Jesse Tuck and he's passing through the area and, when asked, says he's one-hundred-and-four but really seventeen-years-old. Winnie wants to drink from the stream, but Jesse insists she doesn't.

Suddenly, Jesse's mother, Mae, and brother, Miles, walk in. They are scared to see Winnie with Jesse and cryptically discuss what must be done. They decide to take Winnie with them. Miles throws Winnie over his shoulder and the Tucks begin to run. Just as they exit the woods, they bump in to the stranger who then, unnoticed, follows them.

Finally out of the woods, the Tucks try to comfort a very upset Winnie. She stops crying when Mae plays her music box; it's the same music Winnie's grandmother thought belonged to elves! The Tucks decide to tell Winnie their secret: over eighty-years ago, as the family was traveling through the area, they drank from that stream in the woods. After years of not aging and experiences that should have been deadly, the Tucks realized that it was the stream that had caused them to be changeless. Once others (including Miles's wife) began to see that none of the Tucks were aging, the family knew they had to keep the stream and its effects a secret.

Mae asks if Winnie will come home with them so Angus can better explain exactly why she has to keep the secret, and Winnie agrees.

They finally reach the Tuck's home and Angus is surprised and excited to see Winnie with his family. Jesse and Miles jump in the pond for a swim while Mae shows Winnie around the house and Angus finishes up making dinner. They walk around the dusty, old home and Mae explains that she and Angus only see their sons once every ten years. The boys can't stay too long in one place so they move around often, finding work as they are able, to help keep their secret. Mae doesn't understand why they were blessed (or cursed) with eternal life because they are just a "plain as salt" family. The boys come inside for dinner, but when they sit down to eat Winnie exclaims that she doesn't believe their story and demands to be taken home. Angus says he will take Winnie out for a row on the pond and explain more. He's worried and thinks they should return Winnie soon, especially when she reveals she knew the stranger they bumped in to on their journey through the woods.

The Tucks walk down to the pond with Winnie and point out the signs of life around them: frog and bird noises, fish in the pond, and the movement of the water. The others leave Winnie and Angus to continue the conversation. Angus tells Winnie how important this cycle of life is. A person is born, becomes an adult, and then passes on. Winnie is sad; she doesn't want to die. Angus understands, but explains that dying is a part of living and you can't have one without the other. What has happened to the Tucks is that they are no longer really living anymore. Without experiencing the changes that come with getting older, they are just like "rocks by the side of the road" watching life pass them by. And, if others found out about the stream they might not understand their mistake until it's too late. Suddenly, Miles screams that their horse has been stolen.

Intermission (15 minutes)

Act II (45 minutes)

Back at the Foster home, the stranger knocks on the door. When grandmother answers, he explains that he discovered Winnie was kidnapped and took the kidnappers' horse in order to come back and tell her family. He knows where to find Winnie, but he needs something in return: to buy the woods. Grandmother is hesitant, but he convinces her it's the only way to get her granddaughter back.

It's time for the Tucks and Winnie to go to bed. Mae tries to make Winnie comfortable on their couch and Angus insists she tell him if she needs anything during the night. After everyone goes to bed, Jesse sneaks back out and proposes a plan to Winnie. When she's seventeen, why doesn't she drink from the stream, too. Then they could get married and spend the rest of time seeing the world together. Smitten, Winnie agrees to think about it.

The stranger has taken the constable to go find Winnie and return her home. The constable is tired, and his horse isn't energetic either. He tries to make conversation with the stranger, raving about the new jailhouse and gallows in Treegap. But, the stranger isn't in the mood for chit-chat and decides to ride ahead.

The next morning, Winnie heads to the pond to fish with Miles. He tells her about his wife and children from long ago. She asks why he didn't have them drink from the stream, too, but he said he wouldn't do that to them. When they catch a fish, Winnie is horrified and begs Miles to throw it back. They return to the house fish-less, and sit down to breakfast with the rest of the Tucks. Winnie says she wishes she could stay with them forever. Suddenly, someone knocks on the door. It's the stranger. He's there for Winnie, but also has something to tell the Tucks. As a boy, he was obsessed with the tale about a family that never aged, and, after discovering the secret, intends to sell the stream water to the highest bidder. A struggle ensues, and Mae hits the stranger. Just then, the constable arrives. He arrests Mae and takes Winnie home.

Grandmother is relieved to see Winnie. But, she's surprised when Winnie declares she wasn't actually kidnapped; she went with the Tucks willingly. Winnie tries to explain, but her grandmother just doesn't understand.

The constable brings news to the Fosters: the stranger has died from his injury. And Mae will be hanged for her crime. Upset, Winnie goes out to talk to the toad in the yard. Jesse approaches her and says Miles has a plan to break Mae out of jail, but he doesn't see how it will work. He gives Winnie a bottle of the stream's water and asks her to drink it when she's seventeen and come find him. She accepts the water, then tells him she can help with Miles's plan. She will take Mae's place in jail. Jesse leaves just as grandmother comes out.

After the jail break, the constable tells Winnie that if she was any older she would be in jail herself. She goes to tell the toad everything that has happened, but when a dog tries to catch it, she decides to save it forever. She pours the bottle of stream water over the toad and says when she's seventeen, if she decides to drink the water, she can go to the stream to get more.

Seventy years have passed. Mae and Angus ride back in to town. They've heard that the woods are no more. Passing the cemetery, they see Winnie's tombstone. She died two years earlier. They all knew she must have decided not to drink the stream water, but now it's confirmed. As they leave, they almost ride right over a toad that sits in the middle of the road.

Notes:

- This play deals with mature themes (including mortality & death, living forever, romantic love) and there is an ominous undertone throughout the play.
- There is a thunderstorm in the play.
- There are few potentially disturbing scenes in the play such as when one character violently strikes another and the victim later dies.