

WILLA IN WETLANDS

by

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Music: Rory Chalcraft

Music and Lyrics:

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(Willa comes up an aisle, talking to herself. As she walks beside the children, she will stop and interact with them.)

WILLA

Today in science class, my teacher told us there was treasure in the wetland, and I'm going to look until I find it. (She lifts someone's hair.) This looks like silk. It feels like silk. But no. I don't think it's real silk. I want real treasure. (She walks to the center of the stage.)

(She surveys the scene.) But it's hard to believe there's a treasure here. It's so ...so..., well, wet. And gushy. I just know it's filled with slippery, slimey things. (She walks around the set examining things.) Looking for a treasure in a swamp or a marsh is a hard job. I see nothing that looks the least bit priceless. I guess I'll just close my eyes for a minute or two -- if I can find a decent place to sit down. Gross.

(Two lumps that have been resting on the set rise up and show themselves to be pink shrimp.)

SHERMAN

Well goodness. I thought that thing was going to step right on us. I've never seen it around here before. Do you think we eat it or it eats shrimp like us?

SHIRLEY

I'm not sure. It's very ugly. Would you look at that? Only two legs. (They giggle uproariously.)

SHERMAN

Everyone knows you should have at least ten to be beautiful.

SHIRLEY

At least. And look at all those teeth when only one will do.

SHERMAN

I think it's a human.

SHIRLEY

A human. Oh no. A human is absolutely the worst thing to find. You know how humans feel about shrimp.

SHERMAN

They like shrimp very much indeed.

SHIRLEY

Too well. That's the whole point, silly. Why there's even a rumor that humans are going to take away our homes.

(Willa wakes up and is slightly alarmed.)

SHIRLEY

Look. It's moving.

WILLA

Hello.

SHIRLEY

(Quaking) It said hello. What do we do now?

SHERMAN

Say hello back.

SHIRLEY

(Bravely) Hello back.

WILLA

I'm Willa.

SHERMAN

Well, you're not crying, so you're not one of those weeping willows. Thank goodness.

SHIRLEY

I don't see anything wrong with weeping. I am very sensitive and weep frequently.

SHERMAN

You're telling me. You're a big crybaby in fact.

SHIRLEY

Am not. (Argue.)

WILLA

I said Willa. Not willow. It's a perfectly respectable name.

SHERMAN

Well aren't you a Miss Priss. You didn't even ask our names. Not that we would have told you. I'm not sure we should talk to you at all. Let's see. Here's a test. What do you think of pink?

SHIRLEY

Answer carefully my dear. This is important.

WILLA

When I was a little kid, I liked pink, but now that I'm older ... (the shrimp lean toward her) ... I think I like it even more.

SHERMAN

Oh good. Very good indeed.

SHIRLEY

We absolutely love pink. We're so glad we're pink shrimp.

SHERMAN

It would be terrible to be a common grass shrimp.

SHIRLEY

Oooh! So common to be common. Of course, you must understand that I am pinker than Sherman.

SHERMAN

No I am pinker than Shirley.

SHIRLEY

You are not. (Argue.)

WILLA

Excuse me.

SHERMAN

Of course we'll excuse you. You aren't pink at all.

WILLA

I mean I have a question.

SHERMAN

Everyone has a question. I have a question about that horrible sound you hear right now. There's a rumor that humans make it ... and that it means we're going to lose our homes.

SHIRLEY

Lose our homes? Oh no. We'll have to leave our shrimp beds.

SHERMAN

Leave our shrimp everything. Well, what do you know about it ... Willa.

WILLA

Nothing. I don't know anything about this place except there's supposed to be a treasure here. Can you tell me where it is?

SHIRLEY

Treasure? I know of only one treasure here.

WILLA

Thank heavens. Where is it?

SHIRLEY AND SHERMAN

You're looking at it.

The Pink Shrimp Song

Stop! Don't go no further
For what you seem to seek
The treasure you are searching for
Is right here at your feet.

We're shrimp and we are proud to think
That no one else is quite as pink
Or has a more delightful smell
Than we have when we're in our shell.

Now don't be sad
Don't look so confused.
So you're lookin' for a treasure
Well I've got the greatest news.

We're pink and we have lovely eyes
All black with stalks the perfect size
And lovely graceful swimmerets
We'd make terrific household pets...

Don't be sad.
Don't look so confused.
So you're lookin' for treasure
Well I've got the greatest news.

