

# **DO NOT GO GENTLE**

**A One-Act Play**

**by**

**SUZAN L. ZEDER**

**(Shortened version for competition only)**



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**In memory of Claire.**

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# **DO NOT GO GENTLE**

**A Play in One Act  
For 3 Women, 1 Man, 1 boy and 1 girl**

## **CHARACTERS**

**LILLIAN BARRON** . . . . . Recently deceased, 84 years old.

**JOANNA** . . . . . Lillian's niece, in her late 30s.

**WINDSOR** . . . . . Lillian's son, in his mid-40s.

**KELLY** . . . . . Lillian's granddaughter, 13 years old.

**MILDRED FLUMAC** . . . Professional estate sale organizer.

**NOBODY** . . . . . 12 years old.

**TIME:** January 12, 1991 and various times during the  
previous 84 years.

**PLACE:** The living room of Lillian Barron's house on the  
afternoon before an estate sale.



## DO NOT GO GENTLE

**SCENE:** *The living room of Lillian Barron's somewhat dilapidated house in University City, an older section of St. Louis.*

**AT RISE:** *The stage is in darkness. LILLIAN appears in a spotlight. She sees someone out front and shouts.*

**LILLIAN.** Get away from my fence! Young man, that word is spelled with a "K" and damn has an "N" in it. You've got no future as a vandal if you can't even spell your swear words correctly. Now, damn is D.A.M..N.

*(Blackout. There is the sound of a clock chiming and then a telephone ringing in the darkness. A tight pin spot comes up on JOANNA.)*

**JOANNA.** I knew that she was dead when she didn't answer the telephone. It rang, and rang, and rang, and I just knew.

*(A pin spot comes up on KELLY who wears a cap or beret.)*

**KELLY.** It was the sound of the clock chiming that woke me up, like a voice calling to me, and then I heard the phone ringing and then the ringing stopped.

*(The phone stops ringing. A pin spot comes up on WINDSOR.)*

**WINDSOR.** When I heard that she was dead, it was like someone hit me in the chest with a shovel.

*(The clock stops chiming. A pin spot comes up on LILLIAN sitting in her chair.)*

**LILLIAN.** When I realized I was dead, I laughed out loud, took a deep breath of pure light, and stepped out of my body.

**JOANNA.** I found her in the living room, sitting in her chair; her brushes were still in her hand.

**LILLIAN.** That poem by Dylan Thomas kept running through my head...

**WINDSOR.** I've got forty-eight hours emergency leave for the funeral.

**LILLIAN.** "Do not go gentle... "

**KELLY.** I never knew anyone who died.

**LILLIAN.** "...into that good night." My last words, and they weren't even my own!

**JOANNA.** The funeral was lovely...

**WINDSOR.** ...a total blank...

**KELLY.** ...really weird...

**WINDSOR.** All the time I kept thinking, I'm nobody's child. I'm nobody's child anymore.

**LILLIAN.** Why am I still here?

*(Lights out on WINDSOR, JOANNA, and LILLIAN. Dim lights come up on the living room. NOBODY is seen as a shadowy figure coming down the stairs in the semi-darkness. He stops on the landing and looks around.)*

NOBODY. Is there anyone here?

JOANNA *(offstage)*. I've got the key.

*(NOBODY bolts upstairs just as a sharp angle of light with three shadows floods the stage.)*

JOANNA. I'll get the light. Now, Windsor, don't blow your stack when you see this.

WINDSOR. See what?

JOANNA. This.

*(Lights come on suddenly and brightly, revealing the chaos of the room. LILLIAN sits in her chair, unseen and unheard by the other characters except in flashback. She sits and watches as if slightly confused.)*

LILLIAN. So, here you are. Here you all are!

*(KELLY, JOANNA, and WINDSOR enter wearing coats, etc. KELLY still wears her cap or beret which she does not take off.)*

WINDSOR. What the ...

KELLY. Wow!

JOANNA. See?

KELLY. There's a thunderstorm painted on the ceiling... clouds, rain, lightning...

LILLIAN. Oh, Kelly! Kelly, my girl.

WINDSOR. What's all this paint on the floor?

LILLIAN. And Windsor, you look so old.

JOANNA. That's what I was trying to tell you. There's stuff painted all over the walls.

LILLIAN. Joanna, you look so sad.

WINDSOR. Bombs exploding, people shooting, planes crashing...

KELLY (*peeking under a cover*). Hey, there's a picture under this cover, painted right on the wall.

JOANNA. I told Mrs. Flumac to cover the paintings as best she could. She should still be here... Mrs. Flumac?

WINDSOR. Are they all over the house?

LILLIAN. Yes.

JOANNA. When I let myself in it was dark. I was more concerned about your mother than looking at pictures.

KELLY. Over here the floor has a big crack in it and it's painted to look like molten lava's pouring out... Cool!  
(*KELLY exits through the UR archway.*)

WINDSOR. How long has it been since you were over here?

JOANNA. Not for a while, quite a while. After Sam left, things got a little complicated. But I...

LILLIAN (*simultaneous with JOANNA*). You called me every day!

JOANNA. ... I called her every day.

KELLY. There are alligators in the bathtub, a shark in the sink...

JOANNA. Mrs. Flumac! Are you here?

KELLY. There are piranhas painted all over the toilet.  
(*KELLY lifts a drape so that WINDSOR and JOANNA can see what is underneath, but not the audience.*) Oh,

gross. There's a picture here of a kid getting shot, there are rainbows spurting out of his head.

JOANNA. That's the first one I saw. That's why I asked Mrs. Flumac to cover them up.

*(WINDSOR and JOANNA cross to look at the picture.)*

WINDSOR *(softly)*. Oh, my Lord.

KELLY. There's another kid pointing a gun at him.

JOANNA. Tomorrow, everybody in the neighborhood will be over here for the estate sale. Is this the first thing you want them to see when they walk in the door?

KELLY. Gross.

WINDSOR. Cover it up, Kelly.

LILLIAN. No! Don't!

*(KELLY replaces the cover.)*

KELLY *(indicating her cap)*. Can I take this thing off now?

WINDSOR. Do you have to?

KELLY. It was driving me crazy all during the funeral. I don't see why I had to wear it anyway.

WINDSOR. Considering the occasion, I should think that answer would be fairly obvious.

*(KELLY removes her hat and reveals her hair which is cut short and spiky and is multicolor.)*

KELLY. That old lady playing the organ had blue hair.

WINDSOR. That is quite a different matter.

KELLY. So, Aunt Jo, you still haven't told me what you think about my hair.

JOANNA. Well, it certainly is...

WINDSOR (*under his breath*). Ridiculous!

JOANNA. Unusual.

LILLIAN. Marvelous!

JOANNA. Mrs. Flumac has got to be here somewhere.  
Mrs. Flumac!

WINDSOR. Keep the cap on, okay? It's been a rough day.

JOANNA & WINDSOR. MRS. FLUMAC!

(*MILDRED appears at the top of the staircase.*)

MILDRED. Here I am! I was in the attic! Colonel Barron, permit me to offer my sincerest sympathy. I am looking after your mother's estate sale. Mildred Flumac, M.C.

WINDSOR. M.C.?

MILDRED (*as she descends the stairs*). Merchandising consultant! Estate sales, garage sales, moving sales, no sale is too big or too small, I do them all: pricing, sorting, advertising, put up signs, take them down, watch the customers, make change, take checks, all for just the tiniest percentage of the total. I turn garages into gold mines and trash into treasure. (*She hands him a business card.*) As you will see, I have followed your instructions to the letter! The walls are now covered with the contents of the linen closet, a very wise idea indeed. You certainly don't need any more talk in the neighborhood about your mother, God rest her soul.

WINDSOR. More talk?

MILDRED. Your mother had a bit of a...reputation.

WINDSOR. A reputation for what?

MILDRED. After she painted the windows with thousands of eyeballs, people got a little ... well, curious.

WINDSOR. My mother did all this painting?

MILDRED. I assume so.

WINDSOR. But she was eighty-four years old! Why would she paint on the walls?

MILDRED. It's all over the house, in the hallways, up the stairs, even the straight-backed chairs in the kitchen are painted to look like people are sitting in them.

WINDSOR (*incredulous*). I can't believe my mother did all this!

MILDRED (*ignoring his comment*). But never fear, I have arranged for a team of painters to come in here to slap down a coat of flat white latex over the whole interior of the house.

LILLIAN. No!

(*KELLY enters from the kitchen.*)

KELLY. This is like a whole house covered with tattoos!

WINDSOR. Mrs. Flumac, this is my daughter, Kelly.

KELLY. Hello.

WINDSOR. Joanna, do you know if Mother had a TV anywhere around here?

JOANNA. There used to be one upstairs.

KELLY. Dad wouldn't want to miss a minute of the war.

WINDSOR. We are not at war, Kelly.

KELLY. Not yet.

MILDRED. So, Colonel Barron, are we going to war with Iraq?

WINDSOR. That all depends on the Congress and the President. (*To KELLY.*) Check out the TV upstairs.

KELLY (*mimicking the announcer*). This is CNN! "THE STORM IN THE DESERT!" Dum ta da DUM DUM!! I hate that music!

WINDSOR. Hop to it!

KELLY (*snaps to attention*). Yes, sir! Colonel Barron, sir!

(*KELLY exits upstairs. MILDRED crosses to WINDSOR.*)

MILDRED. We have much to do before the thundering hordes come pounding through this door bright and early tomorrow morning for the sale. You all will need to sort through these boxes and set aside anything of sentimental value that you might wish to keep. Otherwise, I shall consider everything here fair game.

WINDSOR. Sell everything.

MILDRED. Then we shall all need to get busy with the pricing! Many hands make light work. (*MILDRED exits through the hall doorway.*)

WINDSOR. I just hope we aren't paying her by the cliché.

JOANNA. Windsor, you should sort through these boxes.

LILLIAN. Things, so many things!

WINDSOR. Take anything you want, Joanna, but sell the rest.

JOANNA. But there might be something you want to remember.

WINDSOR. I haven't got time for memories now. At exactly 2100 hours Kelly and I have got to be on that plane back to...

JOANNA. Let's just put everything in storage until you can deal with it.

WINDSOR (*sharply*). I am dealing with it!

KELLY (*from upstairs*). Hey, Dad, your old bed is painted with monsters all over the headboard.

WINDSOR (*very short*). Kelly, come downstairs!

KELLY. Godzilla, King Kong, Franken—

WINDSOR (*interrupting, sharply*). Right NOW!

(*KELLY enters from upstairs.*)

KELLY. Jeez, don't have a cow! I'm coming.

WINDSOR (*angry*). And don't use that expression; you know I hate it.

KELLY. Mission accomplished, sir. I have some good news and some bad news for you, sir.

WINDSOR. What is it?

KELLY. The good news is, I found the TV.

WINDSOR. Good.

KELLY. The bad news is, Grambie painted flowers all over the screen.

WINDSOR. What?

JOANNA. Looks like we'll have to watch the war through the wildflowers.

KELLY. Dad, what happened to Grambie?

WINDSOR. Kelly ... she had a heart attack.

