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Roald Dahl's Marvellous Children's Charity aims to raise as much money as possible to make life better for seriously ill children because it believes that every child has the right to a marvellous life. This marvellous charity helps thousands of children each year in the UK living with serious conditions of the blood and the brain — causes important to Roald Dahl in his lifetime.

Whether by providing nurses, equipment, carers or toys, the charity helps to care for children with conditions including acquired brain injury, epilepsy and blood disorders such as sickle cell disease.

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www.marvellouschildrenscharity.org
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The Roald Dahl Charitable Trust supports the work of RDMCC and RDMSC





George (Clark Devlin) gives Grandma (Erika Poole) some of his marvellous medicine.

George's Marvellous Medicine

by Roald Dahl

Adapted for the stage by
David Wood

Samuel French — London
www.samuel french-london.co.uk



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GEORGE'S MARVELLOUS MEDICINE

First performed by the Birmingham Stage Company at the Capitol Theatre, Horsham on October 28th, 2009, followed by a national tour and a London Christmas 2010 season at the Bloomsbury Theatre. The cast was as follows:

George	Clark Devlin
Mum	Alison Fitzjohn
Dad	Tom Woodman
Grandma	Erika Poole
Giant Chicken	Jason O'Brien
Director	Phil Clark
Designer	Jacqueline Trousdale
Lighting Designer	Jason Taylor
Composer	Matthew Scott
Sound Designer	Tom Lishman
Puppet Master	Roman Stefanski

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CHARACTERS

George

Mum (Mary Kranky)

Dad (Killy Kranky)

Grandma

Giant Chicken

A Large Chicken and optional Little Grandma can be played by a child.

The action of the play takes place on the Kranky family farm, in the farmyard and farmhouse.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I The farm

ACT II A few minutes later

Time — the present

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

David Wood wishes to thank Neal Foster and Phil Compton of Birmingham Stage Company for commissioning this play, and Phil Clark for his suggestions and for directing the successful première production.

Photographs

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Samuel French Ltd acknowledges the publication of the original book **GEORGE'S MARVELLOUS MEDICINE** by Jonathan Cape Ltd in hardback format and Puffin Books in paperback format.

INTRODUCTION

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to bring Roald Dahl's classic story, *George's Marvellous Medicine*, to the stage. One of his most popular tales, it combines his familiar and anarchic sense of humour with the enriching theme of a put-upon child approaching his situation with determination and an eventual sense of empowerment. Although adults may quake at the way George recklessly creates his marvellous medicine from the most unlikely and potentially dangerous ingredients, children react to his ingenuity with a satisfied feeling that justice is being done. George's grandmother is extremely unpleasant and deserves her comeuppance.

But because I wanted the audience to join in George's attempt to make his grandmother better, I decided to introduce a back story, to give George even more justification for his actions. I hoped Mr Dahl wouldn't mind me depicting Grandma's arrival at the Krankys' farm to convalesce. Poor George has to give up his bedroom to accommodate her, and she makes it quite clear that she is a "townie", who cannot stand being in the country. Her presence turns the whole family upside down. Mum, Grandma's daughter, finds it especially difficult having her loyalties so severely tested.

In fact, as the story progresses, Grandma becomes quite sparky, excited by the changes that occur, thanks to George's medicine. And, to give her a certain amount of audience sympathy, it was fun to embellish, with a fantasy scene, George's wish that she could be really nice and friendly. This also gave the actress another aspect of Grandma to play.

Interestingly, as in *The Witches*, Dahl is somewhat ambiguous as to whether Grandma might actually have dabbled in witchcraft. This adds another dramatic and somewhat darker dimension.

It also seemed to me to be important to emphasise that the fantasy elements of the story are deeply rooted in reality. Not only is the family in a very real sense brought to despair by Grandma living with them, Dad is also genuinely excited by the realization that George's marvellous medicine might lead to a humanitarian miracle. He is not simply motivated by the possibility of becoming rich, he thinks that his son's invention could change the world for good, as well as change his family's lives.

Phil Clark's splendid première was full of fun and humour, but also emphasized the reality within the fantasy. This, I'm sure, echoes Dahl's intentions in the book.

