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Dramatic Publishing

JESSICA'S WILL

by

KENT R. BROWN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(JESSICA'S WILL)

ISBN: 1-58342-302-8

For Nana, a grandmother blessed with great charm,
infinite wisdom and a deep love of family.

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In 2003, **Jessica's Will** won the Third One-Act Playwriting Contest sponsored by Theatre in the Raw, Vancouver, B.C. On November 25, 2004, the play premiered as part of Theatre in the Raw's Festival of One-Acts & Radio Plays. It was directed by Jay Hamburger and featured Eroca Morin as Jessica, Linda Rae as Michelle and Michelle Baynton as The Little Girl.

JESSICA'S WILL

A One-act Play
For 2 Women, 1 Girl

CHARACTERS

JESSICA. Michelle's grandmother. In her upper 70s,
tenacious.

MICHELLE Jessica's granddaughter. In her 20s.
Caring, patient.

THE LITTLE GIRL an apparition

SETTING: Multiple areas including Jessica's modest home, a sidewalk, and the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea. Props include a series of packing boxes, a bed, cot, and assorted smaller items such as plates, dolls, candle holders, items of clothing and so on.

TIME: The present.

AT THE CURTAIN: LIGHTS UP on JESSICA who is sipping soup out of a large bowl. She is standing near a chair in her living room, looking out a "window." Several packing boxes are open. On the floor are sweaters, shoes, small antique lamps, mirrors, photo albums, serving plates, candlesticks, beaded purses, mugs and others items gathered by living an eclectic life. After a moment, MICHELLE speaks from offstage.

SCENE 1

MICHELLE (*offstage*). Grandmother? Are you ready? All set to go? I don't want to get stuck in traffic.

(*MICHELLE enters.*)

MICHELLE. Grandmother, did you hear me? (*JESSICA nods her head and continues taking sips of her soup.*) Still having your soup? (*JESSICA looks at MICHELLE as if to say, "Are you blind?"*) Where's your suitcase? Oh, here it is. (*MICHELLE moves to an opened suitcase. A varied assortment of items has been tossed into it.*) Here, I'll fold all this while you finish your soup.

JESSICA. Leave all that alone. Just push it all back inside, shut the suitcase and close the latch. That's what I suspect they'll do with me. Open me up, see that everything is a damn mess, and simply close the latch.

MICHELLE. That's negative thinking. You know you have to think positive.

JESSICA. Positively, not positive.

MICHELLE (*quickly folding what she can*). It's a phrase, Grandmother. Like "Have a good day."

JESSICA. Your grandfather left me with a great deal of money.

MICHELLE. I know, Grandmother.

JESSICA. Lots of money. In the top drawer. In the den. There are several checkbooks. And that hutch my

mother gave us for our wedding anniversary? The hutch is yours, Michelle. Don't let Rebecca shame you out of it. She's very persuasive. "Grandmother told me when I was thirteen that since I loved that hutch so much it would be mine when the poor dear passed on." Poor dear, my ass.

MICHELLE (*smiling at JESSICA's mimicry*). Yes, ma'am.

JESSICA (*continuing to savage Rebecca*). "And since she's dead now, finally, I'll just send Roger around with a truck and I'll drag that sweetheart hutch out of that old woman's smelly den and sell it for a fortune!"

MICHELLE. Grandmother, it's only a three-day visit.

JESSICA. A visit is when you go visit someone in the hospital and then have the luxury of leaving and saying "Lord, did you see how pale she looked?" (*Beat.*) The certificates of deposit and the portfolio...you check it all out with Mr. Sawyer. He's been my lawyer for...whatever is there...it's all yours.

(MICHELLE has finished packing the suitcase and moves to take the bowl of soup from JESSICA.)

MICHELLE. Here, let me take that. (*JESSICA does not hand MICHELLE the bowl.*) We've been through the process, Grandmother. It's just for tests, some screening for—

JESSICA. They don't even know! They're just fishing! Screens are what you put on back-porch doors to keep the bugs out!

MICHELLE. You'll be back in the house on Thursday. I'll pick you up after work just as we've planned it.

JESSICA. You tell Clarissa to clean under the refrigerator.

MICHELLE. I have.

JESSICA. She must pull it away from the wall. She can do that. She's strong enough. Then she gets the gunk up from the floor. Things get back there...they sneak under the refrigerator when you're not looking.

MICHELLE. Absolutely.

JESSICA. Then she must let it dry. Before she rolls it back into place. She'll want to shove it back right away. But the floor needs to be dry. She knows that but she is careless when I'm gone.

MICHELLE. I wrote out the instructions just as you told me to.

JESSICA. Where did you put the note?

MICHELLE. Where she can see it.

JESSICA. Good for you. (*JESSICA hands MICHELLE the soup bowl.*)

SCENE 2

(LIGHTS up on THE LITTLE GIRL who is playing hopscotch. She tosses a brightly colored beanbag doll into the squares. She is quick and agile. She plays beautifully. After a moment, LIGHTS UP on JESSICA and MICHELLE as they enter another part of the stage. They do not "see" THE LITTLE GIRL. SOUNDS of the sea, of waves crashing against rocks.)

JESSICA. Do you hear?

MICHELLE. Hear what, Grandmother?

JESSICA. Nothing.

MICHELLE. We have to go.

JESSICA. The summer you were born, your grandfather and I were at the shore. We were hiding out. Taking time for ourselves. Being selfish. Two wonderful days. On the sand. Swimming. He was a scoundrel, did you know that?

MICHELLE. Grandmother, we'll be late for our appointment. Please?

JESSICA. He was. He gambled. But it didn't matter. What he could do in bed.

MICHELLE. Grandmother.

JESSICA. His tongue came from another world. And the way he stroked my neck. Right here. (*JESSICA seductively strokes her neck.*) And when he smoothed his hands over my body...my ankles...my toes.

(THE LITTLE GIRL giggles.)

MICHELLE. Grandmother. Please.

JESSICA. People think those images fade away. That they don't last. That the memory of sensation dulls with time. They are wrong. You'll see. I am very much alive. (*Beat.*) Don't let them kill me.

(As MICHELLE and JESSICA begin to leave, THE LITTLE GIRL waves goodbye to JESSICA. JESSICA pauses, looks in THE LITTLE GIRL's direction.)

SCENE 3

(JESSICA is sitting up in bed, at home. She wears sleepwear and a robe. Nearby is a cot where MICHELLE