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## **Family Plays**

# And the Tide Shall Cover the Earth

By  
Norma Cole



# And the Tide Shall Cover the Earth

IUPUI/Bonderman Award

ASSITEJ/USA Outstanding Play

This dramatization was previewed at the 1993 Children's Theatre Symposium in Indianapolis and developed at New York City's Theatre of the Open Eye and Nashville's Academy Theatre. The 1994 Southeastern Community Theatre Festival awarded *And the Tide Shall Cover the Earth* its Best Play Award, observing it as "a new American classic."

**And the Tide Shall Cover the Earth - Drama. By Norma Cole.**

*Cast: 2m., 5w., with doubling, or 8 (2m., 2w., 1 boy, 3 girls.) And the Tide Shall Cover the Earth* is an unforgettably warm and true story of a remarkable grandmother and her granddaughter confronted by inexorable nature and change. The setting is within in the world of the lakes and dams of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The hydroelectric dam at Wolf Creek is finished and closed, and heavy rains lift the levels of the new lake. Soon water will cover the lands and farms long-since purchased, and people must move to new towns. Granny is determined to keep her promise to her man in the graveyard. Her granddaughter, Geneva, is just as certain they will leave. The two are locked in a contest of "the stubborn." Geneva gradually prevails. Granny, in turn, brings forth her hidden treasures in blue jars, and both find a way to go forward with the changes of their lives. *Open stage with simple set pieces, props and lights. Costumes: 1930s Appalachian costumes. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: AE2.*

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**DEDICATED**

**To my granddaughter,**

**Erika**

**and my grandmother,**

**Myrtie**



## **FROM THE AUTHOR**

A word of appreciation to the many insightful people who guided me in shaping a mishmash into a play.

I begin with Dr. Dorothy Webb at Indiana University, Purdue University, Indianapolis who, along with Mark McCreary and a host of others, set the pace at the New Play Symposium of 1993. Included on my long list are Scot Copeland, Aimie Brockway, Dan Herring and more. They showed my how to work.

Ms Janet Allen needs my thanks - - she made me understand that "what day is it?" is a legitimate question in the play's world. Thanks, too, to Orlin Corey, who waited while I fiddled.

Appreciation also to many fine actors in Indianapolis, IN Shelbyville, KY, Roxbury and New York City, NY, Horse Cave, KY, and Nashville, TN. They let characters live even as I changed things almost as they spoke.

Last but important to my state of mind were my family and friends who cheered me on.

Norma Cole  
Monticello, KY  
February, 1994

## *And the Tide Shall Cover the Earth*

*(The setting contains four locations. One location represents the porch and house wherein live Dade, Mattie and Geneva Haw. A low bench and rocking chair rest on the porch. Another location is the cabin of Augusta Haw. Like the other home, there is a porch with a rocking chair and a bench. We see inside the cabin to a table, a small chest of drawers or cedar chest, a shuck bed with a quilt covering. On the chest of drawers rest a mantel clock with a small drawer under it. The third location is a portion of the backyard adjoining the home where Alice, Kendall and Betty Lou Haw live with their parents and other siblings. This yard is separated from offstage by a short stretch of barbed wire fence. The fourth location is the high road, an amorphous area that connects the other locations.)*

*The play is set in Kentucky, in early March of 1948, in the Cumberland River gorge; the dam at Wolf Creek is nearly completed.)*

### ACT ONE

#### A RAINY SATURDAY EVENING NEAR DUSK

*(GENEVA Haw enters high road from direction of her house. She wears a cotton dress, apron, sturdy shoes and bobby-socks. Over this she wears her father's jacket - - old - - with the sleeves turned up.)*

*Her cousin ALICE enters from direction of her home. ALICE wears similar clothing with, perhaps, a rather large, buttoned sweater.)*

GENEVA:       Where you going, Alice?

ALICE:         Where you been, Geneva?

GENEVA: I took the cows to high ground. I ought to get in, but I was going to stop at your house on the way to Granny's. I want to be sure she wasn't flooded out in all this rain.

ALICE: And where'd yer mamma tell you to go, Geneva?

