

Parallelodram Two

by Nicholas Richards

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This short play consists of two simultaneous scenes in which two families (parents with one son) are getting ready to go to a play. The stage is divided down the middle by the layout of the furniture (and by the acting). The dialogue mostly interleaves but sometimes overlaps or coincides. The boy in the right scene (Sean) is right handed, the other boy (John) left handed.

Characters

(Family Stage Right)

Sean – aged about 12

Mr Smith}

Mrs Smith} - parents of Sean

(Family Stage Left)

John – aged about 12

Mr Smithson}

Mrs Smithson} - parents of John

(Two front hallways mirror-imaged down the middle of the stage. The furniture is also mirrored. There is a small table and chair at each side, and chairs back-to-back centre stage with a gap where we are to imagine the division between the houses. On the 'dividing wall' there are to be imagined mirrors. There could also be umbrella-stands or hat-stands. The actors enter from Upstage as if coming down from upstairs.)

(Enter from Upstage Right Sean. He mooches around, then takes out a small rubber ball and idly bounces it for a while. Mrs Smith, his mother, calls from backstage.)

Mrs Smith: Sean – are you ready?

Sean: Yes.

Mrs Smith: Sean...?

Sean: **(Loudly)** I said I am. **(Softly)** Been ready for ages. **(Loudly)** What time is it?

Mrs Smith: What's that?

(Meanwhile John enters from Upstage Left. He also bounces a ball – with his left hand.)

Sean: What time is it?

Mrs Smith: Somewhere past six.

Sean: No, I mean: What time does it start? The play?

Mrs Smith: Er... Seven o'clock.

Mrs Smithson: **(Off)** Where are the tickets?

Mrs Smith: **(To Mr Smith – as if across a landing)** Do you have the tickets?

Mr Smithson: **(Off)** In the hall.

Mr Smith: **(Off)** No – I gave them to you, remember?

(John goes towards the table.)

Mrs Smith: Oh... You did, didn't you...

Sean: **(Going towards the table and picking up the tickets)** They're here.

Mrs Smith: Wonder where they are...

Sean: **(More loudly)** I said...

(First moment of symmetry. Action, speech and position in the two halves are mirrored.)

John: } **(Together)**

Sean: } They're here.

Mrs Smith: Oh good. **(To Mr Smith)** Hear that, dear?

Mrs Smithson: **(From Off)** What's that, John?

John: The tickets are down here - on the table. **(He looks at the tickets and reads out the play's title without much interest.)** *The Return of the Idol.*

Sean: **(Inspecting the tickets)** What's it about?

Mrs Smith: What's that, Sean?

Sean: The play: *The Return of the Idol*. What's it about?

Mrs Smith: Oh... not sure. Ask your father. Think it's about people trapped on an island. Are you looking smart, Sean?

Mrs Smithson: John...?

John: Still here.

Mrs Smithson: Have you washed your face? It was smeared with chocolate last time I saw.

(Both boys go towards the centre of the stage and stand opposite each other as if looking in mirrors. Second moment of symmetry. They push their hair across, Sean with right hand, John with left; and then put out their tongues as if at each other. John licks around his mouth.)

John: } (Together)

Sean: } Yes.

John: (Aside, but almost as if he's talking to Sean) But if a boy can't wear chocolate on his face on his birthday when can he?

(Enter Mr Smith and Mr Smithson from Upstage Right and Left respectively. They walk to the tables and pick up the tickets.)

Mr Smith: Here they are.

Mr Smithson: (With a vague, preoccupied tone) All right, John?

Sean: As I said.

(John gives a non-committal shrug. Third moment of symmetry.)

Sean: } (Together)

John: } What's the play about?

(Both fathers put the tickets in their jacket pockets. Mr Smith could pick up a newspaper from the table and see a review of the play.)

Mr Smith: *The Return of the Idol*... it's about an expedition to a mysterious island in the middle of the ocean...

Sean: Which ocean? There are four.

Mr Smith: (Pleasantly) Or five. Not sure which.

John: Well?

Mr Smithson: Something about explorers, I gather.

John: *What* about explorers, do you gather?

Mr Smithson: They go exploring. On an island.

Sean: And is it a desert island?

Mr Smith: Not a *desert* island, because it's inhabited – by a little known tribe.

Sean: And...

(John bounces his ball once; Sean bounces his to coincide with John's second bounce. Both then look up at their fathers. Fourth moment of symmetry)

John: } **(Together, bouncing the ball once or twice)**

Sean: } What happens?

Mr Smith: **(With a cheerful, histrionic gesture of his hand)** That, my boy, we shall discover shortly.

Mr Smithson: **(A little wearily)** Well we'll find out when we see it, won't we? **(Looking Upstage)** Angela...! Come on or we'll be late.

(Enter Mrs Smith from Upstage Right.)

Mrs Smith: Right... All set? **(She goes over to Sean and straightens his collar and tie.)**

John: Why do we have to look smart?

Sean: **(Perhaps surveying the audience)** Why do people get dressed up for the theatre?

John: *We're* not performing.

Mr Smithson: We just do.

Mr Smith: It means ... we're taking it seriously. Gives a sense of occasion; makes us step out of the ordinary.

Mr Smithson: **(Looking Upstage impatiently)** Angela... I'm sure you're looking fine.

Mrs Smith: And it's my birthday... and I like us to look smart when we go out.

Mr Smith: Besides it's good manners to everyone else.

John: I think it's silly.

Mr Smithson: Well there we are.

(Enter from Upstage Left Mrs Smithson.)

Mr Smithson: Finally!

(The two mothers consult the mirror, Mrs Smith with a smile, Mrs Smithson with a frown.)

John: And why do we have to go to the theatre anyway? It's not as if we don't have a television.

Sean: You know, we could celebrate mum's birthday at home. Then we wouldn't have any fuss.

Mr Smithson: It's a treat.

Mr Smith: Fuss?

Mr Smithson: For your birthday.

John: **(Wryly)** Really? Thought I was being punished for something.