

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

(curtly)

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.

DOROTHY

Try.

ESTHER

I've tried.

DOROTHY

You haven't tried.

ESTHER

I've tried.

DOROTHY

Do you want me to return the books?

ESTHER

Whatever you'd like.

DOROTHY

It's up to you.

ESTHER

Do you want me to fold what's in the basket?

DOROTHY

Sure.

Dorothy brings the basket to Esther. Esther folds neatly and conscientiously. Dorothy resumes ironing.

ESTHER

I want to earn my keep.

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

(dismissing)

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.