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Dramatic Publishing



BELONGINGS

A Play in Two Acts

by

DANIEL FENTON



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(BELONGINGS)

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For Suzi, Shea, my mom...
for giving me belongings of my own.

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BELONGINGS

A Play in Two Acts
For 3 women and 2 girls

CHARACTERS*

AUNT ELLA . . Grandma's sister, Gene and Renny's aunt,
65-70

GENE Grandma's daughter, Ella's niece, mid-40s

RENNY . Katy and Jimmie's mother, Grandma's daughter,
Ella's niece, early 40s

KATY Renny's daughter, 14

JIMMIE Renny's daughter, 10

*All characters' ages approximate.

SETTING:

All action takes place on the front porch, the side porch, the yard and the living room of Grandma's home. The house is in an urban area of older homes. Across the street is a park, former home of an the orphanage where Grandma and Ella grew up. Aunt Ella lives next door.

TIME: Two weeks after Grandma's death.

ACT ONE

SCENE: *It is the dark hours of early morning. A quiet calm is interrupted only by the sound of crickets and an occasional dog bark. KATY is in the front yard of her grandmother's home. Her sister, JIMMIE, is stretched out asleep nearby, wrapped in a cover to conceal the oversized fur coat she is wearing underneath. JIMMIE has a stash of objects collected next to her—a family portrait, a megaphone, a few pieces of silver and other assorted “finds.” Beyond the steps, there is a wide porch fronting an older home. KATY looks at the sky and across the street as she talks. During her exchange, darkness begins to fade slowly into daylight.*

KATY. I got you covered, Gramma. Don't you worry. You're safe with us, huh, Jimmie? Jimmie... Jimmie, are you asleep again? Aw, nuts...

(She continues to stare into the sky and across the street. After a moment or two of silence, she sings the following song, softly and to herself, alternating the words with humming.)

KATY (*humming*).

...don't say a word.

Gramma's gonna buy you a mockingbird.

And if that mockingbird won't sing.
Gramma's gonna buy you a diamond ring.

And if that diamond ring turns brass...

(She gets emotional, but works to hide it.)

I spread your ashes in the park. Right under the maple tree you planted there. I thought you'd like that. I'll be able to talk to you that way. And you can look across the street at your house. *(She pauses as if waiting for an answer.)* You hear me? I'm banking on you being able to hear me, Gram. If you can, I sure wish you'd say something...tell me you're proud of me, maybe. If I could just hear you say something... or see your face... for just a minute...

Even just to hear you sing that song...the way you sort of whispered it. It made me feel so, I don't know... safe. *(Beat.)* Don't be dead. I don't have anybody.

(She sees Mrs. Werthmeyer down the street looking out her window. She stands abruptly and addresses her angrily as she wipes away her tears. She is embarrassed that anyone would have seen her cry. She adopts a fighter's instinct and her words jab like a boxer as she yells across the street. Lights ease up slowly to indicate the dawn of a new day.)

What are you looking at, Mrs. Werthmeyer? Oh, don't hide now. I saw you. Why don't you open your drapes so you can get a better view? Matter of fact, why don't you come on down...

JIMMIE (*awakened*). Katy...

KATY. Better yet, why don't you send that bully of a daughter down? Yeah, because if you send her down now, Mrs. Werthmeyer, I tell you what, I'll beat the life out of her! How about that, Mrs. Werthmeyer?

JIMMIE. Katy, you're going to wake everyone up.

KATY (*to JIMMIE*). Leave me alone. (*About Mrs. Werthmeyer.*) Nosy witch! (*Yelling again.*) I've listened to all of Jamie Werthmeyer's meanness. "Look everybody. Katy brought her Gramma on the field trip." I'd like to pound her.

JIMMIE. You're scared of her.

KATY. Not today, I'm not! Send her down now, Mrs. Werthmeyer, and I'll send that sissy daughter of yours home crying.

JIMMIE. You're going to ruin it!

RENNY'S VOICE (*from off*). Katy, what's going on? Is everything all right?

(*JIMMIE and KATY look at each other.*)

KATY. It's fine.

(*We hear a phone ring next door.*)

JIMMIE. I tried to tell you.

RENNY (*off*). What are you yelling about? It's six o'clock in the morning.

KATY (*loudly, to RENNY*). Sorry!

RENNY (*off*). You'll be sorry when your Aunt Ella gets through with you.

KATY (*as she and JIMMIE scramble*). Here they come. Now you take my lead.

JIMMIE. If I took your lead, we'd both be screaming at Mrs. Werthmeyer.

KATY. Just act casual. Do what I do.

JIMMIE. I'm starting to question your leadership.

KATY. Look, you knew what you were getting into.

JIMMIE. I don't think I thought it through.

(Lights are up full now. We hear a door slam. RENNY enters with a cup of coffee, a clipboard and a metal box. She sets her keys down on a bench out front along with the rest of her things.)

RENNY. Robina Werthmeyer is on the phone right now with your Aunt Ella. What has gotten into you?

KATY. She was spying on us.

RENNY. It's six o'clock in the morning. What are the two of you doing out here at six o'clock in the morning?

KATY. We couldn't sleep.

RENNY. You've wakened the whole neighborhood. What's everyone going to think?

KATY. I lost my head.

RENNY. I hope that works for your Aunt Ella.

KATY. Mrs. Werthmeyer needs to mind her own business. Just like everyone else on this block.

RENNY. All we have to do, and you start off the day by threatening Robina Werthmeyer. As if we need her as an enemy! *(Switching gears, she is frantic with her instructions.)* Katy, I'm counting on you today. Your Grandma's estate sale starts at two o'clock. And everything from that porch needs to come out to the yard. *(JIMMIE is still wrapped in a cover and is trying to stay awake.)* Jimmie, I need you to get tables from the garage. Do you hear me? What are you doing just sitting there? It's time to get started. We've not got a minute to spare. *(RENNY heads for the porch and then turns back.)* Wait

a minute! Have you two been up all night? (*Pressing KATY.*) Have you?

KATY. It did get dark and then light again.

RENNY. Look at Jimmie. She can't even stay awake. (*Turning back to KATY.*) How could you do this? In just a few hours, we're going to have a yard full of people. Your Aunt Gene and Uncle George will be here any minute. And the realtor!

KATY. I couldn't sleep.

RENNY. Jimmie will be exhausted today.

KATY. She slept like a log.

RENNY. You'll both be exhausted. When we have so much to do, you two will be no help at all. It's a good thing we spent yesterday getting everything sorted and onto the porch. (*She points back without seeing the empty porch.*)

JIMMIE. Yeah, it's a good thing.

(*KATY gives JIMMIE an evil look.*)

RENNY. Get up, Jimmie! Get up! And don't you breathe a word of this to your Aunt Ella. Do you hear me, not a word? (*KATY gets up. JIMMIE yawns and stretches. She pulls off the cover and is wearing Grandma's fur coat. RENNY starts for the house and then turns back to the girls.*) Now let's get busy and maybe she won't notice. Go get the tables. And remember, we still have to move all of our things next door. I really need you to pitch in. (*They stare at her blankly.*) Good, then. Okay...I'm glad we had this talk. Right?

JIMMIE. Sure.

KATY. Whatever.

(*RENNY sighs, then quickly composes herself. She leaves for the porch, then turns back to KATY.*)

RENNY. Katy, what's gotten into you? (*KATY and JIMMIE look at each other. RENNY passes the porch and enters the house, then realizing that nothing is on the porch, she screams from inside the house.*) Aaaaaah! (*Running back outside the house.*) This...this porch was full. Everything. All boxed and... Last night when we left. And now, it's... It...it... what...I...oh... (*Turning back to JIMMIE and KATY.*) WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THE THINGS ON THIS PORCH?!

KATY. I don't know.

RENNY. Katy, your Aunt Ella is going to be here any minute. She's going to be furious. (*From inside the house, loudly.*) Oh, don't, please God, don't... (*She comes back onto the porch.*) What have you two done?

JIMMIE. We couldn't sleep.

RENNY. You moved everything back into that house. (*There is no answer. RENNY sits down on the step with her head in her hand.*) Oh, my Lord, a whole day's work. We killed ourselves. We literally killed ourselves. All of those things! Oh, please Lord, help me...

AUNT ELLA (*from offstage*). Good morning!

RENNY (*standing up, wiping her eyes*). There she comes. There she is. You'd better think of something. Do you hear me? You better think of something fast! (*Angrily.*) You've sabotaged me. How could you do this? Someday, when I'm old and feeble, you will look back on this... (*Completely composed, sweet as pie.*) Good morning, Aunt Ella.

(*AUNT ELLA enters from next door; she carries a sign that reads "Estate Sale" and positions the sign in the ground.*)

AUNT ELLA. There now. That's a start on the day! (*She goes to hug KATY and JIMMIE.*) So the two of you have been up all night, have you?

KATY. Mrs. Werthmeyer's crazy.

AUNT ELLA. Beyond crazy. But there's nothing wrong with her hearing...or mine.

RENNY. What did she tell you?

AUNT ELLA. The screaming told me a lot.

RENNY. She was spying on them.

JIMMIE. Katy lost her head.

AUNT ELLA. Up all night. The two of you could have been hurt. Do you know that? In this neighborhood, Katy? It scares me to death that you don't have better judgment than that.

KATY. I just wanted to be out here with Gram.

RENNY (*quietly, to ELLA*). I let Katy spread Mother's ashes in the park last night.

AUNT ELLA. I don't think even your Grandma Dorothy's safe in that park at night... (*Then hugging KATY tightly.*) ...but she loved that park. That's what she would have wanted. Right, Renny?
(*ELLA gives RENNY the nod to hug KATY as she moves to JIMMIE. RENNY hugs the girls halfheartedly and with distance.*)

RENNY. I just worried what the neighbors would think.

AUNT ELLA (*looking out at the sky*). Ah, the neighbors! Who cares about...? (*Noticing Mrs. Werthmeyer and yelling.*) Everything is under control, Robina! Not to worry! (*Under her breath.*) Old busybody.

JIMMIE. Nosy witch!

AUNT ELLA. Watch your mouth!

RENNY. That's right! If you two wouldn't have been... If she hadn't have seen... She was only... You just watch it.

AUNT ELLA (*staring at her, then...*). Well, it looks to be a good day for an estate sale. That's one good thing. After yesterday, I don't think I could make it in the rain. (*She starts for the porch, but RENNY stops her.*)

RENNY. What are you doing?

AUNT ELLA. Well, we'd best get started, don't you think? (*She continues on, RENNY stopping her.*)

RENNY. Aren't you tired? I am just beat after yesterday. And breakfast, did you eat something? You're going to need to eat something.

AUNT ELLA. Maybe you should lie down for a bit, Renny. You don't act like you've had enough sleep.

RENNY (*grabbing the portrait sitting by the step among JIMMIE's stash*). Look at our old family picture.

AUNT ELLA. Yes, I've seen it.

JIMMIE. Who's the fat girl?

AUNT ELLA. That was your Aunt Gene.

JIMMIE (*with the megaphone among her stash*). Hey everybody, look how fat Aunt Gene was!

AUNT ELLA. Put that down. You'll wake the neighbors.

RENNY. I think they're up. (*ELLA takes the megaphone. RENNY grabs it.*) Jimmie, where did you find this megaphone? Isn't this something? What did Mother need with a megaphone? Tell us the story!

AUNT ELLA. What story?

RENNY. About the megaphone.

AUNT ELLA (*pulls away from RENNY*). I don't know the story!

RENNY. Don't go up there!

AUNT ELLA. Why not?

RENNY (*looking at KATY and JIMMIE*). I...I don't know.
(*ELLA goes to the porch and into the house. RENNY, KATY and JIMMIE wait apprehensively. ELLA lets loose a yell louder than RENNY's.*)

AUNT ELLA. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

(*She comes back on to the porch and fiercely, but without a word, spreads her outstretched hands to her side and glares at RENNY, KATY and JIMMIE, demanding an explanation.*)

RENNY (*looking at JIMMIE and KATY*). They couldn't sleep.

AUNT ELLA. Katy, Jimmie, did you do this? Did you? Did you take everything that we labored over yesterday and just unravel it? Oh, my heart. I don't think my heart can take this.

RENNY (*rushing to ELLA*). Ella, sit! Please.

AUNT ELLA. I want someone to explain this. Do you hear me? I want someone to explain. (*Beat.*)

RENNY (*next to her as she sits on the step*). I found the silver.

KATY. You want an explanation! Okay. Okay, I'll give you an explanation. I'm not going to let you sell her things.

AUNT ELLA (*after a beat*). Katy, honey, we've been through this before.

KATY. Everything about her. Everything we have to remember her by you just want to sell off to strangers!

AUNT ELLA. Katy, your grandmother's death has been hard on all of us. I know you're hurting.

KATY. No, it's not right. She's been gone two weeks and you just want to put everything out here in the yard for sale.

AUNT ELLA. Honey, I said you could take whatever you wanted.

KATY. That's not the point!

AUNT ELLA. Anything you want to remember her by.

KATY. I want the house.

AUNT ELLA. Katy!

KATY. ...and all her things.

AUNT ELLA. Katy, we can't do that. We can't.

KATY. I'll stay here then. I will stay here. And everything will be just like it used to be.

AUNT ELLA (*looking at RENNY for help, then...*). Katy, we're just going next door to my house. You and Jimmie will have your own rooms.

KATY. I don't want my own room. I want the room I've always had.

AUNT ELLA. Renny...?

RENNY. Katy, we're going to sleep at Aunt Ella's tonight.

KATY. I'm going to sleep where I always have—in Gramma's bed.

RENNY. Katy, the estate sale starts in...

KATY. I don't care about the estate sale!

JIMMIE. Why do we have to have an estate sale?

KATY. So a bunch of greedy strangers can come and scavenge through Gramma's things!

AUNT ELLA. Katy, that's a terrible thing to say. We have to sell the house. (*KATY storms off to the porch, where she sits down. ELLA looks at RENNY and then at JIMMIE.*) Jimmie, why are you wearing that fur coat in this heat?

JIMMIE. It covers up my underwear. (*Opens the fur coat to reveal a pair of old-fashioned long-underwear.*)

AUNT ELLA. Take it off.