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Product Code A0801.1

AGING GRACE

A Short Play

by

Lynn-Steven Johanson

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Aging Grace

by Lynn-Steven Johanson

SETTING:

The present; a park bench in a small Midwestern city

CHARACTERS:

GRACE; 82, and in early stages of Alzheimer's disease

LAINIE; 47, a university professor; her daughter

SUZANNE; 44, her other daughter

ETC.

AGING GRACE was first presented by Catch A Star Theatrical Players as part of their National One Act Play Festival in Beaumont, California, on June 22, 2012 with the following cast:

Grace..... Sallie Smelker

Lainie.....Pam Bernard

Suzanne.....Paige Polcene

It was directed by Donnell Powell.

Aging Grace
by Lynn-Steven Johanson

AGING GRACE

(AT RISE: A park in a small Midwestern city on a mild summer day. There are two benches, the type with metal frames and wooden slats. Nearby is a trash receptacle. LAINIE, a trim, well-kept woman of 47, enters with a high-end digital camera slung over her shoulder and carrying a grocery bag and a cup of coffee. Beneath her seemingly easy-going exterior lies an intensity and anger that she carefully suppresses. Accompanying her is her mother, GRACE, who is 82 years old. She carries a paper coffee cup with a lid on it. Physically GRACE seems spry for her age, but her short-term memory loss belies the fact that she is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. LAINIE consults her watch, stops, and sets the grocery bag and coffee cup on the bench. She pulls a cellular phone from its holder on her belt.)

LAINIE

Let's stop a second, okay?

GRACE

How come?

LAINIE

I have to make a call.

GRACE

What? You can't do it from home? *(LAINIE ignores her question; pause)* Seems like everybody's got one of those things nowadays.

LAINIE

You want one? I'll get you one if—

GRACE

Good heavens, no. What would I do with something like that?

(LAINIE dials a number and places the phone up to her ear.)

LAINIE

Talk to people.

GRACE

My regular phone is just fine. Besides, those things are going to give everybody brain cancer.

LAINIE

Brain can—?

GRACE

You wait and see. There will be an epidemic of brain cancer twenty years from now—mark my words.

LAINIE

Where'd you hear that?

GRACE

I don't know. Must've read it somewhere.

LAINIE

Mm.

GRACE

Or maybe Beatrice told me. I don't remember.

LAINIE

She ought to know. She knows everything else.

(GRACE laughs. LAINIE flips her phone shut.)

GRACE

What's the matter?

(LAINIE takes a drink from her coffee. She makes a face as it is much too strong for her liking.)

LAINIE

No answer.

GRACE

Who you trying to call?

LAINIE

Suzanne.

GRACE

Well, she's at the house.

LAINIE

You said she was out jogging. So, I'm calling her cell phone.

(GRACE puts her coffee cup down on the bench.)

GRACE

Oh, yeah. She has one, too, doesn't she? *(Looks into the grocery sack)* What did you say you wanted this stuff for?

LAINIE

Chinese food. Kung-Pao chicken.

GRACE

That's right. You going to make it tonight?

LAINIE

You said you wanted me to stir-fry, remember?

GRACE

Good. I like Chinese food. But I don't like it too spicy.

LAINIE

I know. Not too spicy.

GRACE

(Rising) Well, we should probably get home.

LAINIE

(Looks offstage and waves) There she is.

GRACE

Runs every day. She's going to wear out her knees. I tried to tell her but you know how she is.

LAINIE

Well, they're her knees. If she wants to wear them out ...

GRACE

I guess they are...

(LAINIE turns on her camera, removes the lens cap, and starts shooting photos offstage. SUZANNE enters walking, cooling down from her run. She is 48 and prettier than her sister. She wears expensive running clothes and looks professionally manicured even through her perspiration.)

SUZANNE

Hi, Lainie.

LAINIE

(Snapping another photo) Hi.

SUZANNE

Don't take pictures of me. I look like hell.

LAINIE

You never know when and where you might find an interesting composition. Maybe I'll do a new series called... "The Sweat of a Woman."

