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# Getting Near to Baby



Drama by Y York  
Adapted from the Newbery Honor Book by  
Audrey Coulumbis

"The right book-turned-play to help launch a searching child's own journey and make it just a little less lonely."

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"York's script is intelligent, poignant, well timed and moving." —Cheryl Murfin, *Seattleschild.com*

## Getting Near to Baby

*Drama. By Y York. Adapted from the Newbery Honor Book by Audrey Couloumbis. Cast: 2m., 6w.* Twelve-year-old Willa Jo Dean and 7-year-old Little Sister Dean are reeling from the death of their baby sister, Baby. Little Sister's torment is so profound that she has stopped talking. The girls have come to stay with Aunt Patty so that their mom can recover, but Aunt Patty is unused to the messy human ways of little girls and finds Little Sister's silence intolerable. Aunt Patty's rules and regulations finally drive the sisters to the roof, where they hope to escape her laws while at the same time getting nearer to their departed baby sister. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: GA6.*

Cover photo: People's Light & Theatre Company, Malvern, Pa.  
(l-r) Maggie Fitzgerald and Claire Inie-Richards.  
Photo: Mark Garvin. Cover design: Susan Carle.

ISBN 10: 1-58342-720-1  
ISBN 13: 978-1-58342-720-0



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[www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com)



*Dramatic Publishing*

311 Washington St.  
Woodstock, IL 60098  
phone: 800-448-7469  
815-338-7170



Printed on recycled paper

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# GETTING NEAR TO BABY

By  
Y YORK

Based on the book  
by  
AUDREY COULOUMBIS



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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Y YORK

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(GETTING NEAR TO BABY)

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ISBN: 978-1-58342-720-0

For Audrey,  
and in memory of Akila

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“*Getting Near to Baby* was first produced on March 27, 2008, at People’s Light & Theatre, Malvern, Pa. Abigail Adams, Artistic Director and Grace E. Grillet, Managing Director.”

*Getting Near to Baby* was premiered by People's Light & Theatre Company, Malvern, Pa., March 27, 2008, Abigail Adams, artistic director; Grace Grillet, managing director.

Willa Jo . . . . . Claire Inie-Richards  
Little Sister . . . . . Maggie Fitzgerald  
Aunt Polly . . . . . Mary Elizabeth Scallen  
Uncle Hob . . . . . Christopher Patrick Mullen  
Liz Fingers . . . . . Katie Johantgen  
Isaac Fingers . . . . . Nathaniel Brastow  
Lucy Wainwright . . . . . Susan McKey  
Cynthia Wainwright . . . . . Meg Rose

Directed by . . . . . Abigail Adams  
Set Designer . . . . . Jim Kronzer  
Costume Designer . . . . . Marla Jurglanis  
Lighting Designer . . . . . Dennis Parichy  
Sound Designer/Composer . . . . . Christopher Colucci  
Stage Manager . . . . . Kate McSorley



# GETTING NEAR TO BABY"

## CHARACTERS:"

WILLA JO . . . . .	12"
LITTLE SISTER. . . . .	7"
LIZ FINGERS. . . . .	13"
ISAAC FINGERS. . . . .	7"
CYNTHIA WAINWRIGHT. . . . .	12"
AUNT PATTY"	
UNCLE HOB"	
LUCY WAINWRIGHT"	

## PLACE AND TIME:"

In a backyard, a cave and on a roof in a small town in North Carolina in 1967."

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:"

LITTLE SISTER does not speak, but she hears and reacts."

# ACT ONE

## PROLOGUE

*(Night. WILLA JO and LITTLE SISTER stand on the roof of a small house. They are wearing T-shirts and shorts. LITTLE SISTER holds a rolled-up painting.)*

WILLA JO. Careful now, don't fall... Look at them stars. Look at all that sky, Little Sister. I told you I'd find us some *sky*. Is that enough sky for you?

*(LITTLE SISTER raises her arms toward the heavens in an embrace.)*

## SCENE 1

*(An uncluttered backyard and porch of a simple but clean house floating in a blue sea of a sky. There are seven large decorative yard gnomes. PATTY enters from the street with suitcases and shopping bags.)*

PATTY. Come on, girls, don't dawdle. Hob! Hob, we're home.

*(HOB enters.)*

HOB. I kinda thought you'd be home three hours ago.

PATTY. I had to feed them—then we stopped at May's.

You can't believe their clothes— *(To off.)* Willa Jo, don't let her go in the ditch— *(She snaps her shorts in a gesture of frustration.)* I'm going to have half a heart attack before this is over. Oh, Hob, you can't even imagine it. Noreen's gotten worse even than she was.

HOB. You didn't bring her?

PATTY. ...I didn't even think of that. All I could think of was getting the girls away. Truth be told, they were glad to leave.

HOB. What's Noreen going to do all by herself?

PATTY. She's going to get better is what she's going to do— Hush now.

*(WILLA JO and LITTLE SISTER enter; they are wearing clean but tattered dresses. LITTLE SISTER clutches the painting. Her shoes have gotten muddy.)*

PATTY. Oh, Little Sister, look at your shoes!

WILLA JO. Why do you have a ditch?

PATTY. We got new neighbors. One of them's loopy as a bedbug—

HOB. Patty—

PATTY *(over)*. Larry Fingers dug that ditch in the middle of the night. Says he's going to fill it back up as soon as the weather's right, whatever that means. I bet you end up doing it, Hob.

HOB. It's not that bad.

PATTY. Say hi to your Uncle Hob.

WILLA JO. Hi, Uncle Hob.

HOB. Willa Jo. Hey, Little Sister. You musta grown a foot. *(Brief awkward pause.)*

WILLA JO. We saw you two weeks ago. She couldn'ta grown a foot since then.

PATTY. ...You girls go on in— Put on your new little outfits. *(Hands them the shopping bags.)* Give me that picture, Little Sister—I'll take care of it—

*(LITTLE SISTER clutches the painting.)*

PATTY. Okay, then, how's about I get a frame for it? Won't that be nice?

*(LITTLE SISTER does not reply.)*

PATTY. Go inside and put on your new sandals. Your sneakers are filthy.

*(The girls head for the porch.)*

PATTY. Hey—hey. What do you think you're doing?

WILLA JO. We're going in the house like you said to.

PATTY. Go 'round through the garage.

HOB. New carpet. Your aunt's trying to keep it nice.

PATTY. You can't keep a carpet nice when you got children traipsing in and out all day long.

WILLA JO. We won't traipse. Neither one of us will traipse, will we, Little Sister?

*(LITTLE SISTER touches the gnomes as she passes.)*

PATTY. Careful there with my garden gnomes.

WILLA JO. She don't mean no harm. (*To LITTLE SISTER.*) Come on, I'll help you take off your shoes.

(*WILLA JO and LITTLE SISTER exit.*)

HOB (*brief pause*). Wow...

PATTY. Yeah. Not a word out of her.

HOB. Why didn't you bring Noreen, Patty?

PATTY. She'd hate living with me. It would never occur to her to put something back where it belongs, and I'd just be at her every single second—she'd never get well... Oh, Hob, did I do wrong?

HOB. Don't worry. We can always go back and get her if we need to. Has she heard from Joe?

PATTY. Not a word. And she makes all these excuses to the girls—"Oh, your father loves you, he just can't call because he's working so hard." The girls *know*. They're children, but they are not stupid.

HOB. She's doing her best.

PATTY. It was awful. If I hadn't gone back the welfare would have taken the girls away. They hadn't bathed since the funeral—dishes piled up—when they need a plate they use a dirty one. How can people live like that?

HOB. They're suffering in their grief, that's how.

PATTY. You can wash a dish no matter how sad you are. By the time I left, she wouldn't even look at me. All she does is paint. And not for the greeting card company, just enormous pictures she won't let anybody see—Little Sister won't let me see it either. Noreen's going to lose her job she don't shape up.

HOB. Did you tell her to call us if she needs money?

PATTY. She knows that.

HOB. Still, it's nice to hear it.

*(WILLA JO and LITTLE SISTER enter from the garage; LITTLE SISTER with the painting.)*

PATTY. Well, isn't that better? A sight more comfortable than those dresses. Don't they look as cute as buttons, Hob?

HOB. Well. They look familiar.

PATTY. Of course they look familiar. They're kin.

WILLA JO. I think Uncle Hob means we're dressed like you.

PATTY. Don't sass.

WILLA JO. I didn't mean to—

*(LITTLE SISTER has been poking a finger into her shoes.)*

PATTY. Little Sister, quit picking at your new shoes.

WILLA JO. They hurt.

PATTY. How do you know that? Did she say something?

WILLA JO. No, ma'am. She didn't say something. I know it because mine hurt.

PATTY. They do not hurt. They're very expensive. What did you do with your dirty clothes?

WILLA JO. We left them in the bathroom.

PATTY. Did you put them in the hamper?

