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Dramatic Publishing

THE CHEST OF DREAMS

by

Max Bush



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(THE CHEST OF DREAMS)

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THE CHEST OF DREAMS

A Play in One Act
For Three Men and Four Women

CHARACTERS

LILY a seven-year-old girl
JUNE her mother
GYPSY GHOST a ghost
KARKINO a hypnotist and a ghost
BUCKLEY a friend of Lily's
MEENA a friend of Lily's
DAVID a friend of Lily's

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Large room in an old house.

Playing time: Fifty-five minutes without intermission.

THE CHEST OF DREAMS received its initial touring production from The Perfect Circle Theatre Project of Holland, Michigan, opening in March of 1978, and playing seventy-five performances to 20,000 children, with the following cast:

LILY (AARON)	Dan Chichester
JUNE	Amy Nicholson
GYPSY GHOST	Debra Olsen
KARKINO	Matt Robison
BUCKLEY	Martin Ribiero
MEENA	Lianne Cohn
DAVID	Doug Ronan

Production designed and directed by Penelope Victor

to Penelope Victor

THE CHEST OF DREAMS

AT RISE: We see a large room in an old house. The walls have been painted in bright colors depicting various objects and scenes: Saturn, the Moon, a pirate ship, mountains, a large whale, the sun, a castle, a barn, stars, etc. Possibly manikins stand in front of the walls, dressed in various costumes. Boxes are strewn around the room—there is a dressing screen stage right. KAR-KINO THE HYPNOTIST is standing UC, motionless, his head down. He is dressed in fashionable pants, a Victorian, frilled shirt, and a long cape. All his clothes are white, except for red pleats in his cape. The Chest of Dreams is RC. It is large—four feet long, two-and-a-half feet wide, and three feet tall. A large lock hangs from the front hasp, and a sign saying “For Lily, the Chest of Dreams” is fastened to the chest, written in big letters so that the entire audience can read it. There are a minimum of two exits, one leading off R, the other leading off L.

During the opening scene, JUNE is especially warm to LILY. This is the first time LILY has been to Grandma Iris’ house since Iris died. Throughout the opening, JUNE is amused by LILY, laughing at her, encouraging her play, even playing with her. Grandma Iris was JUNE’s mother.

GYPSY (*music cue 1*).

I can hear you,
I can feel you.
Grandmother's wise child,
Our spirit will rise, child.
For Lily will see me,
For Lily will hear me...

LILY (*off*). What room is this?

JUNE (*off*). Wait for me.

LILY (*off*). What's in here?

JUNE (*off*). It's a surprise room.

LILY (*off*). Why is it a surprise?

JUNE (*off*). Slow down, Lily, I'm coming.

(LILY bursts into the room. She stops, sees the nature of the room, the walls.)

LILY. What kind of room is this?

(JUNE is entering.)

JUNE. Grandmother said that we had to leave everything just like it was—until you changed it—because this is *your playroom!*

LILY. My room?!

JUNE. She said so in her will.

LILY. My playroom! *(She runs, does a cartwheel, falls, laughs, behind chest.)* Hey, look out for the giant grizzly bear! *(She crawls onto chest as a giant, growling grizzly bear.)* Food! Food! *(She growls, looks behind chest.)* Salmon! *(She growls and jumps behind chest, suddenly reappearing and pretending the chest is a soda bar. In a Spanish accent.)* Hey, Barkeep, I'd like

some grape pop —and some Mexican Jumping Beans. *(She mimes taking a bag of jumping beans, and taking some of them out. They fall onto the chest; she chases them with her hands, trying to grab them as they jump around. She catches a few, puts them in her mouth; her head jumps, her trunk jumps, her arms, then her whole body. She grabs the grape pop, tries to drink it. Suddenly she stops, jumps on the chest and says to JUNE:)* Mom, get out of the water!