LILLIAN. My heart did not attack...

KELLY. I know that...

LILLIAN. It just decided to stop beating.

KELLY. I mean, why did she do all this?

JOANNA. Your grandmother was a very ... unusual woman, Kelly. But she loved you very much and...

KELLY (*sharply*). Do we have to talk about it?

JOANNA. What?

KELLY. How come when someone dies, you have to talk about them all the time?

WINDSOR. But you just asked ...

JOANNA. Sometimes it helps to talk.

KELLY. Sometimes it doesn't.

LILLIAN. I've had a letter from my granddaughter.

JOANNA. Sometimes it hurts at first.

LILLIAN. She's very angry with me.

JOANNA. But it almost always helps.

LILLIAN. She says she wishes I were ...

KELLY. It doesn't help at all!

WINDSOR. Let's just get a move on, okay? What have you got there, Kelly?

*(KELLY has been looking at a box.)*

KELLY. Just a bunch of photographs!

WINDSOR *(crosses to her)*. Where did you find this?

KELLY. Right here under this pile.

WINDSOR. I have looked for this photograph for years.

KELLY. Who is it?

WINDSOR. A wedding photo of Grambie and my father.

This is the only picture she kept of him after he died. I used to look into his eyes staring back at me and wonder what kind of dad he would have made.

JOANNA *(with another photo)*. Oh, my God, Windsor.

Look at this one! Your baby picture.

WINDSOR. Oh, no.

KELLY. What?

JOANNA. She loved this picture, and she loved to tell people about it...

WINDSOR. Joanna, don't...

LILLIAN. I was at my kitchen window and...

JOANNA. She looked into the garden and there was your father, two years old...

LILLIAN. Sitting in the birdbath.

JOANNA & LILLIAN. Naked as a jaybird.

LILLIAN. ...splashing, and laughing, and flapping his arms, trying to fly.

JOANNA. So she grabbed her camera...

LILLIAN. ...and crept right up to him without his noticing and...

JOANNA & LILLIAN. Flash!

LILLIAN. He started to cry, so I reached out, lifted him, and up he flew. Stark naked, dripping wet, and trailing glory. Fly little jaybird, fly!

JOANNA. She loved to tell that story.

WINDSOR. To my eternal mortification.

KELLY. Why didn't we come here more often?

WINDSOR. We came.

KELLY. We'd only stay a day or so whenever we were moving someplace else.

WINDSOR. That's not true. We came whenever we could!

KELLY. Maybe if we hadn't moved so much we could have...

WINDSOR (*getting angry*). You could have picked up a pen and written in the past few months. It's a little late to think of that now!

KELLY (*flares in anger*). Don't you think I know that?  
(*KELLY storms out, slamming the door.*)

JOANNA. What was that all about?

WINDSOR. One minute she asks me something about Grambie, then when I tell her, she goes ballistic.

JOANNA. This is a hard time, for all of us.

WINDSOR. It's more than that. Something happened between Kelly and Grambie right around the time we left for Germany. She wouldn't talk to her on the phone. She ripped up letters Grambie sent. Whenever I asked what was wrong, she'd say, "Nothing," or turn up her stereo loud enough to drown out a sonic boom!

JOANNA. That's strange. They used to be so close.

WINDSOR. Well, something happened. Kelly won't talk about it, and Grambie... can't. (*WINDSOR sits in a chair and groans.*)

JOANNA (*after a beat*). How are you holding up, Windsor?

WINDSOR. I feel like my whole body is filled with Novocain. It's so strange being in this house. I keep expecting to see her coming down the stairs, I keep expecting to turn around and there she'll...

JOANNA (*finding a cup*). The hard part isn't the big things like the funeral, it's the little things like finding a coffee cup that still has her lipstick on it. (*She is overcome and fights tears.*) I never even got a chance to say...

WINDSOR (*moves to her*). Come on now, don't cry. You know she wouldn't want you to cry.

(*MILDRED enters from the attic with a large wooden box. She places the box very near to KELLY.*)

MILDRED. Now this is really something. This box was all tied up with yards of twine, I practically had to use a hacksaw to... (*Suddenly all the lights go out.*) Oh, my God!

JOANNA. Hey ...

*(KELLY enters from the kitchen.)*

KELLY. What happened to the lights?

WINDSOR. Somebody open the drapes.

MILDRED. They are open!

WINDSOR. But it's pitch-black in here.

*(NOBODY enters unseen in the dark.)*

JOANNA. I'll feel my way to the kitchen and check the fuse box.

*(NOBODY trips JOANNA.)*

JOANNA. Hey! Owwww!

MILDRED *(groping her way across the room)*. All the windows have been painted over, little eyeballs in the living room, and little faces in the foyer... *(NOBODY crosses to the kitchen and exits. He kicks MILDRED on his way out.)* Ouch! I do believe someone kicked me!

WINDSOR. Kelly, that's not funny!

KELLY. I didn't do it! I'm all the way over here.

*(The lights come back on. JOANNA enters from the hallway.)*

JOANNA. Now that's strange! The fuses are okay, but somehow the master switch was thrown.

*(KELLY has found a pistol in the box. She draws it and aims it at MILDRED.)*

KELLY. Freeze, sucka!

*(Everyone looks at KELLY totally shocked. MILDRED screams and ducks.)*

JOANNA & LILLIAN. Kelly!

WINDSOR & LILLIAN. Put that down!

MILDRED. Firearms are not to be played with!

WINDSOR. Give that to me. *(She hands him the gun. He quickly checks to be sure it isn't loaded.)* Where did you get this?

KELLY. In the box.

MILDRED *(pulling herself together)*. I'll try the painters from the upstairs phone; and I suggest that we try a little more sorting and a little less gunplay around here. After all, "idle hands are the devil's" ... *(She receives stony looks all around.)* Never mind. *(MILDRED exits upstairs.)*

JOANNA. I can't believe Grambie had a gun in the house.

WINDSOR. It was my father's gun. Six years after he was killed in the Philippines, the army shipped us this box of his personal effects. Mom wouldn't open it, or even look at it. That box in the attic haunted me. It was like my father was a ghost, held prisoner in a web of twine and tape. I used to sneak up there, open it, look inside, and then tie it up again.

JOANNA. Grambie always hated guns. She never even let you have a cap pistol.

LILLIAN. So you tied sticks together to make pistols...

WINDSOR. When I used to dream about my father, he was always in uniform.

LILLIAN. ...Or you used your fingers.

WINDSOR. I dreamed about him all the time...

LILLIAN. When I asked you not to use your fingers, you bit your breakfast toast into the shape of pistols.

WINDSOR. ...until I enlisted.

*(WINDSOR moves into the scene; they play out the flashback.)*

WINDSOR. Surprise!

LILLIAN. Oh, my God.

WINDSOR. I wanted you to be surprised, Mom, that's why I didn't tell you.

LILLIAN. You didn't tell me ...

WINDSOR. Because I wanted you to be surprised.

LILLIAN. ...because you knew I'd be horrified.

WINDSOR. I want to be a pilot. They'll send me to flight school.

LILLIAN. With your grades you could be anything.

WINDSOR. I like the military, it's organized, it's got rules and...

LILLIAN. Windsor, going to war is not something to do just because you need a little structure in your life.

WINDSOR. We are not at war. President Kennedy has just sent advisors to Viet Nam.

LILLIAN. Four thousand advisors?

WINDSOR. Somebody's got to make the world safe for democracy.

LILLIAN. I have lived through three wars in my lifetime and every one of them started to make the world a safer place, and every one of them ended with mothers and fathers burying their children.

WINDSOR. I am not going to get killed.

LILLIAN. That's exactly what your father said.

WINDSOR. Isn't there one thing you remember about my father other than the way he died?

LILLIAN. Don't do this to me, Windsor, not again.

WINDSOR. I don't need your permission, I don't expect your approval, but I'd like your understanding.

LILLIAN. I'm sorry, Windsor, that's something you're going to have to learn to live without. *(She turns away and breaks the scene.)*

KELLY. She didn't want you to go into the Air Force?

WINDSOR. No, Kelly, she didn't.

*(MILDRED comes down the stairs with a crystal ball and places it on a table.)*

MILDRED. Now this is a real treasure. I know a lot of women in this town who'd pay a pretty penny for Lillian Barron's crystal ball.

KELLY *(to MILDRED)*. Don't you ever feel like a vulture, feeding on the remains of the dead?

MILDRED. Why ... no. *(MILDRED briskly exits to the kitchen.)*

WINDSOR. Crystal ball? What is she talking about?

LILLIAN. I have the most wonderful secret, but you must promise not to tell Windsor; he'd ship me off to the funny farm if he knew I had become "Madame Lillian, Reader-advisor."

WINDSOR *(incredulous)*. She was a fortuneteller?

JOANNA. Reader-advisor.

*(KELLY and WINDSOR freeze as JOANNA enters the flashback.)*

JOANNA. Aunt Lillian, I need a reading.

LILLIAN. Palms, cards, or crystal ball?

JOANNA. Sam called. He wants to come back.

LILLIAN. Crystal ball.

JOANNA. I don't know what to do, Aunt Lil.

*(LILLIAN looks in the ball and does her "hocus-pocus.")*

LILLIAN. I see a man.

JOANNA. That's Sam.

LILLIAN. And a woman.

JOANNA. Obviously me.

LILLIAN. And the man says...

JOANNA. That he's changed, that everything will be all right...

LILLIAN. But the woman remembers...

JOANNA *(with building fury)*. What happened the last time, and the time before that.

LILLIAN. And she hears...

JOANNA. The same old promises, the same old lies...

LILLIAN. And she realizes...

JOANNA. There's not a word of truth in them.

LILLIAN. So she decides...

JOANNA. To tell him to take a flying leap.

LILLIAN. The vision fades.

*(Lights change back to "real time." Spot out on LILLIAN. MILDRED enters from the kitchen.)*

MILDRED. Dead.

JOANNA & WINDSOR. What?

MILDRED. Dead as a doornail.

JOANNA. My God, who's dead now?

MILDRED. The phone.

WINDSOR. The phone is dead?

MILDRED. The line has been cut, right where it comes into the house. It happens all the time, disreputable people read in the paper about a death in the family, they look up the address, and then break into the house the night before an estate sale and wipe it all out.

WINDSOR. It's this neighborhood!

MILDRED. We should let the police know to be on extra alert tonight. There's a phone at the 7-Eleven on the corner. I'll call from there and while I'm at it, I'll try the painters again, and you all keep sorting! (*MILDRED exits out the front door.*)

WINDSOR. I should have gotten Mom out of this neighborhood long ago. (*The sound of breaking glass.*) What the ...

JOANNA. That's a window breaking upstairs.

WINDSOR. It's those rotten kids throwing rocks. (*Another crash.*) Stay here, Kelly, and call the police.

KELLY. I can't, the phone is ...

(*Another crash as WINDSOR exits.*)

WINDSOR. Don't argue. Just DO it!

JOANNA. I'll run to the corner and call from the 7-Eleven. I'll lock the front door, and you lock the back. If I know your father he'll chase those kids all over the neighborhood.

KELLY. Okay, Aunt Jo.

JOANNA. Don't let anyone in unless it's us!

*(JOANNA exits through the front door. KELLY exits to the kitchen. NOBODY races down the stairs and hides as KELLY re-enters.)*

KELLY. This is just like *Unsolved Mysteries*. The killer broke windows from the inside, trying to make everyone think he was outside... But he was *inside* all the time. *(She picks up a golf club and turns her back to NOBODY.)* OK, get out of here, if you're in here, that is... GET OUT!

NOBODY. Get out.

KELLY. Oh, my God, there *is* someone here! You might as well come out... *(Lying.)* The police will be here any minute.

*(NOBODY emerges from hiding.)*

NOBODY. You shouldn't be touching her things...

KELLY *(astonished)*. You're just a kid.

NOBODY. They're not yours.

KELLY. She won't need them anymore. After all, she's dead.

NOBODY. You sure?

KELLY. I saw her body at the funeral home. I didn't want to, but I did. I tried not to look in the coffin, but I couldn't help it.

NOBODY. You saw her?

KELLY. It didn't look like her, not really, but it was.

LILLIAN. It wasn't really me, all painted up like that. It was just the leftover part.

KELLY. You knew her, didn't you?

*(LILLIAN enters the scene.)*

LILLIAN. Oh, my God!

NOBODY. Uhhhh!

LILLIAN. If you've come to rob me, take whatever you want and go.

NOBODY. I didn't come to rob.

LILLIAN. Who are you?

NOBODY. Nobody.

LILLIAN. I'm calling the police.

NOBODY. Nobody watches out for you. When you walk at night, Nobody keeps you safe.

LILLIAN. You're Nobody!

NOBODY. I've seen you sit here and people sit there. I've seen you look in here ...and tell the future.

LILLIAN. You want me to do a reading?

NOBODY. NO READING! Just look and tell me. Can you see tomorrow?

LILLIAN. Sit there.

*(He sits in the "customer" seat and LILLIAN makes her "hocus-pocus" sound and gazes deeply into the crystal.)*

NOBODY. What do you see?

LILLIAN. I see ... tomorrow.

NOBODY. You see the school?

LILLIAN. Yes.

NOBODY. You see the class, you see the teacher, you see the test?

LILLIAN. Oh, yes.

NOBODY. Who's flunking the test?

LILLIAN *(without meaning the double meaning)*. Nobody.

**NOBODY.** Oh no! Not again. You gotta do something!  
You gotta stop the testing. Do magic. Do a spell. Make a  
big snowstorm come.

**LILLIAN.** I'm sure the test will be fine. Just study for it  
and do your best.

**NOBODY.** Can't.

**LILLIAN.** Why not?

**NOBODY.** I don't have a best. Can't make myself invisible  
tomorrow.

**LILLIAN.** You can make yourself invisible?

**NOBODY.** Easy! I just sit behind a fat kid, and no one  
notices. Teachers only see the smart ones and the bad  
ones. They don't even see the rest.

**LILLIAN.** You're the one who keeps spray painting dirty  
words on my fence!

**NOBODY.** How do you know?

*(She lifts the can out of his pocket.)*

**LILLIAN** *(with some sarcasm)*. I see it in the crystal ball.  
You had better learn how to spell, you have no future as  
a vandal if you can't even spell your swear words.

**NOBODY.** Just like a teacher! All they see is dumb, all  
they know is stupid!

**LILLIAN.** Are you stupid?

**NOBODY.** That's what they think.

**LILLIAN.** Do you want to be stupid?

**NOBODY.** No.

**LILLIAN.** Then don't be. Decide you're smart and go on  
from there.

**NOBODY.** Oh, yeah, sure! Never mind! Nobody helps no-  
body! *(He starts off.)*

LILLIAN. Wait a minute! (*She tosses him back the can.*)

Write something on that wall. Go ahead. As soon as I die they'll flatten this old firetrap with a bulldozer, anyway. Might as well make these walls good for something. Go ahead, write something, write any word as long as it has more than four letters!

NOBODY. Won't.

LILLIAN. Can't.

NOBODY. Won't.

LILLIAN. You can't read...or write... can you?

NOBODY. No.

LILLIAN. How old are you?

NOBODY. Too old.

LILLIAN. Me too...

NOBODY (*angrily starting off*). Never mind!

LILLIAN. Wait a minute! (*She sits at a table and scribbles a note.*) Take this note to your teacher.

NOBODY (*opens the note and stares at it blankly*). What's it say?

LILLIAN (*taking the note*). "Please excuse my grandson from the testing today as he has highly contagious conjunctivitis" ...

NOBODY. Huh?

LILLIAN. Pink eye. Now there's your magic, but the spell is only temporary. Sooner or later you are going to have to take those tests. So you had better tell someone you can't read and get some help.

NOBODY. How come you're doing this?

LILLIAN. I never knew Nobody was watching out for me.

(*Lights return to normal. KELLY steps in scene.*)

KELLY. When did that happen?

NOBODY. About a year ago.

KELLY. She never told us about you.

NOBODY. It wasn't about you. It was about us.

*(Lights change, KELLY moves away. LILLIAN is sitting in her chair, reading the newspaper. She is weeping and very upset. She crumples the paper.)*

LILLIAN. Dammit! Dammit! Dammit!

NOBODY. What's the matter with the newspaper?

LILLIAN. Look at this, another car bomb in Northern Ireland. And this, "Man convicted in beating death of a two-year-old" ... and this ... right down the street ... "Ten-year-old girl fatally wounded in drive-by shooting." Every day, it's the same thing, the same bullets, the same bombs, the same shooting and dying, it's just the faces that change and the pictures of the ones who are left behind.

NOBODY. Don't read it.

LILLIAN. I have to. Outrage is important. It's all you can do when you can't do anything else. What are you doing here?

NOBODY. I'm doing what you told me. "Tell someone you can't read and get some help."

LILLIAN. I meant for you to tell somebody at school.

NOBODY. I can't read at school. I can't write at school.

But I can write on your fence! *(He pulls out several cans of spray paint.)*

LILLIAN. I'm not a teacher.

NOBODY. Good. All teachers see is stupid.

LILLIAN. I wouldn't know where to start.

NOBODY. Start on the fence.

LILLIAN (*she laughs*). There's not enough room on my fence!

NOBODY (*indicating the wall*). Then, start here.

LILLIAN. Give me one good reason why I should do this!

NOBODY. I decided I'm smart.

*(Lights return to normal. KELLY steps back into the scene.)*

KELLY. She taught you by painting on the walls?

NOBODY. First letters, then words. We'd shout letters, we'd sing words. I filled my whole self with words!

KELLY. So you could read them?

NOBODY. So I could feel them.

*(Lights change. NOBODY whirls around, grabs a book and throws it on the floor.)*

NOBODY. That's it! I'm not doing that again. Not ever!

LILLIAN. What happened, Buddy?

NOBODY. Teacher saw me writing, practicing my words and told me to read it to the whole class.

LILLIAN. You read in class?

NOBODY. She made me.

LILLIAN. That's wonderful!

NOBODY. No! Terrible! Sent me to the principal.

LILLIAN. What did you write?

*(He hands her a scrap of paper. She hands it back to him.)*

NOBODY (*reading*). "Once upon a damn time, there was a damn boy, who had a damn dog, who had a damn bone."

LILLIAN. Buddy, don't you realize what you are?

NOBODY. Yeah, a fool!

LILLIAN. You're a writer! All you need is more vocabulary.

NOBODY. What?

LILLIAN. More words. Words that touch ideas. Words that paint pictures in the mind and tell the world how you feel. (*She picks up a book.*) Here, look at this.

"Do not go gentle—Into that good night  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

NOBODY. So?

LILLIAN. What does that mean to you?

NOBODY. Nothing.

LILLIAN. Come on, it must mean something.

NOBODY. Somebody's mad?

LILLIAN. What do you do when you're angry?

NOBODY. Yell or hit someone.

LILLIAN. Why not write it down?

NOBODY. What good would that do?

LILLIAN. The man who wrote that poem was mad about something many, many years ago, and when we read his words we still feel his anger today; and if we are mad about something ourselves, we hear our anger in his words. The feeling lives in the words... forever.

NOBODY. Like writing on the fence! Yell those words out loud, and they're over too quick! Write them on the fence, it's like swearing forever. The words just stay up there yelling!

LILLIAN. How did those kids make you feel today?

NOBODY. Mad.

LILLIAN. Mad enough to burn and rave? Mad enough to rage?

NOBODY. Yeah!

LILLIAN. Then do it. Rage—burn—rave—howl!

NOBODY. Howl?

LILLIAN. I do it all the time. If I get really angry, I just howl. *(She howls, loudly.)*

NOBODY. That's dumb.

LILLIAN. Try it. *(He howls, less loudly.)* Try it again. *(He howls again, slightly more enthusiastically.)* Now, put it in your whole body. Do it! Rage from the soles of your feet. Think of those kids. Think of that teacher. *(He really lets one rip.)* Okay. Now, give me some howling words and howl. *(She howls.)* Howl! And scowl. And foul!

NOBODY *(howling)*. Foul!

*(They howl together for a moment and KELLY interrupts the scene.)*

KELLY. You're a liar! You made all that up! There are pictures under these covers not words!

NOBODY. Words first, pictures later.

KELLY. I was here last year. I was here right before we moved to Germany, and there weren't any words on the walls.

NOBODY. You never went upstairs.

KELLY. You were spying on me?

NOBODY. I know what happened, I saw it all.

*(Lights shift and LILLIAN and KELLY enter the scene.)*

**KELLY.** Surprise! Don't tell on me, Grambie.

**LILLIAN.** You're supposed to be at camp.

**KELLY.** I'm not going back to camp. It's too much like the Air Force! I want to stay here, Grambie.

**LILLIAN.** You can stay for the weekend, but then...

**KELLY.** Dad's been transferred overseas again, to Germany!

**LILLIAN.** Oh, dear.

**KELLY.** But, I am not going to move, not over there, not again! I'm sick of it, Grambie. So, I'm staying. I am going to live with you. Isn't it a great idea?

**LILLIAN.** I'm at a time in my life when I'm slowing down and you're at a time when you're just speeding up. The next few years are going to be wonderful. You'll go to high school, and parties, and have dates. You need your parents now.

**KELLY.** You don't want me?

**LILLIAN.** I want you to be my granddaughter. I want you to be my friend, but I am eighty-three years old and I can't be starting again with children.

**KELLY.** Not children, Grambie, just me.

**LILLIAN.** I'm sorry.

**KELLY.** You don't want me.

**LILLIAN.** That's not true.

*(KELLY exits the scene.)*

**NOBODY.** By the time she got out the door, you were down the street and she couldn't catch you. I saw from

the upstairs window. She just sat down on the porch steps and cried.

KELLY. Did she ever talk about us?

*(LILLIAN and NOBODY move into a scene.)*

LILLIAN. My son and his family are stationed in Germany.

NOBODY. Is he in the Army?

LILLIAN. The Air Force.

NOBODY. Cool. I saw *Top Gun*. Cool.

LILLIAN. It's not "cool," Buddy, not if you're a mother. On top of everything, I've had a letter from my granddaughter in Germany. She's very angry with me, she never wants to see me again. She says she wishes I were ... *(LILLIAN does not finish the sentence.)*

NOBODY. What?

LILLIAN. A different kind of grandmother. *(Changing the subject.)* You're early today. Why aren't you in school?

NOBODY. They let us out, early. We didn't get lunch. You got anything to eat?

LILLIAN. You're not playing hooky again, are you?

NOBODY. I told you, they let us out. A kid in my school got killed.

LILLIAN. What?

NOBODY. At recess on the playground. Some older boys shot him.

LILLIAN *(horrificed)*. Why?

NOBODY. For his shoes. He wouldn't give them his shoes, so they shot him.

LILLIAN *(incredulous)*. They killed him for his shoes?

NOBODY. They were cool shoes. You got any Ding Dongs?

LILLIAN. A boy is dead and all you can think about is something to eat?

NOBODY. You know him or something?

LILLIAN. No, but you did.

NOBODY. He just went to my school. It just happened, okay?

LILLIAN. It didn't just happen. Someone made it happen!

NOBODY. It wasn't me.

LILLIAN. Yes, it was. It was every one of us who don't give a damn.

NOBODY. What am I supposed to do?

LILLIAN. Rage, how! ... Use your words to tell his story.

NOBODY. I don't know the words.

LILLIAN. Tell me in pictures and I'll paint them on the wall. Unless you look at the violence, it will always be part of you and you'll be part of it.

NOBODY. I don't want to see it!

LILLIAN. We'll give it a color, and a shape. We'll put it up on the wall and look at it! I tell you what; I'll trade you, story for story. I'll tell them with pictures, and then you make up the words. How does that sound?

NOBODY. It sounds crazy.

LILLIAN. Sometimes the stories will be crazy, and sometimes they will be sad, and sometimes, if the stories are really good, they'll make you laugh hard enough to shake your whole life loose, or make you mad enough to want to tear this old house right down, rip the stories right off the wall, and change the endings for yourself.

NOBODY (to KELLY). She started painting.

LILLIAN. And the pictures came rushing out of my brush.

NOBODY. On the walls, on the ceiling, on the floor.

LILLIAN. My whole life spilled out onto these walls.

NOBODY. I piled tables on top of tables and chairs on top of chairs so she could reach the ceiling.

LILLIAN. Things I felt, but never understood were all there, so simple, so clear! People I loved, things I hated...put them on the wall and look at them.

NOBODY. What's that?

LILLIAN. I have no idea. I painted it, but I have no idea what it is. You tell me.

NOBODY. It's a Killing Angel.

LILLIAN. A Killing Angel?

NOBODY. She has bullets on her belly, and fire for hair, and fire feathers for wings.

LILLIAN. She comes in wars...

NOBODY. ...or on the streets, or playgrounds whenever people get killed.

LILLIAN. And what are those eyes all over her body?

NOBODY. She has a thousand eyes to cry.

LILLIAN. She's too heavy to fly. Too many memories.

NOBODY. So, she puts the memories on little feathers of fire and lets them go...

LILLIAN. ...and all that's left is smoke... And forgiveness.

WINDSOR'S VOICE. Kelly, it's me. Let me in.

KELLY (to NOBODY). That's my dad. You better get out of here.

*(KELLY crosses to the door and opens it. WINDSOR enters very surprised to see NOBODY.)*

WINDSOR. Kelly, I thought we told you not to let anyone in.

KELLY. He was in already.

WINDSOR. Who are you? What are you doing here?

NOBODY. I belong here.

WINDSOR. Out of here! Right now!

*(MILDRED and JOANNA enter.)*

MILDRED. This is our lucky day! I got the painters on their mobile phone and they are on their way over here now, and they should get the whole house painted by midnight.

NOBODY. Somebody's coming to paint?

JOANNA. Who is this boy?

NOBODY. Going to paint over her pictures?

MILDRED. If you're here for the sale, it isn't until tomorrow! And it isn't going to happen then unless somebody gets a move on! *(MILDRED exits through the hall door.)*

NOBODY. She painted all day, sometimes all night ... Who are you to cover her paintings?

JOANNA. We're her family!

NOBODY. I know all about you.

KELLY. She was my grandmother, not yours!

NOBODY. I know all about the letter you wrote to her.

LILLIAN. No, Buddy, don't.

KELLY. She told you about the letter?

LILLIAN. Don't do this!

NOBODY. That you hated her ... That you wished she was ...

KELLY. NO!

WINDSOR. I told you to get out of here and you are going now! (*WINDSOR grabs him to throw him out. NOBODY whirls and assumes a street-fighter's stance.*)

NOBODY. Don't you touch me, man! You mess with me and I'll ...

WINDSOR (*challenging*). What?

LILLIAN. Windsor, Buddy, No.

*(There is a moment of standoff between the two ... NOBODY throws up his hands in frustration.)*

NOBODY. What's the use? (*He turns away.*)

KELLY. He really did know her, Dad. She taught him to read and everything.

JOANNA (*to NOBODY*). Why did you come here?

NOBODY. I had to make it real, her being dead and all. I guess I just miss her. (*He sits, sobbing.*)

LILLIAN (*with infinite tenderness*). Oh, Buddy.

JOANNA. What is your name?

NOBODY. It's not important.

LILLIAN & KELLY. Yes, it is.

NOBODY. Derek. My name is Derek.

KELLY. I didn't mean all those things I said in the letter.

WINDSOR. What is all this about a letter?

KELLY. Right after we went to Germany, I wrote Grambie this terrible letter. I said I hated her, I never wanted to see her again, I wished that she was dead.

WINDSOR. Why would you do such a thing?

KELLY. I wanted to come live with her, but she wouldn't let me.

WINDSOR. You wanted to live here?

**KELLY.** This house is the only place in the whole world  
I've ever felt... I don't know... safe.

**LILLIAN.** Oh, Kelly. Kelly, my girl.

**KELLY.** I wished that she was dead, and now she is. She  
could never forgive me for what I said.

**LILLIAN.** Let it go!

**NOBODY.** She did.

**KELLY.** What?

**NOBODY.** She forgave you.

**KELLY.** How do you know?

**NOBODY.** I saw it in your picture.

**LILLIAN.** Show her.

*(NOBODY pulls down a covering, colored light shines  
and soft music begins.)*

**LILLIAN.** What do you see?

**KELLY.** It looks like a girl without a face.

**LILLIAN.** I haven't finished the face.

**JOANNA.** And she's juggling something.

**LILLIAN.** I would have given you stars for eyes and a  
moon for a mouth.

**WINDSOR.** It's earth, she's juggling the planet earth.

**JOANNA.** Look at her hair!

**KELLY.** It's a rainbow!

**LILLIAN.** All the colors of the earth and sky.

*(MILDRED enters and takes the covering from NO-  
BODY.)*

MILDRED. Oh, good. We can use these for drop cloths. I want to cover up all these tables so that we don't get paint on any of these treasures.

KELLY. Dad, these pictures are important. I think Grambie is talking to us in these pictures.

MILDRED. Colonel Barron... Colonel Barron...

KELLY. It's me, Dad. This picture is of me!

MILDRED. The painters will be here any minute.

WINDSOR. Call them off.

MILDRED. What?

WINDSOR. Tell them we won't be needing them, today.

MILDRED (*stamping her foot*). But they are on their way!

WINDSOR. Mrs. Flumac, if you have to fling your naked body across the driveway you're going to stop them.

MILDRED. Well, Colonel Barron, I never.

WINDSOR. No, Mrs. Flumac, I'm sure you haven't.

*(She storms out in a huff. NOBODY stands with his arms raised about to pull down one of the coverings.)*

KELLY. It's me! Dad, she forgave me!

NOBODY. You want to see the rest?

WINDSOR. Pull them down, Derek! Let's pull them all down!

*(There is music. They race all over the stage pulling down the sheets and blankets, revealing walls that are screens filled with swirling colors. As the family looks at the pictures, we never actually see images, just swirling color and light. Light is also projected onto their bodies, the whole stage fills with color.)*

KELLY. Dad, there's a soldier in this painting. His face looks like the photograph.

WINDSOR. That's my father!

JOANNA. Look, over there, it's a baby flying through the air.

WINDSOR. Naked as a jaybird.

KELLY. That's you, Dad!

LILLIAN. Trailing clouds of glory. Fly, jaybird, fly!

WINDSOR. Look, Joanna, that's you, and you're throwing a crystal ball at...

ALL. Sam!

LILLIAN. Give him a little message from the "Great Beyond."

*(They move to another picture.)*

KELLY. Hey, Derek. This kid looks like you; and you're painting a fence, and it says...

NOBODY. "Somebody was here!" I didn't see that one before! Hot damn!

KELLY. We're here! We're all here on these walls!

*(Music and lights continue, but focus shifts to LILLIAN who ascends the staircase.)*

LILLIAN. As for me, I'm not really here. I'm somewhere else entirely, and I would tell you where, but I haven't the words. What was left behind were the pieces that needed finishing.

JOANNA *(in awe)*. Look at this, Windsor! Look at this enormous angel. She has fire for hair and fiery wings of flame.

**LILLIAN.** Pieces of forgiveness that needed to be given...

**KELLY.** She's beautiful.

**LILLIAN.** ... Pieces of grief that needed to be grieved...

**WINDSOR.** She's terrifying. All of her eyes are weeping.

**LILLIAN.** ... Pieces of memory that needed to be remembered...

**WINDSOR.** Go in peace, Mom. Go in peace.

**LILLIAN.** "And you, my children, on that sad height,

Curse, bless me now, but

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Rage, rage, against the dying of the..."

*(LILLIAN's light goes out.)*

**END OF PLAY**

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

**SET:** In real time the play is set on January 12, 1991, in the living room of Lillian Barron's somewhat dilapidated house in University City, an older section of St. Louis. My vision of the set is fragmentary and nonrealistic. A suggestion of the house, which is emphatically Victorian, with peaked roofs and a turret or two can be seen. The upper floors are simply indicated in deft lines and, perhaps, bits of gingerbread trim and patches of roof.

Downstairs, the living room is set up for what will be an estate sale of Lillian's goods to take place the next day. The walls are created by panels of scrim material stretched over frames. These walls have been covered by an odd assortment of coverings: blankets, quilts, even large bath towels, giving the place an oddly circus-esque appearance. The floor and visible surfaces of the walls bear traces of swirls and slashes of paint in bright incongruous colors, but no specific images are seen. UC there is a staircase with an ornately carved banister leading to a landing and then to the floors above. UL is an arched doorway leading to the front door. UR there is another archway and a hallway which leads to the kitchen in one direction and a downstairs bedroom in the other. Downstage there is a bay window with a window seat. The window is draped with sheets or towels. There are tables stacked with dishware, kitchen utensils and personal items and several racks of clothing on wheels. In a dominant place is a large wing-backed easy chair, the chair that Lillian died in.

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