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Product Code YA800-SP

The Pinocchio Problem

What is Human?

A One-Act Comedy with Overtones
Playable for Teens or Adults

by Paul DiLella

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The Pinocchio Problem
 A One Act Comedy by Paul DiLella
 2 F / 1 M
 Playing time: Approximately 30 minutes

Time: *The Present*

Setting: *A specialty toy store in a mall*

Characters:

ANNIE REDWIG; *A Raggedy Ann doll.*

JACK SPRINGER; *A Jack-in-the-Box* [Aka Jacques du Fleur]*

GERTA ALPINE; *A Swiss Miss doll/figurine*

Etc.:

Simple Setting/Single Set

The character, "Jack", speaks with a French accent throughout. If an actor has difficulty with the French words, he can substitute with the indicated English equivalents as long as the French accent is maintained. With costuming/make-up, Jack may be played either Male or Female

"The Pinocchio Problem" premiered as "What is Human?" at Pahrump Valley School on December 8, 2006 with the following cast:

*Ann: Heather Gibeson
 Jack: Stephanie Massimino
 Gerta: Katie Joray*

"The Pinocchio Problem" premiered in its present version at Pahrump Valley High School on April 25, 2008 with the following cast:

*Ann: Heather Gibeson
 Jack: Sierra Castro
 Gerta: Paige Trifficana*

The Pinocchio Problem

A One Act Comedy by Paul DiLella

(AT RISE: A specialty store in a mall at Christmas. Various toys are scattered around the shop. Prominently displayed; a Jack-in-the-Box, a Raggedy Ann, and a Swiss ballerina doll. A counter/ table up center. In the dark, Christmas decorations and lights add a festive flair to the store. Each character has his own flag: Ann, an American flag; Jack, a French one; Gerta, Swiss. THE LIGHTS FADE UP slowly as generic CHRISTMAS MUSIC wafts from the Mall without. As the Audience glimpses the toys, there is a BLACKOUT. LIGHTS RESTORE as we see full-size versions of Raggedy Ann, Jack-in-the-Box, and the Swiss ballerina doll in place of the toys, all asleep. ANN stirs.)

ANN

Christmas. *(To JACK)* Did you hear me? Christmas.

JACK

Music. *Mais oui. C'est plaisant.* [But yes. This is pleasant.]

ANN

I hate Christmas.

JACK

Moi aussi. [Me, too.]

ANN

No respect.

JACK

Les enfants. *(ANN doesn't understand)* Kids—

ANN

Paw you.

JACK

Shake you.

ANN

Drop you.

JACK

Tug you.

ANN

Poke eyes.

Break you. JACK

Hide you. ANN

Je desteste Christmas. JACK

I hate Christmas. ANN

'Tis the season. JACK

For abuse. ANN

For death. JACK

I hate Christmas. ANN

Je deteste Christmas. JACK.

They're supposed to be on their best behavior. ANN

Peuple. JACK

People. ANN

Oui. JACK

Yes. ANN

Then why aren't they? JACK

I don't know. ANN

Je ne sais pas. [I don't know.] JACK

How could we know? We're toys. ANN

How could we know? Just toys. JACK

Pinocchio was a toy. ANN

Maintenant, il est un jeune garçon. A boy. *Personne chanceuse.* Lucky, *mais oui?* [but yes?] JACK

Yeah, he's human. ANN

A *humain* boy. JACK

Why didn't he want to be a toy? ANN

Maybe, he was afraid he'd break. JACK

Break. First step to firewood. ANN

(Shudder) *Bois de chauffage?* ...fire...wood...ugh! *Je comprende.* [I understand.] JACK
Pinocchio had a—

a burning desire— ANN

he was *enflamme*...on fire? JACK

No, no, no. Pinocchio had a feeling, a strong feeling— ANN

Moi aussi [Me, too], a feeling— JACK

the same feeling— ANN

the same feeling— JACK

the same feeling as Pinocchio— ANN

the same! JACK

Yes! ANN

(Pause) Lequel qu'etait? [Which was what?] JACK

Mon *ami* [My friend], Pinocchio had a feeling he could be human! ANN

Mais oui! [But yes!] *Humain!* JACK

That was his problem. ANN

Pinocchio's problem? JACK

The Pinocchio problem. ANN

To be...*humain*, or not to be *humain*. A very good question, *ne vous pensez pas?* [don't you think?] JACK

Yes. ANN

JACK

Mais [But], Pinocchio *ne comprendez pas qu'il est humain* [didn't know what it was to be human.]

The problem again. ANN

Oui. JACK

What is human? ANN

Je ne sais pas. [I don't know.] JACK

We see what they do. ANN

We hear what they say. JACK

We see how they feel. ANN

We see others react— JACK

to what they do— ANN

to what they say— JACK

to how they feel. ANN

Le question answered? JACK

No. I want to say what they say, do what they do, feel as they feel. I want to be human. ANN

Humain? JACK

ANN

Yes.

JACK

Pourquoi? [Why?]

ANN

I'm tired of being a toy. A play-thing. I want meaning. Humans have meaning.

JACK

Qu'est-ce fait il moyens etre [what does it mean to be] "*humain*"?

ANN

I talk. Therefore, I am human.

JACK

(Points to ears) J'ecoute. Listen. *Je suis humain?* [Am I human?]

ANN

Yes. Yes. We're getting closer.

(JACK tries to step over his box but can't easily get a leg over. He shrugs and nonchalantly opens a door and steps out. He moves to ANN.)

JACK

Closer. Now I'm closer. Is that what you mean?

ANN

Not physically. Closer to discovering.

JACK

Oh.

ANN

I talk. I must be alive. That's human.

JACK

What if it's a program? We have computer chips.

ANN

Possibly. Then how do I know?

JACK

'savoir que? [Know what?]

ANN

Know that I know. Know that I am speaking?

Echo? JACK

ANN
No. I know that I know because I'm...sentient. *(Taken aback)* Whoa. Where'd that come from?

What? JACK

ANN
That word. Sentient.

JACK
From you. You said it.

ANN
I know I said it. Where'd it come from?

JACK
Dans votre tete.. Inside your head.

ANN
My head is filled with stuffing. My stuffing tells me—

JACK
(Beats her to the answer) “*Etre vivant.*” To be “alive.” *(Startled)* How did I know that? *C'est alarmante.* Scary. *(Pause)* Am I alive?

ANN
So far.

JACK
(Struts around. Each time with more gusto) *Je suis vivant...Je suis vivant...I'm alive...I'm alive!*

ANN
Good. Good. Walking is motion. But not life. Not human.

JACK
I walk. Therefore I am.

ANN
No.

No? JACK

No. ANN

How do I know if I'm *humain*? JACK

To speak. To think. That's human. ANN

I knew it! JACK

There's got to be more. ANN

More what? JACK

To human-ness. ANN

I'm quite satisfied with what I've got. JACK

ANN
Then you're not human. Humans are never satisfied. Do they buy only one toy? No. They buy truckloads. After Christmas, the broken ones go to the dump.

Oh, my. *Le* [the] dump. JACK

The graveyard. ANN

Not satisfied. Not satisfied. Be *humain!* Be *humain!* JACK

Greed is good. Greed is good. ANN

JACK

Greed is good! Greed is good! *(Pause)* If greed is good, *pourquoi* [why] am I depressed?

ANN

Even better! To be human is to be depressed!

JACK

J'ai besoin de [I need] *un docteur* [doctor].

(SCENE-WITHIN-A-SCENE: MUCIC, like a harp glissando. ANN goes behind the counter, puts on glasses, flips over a sign which reads, "SICKO-ANALYSIS" and gets a clipboard and pen.)

ANN

Welcome! You've picked the right place to kick your sickness.

JACK

How do you know I'm sick?

ANN

See the sign: "Sicko-analysis." If you're here, you must be a sicko. What's your problem?

JACK

I have a Pinocchio problem: I am a toy, but I want to be *humain* [human] I want to be *humain*, but I don't want to be sad. What should I do?

ANN

Hmm. Let me see. How about--get well.

JACK

C'est votre [that's your] answer?

ANN

The human mind is a dense network of neurotransmitters, and a toy's mind is denser than most. Like a block. A block-head. You can't expect psychiatry to be able to penetrate such thick layers quickly. The process could take years. Even then, there is no guarantee of success. You want a guarantee, go to Wal-Mart. So to save you time and money, we cut to the chase and tell you to get well.

