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Who Gets the Granny?

A One-Act Comedy
by
Christina Hamlett

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Who Gets the Granny?

by Christina Hamlett

CHARACTERS

4 Women / 2 Men

MONA: *50ish; the oldest sister*

BRITTA: *Late 40s; the career woman*

ALAN: *45ish; Britta's snarky husband*

SHELLY: *40s; Mona and Britta's unemployed sister*

BENJAMIN: *Late 30s; the actor*

COURTNEY: *30s; the pretty stepsister*

PLAYING TIME:

30 minutes

CIRCA AND SETTING:

Present day; Hampstead

THE SET:

All action transpires in Mona's living room. The house itself with its high ceilings and upstage bay windows looking out on a park suggests the Edwardian era but Mona's decorating style is that of a woman who clearly never embraced a unifying theme.

The fabrics of the centerstage loveseat and armchairs are a riot of odd colors made even stranger by the haphazard placement of granny square afghans and plump satin pillows with Asian motifs. The coffee table is stacked with magazines and an assortment of books. A mobile is tucked in there somewhere as well.

The mantle of the fireplace stage left is as cluttered with memorabilia as is the wall above with its mix of vintage portraits, modern photos and kitschy folk art. A patched leather ottoman and a beanbag chair downstage provide extra seating.

A dining table with four chairs stage right have seen better days but have obviously been retained for nostalgia. Cookies, cheese, crackers, mixed nuts, a pitcher of lemonade and mismatched glasses have been set out on the brightly colored runner.

Entrances and exits are made through matching arched doorways upstage right and upstage left.

Adding to the design nightmare is a suit of armor downstage right which appears to be guarding an elephant foot vase with bright pink painted toes and full of brolleys.

Who Gets the Granny

by Christina Hamlett

SETTING: *MONA's living room.*

AT RISE: *An impatient BRITTA, wearing a stylish jumpsuit and tasteful but expensive jewelry, is standing downstage left and in the midst of a call on her cell phone. Her husband, ALAN, wears slacks, an open shirt and blazer, and is standing by the dining room table opening a bottle of wine.*

BRITTA

Well, if Gustead's is going to be difficult getting the calla lilies I want, you're just going to have to call Renetta's and tell them I said so. Honestly, Deanne, how do some of these people stay in business? Uh-huh. Uh-huh. All right, have I left anything out? Oh right, the final headcount. I think it's sixteen but let me check.

(Snaps fingers to get her husband's attention)

Darling? Are the Bingham's a "yay" or "nay"?

ALAN

Definite nay. I told you already. They're leaving for Cancun.

BRITTA

(Back to her call)

Sixteen it is then. Call me if there are any problems. Thanks, luv.

ALAN has opened the wine and looks in disdain at the glasses.

ALAN

Where does she keep the good glasses?

BRITTA

Locked up. You know she only brings the Waterford out for holidays and special occasions.

ALAN

Fine.

(Holds up two glasses)

You want to be Tweety-Bird or Sylvester?

BRITTA

Alan?

ALAN

Hmm?

BRITTA

It's only one afternoon out of your life. Can you please promise to just blend in and not be an ass?

ALAN

Which do you want? In this family, it's impossible to accommodate both your requests...

Further argument is pre-empted by the arrival of BENJAMIN and COURTNEY from upstage left. BENJAMIN, the actor, has perfect hair and wears skinny jeans and a black and gold velour Nehru jacket which looks as if he has just come from a lead-role performance of Hamlet. COURTNEY wears a smart designer suit in black. She's an attractive young woman but might not fare well in a battle of wits.

BENJAMIN

No contest. It's David Tenant. Peter Capaldi was fair enough but no, I still say Tenant.

COURTNEY

(Rolls her eyes)

Soooo typical of a man! Jodie Whittaker--now she was epically groundbreaking.

BRITTA

(Puzzled)

Who are you talking about?

BENJAMIN

Exactly! Dr. Who. Who played him the best? I say Tenant and this one's going all *(Finger quotes)* "femme-tard".

COURTNEY

(Indignantly)

Nothing in the rules says a Time Lord can't be a woman.

BRITTA

Is that show even still on?