We're pink and we have lots to say
Of what is fashion in the Bay
And pink's the leading color here
Of this or any other year.

Just one little, little glimpse
Will show you
That all the shrimps
Got the beat and got the pleasure
Of being the greatest treasure
In the world.

WILLA

That was quite impressive, I must say.

SHERMAN

(Fanning himself.) We know you must.

WILLA

You dance very well, especially with all those legs.

SHIRLEY

It wouldn't be much of a dance with only two legs, now would it?

WILLA

I guess not. But as clever as you are, you're still not the kind of treasure I'm looking for.

SHERMAN

She must be looking for a lesser treasure.

SHIRLEY

I guess you'll have to speak with the Blue Heron. Maybe he can understand what kind of treasure you're talking about. He knows everything about the wetland. I've heard he even knows about the great sound.

WILLA

Where is he?

SHIRLEY

He's everywhere, but you can only see him when you're still and quiet.

WILLA

Surely someone can give me better directions than that. Look. Here comes a fish. I'll ask him.

SHERMAN

A fish? Oh horror of horrors.

SHIRLEY

Terror of terrors.

SHERMAN

Fish will eat us even with our heads on. We've got to get away. (They begin to run.)

WILLA

But you haven't told me

SHIRLEY

(Over her shoulder.) Ask the Blue Heron.

(Willa gives up following them and walks back to center stage where a rockfish with sunglasses is entering.)

JOHNNY

I am too cool. I am cool, cooler, coolest.

WILLA

Hello.

JOHNNY

Look at those stripes, man. They are coolarama. And that pretty white belly ought to be on the telly.

WILLA

Telly?

JOHNNY

(Condescendingly.) That's television to you.

WILLA

You shouldn't talk to me that way. Why you're nothing but a fish.

JOHNNY

A fish!!! Honey, anybody cool knows who I really am. I suppose you don't recognize me because of the shades, huh. (He takes off his sunglasses and poses dramatically.) How's that?

WILLA

You still look like a fish.

JOHNNY

What's the matter with you? Don't you watch TV? Haven't you ever heard, "Here's Johnny Rock Fish, star of stage and stream." (He strikes a rock star pose.)

WILLA

My mother doesn't let me watch much television. And I've never seen you before.

JOHNNY

I can't believe it. Maybe you'll remember when you see me with my all star band. (When he snaps his fingers, Rita Rockfish and Wild Rice run up the aisle with great flourish.)

WILD RICE

OOOh yeah. I'm Wild Rice and am I nice! Yeah. (He exchanges high fives with Rita, Johnny, and tries with Willa but she doesn't know how.) The birds groove on me. The fish groove on me. You'll look twice when you see Wild Rice. (He dances wildly for a moment and then stops.) Gotta be careful. Gotta maintain my grains.

RITA

Please to meetcha I'm sure. I'm Rita Rockfish. Maybe you saw me on the cover of Food Magazine. I was the dish of the month.

WILLA

This is ridiculous. What's a rock band doing in the wetlands?

JOHNNY

We live here "oh human one," and today we're trying to find some rehearsal space away from our fans.

RITA

We were up the river earlier, but the great sound drove us away. Not even Wild Rice can sing louder than the great sound.

WILD RICE

Oh yeah, man. The great sound makes my head pound.

WILLA

Do you know what the great sound is?

JOHNNY

My job is not identifying other sounds. My job is making my own cool sounds. You must have seen our latest video, "The Rice is Wild."

(Willa shakes her head no.)

RITA

So what brings you to the wetland? Are you a singer or something. Because if you are, let's get things straight right now. This is my territory ... rockfish city. Johnny Rockfish and Wild Rice are the band, and I am the girl singer.

WILLA

I don't want to be a singer. I'm here to find a treasure. You seem to get around. Have you seen one?

JOHNNY

Let's see. We've got two gold records, not to mention our platinum one.

WILLA

A real treasure.

(Wild Rice takes her by the hand and begins to rap with Johnny and Rita providing background.)

WILD RICE RAP

Wha's up! Now you talk about a little treasure
 But hey, you dig, you should get a pleasure
 At the sight of us 'cause we're marvelous.

Johnny Rockfish (word)
 My homeboy's here.
 Rita Rockfish (word)
 My flygirl's there,
 And you as lucky as a millionaire.