SUZANNE

I thought maybe you'd done that one already.

(LAINIE laughs, crosses to SUZANNE, and they hug. GRACE walks over and puts her arms around both LAINIE and SUZANNE at the same time.)

GRACE

It's nice to have you two girls home again.

LAINIE

At the same time, no less.

SUZANNE

It's always good to be here, Mom.

GRACE

I should be getting home. The chicken might spoil if I don't put in the refrigerator.

LAINIE

You want me to walk with you?

GRACE

What for? You think I'm an old lady or something?

LAINIE

Of course not.

GRACE

Well, I am. But it's only three blocks so I think I can manage.

SUZANNE

I'll be home in a little bit.

LAINIE

So will I.

GRACE

Don't worry about me. Come home whenever you're ready.

(GRACE starts to exit.)

LAINIE

(Grabbing GRACE's coffee cup) Oh, you want your coffee?

GRACE

No. Too strong for me.

(GRACE exits with the grocery bag. SUZANNE and LAINIE watch her leave.)

SUZANNE

Give it to me, I'll drink it. *(LAINIE hands her the coffee cup.)* How have you been?

LAINIE

Can't complain. Wouldn't do any good if I did.

SUZANNE

And the university's been treating you well?

LAINIE

Mm-hm. I was asked to apply for the Dean of Fine Arts position last month.

SUZANNE

Really!

LAINIE

Yeah. But, I told them to go to hell.

SUZANNE

Why would you do that? Wouldn't that mean a large boost in salary?

LAINIE

It would, but who needs all that political bullshit, you know? Besides, I don't want to be behind a desk.

SUZANNE

You're an artist, not a paper pusher.

LAINIE

Precisely. *(Beat)* Oh, I had two photographs accepted for a show in New York in January.

SUZANNE

That's exciting.

LAINIE

And we're going to visit Arizona next month. I want to shoot some desert sunsets, and Jane wants to hike the Grand Canyon, so...

SUZANNE

Ew—hot.

LAINIE

I know, but the best sunsets are the ones during the summer months. It should prove interesting. Jane's never been to the desert, so she doesn't know about the heat...yet.

(SUZANNE takes a swig of coffee.)

SUZANNE

That's good coffee. *(Beat)* I take it Jane didn't come with you.

LAINIE

No. You know how Mom is. She's still under the impression that Jane is my "roommate." Besides, she's teaching a writing workshop at the moment.

SUZANNE

I read her article in *The Nation* last year.

LAINIE

Really. I didn't think you approved—or cared.

SUZANNE

No, that's not it at all. I'm not the homophobe in the family. She's a good writer.

LAINIE

Yeah, she is. She had an article published in the *Windy City Times* last month, and she has another one scheduled for publication in *Vanity Fair* this fall.

SUZANNE

Wow! Busy lady.

LAINIE

And how's that pet Neanderthal you have at stud? "Craig" I think you call him?

SUZANNE

He's home.

LAINIE

Have the drag marks on his knuckles calloused over?

SUZANNE

Come on, Lainie! He's gotten better.

LAINIE

You mean he no longer thinks of me as "Twatasaurus Rex?"

SUZANNE

No, he still thinks of you that way.

LAINIE

Ah.

SUZANNE

He's no longer vocal about it. He's learned to keep his opinions to himself.

LAINIE

Well, it's nice to know he's evolved.

(LAINIE sets her camera down on the bench, picks up her coffee cup, and takes a swallow.)

SUZANNE

He had to stay home—keep on top of the kitchen remodeling.

LAINIE

Remodeling—congratulations on your mess.

SUZANNE

No kidding. It's turned into a real pain.

LAINIE

It usually does.

SUZANNE

He called and said when he came downstairs this morning, the two tile guys were grouting the backsplash with the wrong color grout. They're Russian, and they don't speak much English, so he had to call their supervisor in to translate. They weren't too happy about scraping it out and starting over.

LAINIE

Too bad I wasn't there. I speak Russian pretty well. Tell Craig he should say to them, "Kakogo cherta ty delaesh?"