At first glance, the staging may seem complicated. But the set is a basic one, with no complicated scene changes, and the device that enables Grandma to grow and grow, upwards until she bursts through the roof, was not, as many thought, an expensive, computerized piece of machinery. It was basically a see-saw, with Grandma on one end, and stage crew backstage weighting down the other end, carefully causing Grandma to rise.

We successfully used a child to play the Large Chicken and “Little Grandma”. Chicken puppets on wheels, pushed by rods, were often “walked” by Mum and Dad as they went about their farm business. The giant pigs were not really puppets, more large soft toys. All the animals contributed considerably to the enjoyment, and employing an experienced puppetry person paid great dividends.

Great care was taken with a detailed soundscape. Not only were the sounds of the farm animals effective, the pouring of each ingredient into the saucepan was accompanied by appropriate fizzing and squelching and bubbling noises, which added humour and authenticity.

We discussed creating a smell to pervade the auditorium when George mixes his medicine; the idea was not implemented, but I still rather like it!

Audience response to the first production was, quite frankly, a delight to witness. I do hope that everybody involved in future productions of the play will enjoy the same rewarding experience, and feel, as we did, that as the children left the theatre, they couldn’t wait to come back! Maybe they will become theatregoers for life. I do hope so.

David Wood

PRODUCTION NOTE

The book *George’s Marvellous Medicine* includes a “don’t try this at home” message to its readers. For the play, I wrote a similar speech for “George” to record. It was played as the audience started to leave the auditorium at the end of the play.

George Hi, boys and girls. Thanks for helping me make my marvellous medicine. But listen, don’t try it at home, will you? ‘Cause no one’s got a grandma as nasty as mine! Safe journey home! Bye!

Music: The choice of music is left to the director.



George tries his medicine out on a chicken held by Mum (Alison Fitzjohn), with Dad (Tom Woodman) watching.



Dad tries to fend off the Giant Chicken (Jason O'Brien).

OTHER PLAYS AND MUSICALS BY DAVID WOOD

Aladdin
The BFG (based on the book by Roald Dahl)
Babe, the Sheep-Pig (based on the book by Dick King-Smith)
Babes in the Magic Wood
The Christmas Story
Cinderella
Danny the Champion of the World (based on the book by Roald Dahl)
Dick Whittington and Wondercat
Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish (based on the book by Michael Foreman)
Fantastic Mr Fox (based on the book by Roald Dahl)
Flibberty and the Penguin
The Gingerbread Man
Hijack Over Hygenia
The Ideal Gnome Expedition
Jack and the Giant
Jack the Lad (co-written with Dave and Toni Arthur)
James and the Giant Peach (based on the book by Roald Dahl)
Lady Lollipop (based on the book by Dick King-Smith)
Larry the Lamb in Toytown (co-written with Sheila Ruskin, adapted from
the stories of S.G. Hulme-Beaman)
Meg and Mog Show (from the books by Helen Nicoll and Jan Piéńkowski)
More Adventures of Noddy (based on the stories by Enid Blyton)
Mother Goose's Golden Christmas
Noddy (based on the stories by Enid Blyton)
Nutcracker Sweet
Old Father Time
The Old Man of Lochnagar (based on the book by HRH The Prince of Wales)
Old Mother Hubbard
The Owl and the Pussycat Went to See ... (co-written with Sheila Ruskin)
The Papertown Paperchase
The Pied Piper (co-written with Dave and Toni Arthur)
The Plotters of Cabbage Patch Corner
Robin Hood (co-written with Dave and Toni Arthur)
Rupert and the Green Dragon (based on the Rupert stories and characters by
Mary Tourtel and Alfred Bestall)
Save the Human (based on the story by Tony Husband and David Wood)
The See-Saw Tree
The Selfish Shellfish
Spot's Birthday Party (based on the books by Eric Hill)
There Was an Old Woman ...
Tickle (one act)
Tom's Midnight Garden
The Twits (based on the book by Roald Dahl)
The Witches (based on the book by Roald Dahl)



ACT I

The farm

Downstage is the farmyard, with a chicken house and shed (a door only may be necessary). Access is required from both sides for animals, normal and giant-sized. The farmhouse is upstage of the farmyard. It is on two levels, with stairs. Upstairs is a bathroom with a medicine cabinet and Mum and Dad's bedroom and a door (leading to a box room). Downstairs is a kitchen with a sink, stove, a door marked "DAIRY", and George's room, which becomes Grandma's room. In George's room is an armchair with a cushion and blanket, a chest of drawers, a table and, perhaps, a bed (though this is never used). A curtain can be drawn to conceal Grandma in her chair. Two or three pieces of furniture, including the stove, should be made to be able to be knocked over

NB. For a full list of props required, including ingredients for George's medicine, please refer to the Furniture and Property List at the back of the text

As the house lights go down, we hear a cacophony of farm animals. This fades out as ...

George is discovered in his room downstairs, sprawled in the armchair, reading a book

George (*reading*) "Frowning with concentration, Billy pointed his magic wand at the blue monster. 'Alakazam,' he chanted. Suddenly ..." (*He turns the page, and suddenly notices the audience*) Oh! Hi! I'm George. It's half term, so no school today. Great! I can read my book. It's all about —

He is interrupted by a voice

Mum (*off*) George! Give me a hand, please!

George It's Mum. Sorry ... (*He puts down his book and dashes outside to the farmyard*)

The back end of a cow enters with Mum sitting on a stool squeezing milk from the udders into a bucket. (NB in the original production, the dairy had double doors that opened to reveal Mum with the cow)

George Mum, I'm reading ...

Mum Quick, George. Bucket! This one's full.

George OK. *(He runs inside to the kitchen to find a bucket; to the Audience)* Don't go away! *(He returns with the bucket)*

Mum hands him the full one and puts the empty one under the udders

Mum Thank you, dear. In the dairy, please.

George staggers to the kitchen and takes the full bucket through the door marked "DAIRY"

(Calling) Help yourself to a drink.

Mum and the cow exit

George returns, collecting a can of drink, and opening it on the way

George *(to the Audience, returning to his room and sitting in the chair)*

Anyway, this book is all about a boy wizard who does magic spells ... *(He swigs his drink, picks up the book and starts to read again)*
"Suddenly, a swirl of smoke spurted from the blue monster's ears as his three eyes bulged and —"

A voice interrupts him

Dad *(off)* George! Help!

George *(irritated)* It's Dad. Sorry. *(He rushes out)*

Dad enters backwards, pushing and straining against the front end of a ferocious-looking bull

Dad The bull's escaped! Push, son, push!

The bull snorts angrily. George joins in trying to push him back

George I'm on holiday, Dad.

Dad Wish I could have a holiday. Seven days a week, me.

George I know, but ...

Dad Heave! Animals don't understand nine to five, son. And we can't afford to pay for help on the farm. Times are tough.

George I know.

Dad Heave!

The bull retreats. Dad goes with him

(Off; calling) Got him! Thanks, George!

George *(to the Audience)* Dad's right. Running a farm means being on duty all day and all night too. For some reason baby animals seem to like being born at night. I ... *(Suddenly he has an idea)* Stay there!

George exits

Piglets grunting are heard

George returns holding two very young piglets

(Smiling) The latest arrivals. Pinky and Perky. *(Looking closely)* Or is it Perky and Pinky? They're special. And it was special helping Dad bring them into the world. All slimy they were, with their eyes closed tight. *(To the piglets)* Weren't you?

The piglets grunt

I don't mind helping really. And the animals are like friends. I don't see my school friends outside school 'cos it's in the village, see, miles away. *(He has an idea)* Maybe, today, I could be your friend and you could be my friends? Yes?

Hopefully the audience agree

Really?

Hopefully they agree more positively

Great. Tell you what, I'll show you my best, my favourite animals!

Clucking noises

George exits to put away the piglets

Mum and Dad enter from the chicken house operating three chicken puppets and a cockerel puppet [see Introduction]. They parade them up and down, looking for food

George enters with a metal dish of chicken feed and throws some down

The chickens peck greedily

Chick — chick — chick!

Dad That's it, peck away! Peck, peck! We'll get you nice and plump!

Mum Then you can lay us a nice egg each for tea, please.

George *(to the Audience)* Sometimes ... Watch! *(He demonstrates)*
Come on, chick — chick — chick! *(He holds out his hand with some chicken feed on it)*

One of the chickens approaches, a bit tentative, then eats from his hand

There you go! Good girl!

Mum and Dad exit, returning the chickens inside the chicken house

George returns to his armchair, swigs his drink, and picks up his book

No, life on the farm's pretty cool. I wouldn't have it any other way.
(Finding his place in the book; reading) " ... as his three eyes bulged,
and the claws on his six stumpy arms jerked open and shut, open and
shut, till suddenly, as the smoke cleared, Billy could see that the blue
monster had ... disappeared." Wow!

Suddenly a blood-curdling scream makes him jump

Mum *(off)* Aaaaaaaaah!

Mum enters, shocked and emotional, with a letter

*George dashes outside, leaving the can in the chair and putting his book
in his pocket, and meets Mum*

George Mum!

Dad enters on the run

Dad Mary? What's happened?

Mum *(trembling)* I've had ... a letter. *(She produces it)*

Dad Is that all? I thought you'd had a heart attack.

Mum My mother.

George Grandma's had a heart attack?

Mum No, no. She's ... coming to ...

George Tea?

Mum (*shaking her head*) She's coming to ... stay!

Dad What? She can't!

Mum She can. She is!

Dad But I can't stand your mother! She's selfish. She's bad tempered. She's got brown teeth and her mouth's all puckered-up like a dog's bottom!

Mum Killy, don't be so rude. (*Pointing to the letter*) She's been ill. She needs looking after.

Dad She needs locking away!

Mum Killy, the doctor says she can't be on her own. There's nowhere else she can go. It's my duty. We're all she's got. (*She is on the brink of tears*)

George It'll be all right, Mum. I'll help.

Mum Thank you, George.

Dad When's she coming?

Mum (*looking at the letter*) Wednesday.

George That's today!

Mum Ten o'clock.

Dad (*checking his watch*) That's in three minutes time!

Mum No! We're not ready! George, dear, she'll have to have your room.

George Mum!

Mum She can't climb stairs.

George But where will I go?

Dad You can sleep with the chickens.

Mum No, you'll have to go in the box room.

George But it's tiny!

Mum Sorry, dear. Move your things upstairs. Quick!

George reluctantly goes in to his bedroom and gathers his things — toys, books, pyjamas etc. from on and in his chest of drawers

Killy, get some flowers.

Dad Flowers?

Mum To brighten up her room. Now!

Dad crossly leaves

Mum thinks, then dashes into George's room. George goes upstairs with his things. Mum takes off her apron and uses it as a duster, flicking dust off the furniture

Immediately we hear a car approaching, hooting its horn, and stopping

Dad rushes in

Dad (*shouting*) She's here!

Mum (*shouting upstairs*) George, she's here!

Panic. George throws his things into the box room

Mum stuffs the apron behind the armchair cushion and exits to the car

George dashes downstairs and escapes off the other side

Sounds of car doors slamming. The noise makes the chickens squawk

Mum enters, pushing Grandma in a wheelchair. Grandma clutches her handbag and walking stick

Grandma Gently, gently, Mary. Don't jolt me.

Mum Sorry, Mother.

Grandma I'm already feeling sick. That taxi driver drove like a lunatic. Twisting and bumpetty-bumping up and down through those narrow little lanes.

Mum The charm of the countryside, Mother.

Grandma Charm my foot. Give me my big city. Lord knows, Mary, why you wanted to live in the middle of nowhere.

Mum I love it here, you know I do.

Grandma (*sniffing*) What's that smell?

Mum What smell?

Grandma There's a distinctly unpleasant aroma of blocked drains.

Mum It must be the farm, Mother. We're used to it.

Grandma Like living in a lavatory.

George runs in, carrying a piglet

George Hi, Grandma!

Grandma Ah! George. I hope you're being good.

George Of course. (*Showing her the piglet*) Look.

Grandma (*with a jump*) Aaah!

George This is Perky.

Grandma A turkey?

George No, Grandma. Perky the piglet. Say hello to Grandma, Perky.

The piglet grunts

Hungry for More?

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