JUNE. Aye, aye, Captain! *(LILY steers the chest, which is now a ship, standing, facing L. JUNE swims over to the chest, sits on it, facing R.)*

LILY. Raise the mast, hoist the decks, woman those oars, row us on out of here! We got to get away from those pirates! *(LILY points to ship on the wall.)*

JUNE. Pirates, Mates! Row fer yer lives! *(JUNE begins to row frantically.)*

LILY. Here they come; faster!

JUNE. Faster, ye sea dogs, or we'll be shark bait! *(LILY turns, faces AUDIENCE.)*

LILY. There's another ship...*(She mimes looking through a spyglass.)* Oh no, it's the Prune People! *(She ducks.)* And they're shooting their pits at us. *(She gets hit.)* Ow! We're hit. Abandon ship!

JUNE. Into the sea, Mates! We're goin' down! *(LILY pulls JUNE up, pushes her off chest. JUNE holds her nose.)*

LILY. Save yourself, Mom! *(She holds her nose and jumps off chest. LILY looks at chest.)* What's this? What's in here?

JUNE. I don't know.

LILY *(looking at sign on chest, reading)*. "For Lily..." That's me. This chest has my name on it. *(Reading.)* "For Lily, The Chest of Dreams," it says. It's a present

from Grandmother! *(She pulls on it; it won't open.)*

Mom, help me open it.

JUNE. It's locked.

LILY. Where's the key?

JUNE. I don't know.

LILY. What's in it? Why is it so big? Why is it called The Chest of Dreams?

JUNE. I don't know, honey.

LILY. Grandma liked me, didn't she?

JUNE. You were her favorite grandchild. Oh, she loved you very much. She must have put something special in here.

LILY. A special present in a special room.

JUNE. For a special child.

LILY. Let's find the key.

JUNE. I'll look over here—

LILY. —and I'll look over here. *(The VOICE drifts into the room. LILY slowly hears it, turns around, looking to see where it's coming from. JUNE doesn't hear it. LILY is enchanted by it. Music cue I.)*

VOICE.

I can hear you,
I can feel you,
Grandmother's wise child,
Our spirit will rise, child.
For Lily will see me.
For Lily will hear me...

LILY *(speaking during song)*. What's that singing?

JUNE. What singing?

LILY. I heard it before, downstairs. *(Coming out of the spell, as singing stops.)* Is this house haunted?

JUNE. Why do you ask that?

LILY. Before she died, sometimes Grandma Iris would talk to people we couldn't see, and Buckley said that she was talking to ghosts.

JUNE. Well, if this house is haunted, I'm sure they're friendly ghosts.

LILY. Hey ghosts, it's me, Lily the Ghost Gobbler! This is my playroom! *(She gnashes her teeth.)* There's a ghost! *(She turns into something vicious, lunges, and gobbles an imaginary ghost.)*

(GYPSY GHOST enters, crosses to LILY. GYPSY GHOST is beautiful, and dressed just like a gypsy except that she is dressed all in white. LILY feels her presence, looks around and through GHOST, who is invisible to LILY and JUNE. From her response to seeing LILY, GYPSY GHOST obviously cares deeply for LILY.)

GYPSY. Lily...*(While LILY leans to carefully listen in the direction of GYPSY, GYPSY kisses her on the cheek. LILY feels it, is startled, looks around. GYPSY laughs; LILY feels the air around her.)*

JUNE *(who has watched LILY's strange behavior)*. What's the matter, Peppy?

LILY. I think a ghost just kissed me.

JUNE. Oh, Lily...

LILY. Hey, ghost, do that again. *(GYPSY does, LILY is startled, wheels around, paws the air.)*

JUNE. Are you all right? Does this house make you spooky now that Grandma is gone?

LILY. No.

JUNE. Why don't you call up your friends and invite them over to play in your new playroom.

LILY. I know, I'll call Buckley, Meena and David! *(She bolts out the door.)*

JUNE. "The Chest of Dreams"...What could Iris have put in here?