SUZANNE

(Enunciating it badly) Kakogo cherta ty delaesh. What's that mean?

LAINIE

Basically, "What the hell are you doing?"

SUZANNE

Oh, yeah, right! Probably get him beaten up.

LAINIE

That's the point.

SUZANNE

Anyway, I had to go for a run to calm down.

(SUZANNE puts her foot up on the edge of the bench and begins loosening her shoe laces.)

LAINIE

I wish I had your discipline. Every time I think about exercising, I pour myself a glass of wine and sit down until the urge goes away.

SUZANNE

Whatever works... What time did you get in?

LAINIE

About two hours ago.

SUZANNE

Two hours?

LAINIE

Before I took Mom to the grocery store, I stopped at Thelma's Cafe and drank coffee with all the retired farmers.

SUZANNE

Is that dive still open?

LAINIE

Oh, yeah. Hasn't changed a bit. Looks the same, smells the same. You're drinking her coffee.

SUZANNE

Really. Hm. She knows how to make good coffee, I'll give her that.

LAINIE

(Laughs) The clientele is interesting. This morning, some guy with "Darrell" written on his shirt, was showing his buddies some smut magazine...

SUZANNE

Dear god!

LAINIE

...acting like a bunch of twelve-year-olds with a Playboy.

SUZANNE

Grown men.

LAINIE

"Men"—yes. "Grown"—that may be a stretch. *(Pause)* Time has really taken its toll on Dad's old cronies. Only a handful left.

SUZANNE

Ten years.

Ten years?

LAINIE

Since Dad's been gone.

SUZANNE

Oh. Yeah. September twenty-ninth.

LAINIE

Twenty-sixth.

SUZANNE

Sixth?

LAINIE

Yeah. Funeral was on the twenty-ninth.

SUZANNE

Oh. Yeah, you're right.

LAINIE

How could you forget that?

SUZANNE

I didn't forget. I just don't like thinking about it, although he insists on wandering in and out of my thoughts every day. *(Pause)* So...What about Mom?

LAINIE

Ugh! This whole thing is driving me crazy.

SUZANNE

What...in particular?

LAINIE

I called her last week, and she was making absolutely no sense. I asked her if she was going to go to Ida's birthday party, and she said she couldn't because she had to answer the phone for the funeral home.

SUZANNE

The funeral home.

LAINIE

Yeah.

SUZANNE

Mom and Dad stopped working for the funeral director twenty years ago.

LAINIE

SUZANNE

I know that. So, I got to thinking, maybe she got bored and needed something to do, and I called the funeral home. They didn't know anything about it.

LAINIE

She sounds okay when I call her, but she doesn't talk about much anymore. Asks how I'm doing over and over again. Last month she asked about Chuck—which I thought was strange because we've been divorced for twenty years. And she liked him even less than I did.

SUZANNE

Well, she was just "out of it" when I talked to her. So I called Dr. Henderson, and we had her taken off that new Alzheimer's medication. It was making her worse instead of better.

LAINIE

Worse?

SUZANNE

It does that to some people.

LAINIE

So, has there been any improvement?

SUZANNE

Some. I mean, she's not talking crazy anymore.

LAINIE

Thank goodness for that.

SUZANNE

And her friends...

LAINIE

What about them?

SUZANNE

They've practically abandoned her. They don't stop by to see her or to invite her places.

LAINIE

Really.

SUZANNE

And I'm so angry at Jolene I could just about... About six months ago, I started paying her a hundred dollars a month to look in on Mom now and then, you know, call her every day to make sure she's all right, help her out if she needs anything, take her to the doctor, things like that.

Yeah?
LAINIE

And she hasn't done a damn thing.
SUZANNE

Nothing?
LAINIE

No.
SUZANNE

What's she do? Just cash your checks?
LAINIE

Yes!
SUZANNE

What a— Maybe I should talk to her.
LAINIE

Too late. I fired her.
SUZANNE

You fired—
LAINIE

That's what I said.
SUZANNE

I don't know if I would have done that. I mean, shouldn't you have had a talk with her—
LAINIE

Let me tell you something. That woman is a piece of work.
SUZANNE

Given how much Jolene needs the money, you'd think that a simple threat to stop the checks would have motivated her.
LAINIE

Mom thinks she's such a good friend, but she's really just a lazy, self-centered bitch who could care less about anyone else.
SUZANNE

I still think you were a little too abrupt.
LAINIE

SUZANNE

I'm not putting up with it, Lainie.

LAINIE

I assume she wasn't amused.

SUZANNE

Oh, she got all huffy with me because she's not going to get her monthly stipend anymore. Must think she deserves a free ride or something.

LAINIE

What about Louise?

SUZANNE

She does a lot for Mom the way it is. She's a great neighbor, but I don't want to impose on her anymore. And she goes to visit her daughters out in Boston and stays for a month or more. So, she's not always around.

LAINIE

If mom was ready for a nursing home that would be one thing...

SUZANNE

I don't know about that.

LAINIE

What?

SUZANNE

She's got other problems.

LAINIE

What are you talking—?

SUZANNE

She doesn't eat.

LAINIE

What do you mean she doesn't eat?

SUZANNE

Just what I said. Instead of fixing a meal, she eats a bowl of cereal. She's lost eight pounds since the last time I was here.

LAINIE

Maybe her appetite problem has something to do with the medication she's taking.

SUZANNE

No, it's her age. She doesn't have an appetite anymore.

LAINIE

Well, she seems to eat when I visit. And she cooks.

SUZANNE

For you. She cooks and eats when I'm here too. But she won't do it for herself.

LAINIE

And you know this how?

SUZANNE

She told me! She said she isn't hungry. I looked in her refrigerator and there was nothing to eat. Nothing! No vegetables, no fruit, no meat. I went up to the grocery store and bought her some food yesterday. And she won't drink her supplement either. If she would just drink a can of that every day, she would be getting some good nutrition. I'm telling you, I'm at my wits end.

LAINIE

She can't keep her blood sugar in check if she doesn't eat.

SUZANNE

I know. Her diabetes is going to get worse if she doesn't take better care of herself. And when she does eat, it's stuff she shouldn't—like ice cream, canned peaches in that syrupy sauce.

LAINIE

God.

SUZANNE

Oh, something else. The county health nurse said she has been hiding her medication in the hall closet.

LAINIE

Hiding her medication?

SUZANNE

She found a plastic bag full of her pills on the closet floor.

LAINIE

For god's sake!

SUZANNE

That's what I thought.

LAINIE

Well, did she ask her about it?

SUZANNE

Yeah, and she said, "I don't know how they got there."

LAINIE

Jesus Christ!

SUZANNE

It's embarrassing. She's so stubborn, and I can't seem to get her to do a thing.

LAINIE

That's crazy!

SUZANNE

I know.

LAINIE

Sounds like she needs daily monitoring.

SUZANNE

She does. But it's not like either one of us can move in with her.

LAINIE

We need to get somebody.

SUZANNE

Like who? How are you going to find somebody willing to move in just to look after her? We can't afford a live-in nurse. Besides, she wouldn't have it.

LAINIE

Maybe I should have a talk with her.

SUZANNE

It won't help. She'll get mad and tell you to mind your own business.

LAINIE

Oh, come on—

SUZANNE

That's what she told me.

LAINIE

You're kidding!

SUZANNE

She accused me of "meddling" and told me to stop being so bossy.

LAINIE

Well, you are bossy.

SUZANNE

I know I can—

LAINIE

And pushy. She doesn't like that either.

SUZANNE

What do you suggest I do?

LAINIE

Try another tactic.

SUZANNE

I tried every tactic known to man. I've pleaded, I've cajoled, I've reasoned, I've humored, I've nagged. Hell, I even broke down and cried once. Nothing works.

LAINIE

She's a proud, stubborn woman, and she's not about to give up her independence—not without a fight, anyway.

SUZANNE

You can see that I am frustrated to the point of...

LAINIE

So, you want her to go into a nursing home.

SUZANNE

I think it's come to that.

LAINIE

Jesus.

SUZANNE

I'm not kidding.

LAINIE

It's that bad?

SUZANNE

Yes. If she was in a nursing home, at least I would know she was getting good care, supervised care.

LAINIE

It would break her heart if she had to leave her house and move into the nursing home. Her home is everything to her.

SUZANNE

Don't you think I know that?

LAINIE

And, how much savings does she have—enough to keep her for what? Six months?

SUZANNE

If that.

LAINIE

And when that money's gone, the state will step in and sell off her house, her belongings, cash in her life insurance... And when she's gone—nothing. They will have sucked up everything except for the few keepsakes and mementos we would take.

SUZANNE

I could care less about any inheritance. It's mom's—

LAINIE

That's easy for you to say. You make over six figures a year. I don't.

SUZANNE

(Beat) I can't believe you—

LAINIE

Look. I'm not planning to get rich off my mother's estate, but it would be nice to have something left to give her a decent burial and leave a memorial to her church or the community center. Hell, she's lived here since she was nine years old!

SUZANNE

I need to talk with an attorney about that. I think there's some provision for a funeral fund.

LAINIE

We should have had her transfer the house to our names right after Dad died.

SUZANNE

I know.

LAINIE

What's it been? Three years since we had the deed transferred?

SUZANNE

Something like that.

LAINIE

And it doesn't become officially ours for five years, right? So that means we have another two years to go.

SUZANNE

Right.

LAINIE

Wonderful, just fucking wonderful!

SUZANNE

Lainie—

LAINIE

It's unfair. We should have—

SUZANNE

Maybe an attorney can figure out some legal way to—

LAINIE

I can understand that there are people who try to protect their assets so they can leech off the government. But this is different. She doesn't own three farms or have a huge stack of treasury notes sitting in a safety deposit box.

SUZANNE

I know that. You don't have to preach at me.

LAINIE

I'm not preaching!

SUZANNE

Okay then. Ranting. There's no sense "ranting" over something we have no control of.

LAINIE

Ranting...Christ!

SUZANNE

We wouldn't have this problem if her attorney had been doing his job. He should have been advising her about this kind of stuff.

LAINIE

Is old man Morris still her attorney?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

He's getting long in the tooth—he should have retired years ago.

SUZANNE

He's incompetent and he's a misogynist. I swear, he hates women.

LAINIE

What?

SUZANNE

After dealing with him over the transfer of the house, I never want to see him or speak to him again. He was rude, I mean rude!

LAINIE

He's always had the warmth and charm of a boa constrictor but—

SUZANNE

It goes way beyond that.

LAINIE

He's always treated me all right, though.

SUZANNE

You're lucky.

LAINIE

Maybe it's pushy women like you that trip his trigger.

SUZANNE

There's that word again.

LAINIE

What?

SUZANNE

"Pushy."

LAINIE

Well, you are. I don't mean it badly.

(LAINIE starts making adjustments on her camera and walks over to the trash receptacle.)

SUZANNE

Since when did "pushy" have a positive connotation, Lainie? *(LAINIE ignores her; pause)*
Hey! Don't ignore me. Since when did "pushy" become an attribute?

LAINIE

(Turning) Okay! Poor choice of words! How about...

SUZANNE

What?

LAINIE

"Assertive." Some men can't deal with assertive women. They feel threatened and they don't respond well. I'm not making excuses for the old snake, it's just the way some guys are.

SUZANNE

I know I can come off demanding sometimes, but when you own a business like I do, you have to be tough. People are always trying to jerk you around, run you over, and harass you by threatening law suits. If they're competitors, you can hand it back to them in spades, but if they're customers, you just have to take it. You have no idea how many nasty, obnoxious people I have to contend with.

LAINIE

I can imagine.

SUZANNE

No, I don't think you can. I have to deal with that crap day in and day out.

LAINIE

(Pause) Look, not to change the subject or anything, but is Mom still driving?

SUZANNE

Only to go up town to get the mail and to go to church. Why?

LAINIE

Did you know she forgot to renew her driver's license?

SUZANNE

What?

LAINIE

She forgot to renew it.

SUZANNE

How did you know that?

LAINIE

She told me. She's taken the exam and she's failed it twice.

SUZANNE

She'll never pass it. She can't remember all that stuff anymore.

Well...

LAINIE

So she drives without a license?

SUZANNE

Yeah.

LAINIE

That's it. I'm taking away the keys.

SUZANNE

Now, wait. I don't think you should do that.

LAINIE

Why?

SUZANNE

Because she will be totally isolated and dependent on other people for everything.

LAINIE

She's not legal. Her insurance will—

SUZANNE

It can't hurt anything.

LAINIE

Lainie, it's—

SUZANNE

It's a little town. Everybody knows everybody. They take care of each other. What does it hurt if she drives five blocks to church or six blocks to the post office when the weather isn't suitable for walking? Nobody's going to rat her out to the cops.

LAINIE

She's breaking the law.

SUZANNE

So.

LAINIE

She should have a mailbox put up on her house—next to her front door like mine. And there's somebody who can pick her up and take her to church.

SUZANNE

LAINIE

The mailbox on the house might be a good idea. But that's not the point. It's important to her to get out of the house—so she doesn't have to be alone all the time. Up town for the mail or Thelma's for a cup of coffee—it's a major social event. It's important she does that while she still can.

SUZANNE

It scares me that she's driving anyway. What if she forgets to buckle her seat belt? Or fill the car with gas? What if she has an accident? Or hurts somebody?

LAINIE

She doesn't drive out of town anymore. She probably doesn't drive over twenty miles an hour. What's it going to get hurt?

SUZANNE

She's eighty-two years old and her mind is failing.

LAINIE

She still functions fine at home, doesn't she?

SUZANNE

Well—

LAINIE

Okay. Does she keep the house clean?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

Does she pay her bills?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

Does she do her laundry?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

Can she still cook?

SUZANNE

If she feels like it.

LAINIE

It doesn't sound like she needs to be put into a nursing home to me. She functions adequately in her own home. Instead of a nursing home, what about some sort of assisted care facility?

SUZANNE

There aren't any close. She told me she absolutely did not want to move to one of those places. And she would only consider moving into a nursing home because she could be close to people she knows—"when the time comes."

LAINIE

When the time comes.

SUZANNE

And believe me, she does not think the time has come.

LAINIE

Well, I—

SUZANNE

And you know what? Pleasant Plains doesn't have anything but the nursing home.

LAINIE

What about the new addition? I thought that was supposed to be some new assisted living residence for—

SUZANNE

No.

LAINIE

So, what's the new addition for?

SUZANNE

It's for retirees but it's not assisted living.

LAINIE

Great.

SUZANNE

The closest assisted care facilities are thirty miles away. She wouldn't know a soul.

LAINIE

Christ! Richest country on the face of the earth and they would rather spend billions making weapons and give tax cuts to the rich rather than take care of its people. It's a god damned disgrace!

SUZANNE

Don't go off on one of your liberal tangents.

LAINIE

Hey, it's—

SUZANNE

I'm just saying—

LAINIE

Liberal, hell! It's a humanitarian issue. It's a question of responsibility to some of our most vulnerable citizens. If that's liberal, then I'm damned glad I am one.

SUZANNE

(Beat) Lainie . . .

LAINIE

If Dad's health problems hadn't eaten up most of their savings, it would be different.

SUZANNE

Please.

LAINIE

His medication alone was over eight hundred a month.

SUZANNE

I know that. You don't have to—

LAINIE

How are you supposed to get by when your social security check is nine hundred dollars a month?

SUZANNE

(Pause; changing her tone) I called the administrator at Pleasant Plains. They have an opening. But they won't hold it more than a week because someone else wants it if we don't take it.

LAINIE

No.

SUZANNE

She would be better off.

