

PRELUDE

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PRELUDE is set in the kitchen of a farmhouse in western Connecticut on a Sunday in July of 1946.

CHARACTERS

GRACE - 34 years old. About to marry for the second time.

MOLLY – 12 years old. Soon to be Grace’s stepdaughter.

Running Time: approximately ten minutes.

PRELUDE is a part of the full-length play GRACE NOTES, which premiered at the Gemini Theater in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on February 10-12, 2000. The companion plays are titled RONDO, ALLEGRO, CODA, and SOWING THE SEEDS.

Excerpts from GRACE NOTES appear in three anthologies published by Smith & Kraus:

BEST STAGE SCENES 1998

BEST WOMEN'S MONOLOGUES 1998

and

THE ULTIMATE SCENE STUDY SERIES, VOL. IV:
104 SHORT SCENES FOR FOUR ACTORS

PRELUDE

SETTING: The kitchen of a farmhouse in western Connecticut. A Sunday in July of 1946.
Late morning.

AT RISE: GRACE, an attractive woman of 33, dressed in a conservative suit, is examining herself in the mirror. A bridal veil is on the table, along with a bouquet of flowers. There is a knock on the door. GRACE looks at the door nervously, sits, then stands again and resumes pacing. A second knock, more insistent this time.

Grace? MOLLY

Come on in, Molly. GRACE (steeling herself)

(MOLLY enters. She is nearly 13, and rather awkward. She wears a formal dress and looks very uncomfortable.)

Everybody's here. Daddy said to see if you were ready. MOLLY

Molly, look at you! You look lovely! (tries to hug MOLLY) GRACE

Thanks. (Pause) I gotta talk to you. MOLLY (pulling away)

Now? Molly, I don't really have time right now. I've got a million things to do yet. GRACE

It's important. MOLLY

All right. What is it? (pause) Molly? I'm listening. GRACE (with an effort)

Do you have to marry Daddy? Can't you stop this? MOLLY (blurts it out)

What? It's a little late, don't you think? GRACE

No it's not. We could just have a party instead. MOLLY

A party? What are you talking about? There's no turning back now. (deep breath) I can't call this off. Not any more. GRACE

Sure you can. You're the only one who can. You have to, Grace! I don't want you to marry Daddy! MOLLY

GRACE

I thought you were excited about the wedding.

MOLLY

Sure, but what about after? Daddy's not gonna have any time to spend with me, and then I have to go away to stupid school in the fall, and...everything's changing, and I hate it! I don't want a stepmother!

GRACE

Now, Molly. Everything is going to be fine. You'll see.

(MOLLY looks away, slumps onto a chair)

I'll tell you a secret. I'm nervous, too.

MOLLY

Yeah?

GRACE

Absolutely.

MOLLY

I didn't know grown-ups got nervous about anything. (Giggles) I guess that's why Daddy couldn't even light his pipe this morning. His hand was shaking too much. I just thought he drank too much coffee.

GRACE

Everyone gets nervous on their wedding day.

MOLLY

Well, can't you tell Daddy you're nervous? Then maybe you won't have to get married.

GRACE

It's not that simple. Anyway, I want to marry your father. I love him. Just because I'm nervous doesn't change that.

MOLLY (deflated)

Oh.

GRACE

Molly, I know this is a big change for all of us. I've been in the city for a long time. And Jason's never lived on a farm before. You'll have to show him a lot of things. He looks up to you.

MOLLY

Well... I just don't see why Daddy has to get married all of a sudden. We've gotten along OK. I think he thinks he's doing this to help me.

GRACE

So you think everything revolves around you? Did you ever think we might love each other?

MOLLY

Well, I heard Daddy talking to Uncle Stan. He thinks I'm too much of a tomboy. He thinks I need a...womanly influence.

He said that? GRACE (a bit annoyed)

Uh huh. MOLLY (slyly)

I see. GRACE

At least he's being honest. Why can't you? You're just after his money, like everyone else. MOLLY

Molly, this is really none of your business. But I assure you, I don't need your father's money. I've got plenty of my own. GRACE

Oh. Is that why you divorced Jason's daddy? Was *he* after *your* money? MOLLY (abashed)

No, no. We couldn't...I don't know, Molly. We just weren't any good together, that's all. GRACE (caught off guard)

Oh. So what makes you so sure you and Daddy will...be any good together? MOLLY

Molly! Do you always say exactly what's on your mind? GRACE

Yeah, mostly. And I never knew anyone else who got divorced. Do you really love Daddy? MOLLY

I care a great deal for him. GRACE

Is that all? MOLLY

And I can depend on him. That's very important. Bill was never someone I could count on. GRACE

I know the feeling. MOLLY

Listen, Molly. You can count on me. Once I make a promise, I keep it. Understand? GRACE

I'm okay. MOLLY

Sure, you are. You're tough. But everyone needs to count on someone else, once in a while. GRACE

MOLLY

You can't count on anyone. Don't you know that by now? It never works out. You must be pretty dumb for a grownup.

GRACE

Maybe I am. But I happen to think giving up is about the worst thing you can do. And I know what I'm talking about, Molly. You're not the only one who's lost a mother young. My mother died when I was fourteen.

MOLLY

Yeah? At least you remember her. Even when I look at pictures of Mommy and me together, and I try really really hard, I'm not sure if I actually remember her or if I'm just imagining I do.

GRACE

Sometimes I used to dream about my mother, sitting by my bed, and I'd wake up feeling sure she was sitting right there, watching me.

MOLLY

That's dumb. I used to do that when I was a little kid. But she was never there. You know something? I think Mommy loved drinking more than me.

GRACE

No, honey, don't say that. She loved you very much. She must have.

MOLLY

Then why wouldn't she stop? Even after she went to the hospital, again and again, she wouldn't stop.

GRACE

I guess she just couldn't help herself. But that doesn't mean she didn't love you.

MOLLY

How do you know? You never even met her!

GRACE

I know how a mother feels. You can't have a child and not love them more than anything.

(MOLLY glares)

Not good enough, huh? Okay, then, look at the pictures. Notice how she's looking at you.

MOLLY

I miss her so much.

GRACE

Your mother loved you, Molly. And I love you, too. (surprised at herself) I really do.

MOLLY

How can you lie to me like that? You don't love me. You don't even know me!

GRACE (fiercely)

Oh yes, believe it or not, I do know you, Molly! Only too well. You're exactly like I was. You feel so angry. So abandoned. I wish to heaven that neither of us had lost our mothers so young. But I do love you. I want you love me, someday. And I hope that together we can make up for some of what we've lost. You don't have to give anything up. Not your mother, and especially not your father. I want us to be a family. I want that more than anything. Can't we give each other that chance? All of us?

MOLLY (pause)

Do I really have to go away to school?

GRACE

I suppose not, not if you don't want to.

MOLLY

You know what, Grace? You're OK, I guess. You're funny, and nice, and you don't try so hard to make me like you. Most of Daddy's girlfriends are so pushy.

GRACE

Most of them? Were there so many?

MOLLY (shrugging)

I dunno. I didn't meet all of them.

GRACE

I see.

MOLLY (hesitantly offering her hand)

Anyway, I guess - if he's gonna marry somebody, sometime - it might as well be you.

GRACE (wryly, taking it)

Thanks. (awkward pause) The odd thing is, I never thought of myself as the stepmother type.

MOLLY (giggling)

Like in Cinderella?

GRACE (laughing too)

I won't make you clean any chimneys, don't worry about that.

MOLLY

I think it would be fun to clean chimneys.

GRACE

Mm hmm. You say that now.

MOLLY

Hey, Grace? Did you know I'll be thirteen in only two months? I can't wait!

GRACE

Well, we'll have to do something very special to celebrate.

MOLLY

Neat! Judy thinks she's so great 'cause she's already thirteen. We'll show her, right?

GRACE

I thought she was your best friend.

MOLLY (shrugging)

Sometimes. You know what I really want? A little sister.

GRACE

I can't make any promises, but we'll see what we can do about that.

MOLLY

Neat! Hey, who's your favorite movie star? Mine is Frank Sinatra. Isn't he a dreamboat?

GRACE

Why don't we talk about this another time? We have a wedding to go to, remember?

MOLLY

Oh. Yeah.

GRACE

Don't say yeah.

MOLLY (rolling her eyes)

Oh, please don't start that. (Pause.) Yes.

GRACE

So will you help me with my veil now?

MOLLY

Sure.

(GRACE sits, adjusts veil, and waits as MOLLY fusses with bobby pins)

GRACE

It's a beautiful day, anyway.

MOLLY

It's all right. Does that feel like it's on good?

GRACE

It feels fine. Is it straight?

MOLLY

Yep.

GRACE

All right, then let's get this over with, Cinderella. (Stands up) What do you think?

MOLLY

I think you look beautiful...Mother. (giggles) It feels strange to say that. It's gonna be weird having a mother.

GRACE

Well, we can practice on each other. I'm not used to having a daughter either. (sighs) Speaking of which, I'll bet Jason's filthy by now. If there's anything little boys hate, it's dressing up.

MOLLY

No, he was being good this morning. Besides, Daddy's keeping an eye on him.

GRACE

I can just imagine. Are you ready?

MOLLY

Yup. You?

GRACE

Ready as I'll ever be. You have my bouquet, right?

MOLLY

I have it.

GRACE

So you want a little sister, hmm?

MOLLY

At least one.

GRACE

Well, you'll have to promise to babysit.

MOLLY

Neat!

GRACE

Isn't anything ever wonderful? Or good? Do you ever say anything besides neat?

MOLLY

Yeah.

GRACE

Very funny.

(As GRACE and MOLLY exit, MOLLY takes GRACE's hand.)

LIGHTS FADE

CURTAIN