COURTNEY

Duh. Time Lords are timeless.

ALAN

(Musing)

I'd have made a good Time Lord.

BRITTA

Ah yes, a legend in his own mind. You two want some wine? Benjamin?

BENJAMIN

(Waves off the offer)

I'm juicing.

(Crosses to table)

Is that lemonade?

ALAN

Either that or piss in a pitcher. Knock yourself out.

BRITTA

(To BENJAMIN)

He's in a mood. Just ignore him, sweetie.

BENJAMIN

Don't I always?

BENJAMIN proceeds to take nibbles of everything set out.

BRITTA

Courtney?

COURTNEY

(Indicates ALAN's glass)

What have you got?

ALAN

An amusing Margaux my broker recommended.

COURTNEY shrugs as she crosses toward him.

COURTNEY

Whatever.

(To BRITTA)

So where's Mona?

BRITTA

Fussing in the kitchen. *(Beat)* You could go help her...?

COURTNEY

(Indifferently)

Or not. What about Shelly? Mona said it was a family meeting. Something to do with Granny.

BRITTA

On her way.

BRITTA (*Cont'd*)

(*Looks at watch*)

You know how directionally challenged she is. Anyway, we've lots to talk about once everyone's here.

COURTNEY

You know to be honest I'm not sure why I'm included in any of this. I'm just the step-sib.

BRITTA

Nonsense! You're as much a part of this family as everyone.

COURTNEY

But it's not like I even know her that well.

BENJAMIN

(*Snidely*)

Though well enough to let her pay your full tuition at uni.

COURTNEY

Oh stuff it! You're just jealous she saw my potential.

BENJAMIN

As if!

ALAN is amused by the fractious exchange.

ALAN

(*To BRITTA*)

We should do this more often. Speaking of which...

BRITTA

Yes?

ALAN

Why should I have to be here if Dwight doesn't? You're all the flesh-and-blooders. Dwight and I only married in.

BRITTA

You heard what Mona said. He's in his man-cave and not to be disturbed.

COURTNEY

What do men do in man-caves anyway? I've always wondered.

ALAN

Besides smoke cigars and watch porn?

If BRITTA heard this, she chooses to ignore it.

BRITTA

Men have hobbies and enjoy their alone-time same as anyone.

ALAN

(To COURTNEY)

I rest my case...

A breathless SHELLY bursts in from upstage left. Her hair is a riot of frizzy curls and she wears a gauzy Bohemian dress with scarves, lots of beads, large dangling earrings with feathers, and high-top tennis shoes. She also carries a messy canvas bag with all manner of Zodiac signs painted on it. Oddly enough, SHELLY is the only one whose ensemble actually fits the living room decor.

SHELLY

Oh my God! I'm not late, am I?

ALAN

(Looking askance at her outfit)

If you mean for the 1960s--

BRITTA shoots him a warning look.

SHELLY

I just came from the most awesome job interview!

BRITTA

(Also questions the weird outfit)

Oh, honey, don't tell me that's what you wore?

SHELLY

I read an article online that said for interviews you should always dress for the job you want.

If there were a collective thought bubble over everyone's heads, you can just tell they're all dying to make guesses. It's BENJAMIN who finally breaks the awkward silence.

BENJAMIN

Okay, I'll bite. What job is it?

SHELLY

(Very excited)

Well, The Herald is advertising for someone to replace the horoscopes girl, Madam Ruth. Poor thing. It's quite terrible. She got hit by a bus she never saw coming.

ALAN

Doesn't seem to speak well of her prognostication skills...

SHELLY

Anyway, I think Mr. Gru, the editor, was favorably impressed when I got down and showed him my best spread.

ALAN

(Nearly chokes on his wine)

Come again?

BRITTA

Tarot cards, Alan.

COURTNEY

When do you think you'll hear back?

SHELLY

Soon, I'd think. You know they don't want to leave readers dangling when Mercury's in retrograde!

MONA enters from upstage right carrying a tray with more treats. She wears a blouse and skirt and has clearly put more thought into her personal appearance than she did on her decorating.

MONA

(Cheerfully)

Who's up for lemon bars and oatmeal buttons?

BRITTA helpfully takes the tray to set it on the table.

BRITTA

Granny's recipe?

MONA

For both, yes. No one does them better.

SHELLY

Have you been to the hospital to see her?

MONA

Just yesterday. If all goes well, they think they can release her on Monday.

BENJAMIN

So soon? Didn't she crack her skull open or something?

MONA

(Pouring herself some lemonade)

The correct term is "mildly concussed," Benji. She hit her head when she was trying to put out the fire.

ALAN

The fire she started herself?

MONA

(Defiantly)

You don't have to say it as if she did it on purpose. She was baking a pie when the phone rang and she left the room for a few minutes.

BRITTA

Poor darling. She's just lucky it wasn't much worse.

MONA

Well, since we're all here, we may as well get down to serious business.

*With the exception of SHELLY
who is loading up a plate of treats
as if she hasn't eaten in a week,
everyone finds a place to sit while
MONA continues talking.*

MONA *(Cont'd)*

As I mentioned on the phone, I've spoken extensively to Granny's physician. He says that although she can be released to go home, he doesn't think that at her age it's in her best interests to live by herself anymore.

BRITTA

So what does he recommend?

MONA

Well, as he sees it, we have three options. The first is to move her into an assisted living facility.

*Immediately, the other hands go
up. MONA is discomfited by this.*

MONA (*Cont'd*)

I wasn't putting it out to a vote. I was putting it up for discussion.

BENJAMIN

Color me confused but didn't you make a pinky swear on that? I could've sworn she said,

(In an old-lady voice)

"You're never stuffing me into one of God's waiting rooms!"

MONA

I'm quite sure she never called them that.

ALAN

Why not? Everyone else calls a spade a spade.

MONA

(Sharply)

For your information, Alan, some of them are quite nice. I sent away for a few brochures and they look to have lots of pleasant activities for people Granny's age. Not only would she be getting the attention and supervision she needs from trained professionals but I also found one with a dementia care unit so she wouldn't have to be relocated if, heaven forbid, she starts to lose her marbles.

BRITTA

But don't those places cost an arm and a leg?

MONA

Actually I spoke to a very nice girl at NHS. She said that if Granny qualifies – and assuming there's space available – the costs of her continuing health care would be minimal.

SHELLY

That sounds fine to me. What does Granny say?

MONA

Well obviously we haven't talked about it yet. There are two other options we need to consider as a family.

BRITTA

You know she's not going to want to move out of her house. It's where all of her memories are.

ALAN

Not to mention how much crap she's got shoehorned in every room. I'm surprised the whole place hasn't split its seams and exploded.

BENJAMIN

So what's Door Number Two?

MONA

(Takes a deep breath)

One of us could move in with her.

ALAN

And by "us" I assume you're not referring to anyone who's currently married?

COURTNEY

(Hotly)

Why should anyone who's single be singled out and penalized?

MONA

It's not being penalized, Courtney, to move into a charming house with a garden and provide company to someone who loves you. Besides, didn't you say your flat mate was moving out next month and that—

COURTNEY

I've already had three people answer my advert! It won't be that hard to find someone.

BRITTA

What about you, Benjamin? Haven't you always been saying you wanted to move closer to the theatre?

BENJAMIN

(Shakes his head)

No, this really isn't a good time.

COURTNEY

Why isn't it a good time?

BENJAMIN

Well, I didn't want to say anything until it was official, but Perry and I have sussed it out and decided to take our relationship to the next level.

MONA

Meaning what?

BENJAMIN

Meaning we've decided to live together. He's moving in as soon as he wraps his latest show.

SHELLY

But Granny has plenty of room at her house. Since you're always at auditions or rehearsals, she wouldn't even know you two boys were there.

BEJAMIN

Oh puh-leese. Haven't you heard that two's cozy and three's positively ghastly? Especially if the third one is older than dirt. Besides, you know how she feels about theatre.

SHELLY

What are you talking about? Granny loves theatre. She knows all the lyrics to The Sound of Music.

COURTNEY

I think what he's talking about is that Granny's not keen on theatre *(Finger quotes)* "people."

SHELLY

(The truth dawning)
Ohhhhhhh.

MONA

So I guess that just leaves you, Shelly.

SHELLY

Me?

BRITTA

The fact is, sweetie, you're usually – um – how shall I put this?

MONA

Between situations?

BRITTA

Exactly the phrase I was looking for. Between situations.

MONA

And I'm sure Granny wouldn't charge you any rent.

BRITTA

It'd be a chance to save some money, pay some bills.

SHELLY

(Sputtering)
Out of the question! What about my love life?

*BENJAMIN and COURTNEY
can't help but snicker. SHELLY
glares at them.*

SHELLY

It's not like I haven't been looking! It could happen, you know.

MONA

And I'm sure it will someday but for now—

SHELLY

(Folds her arms)
I'm not moving in with her and you can't make me!

BENJAMIN

Pfff! What are you—five?

*MONA issues a deep sigh of
exasperation.*

ALAN

So what's the third option? I think I speak for everyone here when I say we're on pins and needles.

MONA

Well since no one wants to move in with Granny, it's only logical, I think, that she move in with one of you.

ALAN

Am I the only one who noticed just now that she said "one of you" instead of "one of us?" Leaving yourself out of the messy mix, are you?

MONA

No, what I meant was—

BRITTA

It would only make sense actually.

MONA

What?

BRITTA

Well, you and Dwight do have the biggest house.

The OTHERS are now nodding in agreement.

BRITTA

And there's that nice guest room on the third floor you hardly ever use. She'd even have her own bathroom.

MONA

No, that's completely impractical, Britta, and you know it.

BRITTA

Why is it impractical?

MONA

Because with her bad hip she can't do stairs.

COURTNEY is now waving her hand enthusiastically.

COURTNEY

Oooh! Oooh! I know what you could do!

MONA

And what's that?

COURTNEY

You could install one of those stair-glidey-things and she could ride up and down whenever she wanted to. It'd be like her own amusement park ride.

BENJAMIN gives COURTNEY a high-five of approval.

BENJAMIN

Brill! I wish I'd thought of it.

MONA

In the first place, do you have any idea how expensive those things are?

SHELLY

Maybe you could buy a used one...?

BRITTA

(With a scowl)

I really don't know I'd want one secondhand. It could be defective and goodness knows what kind of horrible accident would just be waiting to happen and send a helpless old lady tumbling to her death...

SHELLY

(To MONA)

You wouldn't be expecting us to pay for it, would you? I mean, it's going into your house as an addition and all.

MONA

No, it's not. Even if it weren't the expense – and NHS might even cover part of it – this house is almost two hundred years old. Dwight and I aren't going to do anything that could compromise its elegance and integrity!

Another collective thought bubble as the group looks around at the cluttered decor. "Too late, Mona, that ship has already sailed."

BENJAMIN

What about the room across from the kitchen? If Granny can't do stairs, why couldn't you just put her in there?

MONA

You mean my sewing and crafts room?

SHELLY

(Excited)

Oh that would be perfect, don't you think? All those big sunny windows so she can look out and wave at people...

MONA

No, Shelly, I don't think that's perfect at all. Where am I supposed to work on my projects?

BRITTA

You could do them at the dining room table. Isn't that what you used to do when you and Dwight first got married?

MONA

There's not nearly enough room, especially for my sewing machine and all my tubs of yarn. Plus I'd have to clear it every time we sat down to eat.

COURTNEY

You could set up in the guest room. Wouldn't that work?

MONA

And have to move everything when we have guests? No thank you.

BRITTA

(With a shrug)

Well then, I guess that's that. The nursing home it is.

MONA

Wait a minute. What about you and Alan?

BRITTA

What about us?

MONA

Your place is almost as large as ours.

SHELLY

And you have that big backyard. You could build one of those cute little granny houses that look like chicken coops with colorful front doors.

ALAN

Have you forgotten we also have a swimming pool?

COURTNEY

Aquatics therapy is very therapeutic for seniors. I read that somewhere.

ALAN

Did you also read how many of them amble out in the middle of the night, get disoriented, fall in and drown?

BENJAMIN

You could put a fence around it.

ALAN

I'm not putting a fence around my own swimming pool.

BRITTA

If I could just interject, I don't think it's advisable for those of us with children to accommodate someone who could accidentally burn our house down.

MONA

Oh good grief, Britta. Your "children" have been out of the house for over 10 years.

BRITTA

But they come back to visit. Plus Marjorie is expecting twins. Remember my saying that in the last newsletter?

(To ALAN)

We're thrilled to pieces, aren't we, darling?

ALAN

Thrilled. Completely.

BRITTA

And, of course, she'll be pressing us to babysit for them when she and Daniel want date nights, and I'm just not going to put the littles in harm's way.

*BENJAMIN has been studying
one of the oatmeal buttons he
picked up.*

BENJAMIN

If I could just ask something before we move on?

MONA

Yes?

BENJAMIN

Are there walnuts in these oatmeal buttons?

MONA

Oh dear! You don't have a nut allergy, do you?

BENJAMIN

No, but I've always thought walnuts tasted like dirt and I'm getting a vaguely earthy flavor in this...

MONA

(Her patience is wearing thin)

If we could all just stick to the topic at hand.

BRITTA

I think we've exhausted all the possibilities, Mona. If these places you've been checking out have availability—

ALAN

They always have availability. It's not like anyone over 90 is checking into a forever home.

BRITTA

I meant immediate availability.

(To MONA)

You did say she's getting out on Monday, right? There's no time to dawdle around with this.

MONA

I haven't even talked to her about it yet. It's not like she's going to get wheeled out of the hospital and through the doors of a strange place she's never even seen.

SHELLY

Not to mention all the packing up you'll have to do.

MONA

I'll have to do? I was rather hoping some of you could help. She's your Granny, too. The one who never missed a birthday or milestone accomplishment. The one who was always there to put band-aids on our boo-boos. The one who encouraged us to be our best and who still loved us even when our best wasn't good enough for anyone else. The one who read us bedtime stories and always checked the closets and under the bed to make sure there weren't any monsters. I think at the very least we owe it to her to help sort things out and settle in.

SHELLY

Well, sure. Of course. But if I hear back on the new job and they'll be needing me to start right away...

MONA

(Shakes her head)

It just doesn't feel right making this kind of decision for her. How would all of you feel if you were taken out of a place that's safe and comfortable and familiar and thrown in with a lot of people you don't even know?

BENJAMIN

She'll make friends. She's very gregarious. You're always saying so.

MONA

That's not the point. None of us are getting any younger. Have you even thought about your own circumstances when the time comes?

BRITTA

(Breezily)

Oh, Alan and I have already had The Talk. We plan to grow old together gracefully and remain in our own home til our dying breath, haven't we, darling?

*ALAN hasn't heard this because
he's busy refilling his wine glass.*

ALAN

What?

MONA

But what if one of you dies first?

BRITTA

(Matter-of-factly)

Well, obviously that would be Alan.

ALAN

(To BRITTA)

Do you know something I don't?

BRITTA

It's a fact of life. Wives usually outlive their husbands. While I don't want to picture being without him in my dotage, one has to be a realist, don't they? I'd grieve for the appropriate period of mourning and then dive back into the dating pool.

ALAN

(Not amused)

Given this a lot of thought, have you?

MONA

(To ALAN)

But what happens if Britta dies first? Do you think you'd remarry?

ALAN

Of course not. I'll be over here with Dwight smoking cigars and watching porn.

*EVERYONE EXCEPT BRITTA
laughs at this. She continues on
as if he hasn't said anything.*

BRITTA

But, of course, we're also blessed to have the children. I'm sure they'll see to our best interests.

BENJAMIN

(Mysteriously)

Unless in the future they're all gathered together in your living room on a day very much like this one.

(Evil laugh)

Bwah-ha-ha-ha!

SHELLY

(With a shudder)

Can we talk about something else? This is creeping me out.

MONA

We can't avoid the elephant in the room, Shelly. Monday will be here before we know it. Not talking about it doesn't make the problem go away.

There is a long, pregnant pause.

SHELLY

(After a moment)

I'll probably become a nun.

COURTNEY

Instead of the horoscope job? You seemed so keen on it.

SHELLY

No, I meant when I get as old as Granny and if I don't have anyone to take care of me.

ALAN

The last time I checked, I'm pretty sure that nunneries aren't viable retirement options.

SHELLY

(Earnestly)

Oh, but if you showed up and had nowhere else to go, they'd have to take you in, wouldn't they? I mean, they're the church. It's what they do.

BRITTA

(To ALAN)

I swear I don't know sometimes where she gets her information.

MONA

Can we please just get back to discussing Granny?

BRITTA

You'll need to talk to her about selling the house. I know a divine estate agent I could talk to.

(To ALAN)

Remember the one who listed the Trowbridges' house last summer? Got way more for them than they were expecting. That's always the sign of a smart negotiator.

MONA

No, no, it's much too soon. She'll need to process one thing at a time.

BRITTA

Oh honestly, Mona. How much time do you think she even has left? Besides, money from the sale of the house could go to offset some of her needs at wherever you decide to put her.

SHELLY

(Confused)

I thought you said the whole thing would be paid for by NHS.

MONA

It depends entirely on the assessment. If a new resident has their own resources available, those would likely be tapped first.

BRITTA

Well, that doesn't sound completely fair. That house represents a considerable chunk of our inheritance. If it's to be split five ways—

BENJAMIN

Six.

BRITTA

What?

BENJAMIN

(Feeling quite smug)

Aren't you forgetting someone? In fact, the one person you haven't even considered is not only the best qualified and most experienced but also quite possibly the Door Number Four who could put all of this to rest.

MONA

Who are you talking about?

BENJAMIN

(Inclusively spreading his arms)

The mother of us all! Well, of course, except for you, Alan. No offense.

ALAN

None taken.

MONA

Mum?! Are you out of your mind?

BENJAMIN

Give me three good reasons why Mum shouldn't be in charge of Granny.

MONA

I only need one. They hate each other. They always have.

BENJAMIN

And they're both getting on in years. What better time than now to bury the hatchet?

MONA

Because it will likely be in each other's forehead.

SHELLY

Why do you say Mum is the most experienced?

BENJAMIN

Don't you remember how she took care of Dad when he was on his way out? And not to mention — *(Indicating COURTNEY)* — this one's father even though he never stepped up and married her.

MONA

(Sternly)

Mum never signed up for caregiving, Benjamin. Not for either one of them. It's a full-time job and it was thrust upon her.

BENJAMIN

Just like greatness. Isn't that what they say? She rose to the challenge and, just like a phoenix, she'll rise again.

MONA

And burn herself out. Mum is finally hitting her stride and being able to do all the things she couldn't do before. In fact, she's planning to go on a Mediterranean cruise with her friend Ethel.

BENJAMIN

I was just making a suggestion. You don't have to go all hopping mad about it.

ALAN

Sounds as if you're all back to square one.

BRITTA

Wait a minute. I just remembered something. Didn't Mum hire one of those nurse helpers to come in a few hours each day to give her a break?

MONA

Granny's going to need more than just a few hours of assistance. Too many things could happen if she's left by herself.

COURTNEY

What if we take out her stove? Then she couldn't accidentally start another fire.

BENJAMIN

But what about candles and matches?

SHELLY

Or burning incense!

BRITTA

Or a dryer that overheats or an iron she forgets to unplug.

COURTNEY

And it's not just electricity or fire dangers. She could slip on a bar of soap in the bathtub.

SHELLY

I read once that someone can actually drown in three inches of water!

COURTNEY

Or choke on a parsnip.

BENJAMIN

(Rolls his eyes)

Personally, I'd rather die than eat a parsnip...

ALAN

With so many rampant hazards, it's amazing the old gal has lived this long.

MONA

So are all of you willing to spring for a 24/7 companion to live with her?

*The collective reaction tells her
everything she needs to know.*

SHELLY

Why can't NHS pay for it? If she's in her own house, it's not like it's taking a bed away from somebody else at a nursing home.

COURTNEY

But doesn't it take time to vet those people? We can't just hire anyone off the street. They could rob her blind!

BRITTA

Which is why we'd absolutely have to remove any of Granny's valuables first and eliminate the temptation. She did promise me her Art Deco jewelry and some of her antiques.

SHELLY

She promised her piano to me!

BRITTA

Why would she do that? You don't even play.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes