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The Chastening & And Jack Fell Down

**Two one-act dramas
by
Richard Weaver**

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(THE CHASTENING & AND JACK FELL DOWN)

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ABOUT THE PLAY

Here are two plays which offer directors and actors much opportunity for experimentation.

"And Jack Fell Down" is about two puppets, Jack and Jill. Jack resents the master hand which controls his every movement, and he wants to break free. Jill believes that without the guidance and support of the puppeteer, they would die. The play may be done by three performers; the sounds of the unseen crowd in the background may be taped sound effects. Or, to increase the size of the cast, the crowd noises may be made by live actors.

"The Chastening" takes place in one brief twinge of memory—that fleeting moment when one catches the whole panorama of his life flashing through his mind. At a climactic moment in his life George remembers the way he was reared by his father—and the way he reared his own son. His father was strict, stern, demanding that George follow the family rules to the letter. As often happens, George treats his own son diametrically opposite, allowing him complete freedom. Which is the best way to bring up a child?

These impressive plays are recommended for all groups and all ages.

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The author, Richard A. Weaver, is a native of Okmulgee, Oklahoma. He received a bachelor of fine arts in drama and a master of fine arts in technical theatre from the University of Oklahoma and a Ph. D. in theatre administration from the University of Missouri. His skill and interest in technical theatre are evident in the two plays presented here. At the time these plays were published he was director of theatre at Texas Tech University.

"The Chastening" was given a special commendation for excellence in writing by the Texas Educational Theatre Association.

AND JACK FELL DOWN

Cast of Characters

JACK. A boy clown puppet, dressed in a *commedia* costume, his face is painted in a perpetual smile. His unblinking eyes reveal a sadness his painted mouth belies. His costume is white with patches of blue.

JILL. A girl clown puppet whose painted face resembles a china doll. She is dressed in white with festoons of pink and blue. Her beautiful mouth is frozen in a half-pout, half-smile.

PROFESSOR BRIZZARO. A mustached, gaudily dressed man who resembles a gypsy from a period other than the present one. His clothing is bright but soiled. He wears a head scarf with an earring in one ear.

VARIOUS VOICES from the blackness



*... and Jack fell down
and broke his crown
... and Jill
came tumbling after.*

*and the hurt
was
very
very
real*

AND JACK FELL DOWN

The entire action of the play takes place within a large puppet stage set up in the center of your regular stage. The atmosphere of the puppet stage is one of carnival. Although the lights on the puppet stage are bright and colorful, inky blackness surrounds it. Located at various points in the blackness are invisible speakers who will create the impression of an unseen audience for the puppet show. Above the curtain of the puppet stage, a large sign painted on scrim proclaims "Professor Brizzaro's World Famous Puppets." Smaller letters explain "The only man in the world capable of controlling multiple puppets." Use of scrim for the sign allows the professor to be seen intermittently during the course of the play. Behind the curtain of the puppet theatre, the stage is set for the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet. A low balcony, a bench, and a trellis make up this scene. Above the puppet scenery a low railing hides the professor's knees as he stands on the platform to manipulate the puppets. From two control sticks held by the professor, elastic strings create the illusion that he is actually controlling the puppets.

[To begin the play, PROFESSOR BRIZZARO steps forward and speaks as his own barker. He is a gaudily dressed man wearing a head scarf, an earring in one ear, and a sinister mustache. He resembles a gypsy from some other time.]

PROFESSOR. Ladies and gentlemen, may I direct your attention please to the midway where, for your edification, entertainment *and* delight, we are pleased and privileged to

present for your amusement, the one, the only, Professor Brizzaro's humanistic puppets. Professor Brizzaro has been brought to our midway at great expense and sacrifice for your pleasure tonight. Step right up, ladies and gentlemen. For the price of cotton candy you can actually see Professor Brizzaro, single-handedly and without assistance, control not one but *two* puppets. Yes! I said alone and without assistance, he will create before your eyes an entire play using only wooden and painted puppets which he will so cleverly manipulate they will appear to come to life before your very eyes. Step right up, ladies. Step right up, gentlemen. The show is about to begin.

[The sound of a crowd gathering and murmuring is heard in the blackness around the stage as the PROFESSOR steps through the curtain. As the unseen crowd is gathering, the curtain abruptly jerks open revealing two puppets sprawled lifeless before a setting for the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet. JACK is a boy clown puppet dressed in a commedia costume. His face is painted in a perpetual smile but his unblinking eyes reveal a sadness his mouth belies. JILL is also sprawled out of place for the drama about to unfold. She is a girl clown puppet whose painted face resembles a china doll. She is dressed in white with ribbons of pink and blue. Her beautiful mouth is frozen in a half-pout, half-smile. JACK abruptly jerks his head up and looks around at the unseen audience.]

JACK. Oh! Hello there. I'm afraid the curtain puller has caught us napping. We were very tired from the last show we did just half an hour ago. I see some of you have come back to see us again. Jill and I like that. *[He begins to jerk himself into a standing position. His back jerks up until his feet are beneath him; then his torso jerks erect. Finally, he brings his hands into play. His movements are jerky and spasmodic like a puppet whose puppeteer is out of control.]*

You will find this show better in some ways. Perhaps, in some ways, you will find it not so good. You see, our handler, Professor Brizzaro—*[He cups his hand to the side of his face in an exaggerated aside.]*—has had too much wine to drink since the last show. So Jill and I should be more relaxed and able to do a better show. On the other hand, we might have less control. *[He staggers, as though drunk, over to Jill and begins to wake her.]* Now, let me wake up Jill. I don't know why I am staggering like this. I didn't get into the wine flask. Professor did. *[He yanks up Jill's head string.]* Wake up, Jill. It's time to perform again. Professor has some more customers so we must do another show. *[JILL looks around at the audience unblinkingly.]* Isn't she beautiful? Well, if you were a puppet, you'd think so. She's the most beautiful girl in my life. I think she's the most beautiful creature in the world. She is beautiful. She is warm and kind . . . and loving. Come on, Jill. It's time to do another show.

JILL. *[Her smiling face belies her voice as she complains.]* Do I have to? It seems we just finished *Romeo and Juliet*. I was so tired after dying. *[Her head wobbles.]* I don't know why I feel so dizzy. My head is wobbling.

JACK. You feel dizzy because Professor has been nipping at the wine flask. I'll help you up. Come on, get up now. *[He tries to help her to her feet. He tries lifting her by her strings. This produces no effect. He tries lifting her by the hand but becomes entangled in her strings.]* Professor! Can you help me get her up?

[The strings grow taut and JILL jerks to her feet immediately. She is alive and pert instantly.]

JILL. How's that, ladies and gentlemen? You now see that Professor Brizzaro is the only man in the world that can control not one, *[She holds up one hand.]* but two *[She holds up both hands.]* puppets at the same time.

[Murmured sounds of applause and astonishment from the blackness. Both puppets bow loosely from the waist.]

JACK. And now, ladies and gentlemen, on with our show!

[The light comes up behind the scrim sign and the professor is seen as a sinister dark figure above the two puppets.]

JACK. Only what show shall we do, Jill? Some of the people here were at the last show and saw us do our *Romeo and Juliet*.

JILL. Let's do it again. It is our best scene. I die so beautifully. *[She steps toward the audience.]* Would you like to see me die beautifully? *[Murmurs of assent from the blackness]*

JACK. I think we should play the balcony scene. I think that is our best scene. And besides, since the professor forgot to change the scenery, we are all set up to do the balcony scene. *[Murmurs of laughter from the blackness]*

JILL. We could do the last scene just as well. The scenery doesn't matter anyway. It's the beauty of expression that makes the scene lovely. And I die so beautifully.

JACK. *[Disturbed]* Well, yes, you do, Jill. But we should play the scene we have the scenery for. We'll get around to the dying soon enough.

JILL. Why? Why do we have to play one scene just because there is some silly cardboard scenery behind us?

JACK. Because that's the way it is. We have our work to do. We have to do it right. We have to play the scenes in the right order.

JILL. Who says so?

JACK. *[Scratches his head]* I don't know.

JILL. Then how do you know that's the way it is? How do you know that's the way we have to play the scene? Why can't we play the dying scene first and then the rest of the play?

JACK. *[He is confused.]* Well . . . just because . . .

JILL. Who told you we had to always start at the beginning?

JACK. I don't know.

JILL. Then you just made it up to keep me from getting to play the scene I look best in.

JACK. No, I didn't. I really think we are supposed to start at the beginning and play the scenes in order, from the first to the last.

JILL. But you don't know who told you that?

JACK. No.

JILL. Then it isn't a rule at all, is it? If you don't even know who told you something, it can't be a *real* rule, can it?

JACK. I guess not.

JILL. Then let's play the dying scene.

JACK. [*Uncertain*] Well.

JILL. [*Sidles up to him coyly*] You do want me to be happy, don't you?

JACK. Of course.

JILL. Then can we play the death scene first?

JACK. Well, okay. We'll play the dying scene first. Shall we start where I kiss you and die?

JILL. No, you don't die very well.

JACK. I don't die well?

JILL. Not so well as I. We'll start where I waken and find you already dead. [*She pushes him into the garden bench. She stretches herself out gracefully on the floor. She then rouses herself as a very dramatic Juliet. She yawns heavily.*]

"O, where is my Lord?

I do remember well where I should be

And there I am, where is my Romeo?"

[*She rises and crosses to Jack.*]

"What's here?"

[*She looks up at the professor who drops a golden goblet into her hands.*]

"A cup clos'd in my true love's hand!"

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THE CHASTENING

THE CHASTENING

Cast of Characters

DAD. A middle-aged man dressed in black work clothes. He has always been a stern disciplinarian

GEORGE. At the moment of the play he is forty years old. George appears dressed in black casual clothes of the present time.

TIM. George's son is dressed in black pants and shirt. He appears at various ages from eight to twenty years old as the shifting scenes demand.



THE CHASTENING

[The action of the play takes place in George's mind. The entire time covered in the play represents one of those brief twinges of memory that occur when painfully ruminating through an old scrapbook.]

SETTING: A dim pool of light envelopes a black cube on an otherwise dark and empty stage. The lighting for the play is as murky as memories too painful to recall. Two fluctuating pools of light on either side of the stage illuminate those past moments still vivid in George's memory.

The curtain is open as the audience enters. When it is time for the play to begin, DAD enters. He is a middle-aged man dressed in black work clothes. He carries an enormous black belt with an oversized buckle. He takes his place sitting on the cube. After he is seated, GEORGE enters. GEORGE is a man of forty, not so strong willed as Dad. Whereas DAD and TIM know the roles they must play, GEORGE is confused and, at times, frightened. GEORGE is dressed in black casual clothes of the present period. He takes a position in the pool of light that has come up on Stage Left. When GEORGE is in place, TIM enters. He is George's twenty-year-old son. (TIM will appear later at younger ages.) He is dressed in simple black pants and shirt. TIM assumes a position in the pool of light on Stage Right. As the lights dim in the auditorium, DAD stands, sighs deeply and the play begins.]

DAD. *[Sighs]* All right. Come here, George. Let's get this over with.

GEORGE. *[Turns to him and becomes a hesitant boy]*
Do we have to?

DAD. We do. Come here, boy.

GEORGE. *[Obeys]* Yes, sir.

DAD. Now, boy. You know why we have to do this?

GEORGE. Aw, Dad!

DAD. Boy! Why am I whipping you?

GEORGE. Please. Dad!

DAD. Answer me! Why am I whipping you?

GEORGE. *[Confused]* I . . . don't know. I can't . . . remember.

DAD. Boy!

GEORGE. I . . . can't. I remember what you used to spank me for. But . . . now . . . I don't know.

DAD. Well, boy. Refresh your memory a bit. Why have I always had to whip you?

GEORGE. You spanked me for . . . keeping some of the change from the grocery money. *[More steadily as it comes to him]* You spanked me for coming home late from school. You spanked me for skipping Sunday School. You spanked me . . .

DAD. Those reasons are only skin deep, boy! Why did I *really* have to whip you?

GEORGE. *[Reciting from dim memory]* You had to spank me for behaving . . . irresponsibly.

DAD. Good. And what must happen when we behave in an unreliable manner?

GEORGE. *[Has become a frightened, trapped animal. He looks for an escape.]* We . . . must . . . be punished. *[He clutches his father.]* Dad! What is this? What is happening? Where are you? Where am I?

DAD. *[Gently]* Easy now, George. We are . . . here. We have to stay here. *[More sternly as GEORGE grows calmer]* Now, boy, why must we be punished if we behave irresponsibly?

GEORGE. We must . . . we . . . must . . . be punished because . . . because we *must* learn . . . responsibility. *[Panic again]* Dad! What are you doing here? What am I doing here?

DAD. *[Coldly]* If we must behave in a responsible manner . . . then why don't you do it? . . . Now!

GEORGE. Yes. Yes, sir. *[DAD places the huge belt in George's hand. GEORGE looks at the belt blankly as he confusedly assumes the role of a father.]* Tim. Tim! Come here. Let's get this . . . over with.

TIM. *[Comes to George hesitantly]* Do we have to, Dad?

GEORGE. Why, uh . . . yes . . . we do. Now, Tim. You know . . . why we have to do this.

TIM. *[More sure of his role than George]* Aw, Dad!

GEORGE. Tim! Tell me. Why? Why am I spanking you?

TIM. Please, Dad.

GEORGE. *[Insistently]* Answer me, Tim. Why am I spanking you?

TIM. *[Knows his part]* You are spanking me because I stayed out too late last night. You are spanking me because I brought the car home with a dent in the left front fender. You are spanking me because I had the smell of liquor on my breath. You are spanking me because I was in the closet with the little neighbor girl naked. You are spanking me because I made a bad grade in fifth grade arithmetic. You are spanking me for wetting the bed because I was too afraid to get up in the middle of the night and go to the bathroom. You are spanking me because . . .

GEORGE. Those are the *superficial* reasons! Why am I really spanking you?

TIM. *[Coldly]* You know why you have to beat me.

GEORGE. You have to . . . say it! When we behave irresponsibly, we must be punished. Why?

TIM. The *real* reason you have to beat me is because you failed. You failed as a father. You failed as a human being.

DAD. *[GEORGE turns to Dad.]* Boy! Come here. *[He takes the belt from him as the light on Tim fades out.]* Now you are saying we must be punished when we behave irresponsibly. Why is that, boy? Why is that?

GEORGE. *[Searching his memory]* Because . . . in life . . . there is no place for people who are not . . . trustworthy. *[Pause]* I must learn to be responsible. Dad! What? What did I do?

DAD. *[Losing his patience]* You know damn well what you did. You know how you behaved irresponsibly. You know how you betrayed your trust.

TIM. *[The light comes up on TIM, who has become a boy of eight.]* Hey, Dad! Tonight's the night for Papoose meeting. Can we go?

GEORGE. *[Enters the scene immediately twelve years younger]* You bet, scout! Hey! You've got your feather on. Where's mine?

TIM. *[Hands George an imaginary feather head band]* I brought it.

GEORGE. *[Places the head band on his head. The two of them go through the elaborate ritual of greeting of the Papoose Tribe. The ritual ends with an elaborate secret handshake. They sit facing each other Indian style.]* I am Red Cloud. I float over hill and meadow seeing all.

TIM. I am Pink Cloud. Papoose of Red Cloud. I float over hill and meadow seeing all. *[They both laugh.]* Tonight we plan the camp-out. That'll be great.

GEORGE. *[Uncomfortable]* Tim, I mean, Pink Cloud. There's something I've meant to tell you. *[Pause]* My boss has asked me to swing down through the southern end of my territory this week and—

TIM. *[Frightened]* Yes?

GEORGE. Well, I may not . . . be back . . . for the camp-out.

TIM. *[His worst fears realized]* We don't get to go?

GEORGE. Now it's not so bad as all that. I'll tell you what. I'll ask Hank . . . I mean Black Eagle to take you with him and Grey Eagle. How's that?

TIM. The tribe won't allow it. You know the rules—no papooses without their dads.

GEORGE. Well—maybe we could take a trip together—just the two of us.

TIM. That's not the same! You promised! You said we could do all the tribal things together.

GEORGE. Son! Try to understand. I can't help it! *[Desperate for a way out of the situation]* We'll go camping together, just the two of us.

TIM. *[Rises and walks away. He is a twenty-year-old again.]* We never did though—did we, Dad?

[The light fades on him.]

GEORGE. No. *[Pause]* We never did. It seems things got in the way.

DAD. You *let* things get in the way.

GEORGE. No! I couldn't help it! It was important that I was out of town that week. I couldn't help it.

DAD. There were other times too. Remember!

TIM. *[The light comes up on TIM, now a boy of ten with an imaginary ball and glove.]* Hey, Dad! Got time to play a little catch?

GEORGE. *[Begins work on an imaginary television set]* Just a second, scout. I've got to get this damned tuner adjusted.

TIM. How long will that take?

GEORGE. Not long. Let's see . . . the points . . .

TIM. Tomorrow the coach is going to have tryouts for pitcher. He says we all get to try out.

GEORGE. Oh, yeah? This should make contact . . . right back there.

TIM. Coach says he's going to choose the three best. He says the most important thing is accuracy. Said if we'd practice up today for accuracy, we'd do better tomorrow.

GEORGE. Hm. Can't see why that isn't working.

TIM. I thought, if you'd catch for me, I could really get good by tomorrow.

GEORGE. Yeah, yeah. Hold on, son. I have to get this working so we can catch the game tomorrow.