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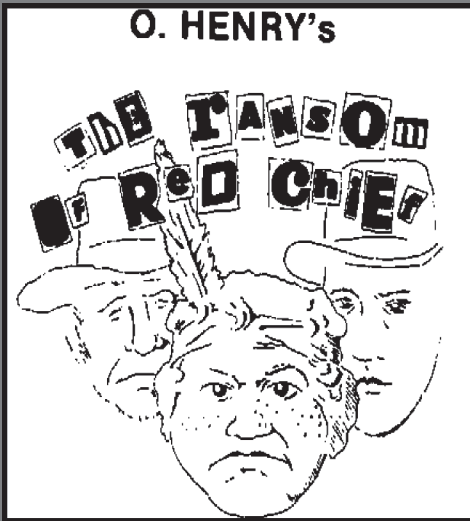
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Family Plays

O. Henry's
The Ransom of Red Chief

A Comedy for Children of all Ages

Original Script by Brian Kral



THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF, a comedy for children of all ages. This original script by Brian Kral is a fresh adaptation of the hilarious O. Henry classic, set in the turn-of-the-twentieth century West. Originally produced by the Rainbow Company of Las Vegas.

Summary: This winning story captures all the charm and exaggerated comedy of O. Henry's classic about two bungling kidnapers who fall prey to their young "victim," who turns-the-tables on their plan. Armed with the latest inventions of a rapidly-changing America in the early twentieth century, the kidnapers attempt to make their fortunes by holding for ransom "a two-legged sky-rocket named Johnny Dorset" —who insists he's an Indian chief. The outcome is a side-splitting combination of historical culture and entertaining fancy as the would-be kidnapers learn that with little Red Chief, their crime adventure doesn't pay! Code: R90.

CAST: 3 (2 M, 1 B)

SETTING: OPEN STAGE: A CAVE IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

COSTUMES: WESTERN AMERICAN COSTUMES OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

SUGGESTED AUDIENCE: YOUTH AND TEENS

PLAYWRIGHT: BRIAN KRAL

Brian Kral is a director, playwright and theatre educator in Las Vegas. The author of more than twenty plays, his scripts have been published primarily with Anchorage Press, but have also appeared in the anthologies LUCKY 13 and WEST COAST PLAYS, as well as in Dramatics Magazine. Kral is a past recipient of the Chorpensing Cup, presented by the American Alliance for Theatre & Education for "a body of work of national significance," and he received the Governors Arts Award for his contribution to Literature in the state of Nevada. His PAPER LANTERNS, PAPER CRANES, about the bombing of Hiroshima, was selected as a winner of the IUPUI/Bonderman Playwriting Competition, and was honored with a Medallion Award from the American Alliance of Theatre & Education in 2003 as "the best new published play in the United States." Since the debut of THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF in 1978, Kral has enjoyed an unprecedented ongoing relationship as playwright in residence with the Rainbow Company Youth Theatre, where a majority of his plays have had their premiere productions, culminating in 2010 with the presentation of THE ZOMBIES WALK AMONG US, a play about voodoo and grief, set in post-earthquake Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Brian Kral plays published by Anchorage Press Plays: *Apologies*, *East of the Sun West of the Moon*, *One to Grow On*, *The Ransom of Red Chief*, *Paper Lanterns*, *Paper Cranes*, *Special Class*, and *Troubled Waters*. (2010)

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The Ransom of Red Chief

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An original play by Brian Kral
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IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

*To Jody Johnston, who put the play on its feet,
and Jerry Crawford, who made it walk to Louisiana.*

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The original production of THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF, an original play by Brian Kral, based on the short story by O. Henry, was premiered in Las Vegas, January 13-29, 1978, by the Rainbow Company* of the City of Las Vegas. Directed by Jody Johnston, the play was staged by the following artists of the Rainbow Company:

SAM PORTER
BILL DRISCOLL
JOHNNY DORSET

Brian Strom
Thomas Barr
Todd Phillips

Costume Designer
Scenic & Lighting Designer
Special Effects
Technical Crews & Ushers

Gretchen Spiess
Jody Johnston
William O. Schultz
Members of the Rainbow Company
Children's Ensemble

*The Rainbow Company, housed in the Reed Whipple Center of Las Vegas, provides a full spectrum of theater experiences for youth, under the sponsorship of the City of Las Vegas Department of Cultural Services. Each year there is a complete season of live performances, creative dramatics instruction, and extensive touring by the Rainbow Company. There is a Rainbow Company Children's Ensemble, a group of twenty youngsters ranging in age from 7 to 17, selected from more than 400 children attending creative dramatics classes. In addition to acting in Rainbow Company productions, the Children's Ensemble members work backstage in all technical aspects of theatre.

