

Commentary on *Looking in the Same Direction*

A Play by Freda J. Fuller Coursey

Looking in the Same Direction is, on the surface, a play about three women: one child-woman, one mature woman, and one older woman. I wrote it after the occasion of the death of my paternal grandmother, when I was thinking about how to prevent the value that is the “self” of a human being, any human being, from being lost after the physical person has gone. The play is loosely based on the life of my grandmother, but much of it is embellished, telescoped, or changed for the purpose of adhering to my literary themes. It is my purpose to do my grandmother honor in her hero’s journey, and to honor all who make such a journey.

The three characters in the play are Meg, a thin, nice-looking woman about thirty years old, her daughter Holly, who is eleven, and Meg’s father’s mother, who is called Gramma, and is an older woman about seventy years old. The story is ostensibly about a fairly short period of their lives, and about Gramma’s stroke and subsequent partial recovery.

All of the actual “action” of the play takes place in Gramma’s living room. Off-stage action, people, and sounds are heard or referred to, but only the three characters of Holly, Meg, and Gramma are seen. Stories are told of other family members, and the viewer is present for one side of a couple of telephone conversations (which function, effectively, as soliloquies), but all of the *observed* action occurs in Gramma’s living room. It is never said where the setting is geographically, but the location is not significant to the story. There are some time and date clues: Meg takes a Milky Way candy bar to Wallace in a nursing home, there is a discussion about satellite photography, Gramma has a clothes dryer and a telephone, and she refers to watching Sally Jesse Raphael on television. Gramma refers to the refrigerator as an “icebox,” which pins the time down to some time after, but not too long after, the icebox was the common method of refrigeration for food, but the actual date itself is not significant. The seasons are

more important, and the cycle of seasons, and there are references to them in the textual notes.

The limitation in the number of characters, the choice of that number as being three, the restriction of characters to one gender, and the centralization of the action to one enclosed location are all significant, and necessary for the development of the play and its underlying messages. It was suggested to me by someone who did a critical reading of the play at my request (I sent copies of the play out to readers in several areas of the country) that I needed more characters, some of them male, but that reader missed the point. This play is only superficially about events of the lives of the three women; it is really about the transition of someone, in this case of Gramma, but it could have been anyone (with some restrictions which I later discuss), from being the care-giver to being the one in need of care, and about that person being able to maintain value and dignity throughout the transition. I could have done the same thing, with an all-male cast, for the development and transition of a male persona (and then all of the male cast members would have been working on the transition of *that* self in *that* hero journey), but I chose to develop the female; less attention has been paid to the female hero journey.

Gramma's living room functions as the cave, both the cave of the unconscious, through which Gramma (and all of us) must travel, and the cave of the womb. Woman is the symbol of life, and this is a female consciousness we see pursuing its hero's journey; male characters would only be in the way here, for reasons I have already discussed. If we consider this play to be a discussion of life issues, the woman's journey is also a better choice for that reason.

Gramma is a hero. She works hard all of her life, and does what she can to help others. She "sacrifices" whatever personal accomplishments she might have had to nurture others. This is consistent with seeing the hero character as one who performs physical deeds and sacrifices him- (her-) self. A hero is worth writing about, both to heap glory on the hero and the notion of heroism, and to hold the individual hero up as an example for the reader (or the watcher, if the play is being performed.)

I give many stage directions and director's comments in the text. I have done quite a bit of theatre myself, onstage and off, and it is often the case that the actor or the director must fish around, trying to interpret just what it is that the writer wants to say or to accomplish. I did not want my intentions to be unclear, so wherever I thought there might be any reason for doubt, I have tried to express my intentions in the textual notes, as well as in the text itself, such as I have done when we are warned that Gramma is ill, before the stroke; she talks to Meg about being cold or "having the rigors," and I point out to the reader that it is *not* cold; I have tried to leave all of the clues to my intentions that I could.

Rebecca Greene Udden, the Artistic Director of the Main Street Theater in Houston, Texas, to whom I sent a draft copy of *Looking in the Same Direction* for reading and evaluation, says in a letter to me about it: "Thank you for sending me your play. I enjoyed reading it; it is a sweet story" (Udden 1). I don't know that I agree with her evaluation. It is a *good* story, heart-wrenching and sometimes funny, but I don't believe I intended it to be "sweet."

Though the Gramma character does not do this in the play, the real Gramma on whom this story was modeled (my own paternal grandmother, Willie Gladys England Doughty Hill) always sang a song about Jonah in the belly of the whale. I thought about using this song in the text, but decided that as a plot device, it was much too obvious. Such a story as that of Jonah and the whale is about a descent into the dark. It is a standard motif personifying all of the unconscious. The water the whale swims in is the unconscious mind, and the creature itself represents the dynamism of the unconscious. I wanted to work with this idea, but in a more subtle way. The notion of Jonah's emergence from the belly of the whale would have worked here, but that notion still lacks the subtlety with which I hoped to present the messages I present in my play.

In the play, the stroke Gramma suffers is the "monster." I consider that it may even be said that it is Gramma's own *brain* that is the monster: an organ without any feeling of its own,

her brain comes asserting itself to disrupt her consciousness. It is not malevolent, just serendipitous. The stroke sequence is meant to be indicative of the fact that the consciousness (both the conscious mind and the unconscious, the totality of them) must submit to the humanity of the body. The physicality of the body is the “system,” the arena in which the consciousness as hero must travel. Will the arena and its attributes defeat the hero? The self is always a hero, or can always be; it descends into the dark of the unconscious mind concurrently with the daily playing out of conscious will and action. Will the hero – the wholeness of the consciousness – be able to resist the physicality of the body and so be able to overcome the system?

Joyce said that “history is a nightmare” from which he is “trying to awake.” In *Looking in the Same Direction*, the stroke is the nightmare trapping Gramma in her past and her unconscious, and she is trying to awake from it. The stroke is the plot device focus for a physical influence that is present throughout the journey of life for everyone. For Gramma, in the play, the stroke opens a door, destroying the temporality of how she accesses her unconscious mind and her memories. To the outside world, to the observer, this looks like dementia. To the one experiencing it, this “dementia” could be a gate to the inner self.

Gramma does wake up after the stroke, and she does reach some stage of enlightenment. This enlightenment may suggest the idea of religion, both because of an enlightenment experience being closely tied with religious experience, and because of the idea of waking up itself: “Buddha”, for example, means “one who waked up.”

The character “Gramma” does have a religion, the societally, structurally, socially available religion of her immediate fathers. She participates in it. She tells about playing the organ for church services, and there is discussion of selections she has played and of choir directors. She sends food for a funeral and makes cookies for the church.

As a plot device, or in a psychological way, religion provides a known horizon, some given point for which the traveler may aim with a fair assurance of being able to arrive there at

the journey's end. In a physical and psychological way, the journey of life is the transition from childhood through maturity to the losing of at least some of the powers achieved in maturity, hopefully with an acquiescence and an acceptance of the inevitability of this process as being nature's, or God's, normal way in which the processes of life *should* progress. Religion suggests a beauty inherent in the process, where nature may be perceived as being neutral; religion is not neutral. When Gramma sings "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," she is thinking of going home, of crossing a river and arriving at her destination.

Both the ideas of an afterlife and of the unconscious mind suggest that there is a plane behind the visible plane to which we who are in the world and on the journey have to relate, a hidden plane which supports, feeds, and interacts with the visible one. Jung talks about the free exchange of information between these two planes. The mentally ill person or the person suffering from some physical ailment such as the aftermath of a stroke may have no concept of the differences between the two planes. Dementia transcends temporality. In the early stroke state, the *mind* is a cave: all orientation is gone. There is no "direction." Following or coming out of such a state, there is an ensuing struggle by the person on the journey to discover whether it is the inner or the outer reality that is the expression of the unconscious and of the consciousness as a whole. When the stroke happens, the invisible plane overtakes Gramma. She loses contact with temporality. With the help of Meg and of Holly, Gramma is able to emerge from her subconscious to exist again for a short while with her family in the visible plane.

Life evokes character, for good or for bad (not "evil"; as Hinduism says, the processes of nature cannot be "evil.") The "self" is the quiet place, or, if not actually quiet, the self is at least the center out of which the action comes. The living room in the play is the "quiet place" for these three characters, the focus for their developments of self and consciousness. Growth is most obvious for Gramma, for it is her transition that is the most evident, but transition is ongoing for all of the characters.

The child, Holly, represents the future. She suggests the mystic child who solves riddles and teaches wisdom. Her name comes from the Old English name Halig, which means “holy” (Rule 61). The name also has associations with Christmas holly and with the holy child born at Christmas time. The name “Holly” also has older, Druidic associations; holly is one of the two sacred plants of the Ogham alphabet of the Druids. “Ogham” is a sacred woodland alphabet used by the Druids for purposes of divination. The Ogham alphabet itself consists of a number of signs, which are used to represent each of the sacred animals or trees. The signs are carved on sticks to symbolize the concepts, and the sticks are then cast on the ground and “read.” In the play *Looking in the Same Direction*, the character Holly often serves as a catalyst or pivot upon which some point of revelation turns. In her, some higher concept is represented and (perhaps) read.

Meg, the mother, represents the present. I chose her name mostly because it is the name of the strong, housewifely sister in *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott. I thought about choosing the name “Jo” from the same story, to use that character for the strength she represents, but I decided that Jo symbolizes the wrong kind of strength for my purpose; Meg is the character more centered in the home, and in homey kinds of nurturing, and that is what I want the mother character in the play to be. She does have some of what Jo has: she is intellectual, and sometimes funny. But Meg is more centered than Jo is, at least as Jo is portrayed in the book *Little Women*, though the character she has grown up to be in *Little Men* would have suited my purpose. I decided that *Little Men* is not well enough known or widely enough read to work for my purposes of suggestion, and settled on the name “Meg” for the mother here.

The name “Meg” was also chosen for its meaning. “Meg” is a diminutive form of the name Margaret, which honors the patron saint of Scotland, and means “a pearl” (Rule 73). Margaret is a family name used in the text of the play, and I want to suggest both value of the self and family values and ties here. The Gramma character also has a friend named Pearl, which

subtly reinforces that sense of value. Pearl and her husband Ode are mentioned in a discussion held between Gramma and Meg when Gramma is beginning to recover some sense of the present during her recovery from the stroke. “Ode” is also a suggestive name.

Gramma obviously represents the past as well as representing the completion of the cycle. We do not know what her name is; she is “Gramma.” This circle of women and of life gives us a pattern. It is a matriarchal pattern or group, a maternal social and familial group, and it is clear that the blood relationships are important. There being three females both serves to complete the circle of the life cycle and to suggest Nietzsche’s three transformations, as in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. This association is not nearly so obvious as the showing of the life cycle, but it is present.

In India, a visitor to a home is greeted with praying hands in recognition of the divinity present in man. In the rural America from which Gramma comes, the visitor is greeted with food and with comforts, essentials needed to sustain the body, which is the seat of the self. The food sometimes even has symbolic meaning, as in the opening scene of the play when the characters are about to have black-eyed peas and cabbage, both for dinner and for luck. (The food is eaten off-stage. I have done enough Neil Simon plays to know that I prefer not to have to manage a full meal in view of the audience. The actual *eating* of the meal is not necessary in this case, anyway; it would only be a distraction.) This menu-as-lucky, black-eyed peas and cabbage, is associated with the new year and the New Year holiday, which also suggests an ending and a beginning, and the continuity, birth, death, and rebirth, of the life cycle.

There are other symbols in the play, too. Woman is of course the mother, the source of life. Gramma’s living room is the cave, the womb, and the unconscious out of which and in which the self develops. The house is an anchor point for the lives of the characters, a source of strength and wisdom. Other things try to look into the house or come into it, such as when the hot air balloon passes overhead, or the cat comes in and hides under the bed. A cat is associated

with the moon, which is woman, but also with Bast, who is the guardian of marriage, but notice that the cat is never seen, and is sent back out of the house. (This is helpful to the director of the play, too; he does not have to manage an animal in a stage show!) Consistent with the idea of sending “Bast” away, Meg has been married but is divorced, and both her husband and her father (Gramma’s son – also absent) are referred to unfavorably. In talking with Holly, Gramma likens Meg’s ex-husband to tree roots in the sewer. Gramma’s second husband, Wallace, is alive at the beginning of the play, but dies without being seen, and is known only by reference; his description makes him seem harmless, but fairly ineffective in any hero journey. The only favorable male reference is to Gramma’s first husband, who has died and become almost a mythical figure.

There are other symbols. When Gramma has the stroke, she is left with a paralyzed and useless arm. In her state of dementia, she does not even know that it is *her* arm, and is stopped from hurting the arm only by Holly, who functions as the mythic child. The arm Gramma does not recognize as her own is her left arm. In the symbolism of the members of the body, the left arm represents the unconscious, which is appropriate here. After the stroke, Gramma cannot recognize her “center” as being her own. Interestingly, it would also have worked to have the right arm, the symbol of the conscious self, be the paralyzed one; this could also show Gramma’s separation from herself. I used the left arm because it is the inner self I want to show as the one in the position of importance. I want to show that one must be in communication with the inner self in order to be a whole and functioning being. I mean also to subtly suggest with Gramma and her useless arm a bird with a broken wing, which is a familiar symbol (I had not yet read Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* when I wrote this, but the final scenes only reinforce my assurance about using the bird with the broken wing image in my play.) The bird is often used as a symbol of the human soul or is associated with the spirit, and a bird with a broken wing is a symbol of a soul not able to fly, not able to fulfill its function. Making this bird-with-the-broken-

wing suggestion is another way to point out that the self must be whole for the person to be realized.

Teeth can represent a symbolic barrier put up by an individual against the world around him. In the play, Gramma loses her false teeth. She wraps them in Kleenex and puts them in a basket. Jung says that a basket is an archetype that represents the maternal body. A basket could therefore be interpreted as being a womb, or perhaps another cave into which to go, and from which to emerge. Gramma's teeth go into the basket; her defenses or barriers go into the cave, as indeed they do when she has the stroke. They are *false* teeth, so perhaps also false barriers. This "teeth" symbol has come idiomatically into the English language; something that is weak is said to have "no teeth in it." In the play, Meg and Holly help Gramma to recover both her teeth and her inner self, thus showing that *all* of the parts of the cycle are necessary to complete the whole, as all of the parts of the self are necessary to complete *that* whole.

During the course of the play, Meg gives Gramma a bath (offstage; I tried to keep the staging simple.) A bath symbolizes both purification and cleansing. The reason given in the text for the necessity for the bath is that Meg has brought Gramma some talcum powder scented with her favorite perfume. Perfume is symbolic of memories and reminiscences. Gramma is purified and then dusted with memories and with reminiscences. This scene is critical not only to suggest this, but also to show Gramma's increasing dementia, or the breaking down of the barriers between the conscious and the unconscious. Gramma is also returning to her role as child, shown by her needing to be bathed by the mother figure, Meg, and again later by Gramma asking Holly to tell her a story, instead of Gramma telling a story to Holly, as they had done in the past (this reversal of roles also shows Holly's transition to that of mother figure.)

In the scene following the bath, Holly and Gramma have the discussion from which the title of the play comes. Gramma is talking with Holly about the meaning of life, and about what it is that is important. Gramma says: "... we need to be thankful for the gift, Holly, instead of

whining about how long it lasts. We should be glad that we live, instead of complaining that we die” (Coursey 63). This joy in the face of whatever happens is central to the family portrayed here. They are not defeated. Gramma tells us what “the real question” is herself: “... how could [we] possibly bear to waste life, just because death is coming” (Coursey 63)?

Besides all of the other references to the cycle of life and of the self, the play itself cycles. Much of it deals with memories and with reminiscences. There are stories about family history, and about how the family migrated to the American West. There is a Civil War story illustrating another sacrifice by a female, a girl child who was forced to give up her doll so that the material in it could be used to make a food sack so that a soldier (male) could carry potatoes. There is another story about the death of a female forebear, and about how she faced her death heroically and with foreknowledge; she died in a storm cellar, in a descent into the underworld in a time of danger, in spite of which descent she achieved her resurrection with gladness. There is still another story about Davy Crockett that is a variation of early American folktales. At the end of the play, there is Holly’s story of David and Goliath.

Early in the play, Gramma tells Holly a story. Mid-way in the play, Gramma tells a story in which Meg must fill in the blanks because Gramma cannot remember the details. There are other stories in the course of the action. At the end of the play, Holly tells Gramma a story. She tells the story of David and Goliath, with interjections by Gramma. Most of what Gramma says here is just commentary, not too significant to the story, but there are some meaningful words of wisdom even at this point when we know that Gramma is nearing her death. She says: “The way you know is usually the best” (Coursey 102) and when Holly talks about how David’s people killed the Philistines, Gramma says “I remember the Bible says by the hundred and thousand. I don’t like wars.”

It is in this scene of the David and Goliath story that another role reversal between Holly and Gramma is carried out. Early in the play, Gramma sings Holly to sleep while stroking her

hair and forehead. The song Gramma sings is “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” In the last scene of the play, Gramma asks Holly to sing to her. Holly does, and she sings the song Gramma always sings, but more slowly and in a clear soprano voice, stroking Gramma’s hair and forehead while she does so. A few minutes before, Holly has asked Gramma if she is ready for a long sleep, and Gramma answered, nodding, “...Almost, child.” We can see that this is so; the cycle is almost complete.

The play ends with Gramma’s death imminent, but on an upbeat note. The character of Gramma has emerged triumphant at the end of the journey, and she passes her hero quest on to her descendants in the immediate persons of Holly and of Meg. They accept the bequest willingly and as their rightful inheritance. For the curtain call, all three characters hold hands and sing at least two bars of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” in a powerful, up tempo rhythm. Gramma is of course mobile and holding and swinging hands with the others, so that the audience has no doubt of the successful resolution of Gramma’s hero quest.

This play must be visualized to be completely appreciated. This is another reason that I gave so many stage directions and comments in the textual notes. The reader must be able to see into the space where these characters are in order to get into touch with them. Maybe that is the essence of the message, anyway. The unconscious is a dark place sometimes, but things and people on the journey of the hero cast light into the unconscious, or into any cave, and the hero, through these devices, emerges triumphant at the end of the journey with his prize, which in Gramma’s case was the knowledge of her self and her value, and the security that Meg and Holly and their genetic children into some deep future could also have that knowledge of self and value. Such a prize as this one is a worthy goal to be attained at the successful conclusion of a hero’s quest, and the Gramma – all three characters, really – successfully complete their own quests.

Works Cited

Coursey, Freda J. Fuller. *Looking in the Same Direction*. Privately printed, 1994. Revised 2000.

Rule, Lareina. *Name Your Baby*. New York: Bantam, 1976.

Udden, Rebecca Greene. Letter. Unpublished. Undated, but postmarked 24 May 1994.

My play *Looking in the Same Direction* was a semi-finalist in the Living Room Theatre (Texas) 2002 play competition, and was used in summer 2001 in a university playwriting class at William and Mary University in Virginia.

LOOKING IN THE SAME DIRECTION

By

Freda J. Fuller Coursey

Copyright ©2000 **Freda Fuller Coursey**

LOOKING IN THE SAME DIRECTION

Cast of Characters

Gramma — Older woman about seventy. Meg's father's mother.

Meg — Thin, nice-looking woman about 30. She must be big/strong enough to be able to make it believable that she could lift Gramma.

Holly — Meg's daughter. Age 11 at start of play (could be a little older, but prepubescent).

The Gramma and Holly characters should be able to sing fairly well, and Meg should be able to sing at least passably.

All of the action takes place in Gramma's living room.

Props or Other Items Needed

A hospital bed with side rails

Ironing board with iron and basket of ironing

Towel, bowl of applesauce, and spoon

Wrapped item assumed to be Gramma's false teeth

Glass of water and a pill

Stethoscope and a blood pressure cuff

Newspaper articles (old and yellowed)

Get well cards

Kleenex

Clipboard and a pencil and paper

Schoolbooks

Cup towels (several)

Apron with pocket

Throw for sofa

Mending — socks to darn, and pajamas to mend

Bills, insurance and social security papers, and legal documents

Purse and keys

Coke can with a flexible straw

Covered dish

Basketball

Horrible large out-of-style dress

For the set:

Chair or stool

Sofa

Dining table with chairs (four or more)

End table with lamp; doilies for the tables

Telephone

Knick-knacks for Gramma to dust

Two bedspreads

Flowers in season

Costumes

- Gramma — jacket; pajamas; robe; two pairs of socks; wash cloth; safety pins (about 40 per show); house dresses; glasses; and an arm brace, the kind with the metal rods in it; apron with pocket
- Meg — jacket; watch by which to take Gramma's pulse; professional looking outfits otherwise; and purse and keys
- Holly — robe; flannel nightgown; slippers; socks; hairbrush; bath towel; and school clothes

Act I Scene I

LIVING ROOM —

No one on stage. Sofa at center stage, covered with a bedspread. Dining table upstage. Doilies on tables, coffee table in front of sofa. There is a lighted lamp on an end table next to the sofa, and a telephone on the table. Doors upstage L and R, L to kitchen, R to bedrooms. Door CSR to yard and street. Assume door from kitchen to backyard, but this is offstage.

(Voice): Gramma? Gramma! *(Enter from street door, stamping their feet, Meg, a woman about 30, carrying a covered dish, and her daughter, Holly, who is perhaps 11.)* We're here!

Gramma: *(Enter from the kitchen wiping her hands on an apron, an older woman, about 70.)* Come in this house! Let me take your coats. *(Takes them and puts them on a chair.)*

Meg: Here's the potato salad; can we do anything to help? *(Gives dish to Gramma.)*

Gramma: You can finish cutting up the salad, Meg, and Holly can set the table, and then we'll eat. Come here, Holly, and give Gramma a kiss! *(Puts dish down.)*

Holly: *(Going to her grandmother and kissing her)* Hi, Gramma. What're we having to

eat?

Gramma: Well, let's see; since it's New Year's Day, we're having black-eyed peas with salt pork, and then *I* made potato salad, and peach cobbler, and there're some radishes and green onions. And green salad, and whatever you'd like to drink.

Holly: That sounds good!

Gramma: And cabbage. You have to have cabbage on New Year's to give you luck with money.

Meg: Then I'll be certain to eat some cabbage.

Gramma: There's plenty. Why don't you go wash your hands, Holly, and you can help Gramma finish getting everything ready.

Holly: Okay, Gramma. Can I taste the peach cobbler?

Gramma: Put some in a little dish and you can. (*Picks up covered dish*) And take this out to the kitchen as you go. (*Gives Holly the dish.*)

Meg: Just a bite; you don't want to spoil your dinner.

Holly: Okay, Mom. (*Runs out to the kitchen.*)

Gramma: Men and children always seem to like the sweet stuff the best.

Meg: Speaking of men, how is Wallace doing?

Gramma: He's not doing any good at all. I went out to the nursing home to see him and feed him his dinner, and he didn't even know where he was. He didn't seem to know who I was, either, and we've been married for fifteen years.

Meg: I know; I went by there on my lunch hour to see him and took him a Milky Way and a sweater — it's always so chilly out there — and he told me he was staying in a hotel, that he had just gotten off work, and that someone had stolen all of his clothes. He called me at the office today.

Gramma: I don't understand how someone who doesn't know where he is can remember how to make a telephone call.

Meg: I wondered how he could remember my phone number! I don't think you'd better go out there tonight; there's too much ice on the road. I'll go out and check on him after dinner. Is there anything else I can do to help, besides finishing the salad?

Gramma: Not with the food; everything else is done. I couldn't sleep this morning, so I got up and started working on our dinner, 'bout four o'clock it must've been, before it was even daylight, and I've just worked on it slow

all day. I stopped for a little while and talked to Mrs. Stewart; her daughter's having problems with that husband of hers.

Meg: He never was worth much, not that I should say anything; mine didn't turn out so well, either.

Gramma: Both of you got married young, and your parents being the way they were didn't help any. I still can't get over your dad turning out the way he did, when he was raised in the church. I worry sometimes over whether he was really saved or not. You know he was saved at a revival when he was just a little boy; I was playing the organ for it for Brother Matthews.

Meg: I think that daddy was saved. He always got so angry about religion; nobody gets that angry about something that doesn't mean a lot to them.

Gramma: I hope you're right.

Holly: *(Running in out of the kitchen)* I finished cutting up the salad for you, Mom.

Meg: Why, thank you, Holly.

Holly: You're welcome. Are you ready for me to set the table now, Gramma?

Gramma: Did you wash your hands? *(Taking Holly's hands and inspecting them closely.)*

Holly: Yes, I did.

Gramma: *(Looking over the tops of her glasses)*
With soap?

Holly: Yes, Gramma.

Gramma: Okay, then you can set the table. Just use the every day dishes.

Holly: Do you want to eat in the dining room or the kitchen?

Gramma: Let's just eat in the kitchen; then we can serve from the stove and your mother won't have to wash all those serving bowls.

Meg: Sounds good to me!

Holly: Okay! *(Running out to kitchen.)*

Gramma: I wish that Wallace could've been here.

Meg: *(Nodding)* So do I. At least he doesn't really know where he is; he thinks he's managing a job somewhere.

Gramma: I don't think he ever really managed much of anything.

Meg: Then let's be thankful that he finally can, if it means so much to him. I'll go out and see him after while, and take him some of your black-eyed peas.

Gramma: He's not your Grandpa; he's not anything like your Grandpa, but he tries.

Meg: NOBODY is like Grandpa; Grandpa was like Dennis the Menace.

Gramma: Your Grandpa used to walk up behind me when I had my hands all greasy or soapy, and stick my dress up in the crack of my behind, and then just laugh like an idiot.

Meg: I know. Remember the time he fed me the green persimmon? Oh, that was awful! I never tasted anything so sour. I think it took a week for my face to turn back right-side out.

Gramma: *(smiling)* He always acted that way. We lived in a house one time where the only claim to being "fancy" or "modern" the house had was the indoor plumbing; there were even holes in the walls. There were big cracks in the wall of the shower, and your Grandpa would peek in from the room on the other side of the wall while I was in the bathtub, and tease me. I had never been used to anyone seeing me without my clothes on.

Meg: *(Shaking her head)* Had he always teased like that?

Gramma: Yes. He was friends with my brothers for a long time before I ever really thought about him as anything BUT an extra brother, and I think it was his orneriness that made me notice him. Momma used to say that a boy would only tease you if he liked you, and I began to think there must be something to it, and I guess there was.

Meg: I know he teased us kids for as long as I can remember. I think teasing is the only thing my sister can remember about Grandpa; she was only about three years old when he died. In fact, I've heard her say that the only clear memory she has of him, is of him standing at the foot of that big pecan tree in your back yard, laughing up at *us* in the top of that tree, with me hanging onto her shirt-tail, and her yelling to be let down.

Gramma: That was probably on the very day he died; do you remember that, Meg?

Meg: Gosh, yes. I thought Sissy was gonna fall outta that tree before we could talk him into letting us down.

Gramma: I told him that you girls oughtn't to climb a tree that you couldn't climb on your own, without a ladder, but he never would listen to reason when he was playing a prank like that.

Meg: He certainly played one on us that day. Remember? He put the ladder up against that big tree, and then let us climb up into the top of it, and took

the ladder.

Gramma: *(Shaking her head, but smiling)* He was one for the mischief, all right.

Meg: I remember how he stood there and laughed and laughed. I guess it's that that Sissy remembers about it.

Gramma: I s'pose if you only had one memory of someone, the memory of the sight of them laughing wouldn't be a bad one to have.

Meg: No, and she never talks about how upset she was, only about him having such fun with teasing us.

Gramma: *(Sighing)* I miss your Grandpa.

Meg: Me, too. But Wallace is a good man.

Gramma: I know. Tell me how you think Wallace is getting along after you go out to see him.

Meg: I will. Let's go finish putting dinner on the table; it's too quiet in the kitchen.

Gramma: That probably means Holly's eating the cherries off the top of the dessert.

Meg: Or listening to us talk.

Gramma: *(Nodding)* Let's go eat.

(Fade to black.)

(Clear jackets from set.)

Act I Scene II

Lights come up with Gramma coming out of the bedroom into the living room, calling for, and looking for Meg.

Gramma: Meg? Meg! Where are you? *(Stops about CS between the sofa and the dining table.)*

Meg: *(Coming out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on a cup towel)* Here I am, Gramma. How're you feeling? *(Goes to Gramma and kisses her cheek)*

Gramma picks up a rag and begins dusting, picking up knick-knacks and wiping them with a cloth.

Gramma: Fine. *(Presses her cheek to Meg's cheek instead of kissing her)* I'm glowing pretty good, though. I worked all day in the yard; I cut down a tree, raked leaves, and dug the grass out of the flowerbed and around the shrubs in front. *(Keeps dusting as she talks. Meg puts her cup towel down and picks up a rag and helps Gramma dust.)* I gave that neighbor girl a start of monkey grass.

Meg: I thought this was the day you were going to go shopping. Every time I've seen you, you've been telling me you don't even have anything to wear to church.

Gramma: I went to the Tall Shop yesterday. Bought two dresses and a robe and a girdle, and had them order me a coat from New York. Elizabeth went with me; she got the tackiest old pink dress.

Meg: Now, Gramma.

Gramma: Well, it was. When we left there, we went out to the barbecue place, and then on over to Lomar's and got some turnip greens; they had bugs on them, and I had to wash 'em and pick all the bugs when I got home. Where've you been all day, at work?

Meg: Yes, but you'd've been proud of me this morning. I got up real early, cleaned out the icebox, washed a few dishes, made fruit salad, and then baked some homemade bread I had put in the oven to rise last night; it was real good this time. I used your recipe.

Gramma: I've always had the best luck with that recipe; it was Momma's. I'm always sorry any time I try and change it. Her recipe makes real good rolls, too, if you punch 'em down and let 'em rise again. I never can get 'em as white as hers, though; I think it must be the flour we get.

Meg: It's hard to get the temperature just right in my old oven. I don't know how your Momma ever did bake anything, in that wood stove she had.

Gramma: She just had a knack for it; some people do. Your sister has it. By the way, I wrote to Sissy today; she is so good to write me. (*Looks accusingly at Meg.*)

Meg: I didn't know I ought to write to you, Gramma; we live in the same town and I see you all of the time. I suppose I *could* write to you, if you'd like for me to. Would you like your letters mailed, or hand-delivered?

Gramma: There's no need to be nasty. (*Changing the subject*) I started fixing up my dresses today, the ones I got at the Tall Shop. One of them was too small in the armholes and shoulders; I'll have to take it back.

Meg: Didn't you notice that when you tried it on?

Gramma: Oh, I didn't try it on. It was my size, and since I'm always a perfect fit, I thought it would be okay, but it isn't; it must be made wrong. Some of these girls who sew any more just don't know anything.

Meg: If you say so, Gramma.

Gramma: (*Putting down her dusting rag, and picking up a very large dress which is horribly out of style.*) By the way, I found that dress of mine I was telling

you about. (*Holding it up*) This would look really good on you, and it would be professional looking for you to wear to work. *I* used to wear it when I was working at the Tall Shop, and all of the women thought it was really up-and-coming.

Meg: I — uh — thank you, Gramma, but ... I think it would be too big for me.

Gramma: Oh, that's no problem. You can put it on and I'll pin it up, and I can have it ready for you to wear by tomorrow or the next day. I always sit and sew while I'm watching my shows, and the work gets done in no time.

Meg: Thank you, Gramma, but I don't want you to go to all that trouble for me.

Gramma: Oh, it's no tr—(*the back door slams loudly and Holly comes tearing in out of the kitchen*)

Holly: Did you see it? Did you see it?

Gramma: Slow down, Holly!

Meg: See what?

Holly: There was a hot air balloon right over the house! It was really low, almost touching the tops of the trees, and the man in the balloon waved to me. He was taking pictures, too; I think I'm in some of them, waving back. Do

you think I look okay?

Gramma: Oh, heavens, Holly; if the man was in a balloon, if you do show in the pictures, you'll probably look like an ant.

Meg: Not necessarily, Gramma. There are satellites up there that are s'posed to be able to take good enough pictures that when people look at them, they can read the labels in your clothes.

Gramma: I don't want anyone reading the labels in my clothes; a lady's size is her own business. They taught us that at the Tall Shop.

Meg: Then you'd better not hold up anything with a label in it near the window.

Gramma: Hmmph! (*Quickly folds up dress she is still holding, and looks suspiciously toward a window or door.*) But I guess it doesn't matter since this is YOUR dress.

Holly: That? (*Aghast*) Mom, you're not going to wear THAT! One of my friends might see you!

Gramma: You don't like it either? Well, then it must be bad. (*Throws it on the floor.*) I can't do anything any more, I guess. I don't understand anything any more, either; like the pictures. It used to be that if someone was taking your picture, he was standing there with a big cloth over his head, and a

flash bright enough to curdle milk.

Holly: I've seen a camera like that. A friend of mine's dad had one; he took our pictures with it.

Meg: Did you ever see the pictures he took?

Holly: Yes; they were okay, but real small, and they were black and white instead of color.

Gramma: I have something I'll bet you've never seen, put away in a box somewhere.

Holly: What, Gramma?

Meg: I know, because you showed them to *me* one time.

Gramma: I have some pictures of my great-great-great grandparents, and they're on little sheets of metal instead of paper.

Holly: Metal!

Gramma: Yes; it was thought up by some French painter. That was how all pictures were, when they first started making pictures.

Holly: Wow. I'd like to see them sometime.

Meg: I think I remember where they were when Gramma showed them to me,
Holly; we can look for them after while, if you want to.

Holly: Okay; that would be neat.

Gramma: I'd like to see 'em, too; where were they?

Meg: In a tin box in the storeroom.

Gramma: The two of you run on out there and start looking. I'll catch up with you in
a minute. It takes me a minute to get started.

Holly: Okay, Gramma. (*Jumping up and pulling Meg into the kitchen by the
hand*) Come on, Mom; come on!

Meg: All right, I'm coming! (*They go out.*)

Gramma: (*Getting up slowly and rubbing her back*) Older and stiffer, every day.
(*Loudly*) Wait for me, girls! Wait for Gramma! (*Walks stiffly but quickly
into the kitchen. Light fades to black.*)

(*Clear dress from floor of set.*)

Act I Scene III

TIME — FOUR MONTHS LATER, EVENING.

Scene opens with semi-darkened stage. There is a lighted lamp on an end table next to the sofa, and a telephone on the table. Gramma is sitting on the end of the sofa talking on the phone. She is in a house dress, but different. It is about 4 months later, evening. There is a different bedspread on the sofa, a throw or blanket on the opposite end of the sofa, and lilies or some other Easter flower on the dining room table.

Gramma: We brought Wallace home for his fourth monthly visit since the New Year yesterday, and he didn't recognize the house this time... No, he didn't eat much, and he covered the cornbread with pepper and got choked... I was so tired by the time the kids took him back I was relieved to see him go, and then I felt guilty about it... Wallace just worshipped our little girl; I do think he knew her. But several times, he looked around and said "Where's my wife?" and it broke my heart... Yes, his first wife passed away with cancer... ... Did you get the music for the singing tomorrow? No? I hope it won't be that high-powered stuff. Our regular choir director's out of town and the substitute was supposed to call me, but he hasn't. You know how I get upset when I can't find out what we're gonna do; I just get so nervous if I don't have time to practice... Yes, for more than 40 years. I was the organist for services for the first time in 1947; I still remember I played "Open the Gates of the Temple." The regular church organist had gone with her husband to Chicago. They gave me five dollars... Well, I better

go. I promised our little girl I'd tell her a bedtime story; she's spending the night with me while her mother works. I'll talk to you next week. (*Hangs up without saying goodbye; she doesn't say goodbye.*)

Gramma: Holly? Are you finished with your bath?

(Voice from off-stage): Yes; I'm coming, Gramma. (*Holly enters*

^Holly wearing a flannel nightgown, robe, and socks and slippers, and carrying a hairbrush and a bath towel. Her hair is wet and brushed hanging down her back.)

Gramma: Sit down here by me and dry your hair, and I'll tell you a story. (*Holly sits, and Gramma tells a short story, Holly brushing and drying her hair.*)

Well, one time there was a man called Davy Crockett. He liked to tell jokes, was good at a bargain or a fight, and was strong and brave. He decided to run for Congress. He started off to go give a speech wearing his hunting shirt and carrying his gun Betsy.

Holly: His gun had a name?

Gramma: Yes, he called his rifle Betsy. When Davy Crockett got to the place where he was to speak, he got up onto a tree stump and talked for a while, and then the people began to yell that if he wanted to talk some more, they

wanted something to drink.

Holly: They wanted Davy Crockett to buy them something to drink? You mean like whisky or beer or something?

Gramma: Yes. Well, he went into the place where drinks were sold and tried to order drinks for everyone, but the man working there said that Davy Crockett had to pay his money first, and Davy didn't have any money that day.

Holly: *(Shaking her head)* No money?

Gramma: No. Money was so scarce in those parts that the people were using raccoon skins for money. So Davy took his gun Betsy and went into the woods, and in about 15 minutes he had shot and skinned a raccoon. He went back and bought drinks for everyone, and then continued his speech. He'd gotten about half way through what he wanted to say when the people began calling for another drink.

Holly: But now he doesn't have any money, does he?

Gramma: That's right. But the man selling drinks had left the skin underneath the bar, and Davy tricked the man and pulled the skin out and put it on the counter, as if it had been a new skin.

Holly: And the man didn't notice?

Gramma: No. Davy did that ten times that day, and when the people saw how Davy could buy something with nothing, they elected him to Congress. After the election, Davy sent the man the money to pay for the drinks, but they both kept it a secret, as neither one of them wanted to admit to the trick.

There, now, there's your story. Are you ready for bed?

Holly: Almost. Will you sing to me?

Gramma: All right. Curl up here next to me and pull that blanket over your feet and legs. *(Holly does. Gramma begins singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," clearly but sort of vibrato. Holly looks up at Gramma, who smooths Holly's hair while Holly falls asleep. Light slowly fades as the song begins.)*

"I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,

Comin' for to carry me home?

A band of angels comin' after me,

Comin' for to carry me home..."

(Light fades to black.)

Act I Scene IV

TIME — PERHAPS TWO WEEKS LATER, DAYTIME.

Daytime. Perhaps a couple of weeks have passed, but it is not hot yet. Gramma is sitting on the sofa darning socks and mending pajamas. She looks drawn. There is a stack of medical bills, social security papers, insurance papers, and legal documents on the coffee table in front of her. The door to the street opens and Meg enters; Gramma does not get up, but puts down the mending.

Meg: Gramma? It's me. *(Seeing her now)* Oh — hi. *(Crossing to Gramma and sitting beside her.)* How're you feeling? Did you take your blood pressure medicine?

Gramma: Terrible. No. Well, I don't know. I may have. I've been studying papers until I don't know where I am; I need you to look at them for me and tell me what you think. I've been trying to find everything so we'll be ready.

Meg: *(Taking Gramma's hand and checking her pulse.)* I'd better take your blood pressure. You should rest and let me take care of all of this; I know where everything is. Put your feet up and lean back, and let me check your pressure before we do anything else. *(Gets up and goes out bedroom door.)*

Gramma: *(Calling to Meg in other room)* Our Sunday School class is taking cookies for the children out at the hospital this week; I need to bake some to take for it. I'm not sure what I've got on hand to make, but I guess I can find something.

Meg: *(Coming back in with a pressure cuff and stethoscope)* Don't worry about that right now. *(Meg goes to sofa and sits down.)* Okay, now; you have to be quiet and hold still. *(Puts the cuff on Gramma, and the stethoscope in her own ears.)* Have you eaten today?

Gramma: I fixed some Hungarian meatballs and sent them up to the church for Miz Judd's mother; she died this Monday, you know.

Meg: Did you eat anything?

Gramma: I had some oatmeal this morning. At lunch, I fixed a sandwich with some greens and white bread. Ow! *(Pulling at cuff)* It's too tight! *(Beating on the stethoscope.)*

Meg: Ow, yourself! That hurts my ears! Hold still, will you? I can't hear. *(Lets the pressure off and tries again.)* Now be still this time. I guess a green sandwich is good for you, but I don't want to have to eat one. You should've eaten some of the meatballs.

Gramma: *(Ignoring Meg)* You don't eat anything anyway; that's why you're so thin.

That and worrying.

Meg: I eat enough; I just run it off. Be quiet now; I can hear it. (*Gramma is still for once.*) Okay. It's a little bit high, but not as much as sometimes. I want to take it again after while.

Gramma: You worry too much. Me, I know that Wallace can't go on much longer, and I'm prepared. He's been having that hurting in his chest, and getting choked, and I'm used to the idea. It won't be like Irene's husband, when he died with a massive heart attack, or your Grandpa, who took a bath and went back to the bedroom to get his underwear and fell dead into the floor. I know it's coming. In a way I feel Wallace is already gone...

Meg: In a lot of ways he is. It's frightening how fast he went downhill. He's been asking us if we're still singing in a barbershop quartet every time we go to see him.

Gramma: He used to sing in a quartet before his hearing got bad. When we were young people I used to play for them sometimes. You know we went to the same one-room elementary school when we were children, down home.

Meg: I know. I saw the old schoolhouse when I took you to the homecoming, remember?

Gramma: That's right. That was before Miss Allie died; she was our old school

teacher. She was a sweet lady. The last time I went to see her in the rest home she was piecing quilt tops; I always used to save her the scraps from my sewing.

Meg: You just rest and think about that. I'll fix us something for dinner besides green sandwiches or oatmeal. I haven't had anything today myself but most of a pot of cof... *(Telephone rings on the table next to her.)* Be still; I'll get it. Hello? No, this is her granddaughter; may I help you? What? When?

Gramma: *(Sitting up)* Is it Wallace?

Meg: *(Holding up her hand for quiet and covering her other ear)* Has the doctor been there? What does he say? All right. We'll be right there. *(Hangs up.)* He's bad. The nurse says he's stopped breathing several times. I don't know if we'll be in time or not; do you want to go?

Gramma: Yes. He won't know us, but I still want to go.

Meg: All right. Holly? Holly, come here!

Gramma: Are you going to take her?

Meg: I don't think so; just a minute. *(Holly comes in from the bedroom.)*

Holly: What is it, Mom?

Meg: The nurse called; Wallace is really bad.

Holly: Will he die?

Meg: *(Says nothing.)*

Holly: I know, Mom. I've known he was going to die for a long time.

Meg: *(Nodding)* The nurse said she didn't think we could make it in time.

Holly: Go! Don't waste time locking up and turning things off. I'll stay here. I already told Wally goodbye when he could hear me. You and Gramma go.

Meg: That'll help. *(Turns off the lamp on the table by the sofa)* Gramma, are you ready?

Gramma: Yes. *(Standing up slowly.)*

Meg: Let me get your jacket. *(Goes out to bedroom.)*

Holly: *(Going to Gramma and putting her arms around her)* Are you okay, Gramma?

Gramma: I'll be fine. Will you be okay here all by yourself?

Holly: *(Nodding)* Go and see Wally. Tell him that I love him.

Gramma: *(Squeezing Holly's hand)* I will.

Meg: *(Enters wearing a jacket)* Here I am. I couldn't find what I had done with my keys. *(Goes to Gramma and puts a jacket around her.)* Let's go. *(Turning to Holly)* Will you be all right?

Holly: Fine, Mom. Go.

Meg: Okay. *(Taking Gramma's arm, they exit out street door.)*

Holly sighs, stands there for a second looking at nothing, then looks around, wipes her eyes, shakes her head, and begins straightening the room. In a moment, she goes over to the door to the kitchen, looks back into the room, turns out the light, and goes into the kitchen. Fade to black.

Act I Scene V

TIME — A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER.

Lights come up. Street door opens. Meg and Gramma come in, with Gramma stooped and walking very slowly, Meg holding her up. Holly comes in from the kitchen wiping her hands on a cup towel, and looks at her mother, who nods. They cross to meet in front of the sofa. Holly and Meg help Gramma to sit down, and sit down on either side of her.

Gramma: He looked peaceful, didn't he?

Meg: The doctor said that he just stopped breathing, and didn't ever start again.

Gramma: Well, he had hardening of the arteries, and that old-timer's disease.

Meg: Alzheimer's.

Gramma: I was glad that the nurse's aide had been in to bathe and shave him; he looked better. She'd cut his face in several places, though. He was hard to shave; his skin was so loose.

Meg: I know. We had trouble with that when we were shaving him at home, and he still understood things then.

Holly: He used to let me brush his hair.

Gramma: He had the prettiest hair. We colored it, you know, before he got so sick, and I would fix it for him.

Meg: Remember that time you put the clips in his hair before church and forgot to take them out? He was so embarrassed.

Gramma: I wonder if they'd let me fix his hair for the services; I know just how he liked it.

Meg: I don't see why not, if it would mean something to you. We can see about it when we go down to finish making the arrangements.

Gramma: I think I feel better about things now. I'm just so tired. I had a chill this afternoon and felt like maybe I took a fever.

Meg: *(Feeling of Gramma's face and hands)* I think you're just exhausted. I'll take your blood pressure again before we go.

Gramma: You know, my old Grandma died twenty-three years ago this week; she had hardening of the arteries, too.

Holly: Was *she* in a nursing home, too?

Gramma: No; she was in the cellar.

Holly: The cellar!

Meg: I remember you telling me about that. It'd been storming terribly for a couple of days, hadn't it?

Gramma: Yes; that's why we had her in the cellar. She'd been in a wheelchair for about eighteen months, and dad and I had put her down there when the weather got bad, because we knew that if a cloud came up all of a sudden, we wouldn't be able to get her down there in time.

Holly: What did she do in the cellar?

Gramma: Well, we had a bed in there, so we just put her to bed, and dad stayed with her while I went to work. After I got off, I went back down there, and she looked kind of purple. She was sitting in her chair sewing on a gown.

Meg: Did the doctor come out and see her in the cellar?

Gramma: Yes, but there was nothing he could do, so he just left us there. There was a bad cloud, and we were afraid to bring her out.

Holly: Gosh.

Gramma: I think she knew she didn't have many hours to live. We stayed all night with her in the cellar. Dad sat up with her until midnight, and I sat up the rest of the night. She died at 6:00 a.m., still in the cellar.

Meg: That seems sad, to go that way.

Gramma: I don't think it was. Her mind was sharp as a tack right to the end. She sung every verse and every word of "Jesus Lover of My Soul" that night; I think she knew she was dying. She had been in that wheelchair, paralyzed from the waist down, for so long; I think she was ready to go home. I still have the gown she was sewing that night.

Meg: I remember you showed it to me, folded up in tissue.

Holly: I'd like to see it. I hope I can be like that; still doing things, you know, until I die.

Meg: Me, too, Holly, but we don't get to choose how we die; that's one reason it's so important to choose how we live. (*Standing up*) Let's go home, Holly. I'll come back later, Gramma, and fix you something to eat.

Gramma: I don't want anything.

Meg: I don't either, but we have to eat, and Holly needs to eat.

Holly: I'm not hungry, Mom.

Meg: We can all eat for each other. Sometimes you have to do that; when you can't keep going for yourself, you do it for each other.

Holly: Okay, Mom. You too, Gramma.

Gramma: Okay, honey. For my sweet girl. Okay.

All three hold hands. Fade to black. End of Act I.

Act II Scene I

TIME — A DAY OR SOME OTHER BRIEF INTERVAL LATER; DAYTIME.

Daytime. Scene opens with Gramma on stage alone, looking for something, on top of and under and behind everything. There is an ironing board set up to be used while seated in a chair, a chair is behind it, an iron on the ironing board, and a basket of clothes is sitting there to be ironed. This must be situated so that the basket can be seen from the audience.

Meg: *(Entering from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a towel)* What are you looking for?

Gramma: Oh, nothing. *(Continuing to look)*

Meg: Then what are you doing?

Gramma: Nothing *(still continuing to look; lifts up the bedspread on the sofa to look under the sofa cushions.)*

Meg: Have you lost your teeth again?

Gramma: *(Jumps)* Why would you say that? *(Obviously, she has lost her teeth again.)*

Meg: (*Putting the towel down on the table.*) I told you not to be hiding them; you know we almost threw them away that time. Did you wrap them in a Kleenex again?

Gramma: mumble-mumble-mumble

Meg: What?

Gramma: mumble-mumble-mumble... Well... yes.

Meg: (*Sighing*) Let me help you look. Do you remember when you had them last?

Gramma: I was eating something.

Meg: Ask a stupid question.

Gramma: Don't be that way; I was eating something IN HERE; that's why I'm looking for them in here.

Meg: That's a start. Do you remember where you were sitting?

Gramma: I think I was sitting in front of the ironing board and watching "Wheel of Fortune."

Meg: Did you try the ironing basket?

Gramma: What?

Meg: Did you try looking in the ironing basket?

Gramma: I wouldn't put my teeth in the ironing basket.

Meg: Have you found them anywhere else?

Gramma: No.

Meg: It can't hurt to look in the ironing basket, then, can it?

Gramma: Okay, but they won't be in there; nobody would put their teeth in the ironing basket.

They go and look; naturally, the teeth are in the ironing basket, wrapped up in a Kleenex.

Gramma makes a face and puts the wrapped up teeth into her apron pocket.

Gramma: I wish I wouldn't do things like that. It makes me feel so old.

Meg: I lose things all the time, and I'm less than half your age.

Gramma: Yes, but you don't lose your teeth!

Meg: That's only because they don't come out of my mouth.

Gramma: I'm just too old; old and worn out.

Meg: You can still work harder than most people, and if you couldn't, you've done more work in your lifetime than most people will ever do. I wouldn't worry about losing things. We're here, and we'll help you. You help us all of the time; what would Holly do without you? (*Looking around*)
Speaking of Holly, where is she?

Gramma: I think she's in the bedroom with that cat. It came in the door and she thought I didn't see it and took it into the bedroom. She was being so quiet that I thought I'd let her keep it in there for a while.

Meg: I'll look in and see what they're doing... (*Getting up and going to look into the bedroom, but remaining onstage*) Don't kiss that cat!

(Voice): (*From offstage*) Who, me?

^Holly

Meg: Who do you think I mean? I told you not to kiss cats.

Holly: (*Coming onstage*) I wasn't; the cat was kissing me.

Meg: It's the same thing. I wouldn't think you'd want to kiss anything that bathes with its tongue.

Holly: It doesn't bother me. I'll kiss lots of cats when I'm a veterinarian, and horses and pigs and even possums.

Meg: Possums? I don't imagine there are too many possums treated in veterinary offices. What made you think of possums?

Holly: I saw one in the bushes last night. He looked really scared. I'd never seen one before, alive; he looked just like the pictures in Henry Possum. I told him "hello," but he squashed himself down as small as he could, so I came on inside.

Meg: Poor baby. I'll bet he was just hungry. The cat probably scared him away, though. You know not to touch a wild animal, don't you?

Holly: Yes, Mom, I know. *(Going back into the bedroom.)*

Meg: *(Raising her voice)* Where's that cat?

(Voice): *(From offstage, muffled)* I think he's asleep under the bed.

^Holly

Meg: I guess that's okay. When he comes out he has to go back outside.

(Voice): Okay, Mom.

^Holly

Meg: *(To Gramma)* Have you taken your blood pressure medicine?

Gramma: I don't remember. I'm getting so I don't remember very much any more.

Meg: That's okay. I counted your pills when I gave them to you the last time, so I'll be able to tell. *(Goes off to the kitchen.)*

Gramma: *(Raising her voice)* I meant to take it when I came in from working in the yard, but Pearl called, and I don't know whether I did or not.

Meg: *(Comes back with a glass of water and a pill in her hand.)* No, you didn't; here it is.

Gramma: I don't feel anything when I take these. I don't think I even need them. I think that doctor's just giving me sugar pills and charging me for medicine.

Meg: You know that your blood pressure's been much better since you've been taking these, *(Hands pill and water to Gramma; Gramma swallows pill and puts down glass)* and it was really high before that. Why would the doctor want to give you sugar pills?

Gramma: To get my money.

Meg: The pharmacy gets the money for the medicine, not the doctor.

Gramma: They're probably in it together. I know how they do, preying on old people.

Meg: *(Taking a deep breath)* Gramma, your doctor is not giving you sugar pills. He's trying to take care of you and keep you well.

Gramma: I don't know what for. Sometimes I wish I would just pass on; I'm no use to anybody, and just a burden.

Meg: You know that isn't true. Besides, if something happened to you, who would sing to Holly, or tell her stories? I'm always either too busy or too tired to do it.

Gramma: I guess you're right about that. I'm always so tired, though. I made some tomato soup today, and I was pouring a bowl for myself. The pan slipped out of my hand and I spilled it between the cabinet and the stove. I've never seen such a mess. It took me most of the day to clean it up. I had just gotten it cleaned up when Holly got home from school.

Meg: She could've helped you, or I would've cleaned it up when I got here.

Gramma: I know. I don't like being helpless, though. And it makes me think about when we took Wallace to the nursing home. It was Christmas Eve when he got so bad and we had to take him to the hospital, and then he went to the nursing home, and never came home again after that except for a visit.

Meg: Are you worried about going to a nursing home? You're a long way from that. And I wouldn't take you unless there was just nothing else to do. We *had* to give up and take Wallace, because he kept starting fires by turning on the stove, or going outside and wandering off when you were asleep and we were all at work or school, and he wouldn't let the nurses help him; he needed to go there to make things safer for us and for him. But you aren't in that kind of condition.

Gramma: I fell asleep and left the roast cooking and set off all of the fire alarms.

Meg: Anybody could've done that. That's not the same as putting a plastic dishpan on the stove and turning a fire on under it and going to bed.

Gramma: *(Nodding)* I guess you're right.

Holly: *(Coming out of the bedroom)* I put the cat out, Mom.

Meg: Thank you, sweetheart. Is your homework finished?

Holly: I think I may need some help with my math; I'm not sure I understand how to do the last couple of problems.

Meg: Why don't you get your books and work on them here at the dining table? Then I'll be able to see about Gramma, and be here to help you if you need me.

Holly: Okay, Mom. (*Goes out to bedroom to get her books.*)

Meg: Gramma, what are you doing? (*Gramma is sitting there holding a Kleenex onto the end of her nose.*)

Gramma: My cold is getting in full swing. I have to hold a Kleenex to my nose because it's dripping so fast.

Meg: (*Going over to Gramma and moving the Kleenex and looking*) I don't see anything. (*Holly comes in and sits down at the dining table and opens her books.*)

Gramma: It is, though. It will. It was raining an old cold rain today, and my dad always said that a cold rain will make your nose run, and to be sure not to let a draft get to your skin.

Meg: Okay, Gramma. You hold your Kleenex. (*Going over to Holly.*) How are you doing?

Holly: Fine so far. I thought I didn't understand it, but my answer to this first problem is the same as the one in the back of the book, so I guess maybe I do.

Gramma is sitting over on the sofa rolling up Kleenexes into a roll about the size of a pencil, and putting one into each nostril.

Meg: Keep working, and I'll help if you need me to, but you should try to figure it out by yourself first. *(She notices Gramma.)* Gramma, what are you doing? *(Goes over to her.)*

Gramma: *(Taking out the Kleenex pencils.)* What?

Meg: What were you doing?

Gramma: I was thinking about the time my brother Curtis put the dry beans up his nose, and dad had to hitch up the wagon and drive him to the doctor's because we couldn't get them out as Curtis didn't tell he had done it right away, and the beans had swollen. It made me think about putting things up my nose, and I wondered if Kleenex done that way would keep my nose from running.

Meg: Was it working?

Gramma: Not too well, no.

Meg: I don't think it's a very good idea.

Gramma: The beans weren't a very good idea, either; Doc like to never got them out. Curtis' nose was as red as a beet for a week.

Meg: Was it Curtis or Clarence? That sounds more like something Clarence would have done.

Gramma: Now that you mention it, you may be right. Although both my brothers got into their share of mischief. I don't know how our poor mother survived them. By the grace of God, I guess.

Meg: That's the only way any of us make it.

Gramma: You're right about that.

Holly: *(Standing up and closing her books)* I'm finished, Mom.

Meg: Okay, honey. Go and get ready for bed. *(Looking worriedly toward Gramma.)* I think we'll just stay here tonight.

Holly: Okay, Mom. *(Takes her books and goes to the bedroom.)*

Meg: *(To Gramma)* Let's get you a bath, okay?

Gramma: I can't get into and out of the bathtub any more.

Meg: I know; I can help you.

Gramma: There isn't any "help you" about it; you'd have to lift me.

Meg: I know; I can do it.

Gramma: I hate for you to do it.

Meg: I don't mind; you'd do the same for me. Let's go. I got some new dusting powder for you today.

Gramma: What kind is it?

Meg: Estee Lauder, the kind you like.

Gramma: You shouldn't've spent the money for that.

Meg: I wanted to. Let's go try it out. We can't use Estee Lauder on a body that hasn't had a bath.

Gramma: That's for sure. (*They get up and go out. Light fades to black.*)

Act II Scene II

TIME — THIRTY TO FORTY MINUTES LATER.

Lights come up on an empty stage. Gramma and Meg come in from getting Gramma's bath. Gramma is wearing pajamas and a robe and has a washcloth pinned across the collar of her pajama top where the opening is. They cross to the sofa and sit down.

Meg: Okay, now; what do you want me to do?

Gramma: Put my socks on and pull them up, and then safety pin them to the legs of my pajamas.

Meg: They're new socks; I don't think they're going anywhere.

Gramma: My dad always pinned his socks up, or wore garters with them.

Meg: I'm sure he did, but he was wearing home-knitted socks, and these have elastic in the tops.

Gramma: I want them pinned. I sneeze if a draft gets on me.

Meg: Okay. *(Raising her voice)* Holly! Are you in bed yet?

Holly: *(Comes out of the bedroom in a robe.)* I was just going, Mom; do you need

something?

Meg: Yes; safety pins.

Holly: How many?

Meg: Several; a hand full of them. No; all you can see; I don't know.

Holly: I'll just bring you the bowl.

Meg: That sounds fine. Thank you, dear. *(Holly goes out to the bedroom.) (To Gramma)* What did you want this other pair of socks for?

Gramma: Those are for my hands.

Meg: Your hands?

Gramma: Yes, I want you to put them onto my hands and pin them to my sleeves. I don't want any dr—

Meg: Drafts, yes; I understand perfectly.

Holly: *(Coming back in with a bowl of safety pins.)* Here you go, Mom.

Meg: Thanks, Holly. Go on to bed now, okay? It's late and you have school

tomorrow.

Holly: I'm going. Goodnight, Mom; I love you. *(They hug each other.)*

Meg: I love you, too.

Holly: *(Hugging Gramma and kissing her cheek)* Goodnight, Gramma. I love you.

Gramma: I love you, too, child, but don't kiss my dirty old cheek.

Meg: You just had a bath; you're clean.

Gramma: Oh, that's right. You can't be too careful, though. We don't want to be coming down with the rigors.

Meg and Holly *(together)*: What?

Gramma: The rigors. They're bad in the bottomlands this year.

Meg: Of course. Pick out the pins you want to use, will you, Gramma?

Gramma: Let me see them *(takes the bowl and starts digging through it and selecting safety pins.)*

Holly: *(Whispering to Meg)* What is she talking about, Mom?

Meg: When she was young, a lot of people got malaria from mosquitoes living in the bottom-lands, and a lot of the time it came back again and again; malaria causes chills and fever, so I guess they called it “the rigors” because of that.

Holly: Is Gramma okay, Mom?

Meg: She’s just getting old, and her mind is wandering. Her physical health is okay as long as we watch her blood pressure; for now, anyway.

Holly: Okay. I just didn’t want to lose her, too.

Meg: I don’t think we have to worry about that just yet.

Holly: Okay. Good night, Mom.

Meg: Good night, sweetheart. Pleasant dreams. Don’t forget to say your prayers. *(Holly nods and goes out.) (To Gramma)* Do you have the pins you want to use?

Gramma: These will do just fine *(handing Meg about 25 or 30 safety pins)*

Meg: *(Sighing)* Let’s get started. You need to get to sleep, and so do I; I have to go to work tomorrow.

Gramma: You ought to have a husband so you could stay at home with Holly.

Meg: I'd go crazy at home, Gramma; I like my job... most of the time.

Gramma: You never even get to watch Sally Jesse Raphael.

Meg: Life does have its hidden blessings, doesn't it? Let's get this done and get to bed. *(Starts pinning the socks to the pajamas. Gramma is watching.)*

Gramma: Put some over there.

Meg: I will; I will. *(Pins. The light fades out to black.)*

Act II Scene III

TIME — LATE SPRING.

The scene opens with Gramma and Holly in the living room. It is late spring; there could be wildflowers on the table. Gramma is reading the paper. Holly is sitting in a chair with a book. Gramma folds the paper and puts it down.

Gramma: Come here, Holly. I've been wanting to talk with you about something while I still can. *(Pats the sofa beside her. (It is significant that Gramma wants to talk with Holly, but earlier talked to her friend on the telephone: in this discussion, there is an emotional exchange, not just a holding forth.))*

Holly: *(Getting up and coming over to sit beside Gramma.)* What do you mean, Gramma?

Gramma: I want to talk with you about... people dying.

Holly: I feel like I have bees in my skin when you say that.

Gramma: Why does it make you feel that way?

Holly: I don't want dying to be real, Gramma. Like about Wally; sometimes I

pretend that he's just somewhere else; that he just moved away, like my dad did.

Gramma: They *are* different things, Holly. Your dad left because things weren't what they should be between he and your mother, and he's still somewhere, still doing things. He might turn up again, like tree roots in the sewer.

Holly: Oh, Gramma.

Gramma: Well, you know what I mean; like something you don't really want to see, but you know you might get up one day, and there it is.

Holly: (*Nodding*) I know what you mean.

Gramma: But Wallace — he won't come back. There's no way he can. And he didn't choose to leave. When Wallace first started to get bad, he and I talked about what was happening to him a little, and over and over again, he kept asking me, "Why?"

Holly: What did you tell him?

Gramma: I told him that dying was just part of life; that I didn't know why he was getting sick at that time. *He* felt like it was a judgment.

Holly: What do you mean, “a judgment?”

Gramma: (*Sighing*) Holly, Wallace loved you more than he’d ever loved anyone. He wanted to see you grow up and have children of your own. He felt like it was a judgment that God was taking him before he could see that.

Holly: (*Shaking her head*) I don’t think God works like that, Gramma.

Gramma: Well, I don’t really think He does, either. But we don’t always understand His plans. There *could* be a death in the family, at any time.

Holly: I hate that. It makes me feel afraid.

Gramma: Well, there *could* be. We should live each day as if it were the last day God has planned to give us, and make it full of shared memories.

Holly: Live for today, you mean? I don’t agree with that, Gramma.

Gramma: No, Holly, that’s not what I mean. If we are grateful and happy for the time we have now, we won’t feel that our lives have been wasted. And if we build memories together, well, memories are the only real gifts we can give our loved ones.

Holly: I think I see what you mean, Gramma. Instead of thinking about dying, you just want me to know about it, but to think about sitting here and

talking with you.

Gramma: *(Nodding)* Yes, that's pretty much it. You should save these times together to give you strength later on when you're alone, or to give you a place to look back on and find a story for *your* little girl.

Holly: I still don't like dying. It doesn't seem fair.

Gramma: Well, I guess it doesn't seem like it. But we need to be thankful for the gift, Holly, instead of whining about how long it lasts. We should be glad that we live, instead of complaining that we die. *(Knitting her brows)* I heard a girl ask one time, how she could be expected to enjoy life when she knew that death was just around the corner. The real question is, how could she possibly bear to waste life, just because death is coming?

Holly: *(Nodding)* That makes sense; I never thought of it that way before. Thank you, Gramma.

Gramma: I just wanted you to be looking at the right things, child. If I linger... if I get bad... there may even be things there to share together, as long as we all look in the direction of love, instead of wasting ourselves worrying about the bad things.

Holly: Okay, Gramma. I'll try to remember. But I hope we don't have to worry about it for a long time.

Gramma: Me, too, child; me, too.

(Holly reaches out and takes Gramma's hand. They sit quietly for a few seconds.)

Holly: Would you tell me a story, Gramma?

Gramma: Sure I will. About what, child?

Holly: Well... tell me about your Gramma.

Gramma: That would be my Grandma McCarty.

Holly: Tell me about her; what was her name?

Gramma: Mary Ann ... it was Mary Ann. McCarty was her married name. Would you like to hear about when she moved to Texas?

Holly: Yes, tell me about that.

Gramma: It was in December, in 1876. She came on a train.

Holly: Alone?

Gramma: No... let me see if I can remember it all. It was Grandma and Grandpa, and

his mother came along, and there were Grandma's mother and father, and HER grandmother, and two sisters. And three other families came with them.

Holly: It must have been crowded with all of those people.

Gramma: Not only that... they all got together and got one car of the train between them, and in that car they brought themselves, and all of their belongings, including livestock!

Holly: Gosh! Where did they come from?

Gramma: It was Georgia... They came from Georgia, and it took them three days and nights to make the trip.

Holly: How did they eat?

Gramma: Before they left Georgia, Grandpa's mother boiled whole hams and baked bread and apple pies, enough to last the trip. She also baked a small trunk full of ginger cookies.

Holly: I like ginger cookies.

Gramma: I'm not too fond of them myself. But these cookies didn't get eaten right away, I'm afraid.

Holly: Why not?

Gramma: The cookies were misplaced when the railroad car was loaded, and they didn't get to eat them until they arrived in Texas and unpacked.

Holly: It must have been cold, riding on a train in December.

Gramma: It was, child, and it got worse. It came a cold spell, a real blue norther, while they were on the way, and everyone was very cold, as the car was heated by a very temperamental coal stove. They were all black with soot by the time they got to Texas, but glad of what little heat they had.

Holly: Gosh. I'm glad I don't have to travel like that.

Meg: *(Coming in from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a cup towel.)* What are you two up to?

Holly: Gramma is telling me about when Grandma McCarty came to Texas.

Meg: I know this story. May I sit down and listen?

Gramma: Yes, but I've told about all I remember, about the cold and the animals and the food.

Meg: How far did the story get?

Holly: They got to Texas and found the trunk of ginger cookies.

Meg: I know what happened then. They spent the first night in a small hotel. Before long, they found a place to live, and Grandpa got a job taking care of a herd of cattle.

Holly: Did they grow their own food?

Gramma: Everybody did then, Holly. It was real pioneer country. It was 140 ox-wagon miles to get supplies, and money was scarce.

Meg: They lived in a log house. Their hired man slept in their covered wagon. They had to carry all of their water from a creek.

Holly: Didn't they ever have any fun?

Meg: Of course they did. Grandpa played the fiddle for all of the dances for miles around. Mary Ann always got to go to all of the dances.

Holly: Oh, good; I'm glad the kids got to have fun, too.

Meg: They would all ride horses twenty miles to a dance, stay all night, and go home the next morning.

Holly: Twenty miles!

Gramma: *(Nodding)* Their nearest neighbor was eight or ten miles away.

Holly: Was there anything close by where they lived?

Gramma: Well, their house was close to the cattle corral where they branded the cattle. They couldn't sleep during the roundup and branding time because of the howling of hundreds of calves and cows.

Holly: Did Grandma McCarty like animals, too, like me?

Meg: They say she used to milk the wild cows.

Holly: Wild cows? Did she ever get hurt?

Gramma: She got put onto the fence a few times.

Holly: Were there any other wild animals?

Gramma: Panthers. Panthers would come close to the house at night; Grandma said that the screams would make their hair stand on end.

Holly: Panthers and wild cows and ginger cookies; that was a good story,

Gramma. Thank you for telling it to me.

Gramma: I wish I could remember more. When I was your size my Grandma would tell stories to me, but I can't remember most of them.

Holly: That's okay, Gramma. I love you.

Gramma: I love you, too, Holly.

Holly: Do we have any cookies, Mom?

Meg: Why don't you go out to the kitchen and see? I don't think there are any ginger cookies, but if chocolate chip will do, you might find some.

Holly: Would you like some?

Meg: Why don't you bring some for all of us?

Holly: Okay. *(Runs out to the kitchen.)*

Gramma: I wish I could give her more.

Meg: Gramma, what you give her is beyond price. You know that. She knows it.

Gramma: I hope she thinks that, when she remembers her old Gramma and talks about me to her children.

Meg: She does. She will. What you've given her money could never buy.

Gramma: I hope so. I hope so. (*Shifting*) Could you get me a sweater? It's getting cold in here.

Meg: (*Frowning*) Some of these spring days can be chilly. (*Meg is not cold.*) I'll get you something. Are you feeling bad?

Gramma: A little. Maybe just a touch of the rigors.
(*Rubbing her temple.*) And my head is aching.

Meg: I'll get you something. (*Goes out to the bedroom.*)

Gramma: Take your time, child. Take your time. I don't think I'm going anywhere... just yet...

Light fades to black.

Act II Scene IV

TIME — THE NEXT DAY.

Meg is standing by the phone, alone. The light is low and the lamp from the end table is missing.

Meg: No, I came in and found her on the floor, unconscious. It looked like she tried to grab the lamp as she fell... We don't really know yet. No, there's no point in you bringing food right now; there won't be anyone here to eat it. Holly's staying with a friend or with me at the hospital... I will... No, I'm going to take a leave-of-absence until we see what the situation is, and they won't say until they've done some more testing. No, she can't speak yet. She can eat, though, and swallow, which is very good at this point. She knows us; I can see it in her eyes... One side. Her left side... they don't know yet. Thank you... she can use all the prayers she can get right now. Us, too; I don't know what we'll do if we lose her. I'll let you know if anything changes or if we find out anything definite. I have to get back up there. I don't want her to be afraid... No, I'll bring her home, for as long as I can... You, too. Tell Irene I said "hello." (*Hangs up.*)

(Looks into nothing.) (Stands there for a minute, and then shakes herself.)

For as long as I can, Gramma. And when I can't any more we'll come and tell you stories.

(Starts looking under the cushions.) And I'll be back up to the hospital to feed you... as soon as I figure out what you did with your teeth! *(Still looking and mumbling. Fade to black.)*

Act II Scene V

TIME — A FEW DAYS LATER.

Lights come up with Meg and Holly onstage, sitting on the sofa together. Holly is crying quietly with her head in her mother's lap. Meg is consoling her daughter.

Meg: Now, Holly. Gramma had a stroke, but the doctor told us that she isn't in danger right now.

Holly: What is a "stroke," anyway, Mom? What happened to her? She was just *tired* when we left here!

Meg: Gramma was tired, and she said her head hurt, remember? That was probably a warning, if we had just known it. Your gramma has high blood pressure, which can cause a blood vessel to burst just like a tire bursting when you put too much air into it. And they think there was enough blood flow cut off to damage part of her brain, which is why she can't move her left side. The doctor said that her pressure is okay now, though, which probably means that she had a weak place in the wall of an artery.

Holly: *(Sniffing and sitting up)* I know, Mom, but I'm scared. I don't want Gramma to die. Wally went to the hospital, and he never came home except to visit, and he died.

Meg: We'll bring her home. You need to be prepared for the fact that she won't be the same, though.

Holly: Well... I know she can't use her left arm and leg.

Meg: *(Nodding)* That's right, but that's not all.

Holly: What else do you mean, Mom?

Meg: I mean that she probably won't remember some things.

Holly: Us? She remembers us, Mom. She called me "Holly" at the hospital.

Meg: Yes, but she may get confused and call you by some other name, too. Remember how Wallace got us confused with other people he remembered? A stroke causes that kind of confusion sometimes. It's as if the paths from one memory to another one get mixed up; some of them can get lost completely.

Holly: Gosh. *(Thinking.)* Will we be able to help her to remember things?

Meg: Yes, if we get her talking, and thinking. Sometimes the mind can find new ways to get to the parts that've been lost.

Holly: Okay. I'll help. I'll stay right with her as much as I can.

Meg: She'll need that. She'll be confused; probably very confused, right at the first.

Holly: Let's do it, Mom. Let's bring her home as soon as we can.

Meg: *(Standing)* First let's see how hard it will be to move this sofa; we may have to get some help. Then I'll call and order a hospital bed.

Holly: A hospital bed?

Meg: Yes. I want to put her in here where she'll be right in the center of things, but we'll need a hospital bed to make sure that she's safe, and as comfortable as we can make her.

Holly: *(Getting up)* Okay, Mom. Let's see if we can move the sofa.

Meg: *(Taking the bedspread off of the sofa)* Help me fold this up first; that will make it a little bit easier.

They each take an end of the bedspread and they begin to fold. Light fades to black before they get to eighths (they have folded a couple of times.)

Act III Scene I

TIME — LATE SUMMER, PERHAPS THREE MONTHS LATER.

Later, maybe three months later. It is late summer. Lights come up to find the sofa either gone or against the wall somewhere. Its former central position is occupied by a hospital bed, semi-reclined. Gramma is in it. No one else is on-stage.

Gramma: *(Wailing)* Help! Help! Help me!

Meg: *(Coming in from the kitchen)* What is it, Gramma?

Gramma: I... Mr. Haller's baby... it's sick.

Meg: I don't think so, Gramma, but I'll find out, okay?

Gramma: Okay.

Meg: Do you want some water?

Gramma: Coke. Bring me some Coke.

Meg: All right. Holly?

Holly: *(Coming out of the bedroom)* Yes, Mom?

Meg: Would you get some Coke for Gramma? Put a straw in it so she can drink it.

Holly: Okay. (*Goes into the kitchen.*)

Meg: (*To Gramma*) Do you need anything? Do you need to go to the bathroom?

Gramma: No. Where's Wallace?

Meg: (*Wallace is dead.*) I... uh... I don't know; he could be at work.

Gramma: Why doesn't he come to see me?

Meg: I guess he can't.

Gramma: He's just not doing me right to do me like this.

Meg: I guess he'd come to see you if he could, Gramma.

Gramma: Maybe he doesn't have the address of this hotel.

Meg: If he calls, I'll make certain that he has it.

Gramma: Okay. (*Holly enters with a Coke with a straw in it.*)

Holly: Here you go, Gramma. (*Holly gives some Coke to Gramma.*)

Gramma: Thank you, sweetie.

Holly: (*Sits down in a chair and picks up some get well cards from an end table and begins to read them.*) Here's a card from Aunt Margaret, Gramma; she says she hopes you feel better soon. She says she went up to Anchorage to see Mary Margaret, and that they're all doing just fine.

Gramma: Is there one from Wallace?

Holly: (*Looks startled, but seeing Gramma looking at her, looks through the cards*) No, I don't see one.

Gramma: Then I don't care. He's just not doing me right. (*To Meg*) Whose arm is this in my bed?

Meg: (*Startled*) What?

Gramma: (*Hitting her left arm with her right hand*) This arm; whose amputated arm is this in my bed?

Meg: What are you talking about? That's your arm.

Gramma: No, it isn't. My arm is here (*touching her left shoulder*) This is someone else's arm.

Meg: Gramma... look at it (*holds up both arms next to each other.*) See? They look the same, don't they? It's your arm, Gramma.

Gramma: (*Grabs up her left arm with her right hand and starts banging it against the side rails of the bed*) It isn't! It isn't! Get this amputated arm out of my bed!

Meg: Stop! Gramma, stop! Holly, help me!

Holly: (*Horror stricken*) Gramma!

Gramma: (*Stops in mid-slam, holding her left arm in her right hand*) What? What did you say?

Holly: It's a sad arm, Gramma. Look how sad it is. It's a lonely arm. Don't you think so?

Gramma: Sad? (*Looking at the arm in her hand*) Lonely?

Holly: (*Nodding*) Yes. It looks awfully lonely to me.

Gramma: (*Putting the arm down carefully*) Well... okay then. I guess it can be in my

bed until someone comes for it.

Holly: Thank you, Gramma.

Meg: Yes, thank you, Gramma. Thank YOU, Holly.

Holly: It's okay, Mom. I just guessed how she'd feel about that. You know. The way she keeps going on about Wallace.

Meg: I guess so.

Gramma: Honey?

Holly: Yes, Gramma?

Gramma: Will you cover my feet?

Holly: Sure, Gramma. (*Looks at Meg.*)

Meg: Wrap the covers around her feet and tuck them under. Be careful not to get them too tight. She can't tell if the circulation to her left foot is cut off or not.

Holly: Okay. (*Wraps Gramma's feet.*)

Gramma: *(Stroking her left arm gently with the fingertips of her right hand)*

Watch out for the arm.

Holly: I will, Gramma.

Fade to black.

Act III Scene II

TIME — SOME MONTHS LATER.

Light comes up with Gramma in the hospital bed looking very feeble. Gramma is wearing a brace on her left arm, the purpose of which is to keep her from noticing or perhaps hurting the arm. From outside we hear the bouncing of a basketball. Meg is sitting in a chair doing some paperwork, in Gramma's line-of-sight; they are having a conversation. As we get into the scene, the sound of the basketball fades out.

Gramma: We got out early yesterday morning and cleaned the yard up; we had a lot of sycamore leaves from the tree across the street. After we came in and ate and got washed up, Pete and Elizabeth came over and played Wa-Hoo. *(Gramma is remembering something that happened a long time ago, but Meg is going along with her to keep her talking.)*

Meg: They did?

Gramma: Yes. I made fried pies to serve, only I baked them.

Meg: Well, baked foods are better for you than fried, and you should be careful about that with your high blood pressure.

Gramma: I was already tired when they got here, but Elizabeth and I still won three games. I'd put out a big washing yesterday, and then we had a bad cloud

come up, but we had time to get everything in out of the rain.

Meg: Why didn't you just put the clothes in the dryer, if it looked like rain?

Gramma: Dryer?

Meg: Yes. If it looks like rain, we just dry the clothes instead of hanging them on the line.

Gramma: Dryer?

Meg: Yes. Remember? You got it about a year ago; the men delivered it the day of that big storm.

Gramma: Dryer. (*Frowning. Tilts her head, frowning. We can see some evidence of remembering in Gramma's face.*)

Meg: Yes. You know, you said that it was a shame that the delivery had come, because if the dryer had blown away in the truck it would still be theirs, but since it had been delivered —

Gramma: It would be my loss. (*Nodding and putting her right hand up to her mouth.*) Yes. I do remember that.

Meg: That's right.

Gramma: It came a sandstorm from the north, and had been cold all that day.

Meg: Yes; it was the same day that Cammie fell and broke one arm and—.

Gramma: — and fractured the other one. A year ago, you say? Cammie fell, and I got a dryer, a *year* ago?

Meg: Yes. You had only had it for a few months when you had your stroke.

Gramma: Stroke?

Meg: Yes.

Gramma: *I* had a stroke?

Meg: Yes. Not a terrible one, but bad enough; you're getting better, though.

Gramma: Have I been bad?

Meg: Not terrible, but bad enough; confused, mostly. The last few weeks you've been coming to yourself again. Healing.

Gramma: Holly. Is Holly here?

Meg: Yes; she's outside practicing her basketball.

Gramma: Does she know I've been sick? About the stroke?

Meg: Yes, Gramma. We've been taking care of you.

Gramma: My little girl.

Meg: She's been calling you *her* little girl. She's never said it to me, but I've heard her when she said her prayers at night, asking God to keep her Gramma safe, even if it was this "little girl" Gramma. She doesn't want to lose you.

Gramma: Bad. This has been bad for her.

Meg: Yes and no. We've both been frightened for you, and trying to figure out how to help you. We've talked to you all of the time for months and months, taking turns, hoping that one day something would begin to click, and that you would see the difference between living in your memories, and living here with us. And now, today, really fairly suddenly, here you are.

Gramma: Living. In my memories.

Meg: Yes; like Pete and Elizabeth, coming to play Wa-Hoo. That was years

ago. The week you came home from the hospital, you were talking about Mr. Haller's baby; that was forty years ago. You've come through a lot of time in just a few months.

Gramma: It has seemed real. I didn't notice anything being different.

Meg: It *was* real, to you. It was real to you when it happened, and it was real to you again as you re-lived it. I guess you just got to live those forty years twice. Only this time, Holly and I were here to hold your hand and talk with you about the years as they happened.

Gramma: If I had known... We ran onto Ode and Pearl at the cafeteria after church last Sunday... (*Shaking her head*) That wasn't real?

Meg: It was real about five years ago; you haven't gone to church since Wallace died.

Gramma: That's right; he died, didn't he? So he couldn't've been there. (*Looks down at herself. A look of pain crosses Gramma's face.*) And I couldn't've been there, like this... Maybe it's better not to know what's happening now; if I didn't know, I could go back to those other times.

Meg: If you work at remembering, and come back to being with us, you can still *look* back at other times. If you go back there to stay, you're giving up *this* time; this life with me, and with Holly, won't be part of you any more.

Gramma: *(Heavily)* Holly.

Meg: Yes. She's missed you. *I've* missed you.

Gramma: Okay. *(Swallowing hard and nodding.)* I may be afraid, but... I want to be here. I may forget.

Meg: That's okay; we'll help you.

Gramma: I'm afraid.

Meg: That's okay. We're all afraid sometimes. But as long as we look in the same direction, we can make everything come out okay.

Gramma: That's right; the same direction.

Meg: *(Nodding)* Yes.

Gramma: You said... Holly was outside?

Meg: Yes; she's working on putting some backspin on her shots.

Gramma: Basketball. I played basketball.

Meg: Yes, you did; you were pretty good, too.

Gramma: When Holly comes in, maybe we can talk about that.

Meg: She'd like that.

Gramma: I may not remember.

Meg: *(Taking Gramma's right hand)* That's okay, Gramma. The more we talk about things, the more you *will* remember, if you work at it.

Gramma: Okay. I'll try not to be afraid.

Meg smooths Gramma's hair and the lights fade out. From outside we become aware of the bouncing of a basketball.

Act III Scene III

TIME — MORE TIME HAS PASSED; GRAMMA HAS IMPROVED MORE.

Lights come up with everyone onstage. Meg is feeding Gramma some applesauce from a bowl that Meg is holding in her hand. It is a slow process. Gramma can hardly take a bite of food because of the palsy of her mouth when she tries to do so. They have a towel or large napkin tucked up under Gramma's chin, and there is quite a bit of the applesauce on the towel. Holly is sitting on some kind of chair or stool on the other side of the bed, looking at some newspaper clippings, and making notes on a clipboard or tablet. Holly is on Gramma's right, and Gramma reaches her right hand out every couple of seconds to touch Holly; it is obvious that this is why Holly is working there. Gramma is watching Holly and not Meg; this is not helping with the applesauce.

Meg: Gramma! Look at me for a second, Gramma. You need to eat something to keep your strength up. *(She holds the spoon of applesauce toward Gramma's mouth, waiting for her to look.)*

Gramma: *(Weakly)* All right, dear.

Meg: There's just a little bit more. I know you're tired.

Holly: Listen, Gramma. I was looking through some old things to see if I could find anything to use for a report I'm doing for school, and I found an

article about Mary Ann!

Gramma and Meg: *(together)* Mary Ann?

Holly: Yes, remember? *(To Gramma.)* You and Mom told me about her, your Grandma Mary Ann McCarty.

Meg: Oh, yes. You found an article about her?

Gramma: Somebody should write about Mary Ann, but I don't remember that anybody ever did.

Holly: There's a picture of her, too; she looks really old.

Gramma: I believe she did live to be a fair age.

Meg: What does the article say, Holly?

Holly: It says here that Union soldiers were foraging on her father's farm near the end of the war.

Gramma: War?

Holly: Yes; they mean the Civil War.

Gramma: Oh.

Holly: Little Mary Ann was sitting on a rail fence, holding her doll. Her mother had made it for her out of one of her petticoats.

Gramma: They used to do that; they didn't waste things. Our sheets were made of sugar sacks and my mother always made my school dress out of those flour sacks with the pattern; we would go into town and I would get to choose the pattern myself, and then my mother would make the dress.

Holly: Cool. Anyway, Mary Ann was sitting on the fence with her doll, and a Union soldier rode up. He took the doll from Mary Ann, and cut the bits of string that had been tied to make the head and waist for the doll.

Meg: How mean; why would he do that? Our family were on the side of the Union.

Gramma: One reason our family came to this part of the country was because the people in Georgia called them Yankees. Maybe the man just didn't know that.

Holly: No, it says here what his reason was; he wanted to make a sack to carry some food. He took some twine from his pocket, and tied it around the bottom of the doll's skirt. Then he went to the bin where Mary Ann's father had stored their potatoes, and filled the sack he had made out of the

doll.

Gramma: He was hungry. Those boys were always hungry.

Holly: I guess so. He tied the top shut with the twine, and threw the sack of potatoes in front of his saddle. As he rode away, he called back to Mary Ann: “Thanks for the use of your dolly, little girl.”

Meg: I guess he thought he had a reason, but I still think it was mean.

Gramma: *(Nodding)* Those were hard times.

Meg: They got better after a while, though; hard times usually do.

Holly: I never did ask you what happened to Mary Ann after she grew up, Gramma.

Gramma: I’m sorry I don’t remember much about it now, Holly.

Meg: I know what happened to her.

Holly and Gramma: *(together)* What?

Meg: When she grew up, she married a man called Buck McCarty. Did we tell you that McCarty was her married name?

Gramma: I think I told her that. What was her name before? I can't think of it now.

Meg: Hill. She was Mary Ann Hill.

Gramma: Hill... I don't remember that.

Holly: What happened after she married Buck McCarty?

Meg: About two years after Buck and Mary Ann were married, they moved to Greenwood.

Gramma: I do remember that he had come from Mississippi, and that he had six or seven brothers.

Holly: Was Buck a farmer, too?

Meg: No, he was a law-man, and after they moved to Greenwood, he was Justice of the Peace there for over twenty years.

Holly: Wow; that sounds like the real old West.

Meg: It was, Holly. History is just about people who set out to live their lives the very best they could. The story of what they did became our history.

Holly: I never thought of it like that. Then what we're doing now will become somebody else's history?

Meg: That's right. Maybe one day someone will even write about your history, and another little girl will read about it, just like you've been doing.

Gramma: *(Snort)* I know one thing; nobody would ever write about me! I'm just an ordinary old woman who's a burden on her loved ones, waiting for the Lord to take me home.

Meg: *(Smiling)* You'd be surprised, Gramma; a lot of time it's the history of regular people that makes the best reading, because we can understand them.

Gramma: I still don't think so.

Holly: I'll bet you'd be surprised, Gramma.

Gramma: *(Snort)* Hmmph!

All laugh, even Gramma. Fade to black.

Act III Scene IV

TIME — LATER, THAT NIGHT, OR THE NEXT NIGHT.

The lights are low. Only Gramma and Holly are on stage.

Holly: Are you feeling okay, Gramma?

Gramma: I'm fine, child; just a little tired... *(pause)* Holly?

Holly: Yes, Gramma?

Gramma: Would you mind telling *me* a story?

Holly: No, Gramma, of course not... *(thinking)* Would you like to hear the story of David and Goliath?

Gramma: That would be fine, child; I always liked that one. My Momma used to tell it to me. Momma was a story teller, like Grandma had been. Momma and I would sit out on the porch in the evening and snap beans or sew, and she always had a story to tell to pass the time.

Holly: Like you, Gramma. You always have a story. Let's see... David and Goliath...

Well, David was out in the field with his sheep. There was a war going on, between David's people and the Phil— Phil—

Gramma: Philistines.

Holly: Yes, that's it; thank you, Gramma. There was a war going on between David's people and the Philistines.

Gramma: It was a terrible war. And the Philistines had the giant; what was his name?

Holly: Goliath.

Gramma: That's right.

Holly: I'm getting to that. Anyway, the Philistines had a giant with them, and his name was Goliath. Every day the giant would come out of his camp, and dare someone from David's people to fight with him.

Gramma: They were all afraid to fight him, though.

Holly: *(Nodding)* That's right. I don't blame them, either; the Bible says that Goliath was nine feet tall, with armor covering him from head to toe, and a spear twice as long and heavy as any other man could hold.

Gramma: That sounds like somebody to be afraid of, all right.

Holly: Yes. Well, Goliath would come out, trying to get someone to fight him, and nobody would. Most of David's people were farmers or shepherds, and they didn't know much about fighting.

Gramma: They probably didn't have swords or spears, either, then.

Holly: I think they had some things they'd made out of their farming tools, but not much. Anyway, they were camped there in the valley, and for forty days Goliath kept coming out and trying to get someone to fight him, but nobody would. One day, David's father sent him to visit his brothers in the camp, and to take them some presents.

Gramma: Might've been food. Soldiers are always looking for food.

Holly: I don't know, Gramma. But while David was there, Goliath came out and started daring someone to fight him, and David got upset, and decided he would do it.

Gramma: Those shepherds were a feisty bunch; like cowboys.

Holly: Probably just about the same. The people in the camp took David to see the king, who tried to give David some armor, but David said "no," that he would fight in his own way, the way he'd fought when he protected his

sheep from lions and bears.

Gramma: The way you know is usually the best.

Holly: That's what David thought, too. He went out to meet Goliath with a shepherd's staff, so that Goliath would think that that was David's weapon, but under his arm David had five smooth stones and a sling in a bag; the sling was the weapon David used to protect the sheep.

Gramma: I've used a slingshot a lot of times; we made them out of old inner tubes.

Holly: That's a good idea. I'll have to save mine and try that the next time I have a flat tire on my bicycle. But this was a sling, not a slingshot.

Gramma: An inner tube works real well. I wonder what David used for his slingshot?

Holly: Sling, Gramma. I guess maybe leather? But he had the stones in his bag, and he waited for Goliath to come out.

Gramma: I don't see how leather would've stretched very much.

Holly: It was a SLING, Gramma, not a SLINGSHOT. It's not the same thing.

Gramma: *(Irritatedly, raising her voice)* I know what I'm talking about. *(Changing*

the subject) David must've been afraid.

Holly: (*Sighing and giving up about the sling*) Okay, Gramma. Well, I think the Bible says that David knew God was with him, so I guess he must not've been afraid. David waited for Goliath, and when he got close enough, David took out his sling and stunned Goliath with a stone on the forehead.

Gramma: That's not good; he'd be mad when he woke up.

Holly: David didn't give him a chance to wake up. While Goliath was there on the ground, David ran up and grabbed up Goliath's sword, and chopped off the giant's head.

Gramma: Gosh!

Holly: When the Philistines saw that Goliath was dead, they ran away, and David's people followed them and killed them.

Gramma: I remember the Bible says by the hundred and thousand. I don't like wars.

Holly: Me, neither, but it also says the Philistines were the enemies of David's people, so maybe they had to do it.

Gramma: I guess so.

Holly: There, now, there's your story. Are you ready for a long sleep yet?

Gramma: *(Nodding)* Almost, child... Holly... would you sing to me?

Holly: I guess so, Gramma. You relax and get comfortable and I'll pull the blanket over your feet and legs. I'll sing you the song you always sing to me. *(Holly does. Holly begins singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," slowly and in a clear soprano. Gramma looks up at Holly, who smooths Gramma's hair while Gramma falls asleep. Light slowly fades.)*

"I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,
Comin' for to carry me home?
A band of angels comin' after me,
Comin' for to carry me home..."

(Light fades to black. Holly's voice fades out as music — instrumental only — of the same song picks up at that point with the next line of the song ["Swing low, sweet chariot..."], but much more up tempo than the way Holly was singing.)

END OF THE SHOW

(Bring the lights back up, and have all three characters sing at least two bars of the song, all holding hands, for curtain call.)