GYPSY. *Dreams... (She laughs.)* It's the Chest of Dreams.

JUNE. That key must be somewhere around here. *(She looks for key.)*

GYPSY *(taking out key—a large, golden key she wears in her belt)*. Here it is. *(She places it on the chest. JUNE continues to look around room, until she sees the music box. She picks it up. The music box is about a foot square, and four inches deep.)* Don't! Don't touch that! Can't you feel what's in there?

JUNE. I've never seen this before. *(She wipes away dust on the cover.)* "Do not open...Karkino sleeps."

GYPSY. Do you understand?

JUNE. Karkino...I wonder what that is.

GYPSY. *That is Karkino, the ghost of (Pointing at him.)* Karkino the Hypnotist.

JUNE. "...sleep here, Karkino..." Maybe there's a doll or something inside. *(She tries to open music box.)*

GYPSY. Don't...here...*(She moves to chest, hits it near the key.)* Here is the key to the Chest of Dreams. I'll help you. See the key...see the key...see the key... *(GYPSY continues to chant; it becomes a definite rhythm, which moves JUNE. JUNE moves to rhythm, which GYPSY turns into a rumba. GYPSY sings chant, JUNE sings chant to a rumba beat. They both dance and sing. GYPSY stops, JUNE continues. Suddenly JUNE stops.)*

JUNE. See the key? *(JUNE looks around, puzzled.)* See the key...that's what I was singing...June, you silly crow, dancing around like a little monkey. *(JUNE returns to chest, where she laid music box, and sees the*

key.) What's this? A key? (*She picks it up.*) But it wasn't there before. Who could have put it there?

GYPSY. The Gypsy Ghost.

JUNE. I wonder if it opens this box. (*She tries it.*)

GYPSY. No.

JUNE. No.

GYPSY. The chest.

JUNE. The chest?

GYPSY. Yes.

JUNE. Yes. (*She opens chest lock.*) Now, Iris, we'll just see what secrets you gave Lily. (*She opens it, looks in.*)

There's nothing in it.

GYPSY. Nothing?

JUNE. Nothing. Poor—

GYPSY. June.

JUNE. Iris. (*The chest obviously has a great deal in it; JUNE isn't able to "see" it. The chest is literally stuffed with costumes, masks, jewelry, shoes, a sword, etc.*)
Lily will be disappointed.

GYPSY. Lily-will-be-happy! She will sail around this world as a princess, as a hawk, as a captain, as a cloud! (*Beginning to exit, calling.*) Lily! Lily! The Chest of Dreams! Come, it's open, SEE! (*She exits L.*)

KARKINO (*his head down, in a hoarse whisper, inaudible at first*). Open the box, June, open the box. Open the box, June, open the box. Open the box, June, open the box. (*KARKINO continues in the same manner during the following.*)

JUNE (*not hearing him at first*). I wonder why Grandma Iris gave this room to Lily...it's a perfect living room. I could put my couch there, my table there, my television there—(*JUNE thinks she hears something, looks around.*) This house does have odd sounds. (*She dismisses it.*)

Maybe Lily wants to go. She acted so strange...*(She listens.)* I should find her and take her box...I mean home...take her home. Box...*(Says this to herself, in KARKINO's rhythm, in a small voice.)* Open the box. *(Beat.)* Open the box. *(She is becoming entranced. KARKINO is more audible, but still in a hoarse whisper. KARKINO and JUNE are now one voice.)* Open the box, yes, open the box. Open the box, yes, open the box. *(They both continue to say it in unison. JUNE picks up music box, touches the knob, it opens. She looks in. Silence.)*

KARKINO. Remove it. *(JUNE reaches in and takes out a large clock that is set into a piece of wood carved into the shape of an eye. The clock is the iris and pupil. It is on a satin band, so as to be worn around KARKINO's neck. JUNE puts down box. JUNE is entranced by the ticking. Now that the box has been opened, KARKINO's VOICE is stronger, and he lifts his head. His VOICE is still quiet, however, and his face is still expressionless.)*
Give it to me.

