

Mom, it's time to sell the house!

By Barb Draper

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This three-act play was written for a Floradale Mennonite Church dinner theatre on April 12, 13, 14, 2013. The audiences enjoyed it immensely; they found it very relevant and very funny.

Church groups are welcome to use this script if everything is done on a volunteer basis and the proceeds are used for charity. If the director and actors are not volunteers, please consider an honorarium for the writer.

The play was written for a specific community. Place names and family names (such as Gingrich) should be changed to reflect the local area.

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Mom, it's time to sell the house!

The time is the present. The stage is set in Elma Gingrich's house somewhere in Woolwich Township. Centre stage is a parlour chair with arms that Elma has been using since her hip surgery. Also on stage are other furnishings that you would find in a sitting room—a whatnot shelf or china cabinet, occasional tables, some plants, a variety of chairs, footstool, perhaps a couch.

There are two entrances. The entrance on stage left goes to the rest of the house, the entrance on stage right is a door to the outside.

Elma is an 85-year-old widow, recently returned home after hip replacement surgery. Her daughter, Marlene, stayed with her for a few days and now she is trying to cope on her own with a personal service worker (PSW) coming in. Elma is still in the home that she lived in all her married life and she is resisting moving to a smaller place. Three of her four children live nearby; her youngest son, Leo, lives in Owen Sound

Characters:

Elma Gingrich—a woman in her early 80s

Susie – Personal Support Worker from the Red Cross

Marlene – Elma's daughter

Bruce – Marlene's husband

Karen – Elma's daughter

Leo – Elma's younger son

Mark—Elma's older son

Pastor Steve

Laura – Karen's daughter (between ages of 12 and 16)

Lily – Karen's daughter (somewhere between 10 and 15)

Lizzie Martin – Elma's sister

(some characters could be played by the same person such as Bruce and Steve, Susie and Lizzie.)

Act I

Scene 1:

Elma enters slowly with a walker. She walks very slowly and makes her way to the parlour chair. (After hip replacement, she must not sit in a low chair.) As she re-arranges the cushions, deciding whether or not or how she wants them, she drops one. She starts to bend over, then stops.

Elma: *(to herself)* Achhh no! I mayn't bend over! So many things to remember that you mayn't do!! *(She finds her "reacher" on a table and manages to grab the cushion that fell. Finally she sits down. Just as she lowers herself into the chair, we hear loud knocking at the door. Elma thinks about getting up, and then decides not to.)*

Susie: *(off stage right)* Yoo-hoo, Mrs. Jin-grich. May I come in?

Elma: *(rolling her eyes)* Jin-grich! *(sighs)* I guess she means Gingrich!

Susie: *(still off-stage)* Mrs. Jin-grich, are you there? I'm coming in! *(enters stage right, sees Elma and says brightly)* Oh, good afternoon Mrs. Jin-grich. I'm glad to see you're up and about.

Elma: Who are you?

Susie: I'm Susie. I'm the PSW come to help you with your bath this afternoon.

Elma: I don't want a bath.

Susie: Well, maybe a shower then. A shower would be easier than a bath, don't you think?

Elma: I don't want a shower either.

Susie: (*comes in and puts her bag on a table*) Why don't we just sit down and visit a bit, and then we'll see how I can help you. (*sits down near Elma*)

Elma: I told Marlene I didn't want help!

Susie: Is Marlene your daughter?

Elma: (*nodding*) She's a good daughter. She comes and helps me now and then. But I'm getting along just fine.

Susie: And you just had hip surgery. Is that right?

Elma: Last week. But I can get around my house. I can look after myself!

Susie: How's the walking going?

Elma: (*fearing that she will lose her independence*) It's going fine.

Susie: Does anyone live here with you?

Elma: Marlene stayed with me a few days, but now she went back home. (*emphatically*) But I'm managing just fine.

Susie: And your house is all on one floor?

Elma: (*nods*) My husband and I moved to this house soon after we were married. I've lived here for over 60 years!

Susie: Wow, that's great! Sixty years in one house is pretty special! . . . What about the laundry? Is your washing machine in the basement?

Elma: Marlene did a load for me yesterday. By the time I need more clean clothes, I'll be able to go downstairs again.

Susie: Hmmmm. I guess we'll see.

Elma: I don't want people pushing me around!

Susie: That's okay. No one will push you around. But I think the arrangements were that I was supposed to help you with a shower today...

Elma: (*emphatically*) I don't need any help!

Susie: Well ... I'll just call my supervisor and check what I should do. (*Susie pulls out a cell phone, walks to stage left and turns her back to Elma to place her call.*)

Elma: (*emphatically*) I don't care what Marlene said. I can manage!

Susie: Hi, Krista! Susie here. I'm just checking in about my 2:30 appointment. Mrs. Jin-grich says she doesn't want help. Could you just check what the arrangements were? (*She ignores Elma during the next few speeches*)

Elma: (*scornfully to herself*) Mrs. Jin-grich!! Who around here doesn't know how to say "Gingrich?" Most of the people I know can still say it the old way—Gingrich. (*emphasizing the rolled 'r' and the 'ch'*) (*She glances at Susie*) I don't want strangers in my home who don't even know how to pronounce my name!

Marlene: Knock, knock! (*enters right, holding Elma's mail*) Hi Mom. Is the PSW here? I thought I saw her car outside!

Elma: You mean her? (*gestures to Susie and whispers loudly to Marlene*) I don't want her here.

Marlene: Now Mom, you need a bit of help as you recuperate from your surgery. Soon you'll be able to cope on your own again. (*Marlene sets down her purse.*)

Elma: (*half-whispering loudly*) She wants to give me a bath!

Marlene: Well, a shower anyway. Don't you think you'd feel a lot better if you were clean?

Elma: Not with her around!

Marlene: (*sighs*)

Susie: Yes, okay. Actually, the daughter has just arrived... We'll work it out... Thanks, see you later. (*closes her phone and crosses to Marlene, extending her hand*) I'm Susie. Are you Marlene?

Marlene: Yes, I'm the daughter. (*shaking hands*) Pleased to meet you Susie. I talked to the case manager who came to visit us the other day and we arranged that someone would come in twice a week to help Mom with personal grooming.

Elma: (*belligerently*) Personal grooming! What am I, a dog!?

Marlene: (*with forced calmness*) Mother, I spent most of last week here, helping you get around and get dressed and got your meals. Now I can't afford the time to do that any longer, so we've arranged for Red Cross workers to come in two afternoons a week and help you with a shower – wash your hair and maybe a couple other little things that you need help with. (*to Susie*) How long will you be able to stay?

Susie: (*pulls on plastic or latex gloves*) A usual visit is about 45 minutes or so.

Marlene: (*nodding*) Now Mom, why don't you let Susie help you wash your hair. And then if there's time she could help you straighten up your bedroom. You said this morning that it bothers you if things aren't put away properly.

Elma: (*big sigh*) Well, I guess if everyone is going to gang up on me and bully me, I'll have to go along with it.

Susie: (*brightly*) No, no. We don't bully anyone. Why don't you show me how well you can walk, and show me where the bathroom is. (*Sets Elma's walker ready for use and reaches out her hand*) Do you need a hand up?

Elma: I can manage. (*She levers herself up using the arms of the chair and slowly shuffles to exit left*)

Susie: You're doing a wonderful job, for someone who had surgery just last week! (*She follows Elma, watching her but does not exit*)

Marlene: (*to Susie*) Thank goodness she agreed! I thought she was going to flatly refuse your help. .. She still might.

Susie: Oh, don't worry. Our clients often have a hard time getting used to the idea that they can't manage on their own any more. It's natural I suppose.

Marlene: (*shaking her head*) She didn't used to be so stubborn and hard to get along with. Sometimes I think I hardly know my own mother anymore!

Susie: Give her some time to get adjusted. She'll be fine. But she might want to think about downsizing and moving to a smaller place.

Marlene: Tsk! (*sighs*) Yes. I know.

Susie: She seems fairly determined. She'll probably learn to cope on her own very soon.

Marlene: I'll stick around for a bit; just to make sure she's coping okay.

Susie: Okey-dokey. (*exits left*)

Scene 2:

Marlene: (*checks through the mail still in her hand and opens two letters; she talks to herself*) These are obviously get-well cards; she can open those. Hmm, car insurance and credit card bill. (*opens the envelopes and glances at the forms*) I wonder if we should just sell her car and cancel her insurance; I can imagine what she would say to that! (*looks at credit card statement*) hmmm...gas, restaurant, hotel! (*looks toward stage left*) What on earth would Mom be doing with a hotel bill from Toronto! I wonder if this is right!

Bruce: (*knocks and calls out as he enters right*) Hellooo!

Marlene: Oh hi, Bruce. I thought you said this morning that you had a busy day. What are you doing here?

Bruce: I just got a text message I thought you'd want to know about right away. I was on my way back to the office and figured you just might be here.

Marlene: I know, I know, it seems as though I'm **living** here these days! So what's the bad news?

Bruce: What makes you think it's bad news?

Marlene: I don't know. . . If it was good news you probably would have just phoned me.

Bruce: Maybe you're right. Anyway, I thought you'd want to know as soon as possible that your dear brother Leo is coming for a visit.

Marlene: (*scarcely believing it*) Leo is coming...this week?

Bruce: The message I got from Karen was that she was picking him up at the bus station this afternoon.

Marlene (*drops into a chair*) This afternoon! (*groans*) That's all we need. And he plans to stay here with Mom, right?

Bruce: (*pats her on the shoulder*) That's right. You couldn't have done anything, even if you had known earlier.

Marlene (*bitterly*) Leo and Karen made sure I didn't find out about it until it was too late. They knew I'd object.

Bruce: What can you do? Your mother is always happy to welcome him home.

Marlene: You know, if she wasn't living in this house that wouldn't happen. We've got to persuade her to move into an apartment or a retirement home.

Bruce: Do you think she's ready?

Marlene: Probably not. But **I'm** ready!

Bruce: (*sits down in a chair near Marlene*) You know, Marlene, there are some things you can't control. Maybe it's time to back off and just see what happens.

Marlene: (*agonizing*) You're probably right. But Mom always lets herself be taken advantage of. Leo will move in for a few weeks, he won't do a thing to help her. And he'll leave things lying around and she'll get all upset, especially when he brings beer into the house!

Bruce: Do you think it will seriously hurt her? He is who he is, and you're never going to be able to change him at his age.

Marlene: Isn't that the truth! I've tried to help him find some kind of back-bone and self-control. And all he does is fritter his life away, spending his time and money in bars and playing his silly guitar!

Bruce: But you've got to admit he's a pretty likable guy.

Marlene: (*sceptically*) Do you really think so? Whenever he comes home all he does is mooch off Mom, borrowing money from her and getting her to wait on him, hand and foot! (*vehemently*) It really ticks me off! I know he's my brother, but sometimes I have a hard time even liking him.

Bruce: (*shaking his head*) Yes, I've kind of noticed that... just a bit (*grins at her*) I always have trouble believing that the two of you are from the same family!

Marlene: (*laughs reluctantly*) Maybe he was switched at birth!

Bruce: (*gets up from chair*) Well I better get back to work. I just thought I'd better get here before he did so you'd know what was up.

Marlene: Thanks. How did you say he was getting here?

Bruce: Your sister Karen said she was picking him up at the bus station. I've no idea when they'll arrive.

Marlene: Well thanks. By the way, Mom's credit card statement came today and it had a hotel bill from Toronto on it. I know she wasn't anywhere near Toronto. Do you suppose that was Leo getting her to pay his bills again?

Bruce: (*shrugs*) Probably—it kind of sounds like something he'd do. But I can't imagine that one or two bills like that will cause her any particular financial distress.

Marlene: You're right... It's just that it's so unfair that she'll pay Leo's bills but I can spend hours and days helping her and taking her to get groceries and for appointments and she never gives me anything—she hardly even thanks me!

Bruce: (*touching Marlene on the arm*) Hey, you've spent a lot of time helping your mother in the last while. (*Marlene nods*) I mean, it's getting so we almost need an introduction when I see you at home! Perhaps you should try backing off and not offering to do so much for her. Let your siblings do more.

Marlene: Hmm. Right now that sounds **very** attractive. (*follows Bruce toward the door right*)

Bruce: Go for it! See you later. (*exits right*)

Scene 3:

Marlene: (*pacing*) Leo is coming today! That's not what this house needs! It's not what **I** need (*she grabs her hair*). I'm going to go crazy! Mom's upset enough already without

having Leo around! I know he's my brother, but he drives me around the bend. Why couldn't he get a proper job like other people? Why can't he see that Mom needs to be supported, especially with her bad heart!? He's like a kid who expects his mother to wait on him, hand and foot. Why can't he understand that she's a frail elderly woman!

(Sound of car horn) Please God! Don't tell me that's Karen and Leo already. Maybe Bruce is right. Maybe I should just sneak out the back door. *(She is perplexed and indecisive, but finally moves toward the door left then stops.)* Oh, my purse! *(She returns to grab her purse.)*

Karen: *(as she enters right)* Hey Mom, guess who's come to visit! Marlene! You're here! *(sarcastically)* What a surprise!

Marlene: Well maybe if **you** spent more time here, I wouldn't have to.

Leo: *(enters right and approaches Marlene to give her a hug)*
Hey, what's up, sis?

Marlene: *(returns his hug half-heartedly)* There's quite a lot going on, actually. So have you come to nurse Mom back to health?

Leo: Well... anything I can do to help...*(cautiously)* but what exactly are you referring to?

Marlene: You do realize that Mom just got out of the hospital after having hip surgery, don't you?

Leo: Of course. She'll soon cheer up with my smiling face around here!

Marlene: Let's see. She sometimes needs help getting in and out of bed, and in and out of the bathroom. And she isn't really able to be on her feet to prepare meals. It would be great if you could look after those things. Then I'd have time to concentrate on my own family.

Karen: You know, the rest of us aren't exactly helpless idiots; we can help Mom too. You don't have to be a martyr and do everything yourself!

Marlene: I'd be only too happy to have other people do more. But when you only do half of a job, she phones me up, and I end up doing it anyway. Sometimes it's just easier to make sure things are done right by doing it myself.

Karen: What do you mean, we only do half a job? Name one time...

Marlene: (*sighs*) Okay...the other week you were supposed to take Mom grocery shopping. But you told her you'd pick things up for her instead. And then you forgot to buy eggs and salad dressing so she ended up calling me to go and get them for her.

Karen: Oh for Pete's sake! I didn't have time to go through all the rigmarole of getting her in and out of the car, and helping her meander around the grocery store. Do you know how long it takes her to pick out what she wants? I'm sorry if I forgot a couple of things, but can't she make do with what she has?

Marlene: She gets upset easily these days. She still likes to go to the store herself. I know it takes patience, but she's feeling very vulnerable as she is losing her independence.

Karen: We've got our own lives and families to take care of, too. We can't just be her servants!

Marlene: You're preaching to the choir, sis! As soon as possible we need to get her to think about downsizing.

Leo: Woah! You mean like, move to a smaller place?

Marlene: (*nodding*) This house is too much for her these days. She's having more and more trouble coping with all the work.

Karen: Hey, wait a minute. Has Mom talked to you about this?

Marlene: No, but we should have talked about it.

Leo: But...She loves this house. It's full of memories of Dad. And where would she move to? An old fogies' home?

Marlene: I was thinking more of an apartment, or a seniors' retirement place where her meals would be provided. . .

Karen: I've heard that's really expensive.

Leo: We wouldn't want her to use up our entire inheritance...I mean, does she have enough money for that?

Marlene: Well I just don't think it's working for her to stay here.

Karen: Look, Marlene, she's going to recuperate from her hip surgery. She'll be able to do stairs again. And she doesn't want to move!

Marlene: She might get over this hip surgery, but she's been struggling with steps—and other things—for a long time!

Besides, you said yourself that we've got our own lives and we can't just be her servants!

Karen: Yeah, I guess I did say that...But selling this house? That's drastic!

Marlene: Yes I know.

Leo: Maybe one of us should move in with her.

Marlene: I just know that over the long term I can't help her as much as I have been doing—not and stay married, that is!

Susie: (*briefly enters stage left*) Do you mind keeping your voices down. Fortunately your Mom's hearing isn't too good, or she'd be able to hear your conversation. You might want to be a little more considerate. (*exits*)

Marlene: Sorry!

Karen: Who was that?

Marlene: That's Susie. She's a PSW, a personal support worker. She's here to help Mom with a shower.

Leo: Why does she need help with a shower? Besides, she always takes a bath.

Karen: Why didn't we know anything about this? Why do you always order Mom about?

Marlene: (*very angry, but controlled*) I spent the last five days here, helping Mom with everything. I slept here, I helped her get in and out of bed, I got her meals, I did her laundry, I cleaned up when she made a mess. When I asked for help

from the rest of the family I got the run-around, so don't you accuse me of bossing people around!

Leo: Hey, hey. Don't get your shorts in a knot! We appreciate everything you do. We'd just like to know about it.

Marlene: How on earth did you think she would be able to cope? She just had hip replacement surgery you know.

Leo: Well what about the hospital? Aren't they there to help you until you can get around again?

Marlene: In this enlightened age the hospital gets rid of you as fast as they can. The choice was help at home or going into convalescent care for a number of weeks. You know she would have **hated** that!

Karen: I'm sure you have your reasons for what you do, but you shouldn't make decisions without including the rest of us.

Marlene: Okay, the next time Mom calls me with a problem, I'll just tell her to call you! *(Marlene begins gathering the papers and letters, preparing to leave)*

Susie: *(offstage)* Elma, are you ready to meet your company? Let's go see who's here.

Elma: *(moves slowly with her walker, pauses)* Oh, it's just Marlene.

Karen: *(coming over to greet her mother with a little hug)* Hi Mom.

Elma: Karen! Hello. How nice of you to come over. (*Coming further into the room. She speaks to Karen, not noticing Leo*) How are the children?

Karen: They're doing fine Mom.

Leo: Mother mine! Aren't you glad to see me? (*Goes over to Elma and gives her a hug and smacking kiss*)

Elma: Leo! Leo! I'm so glad to see you.

Leo: Now, don't fall over. Why don't you sit down and get comfortable. (*gestures to a deep, low chair and Elma begins to move in that direction*)

Susie: No, no, after hip surgery you can't sit on a chair like that!

Marlene: Mom, you know which chair you need to use for the next few weeks.

Elma: I don't like that chair! (*moves toward the parlour chair*)

Leo: (*cajoling*) Now you do as the nurse tells you.

Elma: Oh all right. (*obediently heads for the right chair*)

Marlene: Mom, I'm going to be on my way now that Karen and Leo are here. I'll see you soon. Oh, and remember that someone is coming over to help you with a bath again on Tuesday. (*to Susie*) Is that right?

Susie: I believe so. (*she removes plastic gloves from her hands*)

Marlene: Will it be you again?

Susie: Yes, I think it's on my schedule.

Marlene: Thanks so much.

Susie: We're going to get along fine. Elma's doing very well considering she just had surgery.

Elma: (*emphatically*) She said I'd get along on my own very soon.

Susie: I'll soon be out of a job. (*Susie exits left to dispose of her gloves*)

Marlene: Mom, I'm really glad things are going to work out. (*sarcastically*) Karen, Leo, I leave everything in your capable hands. (*turns to go, then turns back*) Oh, the physiotherapist is coming tomorrow. Mom needs to be sure to take a pain pill an hour before she comes. (*turns toward the door*) I'll see you later. (*turns back*) Oh, Mom's medications are all in the cupboard beside the sink, and there's a list of everything she needs to take on the fridge. Okay. My cell phone is on. (*exits right*)

Elma: Why was she in such a hurry? Isn't she going to cook supper for us?

Karen: I don't know.

Leo: You always used to have a freezer full of food, Mom. Maybe there's a casserole in your freezer.

Elma: (*vaguely*) I don't know. I don't use the freezer much these days.

Susie: (*enters left*) Okay, Elma. Is there anything else you need before I go?

Elma: (*dismissively*) No, you can go now.

Susie: (*amused*) Okay. Be good. I'll see you on Tuesday.
(*collects her bag and exits right*)

Karen: Thanks for coming. Good-bye.

Elma: Good riddance to her!

Karen: So why was she here?

Elma: She thought I needed a shower! I don't see why Marlene couldn't have helped me.

Leo: Marlene says she's too busy.

Elma: No, Marlene's not too busy. She helps me with everything.

Karen: I help you too, sometimes, don't I?

Elma: Yeah. And so does Mark. But Marlene helps with all the things I really need help with.

Leo: I've come to stay with you for a bit, Mom.

Elma: That's nice. But I don't know where the sheets are.

Karen: (*puzzled*) What sheets? You mean sheets for the spare room bed? Why wouldn't they be in the linen cupboard?

Elma: I don't know. Maybe Marlene threw them away. She throws things away sometimes.

Leo: I hope she didn't throw away any of my things!

Karen: I'll go have a look.

Leo: So Mom, are you getting along okay after your operation?

Elma: Yeah, I'm okay. I'm doing well.

Leo: Is the pain better?

Elma: My leg feels better, but now I'm feeling pain in my shoulder.

Leo: Marlene says you didn't like the hospital.

Elma: No. Everybody there bosses you around.

Leo: And you and me, we don't like to be bossed, do we?

Elma: No sir! Where did Marlene go?

Leo: She went home for a while. But Karen and me are here.

Elma: Where's Karen?

Leo: (*moves to exit left and calls*) Hey Karen, what's up?

Karen: (*enters left*) Well there's lot of sheets in the linen cupboard; you can make up your own bed. There is food in the refrigerator, you can probably just heat some up for supper.

Leo: Aren't you going to stay for supper?

Karen: I've got to get home.

Leo: Hey, I need some things from the store.

Karen: Well, I'll drop you off there on my way home, but you'll have to walk back. I really need to get home.

Leo: Oh all right.

Karen: Good-bye Mom. I'll see you soon.

Leo: See you later Mom.

Elma: Are you both leaving? Just like that?

Karen: Leo will be back in a bit. He's just going to get some things he needs at the store.

Elma: *(disappointed)* Oh.

Leo: Toodle-doo. *(Karen and Leo exit right)*

Elma: *(after they have gone she heaves a big sigh)*. That's what happens when you get old. Everybody goes away and nobody comes to visit. I'll probably die here, just sitting in my chair...all alone...

End of act 1

ACT II (*a few days later in the afternoon*)

Scene 1

We see Elma alone, sitting in the same chair as the lights come up.

Elma: (*reads a newspaper; she puts it down and sighs and begins talking to herself.*) Well my name isn't in the obituaries yet. I guess **that's** a good sign. (*She begins looking at get-well cards in a basket.*) So cousin Mary remembered to send me a card. That's nice. I wonder if I ever got around to sending one to her last year when she was so sick. And here's one from Grant Carpenter; that was thoughtful, because his daughter sent me flowers from the family. It's too bad flowers don't last longer, but they are nice when you're feeling down. (*Goes back to looking at the cards*)

Karen: (*knocks and enters right*) Hi Mom. How are you today?
(*she gives her mother a little hug*)

Elma: I'm not too bad, I guess. It's good to see you.

Karen: I came to pick up Leo and take him to the bus station.
Is he ready?

Elma: (*shrugs*) I don't know. He muttered something after lunch; maybe he went downstairs to pack up his things.

Karen: So how have you been getting along with Leo in the house?

Elma: Just fine. He spent a lot of time downstairs, but we had a few little chats.

Karen: Are you managing to move around okay?

Elma: Oh yes. I'm getting around much better now.

Karen: And Leo cooked for you and did the dishes, right?

Elma: Well... mostly we ate things that were in the freezer... Casseroles and things we could heat in the microwave and stuff like that. Leo did wash the dishes sometimes when I asked him to.

Karen: So you got along all right, then?

Elma: Oh yes. It was good to have him here.

Marlene: (*enters right*) Oh hi there, Karen, Mom. I just dropped in for a minute to check how things are going.

Elma: Good, good.

Marlene: I hope having Leo here was a help and not a burden.

Elma: Oh no. Leo could never be a burden. Last night we went for a walk!

Karen: Where did you go?

Elma: We went down to the end of the block, and then we took a tour of the backyard.

Marlene: I hope you were careful. You didn't do any weeding, did you?

Elma: (*sheepish*) I just pulled out one weed. But then I pointed out a few and Leo pulled them for me.

Marlene: (*sternly*) You remember that you're not supposed to bend down, don't you?

Elma: (*with exasperation*) Yes, I remember!

Karen: I'm just going to go see if Leo is ready. (*exits left*)

Marlene: Is Leo going back to Owen Sound today?

Elma: (*nodding her head*) I think so.

Marlene: So was it a good time, having Leo here? He didn't leave his beer bottles around again, did he?

Elma: No, no, he was very thoughtful. He mostly watched TV downstairs.

Marlene: Did he help you with meals and things?

Elma: Well... Yeah he did. But he said the only way for me to get better was to start doing things.

Marlene: Oh. What kinds of things?

Elma: Well, I can walk much better than I did when you were here last, so I can get to the bathroom without help. And I can warm things up in the microwave.

Marlene: And I'll bet you can wash dishes too, eh?

Elma: (*proudly*) Yes, I can. (*Marlene grimaces*)

Karen: (*enters left*) Typical. He's just finishing his packing. It's a good thing I came a bit early.

Marlene: (*firmly, to Elma*) I'm glad that Leo encouraged you to do things for yourself, but please be careful. If you try to do too much too fast you'll just end up back in the hospital.

Elma: *(after looking at Marlene a bit defiantly)* I need to go find something for Leo before he goes.

Marlene: Use your walker, Mom.

Elma: Yes, boss lady! *(She grabs her walker and slowly walks to exit left as Marlene and Karen watch).*

Karen: You have to admit that Leo has done her some good. She's getting around a lot better.

Marlene: I suppose he did, but I'm suspicious it was more out of laziness than concern for her welfare.

Karen: Apparently he slept downstairs and spent a lot of his time down there.

Marlene: I don't suppose we dare to hope that he did any laundry for Mom.

Karen: *(laughs)* Leo? I doubt it. He may have done some of his own.

Marlene: How much of a mess is the basement in?

Karen: A bit, but it's not too bad. Not quite an MDS disaster area...

Marlene: You mean, it's about what you'd expect if a teenaged guy spent five days in the basement.

Karen: *(nods)* Yeah, that's about it.

Marlene: Typical Leo. You wouldn't know he was a grown man.

Karen: (*a bit worried*) Marlene, have you noticed some changes in Mom?

Marlene: (*guardedly*) What do you mean?

Karen: She seems...not as easy-going as she used to be. She seems more critical of people. And last week when Leo came, she made that comment about not knowing where the sheets were for the beds. ...And have you looked in the spare room recently? She has piles of junk in there.

Marlene: You mean the plastic containers?

Karen: There are piles of Styrofoam containers, other containers, and all kinds of stuff. What does she need that junk for?

Marlene: She used to store it in the basement, but then she started using the spare bedroom when it got harder to go down the stairs. I suppose she thinks it might come in handy one day. (*shrugs*) I've known it's there, but I just figured if it made her happier to have it around, I wouldn't make a fuss.

Karen: Do you suppose she's becoming a hoarder?

Marlene: Well, this room isn't exactly covered in piles of newspaper. And the kitchen seems much like usual. It's just the spare bedroom that's filling up.

Karen: But Styrofoam containers! What possible use could they be?

Marlene: (*shrugs*) You know, they say that hoarding is a symptom of stress.

Karen: What kind of stress would she be under?

Marlene: Well, just think about it. She had surgery, she spent time in hospital and now she can't get around as well as she used to. Sounds like stressors to me.

Karen: Sometimes I wonder if she's getting Alzheimer's.

Marlene: What makes you say that?

Karen: The bit about not knowing if there were sheets for the bed. And she thought you might have thrown them away.

Marlene: She's losing something, but other times she's fine. From what I can tell it doesn't quite follow the symptoms of Alzheimer's.

Karen: Why did this happen all of a sudden?

Marlene: Actually, it didn't. She's been getting just a little more vague in recent months. Maybe it's just that since her surgery we've been around her more, and so we've been noticing changes.

Karen: I think it's more than that. She can be almost abrasive, and that's not like our mother.

Marlene: Maybe you're right.

Karen: They must have stopped her blood thinner for the surgery. Maybe she's had a stroke.

Marlene: Hmm. That would explain that edge to her personality that is different now.

Karen: It's scary to see those changes in your mother. What do you think is going to happen?

Marlene: We have to face the fact that she could have a major health issue at any time. I think it's high time she moved out of this house.

Karen: (*sighs*) You're probably right, but do you think she'll agree?

Marlene: Obviously, she'll resist it. I really don't know how to handle this, Karen.

Karen: We should get Mark over here. Maybe she'd listen to him.

Marlene: It's worth a try. Since Dad died she's tended to agree with whatever Mark says.

Karen: I'm going to call him right away. (*gets out her cell phone*) Hey Mark, what's up? Marlene and I are here at Mom's and we've been talking. We really think it's time to encourage her to downsize and move into a smaller place. What do you think? (*listens for a bit*) Sure, that'd be great. See you later, Mark.

Marlene: What did he say?

Karen: He was a bit cautious, but he said he'd be over as soon as possible to add his voice to the chorus.

Marlene: We have to start talking about it sometime. We may as well start today.

Karen: What do you think we should be encouraging her to do?

Marlene: She at least has to go to an apartment, but I wonder if a place where she could get meals and get her laundry done wouldn't be better.

Karen: She certainly won't agree to a nursing home!

Marlene: No, no, not a nursing home...but some kind of assisted living. It's not nursing care, but there are staff around who can keep an eye on people. You often don't get a full apartment, but there are common rooms for everyone to use. And the meals are provided. . .

Karen: How do you know so much about this?

Marlene: I've been keeping my eyes open... And I did tour one or two places.

Karen: You mean you're looking for a place to stick Mom into?

Marlene: The days of forcing someone into a nursing home are long gone. She has to agree. But she gets lonely here, and the house is simply too much for her to manage. Bruce and I have been talking about it, and we think an assisted living arrangement would be good for her. She'd have people to talk to at mealtime and make new friends...

Karen: I hear Mom coming. Should we talk about it with her now?

Marlene: (*unsure*) I'm not sure, but we have to start sometime.

Scene 2:

Elma: (*enters left*) Someone seems to have gone through my stuff. I hope it wasn't that woman that we had here the other day.

Karen: Is there something missing?

Elma: Well I always put my Bible on the little table, and it's not there.

Marlene: (*pointing to a Bible on a table beside Elma's chair*)
Do you mean that Bible?

Elma: Well bless my soul, so it is. I wonder how it got there.

Marlene: (*after a slight pause*) Is that what you went to look for, Mom?

Elma: I went to get Grandpa's pocket watch. (*gets it from her pocket and holds it up*) I want to give it to Leo before he goes.

Karen: Grandpa's pocket watch! Why should Leo get that?

Elma: (*defensively*) Why shouldn't it be his?

Karen: That's a valuable watch...and an heirloom. I thought Mark was supposed to get Grandpa's watch! I'm sure Dad told him it would be his.

Marlene: (*to Elma*) Why do you think Leo should have it?

Elma: Leo doesn't live close by like the rest of you do. This watch will help him remember his Dad and his Grandpa.

Marlene: Mom, Leo doesn't always value family as much as the rest of us do. Remember he wanted to get away from us; that's partly why he moved so far away.

Karen: He'd probably sell it you know.

Elma: (*belligerently*) Girls, I'm ashamed of you, saying nasty things about your brother! He came and stayed with me for a few days, so I want to give him something.

Marlene: I stayed with you too—and gave you a lot more help than it seems Leo did.

Elma: Now don't be jealous of your brother. I'll see that you get something too.

Karen: You know, Leo might appreciate money as much as the watch.

Marlene: (*after a short pause*) By the way, Mom, your credit card statement had a bill for a hotel in Toronto. Was that something you paid for Leo?

Elma: That's none of your business. You should not be snooping in my mail!

Marlene: But I thought you wanted me to check on your bills and then pass them on to Mark so that he could pay them for you?

Elma: But you're not supposed to meddle in my affairs!

Karen: Mom, would you sit down? There's something we want to discuss with you.

Marlene: (*cautioning*) Now might not be the best time...

Karen: (*ignores Marlene*) Mom, we are thinking that this house is getting to be a bit much for you. Have you thought about moving?

Elma: No!

Marlene: Now Mom, just think about it. This house has many rooms you don't use. Also, your laundry is downstairs and you've had trouble for a long time using the stairs.

Karen: (*chimes in*) And all the yard work—you can't really weed the flower borders yourself anymore.

Elma: You're just ganging up on me! I'm not moving!

Marlene: Just think about it, okay? Do you remember Mrs. Watson who lived down the street when we were young? As she got older and older she couldn't mow her lawn, look after the flowerbeds, or trim the bushes. Do you really want your house to end up looking like that?

Elma: (*pleading*) I thought children were supposed to **help** their parents.

Marlene: We don't want to abandon you, but we don't think it's fair that we should have to do all your yard work and your laundry and look after your flowers.

Karen: Why should we have to do our work and your work too?

Elma: (*sobs*) It hurts to have ungrateful children.

Marlene: We're not ungrateful and we're happy to help you, but there comes a point where the help we can provide just isn't enough.

Karen: (*nodding*) In these last few weeks...if you had needed more help, we wouldn't have been able to manage.

Elma: But I wouldn't feel at home if I wasn't in this house!

Marlene: What about your friends? They're not all staying in their houses, are they?

Elma: I don't want to go to a nursing home!

Marlene: Okay, Mom, settle down. We don't want you to go to a nursing home, but you might think about selling the house and moving to an apartment.

Leo: (*enters left, carrying a large duffle bag*) Hey, what's going on here?

Elma: The girls want me to sell the house.

Leo: What?! Mom, you don't want to sell the house, do you? (*perches on the arm of her chair*) It should stay in the family.

Elma: (*nodding*) Your Dad and I lived here for our whole married lives.

Leo: I know what you mean, Mom. I love this house too. Maybe I could live here again someday.

Elma: (*patting his hand*) That would be nice.

Karen: What are you getting at, Leo? Do you think Mom's going to give you this house and leave nothing for the rest of us?

Leo: (*shrugs*) She can leave it to whoever she wants.

Marlene: (*with a hard edge to her voice*) Okay, Leo. If you want to inherit this house then you need to look after it; and your mother too. If she leaves this house to you, I'm not going to pull another weed, or wash another article of clothing or take her to another doctor's appointment. That can be your job!

Leo: Hey, hey, don't get all hot and bothered! What are you so excited about?

Karen: The same goes for me. If you want the house, you can do the work.

Leo: Okay, okay. I just think it's a shame that we can't keep the house in the family.

Marlene: Hopefully we'll soon be looking for a buyer. You could always buy it.

Leo: Where would I get that kind of money?

Elma: I don't want to sell this house!

Marlene: Okay, Mom, we won't talk about this more now, but you need to recognize that staying here may not be an option.

Elma: (*looks defiantly at Marlene and Karen then puts her head down as though she might burst into tears*)

Karen: (*looks at her watch*) Leo, if you want to get to the bus station, we have to get going right away.

Leo: Okay, I'm ready. (*gives Elma a hug*) Good-bye mother. Maybe I can come back and stay with you again.

Elma: (*giving him another squeeze*) That would be nice. Good-bye Leo. It was a good visit. Oh, I forgot this. I wanted to give you this.

Leo: What is it?

Elma: It's your grandfather's pocket watch. Don't you remember?

Leo: Ummm, vaguely.

Karen: It's an antique, Leo. It's valuable.

Leo: Oh. Thank you, Mom. Thank you very much.

Elma: You take good care of it, you hear?

Leo: I'll take very good care of it. Thanks again.

Elma: Good-bye.

Leo: Good-bye. (*Leo exits right with a duffle bag*)

Karen: See you later, Mom. (*Karen exits right*)

Elma: (*sniffs loudly, almost crying*) The Bible says, "Sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have ungrateful children."

Marlene: Are you sure that's in the Bible?

Elma: Well if it isn't it should be.

Marlene: If I remember my Shakespeare correctly, I think that's a quote from King Lear. Do you remember the story of King Lear, Mom? Two of his daughters flattered him, and said what he wanted to hear, but the daughter who truly

loved him and who spoke the truth to him, he sent her away.

Elma: I don't want to know about King Lear!

Marlene: Mom, I only want what's best for you. You're getting stronger again after your surgery, and that's good. But don't get mad at me because you don't want to hear what I'm saying. Just think about it, okay?

Elma: (*she gives Marlene a pat*) You're a good daughter.

Marlene (*gives Elma a hug*) I love you Mom, and I want what's best for you.

Scene 3:

(*doorbell rings*)

Elma: Now who could that be?

Marlene: I'll go see. (*moves to stage right*) Oh hello. Come on in. Mom, did you know that Pastor Steve was coming to visit?

Elma: (*vaguely*) Did you say you were coming today?

Steve: (*shakes hands with Elma*) Yes, I called you on the telephone this morning.

Elma: Oh. Well now that you're here, come on in and sit down. Marlene, would you get us some tea?

Marlene: Umm, (*shrugs reluctantly*) Okay. (*exits left*)

Steve: (*sitting*) So Elma, how are things going?

Elma: I'm doing well. (*suspiciously*) Did Marlene ask you to come?

Steve: No... Was there some reason she should have?

Elma: Well, my children are ganging up on me. Well, not Leo, but he left to go back home again.

Steve: What are they ganging up on you about?

Elma: They want to stick me in the poor house!

Steve: The poor house?

Elma: The old folks home. They think I can't look after myself any more.

Steve: Well it must be a challenge, with your lawn and your flowers and getting around hasn't been easy for you recently.

Elma: (*definitely*) I can manage.

Steve: But the last time I talked to Marlene she said that Bruce mowed your lawn and that she did most of the weeding.

Elma: I did some weeding last night.

Steve: You did! That's amazing!

Elma: Well, I guess Leo helped me a bit. But soon I'll be able to do everything again.

Steve: What does Marlene say about that?

Elma: (*clicks her tongue in disgust*) Marlene thinks I'm not fit for anything anymore.

Steve: (*puzzled*) I thought Marlene was your main support, your Rock of Gibraltar.

Elma: Well she isn't any more. She wants me to sell the house! And she's just going to dump me out like a piece of garbage!

Steve: I don't think so. Marlene has been looking after you for years. You've depended on her help for many things. I don't think she's turning against you.

Elma: Well she's not helping me now! She is crushing my spirit (*bangs her fists together spiritedly*).

Steve: (*nodding sympathetically*) Sometimes when we face tough times, it seems as though our spirits **are** being crushed. But, you know, life is full of difficult situations. Do you remember Jesus' words about denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following him?

Elma: You mean that when your children are a disappointment to you, that's just a cross you need to bear?

Steve: (*laughs softly*) That's not exactly what I meant. There are lots of situations in life when you have to choose what is possible, not what you want.

Elma: (*suspiciously*) Are **you** trying to take my house away from me too?

Steve: Of course not. I'm just trying to say that when we find ourselves in a dark valley, we need to remember that Jesus is our shepherd, and we don't need to be afraid.

Elma: You think I'm going to die, don't you.

Steve: (*distressed*) No, no, that's not what I meant.

Mark: (*enters right*) Knock, knock. Hi Mom. Oh hi, Pastor Steve. I didn't realize you were here. (*shakes hands with Steve; gives a pat to his mother*)

Elma: Mark, I didn't expect you until tomorrow.

Mark: Did I come at a bad time?

Steve: No, your timing was ..um...perfect!

Marlene: (*enters from left with a tray of mugs*) Hi Mark. Can I pour you some tea?

Mark: Ahhh, sure.

Marlene: I'll just grab another cup. (*exits left*)

Elma: Sit down, Mark. (*definitely*) Can you tell Pastor Steve that I don't ever want to leave this house.

Mark: Well...

Elma: Has Marlene got to you too?

Mark: (*bewildered*) Marlene did not talk to me. What have you got against Marlene?

Elma: She's trying to take my house away from me!

Mark: No she's not.

Elma: Yes she is! She's been after me and after me about it.

Mark: I don't think you're being fair to her. Don't you remember that last week she spent five days with you, looking after you? If she hadn't done that you would have had to go to a convalescent home.

Marlene: (*enters from left*) Thanks Mark. Thank you for sticking up for me.

Elma: Well who's going to stick up for me?

Mark: We all are, Mom. That's why we're here. We're concerned about you.

Elma: (*angrily*) Well, you have a really great way of showing your concern! (*almost in tears*) You're trying to take my house away from me! What's going to become of me?

Marlene: (*after a slight pause*) Here Mom, have some tea.

Elma: I don't want tea. I can't drink tea when my spirit is crushed! (*getting up from her chair*) Do you know what it feels like when people tell you to get rid of your home? (*moves to exit left*) Now all of you, just leave me alone for a while! Tomorrow I'm going to change my will! (*exits*)

Marlene: (*after a pause*) I wonder what that was all about. She's never acted as though she didn't trust me before.

Mark: I've never seen her like this before! (*upset and begins to pace*) This is not the mother I've known all my life. Do you think she's having a nervous breakdown? Maybe we should try to get her into a nursing home as soon as possible!

Steve: Maybe she's just frightened.

Mark: But why would that turn her against us, against all of us?

Steve: How long has your mother lived in this house?

Marlene: More than 60 years.

Steve: That's a long time to get comfortable with your surroundings and probably the thought of living anywhere else is terrifying. It's easier to lash out at others and deny that anything is wrong rather than face the idea of moving.

Mark: But what are we going to **do** with her? We have to do something!

Steve: First, why don't we all sit down and drink some tea?

Marlene: That's a good idea. (*Mark sits down and Marlene offers Steve a mug of tea*) Do you take milk or sugar?

Steve: Just plain, thanks.

Marlene: (*hands a mug to Mark*) How about something to nibble on. (*offers a plate of cookies*)

Steve: Thanks. Your mother seems to think you're very determined to get her out of this house.

Marlene: (*shaking her head*) Today is the first time we've talked about it. Her reaction has been a real surprise.

Mark: I've never said a word to her about it, either. She's always been so rational, why is she suddenly going squirrely?

Steve: Have you noticed unusual reactions previously?

Mark: Never!

Marlene: (*to Steve*) You know, when you came in she didn't remember that you were coming, but you'd phoned only this morning. Her memory seems to be affected...and she's a little more abrasive than she used to be. It's worrying...

Mark: It sure is worrying. The last thing I need right now is a mother that's making all kinds of accusations that aren't true!

Steve: Maybe it's just too much for her to cope with, all at once. Maybe if you give her a bit of time she'll get used to the idea.

Marlene: I think that's good advice. Mark, she'll be okay, probably. Maybe we just need to think of her as being like a teenager saying things she doesn't mean.

Mark: (*sighs*) I never was very good at dealing with teenagers. But do you really think it's normal for someone to fly off the handle like that? Shouldn't we be taking her to the doctor, or making an appointment with a psychiatrist?

Marlene: Let's just wait and see how she is later today. She certainly isn't ready to think about the future in any helpful way right now.

Mark: Why can't she see that she's going to have to make some decisions and soon? Is it normal for someone to just close her eyes and pretend the future isn't going to happen?

Steve: Some people are like that. Wise people open their eyes to the future, and make decisions before they're in a situation where they really don't have a lot of choices left.

Marlene: Dad was like that. Mark, do you remember when he chose to retire? We were so surprised when he made that decision, but he and Mom had many years together after he quit working. They enjoyed those years immensely.

Steve: How old was he when he retired?

Marlene: Let's see. He would have been in his late 50s.

Mark: (*looking struck*) Wow, he wasn't much older than me when he retired!

Steve: Have **you** thought about retirement?

Mark: No way! Retiring is for old people! I've got a company to run! If I retired, what would I do then?

Steve: (*nods sympathetically*) It's hard to think about ending something that you enjoy, but it's important to think ahead. I always thought your Dad coped pretty well with life.

Marlene: (*nodding*) He wasn't afraid to retire. He never had expensive tastes and he was sure they could live happily on his pension.

Mark: I know, he really enjoyed the volunteer work that he was able to do for so many years.

Steve: He once told me that he felt called by God to donate his time and effort in his volunteer work.

Marlene: You know, I just thought of something. One day Dad and I were walking past the seniors building at the end of the street. It was still under construction and he made a comment that he and Mom might live there someday.

Mark: You mean he might have been thinking about moving way back then?

Marlene: Could be. I wonder if he and Mom ever talked about what they might do. If we approached it from the angle that it was Dad's idea, she might be more willing to go along with it.

Mark: D'you think?

Steve: Still, it might be better not to suggest it today.

Marlene: Mark, you should ask her if Dad ever talked about moving. It would come better from you than from me.

Mark: I doubt it.

Marlene: Oh yes. If you suggest something she's always willing to consider it.

Mark: I thought she always listened to you.

Marlene: Not recently.

Steve: (*getting up*) Well, I should be going. I hope you can work things out.

Marlene: I'll just take a quick peek to see how Mom's doing.
(*exits left carrying tea mugs*)

Mark: So do you have any advice on what we should be doing? Should we try to get Mom declared incompetent so that we can make decisions for her?

Steve: That's a pretty drastic step; I wouldn't rush into anything too quickly. You know, in a few days your mother might be doing a lot better.

Mark: I'm just not very good at this. I don't mind paying her bills and making sure no one takes advantage of her, but dealing with paranoia is just too much for me.

Steve: It's important for all of you to work together. I think Marlene's done an excellent job in helping your mother, but it can be a pretty heavy load if it goes on for too long.

Mark: That's why we have to get her into some place with more help.

Steve: But it's important for your mother to feel that **she's** the one who's made that decision. If you push too hard, you might regret it in the long run.

Mark: So first we need to persuade her that moving is a good idea.

Marlene: (*enters from left*) Mom's going to have a nap. I told her we'd be in touch tomorrow. She seems to be mostly over her snit.

Steve: Well, I'll be on my way. (*shakes hands with Mark and Marlene*)

Marlene: Good-bye. Thanks for coming. (*Steve exits right*)

Mark: I don't seem to have been of much help today.

Marlene: Hey, your work is still coming, big brother! The one little thing you need to do is talk Mom into moving.

End of Act II

Act III
Scene 1

(Karen and her daughters, Laura and Lily enter left. Laura and Lily are somewhere between 10 and 16 years old)

Karen: Okay girls, you know the deal. You help me for a while cleaning Grandma's house and then we'll go to the mall. Laura, why don't you dust *(hands her a dust cloth)* and Lily, you vacuum.

Lily: Where's the vacuum?

Karen: It's in the hall closet. *(Lily exits left; Karen begins tidying papers)*

Laura: So what's this, Mom? *(holding up a small rock from a shelf)* Why does Grandma have a rock?

Karen: *(looks at it more closely)* Oh, that's a memory stone!

Laura: What's a memory stone?

Karen: I forget! Seriously, Grandma picked up that rock the first time we visited Lake Superior. *(remembering)* Wow, that seems like a long time ago.

Lily: *(returning with a vacuum cleaner)* What have you got?

Laura: Mom says it's Grandma's memory stone.

Karen: I'll bet there are rocks or stones all over this house. Whenever we went on vacation, we'd often bring back a stone with a special memory connected with it. I wonder why Grandma kept this one here.

Laura: So what happened at Lake Superior?

Karen: It was our first trip with a camping trailer. Your uncle Leo was just a little kid, maybe five or six. He was sleeping in a tent with Mark and Marlene and I slept in the trailer with Grandma and Grandpa. One morning, when we got up, Leo was missing.

Lily: Where did he go?

Karen: He got up early and went down to the lakeshore. When we found him, he was just throwing stones into the lake. Grandma chose a stone from the beach to remember how afraid she was that she wouldn't see her little boy again.

Laura: You'd think he would've known she would be scared.

Karen: Leo has always marched to his own drummer, and done things his own way. Even now, he probably doesn't think much about other people.

Laura: He plays a mean guitar.

Karen: Yes, he does.

Lily: What does Grandma remember when she looks at this rock?

Karen: You'll have to ask her. I just remember how upset she was.

Laura: Does Grandma have other memory stones? I don't see any others.

Karen: She used to have a whole collection that she would keep in a tray lined with velvet. But, you know, I haven't seen them recently.

Lily: I think that's a neat idea. Maybe each stone reminds her of a special person.

Laura: (*playfully insulting her sister*) So what kind of stone would remind her of you? One with a pointy head, or one with big feet?

Lily: (*responding in kind*) Your stone probably has a big mouth!

Karen: Okay girls, let's get this room dusted and vacuumed.

(*Laura goes back to dusting, Lily turns on the vacuum*)

Lily: (*to Laura, shouting over the sound of the vacuum*) Get out of the way!

Laura: Why don't you do the other side first?

Lily: Why don't you do the other places first!

Laura: I was here first!

Lily: The cord won't reach!

Laura: Yes it will... Hey, don't hit me. (*Lily gets the wand close to Laura's feet*)

Lily: Then get out of the way!

Karen: Girls, that's enough!

Laura: She started it.

Karen: (*sigh*) Just do your work.

Laura: Hey, look at this! She throws something to Lily who drops the vacuum hose, trying to catch it.

Karen: Will you two stop clowning around!

Lily: Hey, this is neat. (*she turns off the vacuum*) Where did you find it?

Laura: On this shelf, along with the other knick-knacks.

Lily: I wonder what it is.

Laura: It's sort of like a rock, but I'm not sure. It has a picture on it.

Karen: Let me see. (*comes over and takes the object*) Oh, that's a paperweight. (*searching her memory*) I think there's some story connected to it, but I can't remember.

Lily: We'll have to ask Grandma about this too.

Laura: She has so many knick-knacks.

Karen: And undoubtedly each one has a special memory.

Lily: We need to write them down. Wouldn't it be awful if Grandma couldn't remember any more?

Laura: (*teasing her mother*) You mean like Mom forgets everything?

Karen: Hey! I remember the important stuff.

Laura: Then this paperweight mustn't be about you.

Lily: That's going to be my project. To ask Grandma about each thing here and the memories that go with them.

Laura: Good luck. There must be a million things here.

Karen: That's a good idea, Lily. I'm sure each of these things (*gestures to the knick-knacks*) reminds Grandma of someone or something.

Lily: (*looking at the paperweight*) Maybe someday this will be mine, and it will remind me of Grandma and her memories.

Karen: In the meantime, let's finish our dusting and vacuuming.

Laura: Yes boss! (*Lily turns on the vacuum and quickly finishes, then turns off the vacuum and prepares to put it away*) Hey, you can't be done already.

Lily: See that's the beauty of floors, you don't have to dust around all the knick-knacks.

Karen: Grandma always treasured the little gifts that people gave her. I wonder if she has ever thrown any of them away.

Laura: Probably not. This one even has a chip out of it! (*holds a glass or china object*)

Karen: It's not going to be any fun when Grandma moves out of this house, deciding what to do with all her little bits and pieces.

Lily: (*enthusiastic*) Maybe we can have some of them.

Karen: We'll probably get more than we want.

Laura: What would we do with them?

Lily: We could have lots of shelves, just like Grandma does.

Laura: Can you imagine dusting them all, over and over again every week?

Lily: Maybe if they were in a cabinet they wouldn't get so dusty. And then every time you did clean around them, you could go through all your memories.

Elma: (*enters left, walking more briskly than before, using a cane.*) That was fast.

Laura: We're fast people, Grandma. (*she quickly finishes her dusting*)

Karen: Can all these magazines and newspapers go into the recycling bin?

Elma: Yeah sure. (*Karen exits left with newspapers and magazines*)

Lily: Grandma, we wondered about some of your things. Mom said this is a memory stone (*showing her the first little rock*).

Elma: Oh yes. That one reminds me of an answer to prayer.

Laura: Mom said that you lost Uncle Leo when he was playing by the lake.

Elma: I was frantic. I worried that someone snatched him or that he drowned. But I remembered to pray that God would keep him safe and while I was still praying, Mark came running to say that he had found him.

Lily: What about this? (*passing her the paperweight*) What does it remind you of?

Elma: (*holding the paperweight*) Oh yes, this is a paperweight from the Ten Thousand Villages store. My cousin Winnifred came to our church ladies group and made a speech about the good work the store does in helping poor people in other countries.

Lily: Who is your cousin Winnifred?

Elma: Her father and my father were brothers. Her family were missionaries in Africa.

Laura: So why did she give you the paperweight?

Elma: Oh, it wasn't a gift. I bought it to remind me of Winnifred and just to buy something at the Ten Thousand Villages store.

Lily: (*gesturing to the knick-knacks*) Do all these things help you to remember people?

Elma: Yes they do. I remember who gave them to me, or how I come to have it. (*Moves over to the collection*)

Laura: Are they valuable?

Elma: Probably not. Some of them are very old. Some of these dishes belonged to my mother, and my grandmother and my great-grandmother.

Lily: Wow. What belonged to your great-grandmother?

Elma: This salt dish. It's very, very, old.

Laura: Is it an antique?

Elma: Well, I don't know.

Laura: Could we take it to the Antiques Road Show?

Elma: (*doubtfully*) I expect it's just an ordinary salt dish. But it's valuable to me.

Lily: What **is** a salt dish, anyway?

Elma: Long ago people used to put salt in a little dish on the table and you would take a little pinch and sprinkle it on your food. (*puts back the salt dish*)

Lily: And which of these things is from your grandmother?

Elma: (*points*) This plate is from her Sunday set of dishes. I still remember using these dishes at her house.

Laura: They're not very big plates, are they?

Lily: Maybe in olden days they didn't eat as much as we do.

Elma: (*Laughs*) Oh, we always had **lots** to eat. My mother taught us not to be greedy the first time the food was passed around, but we could always have seconds.

Karen: (*enters left*) Okay girls, if the house is clean enough for Grandma's company, we should be on our way.

Lily: Grandma was just telling us about all her things. Can't we stay a bit longer?

Karen: (*looks at her watch*) Grandma's company is expected any minute now.

Laura: Besides we want to go to the mall.

Lily: Would you let me write down your memories Grandma? Then we can all remember about the plates and things.

Elma: (*nodding*) That would be nice.

Karen: That's a great idea, Lily. Maybe you can come over after school sometime. (*touches her mother on the arm*)
Bye-bye Mom.

Elma: Thank you for doing the cleaning. And thank you for visiting.

Lily: (*gives her grandma a hug*) Good-bye Grandma. Be good, and remember your memories.

Laura: Bye, Grandma.

Scene 2:

Elma: (*waving*) Bye. (*Karen, Laura and Lily exit. Elma returns to her curio cabinet and picks up another dish or plate*). This was from Sally Martin... I worked for her for three years. (*shakes her head as she remembers*) Sam and I did a lot of courting at their home. Those were good times... I **can't** leave all this behind! I'd sooner rip my heart out than lose everything that reminds me of the people I used to know. ...(*She takes a deep breath*) Oh my, Lizzie will be here soon... I sure hope she doesn't comment on my housekeeping today... (*listens*) Was that a car door slamming? She's lucky that she can still get around and drive herself. (*She moves toward right exit*) Hello, hello. Come on in. (*She shakes hands as Lizzie enters right.*) It's good to see you.

Lizzie: Hello sister. It's about time we got together again. Your flowerbeds don't look too bad, considering that you've been laid up for a while.

Elma: (*sighs*) Well, they're not what I would like them to be.
But I just can't do what I used to be able to.

Lizzie: Yes, well, none of us are getting any younger! (*Sets her purse on a chair or table*)

Elma: Come and sit down. Can I get you something to drink, maybe some tea...

Lizzie: No, no. I came to visit the sick, not to be waited on.
(*hands her a box*) Here, I brought you something. Maybe I should have made them myself, but, I guess I find the local bakery a little too handy.

Elma: (*opens the box*) Ohh, sticky buns! Why don't I serve them right now!

Lizzie: (*firmly*) Elma, just sit down. You serve those buns to someone special, not me! Besides, I'm diabetic. I shouldn't eat things like that.

Elma: Well thanks anyway. It's been a long time since I baked something like this. (*puts the box down*)

Lizzie: (*finds a seat*) You know, when we were children, we would eat that kind of thing all the time. Pies, morning, noon and night, and somehow we didn't seem to pack on the pounds like we do today.

Elma: I guess we got a lot of exercise just working around the house—doing laundry by hand, scrubbing the floor on hands and knees...

Lizzie: And trotting out to the outhouse! My lands, things are different now. It seems as though we can do everything with just a push of a button.

Elma: Well I'm still trying to figure out how to get down the basement steps with just the push of a button.

Lizzie: So how do you get down there? I didn't think you'd be able to stay in your house alone if you needed a new hip.

Elma: (*sighs*) I haven't been down there for a while. I have to depend on other people to do laundry for me.

Lizzie: You would think one of your children would offer that you could live with them.

Elma: (*hates that idea*) Oh no. I wouldn't want to do that!

Lizzie: Why not? That's how it's been done for generations. We made an apartment in the basement for Mom and Dad when they weren't able to manage on their own any more. And then Dad died soon after they moved in.

Elma: You know, I don't remember that very well.

Lizzie: You don't remember? Oh my! You'd remember if it was **your** house they moved to! Mom was bound and determined she wasn't going to move, but after a while Dad convinced her that it was a good idea. And then when he died so soon after they moved we were so thankful that she was settled in.

Elma: What did they do with all their stuff?

Lizzie: How come you can't remember that? You and I helped Mom sort through what she was going to keep. They gave most of their stuff away to family or to the thrift shop.

Elma: Oh yes, I remember. I got Mom's whatnot shelf.

Lizzie: (*Walks over to shelf or cabinet*) I must say, you keep it almost as full as Mom ever did.

Elma: (*small pause*) Do you think it was hard for her to move into a smaller place?

Lizzie: Oh yes, it was hard. She cried buckets of tears the day they moved. Don't you remember that either?

Elma: I thought Mom was always a happy person.

Lizzie: Oh she was. She just found it hard to move out of her house. But Dad persuaded her that it had to be done. So she cried for a while, and then she got over it.

Elma: (*thoughtfully*) I always remember our mother during those years when we lived on the farm.

Lizzie: It must be nice to forget the negative memories. In those later years she was such a complainer. I always vowed I'd never be like that.

Elma: She must have missed Dad a lot.

Lizzie: Of course she did! But it's not very helpful to sit in a huddle and cry "poor me, poor me!" It's better to grab hold of life and try to make the best of it.

Elma: It's not easy.

Lizzie: Well no, life isn't easy.

Elma: (*after a little pause*) So, what's been happening in your life?

Lizzie: Nothing much, except I've decided I'm going to move to an apartment.

Elma: An apartment? What apartment?

Lizzie: It's a seniors building, not far from where I live.

Elma: But you just moved to your little place not that long ago. Why ever would you move to an apartment?

Lizzie: Well, it's all just getting to be a bit too much. I don't want to have to pay someone to mow the lawn and rake the leaves and look after things that break.

Elma: Ei yi yi, Lizzie, I never thought you would move out of your house!

Lizzie: I'm old enough now to get by with less space, Elma. It's called downsizing. In this building some of my friends will live much closer. We can visit each other without going outside. And I want one of those new bathtubs that are easy to get in and out of.

Elma: You mean like those ones on TV?

Lizzie: Actually, my new place will just have a shower. You know, if you have a bench in the shower, it doesn't matter how old you get, you can safely shower yourself as long as you can shuffle one foot in front of the other.

Elma: You mean you're not going to have a bathtub at all?

Lizzie: Nope.

Elma: I don't think I could get used to that.

Lizzie: Of course you could. Haven't you ever been stuck in your bathtub, as bare as the day you were born, and you have trouble getting out?

Elma: (*nods her head*) I'm so worried that someday I'll be stuck there for days and won't be able to get help.

Lizzie: You could put your telephone beside the tub so you can call 911.

Elma: (*horrified*) And have them find me stark naked?

Lizzie: Oh, the paramedics probably see that kind of thing all the time! Anyway, why not do something about it? Remodel your bathroom or find a new place to live, Sis.

Elma: But... (*sighs*)

Lizzie: Elma, you're going to have to do it sometime or other.

Elma: But I've lived in this house for 60 years. This is what I know!

Lizzie: Elma, you need to take on a new attitude. You're stuck in an old rut, and you need some new thinking.

Elma: What do you mean?

Lizzie: Just because you're getting older doesn't mean you have to turn into a fossil.

Elma: (*insulted*) A fossil!!

Lizzie: You need to get out more. You need to meet people and do things. You know, Cousin Esther and I just joined a walking club. And we're thinking about starting up a book club.

Elma: (*incredulous*) Whatever will you think of next?!

Lizzie: Yes indeed. And I've even thought about learning to do some line dancing.

Elma: Do you think that's a good idea at your age?

Lizzie: At my age? I'm only a little older than you, Elma! Besides, you can't let old age get you down! You need to get going again and step out in life! (*begins sashaying around the room*) You need a little spice! You need a little pizzazz! You need to shock people every now and then! (*gently elbows Elma*).

Elma: Oh Lizzie. You always **were** a little weird.

Lizzie: Now you listen to me! (*shakes her finger*) You've been sitting around in this house, feeling sorry for yourself, haven't you? You've been moaning about the fact that you're a widow and that nobody cares about you. ... Well it's time to stop that right now! Everybody has their own problems, and yours aren't more important than anyone else's. The trick to success in life is to either fix your problems or learn to live with them. So... (*sits down*) what are your problems?

Elma: I don't have any problems.

Lizzie: (*sceptically*) Uhuh... Number one problem: You tell lies to yourself. Okay, I'll tell you what your problems are:

Elma: Well, I do have a bossy sister.

Lizzie: Yes, you do. What are you going to do about it?... Now, my guess is you're feeling a bit lonely. You're a widow and you don't like it. I'll bet you don't get out enough. Am I right?

Elma: Yes. I guess I am a bit lonely.

Lizzie: So make some new friends.

Elma: How do I do that? I haven't driven the car for months. And the children think I should give it up altogether.

Lizzie: Well, for starters, you should move out of this house and into a place where there are more people around. You could move to a place like Parkview Manors, or the Duke Centre, or that fancy new apartment building on Church Street.

Elma: But...

Lizzie: But me no buts, Elma! Wouldn't you like to live in your own place? A snug little kitchen, a bedroom, a living room with your own furniture? All your things all around you? No worries about keeping the basement clean and tidy? No worries about keeping the lawn and the flowers looking good? You could even visit friends without going outside...

Elma: Well, maybe...

Lizzie: And when salesmen come to the door, you know, trying to re-seal your driveway, or wanting to fix your chimney, or sell you a new vacuum cleaner....

Elma: I hate when that happens! I never know what to say.

Lizzie: Well, strangers and salesmen can't come into these places without permission.

Elma: It would be nice not to have people trying to sell me things I don't need.

Lizzie: And there wouldn't be steps into your house.

Elma: No steps?

Lizzie: Seniors housing always has an elevator or everything is at ground level.

Elma: I hate ramps. They make me go out of breath.

Lizzie: See, you would find it a big help to move to an easier place.

Elma: But, how can the children and grandchildren come home for Christmas if I don't have a house?

Lizzie: It's time for them to start hosting Christmas. It's too much work for you anyway! And most places have a room for families to use. The children can bring the food and you don't have to go outside.

Elma: But how can I say good-bye to the house where Sam and I lived for so many years?

Lizzie: Elma, life is about saying good-bye. Nothing ever stays the same, everything changes. This house isn't the same since Sam went is it?

Elma: No. But everything in this house reminds me of him. And of the children when they were young.

Lizzie: Well, it's obvious you need to invest in some big photo albums. You could take pictures of every room in this house and every knick-knack or thing in this house. You could put all those pictures in an album and every now and then, when you feel homesick, you could get out your albums and have yourself a good cry while you trot out your memories.

Elma: Do you think so?

Lizzie: It would be a lot better than moping around here, watching everything go downhill 'cause you can't look after it properly.

Elma: It's not going downhill. I get help from the children.

Lizzie: You're being selfish. You're not being fair to Marlene, or to Karen and Mark. You expect them to do your yard work and help you with laundry and do your grocery shopping.

Elma: But they like to help.

Lizzie: No they don't. They have their own work, and their own lives, and their own problems. They can help you out for a while, but sooner or later they're going to start feeling resentful about all the time they spend doing things for you. Haven't they said that you should downsize and move into a smaller place?

Elma: Well, maybe.

Lizzie: Of course they have. There are lots of places not that far from here that you could consider as a good home. Maybe you could come live in the same building as me.

Elma: (*bluntly*) That wouldn't be a good idea! (*Lizzie makes a face*)... Anyway, I wouldn't even know how to start finding a new place to live.

Lizzie: Never you mind that. I'll bet your children would be happy to help.

Elma: (*uncertainly*) Maybe. But what would happen to this house?

Lizzie: (*a bit sarcastically*) You could always sell it.

Elma: (*sighs*) I love this house.

Lizzie: (*sighs. Looks around the room*) When did you last redecorate?

Elma: Let me see. I guess it would have been the spring before Karen's wedding.

Lizzie: That's a little while ago.

Elma: I don't want to redecorate now. It still looks fine.

Lizzie: Hmmm. I wonder what a real estate agent would think... Could we go have a look at the kitchen and the bathroom?

Elma: Well, I guess. (*moves from her chair*) But I don't want you bossing me around!

Lizzie: I just try to think about possibilities. You should think about possibilities too.

Elma: (*sighs*) I might die tomorrow, then I wouldn't have to think about moving.

Lizzie: Hah! You mean you'll give up this house when they pry it from your cold dead hands!

Elma: (*exits left with a snort*)

Lizzie: (*turns to the audience, musing to herself*) Maybe she'll be more willing to sell it if I say nice things about the house. (*grins and exits*)

Scene 3: *(after a short pause Marlene, Bruce and Mark enter)*

Marlene: Knock, knock! Oh, I wonder where Mom is. She must be here somewhere, but that's not her purse. *(gestures to a purse left beside a chair)*

Mark: She must have a visitor. Was there a car outside?

Marlene: I wonder where they are. I'll go see if I can find her. *(exits left)*

Mark: *(takes a look at his smart phone)* There. Just made another sale! *(sits down and puts his phone away)*

Bruce: Marlene said that when Pastor Steve was over here the other day he was asking you about retirement.

Mark: It was a shock to realize that I'm almost the age my Dad was when he retired.

Bruce: Have you seriously considered how you're going to wind up your working life?

Mark: Not really. I guess I should think about it. But what'll happen to the business? I can't just walk away from it.

Bruce: What would happen if you got seriously sick? Is there someone who could run the company for you?

Mark: I can't get sick.

Bruce: *(dryly)* Getting sick isn't usually a choice. You might want to think about what would happen if you were in a serious car accident or if you had a heart attack.

Mark: Aren't you a cheerful guy! I guess they'd struggle along somehow. But still I'd want to get back into the driver's seat as soon as possible.

Bruce: But what about another 5 or 10 years down the road? Who'll take over from you?

Mark: I haven't really thought about it. Hey it's just a small company, it's not like we have a whole raft of vice presidents competing for the chance to move into my office.

Bruce: But you still need to think about this. Not having a plan for succession could lead to a sad ending for your company, you know.

Mark: (*annoyed*) Why are you getting on my case?

Bruce: If you don't plan for the future, it usually sneaks up on you and bites you in the butt.

Mark: But retirement! What would I do?

Bruce: You wouldn't need to go into full retirement. You could still go into the office every day, but you might want to train someone to know what to consider in making decisions.

Mark: I like making my own decisions!

Bruce: (*shrugs*) In some ways you're as bad as your mother.

Mark: (*belligerently*) What do you mean?

Bruce: Your refusal to think about how to transfer your business to the next generation is a lot like your mother refusing to think about moving out of this house.

Mark: Hmh! Well what about you? Have you thought about retirement?

Bruce: Yup. Marlene and I want to do some travelling before we have any health crises, so I'm planning to retire in a few more years. Maybe we'll check out TourMagination...our pastor says their tour leaders are really good.

Mark: So how do you plan for retirement?

Bruce: For me there's not a lot to it. The boss knows that I've been thinking about it, so he's planning for who will take over my job.

Mark: What about money? Are you going to have enough to live on?

Bruce: We think so. It's going to be hard to think of switching from saving a nest egg for retirement to spending the nest egg, but we've talked about it, and we think it'll work well.

Mark: But what are you going to do with yourself?

Bruce: Well to start with, I'm going to enjoy an extra cup of coffee every morning and read the paper at a nice leisurely pace—just like some retired farmers I know!

Mark: I don't think I could get used to just sitting around.

Bruce: I think of it as training. I want to train my body and my mind to slow down, just a little bit so that I'll be more used to it when my body forces me to shift down into a lower gear.

Mark: But they say people who just stop working and sit around, are the ones that have serious health problems.

Bruce: I said I'd slow down; not stop moving completely! Hopefully I'll be able to gradually switch from working to other activities. Maybe I'll volunteer at the Mennonite Thrift Shop or something...

Mark: Well, I wish you luck. Janice is always bugging me to do more travelling, but I hate being away from the office for too long.

Bruce: If you want to see the world, Mark, you need to do it before you hit 80 years.

Mark: Oh, 80's a **long** way off.

Bruce: Oh yeah? That's what I used to think about turning 60! The big eight zero will be here before we know it.

Mark: Don't remind me.

Bruce: Not everybody likes travelling. Anyway, I'm hoping that we can get Mom settled soon where she can manage without as much help from us. Even getting away for a week has been a real challenge lately.

Mark: Hopefully she'll be more reasonable today than the last time I was here. But she didn't even want to **start** thinking about moving.

Bruce: You never know. She'll probably come around to accepting it if we give her some time to think about it.

Marlene: (*entering left*) It's Aunt Lizzie who's here. They're touring the house... I couldn't believe it when Mom

showed Aunt Lizzie the spare bedroom. You know it has all those containers in it. Aunt Lizzie didn't bat an eye, she just said, "you can never have too many styrofoam containers." I wonder what's going on.

Mark: With Aunt Lizzie, you never know.

Marlene: I think she's up to something.

Bruce: She's not usually the devious kind.

Mark: (*with a laugh*) She's got being "direct" down to a fine science.

Marlene: And blunt too!

Elma: (*enters left*) Whew! There's something about my sister Lizzie that makes me tired.

Mark: Hi Mom. What's Lizzie doing now?

Elma: Oh she's interfering in my life again.

Marlene: Where is she?

Elma: She's looking through all the kitchen cupboards. She knows someone who might want to buy the house.

Marlene: (*surprised*) What??

Mark: Who?

Elma: Ach, umm, our cousin Esther's grand-daughter. I think her name is Nancy. Isn't she married to a Cressman?

Mark: Oh yeah. I know them. She's married to John Cressman.
Are they looking for a house?

Elma: She says so.

Mark: That would be a good couple to sell to. They'd take very
good care of it.

Elma: But where would I go?

Marlene: Mom, what's happened? I didn't know you were
even thinking about selling the house.

Elma: I wasn't, but Lizzie said I have to.

Marlene: She can't force you.

Bruce: But it **is** a good idea, Mom.

Elma: Lizzie says that I'd like a place where I can visit friends
without going outside.

Mark: We'll help you find a good place. You can check them
all out and pick the one you want.

Marlene: And are you really ready to sell the house?

Elma: (*uncertain, but willing to think about it*) Welllll...

Bruce: Let's not rush anything. We'll just think about it for a
while.

Mark: We'll help you with anything you need.

Marlene: You do realize you'll need to let some things go.

Elma: Lizzie said I could take my memories with me in a photo album.

Bruce: (*nodding*) Memories are very portable.

Marlene: (*giving her mother a hug*) Thanks Mom. I really appreciate you taking this attitude.

Elma: I wonder what Leo will say. He loved this house too.

Mark: He'll get over it.

Marlene: (*picks up the box of buns*) What's this?

Elma: Those are sticky buns. Lizzie brought them.

Mark: Mmmm they look good. Can I have one?

Marlene: I'll take them to the kitchen and we'll have them with some tea, or coffee. Is that okay Mom?

Elma: That's a good idea. I'll come and help.

Marlene: (*escorts her mother to exit left*) So, we'll wait until you're all recovered from your surgery, then we'll start sorting things... (*Elma and Marlene exit left*)

Mark: Wow! I came over here prepared to use all the persuasive powers I had and just like that, she's ready to sell the house!

Bruce: She might change her mind tomorrow.

Mark: But at least she's ready to think about it.

Bruce: I really wonder how it happened?

Lizzie: (*enters left to pick up her purse*) You wonder how **what** happened?

Mark: Oh hi, Aunt Lizzie. We were just flabbergasted that Mom was suddenly ready to sell her house. A few days ago she was declaring that she'd never leave here.

Bruce: What did you say to her?

Lizzie: What makes you think I had anything to do with it?

Mark: She said that you said that she had to.

Lizzie: Hah! First I told her she had no choice; then I said she was selfish. Then I warned her that she might not be able to get out of her bathtub by herself some day. And then I praised her house, said how nice everything was.

Mark: But...you don't...

Lizzie: Oh I don't really think it is. But saying that her house is really nice was just a way of buttering her up, and making her more willing to listen.

Bruce: Aunt Lizzie, I take it all back, you really are a devious woman!

Lizzie: Maybe I am, maybe I'm not. But you should chalk one up to me that this time my plain speaking actually did some good! Now, I just came in here to get my purse (*gets her purse*) We're going to have some coffee in the kitchen.

Mark: Okay, we'll be along in a minute. (*Lizzie exits left*)

Bruce: Thank you, Aunt Lizzie!

Mark: You know, usually Aunt Lizzie really gets my goat. I never thought I'd see the day when I'd be thankful for having her around!

Bruce: Oh she'll probably come out with something yet that will make you see red!

Mark: (*nodding*) I hope she doesn't say anything that'll make Mom change her mind.

Bruce: Oh no, she's taking great pride in persuading Mom to sell the house. I think she'll be careful not to spoil that.

Marlene: (*enters left*) Hey, the tea's ready; are you two coming?

Mark: Is Mom still feeling positive?

Marlene: Yes, in fact she's actually sounding excited about selling. I just can't believe it. (*exits*)

Mark: We might make it through this yet.

Bruce: Lord willing and the creek don't rise!

(*Mark and Bruce high five and exit*)

The end