The play was written while the author was employed as an Artist-In-Residence under the nationally funded CETA Program.

SETTING

TIME: The turn-of-the-twentieth-century

PLACE: A cave in the American Southwest

CHARACTERS: Sam Porter, Bill Driscoll, Johnny Dorset

Play Script Layout: revised 2010

Play Script Design: Randy Blevins, jrbdesign

THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF

An original play by Brian Krall
based on O. Henry's short story

SCENE ONE

(A cave in the turn-of-the-century American Southwest. There is one entrance in the foreground, leading outside the cave, and another in the back, leading to an inner cave. From within, a loud, violent sneeze is heard. Sam Porter enters, blowing his nose. When he sees the audience, he advances to them.)

SAM: *(Dressed in an old longcoat)* I don't care how long you're out here, you never get used to all this dus . . . dus . . . dust! *(He sneezes again, as bad as the first.)* You see, I'm not by nature an inhabitant of the desert. That's just the card Fate dealt me. Actually, I was Eastern born and bred, having spent the early years of my life strutting down that long, Broad Way. *(He illustrates his "Broadway Strut." It ends in a fit of laughter.)* Yes, sir, from my first nibble on the high-class style of the Higher Class, I developed a real taste for the better things in life. How, then, you might ask, did this fine and elegant gentleman wind up in such a disreputable state of unrepair in the Great Southwestern United States? Well, it's a long story— but one well worth the listening if you've got the time and the inclination. So, if you haven't got any pressing engagements, I will try to describe to you in all his glory— a skyrocket that somehow managed to pass for a little boy. He had a shock of bright red hair that looked like nothing more than a tangled mop that's been used to paint a barn door, and more freckles than the sky has stars! His name was Johnny Dorset. And it all started right here in this old cave...

(As Sam leaves, there is a cry of pain from the inner cave. Bill Driscoll enters, hopping on one leg and holding the shin of his other, continuing to Oh-oh-oh his agony. He is dressed shabbily, wearing overalls and a wool shirt with its sleeves rolled up to reveal red underwear. From behind a boulder, he drags a large supply bundle and begins to rummage through the contents.)

BILL: *(To himself)* He's going to get it now! Nobody puts the boot to Billy Driscoll and gets away with it! *(He pulls out a large wooden mallet; waving it in the air and shouting, he charges into the entrance of the inner cave.)* You little monkey! I'll give you what for!

(He rushes in. There is a loud crash like pottery being smashed. Bill reenters, the mallet hanging limp in one hand. The other hand holds his head. He walks directly to his bag, and takes out a shaving-mirror to examine his head. He lets out a long, frustrated moan. Sam runs in from outside, carrying an old-fashioned record-player. Bill is again ransacking his bag.)

SAM: What is going on up here? I heard you all the way down the mountain! *(Sam appears younger, and is now well-dressed, wearing a vest and bowler hat.)* First you're shouting to wake the dead, and then I hear you bawling like a calf caught in barbed wire! I swear Bill, you keep this up, everybody between San Francisco and Denver, Colorado, will be able to tell old man Dorset where we stashed his kid! Don't you want that ransom?

BILL: *(Stops searching)* I don't care about the money. *(He pulls out a revolver.)* I'm going to kill that kid. *(He goes towards the inner cave, determined. Sam stops him.)*

SAM: Wait a minute! Now, what happened?

BILL: You remember that big water jug we gave him?

SAM: Uh-huh.

BILL: *(Leaning over to show his head)* Those pieces are all that's left of it. Out of my way, Sam!

SAM: *(Again stopping him)* Slow down, man! I've got a stake in this, too.