JUNE. Give it to me.

KARKINO. Give it to me, now.

JUNE. Give it to me, now.

KARKINO. Now—

JUNE. Now—

KARKINO. Now—

JUNE. Now—*(And so on, until she puts it around his neck. KARKINO takes a deep breath. JUNE turns, begins to walk away.)*

KARKINO. Stop. *(JUNE stops. KARKINO's VOICE is still hoarse and quiet. He holds out his hand, places it on JUNE's back, between her shoulders.)* Spirit, give me your strength. *(KARKINO takes another deep breath)*

as JUNE goes limp. Then he lowers his head as the GYPSY bursts into the room, stops, steps toward chest, sees the open music box, sees JUNE and KARKINO.)

GYPSY. The clock...*(She starts toward KARKINO, going slowly up to him, reaching out to take the clock. KARKINO explodes into life.)*

KARKINO. KARKINO LIVES! FREE! To haunt my own house *(He is stalking her.)* with new blood in it! New subjects, new slaves. I told you I wouldn't stay there forever. *(Suddenly remembering.)* The music box! *(They BOTH bolt for the music box, which is on the chest. GYPSY gets there first, picks it up, laughs, puts it behind her back.)* Give it to me, Gypsy.

GYPSY *(laughing proudly)*. Lily and I will put your clock back in the box. *(She bolts for the door.)*

KARKINO. No further. *(She can't go further in that direction, so she quickly moves R.)* Dark. There is no light. *(GYPSY cannot see. She feels her way, clutching the music box. KARKINO moves behind her and whispers in her ear.)* Karkino is near. *(He whispers in her other ear.)* Karkino is near. *(Again.)* Karkino is near. You...will...be...still. *(She stops moving.)*

GYPSY. I-won't-let-go. I-won't-let-go. *(She sings the following song, confidently. After the first line, KARKINO begins to chant, causing GYPSY's song to become fainter and fainter. The rhythms mesh together. Music cue II.)*

I am a gypsy bold and free
 I hear the songs inside of me.
 I can be anything I want to be.
 I am the Gypsy Ghost, now, and free;
 I am the Gypsy Ghost, now I'm free.
 I can be anyth—

KARKINO.

No...no...listen to me.

Time is mine, you are not free

You're mine, now, mine; no!

You will not sing, you will not grow. (*Beat.*)

Stop.

(*GYPSY stops singing. He moves to her, puts his hand on her spine.*) Spirit, give me your strength. (*He becomes stronger, she weaker, visibly.*) Thank you, Gypsy. I am free now, too. I will grow into this house and its new people like a fire. But first, I have to burn the music box. Let go...yes...let go. (*She does not let go. He grabs music box and pulls it.*) Let go! Ah! (*She holds on, he lets go, backs away. He speaks to himself.*) She is stronger now that Lily is here. (*He has an idea.*) Lily...yes...(He moves to her.) Relax, Gypsy Ghost. Everything is all right. It's Lily's birthday and the music box is a present—a present for Lily. See her? (*She opens her eyes.*) She is standing right in front of you. See how happy she is? (*GYPSY smiles.*) Give her the music box...yes...she wants it...Give it to her. (*She holds out the music box, KARKINO grabs for it, she pulls it away; again and again he goes for it, and each time she eludes his grasp, all the while standing in same place.*) Ah! Give it to me! (*We hear the CHILDREN coming.*) Lily...I'll wait for the best time, Gypsy, then I will take it from you both. (*He passes near JUNE as he exits and says.*) Awaken.

(*KARKINO exits as LILY, BUCKLEY, MEENA, and DAVID burst into the room.*)

LILY. It's a surprise room, my playroom!

BUCKLEY. Wow!

DAVID. Is it big!

MEENA. A playroom!

LILY. My Grandmother gave it to me!

MEENA. You're lucky!

LILY. Didn't she, Mom!

JUNE. Yes.

LILY. You see?

DAVID. All yours!

MEENA. A playroom!

BUCKLEY. Wow!

JUNE. I found the key.

LILY. To the chest?

JUNE. Yes.

LILY (*jumping on chest*). The chest I told you about, the Chest of Dreams!

BUCKLEY. What's in it?

LILY. Toys and thousands of dollars and an elevator and dolls and a new boyfriend and a ship and a guitar—

JUNE. Peppy, it's empty.

LILY. Empty?

JUNE. Yes...there's nothing in it.

LILY. Why's my name on it then?

JUNE. Maybe Grandmother was going to put something in it, but she forgot. I have to lie down for a while. You may stay here and play. Oh, Lily, I need to pick up some boxes from our old house later. Will you help?

LILY. Yes.

JUNE. Do you promise?

LILY. Yes.

JUNE. Okay. Have fun. (*She exits.*)

LILY (*disheartened, sitting on chest*). Old, crazy Iris. She was as crazy as a broken dump truck. (*MEENA laughs loudly.*)

DAVID (*the OTHER CHILDREN are very excited*). This sure is a big room.

MEENA. It's a playroom!

BUCKLEY. I wish I had a playroom this big.

MEENA. We could play anything here.

DAVID. Let's play something, then.

BUCKLEY. I know! I'll hide in the chest, and you try to find me.

MEENA. But we'll know where you are, then.

BUCKLEY. All right, *you* hide in the chest and I'll try to find *you!*

MEENA. What?

DAVID. Let's play *Call out!*

BUCKLEY. First—

DAVID. Second—

MEENA. Third—

LILY (*small voice*). Fourth.

BUCKLEY. I call out—Dinosaurs. (*They are ALL dinosaurs except LILY. She gradually joins. The dinosaurs should take the least time of all the call-out games; it is essentially an introduction to the game. Once LILY joins, DAVID calls out.*)

DAVID. I call out—Dancing Do-Do birds. (*They ALL become dancing Do-Do birds.*)

MEENA. I call out—Ugly Penguins! (*They ALL become ugly penguins, so ugly they cry out when they look at each other.*)

LILY. I call out—A rock-and-roll band! (*BUCKLEY plays the guitar, LILY plays the bass, DAVID sings, and MEENA dances. They improvise a rock song, using*

sounds and nonsense syllables. MEENA dances a variety of rock dances, such as the "swim," and the "buga-loo.")

DAVID. I call out—A merry-go-round. *(They ALL form one merry-go-round, around the chest. They make the music, each making a single sound, forming a typical merry-go-round song. They wave at each other, grab for the ring, etc.)*

MEENA. I call out—Monsters with hiccups! *(They are ALL monsters with hiccups.)*

BUCKLEY. I call out—The sun and the planets!

MEENA. Venus—

DAVID. Mercury—

LILY. Earth—

BUCKLEY. Sun. *(BUCKLEY jumps on the chest, becomes the sun. The PLANETS spin silently around him.)*

LILY *(her disappointment over the "empty chest" suddenly registering as anger)*. I call out—Crazy old Grandma Iris. *(They are ALL crazy grandmothers. LILY moves upstage, the OTHERS move down.)*

MEENA. Have you seen my...my...my...

DAVID. Your what?

MEENA. I can't remember.

DAVID *(pointing L)*. It's over there.

MEENA. Good. I can't remember anything without it. *(She crosses L, hesitates, is vague.)*

BUCKLEY. Well, did you find it?

MEENA. Find what?

BUCKLEY. I can't remember.

MEENA *(pointing R)*. It's over there.

BUCKLEY *(crossing R)*. Good. I can't remember a thing without it. *(He stops, looks, is vague.)*

MEENA. Well, did you find it?