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Dramatic Publishing



Chiaroscuro

by
Lisa Dillman

From...

35 in 10

Thirty-Five Ten-Minute Plays

Compiled and Edited

KENT R. BROWN



Dramatic Publishing

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CHIAROSCURO

By
Lisa Dillman

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Chiaroscuro was commissioned and first produced in 1998 by Chicago's Rivendell Theatre Ensemble for its ten-minute play festival "Mommopalooza: Short Takes on Mom." It was a finalist for the 1999 Actors Theatre of Louisville National Ten-Minute Play Contest.

CHARACTERS

JEN: A daughter.

MOTHER: Jen's.

The characters can be played by a young woman and a middle-aged woman; a middle-aged woman and an older woman; or two middle-aged women.

SETTING: Ideally, the action should take place in empty space full of light and shadow, with specific lighting cues serving to enhance some of the transitions.

TIME: The present.

CHIAROSCURO

AT THE CURTAIN: *LIGHTS* come up revealing JEN and MOTHER on opposite sides of the playing area.

JEN. In the beginning. A woman with red, red lipstick and a voice full of jumps and trills and wonder tells me story after story night after night.

MOTHER. "...Soon the princess came to a clearing in the woods. And there, hunched upon a craggy stump, sat a gnome of questionable breeding. He had a wart the size of an egg on the tip of his nose and he was hairy from top to toe. Some might call him matted. He took one look at our princess and found her so enticing that for a moment he was tempted *not* to put a curse on her. But alas! Evil gnome tradition won the day. 'Oh, thou pretty aimless wench. Sit ye on my splintery bench. Bethink all words ye've spake before. From this day on ye'll speak no more.' "

JEN. Later... She and my stepfather yak away all through dinner—their conversations, their *banter* erupting out of them, surging, blasting, spluttering. They warble. They chortle. They tease. They research and excavate each other's day. Words are king and queen and the rest of the royal family too. Words are the real food; what's on their plates is just an excuse. During a pause that many wouldn't recognize as such, I break in. "Hey, what's that? What's *chiaroscuro*?" They look perplexed for a moment— Did you just hear something?