the beginning of

GRAM FOLDS THE LAUNDRY (from FEMALE PERSUASION)

a short play by Rich Orloff

**Place:** The kitchen of a middle-class home in a Midwestern state.

**Time:** Middle of the day after the first snowfall.

**Characters:**

ESTHER, an elderly woman, feeling her age.

DOROTHY, her daughter, a housewife.

As the scene begins, DOROTHY is ironing at the ironing board. Next to her is a laundry basket, which is by now almost empty. We hear an oven timer TICKING AWAY.

ESTHER enters from the living room, walking as briskly as she can, which is none too briskly. She smiles at Dorothy, walks through the kitchen, turns around, and walks back into the living room.

The oven timer RINGS and stops. Esther walks back in. She sits down at the breakfast table. Sitting down and standing up take some effort for her.

ESTHER

Fifteen minutes.

DOROTHY

Good.

ESTHER

I must have walked from here to the living room and back eight times.

DOROTHY

Good.

ESTHER

How far is that?

DOROTHY

I don’t know.

ESTHER

I didn’t think I could do it.

DOROTHY

Mm-hmm.
ESTHER
But I knew I could.
(Announcing:)
And now, I think I’ll make myself a cup of tea.

DOROTHY
I’ll do it.

ESTHER
Don’t trouble yourself. You’re ironing.

DOROTHY
It’s no trouble. You relax. I’ll do it.

A half-beat.

ESTHER
Never mind.

DOROTHY
You don’t want any tea?

ESTHER
No.

DOROTHY
You wanted some a minute ago.

ESTHER
I thought it might be nice to make myself some tea, but I changed my mind.

DOROTHY
Mother, you’ve burned yourself on the coils twice this month.

ESTHER
It’s that new stove.

DOROTHY
We’ve had the stove eight years.

ESTHER
I never liked it.
(beat)
It snowed so early this year.

DOROTHY
It’s not that early.
ESTHER
I suppose I won’t be able to go out for a walk for another six months.

DOROTHY
Don’t exaggerate. It will be spring before you know it.

ESTHER
Then it’ll be summer before I know it, then it’ll be fall before I know it, and then it’ll be winter before I know it.

DOROTHY
Have it your way.

Beat.

ESTHER
I think I’ll call Leon.

DOROTHY
You already called him once today.

ESTHER
I did?

DOROTHY
Yes.

ESTHER
Oh.

DOROTHY
Did you take your pills this morning?

ESTHER
Some of them.

DOROTHY
The doctor says to take all of them.

ESTHER
And if I don’t?

DOROTHY
Then you won’t feel good.
ESTHER
I don’t feel good.

DOROTHY
That’s because you don’t take all of them.

ESTHER
I don’t feel good even when I do take all of them.

DOROTHY
(losing her temper)
Then why don’t you just take none of them?!

A half-beat.

ESTHER
You don’t want me to feel good?

Dorothy hands Esther the pills and a glass of water. Esther swallows them.

DOROTHY
AS THE WORLD TURNS will be on soon.

ESTHER
I don’t care for it anymore. They’ve added too many new people.

DOROTHY
For twenty-five years, you’ve watched it every day.

ESTHER
So? I’ve changed.
(beat)
You think Leon is happy with his new wife?

DOROTHY
I don’t know. I assume so.

ESTHER
I just want my children to be happy before I die.

DOROTHY
We’re all happy.

ESTHER
Are you happy with Martin?
DOROTHY
(curly)
Yes.
(beat)
Why don’t you read?

ESTHER
There’s nothing to read.

DOROTHY
I just bought you three new books.

ESTHER
I can’t get interested.

Try.

DOROTHY
I’ve tried.

ESTHER
You haven’t tried.

DOROTHY
I’ve tried.

ESTHER
I want to earn my keep.

Dorothy brings the basket to Esther. Esther folds neatly and conscientiously. Dorothy resumes ironing.
DOROTHY
I hate it when you talk like that.

ESTHER
(perfunctorily)
I’m sorry.

DOROTHY
Isn’t it nice that Gary is coming
to visit in three weeks?

ESTHER
He’s such a prince. The best.

DOROTHY
(teasing)
I’ll tell your other grandchildren you said that.

ESTHER
They’re all wonderful. Mark’s wonderful.
Deborah’s very, very wonderful. But Gary,
Gary, is a prince. He couldn’t fall asleep
the night before kindergarten. I must
have rocked him in my arms for hours.
(beat)
I did a fine job with him.

DOROTHY
I think I had something to do with him, too.

ESTHER
(dissinghing)
You did a fine job as mother.
(beaming)
I did a fine job as grandmother.

DOROTHY
(warmly)
That’s true.

ESTHER
If Gary were only married, I’d be happy.

DOROTHY
Gary is married.

ESTHER
Oh. They grow up so fast.