BILL: He's driving me crazy, Sam. You don't know what he's put me through this afternoon.

(From inside comes a loud war-whoop.)

BILL: You hear that? He's been on the warpath all morning. I'm telling you, Sam, he ain't like ordinary children, he's more like a wild animal.

SAM: You mean that?

(From inside can now be heard an improvised facsimile of an Indian dance.)

SAM: That's only make-believe.

BILL: (*Pointing to his head*) This wasn't!

SAM: You just don't understand children, Bill. Try playing with him. Become his friend. Then you won't have any trouble.

BILL: (*Weakening*) I don't know. . .

SAM: Look! Any adult can outsmart any child any day! And don't you forget it. (*He looks around.*) Do you think he's in there for awhile?

BILL: He ain't showed his face since we got here.

SAM: Good. Because I've got something I want to show you. (*He carries over the record player, which is concealed under a canvas cover.*) Something that's going to make your life a lot easier.

BILL: Yeah? What's that?

SAM: (*Unveiling it with a flourish*) A Talking Machine.

BILL: (*Stares at the wooden box with its hand-crank and tin funnel*) A what?

SAM: A Talking Machine! Compliments of Mr. Thomas Alva Edison.

BILL: Who?

SAM: Never mind, it's not important. Do you remember that picture of the floppy-eared dog listening to the tin funnel? (*He assumes a listening pose, hand to ear, next to the funnel.*) Well, this is it!

BILL: (*Completely confused*) This is what?

SAM: (*As though he hears something*) Shh! "His Master's Voice."

(*Sam again assumes the pose, then smiles at Bill, expecting recognition; Bill puts a hand on his shoulder.*)

BILL: Sam, I know you've been under quite a strain lately—

SAM: I have not!

BILL: —and it might be wise if you was to take it easy.

SAM: I have just introduced you to the Twentieth Century, and all

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you can say is, "take it easy?" Dogs to cats, man, this is the future sitting in front of you.

BILL: This thing's the future?

SAM: That's right.

BILL: (*Picking it up to examine it*) How do you figure this little wooden box with the crooked geegaw and a big tin funnel to be the future?

(*Sam liberates the record player, sets it down carefully.*)

SAM: (*Defeated, handing him a pamphlet*) Read the instructions.

BILL: I can't read!

SAM: I forgot—

BILL: You know I can't read!

SAM: Well, look at the pictures! (*Pause*) Aw, Bill, this won't do. We've got to work together on this thing, or it's not going to work at all.

BILL: I don't know what you expect from me. I never saw no tomfoolery like this talking machine. And besides, it ain't said a word since you brought it in here, so how'm I supposed to have any faith in it?

SAM: It's not called a "Talking Machine" because it talks. They call it that because. . .

BILL: Because?

SAM: It's a bit difficult to explain.

BILL: I'm listening.

SAM: Well, what you do is, you crank this up, see?

BILL: I'm with you so far.

SAM: And that sets this turntable into motion.

BILL: I can see that. Go on.

SAM: Then, you take your record—

BILL: (*Interrupting*) What's that?

SAM: (*Taking one from a box*) That's— this. It's called a record. It's kind of a plate.

BILL: (*Taking it from Sam to look at*) It ain't no kind of plate I'd want to eat off! You got a hole right in the middle, you'd lose all your gravy.

SAM: (*Exasperated*) It's not for eating your dinner off of! Give me that before your break it. You place this on your turntable . . .

(*Bill steps closer to see, but Sam stops him.*)

SAM: Very carefully . . . so you don't scratch your record.

BILL: Then what?

SAM: You lower this arm, and—

(*Loud scratching is heard.*)

BILL: What's it doing?

(*Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King" plays scratchily from the record player.*)

BILL: Well, I'll be. Where's that coming from?

SAM: The record goes 'round and 'round, and the music, it comes out here.

BILL: Well, I never heard nothing like that before.

SAM: That's what I've been trying to tell you. It's brand-spanking new.

BILL: (*Beginning to keep time with the music*) And you say your Mr. Edison invented this?

SAM: (*Consulting the pamphlet*) Actually, Edison got the first one going— what you'd call the prototype of this model here.

BILL: (*Beginning to dance in place*) Prototype? I wouldn't call it that.