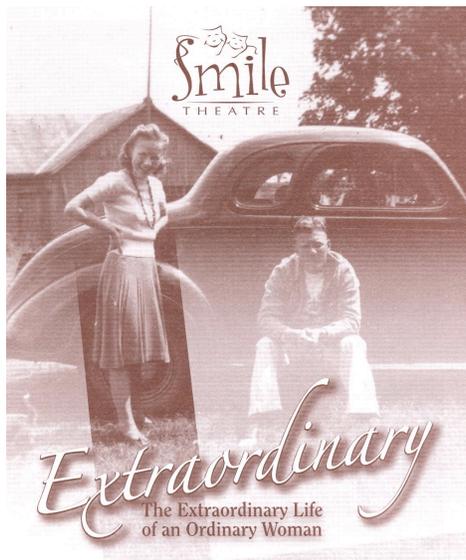


# EXTRAORDINARY

*(The Extraordinary Life  
Of An Ordinary Woman)*

by Jim Betts



Smile Theatre Version  
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Dedicated with love  
to  
Bertha Betts  
90 Years Old  
February 10, 2009

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# **EXTRAORDINARY**

*(The Extraordinary Life  
Of An Ordinary Woman)*

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**EXTRAORDINARY**  
*(The Extraordinary Life  
Of An Ordinary Woman)*

Scene 1 – A Community Room

An OLDER WOMAN is about to celebrate her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday; SHE sits with a quilt on her lap - stitching.

She is sitting in the midst of a celebration of her life – quilts hung, paintings on easels, bits and pieces of memorabilia.

OLDER WOMAN

“Anyone Can Change The World”

Stitch by stitch,  
Square by square,  
Anyone can change the world.  
Row by row,  
Quilt by quilt,  
Lives assembled,  
Histories built.  
Start with nothing,  
Add a patch,  
Contour, colour,  
Mix and match.  
Any woman  
Even any man  
Can  
Can change the world.

...This quilt. I've had 89 years - you'd think I could have finished it by now. If you don't mind, I'll just keep stitching while we talk.

Welcome to my 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party. Thank you for coming. What would any of us do without our friends?

I've invited one more person, who seems not to have joined us yet. Anyway, even if she does arrive, this still doesn't promise to be a terribly exciting party. But at our ages, whose heart can take too much excitement? There'll be no champagne. No scantily clad dancers. No fancy speeches.

Are you like me? Do you sometimes listen to those Tributes - you know the ones, we hear them all the time at Retirement Dinners, Funerals, Birthday Parties - maybe about someone you've known half your life, and yet you can barely recognize who they're talking about? That's the Edith I knew? Am I in the right room?

So no speeches today about how wonderful I am. Every third word would have to be a lie anyway. How would anyone fill 10 minutes talking about me without having to make things up? Nothing's ever happened to me. In my entire life I have not won a single Olympic gold medal. Haven't had a real job in over 50 years. And never once danced with Gary Cooper.

I'm an ordinary woman. Lived an ordinary life. Achieved... so much I'm proud of.

(Shows us the patch of quilt she's working on.)

Look at that stitch. That is a perfect stitch.

And you should have tasted my apple pies.

OLDER WOMAN

Crust by crust,  
Pie by pie,  
Anyone can change the world.  
Fork by fork,  
Taste by taste,  
Let no apple  
Go to waste.  
Flour, sugar,  
Not too much,  
Then we add  
Our magic touch.  
Any apple,  
In any pan,  
Can  
Can change the world.

(A YOUNGER WOMAN enters, looks at the bits and pieces around the room. SHE picks up a hat.)

OLDER WOMAN

You should try it on.

(The YOUNGER WOMAN tries on the hat. SHE likes it.)

OLDER WOMAN

What did I tell you? It suits you. I had a dress like that when I was your age. It's nice of you to wear it today. Thank you for coming.

YOUNGER WOMAN

You're welcome.

(The YOUNGER WOMAN looks around at the objects in the room again.)

OLDER

I'll show you everything when I've finished this.

Penicillin,  
The electric light,  
I invented neither.  
Didn't build the ark  
Map out Central Park  
Never climbed Mount Everest either.  
Never been elected Prime Minister  
So hardly anyone curses my name.  
But in my way  
Day by day  
I've changed the world all the same.

Quilt by quilt.  
Pie by pie,  
In every word I did not say.  
Tear by tear,  
Child by child,  
In every quarrel  
Reconciled.  
Listen closely  
Do one's best.  
Recognize  
We've all been blessed.  
Every morning  
Tell oneself. "Today -  
Today I change the world.

Segue directly to next scene...

Scene 2

Immediately following.

...I'm going to do that.

YOUNGER

What?

OLDER

“Change the world.”

YOUNGER

I believe you.

OLDER

Walter and I.

YOUNGER

(The OLDER WOMAN seems momentarily caught off guard.)

YOUNGER

“Walter”, my sort-of “fiancé”. ...I'm almost 18!

OLDER

Tell me how.

YOUNGER

The usual way. See the world - then change it. Alright, maybe I'm not exactly sure how, I'm just sure I'm going to do it! Although - maybe some days I'm less sure than others. ...I'm a little... nervous.

OLDER

Well, who wouldn't be? You're probably the youngest person in the room by a good 50 years.

YOUNGER

...Your quilt is beautiful.

OLDER

I've enjoyed making it. I've tried to use material from as far back as I could find it. Remnants. Pieces from my various epochs. A person accumulates a lot of odds and ends in 90 years.

YOUNGER

90? ...You're really old.

OLDER

But I'm still feisty, so be careful what you say. ...I'm a little nervous, too. ...No - sorry. I wanted you here today exactly because I want to hear everything you have to say.

YOUNGER

About what?

OLDER

About you. I've had 90 years with me, I'm tired of me. I want to remember what it's like to be almost 18 again. What do young girls want when they're almost 18? I mean, besides the Walters of the world.

YOUNGER

You're teasing me.

OLDER

I don't mean to. I do really want to be reminded.

YOUNGER

I want lots of things. Although I keep most of them to myself.

My friends and I, I guess we all just want there to be something more. We know in times like these that seems selfish. But we can't help it. Even if all we've ever done is read about it - about a world somewhere where wonderful things happen. Amazing things. And that there really are people who make them happen.

"Extraordinary"

When I was ten  
I longed to be  
Anything but ordinary  
Please!  
Don't let me be ordinary  
Let me be a princess  
Let me slay a dragon  
Let me be...  
Let me be Extraordinary.

At seventeen  
I've grown to be  
Nothing more  
Than ordinary.  
See?!  
Single, bored, and ordinary.  
At seventeen,  
One's old enough to know  
No one is a princess

In Ontario.

David slew Goliath  
I thought I could, too;  
That, and have adventures  
Just like Nancy Drew -  
Be Mary Pickford beautiful,  
Tragic as Jane Eyre.  
All I had to do was try,  
But did I dare?

Yes, I do dare!  
And...

When I'm grown up  
Then I will be  
Totally extraordinary.  
Me!  
Perfectly extraordinary.  
I will dance in Paris,  
March in a parade,  
Say the things I'm thinking,  
Brash and unafraid.  
Make no compromises  
Set my standards high  
Angel-blessed  
Earth and sky and sea!  
Me!  
Extraordinary!

Segue directly to next scene...

### Scene 3

Immediately following. The OLDER  
WOMAN starts to gather the quilt.

OLDER

...Thank you. That was worth remembering.

(she starts gathering her quilt)

Here. Help me with this.

(The YOUNGER WOMAN helps her, and together  
THEY work to display, or store, the quilt.)

YOUNGER

It really is lovely. I've never quilted.

OLDER

I expect you will one day. Too many more exciting things to do at almost 18.

YOUNGER

Yes. I've papered five rooms in the farm house this winter. And two more to go. Pretty exciting.

(looking at the paintings)

You paint, too.

OLDER

Not any more.

YOUNGER

I have friends who paint. I love watching them. Someday maybe I'll try.

(The YOUNGER WOMAN takes in everything on display.)

YOUNGER

Everything here on display - it's all so beautiful. But no scrapbooks. No photographs of you.

OLDER

Oh, I have those, too. Hidden away.

YOUNGER

Why hidden?

OLDER

Secrets.

YOUNGER

I love secrets! Are they nearby? Can it be like a treasure hunt?

OLDER

Some secrets are best left secret.

YOUNGER

Still... please?

OLDER

...There's a small box or two somewhere.

YOUNGER  
(seeing and fetching one)

Here! This one?

OLDER  
Alright... This one maybe to start. But before I open it, I don't want to hear later that I didn't warn you now.

YOUNGER  
I'm warned! I'm excited!

OLDER  
Let's see then. Opening Pandora's Box.  
(SHE opens the box)  
Oh, my.

YOUNGER  
Oh, my! Look, there are photos! May I see?

OLDER  
Yes. Eventually, you may see everything. One secret at a time if you decide you really want to know. I promise.  
(pulls out a photo)  
Here - this photo looks safe. You may see this one to start.

YOUNGER  
(looking at the photo)  
Is this you? With your baby? You were so young!

OLDER  
Yes. As amazing as that is to contemplate.  
(to the audience)  
Were we not all young once, ladies?  
(looking at the photo)  
I remember that day. I was ready to give that baby back that day.

(The YOUNGER WOMAN is foraging through the trunk.)

OLDER  
Now what else is in there?

(The YOUNGER WOMAN pulls out an old hat box, then opens the box to reveal an old wedding veil.)

OLDER

Why do we keep all this stuff? Oh, my – where has this been? I haven't seen this in... My old wedding veil. Blow on it and it's as like to disappear.

I remember that day, too.

Look at this. All of this.

"As If It Were Yesterday"

Dusty boxes  
Greying veil  
Lives I thought I had stored away  
The who, where and when  
Revealed again  
Almost as if it were yesterday.

Fading photos,  
Dry and frail,  
Silent, but still so much to say.  
Romance in the air,  
We're young, we're there  
Almost as if it were yesterday.

What's past is past,  
So little will last,  
A sunset follows each dawn.  
What's gone  
Is gone  
Better now we simply move on.

And yet love song colours  
Never pale,  
Dream-woven quilts never fray.  
We see every ghost  
And lover almost...  
Almost as if it were yesterday.  
Almost as if it were yesterday.

Segue directly to next scene...

Scene 4

Immediately following.

YOUNGER

...I'm ready for another photo now.

OLDER

No. This isn't going at all like I planned it. Somehow we have to stop me from talking. Because it's your story I want to hear, remember? So where were we? You were almost 18, on your way to becoming "extraordinary".

YOUNGER

Actually, I'd rather skip the "becoming" part. I'd rather just suddenly be it!

OLDER

I remember.

YOUNGER

I don't know. How does one become anything? Apply to university. Choose a profession. Get a job.

OLDER

That's what I did. When I was growing up, a young woman had her choice of professions. Three choices to be exact.

(to the audience)

Remember, ladies? Secretary. Teacher.

(maybe let the audience answer...)

...Nurse.

YOUNGER

I'm going to be a doctor.

OLDER

Hard work.

YOUNGER

Try living on a farm.

OLDER

With no electricity? No running water? Five mile walk to school uphill both ways?

YOUNGER

You're teasing me again.

OLDER

I'm empathizing! You might be surprised, but I wanted to be a doctor. There were such things even then – in the dark ages - women doctors – but I too was born to a farm family, fourth of 6 children, 5 girls, 1 boy. There was only money enough for one of us to go to university. My brother went to university.

That's not fair.

YOUNGER

It's the way it was.

OLDER

Well, I'm not going to let anything like that stop me! I am going to be a doctor!

YOUNGER

Bravo!

OLDER

The absolute best doctor!

YOUNGER

Huzzah!

OLDER

Minister to the sick! Discover cures to dozens of diseases.

YOUNGER

Show me.

OLDER

What?

YOUNGER

The kind of doctor you're going to be. That nametag on your uniform – what exactly does it say?

OLDER

(The YOUNGER WOMAN is momentarily confused.)

OLDER

Doctor...?

YOUNGER

(understanding then playing along)

“Doctor Boyd”. Actually “Gorgeous Doctor Boyd”.

OLDER

Well, thank goodness you're here, Doctor. I am a medical minefield!

"Doctor Boyd"

OLDER

Paging Doctor Boyd  
My insides are destroyed  
I ate something I shouldn't and my gut is real annoyed  
I'm told that my condition is severe!

YOUNGER

Fear not!  
Doctor Boyd (with Doctor's Bag) is here!

Lie down and let me sharpen up my scalpel  
There's nothing like a really shiny knife  
I'll make a few incisions, and I'll grope around inside,  
And maybe with some luck I'll save your life.  
Oh my goodness, this is odd,  
And unless my guess is flawed,  
Like an oyster squeezes out a pearl -  
Ta da! Congratulations!

(pulls out a baby)

It's a girl!

OLDER

Paging Doctor Boyd,  
I'm wildly paranoid  
And you've been recommended by some Austrian named Freud,  
My complex too complex for him to fix!

YOUNGER

Fear not!  
Doctor Boyd has brought her bag of tricks!

Lie down and tell me all about your childhood,  
Every painful adolescent shame;  
And though all your neuroses are too numerous to name  
No doubt somehow your mother is to blame.  
So although your future's glum  
Lay that guilt trip on your Mum!  
This advice comes medically deployed  
Compliments of gorgeous Doctor Boyd!

BOTH

Doctor Boyd  
The sound of that has such a lovely ring to it.  
My step has now a most expressive spring to it.

YOUNGER

Wrinkly, pasty skin?  
The Doctor is in!

BOTH

Doctor Top-Of-Her-Class  
In beauty and scholastically  
Run don't walk  
To lie down here for Doctor Boyd!

YOUNGER

That's me!

OLDER

Paging Doctor Gorgeous  
I seem to have this pain  
My ankle may be broken or my calf has sprung a sprain.  
I'll never walk again, not even stand.

YOUNGER

Fear not  
Gorgeous Doctor Boyd is here at hand!

I have here in my bag medical miracles  
Elixir that'll fix yer every ill,  
I've instruments to poke and prod and frighten you,  
And for every pain or symptom I've a pill.  
So then swallow all of these  
And you'll feel them pass your knees  
And chase your nether maladies away.  
Not only will you walk but you'll be back in the ballet!

(OLDER WOMAN dances.)

You see?! You're cured! You can dance!

OLDER

And what's really amazing? I've never been able to dance before!

BOTH

Doctor Extraordinaire  
What other doctors dare not be  
Gods were shocked  
When angels brought us Doctor Boyd

YOUNGER

That's me!

BOTH

So dance don't walk  
To lie down here for Doctor Boyd!  
That's me/she!

YOUNGER

That's she!

That's me! OLDER  
That's she! YOUNGER  
That's me/she! BOTH

Segue directly to next scene...

Scene 5

Directly following...

The OLDER WOMAN has found the song and dance of "Doctor Boyd" a bit exhausting.)

OLDER  
Oh my! After that, I think I may really need a doctor!

(The YOUNGER WOMAN attends to the OLDER WOMAN with whatever "medical instruments" she's been using in the song.)

YOUNGER  
...So - "Doctor Boyd" shall start with you. ...Now all I have to do is do it for real.

OLDER  
Yes.

YOUNGER  
But you, even though you wanted to...

OLDER  
It's like I said. It was the times. There wasn't the money.

YOUNGER  
So instead?

OLDER  
So instead, after working the farm for my father enough years, I left home and trained as a nurse. Which made me sick. No, I mean literally. Rheumatic fever. My bonus for putting in 3 years of hard labour (at \$10 a month) was another 6 months in the hospital, this time as a patient, recovering from something I'd caught while making other people healthy.

I was never able to work in a hospital again. Still - looking after other people – it's something I've done all my life.

(to the audience)

I don't expect I'm alone in that. My younger sisters, My parents. My private patients. My husband. My children. My children's children.

YOUNGER

How many children?

OLDER

Two. And two grandchildren. And I refuse to die until I have great-grandchildren.

YOUNGER

And what will you tell them? Your great-grandchildren.

OLDER

Lies!

YOUNGER

I don't believe you.

OLDER

What else do I have to tell them?

YOUNGER

Then show them! Your quilts, your paintings! Your boxes of secrets! I'll bet you've had hundreds of adventures you could tell them about.

OLDER

I was a good girl. I had no "adventures".

YOUNGER

Then something that happened to you you weren't expecting to happen. Something fun. Something you're proud of.

OLDER

Pride is a sin.

YOUNGER

You know what I mean.

OLDER

Well... I have a certificate. It may well be somewhere in that old trunk. From the Red Cross. In Recognition Of My Outstanding Service to the Community.

That sounds impressive.

YOUNGER

Don't be fooled. It was a nightmare.

OLDER

I don't believe you. Tell me.

YOUNGER

Alright. But you have to be me.

OLDER

Why?

YOUNGER

Because I have no interest in suffering through this a second time. My part's easy - I mean, "your" part. You keep finding new ways to say "no".

OLDER

Oh, no.

YOUNGER

(beat - then tries new ways)

I mean: "No". "No". "No". ...I'm not really an actor.

On the contrary, that was very...

OLDER

(But no adjective seems sufficient...)

So, yes, by all means let's be actors. My husband used to love to pretend he was an actor. This will be our theatre. Because in a theatre all things are possible. We are no longer constrained by the mundane rules of time and space. Reality is an afterthought. And if it's a musical, it needn't make any sense at all!

So... Act 1. Curtain Up! Spotlight on you. Me. Spotlight on you, pretending to be me. You are a nurse.

It all started when I was volunteering one afternoon at the Applewood United Church Blood Donor clinic. I'd seen her watching me awhile before she came up and said, "You're good at this."

(The YOUNGER WOMAN is uncertain what to do. The OLDER WOMAN prompts her.)

You say, "I was a nurse before I was married."

OLDER

YOUNGER  
"I was a nurse before I was married."

OLDER  
"We're always looking for help."

(Again, the YOUNGER WOMAN is unsure how to proceed.)

OLDER  
You simply keep trying to find plausible excuses.

YOUNGER  
"I've only so much time."

OLDER  
I'm sure, but...

YOUNGER  
I have six children to care for.

OLDER  
Six?

YOUNGER  
Oh, I know that doesn't seem like many. But that's not including the ones we've adopted.

OLDER  
I see.

YOUNGER  
And of course there's the cows to milk. And the stalls to muck. And...

OLDER  
(cutting her off)  
I lived in the suburbs. Thankfully, not a cow within 50 miles.

YOUNGER  
Oh.

OLDER  
And only 2 children, remember. Both mine.

YOUNGER  
Oh. ...So you had plenty of time.  
(Wrong response.)  
...I mean... I've only so much time.

(improvising desperately)

...Who knows where the time goes?

OLDER

You didn't tell her that you usually ached all day.

(The YOUNGER WOMAN begins to "ache".  
Throughout the next section SHE tries to "act" as  
much of the story as SHE can.)

OLDER

Had barely enough energy to do what little I did do. Laundry, cleaning, house work, yard work, Church work. And a husband who expected dinner on the table as soon as he got home from the office.

YOUNGER

...I have a lot to do!

OLDER

She wrote something on a piece of paper. "Come to this meeting. You might be interested."

A meeting was the last thing you were interested in, but you were too polite to say so out loud. So you smiled, took the paper from her, stuffed it in your pocket and forgot about it.

A couple of weeks later, your phone rang. "So I'll see you there at 7 o'clock? The meeting. You remember?"

YOUNGER

But...

OLDER

"You'll be interested. And there'll be pigs in blankets." Then she hung up.

You ached all over that day. You were in no mood for a meeting. You had dishes to do, and coupons to clip, and what did you find yourself doing? Looking for that piece of paper – which after groping in the pockets of half a dozen dresses in the laundry room, you finally found.

"Don't let yourself be manipulated," you told yourself. "Say what you mean, mean what you say." You poured your husband a drink, and you drove to the meeting.

YOUNGER

Oh, look - pigs in blankets!

OLDER

You didn't even like pigs in blankets.

It turned out to be a Rotary Club. There was a speaker from St. Christopher's House. They'd founded the first Canadian chapter of "Meals On Wheels" and the plan was to start one here. It would be the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meals On Wheels in Canada. What they needed was someone to organize it. Champion it in the community. Against all odds - make it happen.

The speaker from St Christopher's House looked at you. Every other man in the room looked at you. The suddenly silent woman looked at you.

You were paralyzed. Then you did the only thing you could think of to do. You fled.

A month later, the phone rang again. "So?"

YOUNGER

So I have to finish the ironing.

OLDER

"So when do you think you'll start raising the money?"

YOUNGER

Money. Now that's difficult. We've saving to buy a new tractor.

OLDER

"We'd like to start in the fall."

YOUNGER

The Fall. Gee. Oh boy. Bad time. Raking. Baking. There is so much to...

OLDER

"Everyone thinks you're the perfect person to run this."

YOUNGER

...The Mississauga Meals On Wheels.

OLDER

"Exactly."

YOUNGER

I don't believe 'everyone' knows anything about me so how could 'everyone' possibly assume I'm even capable of this?

OLDER

"...Please?"

(Music starts.)

OLDER

And so... One thing led to another. Which led to another. Until suddenly, one day...

(Suddenly, they're in a car.)

"Road Trip!"

Head out on the highway  
Sunlight in the sky  
Elbow out the window  
Watch the pretty boys go by.  
Turkey tetrazzini  
Riding shotgun next to me

YOUNGER

Dessert today's peach cobbler  
How much better can life be?

BOTH

Can't describe how scrumptious it feels

OLDER

On the Road Trip  
Called Meals On Wheels.

YOUNGER

Hear that motor purring,

OLDER

Feel that heater blow

YOUNGER

Radio is blasting out

OLDER

Barry Manilow.

YOUNGER

Smell that lunch aroma  
See the lights turn green  
Perched up here behind the wheel  
A throne made for a queen.

OLDER

Wearing my new dress  
And highest heels

BOTH

On the Road Trip  
Called Meals On Wheels.

Meals on Wheels  
Meals on Wheels  
Gee I hope we get it there  
Before it congeals.  
The highlight of a lonely day

A Meals On Wheels fish filet.

(During the next monologue, the OLDER WOMAN may wait in the car as the YOUNGER WOMAN “delivers meals”.)

OLDER

I hadn't officially learned to drive until after I was married. I had, of course, being a farm girl, driven most of my life. The difference was I'd driven the horses in plowing the fields. I've always been rather proud of the fact that it was only after I left the farm that my father had to break down and buy an actual tractor to replace me.

So I could drive horses, but a car turned out to be a different thing. But I did learn, and in turn added one more piece to the skill set I'd need as Executive Director, chief organizer, and main driver of Mississauga Meals On Wheels.

YOUNGER

Snowstorm closed the parkway  
Engine's running hot

OLDER

Circled this block seven times  
There's still no parking spot.

YOUNGER

One new driver cancelled

OLDER

Lost three volunteers

YOUNGER

Checked the chequing balance  
We are almost in arrears

BOTH

No one knows the daily ordeals  
Of the Road Trip  
Called Meals On Wheels.

Meals on Wheels  
Meals on Wheels

YOUNGER

Leafy greens,

BOTH

And pork and beans  
In automobiles.  
The highlight of a lonely day  
The Meals On Wheels mobile café.

OLDER

It was hard work. But satisfying. It felt worthwhile.



YOUNGER

I like birds!

OLDER

Roy had a house, with birds in nearly every room.

YOUNGER

I like birds!

OLDER

We'd arrive with his meal, and if he happened to be busy fixing some poor creature's broken wing, he'd tell us to put the meal in the refrigerator.

YOUNGER

Jus' put 'er there in the Frigidaire.

OLDER

So we'd negotiate the obstacle course between the front door and the fridge, and when we opened it... "Roy?"

YOUNGER

Yup?

OLDER

There are dead mice in your fridge.

YOUNGER

Yup. I need 'em to feed 'em to Pearl.

OLDER

"Pearl" as it turned out was the Great Blue Heron that lived in his bathtub.

YOUNGER

Only till she's fixed up.

OLDER

Or so we all hoped. Then Roy would wave a battered wing, we'd get back in the car, and hit the road.

BOTH

Meals on Wheels  
Meals on Wheels  
Too much tea,  
Bureaucracy,  
And yearly appeals.  
Still...

Can't describe how wonderful it feels  
On the Road Trip  
Called Meals On Wheels.

Segue directly to next scene...

Scene 6

Directly following...

YOUNGER

That's exactly what you should be telling your great-grandchildren. How many more triumphs like that are secreted away in these boxes?

OLDER

Those boxes are small for a reason.

YOUNGER

But I'll bet each picture tells a wonderful story. Is it time? May I look?

OLDER

It's your turn to tell me a story. But, yes, as you're talking, you may look.

YOUNGER

But there's so little to tell. I've hardly done anything.

OLDER

Nevertheless. No stories, no photos.

YOUNGER

Oh, alright. Let's see...

(as SHE tells her story, SHE absently leafs through the photos)

I like living on the farm. Although sometimes I wonder what it would have been like to grow up in a city. Well, maybe someday.

(remarking on one particular photo)

Look at this one! Two little children dressed up like cowboys. I'll bet you made those outfits.

OLDER

I did.

YOUNGER

That's amazing.

(returns to her story, and continues mining the

photos)

Anyway, one of my good memories is about attending the yearly school commencement functions at the village community hall. The music director had formed what was called Ye Olde Village Choir, and one year he asked me do a solo part in that. It was scary, but exciting! Later, at the dance we always had afterwards, I was asked by one of my classmates - a boy - if I would teach him to dance.

My mother and dad don't dance, but I have an uncle who had taught me the polka, and the waltz.

(remarking on the photos again)

All these things you've done!

OLDER

Tell me more about your dancing lessons.

YOUNGER

...Alright - so I started to teach "this boy" to dance. That friendship grew, and flourished, and he was probably my first date. I was just 14 at the time - years ago now! Of course, our parents were acquainted with one another, and attended the same United Church, so we had to behave. Still - he gave me my first kiss!

If I could paint, I think maybe that's a moment I'd try to capture. Is it hard? Becoming an artist?

OLDER

I had very patient teachers. Though I was never a prize student.

YOUNGER

I don't believe you. I expect you never really needed teachers. No doubt your innate artistry was so beyond their meagre skills that your true talent was never fully appreciated.

OLDER

That's not actually true.

YOUNGER

I think it is. In fact, I think I know exactly how it was.

OLDER

How could you?

YOUNGER

I've seen the painting. And don't forget that I've portrayed you in a dramatic re-enactment of an important and extraordinary moment in your life.

OLDER

Dear me, I've created a monster.

YOUNGER

You've created art. You've seen the world and reshaped it. Recoloured it.

OLDER

I see.

YOUNGER

And what I see is...

“An Art Song”

Mr. Cowan's painting class  
Every Tuesday night  
Kathryn to my left  
Clara on my right.  
Mister Cowan  
Loves wax fruit  
Sees the rules  
As absolute.  
Mister Cowan sees things he says I will never see.  
But then came that Tuesday night  
When suddenly...

There,  
I put something there,  
That was never there before.  
I'm not sure what it is  
I thought it was a tree  
I made it sort of green and brown  
But now it seems to me  
It isn't quite a tree.

Here  
Something's appearing here  
It's like light under a door  
It's a hint of something more  
Or...  
I tried a different kind of stroke  
And something kind of new awoke  
It made old Cowan start to choke  
“Is this a joke?”,  
He said.  
And I said, “No -  
It's red.”

This is I grant you unexpected

And if my technique were dissected  
It might be artistically rejected  
But I don't care  
Because look there!

This paper once was white  
But here this Tuesday night  
I've made it something quite...  
Un-white.  
Clara says, "What lovely flowers"  
I've been staring hard for hours  
And I frankly see...  
No flowers.  
Mr. Cowan looks and glowers  
He likes flowers to be flowers.

But I feel good  
And so I should  
For one thing should be understood:

There  
I put something there  
That was never there before.  
And now that I have done it once  
I can do it once more.  
It's my responsibility,  
To honour this facility  
To continue to explore  
And put something there  
That was never there  
Before.

Segue directly to next scene...

Scene 7

Directly following...

OLDER

That's not at all how it was.

YOUNGER

It is! It's how all of your life has been. I've seen the evidence.  
(SHE is leafing through photographs again)

Creating pies where there never was a pie! And here, where once there were only ordinary children, suddenly there are “cow-children”. Creating “moments” out of... “not-moments”.

(The OLDER WOMAN takes a fabric envelope out of the photo box, and takes a photo from it. The YOUNGER WOMAN can't believe her eyes.)

YOUNGER

Where did you get this photo?

(The YOUNGER WOMAN hands the photo to THE OLDER WOMAN.)

OLDER

I love this photo. Look at that old car. There weren't too many like that in those days. I think it was a 1929 Chevrolet.

YOUNGER

And the boy sitting on the running board?

OLDER

Do I recognize him? Of course. Don't you? And the girl?

YOUNGER

I don't understand.

OLDER

...I thought once or twice you already knew.

YOUNGER

I have thought we seemed a lot alike.

OLDER

Yes.

YOUNGER

You wanted to be a doctor. I want to be a doctor. I grew up on a farm.

OLDER

I grew up in a farm.

YOUNGER

We both seem to have had four sisters and a brother...

OLDER

...And I papered seven rooms of our house the winter before I turned 18.  
I expect you have a mole on your left shoulder.

YOUNGER

...I feel kind of sick.

OLDER

And yet you won't be getting rheumatic fever for three years yet.

YOUNGER

What am I doing here?

OLDER

You're here because you're a good girl, indulging the whims of a "really old" woman.

YOUNGER

I'm you, aren't I? I mean, you're me - in like a hundred years.

OLDER

72 years.

YOUNGER

But we're not... I mean, you look...

OLDER

We look different, yes, I know. But you came here pretty much directly out of my imagination. And I've always liked to imagine myself with red hair<sup>1</sup>.

YOUNGER

I don't believe this!

OLDER

Of course not. I'm sorry. This wasn't fair to you. I've been selfish. I wanted to remember. I wanted to feel...

YOUNGER

...What?

OLDER

(of the photos)

These moments. These expectations. Dreams. ...But I shouldn't have "invited" you today. We should stop.

---

<sup>1</sup> Depending on the physical relationship between the two actors, this line can be changed to whatever is appropriate, eg. "imagine myself taller".

YOUNGER

No. Not until you tell me about him.

OLDER

That other boy you just talked about. I remember teaching that boy to dance. But I can't remember his name.

YOUNGER

...Hillis.

OLDER

Yes. Hillis. And wasn't it through Hillis that we were introduced to...

YOUNGER

(takes back the photo)

Him. Yes. ...Tell me about Walter.

OLDER

I'm suddenly tired. And you're disappointed.

YOUNGER

No.

OLDER

Don't deny it. I'm not the person you at almost 18 wanted to be. I never became a doctor. Meaning you will never be a doctor.

YOUNGER

I will.

OLDER

Look at me. We didn't.

YOUNGER

Then you gave up.

OLDER

I adapted.

YOUNGER

You compromised.

OLDER

I've always wondered. Is that in fact what I did?

YOUNGER

What else would you call it? You had dreams. You abandoned them! It's time - tell me about him.

OLDER

What if I tell you I was happily married for almost 60 years.

YOUNGER

To Walter?

OLDER

To a very good man.

YOUNGER

Tell me!

OLDER

Why didn't you marry him when you had the chance?

YOUNGER

No money. No jobs. There's a Depression. He enlisted.

OLDER

And went overseas.

YOUNGER

Yes.

OLDER

He flies fighter planes.

YOUNGER

Yes.

OLDER

He never comes home. I still have the telegram.

YOUNGER

It's not true.

OLDER

I thought I'd never be happy again.

YOUNGER

...I want to go back. I don't want to be here anymore.

OLDER

I'd like you to stay.

YOUNGER

I don't care what you'd like! This isn't right!

OLDER

Perhaps not.

YOUNGER

You're ruining my life! I'm not staying! And I'm not... I'm not going to live your life! I won't! ...Send me back! Send me home.

OLDER

...Alright. This probably wasn't a very good idea. I never meant it to be painful.

YOUNGER

Another thing you've failed at, then.

OLDER

Perhaps, after all, I wish you would go.

YOUNGER

...I'll write him! I'll make him come home! It won't happen like you say it does! I'll be a doctor! There won't be any telegram!

I'm not going to grow up to be you. I'm not!

The YOUNGER WOMAN exits.

Segue directly to next scene...

### Scene 8

Directly following...

OLDER

...I wonder if perhaps she's right.

(to the audience)

...Is she right?

Have I compromised? Has any one of us not compromised?

(This next section is meant to be partially improvised with the AUDIENCE. The following

lines can be used to prompt responses from the AUDIENCE, then a conversation with a particular AUDIENCE MEMBER can proceed naturally. The actor can use as much or as little of the actual following text as SHE chooses. SHE begins by approaching one particular AUDIENCE MEMBER.)

My memory's not what it was – I recognize your face, but your name escapes me. Remind me, please – your name is...

(with luck, someone identifies herself)

...[Use Actual Name here], of course.

What do you think, “[Actual Name]”? When you were 10 years old, didn't you want to be “extraordinary”?

(If the AUDIENCE MEMBER answers “yes”...)

And you accomplished that, didn't you?! I can see it! (You have extraordinary eyes.)

(If the AUDIENCE MEMBER answers “no”...)

*But you accomplished it anyway, didn't you?! I can see it!*

(asking the audience)

Who remembers what you wanted to be at “almost 18”?

(Improvise with any AUDIENCE MEMBERS who respond.)

Who remembers wanting to be Shirley Temple? Marilyn Bell? Who here wanted to marry Pierre Trudeau? (Or perhaps his son, Justin?) When did it become about what we couldn't do, and not what we could?

Which of us decided – OK, instead of becoming Princess of Monaco, I think instead I'll...

(Give someone a chance to fill in the blank, then carry on...)

Who decided instead of becoming Fred Astaire's new partner, I think I'll become a volunteer? Or who founded a Guides troop? Sponsored a Foster Child? Made tea in the Church kitchen? Raised a strong daughter? A compassionate son? I don't actually want to be a lion tamer, I think instead I'll Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.

Rethink what's important. Remember who you love. And why.

Reach out.

Stop thinking, “I’ve compromised”. Stop thinking it’s too late. Stop stopping.

Start.

How many of us here in this room have ever made an extraordinary apple pie?

“Anyone Can Change The World (Reprise)”

Crust by crust,  
Pie by pie,  
Anyone can change the world.  
Tear by tear,  
Child by child.

(THE YOUNGER WOMAN has returned.)

YOUNGER

In every quarrel  
Reconciled.  
Listen closely

OLDER

Do one’s best.

BOTH

Recognize  
We’ve all been blessed.

OLDER

Every morning  
Tell oneself...

YOUNGER

“Today –

BOTH

Today I change the world.”

Segue directly to next scene...

Scene 9

Directly following...

YOUNGER

I’m going to do that.

OLDER

What?

Change the world. YOUNGER

I believe you. OLDER

Just like you. YOUNGER

...Just like you. OLDER

I'm sorry about before, I... YOUNGER

Ask me. OLDER

...Who was it? You said you were married almost 60 years. Who do we marry? YOUNGER

His name was Jim. OLDER

...Will I love him? YOUNGER

Very much. OLDER

How soon? I mean, after Walter... YOUNGER

Not too soon. You'll meet him in a Church basement. At a youth group meeting. OLDER

That sounds... "romantic". YOUNGER

For the rest of his life, whenever he talks about the night we met, he'll always say the same thing. OLDER

That I was "beautiful"? "Unforgettable"? "Extraordinary"?! YOUNGER

OLDER

"Glasses And A Smile"

"Glasses and a smile":  
When he saw me he saw  
"Glasses and a smile".  
I'm not sure he heard  
A single word I said  
Of the book report I read  
*Footloose In India*  
By Gordon Sinclair.  
Was he dazzled by my rhetoric,  
Or the light on my hair?  
No.

"Glasses and a smile".  
He said later that  
My glasses and my smile  
Gave him butterflies  
And almost stopped his heart.  
And from that simple start:  
Nothing was ever the same.

We make choices  
We take leaps of faith  
And lives can turn in a moment.  
And romance  
And forever  
Can turn on now  
Or never.

Once upon a time  
We know now there is no  
Once upon a time.  
Still, it's possible that right out of the blue  
Some fairy tales come true  
When there I was  
Walking down the aisle  
Wedding veil  
Wedding gown,  
Glasses  
And a smile.

YOUNGER

Is there a picture of him? So I'll recognize him when I meet him?

OLDER

Lots of them. More of him than of me, I think. I've never much liked having my picture taken. There – this is us on our honeymoon.

YOUNGER

We could say the same thing about him.

OLDER

What's that?

YOUNGER

“Glasses and a smile”.

OLDER

(another photo)

And then again about 50 years later.

YOUNGER

You still look happy. And these are our children? Look at the ears on that boy!

OLDER

All the better to not listen with.

YOUNGER

A troublemaker?

OLDER

His father wanted him to be an accountant. He decided to write songs.

YOUNGER

I'm so sorry.

OLDER

He has his good points, too.

YOUNGER

And our daughter?

OLDER

The smart one in the family. And a survivor.

YOUNGER

Like you.

OLDER

We've both of us had our scares. With the number of hospital beds I've been in, it's a wonder I'm still here.

YOUNGER

No “wonder” at all. You’re extraordinary.

OLDER

I’m not. You were right. I compromised.

YOUNGER

I shouldn’t have said that.

OLDER

You may as well start now. Saying what you think. Telling the truth. Too many of us wait until it’s almost too late.

YOUNGER

You’re right. Then hear this, because this is the truth. You are amazing.

OLDER

No.

YOUNGER

You are! You prevailed. You overcame. And you’ve made the world a better place. A more beautiful place. You give me hope. I’ve always worried I might not have the strength, to do everything I want to do. I see now I needn’t worry about that.

OLDER

But you wanted to become a doctor.

YOUNGER

And maybe I still will. We’re not dead yet. I don’t intend to give up. ...You never did.

OLDER

There was never any choice. Or rather, there were always choices – we simply made them one at a time. And we carried on.

YOUNGER

When I grow up - I hope I end up just like you.

OLDER

Thank you. But...

“When I Grow Up”

When I grow up  
I want to be just like you  
I want to have dreams  
Dreams that I stay true to.

When I grow up  
I want to remember how it feels  
To love, to laugh, to play.

BOTH

Growing every day.

If there are songs in my heart  
Please, let every song be sung  
And like you  
Let me grow up  
Forever young.

When I grow up (When I grow up)  
Let me continue to grow  
And to know that when my time to grow is through  
That in growing up I grew  
Into you.

YOUNGER

...I'm glad you invited me today.

OLDER

...I'm glad I did, too. It's been nice to remember.

“Extraordinary (Reprise)”

OLDER

At 89  
What do I see  
Someone simply ordinary?

YOUNGER

No!  
No one's simply ordinary.

BOTH

No more sitting idly  
Knitting in a chair  
Finally I'm a princess!  
Dragons best beware.  
No more compromises,  
Set our standards high,  
Angel-blessed,  
Earth and sky and sea!  
We  
Are  
Extraordinary!

The End.