JACK

That's the best you can do?

ANN

That'll be \$300, please.

JACK

For five minutes work? You didn't even take my family history.

ANN

Toys don't have a family history. You're an orphan on the shelf.

JACK

Mais [But] \$300.

ANN

If plumbers can charge \$65 for a house call and be done in five minutes, then why can't doctors charge \$300?

JACK

But you didn't tell me anything I didn't already know.

ANN

You can always get a second opinion.

JACK

Non, merci. [No thanks.] *Je ne suis pas payer* [I can't afford to get] more of nothing for something.

(SCENE RESTORES with Harp glissando MUSIC. ANN drops the psychiatrist persona and both characters return downstage.)

ANN

What did you learn?

JACK

To be *humain* is to spend money and not get answers.

ANN

Good. What else do humans do?

JACK

Ils mangent. They eat.

ANN

Why not? You have a mouth.

JACK

(Searches. Finds a candy bar on the counter. Takes a bite. Spits it out. ANN laughs.)
Patooie! Yuck!

ANN

What's the matter?

JACK

I have a mouth to take in food. But I have no stomach for it.

ANN

(Beat. Laughs)

You made a joke.

JACK

Moi? [Me?]

ANN

"No stomach for it." Get it? You can't stand it and you don't have a stomach.

JACK

Mais oui. [But yes.] I forgot. It was funny, wasn't it?

ANN

Very.

JACK

Good enough for stand-up?

ANN

You are standing up.

JACK

(Gets it) A joke. You made a joke! *(They clasp arms and dance in a circle)*

ANN

Dancing. Dancing is human.

JACK

We're getting more *humain* every minute.

ANN

Every minute.

JACK

Wait! Wait! *(They stop)* A thought.

ANN

What?

JACK

Hyenas laugh, *n'est-ce pas?* [isn't that right?]

ANN

I think so.

JACK

Nous ne sommes pas humain. [we're not human.] *Nous sommes* [We're] hyenas! (*ANN tickles JACK. He runs to avoid her. She follows.*) Stop! Stop! You're making me laugh!

ANN

Laugh! (*They laugh. Loud guffaws*) See. We tickle and laugh. I'd like to see a hyena do that! (*Congratulatory laugh. High five. They dance in a circle again*) Wait! Wait! (*They stop*) Let's wake up Gerta.

(*With exaggerated movements, JACK and ANN tip-toe to the slumped GERTA.*)

JACK

Gerta sleeps. *Humains* sleep. Therefore, she's *humain*.

ANN

Not until I wake her up.

(*ANN flips a switch on GERTA's back. GERTA raises her head, eyes open*)

JACK

If she's awake, she's not sleeping. If not sleeping, she's not *humain*. I'm confused.

GERTA

(*Head slowly rises*) I hear Christmas music.

JACK

Oui, that time again.

(*ANN and JACK sigh*)

GERTA

I love Christmas! (*GERTA stretches and stands, smiles and begins a ballet then poses oh so prettily. JACK and ANN gossiped out at her self-absorption.*)

JACK

Show off. We should have let her sleep.

ANN

No. No. We need her for our experiment.

GERTA

Has someone bought me yet? I'll look wonderful under a Christmas tree. I'm so pretty. Is that why you woke me up?

JACK

What's *humain*?

GERTA

I beg your pardon.

ANN

We want to know what means to be human. Any ideas?

GERTA

I'm only a doll---a beautiful doll---but I think it means "to sing."

JACK

Hadn't thought of that. She could be right. Do you think she's right?

GERTA

(Dancing, singing off-key) "Jingle Bells, jingle bells, jingle all the wa—aa—yy-y."

JACK

Pain-ful.

ANN

Pitiful.

GERTA

"over fields we go, laughing all the w—a—a—y—y."

(GERTA'S tonal trashing continues under the following dialogue)

ANN

Perfect. She's so bad, she must be human.

JACK

(Covering ears) Hurts so bad I could cry.

ANN

Great idea!

JACK

Animals howl. *Peut-etre* [Perhaps] she's part animal.