LAINIE

What are you going to do, drag her down there kicking and screaming?

SUZANNE

If we have to.

LAINIE

"We" is not the appropriate pronoun. (*Pointing*) You should use first person.

SUZANNE

So we leave her to waste away from neglect and die in her own home?

LAINIE

Of course not.

SUZANNE

Then what?

LAINIE

What's available? The county health nurse sees her once a week right now, right?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

Sounds like all she needs is monitoring. At least for the time being.

SUZANNE

Who's going to do it?

LAINIE

Well...

SUZANNE

Neither one of us can move in with her. Do you want her living with you?

LAINIE

Hypothetically, if she had no place else to go, then she could come live with us. Do you want her living with you?

SUZANNE

No. That simply wouldn't work. We're gone too much of the time.

LAINIE

It doesn't matter. She would never agree to leave her house and live with either of us full time anyway. So the question is moot. Can't we get someone here in town?

SUZANNE

Like who? They don't have baby-sitters for adults.

LAINIE

There ought to be some kind of—elder day care for those who—

SUZANNE

In the best of all possible worlds, yes. But there isn't, so stop getting yourself all worked up.

(Beat)

LAINIE

Aren't there some kind of services provided by the state? You've looked into this, right? I mean, what's available?

SUZANNE

There's a program for the elderly and disabled who can't get out to do their grocery shopping. A provider will come in once a week to help make out a grocery list and do their shopping for them. And they also have a program where a home health care worker comes in and sees to any hygiene needs—they help them bathe, shampoo their hair, change their bedding...

LAINIE

That would help. Are there any restrictions regarding income?

SUZANNE

She qualifies. I checked.

LAINIE

Good. Then don't you think we should try out these programs before we take more drastic measures?

SUZANNE

She'll resist. She won't cooperate.

LAINIE

She'll have to.

SUZANNE

How are you going to make her?

LAINIE

Tell her she'll have to cooperate and let people help her.

SUZANNE

She'll throw a fit.

LAINIE

How do you know?

SUZANNE

She will.

LAINIE

Maybe she won't if I do it. She's already pissed off at you. She might be more inclined to listen to me.

SUZANNE

Go ahead. But I don't want you getting angry and hurting her feelings. She's a sensitive person.

LAINIE

I know she's sensitive. What makes you think I would do something like that?

SUZANNE

Because you have a short fuse—always have had.

LAINIE

Come on—

SUZANNE

I grew up with you, remember?

LAINIE

That was then.

SUZANNE

(Scoffing) Ha.

LAINIE

I get frustrated with myself—that's when I blow. I don't let it show around others. Not anymore.

SUZANNE

Okay.

LAINIE

And speaking of hurting her feelings, I think plopping her into a room in a nursing home is pretty insensitive.

SUZANNE

I'm not planning on "plopping" her anywhere. You make me sound like the Queen of Mean!

LAINIE

That's not what I meant at all. What I meant—

SUZANNE

I know what you meant.

LAINIE

No, you don't. Only I know what I meant—you can only interpret. And you interpreted incorrectly.

SUZANNE

All right. I misinterpreted. I was wrong. I should be whipped with a cat o' nine tails.

LAINIE

Flogged.

SUZANNE

What?

LAINIE

The technical term is "flogged" not "whipped."

SUZANNE

Okay, Professor Jacobson. I stand corrected...again!

LAINIE

(Getting the last word) Sorry. I have a thing for accuracy

SUZANNE

You can't keep it to yourself?

LAINIE

I guess not. *(Pause)* I have a question for you, if you don't mind.

SUZANNE

By all means.

LAINIE

If you were planning to put Mom in the nursing home, how were you going to get her there?

SUZANNE

I thought I would take her down there to visit Ida, and as we were about to leave, I would show the room to her and tell her she was staying.

LAINIE

Jesus H. Christ!

SUZANNE

What?

LAINIE

That's cruel!

SUZANNE

Cruel?

LAINIE

Yes, cruel. To trick her like that. And you don't want to upset her?

SUZANNE

I wouldn't just say, "Here's your room, Mom. See ya."

LAINIE

I would hope not. For crying out loud, I—

SUZANNE

Do you have a better idea? *(Pause)* Well?

LAINIE

Not at the moment. But I think I could come up with one.

SUZANNE

You'd better start thinking about it because it's going to come down to that at some point. And it's not far away.

LAINIE

When the time comes, we can talk about it with her and gradually move her toward accepting it. If Dr. Henderson would talk with her, and the county health nurse would discuss it with her, and maybe her minister—what's his name?

SUZANNE

Pastor Holmes.

LAINIE

Then maybe she will come to grips with the fact that it's inevitable, and she'll be more inclined to accept it.

SUZANNE

She already knows it's inevitable. Besides, she probably won't remember those conversations anyway, given how bad her memory is getting.

LAINIE

I simply think we're overreacting here.

SUZANNE

We? You mean "me," don't you?

LAINIE

Come on.

SUZANNE

Go ahead and say it.

LAINIE

Okay. You're overreacting. Are you happy now?

SUZANNE

Just say what you mean.

LAINIE

(Pause) Bickering like this is getting us nowhere. *(Beat)* Let's just stop it, okay?

SUZANNE

Bickering?

LAINIE

Yeah.

SUZANNE

(A laugh without mirth) You know something? We're still no different than we were when we were kids.

LAINIE

Fighting, you mean?

SUZANNE

Yeah.

LAINIE

I guess we're not.

SUZANNE

Why did we fight all the time, anyway?

LAINIE

I'm forty-seven years old. I can't remember specific instances thirty-five years after the fact. Jesus!

SUZANNE

You just don't want to remember.

LAINIE

Maybe I don't want to be responsible for giving a forty-five-year-old woman an inferiority complex.

SUZANNE

Forty-four!

LAINIE

Sorry.

SUZANNE

I won't be forty-five until—

LAINIE and SUZANNE, *Together*

January.

LAINIE

I know. I know. Forget I said it.

SUZANNE

I will.

LAINIE

Good.

SUZANNE

And something else. You always got the last word. You still do. (*LAINIE shrugs; SUZANNE points at her.*) That shrug counts as a word!

LAINIE

Does not!

SUZANNE

Does too!

LAINIE

It does not!

SUZANNE

I'll bet you don't do that with Jane.

LAINIE

I'm not aware if I do or don't. If it bothered her, I can tell you that she would have called me on it.

SUZANNE

Maybe you only do it with me.

LAINIE

Oh, bullshit!

SUZANNE

Well, you don't act as though you like me very much.

LAINIE

How can you say that? I like you, for Christ's sake! You're my sister, my only sibling. What do you want me to say?

SUZANNE

Never mind.

LAINIE

If you have issues...

SUZANNE

Issues?

LAINIE

Yeah. "Issues."

SUZANNE

You're talking to me about issues?

LAINIE

Yeah. Maybe you should see a counselor or something. Get it figured out.

SUZANNE

I don't need a counselor.

LAINIE

It couldn't hurt.

SUZANNE

I said, I don't need a counselor. End of subject!

LAINIE

Fine.

(Again, LAINIE got the last word.)

SUZANNE

Ugh!

LAINIE

I'm sorry. I got the last word again, didn't I? *(SUZANNE gives her a glance.)* All right! I should be "flogged".

SUZANNE

God!

LAINIE

I'm sorry. I apologize. *(Pause; SUZANNE is silent.)* Seriously, I don't even know I'm doing it. *(Pause)* I mean it. I apologize.

(Another pause; finally, SUZANNE speaks.)

SUZANNE

We are so different. I can't understand you.

LAINIE

Nothing complicated about me.

SUZANNE

Everybody's complicated.

(LAINIE stifles a verbal response. Instead she gives a non-verbal "whatever" gesture.)

LAINIE

(Beat) So...What about Mom? What are we going to do?

SUZANNE

We seem to be at an impasse. You don't want her in a nursing home, so...

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes