

SENSE AND CENSORSHIP

by Jerry Rabushka

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ISBN: 978-1-64479-131-8

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A Comedic Duet

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SYNOPSIS: Mom tries to shut down her daughter's love of the macabre by threatening her with a trip to the dinosaur park. Suddenly a group of concerned moms try to stop the play in mid-sentence, claiming it's unfit viewing. In the ensuing squabble, will you get to see the end, or will it be... censored?

TIME: Present.

SETTING: Agatha's house and later at her uncle's house.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females)

AGATHA (f).....A young girl who enjoys stories with horrific endings; also plays "concerned mother." (53 lines)

MOM (f).....Her mother, who wants Agatha to change; also plays a government agent and her brother, Agatha's "Uncle Cheesebroth." (53 lines)

SET: A bare stage, or some basic furniture: chairs, acting blocks, etc.

PROPS: One or two small scripts and a card, which can be pantomimed if need be.

COSTUMES

This is pretty much open, but if Agatha is dressed as a "sweet little girl" it might make for a fun contrast with her dark character. Mom is more "harried" and she could be in something old and wrinkled, for example. As characters re-enter as various authority figures, they can don a uniform or officious type coat and/or hat.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

This play thrives on quick plot turns and people saying strange things as if they're perfectly normal. As always, when you're not talking can be the hardest time to act, but this is the perfect time to practice that. Your reactions can be just as telling as your words, and in many cases the characters say they feel one way, but the delivery and body language should let us know they feel the exact opposite. Also the character changes come fast, and give you an opportunity to do some very different roles, quickly. How you exit and then re-enter as a new character can help you define the change in role as soon as you get on stage.

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AT START: MOM and AGATHA both address the audience, talking “at” each other through talking to the crowd.

MOM: My daughter really liked Hansel and Gretel—until the end.

AGATHA: I liked how the witch kept the children in cages and ate them. (*MOM shakes her head, resigned to AGATHA’S dark nature.*) Roasted, I supposed. But eeewww, I wonder how she cleaned the cage out, like when they pooped and stuff. Anyway, none of her recipes survived.

MOM: (*Flabbergasted.*) We had to censor her fairy tales.

AGATHA: (*Starts with a smile and a spin-around and then gets dour.*) Sweet little sugar-and-spice girls make their stepmothers’ lives miserable and you act like they deserve my sympathy.

MOM: I’d had enough of Agatha’s hijinks, so I decided to take her to the dinosaur park.

AGATHA: There’s no such thing as a dinosaur park. A bird sanctuary is the sad remnant of the gory glory days of long ago.

MOM: (*Now they start speaking more to each other unless indicated.*) There is. You have to fly a long way away...

AGATHA: Like millions of years back in time.

MOM: You have to fly to Antarctica. There’s been a fully functioning dinosaur park there for years. Stegosaurus, brontosaurus, tyrannosaurus, all of which use their comparative size to great advantage.

AGATHA: (*To audience.*) My mother thinks I’m crazy, but now I’m not sure she’s the best judge.

MOM: (*To audience.*) I want her to see that the danger of being eaten is not something to laugh at.

AGATHA: (*To MOM.*) It is if it’s not you.

MOM: Your older sister loved the dinosaur park.

AGATHA: I don’t have an older sister.

MOM: (*Trying not to smile.*) Exactly.

AGATHA: (*A little nervous.*) Exactly what?

MOM: Exactly “that’s why children get in at a discount.” They usually don’t make it through a whole day’s worth of rides.

AGATHA: (*Scared.*) Mom, you’re not scaring me.

MOM: If you're not scared by a wicked witch, evil stepmothers and poisoned apples, not to mention a general misrepresentation of women as jealous, petty, and with a taste for young human flesh, then I doubt you'd be remotely frightened by a hungry raptor. *(Shrugging it off.)* But it's worth finding out.

AGATHA: Mom, you're a nut-bag. *(Exits.)*

MOM: *(Just about as spooky as AGATHA.)* Agatha get back here, we have to pack! We have to plan! *(To audience.)* She wouldn't go to Disneyworld either.

AGATHA: *(Re-enters as a "concerned mother", with loud stomps as she walks, and with a very uptight demeanor; perhaps wearing a really out of date jacket or sweater.)* I hate to bust up such a beautiful mother-daughter excursion, but I'm with a group of concerned mothers.

MOM: Mothers, concerned. That's always concerning.

AGATHA: Very concerned mothers. Concerned, concerning, and not very discerning. *(Pulls out a script.)* We're a makeshift government agency at odds with the first amendment and we're going to have to ban this play. *(To audience.)* What you just saw? Unsee it. What you just heard? Unhear it. Sorry though, no refund, no exchange.

MOM: *(Grabs the script.)* What you just said? Unsay it.

AGATHA: *(Grabs it back.)* We've done an extensive study of this author's work and we find that there's an extraordinary reliance for humor on *(Disgusted.)* the consumption of small children. Sometimes yet alive, sometimes garnished with kale and parsley. Witches, dinosaurs, and birds of prey ensure that no child is left behind. *(Stomps feet.)*

MOM: *(Looks at AGATHA'S stomping feet with disdain.)* I fail to see the problem here.

AGATHA: *(Stern, and loud.)* There's nothing funny about children being eaten.

MOM: Then you obviously don't have any. It's highly doubtful you're a concerned mother at all, but rather a busybody with no judicial standing. Can I interest you in some soup? It's stegosaurus. One goes a long way, but once it's gone, it's gone.

AGATHA: Thank you but I'm out of floss. *(Grabs the script and tosses it away.)* I'm going to put this production into the banned play file and light it on fire. *(To audience.)* Thank you and good night.

MOM: That'll just get more people to read it and put it on.

AGATHA: They'll go to jail.

MOM: Have you missed *Jurassic Park*? Parts one, two, three, and who knows how many offshoots? Kids love it.

AGATHA: We locked up the entire cast, crew, and promotional team.

MOM: *(Holds out her hands.)* Well, I've always wanted to meet some celebrities. So, take me away.

AGATHA: Come with me, and we'll teach you the true ways of a concerned mother.

Leads MOM out. AGATHA returns first and plays herself again, calling for her mother.

AGATHA: Mom? I've changed my mind. I'll get packed and ready to go. *(To audience, quickly.)* I'm calling her bluff. *(To MOM.)* Mom, where are you?

MOM: *(MOM enters, but this time she's playing a government agent.)* Young lady? Young lady, come here. *(AGATHA doesn't.)* This instant.

AGATHA: *(To audience.)* Hardly. *(Realizes it's not her mother. To MOM.)* Where's your deodorant and what have you done with my mother?

MOM: She's in prison.

AGATHA: What did she do this time?

MOM: What do you mean this time?

AGATHA: If you had the authority you claim, you'd know exactly what I mean.

MOM: I'm the executive director of Concerned Moms Against Free Speech. Your mother was involved in the production of banned plays and threatening your life with reptilian consumption.

AGATHA: *(Not overly worried.)* That's Mom all right.

MOM: *(Aghast.)* This doesn't bother you.

AGATHA: I'm living in fear. Every day's a gift.

MOM: You're not worried she'll feed you to a raptor?

AGATHA: No, I'm worried you'll set fire to my Stephen King collection and kick me off stage because I don't fit the profile of your prejudicial norms.

MOM: I bet you have tattoos and listen to ragtime.

AGATHA: Not yet. Now go get my mother out of jail, or I'll....

MOM: Bail's been set at \$100,000 and you're going to live with your Uncle Cheesebroth. *(Exits.)*

AGATHA: *(To Audience.)* You probably have no idea where this play is going, but since the original ending was banned, we had to change it to something more child friendly. *(Doesn't see how this fits the definition.)* Like putting my mother in jail and sending me to live with my autocratic uncle. If that's not family entertainment, I don't know what is.

MOM: *(Enters, now as Uncle.)* Okay missy, it's time for bed.

AGATHA: It's five o'clock, Uncle Crabstock. You need to go to the bail bondsman and get Mom sprung out.

MOM: She'll just jump it like she did the last time.

AGATHA: We're family, and it's a risk you have to take.

MOM: I have a text from her. It says "I left you some money to take Agatha to the dinosaur park. The plane leaves Wednesday at three pm. You'll see one round trip ticket and another that's one way."

AGATHA: Somehow, I don't believe you.

MOM: Than go to bed, now! *(To audience.)* The beauty of young children is you can solve any problem by moving up their bedtime.

AGATHA: I'm going to run away.

MOM: Where will you go? Wal-Mart?

AGATHA: I'll go live with my older sister.

MOM: You don't have an older sister.

AGATHA: Apparently I do.

MOM: Apparently in a tyrannosaurus's digestive tract. So who's not laughing now?

AGATHA: I think I better go to bed. It's 5:01 after all. *(Exits; Enters, comes back as concerned mother, stomping on stage.)* This script alteration isn't working, Uncle Cheesebreath. We tried to change the tenor of the play...

MOM: Which is hard, since I'm a baritone.

AGATHA: We tried to change the tenor of the play to something less horrific, but you wouldn't have it, Uncle Beefstock.

MOM: Freedom of speech allows me to talk about whatever I want. Even in the presence of precocious children.

AGATHA: Freedom of speech comes with consequences.

MOM: Not from the government.

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