GENEVA: My Mamma said to come right home. But that don't mean I will. What's yer mamma telling you to do that you'll surely do 'cause you was told to do it?

ALICE: She sent me to tell yer mamma should we have church down at the house tomorrow on account of the tide? My Mamma killed a chicken and aims to make chicken 'n dumplings. Reckon she hopes yer mamma'll make the rest of the dinner.

GENEVA: I reckon that'll all happen. What we going to do after dinner? We know how it all will go - - yer daddy'll and mine'll have 'em a nap right there in their chairs then racket around about the dam until chore time.

*(They do a hand-slapping exchange.)*

GENEVA and ALICE: We've heard all that a million times.

ALICE: Yer daddy's all gloom and doom about that dam and the tide to come.

GENEVA: And yers can hardly wait to get shut of this old farm. So let's not hang around.

ALICE: Let's you an me and nobody else go up to Castle Rock tomorrow, or maybe go a-calling the doodlebugs.

GENEVA: Naw. It ain't spring enough fer doodlebugs. Lookey here, the grass ain't a bit new green. Anyway, I've a mind to get me some marbles from some of you.

ALICE: You already got all mine.

GENEVA: I'll slip yers back. I'll hide all our marbles in a poke and sneak 'em out past Mamma. That brother of yers can

pay me interest to use his I already won. I might have got his second best taw but I aim to win his best one. And that tiger eye he won't hardly put into a game.

ALICE: I'd play, but my heart wouldn't be in it. Seems like Aunt Mattie might be right; marbles ain't a game fer young ladies.

GENEVA: You can be a young lady if'n you want, but you won't catch me doing any of that, 'specially what Mamma tells. Any of you been down to Granny's today?

ALICE: I ain't had time what with our fussy baby. Daddy is having him near the vapors about the tide and him not ready to go. He's a wishing we was off this place and already in town where three days of rain don't mean nothing. I don't reckon none of them been down there.

GENEVA: Then I best go on. I got to get home afore dark or I'll catch it.

ALICE: Yeah. I'll give Aunt Mattie my mamma's message. I'll see you tomorrow.

*(The girls separate, turn to wave. ALICE exits through Geneva's porch. GENEVA crosses to Granny's porch.)*

GENEVA: Gra-nny. Granny? You in there?

GRANNY: *(Enters porch.)* That you child?

GENEVA: It's me, Granny. I come to see if yer all right. I come to take you home with me; get you out of this tide.

GRANNY: Law, child, I ain't going home with you. I got to stay here with my treasures.

GENEVA: Granny! Come on, now. Come home with me. That water looks awful high.

GRANNY: No, I won't. You just get on out of here. You ain't even got you a lantern, child. Where's yer hat?

GENEVA: Wind blew it away. I reckon it's down there in the tide, floating along somewheres. It don't matter. It ain't a raining right now.

GRANNY: It will a-fore you get home, child. Storm's does that, you know. Just when yer a-thinking they're done with , they give you one more blast. Yer mamma know yer off down here without you a light?

GENEVA: I wanted to be sure you was safe.

GRANNY: Come up here and get you a lantern, child, and get you on home. I'm an old woman and I can take care of myself. I'm a lot safer than than you out in this wet dark. No telling what's out there to get you.

I got to watch my treasures. (*Distant thunder. Granny speaks conspiratorially.*) You know about my treasures, don't you, child?

GENEVA: Sure, Granny, I understand. (*Disbelief.*)

GRANNY: Then you know why I can't go home with you. Can't let water into my cellar, neither, to get my taters and such. (*Speaks to self.*) But still, my treasures er sealed in blue jars. Reckon they'd be safe.

(*To Geneva.*) Worst come to worse, I'll take them treasures up into the loft. If'n the water was to get that high, you and yer Uncle Bart's an all would be gone. I'll stay to home.

(*Hard rain sound.*)

You run on now, child. Yer mamma and Daddy'll be fussing about you.

(*Lights down on GRANNY and GENEVA, up on GENEVA'S porch where MATTIE stands, eyes searching the dusky dark. DADE enters from house. He wears loose-fitting bib overalls, a blue chambray shirt, straw hat and work shoes. He carries something he's*

*been working with - - perhaps a wooden crate of things packed, or feed sack, or he prepares to pick up feed sack - - full - - to carry off the porch.)*

MATTIE: You shouldn't of sent her up there, Dade. She's been gone - - *(Beat)* - - something's happened to her. I just know it.

DADE: Now, Mattie, yer always fussing at the child to grow up. She's doing that. She'll be fine and come on home in a few minutes. Come in, now. Get out a this damp. Put my supper on the table.

MATTIE: Don't seem to matter how I punish her, she's willful, like yer mamma. Likely she went to Alice's. I declare, maybe she'd be better off living with your brother and his young'uns, she draws to them so.

DADE: I reckon she's lonesome, and there's kids there.  
*(Strained pause.)* I'm sorry, Mattie.

MATTIE: *(Looks to high ground.)* Seems like I can't decide what to do about his little baby bones. Dade, should we move them like the gov-ment says?

DADE: Now, Mattie, you can decide that fer yourself. Whatever decision'll give you ease, that'll be fine with me. I got enough to worry with, getting this whole farm moved and settled. Don't know why all this foolishness has to happen - - water over the best farming land. Land us has always farmed.

MATTIE: You've known about this dam fer fifteen years, Dade. Gov-ment decided we're to move now and it's now we move.

DADE: Knowing that don't make it right.

*(Thunder.)*

MATTIE: I'm plumb frazzled with worry. We lost one young'un to a night like this. You go look for her. I couldn't bear to lose another child - -

DADE: All right, all right.

MATTIE: Now, Dade, she could'uv fallen on that trail, er been bit by one of them snakes leaving the pasture field and the water. Dade?

DADE: I'm going, Mattie. Can't you see me going? Gimme my jumper.

*(MATTIE exits into house. DADE lights lantern. GENEVA approaches. DADE steps off porch, holds up light, seeking.)*

DADE: Gen-e-va! *(Sees her light.)* Geneva?

GENEVA: *(Runs to porch.)* Here I am, Daddy. Oh, I'm cold. I swear, there's not a dry place on me.

DADE: Where you been?

GENEVA: I went to see was Granny all right.

*(Mattie enters with jacket.)*

MATTIE: Geneva Augusta Haw! Where have you been?

DADE: Get out a them wet clothes.

*(GENEVA fakes a sneeze.)*

MATTIE: Yer wet through and through. You ain't had but one cold this winter. Now yer asking fer it.

*(MATTIE takes wet jacket off GENEVA.)*

DADE: Get out a them wet clothes.

MATTIE: There's not a dry place on you. Get into that fire. Yer daddy's waiting on his supper and I'm fooling with a thoughtless child. Where'd you go besides the high pasture? As if I couldn't guess.

GENEVA: I went to see was Granny safe.

MATTIE: And I suppose that included a stop at yer Aunt Ina's. We might as well pack you up and let you go live down there.

*(GENEVA fakes another sneeze and cough.)*

Aha! I knew it! You eat and you get to bed, young lady. I'll be bringing you a hot poultice. We'll get that thing afore it gets to yer chest.

GENEVA: Uhhhh, Mamma? I don't need that smelly old poultice. Truly. I'll go to bed right now. Rest'll take care of my sneezes. Mamma? That old thing with all them onions and mustard that burns my eyes and makes my nose hurt. Mamma? *(Exit.)*

MATTIE: Child! You hear me? Go. Get into dry rags. I declare I don't know when we'll get that child growed.

*(MATTIE and DADE exit house. Lights fade along with sound of rain.)*

**NEXT DAY: SUNDAY MORNING**

*(As lights come up actors are singing a hymn. GRANNY sits on her porch singing.)*

ALL: Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling  
Calling for you and for me  
Patiently Jesus is waiting and watching  
Watching for you and for me.  
Come home, come home  
Ye who are weary come home  
Earnestly, tenderly Jesus is calling  
Calling, oh sinner, come home.

DADE: Go now in peace. May the Holy Ghost guide you today and until we meet again in his name. Amen.

*(GENEVA, ALICE, KENDALL and BETTY LOU enter backyard area. GENEVA carries a poke.)*



KENDALL: I swept off the playing sand, Geneva. I aim to get back all them marbles of mine. I aim to be the best marble player in school come July. 'Specially if Aunt Mattie gets you to stop playing.

GENEVA: My mamma can raise billy-heck about me playing marbles but she can't stop me. And I can tell you this, boy. I aim to get yer bestus taw and I aim to win that tiger eye. Maybe you better back out of this.

KENDALL: Let's play! *(Draws a circle in the sand, he takes a few marbles out of his pocket and carefully puts them in circle.)*

BETTY LOU: Are you going to play, Alice? I'm a-going to do whatever you do.

ALICE: Go away, Betty Lou. Go play with Tad and the baby, hear?

GENEVA: Aw, come on Alice, Betty Lou's OK.

ALICE: She's a pest. I take care of her all the time. I could at least have Sunday to myself.

BETTY LOU: If'n you don't let me play with you, I'll tell Mamma and Aunt Mattie. You ain't supposed to be doing this.

GENEVA: *(Laughing.)* That's blackmail, you little squirt. But yer part of the game the same as the rest of us *(With great ceremony she opens sack and brings out stocking with marbles in them.)* Red sock, Betty Lou. Here you are, girl. You just have 'em back what I won off you last October.

Blue sock, Alice. I'm a-lending yers back so you can play.

Now, this white sock has mine in it. You will notice it is the fattest, the longest, the heaviest - - that's 'cause I got most of Kendall's and today I aim to finish him off.

GENEVA: And this empty sock is special. Kendall's favorite taw goes in there onect I get it, and his tiger eye will be mine as soon as I drive him to playing with it. My sock goes right here.

*(ALICE places two or three marbles in the circle. BETTY LOU takes a marble from GENEVA's sock.)*

BETTY LOU: I'm going to take one of Kendall's, Geneva, is that ok?

*(KENDALL reacts, BETTY LOU defies. KENDALL draws a larger circle around the other one.)*

GENEVA: Come on, boy. That's too close and you know it.

KENDALL: 'Tis not. When Betty Lou and Alice are knocked out, we can put the circle back.

*(ALICE and BETTY LOU shoot to no avail. KENDALL shoots, takes one of ALICE's marbles and shakes it under her nose.)*

ALICE: *(Sisterly sweet.)* You'll give my marble back, won't you Kendall dear?

KENDALL: Naw.

ALICE: You will, or I'll tell Mamma.

KENDALL: No you won't. You ain't supposed to be playing. Yer nothing but a girl and yer too big.

ALICE: I'll tell Daddy, then. He don't care if'n I play marbles. Mamma don't neither. It's just Aunt Mattie who tells her I shouldn't.

KENDALL: *(To Alice.)* Well, I ain't going to give nothing back until I get mine. When I win my dear cousin Geneva, you might-maybe get yers back from me. Until then, shut up and let me think.

GENEVA: Come on, Kendall. Play or quit.

*(He sights his shot. GENEVA bends over him and tickles him with the long end of her braided hair.)*

KENDALL: Quit that. Yer hair's tickling me.

GENEVA: It's my secret weapon.

KENDALL: Secret weapon, nothing. Yer just plain cheating and you know it. *(He picks up a marble and admires it against the light.)*

GENEVA: Hey, that's mine. I won it off you fair and square. You don't get it back 'till you beat it out a me.

KENDALL: It's almost a tiger-eye. I sure do want it back. I'll get it this play.

GENEVA: You can if'n yer good enough.

KENDALL: How about a game of all-er-nothing? Just us two?

GENEVA: Why not? *(ALICE and BETTY LOU remove their marbles from the circle.)*

I can win you big or little, don't matter. I'll win.

ALICE: You best draw lots fer first shot. Here. *(She picks up a small twig and breaks it into uneven parts. She puts hands behind her back.)*

KENDALL: *(To Alice.)* Yer going to give her the short one on purpose, ain't you?

ALICE: I mixed them up. You draw first if'n you think I cheat.

MATTIE: *(Enters.)* What's going on here?

*(Children scramble to their feet. KENDALL grabs his sock of marbles.)*

GENEVA: You put them back boy. Them's mine and you knows it.