WILLA JO. I didn't know to.

PATTY. Well, of course that's what you do with clothes when you take them off. I'll do it. I'm going to wash all your things anyway.

WILLA JO. They're not dirty.

PATTY. They're dusty. Then we'll repack everything and put the suitcases in the attic, and when the fall comes we'll open them up, and it'll be like Christmas.

WILLA JO (*small panic*). Christmas? We won't still be here at Christmas?

PATTY. Well, of course you won't. I'm just saying... Little Sister, you want to give me that picture now?

(*LITTLE SISTER clutches the painting.*)

PATTY. Right. (*Heading in.*) Hob?

HOB. I'll be right there. (*PATTY exits.*) Did you see how I fixed up your room?

WILLA JO. It looks real nice.

(*LITTLE SISTER reaches into her pocket and shows a piece of candy.*)

HOB. Well, now, we don't have to let your aunt see that—I don't think I remembered to get her a piece is why. Just keep it in your pocket. And be sure to brush your teeth after you eat it.

WILLA JO. Thanks for the chocolate, Uncle Hob.

HOB. You're welcome, I'm sure. I'm going to go help your aunt. (*He exits into the garage taking the rest of the suitcases.*)

WILLA JO (*fiercely*). Let me see the picture.

*(LITTLE SISTER hugs it closer.)*

WILLA JO. Did Mom say you could take it? *(No reply.)*  
Which one is it?

*(LITTLE SISTER looks up at the sky.)*

WILLA JO. What are you looking at—? I don't see anything... Are you ever going to talk?... Listen to me, it wasn't your fault—it wasn't my fault—it wasn't anybody's fault—

*(LITTLE SISTER walks away. WILLA JO takes the candy from her pocket. Begins to unwrap it in a solemn ritual.)*

WILLA JO. Do this.

*(LITTLE SISTER mimics WILLA JO's actions. They unfold and flatten the paper, place the candy on the paper on the ground.)*

WILLA JO. I'm going to eat this chocolate, and when it dissolves into my mouth juices, I am going to remember something wonderful.

*(WILLA JO puts the candy in her mouth; LITTLE SISTER does, too.)*

WILLA JO. Mmmm. I'm remembering something wonderful. Are you remembering something wonderful?



*(LITTLE SISTER nods.)*

WILLA JO. You gonna tell me?

*(LITTLE SISTER looks away.)*

WILLA JO. ...I'm remembering catching lightning bugs in a jar. I'm remembering opening the lid and lightning bugs flying away into the night.

*(LITTLE SISTER counts on her fingers to eight.)*

WILLA JO. That's right! There were eight bugs in that jar. I caught eight lightning bugs.

*(Indignant, LITTLE SISTER gestures that she caught them.)*

WILLA JO. I don't think you caught them. I think I caught them.

*(LITTLE SISTER stamps her foot fiercely. WILLA JO laughs.)*

WILLA JO. All right, all right—you caught them.

*(LIZ and ISAAC enter and stop at the edge of the yard.)*

LIZ. I'm Liz Fingers. I live across the street.

ISAAC. I'm Isaac Fingers. I live across the street. I'm seven. We saw you playing in the ditch. Look, Liz, yard

fairies. (*He speaks to the gnomes.*) Hi, hi there, how you doing? What's your name?

WILLA JO. I don't know his name— (*Pointedly.*) He belongs to my Aunt Patty.

LIZ (*catching WILLA JO's meaning*). Leave it be, Isaac.

WILLA JO. I'm Willa Jo, and this is Little Sister. We're visiting my aunt and uncle for a while.

*(LITTLE SISTER holds up seven fingers. A very slight pause as LIZ realizes the little girl isn't going to speak.)*

WILLA JO. She's seven, too.

ISAAC (*holds up seven fingers*). Together we are fourteen. Fourteen fingers, Liz!

LIZ. Yep, just like how many in the Fingerses family household if you count all the uncles.

WILLA JO. There's fourteen of you?

ISAAC. In the house across the street. (*To LITTLE SISTER.*) Do you want to see my cave?

*(LITTLE SISTER nods.)*

ISAAC (*to LIZ*). Can we?

LIZ. Okay, but be sure to take the flashlight.

WILLA JO. Wait—I mean—where is it?

LIZ. In the little rise behind our house. The entrance is all shored up with timbers.

ISAAC. It's irresistible.

WILLA JO. Is it safe?

LIZ. It's perfectly safe. My Uncle Larry made it.

WILLA JO. Is he the same person dug the ditch?

LIZ. Yes, but he didn't get to *finish that*—Miss Patty made him stop.

ISAAC. Stop talking, and let's go to the cave.

WILLA JO. We have to stay here.

LIZ. Oh... Okay. (*Brief pause. Trying again.*) How long is your visit? I hope it's all summer. I have to stay nearby so I can help Mama and there's no other kids except the ones I'm related to. I'm the oldest of five, and one on the way.

WILLA JO. I'm the oldest of two.

LIZ. Any on the way?

(*LITTLE SISTER turns to WILLA JO.*)

WILLA JO. ...No. None on the way.

ISAAC (*to LITTLE SISTER*). Can I see your picture?

WILLA JO. She— She doesn't want you to.

(*PATTY comes to the door.*)

PATTY. Well. What have we here?

LIZ. Hi, Miss Patty. We were just introducing ourselves.

ISAAC. Can we come inside?

PATTY. Won't your mother worry if you go into a stranger's house?

ISAAC. You're not a stranger— You're our across-the-street neighbor.

PATTY. I think your mother might worry. Come on, girls. Time for dinner.

WILLA JO. We just ate—.

PATTY. Your Uncle Hob didn't eat. We have to go inside now.

LIZ (*realizing they are not wanted*) Come on, Isaac. Time to go home.

ISAAC. Why?

LIZ. 'Cause I say so... Come on, we'll go to the cave.

ISAAC. Yippee.

*(LIZ and ISAAC exit. PATTY comes down the stoop.)*

WILLA JO. How come you get to use the porch door and we don't?

PATTY. Because I can come *out* as long as I go back *in* through the garage. Were they here for handouts?

WILLA JO. They came to play.

PATTY. There's other children in town more suitable.

*(LITTLE SISTER gestures toward the FINGERSES; she likes them.)*

WILLA JO. But... (*tentatively*) I think they're suitable.

PATTY. It's not suitable when dozens of people live in one house.

WILLA JO. There's only fourteen.

*(LITTLE SISTER gestures the number fourteen repeatedly.)*

PATTY (*over*). Fourteen people! They're going to turn the street into a junkyard. What's she doing?

WILLA JO. That's the number fourteen. This means ten, plus four fingers equals fourteen.

PATTY. ...Go 'round to your uncle, Little Sister.

*(LITTLE SISTER exits. PATTY attempts to be calm.)*

PATTY. Now, if you encourage her to be silent, she'll never talk.

WILLA JO. I don't encourage her.

PATTY. When you go out of your way to understand her hand signals, you encourage her.

WILLA JO. I don't mean to encourage, but I can't leave her alone in her silence. She would get lonesome.

PATTY. Willa Jo. ...Do you know why she stopped talking? *(Brief pause.)* If you know you have to tell.

WILLA JO *(lying)*. She's just sad, that's all.

PATTY. I'm sad, too. We're all plenty sad. I think it's high time she started talking again.

WILLA JO. She can't.

PATTY. She's willful like your mother.

WILLA JO. Mom's not—

PATTY. Don't tell me about Noreen, I've known her a sight longer than you have. Have you tried to make her talk?

WILLA JO. I try every day.

PATTY. You should just pinch her.

WILLA JO. We're not allowed to pinch.

PATTY. Or hold her upside down.

WILLA JO. For how long?!

PATTY. Until she gives up. She's doing it to get attention.

WILLA JO. Quietness don't get attention. I don't even know when she stopped talking that's how much attention she didn't get. You and Uncle Hob were there—you didn't notice—

PATTY. Your uncle and I were very busy taking care of other things.

WILLA JO. Everybody was. Everybody was busy and she just got quiet. Not for attention. She's too sad to talk, and that's the truth. And I hope nobody holds her upside down.

PATTY. All right, Willa Jo, nobody's going to hold her upside down. I just want her to talk. It's so nervous-making when she don't talk.

WILLA JO. I want her to talk. Mom wants her to talk. She can't talk. When she can talk, she will.

PATTY (brief pause). Well, hasn't this been a fine first day.

WILLA JO. I think it's been a hard first day.

PATTY. I was being sarcastic.

WILLA JO. We're not allowed to be sarcastic.

PATTY. Adults are allowed. Go on in. See to your sister.

(WILLA JO exits through garage. PATTY snaps her shorts in frustration. HOB opens the porch door.)

PATTY. Don't come out that door, Hob.

HOB. I'm not going to. Honey? You all right?

PATTY. Oh, Hob. They hate me. They just hate me.