

# Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

*Dramatic Publishing*

# He Held Me Grand

by  
JAMES STILL



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\*

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: [www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com), or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, P.O. Box 129, Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMIV by  
JAMES STILL  
Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(HE HELD ME GRAND)

For inquiries concerning all other rights, contact:  
Judy Boals, Inc., 208 W. 30th St., Ste. 401, New York NY 10001

ISBN: 1-58342-230-7

## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

On the title page, in all programs for future productions, the following credit must appear:

“*He Held Me Grand* was co-commissioned and co-produced by the Indiana Repertory Company, Indianapolis, Ind., and the People’s Light and Theatre Company, Malvern, Pa.”

“We live forward but we can only think backward.”

— Kierkegaard

“She was teaching me one more, almost her last, lesson:  
emotions do not grow old. I knew that I would feel as she  
did, and I do.”

— Eudora Welty

“Home is a place where they’ll take you in.”

— Robert Frost

“Anyone who doesn’t fear the ocean, shouldn’t go fishing.”

— Chinese Fortune Cookie

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

From its inception as a community-based play, *He Held Me Grand* has been one of the most ambitious projects I've ever tackled. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that personally it has also been one of the most rewarding. With generous support from the TCG/Pew National Theatre Artist Residency Program and the National Endowment for the Arts, I had the great fortune (and luxury of time) to spend two years interviewing senior citizens. My deep interest in history and commitment to community found the perfect partner with this project. I've worked on the play as an anthropologist...putting an ear to the ground, digging, uncovering buried treasures.

Focusing on senior citizens in the Indianapolis and Malvern/Philadelphia areas, I discussed books with a senior citizen reading group, hosted roundtable discussions on race and war, conducted numerous one-on-one taped interviews with seniors in their homes and at both the Indiana Repertory Theatre and People's Light & Theatre, hosted a potluck dinner that focused on family stories and recipes, worked with groups of seniors and teenagers doing improvisation, dance and storytelling. I spent time in James Dean's hometown in Fairmount, Ind. (and put flowers on his grave), and time in the lush flower gardens on the People's Light grounds (and interviewed the senior citizen who planted them). I attended polka lessons at a senior citizen center in Indianapolis (and interviewed the 76-year old dance teacher) and did walking tours of both Philadelphia and Indianapolis (led by senior citizens). I went to the Indy 500 (and interviewed my senior hostess who had been attending the race for over 50 years) and a Quaker meeting in Malvern (and interviewed the eldest member who was 93 years old).

That two-year process brought me face to face with extraordinary people whose honesty and intimacy moved me and changed me. Finally, with over 1,500 pages of interview transcripts, hundreds of pages of notes and a heart full of images

and faces, I began working on the actual writing of *He Held Me Grand*. What began as an exploration of other people's stories became an examination of my own stories. It was always my intention to create a theatrical play inspired by the research, as opposed to a documentary play that recounted information. I wanted to write a piece of theatre that was inspired, not only by the people and their stories, but by theatre itself. There are some other fingerprints on this play as well: my love for the gentle and wise theatricality of Thornton Wilder, the humor of Kaufman & Hart and the sly politics of Preston Sturges.

There's a tricky ethic that goes hand in hand with doing this kind of work: responsibility. Sometimes, late into the night, as I lay in California darkness, I might be visited by the eyes of one of the senior citizens. Sometimes it is a pair of aged hands, a worn wedding ring (or the absence of one). Sometimes it is the sound of their voices that hang in the air; sometimes it's their perfume. The point is, they live in me. Their words, their life experiences, their intimate generosity—I'm haunted by it all. But another way of saying that is that I have had wonderful company. And I hope maybe that's how you might experience *He Held Me Grand*: wonderful company. One of the original conceits of this project was that I would peek into the future by looking at the past through the eyes of ordinary people. My conversations with seniors almost always started the same way. They would say with all honesty, "I don't know why you would want to talk to me...I haven't done anything very interesting... I've lived a very ordinary life." Of course, one of the most profound things I've learned from the process of working on *He Held Me Grand* is that there is no such thing as an ordinary life.

A note about the title: early in the process, we held a dance workshop with senior citizens and teenagers, and one of the seniors told a story about attending a senior citizen prom. Her date was a man in his 90s. I asked her if he was a good dancer. And she told me with a big smile, "He held me grand!"

HE HELD ME GRAND was originally co-commissioned by the People’s Light & Theatre Company and the Indiana Repertory Theatre. Development of the play was made possible, in part, by grants from the NEA and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

HE HELD ME GRAND premiered at People’s Light & Theatre Company (Abigail Adams, artistic director and Grace E. Grillet, managing director) in Malvern, Pa., on May 24, 2002. Direction was by David Bradley, scenic design by James F. Pyne Jr., costume design by Marla J. Jurglanis, lighting design by Dennis Parichy, music composed and arranged by Tim Grimm and Jason Wilbur, choreography by Samantha Bellomo, vocal arrangements and music direction by Jim Ryan, and sound design and stage management by Charles T. Brastow. The cast was:

Young Lillian . . . . .	SAMANTHA WISCHNIA
Pap-Pap . . . . .	ETHAN CADOFF
Mam-Mam . . . . .	D’ARCY WEBB
Buddy . . . . .	SCOTT BOULWARE
Pete . . . . .	TOM TETI
Young April . . . . .	JULIA SMITH
Young Grace . . . . .	ERICA EATON
Jesse . . . . .	KEVIN BERGEN
April . . . . .	CEAL PHELAN
John . . . . .	FRED ROBERTS
Raymond . . . . .	SEAN CAMONI
Grace . . . . .	CATHY SIMPSON
Twin from Terre Haute . . . . .	SUSAN MCKEY
Twin from Terre Haute . . . . .	MARY ELIZABETH SCALLEN
Lillian . . . . .	KATHRYN PETERSEN
May . . . . .	CARLA BELVER
Edie . . . . .	LENNY DANIELS
June . . . . .	ALDA CORTESE
Ted . . . . .	HEZEKIAH LEWIS
Mr. Scott . . . . .	METS JAMES SUBER
Paper Boy . . . . .	TONY YACENDA



In a revised script, HE HELD ME GRAND opened at the Indiana Repertory Theatre (Janet Allen, artistic director and Daniel Baker, managing director) in Indianapolis, Ind., on October 4, 2002. Direction was by David Bradley, scenic design by Russell Metheny, costume design by Gail Brassard, lighting design by Dennis Parichy, sound design by Andrew Hopson, music composed by Tim Grimm and Jason Wilbur, music direction by Terry Woods, incidental choreography by Cynthia Pratt and dramaturgy by Janet Allen and Richard Roberts. Joel Grynheim was the stage manager. The cast was:

THE FAMILY:

April Williams . . . . . PRISCILLA LINDSAY  
 Jesse Williams . . . . . RYAN ARTZBERGER  
 Pete. . . . . JONATHAN GILLARD DALY  
 Grace Turner. . . . . CATHY SIMPSON  
 Young Grace. . . . . MARIAH BRITTON  
 Young April . . . . . EMILY ROBBINS  
 May Crawford . . . . . JACQUELINE KNAPP  
 Edie Alexander . . . . . MILICENT WRIGHT  
 June . . . . . JAN LUCAS  
 Mr. Scott . . . . . WILEY MOORE

THE ANCESTORS:

Young Lillian . . . . . KRISTIN DULANEY  
 Pap-Pap . . . . . MARK GOETZINGER  
 Mam-Mam . . . . . GIGI JENNEWEIN  
 Lillian. . . . . WENDY RADER  
 Twin from Terre Haute (Dot). . . . . CRYSTAL ROBERTS  
 Twin from Terre Haute (Kay). . . . . CATHERINE M. SMITH  
 Buddy Becker . . . . . SCOTT BOULWARE  
 Raymond Williams . . . . . JACOB SAYLOR  
 Ted. . . . . DAVID ALAN ANDERSON  
 John Williams . . . . . BOB MOTZ

# HE HELD ME GRAND

A Play in Three Acts

For 8m., 12w., (three of the female parts are children)

PLACE/TIME: An old house in Indianapolis/2000 and the past.

## CHARACTERS:

APRIL WILLIAMS. . . . . white woman in her late 80s  
PETE. . . . . white man in his late 70s  
JESSE WILLIAMS . . . . . white man in his late 30s  
GRACE TURNER. . . . . black woman in her late 80s  
MAY CRAWFORD . . . . . white woman in her mid-80s  
EDIE ALEXANDER. . . . . black woman in her early 70s  
JUNE . . . . . white woman in her early 80s  
2OLD4U (Henry)

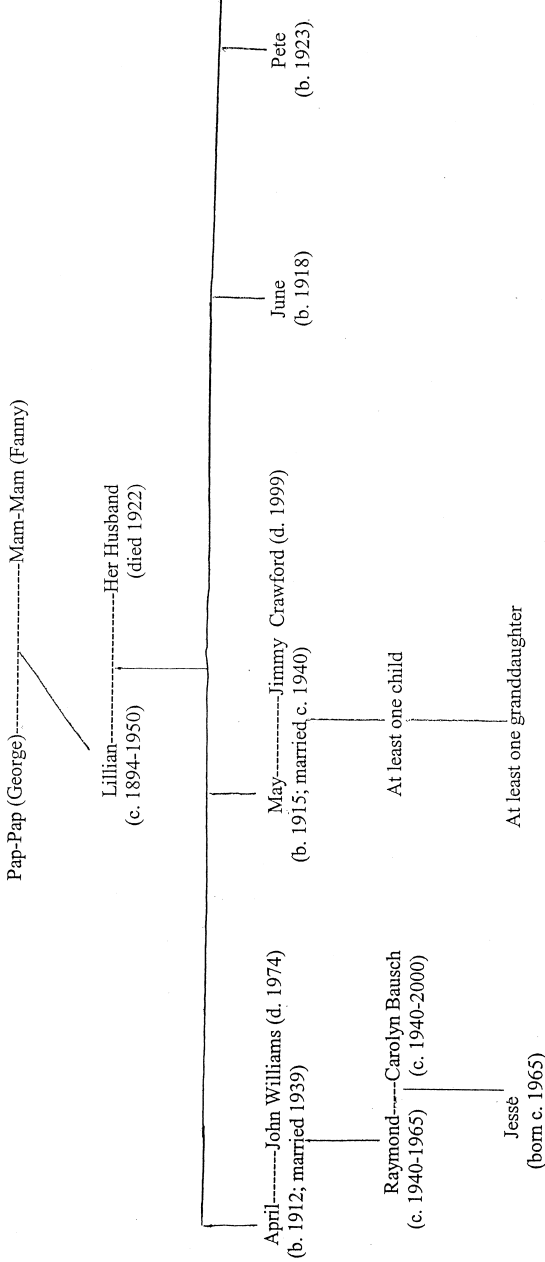
## In the Cemetery:

LILLIAN . . . . . white woman, 30s/40s (April/May/June's mother)  
PAP-PAP (George) . . . . . Lillian's father  
MAM-MAM (Fanny). . . . . Lillian's mother  
BUDDY BECKER . . . . . white man, 17-18 years old  
TWINS FROM TERRE HAUTE (Dot and Kay) . . young women  
who sing/dance  
RAYMOND WILLIAMS . . white man, early 20s, Vietnam soldier  
TED . . . . . black man, WWII soldier  
JOHN . . . . . white man, 60s, April's husband

## Others:

LILLIAN. . . . . as a little girl (5-6 years old)  
APRIL . . . . . as a young girl (11 years old)  
GRACE . . . . . as a young girl (11 years old)

HE HELD ME GRAND  
Family Tree



\*\*\*\*\*  
OTHER DATES:  
\*\*\*\*\*

- Grace (born 1912)
- Eddie (born 1930)
- Henry (born 1907)
- Pete/Twins/Lillian/Mam-Mam scenes take place c. 1939-1941
- Young April and Grace scenes take place in 1923; both are 11.
- Buddy Becker (1920-1945)

## PROLOGUE

*(Morning. Darkness. A huge door opens, a sliver of light spills onto the stage. MUSIC creeps in from long ago—like memory. Something like Delibes’ “Waltz” from Sylvia slowly fills the stage. An OLD WOMAN [APRIL] sleeps in an easy chair. She’s in her late 80s, white. She continues to sleep as A YOUNG GIRL [LILLIAN] peers around the open door in awe... She is young—5 or 6 years old. She wears a simple white nightgown. LAUGHTER. A COUPLE dance/waltz across the stage. They are dressed to the nines in turn-of-the-century evening wear. 1899. They dance together perfectly, swirling and twirling gracefully through space. MORE LAUGHTER. OTHER COUPLES follow. The stage fills with several couples waltzing elegantly to the music. The YOUNG GIRL watches, mesmerized. The COUPLES glide offstage, out of view and the waltz fades away. To get their attention, the YOUNG GIRL begins to sing, and one couple stops and watches her.)*

YOUNG GIRL [LILLIAN].

**“Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And never brought to mind?  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And days of auld lang syne?”**

*(The remaining couple—a handsome HUSBAND and WIFE—go to the YOUNG GIRL.)*

FATHER [PAP-PAP]. Lillian! What are you doing awake?

YOUNG LILLIAN. I couldn't sleep, Papa! I'm too excited.

MOTHER [MAM-MAM]. It's too late at night for you to be excited.

YOUNG LILLIAN. But the new year, Mama! The new century!

VOICES OFFSTAGE *(singing)*.

**“And days of auld lang syne, my dear...**

*(PAP-PAP takes the YOUNG GIRL in his arms. MAM-MAM slips her hand through her husband's arm. They stand in the doorway, light at their backs, looking out at us, joining in with offstage singing:)*

YOUNG LILLIAN/MAM-MAM/PAP-PAP & OFFSTAGE VOICES.

**...And days of auld lang syne!  
We'll take a cup of kindness yet  
for auld lang syne.”**

PARTY PEOPLE *(offstage)*. Happy New Year! Happy New Year!

YOUNG LILLIAN. Happy New Year, Papa!

PAP-PAP. Happy New Year, sweetheart.

YOUNG LILLIAN. What's going to happen, Mama?

MAM-MAM. What do you mean, Lillian?

YOUNG LILLIAN. In the new century...what's going to happen?

MAM-MAM. No one knows.

YOUNG LILLIAN. Wonderful things? (*MAM-MAM doesn't answer. The three of them look out at us—hopeful. Then:*)

PAP-PAP. We'll tuck you in bed. You'll have sweet dreams. And THAT will be the first wonderful thing to happen in this new century.

*(PAP-PAP dances YOUNG LILLIAN out of the room, followed by MAM-MAM...and the door slowly closes behind them. IN DARKNESS we hear a MAN'S VOICE sing a capella. It's simple, sweet, untrained. At first the song is sung slowly, with unnatural breaks—as if the song is trying to be remembered.)*

MAN'S VOICE (*singing*).

**“Let me call you sweetheart...**

*(Lights creep up tight to reveal the singing man who is dressed as a WORLD WAR II FLYER.)*

WWII FLYER (*singing*).

**I'm in love with you.”**

*(Lights slowly fade up on a bare stage...slowly revealing MEN and WOMEN—young and old, black and white. They are sitting in chairs scattered. The image created is an audience—or a cemetery. An OLD WOMAN stands up.)*

OLD WOMAN (*singing*).

**“Let me hear you whisper...**

*(A YOUNG WOMAN stands up.)*

OLD WOMAN & YOUNG WOMAN *(singing)*.  
**...that you love me too.”**

*(MORE PEOPLE stand up, join in the singing.)*

MORE VOICES *(singing)*.  
**“Keep the love light glowing  
in your eyes so true...”**

*(And MORE PEOPLE stand, sing.)*

EVEN MORE VOICES *(singing)*.  
**“Let me call you sweetheart—”**

*(An OLD MAN [PETE] enters wearing pajamas. The lights suddenly fade away on the figures in the cemetery. They watch from the shadows as PETE shuffles across the stage. Though his face looks like a young boy—open, innocent, bright—he’s quite old.)*

WWII FLYER *(singing alone in near-darkness)*.  
**“I’m in love with you.”**

*(PETE methodically goes to several lamps scattered across the stage and turns each one on.)*

PETE *(turning on one lamp)*. Slow. *(Turning on another lamp.)* Slow. *(Walking to more lamps and turning three more on in quick succession.)* Quick-quick-quick. *(He*

*repeats it all again, turning on more lamps to the rhythm of his words.) Slow. Slow. Quick-quick-quick.*

*(Soon the stage blooms warmly with the lights from a dozen or more lamps. We are inside a wonderful old house—the walls full of generations of family photos that glow like ghosts. Calendars from several years gone by. Old furniture. We can almost smell the lives lived in this room through the years. Sound of LAUGHTER precedes TWO 11-YEAR-OLD GIRLS [one black, one white] as they race through the room, out the front door which bangs behind them. PETE doesn't see them, shuffles back to where he entered, disappearing in the glow of the lamps. SOUNDS: THE RUMBLE OF A FLYING AIRPLANE. A TRAIN WHISTLE. A TRAIN RATTLING ALONG TRACKS. The airplane and train recede into the distance and finally fade out. SOUNDS: A LONELY COYOTE. A CAR RADIO. Then the headlights of a car. We see a MAN [JESSE] behind the wheel, driving. He's in his 30s. All around him, it's the middle of the night. He snaps off the radio. He tries to look at a map that has been folded and unfolded so many times it's unreadable. He sips coffee from a paper cup, stares straight ahead at the endless road... And drives.)*

JESSE. I keep having this dream, this same dream over and over.

*(APRIL wakes up in her chair, walks around carefully turning off all of the lamps.)*



APRIL. Grandma's Dream. Trip Around the World. Sunshine and Shadow.

JESSE. I'm climbing in a tree.

APRIL. Tree of Paradise.

JESSE. It's an oak.

APRIL. Tree of Temptation.

JESSE. It's a giant oak tree.

APRIL. Tree of Life.

JESSE. And the rings of this oak tree look like fingerprints.

I climb all the way to the top:

JESSIE (*cont'd*).

...branch by  
branch by branch  
by branch by  
branch...

APRIL.

Stairway to  
Heaven. Barn  
Raising. Streaks  
of Lightning.

JESSE (*cont'd*). I'm almost at the top of this tree and I can feel the wood grinding, snapping, breaking. Time is racing up this tree and suddenly it BURSTS into flames—bright orange—like a burning bush.

APRIL. Drunkard's Path.

JESSE. And now the whole thing is a pile of ashes—

APRIL. Fool's Puzzle.

JESSE. And I'm covered with soot.

APRIL. Wonder of the World.

JESSE. I'm falling through the air—

APRIL. Birds in the Air.

JESSE. And suddenly I'm in water.

APRIL. Ocean Waves.

JESSE. I'm in the ocean. The Pacific Ocean. The sun is setting.

APRIL. Light and Dark.

JESSE. The moon is rising.

APRIL. Evening Star.

JESSE. There are stars in the sky.

APRIL. Lemon Star.

JESSE. And I'm sure I'm going to drown.

APRIL. Broken Star.

JESSE. I know how to swim but I know that's not going to save me. But I don't know what WILL save me. WHAT WILL SAVE ME???

APRIL. Grandma's Dream.

JESSE. When I'm sure I'm going to die—I look up—  
*(APRIL sits in the big stuffed chair next to the only lighted lamp. She unfurls an unfinished quilt onto her lap...it's covered with sailboats.)*

APRIL. The Sailboat Pattern.

*(Images of sailboats flood the stage.)*

JESSE. And there's a sailboat right next to me. And there's another one. And another one. There are sailboats all around me. The sails are different colors, different patterns. And there are people in the boats calling out to me like they know me. And one of them, one of the people—

APRIL. Grandmother's Flower Garden.

JESSE. It's my grandma. She's standing in a sailboat and her hand is stretched out to me.

APRIL. Hands of Friendship.

JESSE. And there are flowers growing out of her fingers.

APRIL. French Bouquet.

JESSE. And her eyelashes are lined with diamonds.

APRIL. Double Wedding Ring.

JESSE. I reach up—

*(APRIL looks at the quilt, talking to herself, creating a kind of incantation, a bedtime story, family history.)*

APRIL. Evening Star, Lemon Star, Broken Star.

JESSE. I can almost, almost touch her hand—

APRIL. Tree of Life. Tree of Paradise. Tree of Temptation.

Wonder of the World. Stairway to Heaven. Grandmother's Flower Garden.

JESSE. And I wake up. *(JESSE wads up the map and throws it out the car window. He stares at the road, and drives.)*

APRIL. Grandma's Dream.

*(APRIL falls asleep in her chair. The clock strikes TWO. Projected against the upstage wall, the sailboats fade away and we watch words appear, letter-by-letter...like someone is typing. It's a computer screen.)*

VIDEO IMAGE & V.O. *(typing)*. I can't sleep. Every night I wake up at three, four in the morning. Does that happen to you? Is that part of being old? I think if people knew how short life really was, maybe they wouldn't sleep so much. My son wants me to see a doctor. I'd rather see a sunrise. *(Pause in the typing.)* Or a beautiful woman. Have you given any more thought to the matter we discussed last week? Sincerely— *(Pause. Then the prompt goes backwards, erasing the word "sincerely"; a new word is typed:)* Respectfully— *(The prompt goes*

*backwards, erasing the word “respectfully”; a new word is typed:)* Regards— *(The prompt goes backwards, erasing the word “regards.” A new word is typed:)* Lov— *(The entire word “love” isn’t even spelled out before the prompt quickly backspaces and erases. Long pause. Finally a new word is typed:)* Yours, *(Then in parenthesis another phrase is typed:)* (If you will have me.)  
2OLD4U

*(The image of the typed note disappears as we hear the familiar static sound that can only mean one thing: A COMPUTER CONNECTING TO THE INTERNET...)*

COMPUTER VOICE. “You’ve Got Mail!”

# ACT I

*(The clock strikes FOUR. APRIL sleeps in the same chair, clutching the unfinished quilt. Sudden LOUD KNOCKING. APRIL snaps awake from a deep dream, disoriented by the commotion.)*

APRIL. What? What is it? *(MORE KNOCKING, more urgent. APRIL looks around, remembers where she is, and slowly pulls herself out of the chair. MORE KNOCKING.)* Yes, yes! I'm coming. *(She goes to the door.)* Well who is it??? *(Silence. She waits, suspicious.)* A bunch of wild kids trying to scare an old lady, is it? Well, you're disturbing the wrong old lady! I'm calling the police.

JESSE'S VOICE *(from the other side of the door)*. No, no—wait. I'm looking for Mrs. Williams. *(Beat.)* Mrs. John Williams?

APRIL *(looks around, nervously, for something to grab, a weapon)*. She isn't here. *(In a panic, APRIL grabs an American flag that's on a small stick in a stand on top of a beautiful old upright piano.)*

JESSE'S VOICE. Do you know when she'll be back?

APRIL. Do you have any idea what time it is?

JESSE'S VOICE. No.

## SONGS

“Let Me Call You Sweetheart”

By Beth Slater Whitson and Leo Friedman. 1910.  
Public Domain

“Beautiful Doll”

By Al Seymour Brown and Nat D. Ayer

“I Wonder Who’s Kissing Her Now”

By Hough & Adams and Howard.  
Public Domain

“I’m Gonna Float My Boat Right Back to Terre Haute”

By Malcolm Scott. 1921.  
Public Domain

“My Buddy”

By Gus Kahn and Walter Donaldson. 1922.  
Public Domain

“By the Light of the Silvery Moon”

By Ed Madden and Gus Edwards. 1909.  
Public Domain

“Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning”

By Irving Berlin. 1918.  
Public Domain

“That Old Gang of Mine”

By Billy Rose/Mort Dixon/Ray Henderson. 1923.  
Public Domain