And everybody knows Wild Rice, That's me,
 Is served as the finest delicacy.
 (we know it)
 Wild Rice: That's me
 (we know it, so show it)
 I'm cooler than Ice-T
 Bigger than Heavy - D
 (word up)
 Wild Rice: That's me.

I grow in the marshes, the lakes, the ponds
 The rivers and the streams have my fabulous fronds.
 (We know it)
 Wild Rice: That's me.
 (We know it, so show it)

I have flowers in the summer; I also have grains
 Though I'm bumpin' and handsome, I still have brains.

I'm cooler than Ice - T
 Bigger than Heavy - D.
 (word up)
 And I'm tellin' you, sister, I'm proud my space
 Is the fresh wonderful wetland place.
 (We know it)
 Wild Rice is nice
 (We know it)
 Wild Rice is nice.
 (Word up! We're siced!)
 Wild Rice.

RITA

Wild Rice is right. He is a treasure. And if you were a fisherman, you'd know rockfish are a treasure too. You'd want to get your hooks into us.

JOHNNY

Don't talk about hooks when we're getting ready to sing. Gives me a lump in my throat. I gotta go think about my image. Hang loose, Canada Goose. (He gives Wild Rice and Rita high fives and exits.)

RITA

Hooks I can deal with. But what about those six pack rings. They are the worst.

WILLA

Why do you worry about them?

RITA

They can turn you every which way but loose. Take my man, Stevie Seagull.

WILD RICE

The dude could not sing for nothing.

RITA

He had his own way of singing. Sort of a laughing call. But he doesn't sing anything any more.

WILLA

What happened?

RITA

Well, he thought he spotted some food in the water, so he made a dive straight for it ... only he didn't see the plastic ring floating in the water. He got that sucker stuck on his beak and that was the last food he ever tried to take.

WILD RICE

He starved to death.

WILLA

That's horrible.

WILD RICE

But you don't have to be a cop to make it stop. You can do something about it.

WILLA

Me? I don't live in the wetland.

RITA

Honey, the six pack ring that got Stevie didn't start in the wetland. Somebody threw it on the street, maybe even the street where you live. Then the rain washed it into the river, and the river brought it down here. You wouldn't believe the trash the river brings down here.

WILLA

So what can I do?

WILD RICE

Put your trash in the can, man. And cut those rings so they won't get caught on some innocent bird. Tell your Mama and Daddy to do the same. They'll listen to you. Parents don't listen much to rice... especially when it's wild.

RITA

I'm ready to slide on down the road now.

WILD RICE

All right sister. We're moving out. (They begin to groove their way off stage.) Don't forget me. I'm worth any price ... Wild Rice!!!

(They boogey off.)

WILLA

My goodness. This is all very confusing. I thought fish were just fish. Well ... I guess I never thought of fish at all, except for having a goldfish once. And certainly never thought of wild rice.

Fish must be all around the wetland here. (She goes to the audience.) Maybe right here. No. No fish. (She looks further.) Not there either. But I guess there are fish in places where we can't even see. (She returns to center.) Oh I hope the great sound doesn't mean that the fish and the shrimp will lose their homes. I wouldn't want to lose mine.

But I must get back to my mission, the treasure. And to find the treasure, I need to find the Blue Heron...who can tell me all about it.

Now the shrimp said I could find the Blue Heron anywhere. So he might be here even now. (She is quiet and looks around.

She hears a kaking sound and sees a bird approaching. The bird is black with a white tail and a hat pulled low on its head.)

LARRY

(Approaching.) Kak. Kak. Kak.

WILLA

Kak?

LARRY

(Surprised.) Kak. Yes. Kak is what I say. I say it all the time. Now I must be off.

WILLA

Are you a Blue Heron by any chance?

LARRY

Blue? Mercy. Do I look blue? Is there a single blue feather on my body? Really I must be off.

WILLA

Wait, I think I've seen you before.

LARRY

I'm sure you haven't. No. I've never seen anyone the likes of you. I don't go many places. I hardly ever leave my lovely home on a tree in the wetlands. And I never should have left it today. I must, must, must be off.

WILLA

But I've seen a picture of you I know. Maybe if you'd just remove your hat, I could remember.

LARRY

Out of the question. Kak. Kak. Kak. I never remove my hat.

WILLA

Why I know what you are ...

LARRY

What I am is ... anxious to be off. (He moves away.)

WILLA

You're a BALD EAGLE.

LARRY

(Stopping and grimacing.) Shhhh. Oh drat! Oh snakes and toadstools! How could you possibly know I was bald? What kind of animal are you that can see through a hat?

WILLA

I'm a girl. And I could tell you were a bald eagle by your yellow bill and your long white tail.

LARRY

But bald. You said bald. Is there nothing I can do to hide it? Oh, I'm so embarrassed. Bald. Bald. Oh miserable me. Miserable, miserable. (He sobs.) I was born bald and bald I shall be forever.

WILLA

You should be proud.

LARRY

Proud? Never.

WILLA

Everyone loves you.

LARRY

No one could love me. No one even knows me. I've tried to hide my whole life.

WILLA

But you're our country's favorite bird. We're so proud of you, we put you on our money. And we love our money.

LARRY

I don't believe you. Let me see.

WILLA

(She shows him a quarter.) You're on our quarter.

LARRY

That's an absolutely grand bird, but it doesn't look like me.

WILLA

If you would stand up straight and take off your hat...

LARRY

(Starting to remove his hat.) I can't. Out of the question.

WILLA

Please. Just for a minute.

LARRY

(He starts to take it off slowly, stops, then jerks it off.) There! You'll laugh. I know you'll laugh.

WILLA

Why, you're not bald at all. You have glorious white feathers on your head. You look splendid.

LARRY

Splendid? (Increasingly excited.) Splendid? Really splendid? What does splendid mean?

WILLA

It means... Let's see. Handsome. The best. (He begins to perk up as she says these things and tries to strut a bit.) There aren't so many bald eagles, you know. You're an endangered species.

LARRY

Endangered? Does that mean people are trying to kill me? Oh saints preserve us. I'm going back to my tree. Let me get my hat.

WILLA

No. It means people are trying to protect you.

LARRY

(Cleverly.) Then why am I endangered?

WILLA

My teacher told me that for awhile bald eagles ate fish that were filled with something called pesticides, they're a kind of poison, and eagles had trouble having babies. But it's getting better now. And everyone wants to help you.

LARRY

And no one thinks it's ugly to be bald?

WILLA

No. You're our hero.

LARRY

You wouldn't be kidding me about this, would you?

WILLA

Of course not. Take that old hat home and don't ever wear it again. You want people to be able to see that you're a bald eagle.

LARRY

I do? (He raises himself up to his full height.) I do! (He starts to walk off and his voice gets louder and louder.) I'm a bald eagle. I'm a bald eagle. (He skips down the aisle, saying to the different children as he passes.) I'm a bald eagle. I'm a bald eagle. See me? See how bald I am?

WILLA

Don't forget. You're a national treasure. (She thinks about what she's said.) A treasure. I guess the bald eagle is a treasure. I never thought much about it before. And the rockfish are treasures to fishermen and to all of us who eat them. But that's not the treasure I was looking for. I'm sure there must be jewels here somewhere, if only I could find them. Where is that Blue Heron? I wonder if he has a special song I should listen for.

(She hears the sound of bluegrass music and Frank the fiddler crab enters, playing a fiddle, followed by Gladys Blue crab.)

FRANK

Swing your partner, to the right, jump in the mud and dig out of sight.

GLADYS

I hate jumping in the mud. I like lurking in weed beds. That's the best way for us blue crabs to live.

~

FRANK

(Still singing to the music.) I love a girl who's name is Sue. She loves me and my big claw too.

GLADYS

Would you stop that singing. I'm depressed enough without that noise. Hearing the great sound is bad enough. I've heard it means we've got to move. I know it means trouble. You mark my words.

FRANK

Gee Gladys. You're always depressed and blue.

GLADYS

You'd be sad too if everybody thought you were delicious.

FRANK

I like it when girl fiddlers think I'm pretty sweet. (He holds up his claw and pretends he's flexing it like a muscle.) I mean, isn't that a claw to die for?

GLADYS

Die. Die? You're trying to depress me even more. A fiddler doesn't have to die for his claw. No one wants to eat that old thing. It's my claws humans are after. Do you know what they call my beautiful fifth pair of claws? (Excited.) Do you know what humans call them?

FRANK

Chill out Gladys.

GLADYS

Lump meat. They call my beautiful swimming paddles lump meat.

WILLA

Excuse me. I don't mean to interrupt you.

GLADYS

Then don't.

WILLA

Are you crabs by any chance?

GLADYS

(Mocking.) "Are you crabs by any chance?" What do you think we are, elephants?

FRANK

Behave yourself Gladys.

WILLA

It's nice to meet you.

GLADYS

Nice? I bet you think it's nice. You probably want to take me home and throw me in boiling water. The very thought of it makes me want to pinch someone.

FRANK

Don't listen to her. Let's do something fun like digging in the mud. I absolutely loooooove the mud. (He sings to himself in a bluegrass way as he pantomimes digging.) Oh a dig-dig-dig. A dig-dig-dig. Nothing so fine as a dig-dig-dig. Makes you want to dance a jig-jig-jig. A dig-

dig-dig. A fiddle-de-dee.

GLADYS

The man is worthless.

FRANK

Say, if you don't want to dig, want to dance? (He takes Willa by the hand and begins to swing her around. They dance to his dig-dig song when he accidentally pulls her arm too hard.)

WILLA

Ouch. That hurts my arm.

FRANK

What's wrong? I didn't even pull it off.

WILLA

I should hope not.

FRANK

Who cares? You can always grow another one.

WILLA

No I can't. If I lose my arm, it's gone.

FRANK

Gone? How very strange. I can shed my claw and grow a new one without any trouble at all. This one's only a few months old.

WILLA

That's magic.

GLADYS

Not if you're a crab, dearie. We can do all sorts of marvelous things you humans never even thought of. Show her your eyes Frank. (He raises them like a periscope.)

WILLA

How did you do that?

FRANK

I'm just doing what comes naturally.

WILLA

With eyes like that, you must be able to see everything. Yes. (Thinking.) And since you're always digging, maybe you've seen a buried treasure. Maybe a pirate chest filled with gold. Or a sunken ship filled with coins.

FRANK

Who in the world would think that's treasure? Give me a nice decayed plant any day...some tasty seaweed. I bet if you ate seaweed, you'd be able to grow back your arm just like I do.

(They hear a voice in the distance.)

MORTIMER

Help. Help. Oh please help, help, help.

WILLA

Who's that?

GLADYS

It's probably that whining Mortimer Hermit Crab. I'm not interested in helping him or anyone else. I like to be helped.

FRANK

I hate to say it, Gladys, but it's crabs like you that give us a bad name.

MORTIMER

(Entering.) Dreadful, dreadful. I have the most terrible aches. Oh ache of aches.

FRANK

Let's hear it.

GLADYS

Let's not.

MORTIMER

First of all, there's the headache. You see, I can fold most of myself into my shell, but my head still sticks out. And there's the most awful sound that goes morning 'til night.

WILLA

The great sound?

MORTIMER

It's not great at all. Who is this person?

GLADYS

She's a crab eater, that's who.

WILLA

I'm Willa. I've heard the great sound before.

MORTIMER

Oh my aching head.

GLADYS

I don't know why you're worried about the great sound. You're not going to lose your home because you carry it with you. But me ... what about me? What if I lose my nice weed beds? Then where will I be? If you think I'm going to stay here and listen to you whine when I have much worse complaints, you're wrong. I'm hungry and it's no use being around you. You eat everything in sight. (She starts off.) It seems to me that hermit crabs ought to act like hermits and hide away. ...

MORTIMER

She's right you know.

FRANK

Right? Gladys? She's never right.

MORTIMER

About my eating I mean. I do eat everything in sight, but it's just that I'm hungry all the time. And when I'm hungry, I eat, and when I eat, I get another ache.

WILLA

A stomach ache?

MORTIMER

Precisely. Although it's not your average stomach ache.

FRANK

Nothing about you is average.

MORTIMER

You see. I have a little snack. And that tastes so good...that I have another ... and another... and another...until the next thing I know, my shell is so tight it feels like ...

WILLA

Like eating three hamburgers, and two orders of french fries...and twelve chocolate shakes.

MORTIMER

Maybe.

FRANK

Then the thing to do is to get out of that shell. Let us help you.

MORTIMER

Oh no. I can't take it off in front of a girl.

FRANK

Sure you can. And then we can help you find another home.

MORTIMER

I'd feel much more comfortable if I found another home first. That's the way I always do it. A pretty moon snail shell. They're my favorite.

WILLA

I'd love to stay and help you, but it's getting late, and I still haven't found any treasure or spoken to the Blue Heron.

MORTIMER

I saw the Blue Heron that way. In the same place where I heard that sound.

WILLA

Oh thank you, Mortimer. I hope your head gets better. And your stomach. I'm sure you'll find a nice roomy shell soon. Goodbye Frank. Thanks for the dance.

(Willa walks off and the two crabs begin to leave as well.)

MORTIMER

I think I see it. A shell that looks perfect. Oh marvelous. You don't know how good it is to find the right home. I hope the great sound doesn't take all the shells away.

FRANK

Or the mud. The wetlands is the best place in the world to live.

MORTIMER

Now when we get to the shell, you stand in front while I change. I don't want anyone to see. Especially girls. (They go off and Willa returns up another aisle.)

WILLA

I wonder how it would feel to be like Mortimer and have your home on your back all the time. You'd never forget your homework because it would be right with you. And whenever you got sleepy, you could take a nap in your own bed. But you couldn't run away from home. And it sure would be hard to play baseball or jump rope.

(She walks on.) I think crabs are very interesting, but I don't think I'd want to be one....I hope I find the Blue Heron soon. I'm getting awfully tired of looking for treasure.

(A muskrat comes running in. She wears a hat of the fraternal order of muskrats and speaks with a Southern accent as do all the muskrats.)

MELODY

Mercy, mercy. Honey child. You haven't by any chance seen a mink?

WILLA

A mink coat?

MELODY

No honey. Not a mink coat. A mink animal...with beady little eyes and strong claws. You don't exactly call it a fur coat when it's your own skin.

WILLA

Excuse me. Of course not. Why do you want to find a mink?

MELODY

I don't want to find one. That is the very last thing on my mind. I want to avoid a mink at all cost. (She whispers to Willa.) Minks eat muskrats.

WILLA

I thought you were a muskrat. I've read about you. Let me see. You love to swim ... and you live in lodges.

MELODY

Why yes indeedy, you're right.

WILLA

And you like to go out mostly at night. Why are you out now?

MELODY

Well it just so happens that I was out to gather a few mussels for the lodge brothers and sisters.

(Leroy and Wayne Muskrat run in and do an elaborate lodge handshake with Melody.)

LEROY

Hey. Brother Wayne, gimme the secret word.

WAYNE

Brother Leroy. You can't say the secret word in front of that one. She's not a lodge sister.

MELODY

She's not a sister now, but we could initiate her. You want to be a sister of the Muskrat Lodge, don't you?

WILLA

I don't think ... I could possibly ... say no.

ALL MUSKRATS

Yeaaaah. We have a new lodge sister.

MELODY

By the way, what is your name.

WILLA

Willa.

ALL MUSKRAT

Yeaah. Sister Willa. Muskrat lodge brothers and sisters forever!!!

(They run around with great activity.)

LEROY

It's time for a muskrat ramble.

WAYNE

We can't ramble-dance until we've taught Sister Willa the salute.

MELODY

And the rules. Don't forget the rules.

WILLA

Does everyone go through this to be a lodge sister or brother?

LEROY

Right on. Aren't we lucky?

WAYNE

Okay. Here's the salute:

Touch your head
And the tip of your nose
Then wiggle and waggle
Your web-like toes.

WILLA

(Following with the head and nose part.) I'm afraid I don't have web-like toes.

LEROY

Oh my goodness gracious me alive. Would you look at that. Sister Willa doesn't have any toes atall.

WILLA

Yes I do.

MELODY

I know toes, and I don't see anything but ... oh, maybe one big toe.

WILLA

I have on shoes.

LEROY

Oh. (Dragging it out.) Shoes.

WAYNE

Shoes, of course.

MELODY

And, just what are shoes?

LEROY

I don't care what they are. Just as long as she can wiggle them, she can do the salute. Let's sing her the rules song now.

WAYNE

Okay, Brother Leroy. Sister Melody. Line up.

MELODY

Don't forget to salute first.

(They line up.)

WAYNE

Salute. (They salute.) Let's hit it.

MUSKRAT SONG

Rule number one (Rule one)
Is always have fun (fun, fun)
Sing and dance every night and day.
That's the muskrat way.

Rule Number Two (Rule two)
Whatever you do
No matter what they tell you when you go to school,
Don't build your home out of paste or glue.

Sing and dance
When you get the chance,
Swim in the water, yeah!
With the fish and the plants.

Rule Number Three (Rule three)
Is plain to see (See, see)
Make yourself as happy as you can be
Have a great big family.

Sing and dance
When you get the chance,
Swim in the water, yeah!
With the fish and the plants.

Rule Number Four (Rule four)
 You can't ignore (Ignore)
 Cause you never know what nature may have in store,
 So don't make friends
 With a dinosaur.

(Refrain)

Rule Number Five
 Is stay alive,
 Sing and dance and you will survive
 But watch the water before you dive.

(Refrain)

(Refrain)

With the fish and the plants
 Just sing and dance!

(They are excited from the activity.)

LEROY

Wooooooooooooo. I am a party animal.

WAYNE`

Let's shake on down to the lodge.

MELODY

We'll have some cattail grits and crawfish gravy.

WILLA

And that's where your treasure is?

LEROY

Oh yeah. We got treasure pleasure at the Lodge for sure. You just jump in the water and swim up through the plunge hole.

WILLA

Plunge hole?

,

WAYNE

You can't have a lodge without a plunge hole.

MELODY

We couldn't very well have doors and windows or the minks would come right in and bite us on the neck. So we build our lodge on a little piece of land that sticks out into the water and then we have a secret entrance from the water.

WILLA

So I'd have to swim underwater to get there.

LEROY

Yeah man. Isn't that great?

WILLA

But I don't have a swim suit.

WAYNE

Swim suit? The suit you're born with is all the suit you need, Sister Willa.

WILLA

It's not that way with humans.

MELODY

You poor things. You can't go swimming any time you feel like it?

WILLA

(Shaking her head.) I guess I won't be going to the lodge after all.

LEROY

Shucks.

WAYNE

Sorry we're gonna have to leave you, Sister Willa, but I gotta be off now. You know the rules.
(He leaves.)

WILLA

The rules. Sing and dance and all that.

MELODY

If you ever want to come see us, you know where we are. Just give us a "Yoo Hoo."

WILLA

Can I have one last salute?

MELODY

Touch your head.

WILLA

And the tip of your nose.

LEROY

Then wiggle and waggle your web-like toes.

WILLA

I'll miss you.

MELODY

We'll miss you too. (They begin to leave.)

LEROY

Don't forget you're our sister.

WILLA

I won't. I'll never forget.

(The muskrats scamper off.)

WILLA

Golly. I never knew there were so many neat creatures in the wetland. I bet I never meet this many interesting guys again if I live to be a hundred years old. Of course I still haven't found the treasure or even the Blue Heron. The shrimp said he was everywhere, but I sure haven't seen him.

(She hears the sound of a bulldozer roaring.)

There's the Great Sound again. Oh I hope it's not going to destroy the muskrat lodge. I wonder what in the world can make that much noise. I can't see anything. I hear it over there. No maybe it's over there. I think maybe it's all around me.

(She is moving from place to place and bumps into the blue heron at the end of one of the aisles. He is carrying a cane. The sound subsides.)

WILLA

Oh. I beg your pardon. I didn't see you there.

BLUE HERON

I saw you. I see everything. That's my job. To stand and watch.

WILLA

Don't you have to go looking for food?

BLUE HERON

No. I just stand and food comes to me. Particularly water snakes. I'm quite fond of water snakes.

WILLA

Could you be ... maybe ... just perhaps ... the Blue Heron.

BLUE HERON

Actually my full name is the Great Blue Heron, but you can call me Blue Heron.

WILLA

I've been searching for you ever since I entered the wetland. The pink shrimp told me you could lead me to the treasure if anyone could.

BLUE HERON

Treasure. Yes. It's true. I know everything about treasure.

WILLA

I came here looking for gold and silver, but I think I've learned what the real treasure is. Everyone I met was a jewel. Except maybe Gladys Blue Crab. But even she was a jewel of a sort.

BLUE HERON

People would say so.

WILLA

I thought the wetland was a creepy place before I came here, but it's really so interesting.

BLUE HERON

It's more than that. It's the place where life begins. You eat a fish, that ate an bug, that ate an algae that lives right here. And without the algae, you would never have the fish.

(The Great Sound begins again.)

WILLA

There it is again. The Great Sound. Do you know what it is?

BLUE HERON

Yes. It's the sound that means the end of our homes.

WILLA

The end! That's what I heard but what does it mean?

BLUE HERON

It's the sound that machines make when they fill up the wetland with dirt so there's no more water for the creatures to live in. No water for the plants to grow in. No more home for us. When it's gone it's gone.

WILLA

What will happen to the friends I've met?

BLUE HERON

They'll have to find new homes.

WILLA

But someone could put the water back. That would make everything all right.

BLUE HERON

When it's gone, it's gone.

WILLA

Oh no. But it's all still here now.

BLUE HERON

That's true.

WILLA

Then we can save it.

BLUE HERON

That's possible.

WILLA

So what can I do?

BLUE HERON

Let people know you love the wetland.

WILLA

That's it?

BLUE HERON

If enough people love the wetland, no one will hurt it.

WILLA

Are you sure about this?

BLUE HERON

Tell me, who knows your home better than you do?

WILLA

Nobody.

BLUE HERON

So. You know your home, and I know mine.

WILLA

I've got to go home right away and tell my family about everything I saw.

BLUE HERON

You can tell them, but most of the time, people have to learn for themselves.

WILLA

Okay. I can bring them here. And we can see everything together. And we can tell lots of other people to come.

BLUE HERON

You don't want to overdo it. Let them come a few at a time.

WILLA

I hope Mom and Dad can meet the muskrats and Wild Rice, and you too. (As she says this, Melody Muskrat and Wild Rice return.)

BE A FRIEND OF THE WETLANDS

Go to your Mother and Father
 (Go to my mother and father)
 Tell them of all the treasures you found
 (Tell them of all the treasures I found)
 Promise that you'll come back later
 (I'll come back later, I promise)
 Be a friend of the wetlands now.
 (I'm a friend of the wetlands now.)

(Over the sound of do/do/do)

BLUE HERON

You can tell them, but most of the time, people have to learn for themselves.

WILLA

Okay. I can bring them here. And we can see everything together. And we can tell lots of other people to come.

BLUE HERON

You don't want to overdo it. Let them come a few at a time.

WILLA

I hope Mom and Dad can meet the muskrats, and Wild Rice, and you too.

Time is running out,
 The clock is ticking by,
 (You gotta save the wetlands)
 Together we can work it out,
 We can try.
 (You gotta save the wetlands.)

Where the wild rice grows
 The muskrats dance
 The pink shrimp sing their song
 And the crabs complain
 That there's too much rain
 But they always get along. (do do do)

CHORUS

Life begins
 In this place of wonder
 Magical things abound (magical things abound)
 Let your song
 Be the whispering thunder
 Tell everyone you see
 That the wetlands are for you and me
 The wetlands are for you and me.

Sing and dance when you get the chance
 Like a muskrat
 (You gotta save the wetlands)
 Wild Rice rapping, feet are tapping
 And the crabs are clapping
 (Save the wetlands)
 You and you and you and you
 You know what you must do
 Tell your parents, friends and teachers
 Of the treasures that are true. (do do do)

CHORUS

Life begins
 In this place of wonder
 Magical things abound (magical things abound)
 Let your song
 Be the whispering thunder
 Tell everyone you see
 That the wetlands are for you and me
 The wetlands are for you and me.

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The wetlands are for you and me.
 The wetlands are for you and me.
 The wetlands are for you and me.

WILLA IN WETLANDS*, Peyton Lewis and Rory Chalcraft. National Children's Theatre for the Environment; Washington, D.C.; 1991; 28 p.; pre-kindergarten to grade 2 to view play and grades 3 to 5 for viewing and reading; E

Summary: A very creative, funny and engaging play, with catch, upbeat songs. Includes players, Willa the student, Sherman and Shirley the pink Shrimp, Johnny Rockfish with sunglasses, Wild Rice, Blue Heron and many other treasures in the wetland. Begins with Willa announcing her decision to go to the wetland because her teacher had mentioned to her that day "there was a treasure in the wetland" and she's going to look for it until she finds it, but soon discovers:

"looking for a treasure in a swamp or marsh is a hard job. I see nothing that looks the least bit priceless."

Discovering that treasures she finds were not what she expected, her search leads her to a Bald Eagle, the Muskrat lodge, the fiddling Fiddler Crabs and many more. Willa continues:

"I came here looking for gold and silver but I think I've learned what the real treasure is. Everyone I met was a jewel."

Comment: As play continues, Willa and the audience become aware of the impending threat of the constant "Great Sound" of development in the background to the homes of Willa's new friends in the wetlands. *Willa in Wetlands* does more than highlight the priceless treasures of wetlands as it presents realistically the real threats to wetlands and offers practicable ways children might help in reducing the loss by sharing wetlands and their treasures with others.

Copies of *Willa in Wetlands* are available at no charge from the Wetlands Information Hotline. Call toll free 1-800-528-7828. Accompanying teacher's guide also available.