ANN

Gerta, can you cry?

GERTA

Cry? Why would I want to cry? I'm happy all the time.

JACK

We noticed. But can you cry?

GERTA

No. I can't. I don't have tear ducts.

ANN

Neither do we. That's out. *(Beat)* There must be something else that makes us human.

GERTA

Happiness. Human are happy. *(Little dance)* Happy—happy—happy!

JACK

Enough with the "happy dance" already. *(Rubs stomach)* *Je me sens mal a l'estomac.* [I am getting sick to my stomach.]

GERTA

You don't have a stomach, remember?

JACK

Smarty-pants. *Juste une expression*, okay? Just an expression.

(GERTA pirouettes around JACK, tucking him under his chin)

GERTA

Who says beautiful, blond, blue-eyed Swiss Miss ballet dancers aren't smart? *(Flirting)* Would you like to dance with me? I think you're very handsome.

JACK

(Flustered) Well...*Je ne sais pas* [I don't know]... I'm not very good on my feet...

ANN

Give it a whirl, big guy.

(GERTA and JACK dance, he ever-so awkwardly, bumping into GERTA and stepping on her feet. GERTA grimaces and mouths an "Ouch.")

ANN

May I cut in?

GERTA

Please do.

(ANN takes JACK's place)

ANN

Looks like you were in pain.

GERTA

Pain? No pain. Although something is wrong with my left foot.

ANN

Too bad, no pain. To be human is to feel pain.

JACK

Je suis suppose pour danser [I'm supposed to dance] *avec la fille!* [with the girl!]

ANN

What if I want to dance with the girl?

JACK

Not you!

ANN

Why not me?

(JACK grabs ANN by the arm and pulls her into his arms. They dance a few steps.)

JACK

That's why.

GERTA

Hey! I'm the pretty one!

(GERTA yanks JACK around and slaps his face.)

GERTA

Courtroom!

ANN and JACK

Courtroom!

(SCENE-WITHIN-A-SCENE transition MUSIC. The scene morphs into a courtroom. ANN slips on a black robe as the judge and stands behind the toy counter. She turns over a sign that reads "Kangaroo Court." She picks up a huge gavel. GERTA is the plaintiff, JACK the defendant, each standing in front of the counter.)

ANN

(On a stool, banging her gavel) Hear ye, hear ye, the First Circus Court for the State of Catastrophe, County of Kangaroo, is now in session. The Right Honorable Judge R. Ann presiding. All rise!

JACK

Nous sommes standing, *votre Honneur* [your Honor].

ANN

Just want to be sure. In this court, we have to go through the motions. You may be seated.

GERTA

There are no chairs, your Honor.

ANN

There's no restroom either. Now, who's the plaintiff?

GERTA

I am, your Honor. I am asking a divorce from him.

ANN

From the papers filed with the court, your legal name is Jack Springer. Am I correct?

JACK

Oui. [Yes.]

ANN

You have an English name, but you speak French. How do you explain that?

JACK

My given name is Jacques du Fleur. *Mais vous pouvez m'appeler* [But you can call me] "Jack."

ANN

Jacques. Sounds foreign. Are you an American citizen?

JACK

Je ne sais pas. [I do not know.]

(JACK struggles, twisting his neck, to read the clothing tag which is on the back of his collar. Like a dog chasing his tail, he spins around and around to read it.)

GERTA

Let me help. *(GERTA looks inside the back of JACK'S shirt. If JACK wears bloomers, she pulls the waistband back, look, and then lets it snap back.)* The label says, "made in China, assembled in Mexico." *(She spins back to the other side)* At least one of us is the genuine article. I'm 100% Swiss.

ANN

(To JACK) You're an illegal.

JACK

Mon patron [My owner], *Monsieur* [Mr.] McGready, imported me, so I must be "legal."

ANN

That's what they all say. Occupation?

JACK

Seasonal toy.

ANN

Ah, part-time employment. Poor provider written all over you.

JACK

Votre Honneur [Your Honor], *Je dois protester* [I must protest]. Divorce is news to me. We're not even married.

ANN

What? Unmarried cohabitation? That's illegal in this state.

JACK

Je veux mon avocat. [I want my lawyer]

GERTA

If he can have a lawyer, I want one, too.

ANN

There are no lawyers. They were all used up in the last presidential election.

JACK

I haven't done anything. *Dire le juge* [Tell the judge], Gerta.

ANN

What do you have to say, young lady?

GERTA

I'm suing Jack for alienation of affection. He jilted me for another woman.

ANN

Who?

GERTA

You!

ANN

(Stands) Me? I'm the judge. I've never seen this toy before in my life.

JACK

Can you prove it?

ANN

I don't have to prove it. These papers prove it. There are affidavits from twenty other toys who saw what you did. It's so shocking I don't want to read them. So I won't. Besides, I don't have my glasses. Twenty sworn oaths are good enough for me. Remember, I am the law. What I say in this court goes. And I say you, Jack, with malice of forethought, premeditation of action, and clumsy footwork, jilted this poor, defenseless, Swiss Miss. *(Pounds gavel)* This court finds you guilty, Jack. I sentence you to a fine of \$20,000 or death. Take your pick. I call it "cash, or be carried." Ha!

JACK

Votre Honneur [Your Honor], I wasn't allowed to tell my side of the story or to provide witnesses.

ANN

Tough cookies.

JACK

Je veux un jury [I want a jury] of my peers.

ANN

It's Christmas. All your peers have gone for presents, every one.

JACK

Maintenant, je veux [Now I want] a change of venue.

ANN

(Pounds gavel) Denied.

JACK

Je veux un nouveau juge. [I want a new judge].

ANN

(Pounds gavel) Denied. *(Pause)* I love saying that.

JACK

Votre Honneur [Your Honor], you treat me like an animal.

ANN

What do you expect? This is a kangaroo court. So what'll it be? Cash, or beheading?

GERTA
Isn't that a bit harsh, your Honor?

ANN
Yeah. So? What'll it be— Moola or mayhem?

JACK
Votre Honneur [Your honor], I'm broke.

ANN
Oh goody. I get to pull the lever. *(Calls)* Bailiff, take him away!

GERTA
Excuse me, your Honor.

ANN
Now what? I thought we were done.

GERTA
If it pleases the Court, I will loan Jack the money.

JACK
You will? *Merci beaucoup!* [Thank you!]

(JACK runs to GERTA, kissing her on both cheeks)

ANN
No, it doesn't please the Court, young lady. You've spoiled my fun.

JACK
You've made my day.

ANN
I say he dies.

GERTA
Lives.

ANN
Dies.

JACK
Lives.

GERTA
Rock, paper, scissors.

ANN

You're on. Tell ya what, if you win, Jack goes free. Like that's gonna happen. On the count of three...one, two, three!

(ANN as The judge tosses "rock," GERTA "paper" and JACK "scissors")

ANN

(To JACK) You lose.

GERTA

(To JACK) Stay out of it! This is between the judge and me. Again! One, two, three!

(ANN does "paper," GERTA "scissors.")

GERTA

I win!

JACK

I live!

ANN

I will not have it in the legal record that a decision of mine has been overturned in such a frivolous manner. I don't care if they did it in U.S. v. Gore. *(She tears up the affidavits. Pounds gavel)* Case dismissed for lack of evidence!

(SCENE RESTORES with music as before. All cheer. While ANN sheds her robe, JACK and GERTA return downstage. Back in the toy store, they dance. GERTA stops. Her foot is hurting.)

JACK

Incroyable! [Incredible!] I guess that's what it means to be *humain*: a courtroom, a judge, lawyers—

ANNE and GERTA

No lawyers!

JACK

—affidavits, testimony, ruling, guilt or innocence, punishment—

ANN

—drama, conflict, human emotion, life or death, resolution.

JACK

Incroyable! [Incredible!] *Humains* experience all that.

GERTA

I have. That makes me human—almost. But at heart I'm still a beautiful doll. I wish someone would buy me. I'm too pretty to stay on the shelf. I want to be wrapped and unwrapped and pampered and played with.

(GERTA tries to dance, but she stumbles because her left foot is broken)

JACK

Qu'est-ce le probleme? [What's the matter?]

GERTA

Something's wrong with my foot. I can't put any weight on it.

JACK

Desole. [Sorry.] It's my fault. I'm really sorry.

ANN

Let me look at it. *(Examines foot)* It's shattered.

JACK

Too bad. If you were Seabiscuit, they'd put a cast on it.

ANN

It's over, kid. No Christmas wrap for you. It's scrap city, baby.

GERTA

It can be fixed. I can be fixed!

ANN

You know the rules.

JACK

Monsieur [Mr.] McGready won't sell any defective merchandise.

ANN

He can't send you back to the factory for an inventory credit. That factory doesn't exist anymore. A band of Zetas tried to kill a drug informant, and all the Mexican workers were killed.

GERTA

Then cover for me. At least let me be someone's present. Let me be wanted if only for one day. Mom or dad can bring me back for a refund. But at least I will have had my moment. In shiny silver paper under a tree. Hearing a pretty girl squeal in delight as she rips the wrapping. Seeing my pretty, smiling face. I want that moment. Please.

JACK

You know the rules.

GERTA

Humans make and break rules all the time. What's so different about this? I am changing the rules. I say I stay!

JACK

We follow the rules.

GERTA

I have worth. I have value. I am somebody!

ANN

Humans are masters at discarding. We could build cities out what they throw away. If something isn't new, it's not worth saving. If it's not perfect, it's not worth fixing. Humans dump their couches, pouches, houses, blouses, spouses, and you think you have a leg to stand on? Get with it. If it's new, it's on view. If it sells, it stays. If it's defective, it's destroyed. Exterminated.

(JACK assists GERTA to her feet)

GERTA

At least send me to Goodwill.

JACK

Aller a la chambre! [Go to the room!]

GERTA

Salvation Army?

ANN

Go to the room!

GERTA

Give me to a crippled girl!

JACK

Aller! Aller vous a la chambre, maintenant! [Go to the room, now!]

GERTA

I won't! I won't! There's a little girl out there somewhere who wants me, you'll see. I won't cheat her of me!

(GERTA attempts to run but only hobbles)

ANN

Grab her!

(GERTA, hobbling, tries to fervently to escape. ANN and JACK catch her. GERTA struggles as they drag her offstage. For a moment...silence. A Christmas carol begins... and then a scream followed by a loud crunch from a machine. Silence again. ANN and JACK re-enter, JACK carrying GERTA's apron, ANN...something else.)

JACK

Forte petite ballerine [strong little ballerina], even with a game foot.

ANN

Souvenir?

(ANN tosses JACK what's left of GERTA's crushed leg.)

JACK

(Tosses limb back like "hot potato") Cela est malade! [That's sick!]

ANN

(Laughs) Never know when you need a leg to stand on.

JACK

Nous la tuons. We killed Gerta.

ANN

That proves it. We're human. Experiment complete.

JACK

We killed Gerta. *Comprenez-vous?* [Don't you understand?]

ANN

I see you have a conscience, another human quality.

JACK

Nous avez [We have] blood on our hands!

ANN

Paint, maybe, but not blood.

JACK

Comment boite vous dites cela? [How can you say that?]

ANN

That was humor. Didn't you find that funny?

JACK

Soudain, j'ai perdu [I've suddenly lost] *mon appetite* [my appetite] for humor.

ANN

See? You did it again. You made a joke. Laugh.

JACK

J'ai non appetite pour vous. [I have no appetite for you.]

(JACK crosses downstage and sits, arms crossed, head down. ANN moves to him)

ANN

Jack?

JACK

Je ne suis pas intelligent [I am not smart] *comme vous* [like you], but I...I...have—

ANN

Compassion. You have compassion. *(ANN kneels and hugs JACK)* That makes you more human than me.

(JACK pulls away, stands)

JACK

Choses [Things] *auraient pu aller* [could've gone] the other way. *Mademoiselle Ann... vous termine dans le* [you ended up in the] dumpster press. *Tout pour quelque experiment stupide.* [All for some stupid experiment.] *Stupide!* [Stupid!]

ANN

I see that now.

JACK

What will *Monsieur* [Mr.] McGready say when he can't find Gerta?

ANN

He'll look around and eventually find the pieces. Probably think his stock boy did it.

(ANN picks up GERTA's leg and gives it to JACK)

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes