

The Far End of the Earth

by
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The Cast

Three Generations – Grandmother, Mother, Daughter

Annie Early 60s; in good health, cantankerous, colorful, clear-headed, and pretty much content at this point in her life...except for her relationship with her daughter, Gayle.

Gayle 37; Cynical, determined, conflicted—sick of fighting her life; and worried about her daughter, Jo

Jo (Joanne) 15; Bright, curious and headstrong; just beginning her journey towards knowledge, understanding, acceptance and wisdom.

NOTE: In the Wiccan Tradition, the trinity consists of the maiden, the mother and the crone.

Synopsis

Annie is an iconoclast and a practicing Pagan witch, whose home is an isolated cabin high in the Cascade Mountains of Western Washington. Here she lives a hermit's life, writes a little, and considers herself guardian of one of the last privately owned old growth forests in western Washington

One morning, Gayle walks into Annie's homestead unannounced—the first time she has set foot on the property since she was 18. This is no casual visit. Gayle feels that she is nearing the end of her rope with her daughter, Jo, and has come to ask her mother for help. She's not after advice or encouragement; she wants money to help pay the costs of Jo's college education. Gayle knows that Annie has only one resource that she can tap—her trees, which she treasures.

Old tensions surface immediately and both women instinctively raise their shields; each aware that it is exactly the wrong thing to do, but unable to override defense mechanisms put into place years before. Jo enters. She and her grandmother haven't seen each other since Jo was ten. Gayle has kept the two apart, fearing that Gayle's eccentricities might have an adverse effect on Jo.

Though Annie professes to be the witch, Jo is the catalyst who works the healing magic. She forces Annie and Gayle to recognize how much they need each other. In the end, the healing process has begun and more natural and supportive family relationships among the three characters are beginning to develop.

Woven through the threads of this story are ideas about the fragile nature of our environment, the importance of intelligent and responsible actions in all phases of our existence, and some questions as to the limits of knee-jerk fundamental Christianity as a source of solutions to the problems that face our world today.

The Time

Contemporary. Summer—mid-July. The play is two acts—each act is continuous.

The Setting

The front porch and yard of an isolated cabin high in the Cascade Mountains of western Washington. The small house—stage left—is old, but comfortable. It is simple wood frame construction, well-maintained, and the porch runs across the entire front. The porch is raised several feet off the ground, with a set of wooden steps leading up to it.

From the porch, a door leads into the house. It has a screen door, and possibly glass in the top half of the door, masked by sheer curtains. There are two or three sash windows in the front wall, also masked by sheers and with curtains on the sides. At least one of the windows is partially open.

The cabin was built at the edge of a forest of old-growth cedars on an overlook commanding the valley below. The trunks of several large cedars can be seen behind and on one side of the building. Downstage right there's the suggestion of a rock outcropping and a cliff with a drop of a hundred feet or more. A rickety split-rail fence provides a slight safety barrier.

In front of the cabin is a pile of freshly split firewood, cut for a wood stove. More split firewood is stacked under the front edge of the porch, ready for winter use. Somewhere out of the way—at one side of the stage or upstage, there is a chopping block with rounds of wood waiting to be split.

Centerstage, in the yard is an old picnic table with a separate bench on the stage right side, and a straight-backed chair on the stage left side. On the table are journals, pens and pencils, a handful of reference books, a glass of water and a portable manual typewriter. The other bench from the picnic table (or possibly a more comfortable bench with a back) is placed stage right to take in the view from the overlook.

Act I

(When the lights come up **ANNIE** is sitting on the bench at the overlook with her eyes closed, apparently lost in thought or meditation. Annie (about 60) is something of an oddball eccentric, something of a hermit, and very much her own person. Her clothing is a combination of aging free spirit and rugged northwest woods-woman—a turtleneck with a work shirt over it, open, tails out and sleeves rolled up; khaki pants; heavy socks and work boots. Her long hair—dark with streaks of gray—is up, out of the way, loosely and casually. Around her neck is a silver pentacle on a leather thong.

(GAYLE Enters. Gayle (37) is dressed smartly in slacks, a nice, lightweight sweater, leather boots and matching shoulder bag. She stops, studying Annie. After a moment....)

GAYLE

...Mama?

(It takes Annie a moment to come out of her thoughts. She turns, surprised; happy to see Gayle.)

ANNIE

...Well I'll be damned.

GAYLE

(With a grin.)

More than likely.

ANNIE

(Annie laughs, then rises and holds out her arms, inviting)

Come here. I need a hug.

(Gayle crosses to her for a quick hug—she is obviously uncomfortable with it, and quickly pulls away.)

You look wonderful.

GAYLE

So do you.

ANNIE

Nonsense.

GAYLE

No. You do.

ANNIE

I'm holding up. Praise be the Goddess.

(Annie knocks on wood. Gayle reacts before she can stop herself, showing her disapproval of Annie's Pagan beliefs.)

So...what brings you back to the far end of the earth?

GAYLE

You.

ANNIE

That's hard to believe.

GAYLE

It's true.

ANNIE

(Deciding to accept that, for now.)

Good. Something to drink? Iced tea?

GAYLE

Anything stronger?

ANNIE

Jug of wine in the fridge.

GAYLE

Perfect.

ANNIE

Be right back.

(Annie exits into the house. Gayle looks around, taking a moment to read from the notes at Annie's typewriter. She smiles and shakes her head. She reaches into her purse for cigarettes and is about to pull one out when Annie returns with a juice jar/glass of wine.)

I thought one of your Christmas cards said you'd quit.

GAYLE

(She takes the implied criticism and puts the pack away.)

Several times. Do you actually still split your own wood?

ANNIE

Yep.

GAYLE

Can't you get someone to do that?

ANNIE

Rather do it myself. Reminds me I'm not as old as I look.

(She gives Gayle the wine. Gayle chuckles at the container.)

GAYLE

Thanks.

(She tosses her purse on the table and then sips the wine.)

Um, nice. Had to leave the car down at the last wash. That road of yours is so much worse than I remembered.

ANNIE

Lot of years since the last time you dropped by.

GAYLE

Wasn't sure I'd make it.

ANNIE

Oh, it's not that bad.

GAYLE

It is! Bouncing all over hell. Afraid I'd bottom out any second. Then where would I be?

ANNIE

Sitting there, spinning your wheels, cursing a blue streak.

(Gayle smiles in spite of herself.)

My old Ford pickup manages fine.

GAYLE

So damned isolated up here.

ANNIE

Part of the charm. You don't get that view on a corner lot. The Tuckers are just down the road.

GAYLE

Three and a half miles.

ANNIE

Close enough.

GAYLE

The least you could do is get a cell phone.

ANNIE

No reception up here. Besides, there's nobody I want to call.

GAYLE

What if you have an emergency?

ANNIE

Ed and I got along fine without a phone for nearly twenty years.

GAYLE

But now you're alone. What if you need a medic, or an ambulance, or something?

ANNIE

I'm still kicking.

(She knocks on wood again.)

GAYLE

Maybe one of those two-way radio things. At least you'd be able to call for help.

ANNIE

What's all this me needing help crap? I'm not ready for a rest home yet. Or a cemetery. I won't spend good money on something I don't need and won't use anyway.

GAYLE

(Placating, trying to keep the peace.)

Then I'll buy it. We'll call it a present. Make me feel better.

ANNIE

What makes you think I want to make you feel better?

GAYLE

(She's thrown, as Annie intended.)

Mama!

ANNIE

Of course I want you to feel good and be happy. But I have no earthly desire for a two-way radio. Sorry, but that's how it is.

(A pause, then Annie continues.)

Gayle, you didn't come up here, for the first time in umpteen years, to chit-chat about roads and telephones and radios, now did you?

GAYLE

...No.

ANNIE

It must have taken something important to bring you. Joanne?

GAYLE

She's fine. Totally insane, but healthy. And driving me out of my skull.

ANNIE

She's...fifteen?

GAYLE

Going on twenty-five.

ANNIE

Wish you'd brought her. Love to see her.

GAYLE

Mama...if I did bring her up here, do you think...?

ANNIE

What?

GAYLE

Do you think you could—like when you came for the wedding—not talk about...certain things?

ANNIE

(She knows exactly what Gayle is getting at.)

Such as?

GAYLE

You know good and well. I mean you're not quite the typical grandmother.

ANNIE

Blessed be the Goddess for that.

(Note: Whenever Annie uses "Blessed" in this context, it is pronounced as two syllables: "Bless'-ed")

GAYLE

That's it exactly. All that pagan stuff. Your "beliefs."

ANNIE

My "beliefs" are nothing more than ideas. Being exposed to new ideas never hurt anybody.

GAYLE

She's being exposed to enough new ideas already. She's got plenty to handle without a grandmother who goes around claiming to be a witch.

ANNIE

A white witch. I don't see what's wrong with...

GAYLE

It's wrong for Jo, because I say it is. If you can't accept that...
(She catches herself and stops.)

ANNIE

Then I can't see my only grandchild?

GAYLE

I'm not a monster, Mama. But I've got to do what's best for Jo.

ANNIE

It's better she not know me at all, rather than think I might be a little...unusual?

GAYLE

A little? Think again. Living up here, the far end of nowhere. Alone. Looking like some aging backwoods pioneer hippie.

ANNIE

I look like who I am.

GAYLE

This mountain—the whole valley—it's deserted. The gold's long gone. The timber's played out. Everybody else had the sense to move on. But not you; oh no.

ANNIE

The Swensons are still here. And Earnest Jackson. The Tuckers, and...

GAYLE

And who? That's it. Old Man Jackson's crazy as a coot. The Swensons are on the other side of the river. The Tuckers... They sold out last month. Be gone by fall.

ANNIE

(That's news to her.)

How'd you know that?

GAYLE

Mrs. Tucker called me last week. Wanted to make sure I knew what was going on up here.

ANNIE

Meddlesome old biddy.

GAYLE

She's worried about you. Told me how the county has decided to stop maintaining the road beyond the bridge. She said you got a notice.

ANNIE

"The high costs are no longer justified." It was justified when the mines were open and the logging companies were getting rich. But now, there's just a few poor folk like me, who happen to love what's left of this place. "The high costs are no longer justified."

GAYLE

It's that stretch down by the river, and the bridge itself. They have to work on it every time the water gets up.

ANNIE

Not anymore.

GAYLE

They figure it won't last more than a couple of years.

ANNIE

Maybe. Maybe not.

GAYLE

Have you thought about what you'll do?

ANNIE

Yes.

GAYLE

...And?

ANNIE

If I'm still around to worry about it, I'll decide when the time comes.

GAYLE

You will be. You've got to move.

ANNIE

Maybe.

GAYLE

There's no maybe to it, Mama. If the bridge goes how can you hope to stay here?

ANNIE

The Swensons will let me park the truck over there. Get some kind of boat. And one of those off-road noisemakers to get me up the mountain.

GAYLE

That's crazy and you know it.

ANNIE

So I'm crazy. Does that surprise you?

GAYLE

Mama, I did not come up here to argue with you.

ANNIE

Good. Then let's drop it.

GAYLE

But...

ANNIE

Even if I wanted to—which I don't—I couldn't afford it. Everything around here has gotten so expensive. All these damned city folks coming out here, buying up everything. Kicking the prices up out of sight.

GAYLE

(Trying not to smile.)

Don't forget, you used to be city folk.

ANNIE

That was a long time ago.

GAYLE

You could move back to Seattle—get a little apartment.

ANNIE

And pay a fortune in rent. Can't afford it.

(A pause—a malicious thought; but Annie plays it straight.)

No, if I ever have to leave this place...my only option will be to move in with you.

(Gayle is horrified by the possibility. Annie laughs at her reaction, then continues.)

Don't panic. I'd never do that to you. Besides, Mike probably wouldn't go for it. How's he doing?

GAYLE

(This is a subject Gayle would like to have avoided.)

...Fine. ...As far as I know.

(Annie gives her a questioning look.)

I should have written you. We've been separated since January.

(With some regret in her voice)

Probably make it permanent fairly soon.

ANNIE

What happened?

GAYLE

It just didn't work out. That's all.

ANNIE

He seemed so nice. I thought you two had a shot at "happily ever after."

GAYLE

(Cynical)

Hey, we almost made four years. For me, that's a big improvement. Who knows? Maybe next time.

ANNIE

But what happened?

GAYLE

Look—I don't want to talk about that right now. Okay?

ANNIE

...Guess it has to be.

GAYLE

(She hesitates, anticipating Annie's reaction.)

Mama...I called Thompson Timber.

ANNIE

(Immediately she is upset.)

So that's what this is all about—those bastards.

GAYLE

They're businessmen, not bastards.

ANNIE

Same difference, and my answer is still no.

GAYLE

Mama, you've got to be sensible.

ANNIE

Who says?

GAYLE

You've got a fortune in old growth timber up here. It's worthless once the bridge is gone.

ANNIE

A forest doesn't have to be cut down to be worth something.

GAYLE
(Exasperated.)
Mama...

ANNIE
No.

GAYLE
They said half a million at least. Sell. Get a house, a few miles down the valley,
on the other side of the river.

ANNIE
No.

GAYLE
But...

ANNIE
No! You ought to know when my mind's made up, it's made up.

GAYLE
Oh I know how stubborn you can be. How..."unusual." But I've never known you
to be downright stupid.

ANNIE
Careful.

GAYLE
They said you won't even let them come in and look. Make an estimate of what
it's worth.

ANNIE
Don't need an estimate on something that's not for sale.

GAYLE
...I told them I'd stop by this afternoon; set up a time for them to come up here.

ANNIE
You've got no right!

GAYLE
You have to know your options, Mama. You can't ignore this. It won't go away.
The only thing that's going away is that bridge.

ANNIE
You bring 'em up here, I'll take a shotgun to the lot of you.

(They are interrupted by a sound from offstage.)

JO

(Calling from offstage, a moment before entering.)

Anybody home?

(Annie and Gayle stop, turning toward the sound. **JO Enters.** Jo, (15) is an attractive kid who has decided, as do all fifteen-year-olds, that she wants to be grown up and in complete control of her own life, Now! Her clothing is eccentric—just what a rebellious kid would be wearing. The only specific item required is a pair of sandals. Her hair is in one of those helter skelter hairstyles which looks as if her stylist may well have been a small tornado. She has a daypack with one of its straps over her shoulder.)

Jeas! This place is incredible.

(She sees the view and heads over to get a better look.)

Wow! You can see for miles.

GAYLE

(More concerned that she reasonably needs to be.)

Jo! Stay away from there.

ANNIE

Careful. That old fence isn't too solid anymore.

(Jo notices the drop, which she is fairly close to by this time.)

JO

Good God...

(She slows down, approaching the overlook more carefully.)

ANNIE

You go over—be playing pinball off the rocks for at least a hundred feet. Definitely a closed-casket service.

GAYLE

(Stern with her daughter, almost harsh.)

I asked you to wait in the car.

JO

You said, "A few minutes."

GAYLE

I said I'd come get you.

JO
But you didn't.

ANNIE
Joanne, is that actually you?

JO
(Turning to greet her grandmother, smiling.)
It's me, but call me Jo. Joanne's a real dipshit name.

GAYLE
Hey, watch your mouth.

ANNIE
I always liked it.

JO
Sounds like some kind of stupid hick or something.

ANNIE
Okay, Jo it is. Now come over here and give your aging, backwoods pioneer hippie grandmother a hug.

(Annie holds her arms out, open, ready for a hug.)

JO
Huh?

ANNIE
Ask your mother. Now come here.

(Another gesture for the hug. Jo crosses to her and moves into her arms for a hug, but she is a bit awkward about it.)

JO
(Pulling away, not comfortable with this intimacy.)
What ya' drinking? I'm dying.

ANNIE
There's tea in the fridge. And sodas.

GAYLE
Why don't you help yourself?
(To Annie)
If that's all right.

ANNIE

Sure. The glasses are over the sink.
 (Jo disappears into the house.)
 I thought you didn't bring her.

GAYLE

I didn't intend to. When I told her I was coming up here, she insisted on tagging along. Would not hear the word "no".

ANNIE

(With a grin)
 I bet she is a handful. She always dress like that?

GAYLE

She's tame today. You should see her when she's "taking in a concert with her man, Chris".

ANNIE

(Amused)
 Her man?

GAYLE

He's a senior; works at Pizza Hut. Scares me to death.

ANNIE

How's she doing in school?

GAYLE

Rotten. Except her art classes. She was doing pretty well until this last year. But now she's decided to be an artist, so the rest..."doesn't matter." It's all I can do to keep her from dropping out.

ANNIE

Merciful Mother.

GAYLE

Would you please watch that while we're here?

ANNIE

I'll try.

GAYLE

Almost seems like she's working to get herself kicked out. Teachers swear she's bright—just won't do the work. Every time I turn around she's in trouble. Talking back to teachers, skipping classes, getting caught smoking.
 (Annie reacts, disgusted by the idea.)
 Guess I should be thankful it's only cigarettes, far as I know.

ANNIE

Get on her. Make her behave.

GAYLE

You saw how she listens. Sometimes I get so mad I could snatch her bald-headed.

ANNIE

(A chuckle)

I haven't heard that in years. Not since I used to say it about...someone in the immediate vicinity.

GAYLE

(Smiling in spite of herself.)

Was I that awful, Mama?

ANNIE

You had your moments. Remember that time you and Alan were up at the lake and took off "huckleberry picking?" You were...seventeen?

GAYLE

(The memory embarrasses Gayle.)

We did get lost, like we said.

ANNIE

Sure you did. We looked high and low for you. Just about ready to go down and get help when you two come strolling in like nobody's business. I could have strangled you with good graces. Alan too.

GAYLE

We were kids.

ANNIE

Just like Jo. She'll be fine. Give her room, but not so much she gets in any trouble she can't handle, and be there when she needs you, 'cause she will.

GAYLE

You make it sound so easy.

ANNIE

It's not so hard...especially if you happen to be a witch.

(Gayle gives her a dirty look.)

Sorry.

GAYLE

I used to think, it's just a phase—every kid goes through it—you just have to ride it out. But with Jo...I'm not so sure.

GAYLE (CONT'D)

(A sigh.)

A few months ago—in April—she disappeared. Left a note on the fridge—"Gone for a few days; see you when I get back. P.S., Don't worry." She was gone for four days. I went out of my mind. Called everyone I could think of—almost called the police. Then, Sunday afternoon, she comes waltzing in out of nowhere. Said she needed time to herself—stayed with "a friend." What the hell do I do about something like that?

ANNIE

Talk to her.

GAYLE

Right. Why didn't I think of that? Since then, it's happened three times. She just goes away. Three days—once four. I have no idea where. It's not with Chris. I know that—I've talked to his parents. She just disappears. When she comes back—I ask her about it—she just closes up. Won't say anything.

ANNIE

What about Mike? Would she go to him?

GAYLE

He says no. I don't know—sometimes I think she hates me. Does it just to...

(Jo opens the cabin door, interrupting the conversation. She comes out, carrying a can of diet soda.)

JO

Wow, Gran, this place is great. Incredible. Right out of a fairy tale.

GAYLE

Yeah; "Hansel and Gretel."

JO

(She gives Gayle a curious look, then continues.)

You really live up here, by yourself?

ANNIE

Sure do.

JO

Don't you get scared?

ANNIE

Of what?

...Animals?

JO

ANNIE

They say there's still a bear or two in this neck of the woods, but as far as I can tell, they're pretty stand-offish.

JO

What about murderers, or thieves, or...

(Jokingly)

...ghosts?

ANNIE

Too far out of the way for murderers. Nothing here to steal, except the trees.

JO

Somebody'd take the trees?

ANNIE

Yep. Timber rustlers. More money in trees than cows. Couple of summers ago, one of the absentee owners came up here camping. Nothing left on his place but stumps.

JO

God.

ANNIE

(Facetiously)

As for ghosts, most of them are quite benevolent. There's one...

GAYLE

(Cutting her off.)

Mother!

ANNIE

These old mining valleys are full of ghost stories.

JO

I bet. The woods coming up from the car—they're downright weird. Never seen trees like that.

ANNIE

That's old growth. Never been cut.

JO

Is your whole place like that?

ANNIE

No. There's a meadow, where I do my gardening and keep the goats. And a small lake up at the top. Great swimming hole.

JO

(To Gayle)

Why didn't you tell me? I'd have brought a suit.

ANNIE

Don't need one. Just a towel. It's very private.

JO

(The idea is almost too much for her to handle.)

You mean...!? Hey, how do I get there?

GAYLE

We can't be here long enough for you to go swimming.

JO

How come?

GAYLE

We just can't. You'll have to do that some other time.

JO

And how many years did it take me to get here this time?

GAYLE

Don't get smart with me.

(Jo reacts to that, but doesn't say anything.)

Now—I need a favor. I'm out of cigarettes.

(Jo reaches for her backpack, to get hers.)

I really don't like the menthol. Would you please run down to the car and get me a pack? In the glove compartment.

JO

I'm supposed to trek all the way back down to the car because you don't like menthol?

GAYLE

Please.

(With an aggravated sigh, Jo starts out.)

Thank you.

(Jo exits. Once she's gone, Gayle lets out a deep sigh of her own and pulls out her pack of cigarettes.)

ANNIE

At least don't let her see you with those.

(Gayle looks at her mother, then puts the cigarettes away.)

Was the lie necessary? Couldn't you tell her we needed to talk...privately?

GAYLE

That'd keep her close for sure. She's a kid, no matter how she dresses.

ANNIE

Been a while since I was around young people.

GAYLE

They've changed. A lot.

ANNIE

Sounds like they still love a good swimming hole. You stayed up there all summer. Why don't we take her? Make some sandwiches...

GAYLE

There isn't time.

ANNIE

Why the hell not? Surely you can survive the "awful fate" of one night under my roof.

(Annie pauses. Gayle gives her a "you don't understand" look and an aggravated sigh—"nothing's changed.")

You intend to turn around and leave?

GAYLE

I'm showing houses tomorrow morning. Have to get back.

ANNIE

Bullshit.

GAYLE

That's colorful.

ANNIE

Honest, which is more than I can say for the crap you're feeding me.

GAYLE

I've accomplished what I came to do. I'll tell the timber company you're as unreasonable as ever. We'll go home.

ANNIE

And I won't see either of you for another four or five years.

GAYLE

Possibly.

ANNIE

Probably; as long as you keep on hating me.

GAYLE

I don't...

(She doesn't finish the denial. There's no point.)

All right. Things aren't so great between us. We both know that. I just thought...was hoping maybe I could talk some sense into you, this once.

ANNIE

Talk me into "sensibly" letting them cut down my trees? My favorite spot on the face of the Earth. "Sensibly" trading that for a big pile of "sensible" money, which I don't need.

GAYLE

But you do—don't you realize that? Sometime soon you're going to have to leave this place. You do need the money. ...And I was hoping...maybe you'd be able to loan me some.

ANNIE

Ahh, so that's where the shoe pinches.

GAYLE

Not for me—for Jo. Two more years and it's time for college, if we get that far. I'd managed to put by some. The real estate market was doing okay, and then with Mike sharing expenses, things were really great. These days, the market's awful—I'm having to pull from her college fund to cover our basics. I always hoped she'd get a scholarship. But now... She probably won't even get accepted to a decent school, much less get money.

ANNIE

You've talked to her about it?

GAYLE

Till I'm blue in the face. It doesn't do any good.

ANNIE

Then forget it. She'll pull it together, or she won't.

GAYLE

How can you say that?

ANNIE

Because it's true. Because I know what's meant to happen will come to pass.

GAYLE

What's meant to happen is that she's going to college—the best damn college she can get into. She is not going to end up with the kind of life...

(She lets that thought trail off, unfinished.)

ANNIE

You lived? Which is, of course, my fault.

GAYLE

I didn't say that. But I will not stand by and watch Jo's life go down the drain.

ANNIE

You may not be able to stop it.

GAYLE

You could. Let them cut the damn timber and you could put her through any school in the country.

ANNIE

But why should I?

GAYLE

She's your granddaughter. Your only grandchild.

ANNIE

If she hasn't got the sense to use her talents, why should I lift a finger to make it easy for her?

GAYLE

Mama!

ANNIE

You either.

GAYLE

If she gets a shot, I know she'll take advantage of it.

ANNIE

Got a crystal ball you haven't told me about?

GAYLE

She'll be fine. But she needs your help. I wasn't going to ask unless I had to. But with this... Had to do it now, or you won't be able to when the time comes.

ANNIE

(Out of left field, an abrupt switch of subject.)

When's your appointment with the timber bastards?

GAYLE

(Thrown by the shift.)

...I told them after lunch.

ANNIE

Got a proposition for you. You won't like it, but I hope you'll agree, for all our sakes.

GAYLE

Sounds ominous.

ANNIE

I'm not saying I will, but if I'm to cut my trees for Jo...

GAYLE

(Interrupting)

Not just for Jo. You need the money too.

ANNIE

(Ignoring Gayle's comment.)

...it's only fair she and I have a chance to get acquainted. Go to town. Tell 'em they can come...whenever. Take your time. Look around. It's changed a lot. Come back...after three. No; four. That'll give me plenty of time.

GAYLE

For what?

ANNIE

A test—to see if she's worth it.

GAYLE

“Test?” What kind of test are you talking about, Mama?

ANNIE

Nothing serious. Just visit. Talk. Listen. Throw out some ideas; see how she responds. I want to find out who she is. What kind of brain she's got.

GAYLE

You mean all that pagan crap, don't you?

ANNIE

I'm not sure what I mean. Gayle, she's fifteen. Probably already dealt with worse than I can spring on her.

GAYLE

...No. I...I just can't.

ANNIE

Then you'll have to find the money somewhere else.

GAYLE

I've got to do what's best for Jo.

ANNIE

If you're sure you're right.

GAYLE

Why does it feel like I'm bargaining with the devil for the soul of my only child?

ANNIE

(Smiling)

Not even a minion.

GAYLE

I can't. Not like this; it's too fast. Later, after I've had a chance to prepare Jo.

ANNIE

For what?

GAYLE

You.

ANNIE

You make it sound like the inquisition. I'm a harmless old crone. Maybe not quite a crone yet, but getting there.

(Jo returns, carrying a pack of cigarettes.)

JO

Here you go.

(She tosses the pack. Gayle misses it and has to pick it up.)

Sorry.

(Jo sits on the edge of the porch and digs into her pack, pulling out a sketch pad. Gayle picks up the pack and starts to open it, but then she looks at Annie. Even as an adult she has trouble smoking in front of her mother. She sighs and puts the pack into her purse. Then she notices what Jo is up to.)

GAYLE

What are you doing?

JO

Gettin' my stuff. I've got to sketch this place.

GAYLE

We don't have time.

(Jo looks up at her, surprised.)

JO

...You said your meeting's not till this afternoon.

GAYLE

I thought we'd go on in, see the sights. You won't believe the high school I went to up here. Get a bite.

(To Annie)

Cafe still open?

ANNIE

Yes, or I could fix something.

GAYLE

No need.

ANNIE

It's no trouble.

JO

See?

GAYLE

It'd be best if we went.

JO

Why?

GAYLE

Because I said so.

JO

(Realizing that's a dead end, she tries another tack.)

Is Gran coming, so we can visit some at least?

GAYLE

We won't be back up here afterwards. Besides, I'm sure she has other things to do. Don't you, Mama?

ANNIE

Nothing that won't wait.

(Gayle gives her mother a look—"Thanks for nothing.")

JO

If I stayed, could you give me a ride in when it's time?

ANNIE

Sure.

GAYLE

No! You need to come with me.

JO

You know, you're not making much sense here.

GAYLE

Put the stuff in the bag and let's go!

JO

I haven't seen Gran since she came to Portland when you and Mike got married. Besides, I want some of her killer gingersnaps.

GAYLE

We can't wait for her to bake cookies.

ANNIE

Don't need to. Got some in the kitchen. Be right back.

(She escapes quickly into the cabin.)

GAYLE

Why have you chosen this particular time to piss me off?

JO

I just want to spend some time with Grandma. Why don't you want me to?

GAYLE

I didn't plan to be here but a few minutes. Told you that when you insisted on coming. Jo... Mama and I don't get along. We haven't for a long time.

(Making a joke.)

You put us together—we fight.

(Realizing it's not funny.)

Whether we want to or not. It just happens. I was hoping that somehow, this time might be different. No such luck.

JO

That's not fair. You don't get along with her, so I get fucked.

GAYLE

I've told you not to use that word.

JO

You've told me not to do lots of things.

GAYLE

What the hell is that supposed to mean?!

JO

Nothing. You wouldn't understand.

(Jo starts throwing her things back into the bag.)

GAYLE

I asked you a question. I expect an answer.

JO

You're so full of rules and regulations. "This is right. That's wrong." Why?

(Exaggerated.)

"Because I said so."

(Back to normal voice.)

That's not much of a reason, especially when the person who said so acts like she's at least as fu... ..messed up as I am.

GAYLE

Where do you think you get off? So I'm fucked up, huh? Not half as bad as you'll be when we get home. Go to the car. Now.

JO

(Calm, but determined)

No.

GAYLE

I'm warning you.

JO

I'm here. I plan to spend some time with Gran. Either come back and get me, or go home. I'll catch a bus, when I'm ready.

ANNIE

(Coming out with a bag of cookies.)

Here you go. Should last you a day or two.

JO

Gran, I'm going to stay a while.

ANNIE

Wonderful. As long as it's all right with your mother.

(Jo looks at her mother. Annie also looks to Gayle. After a moment Gayle sighs and gives in—not happy about it.)

GAYLE

(Under her breath)

Damn.

(To the others)

All right. I can tell when I'm outnumbered. I'll be back when I'm done. Mama... maybe I should look around. It's been a while.

ANNIE

Sure has.

GAYLE

Look for me...

ANNIE

Four o'clock?

GAYLE

Right.

JO

That give us time to go up to the lake?

ANNIE

Plenty.

JO

Great.

GAYLE

You be careful. That water's cold. And mind your Grandma.

JO

I will.

(Jo sits down on the porch and starts pulling out her sketch stuff again, her focus on the bag.)

ANNIE

We'll be fine.

(Gayle turns to start out.)

Gayle, you can tell those timber..."gentlemen," anytime next week. Just so I'll...know my options.

GAYLE

Right. ...Well, Mama, she's all yours.

(A last look at Jo, then she turns and continues out.)

JO

See you later.

(Gayle exits. Jo has found everything she needs and begins to get herself organized. Annie watches her for a moment, trying to figure out how best to proceed. There is a silence.)

This lake. Is it far?

ANNIE

Less than a mile. We've got all the time in the world.

(Jo takes the last sip from her soda and puts the can on the porch beside her. She glances back to make certain Gayle is gone, then continues casually, totally out of the blue.)

JO

How come Mama didn't want to leave me here alone with you?

ANNIE

Maybe she just wanted you to see the town.

JO

That's not much of a reason. Not for how she was acting.

ANNIE

Maybe because...your mother doesn't really approve of me.

JO

Honest?

ANNIE

Honest.

JO

Then we ought to get along great. She doesn't approve of me either.

ANNIE

'Course she does. Your mother loves you very much.

JO

She tell you that?

ANNIE

Not in so many words, but she's very concerned about you.

JO

That's not quite the same thing.

(Jo pulls cigarettes and a lighter from her pack.)

ANNIE

Honey, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to put those away. I'm very allergic to them.

JO

We're outside.

(She continues lighting up.)

ANNIE

Doesn't matter. It's not the smoke. It's watching someone I love slowly commit suicide.

JO

Oh, come on.

ANNIE

If you're not willing to do as I ask, you'd best go catch your mother.

JO

But...

ANNIE

If she's gone, just follow the road. Take the downhill turn every time you come to a fork. At the river, go downstream. Town's about six miles.

JO

Mama smokes.

ANNIE

That's no reason for you to. Put it out, or start walking.

(Annie pauses, waiting for Jo's decision.)

My house. My rules.

(Jo gives in and stubs the cigarette out on the steps, aggravated.)

Thank you. Now would you please throw that in the kitchen garbage, get the broom and sweep off the step?

JO

(Under her breath, almost.)

Christ.

ANNIE

It'll just take a second. Then we can relax—have some fun.

(Jo rises, picks up the cigarette butt and her empty soda can, and exits into the cabin. She probably closes the door a bit harder than necessary. Annie calls after her.)

The broom's in the corner, behind the fridge.

(Annie sighs and comments to herself quietly.)

First blood.

(Annie faces out over the overlook and grips her pentacle, performing a small ritual of concentration—a prayer for guidance. She takes the back of one hand in the other and, holding the pentacle between her breasts, speaks quietly, almost to herself.)

Praises be with the Goddess.

For what is to come, give me courage...wisdom...strength.

Courage...to look into her soul.

Wisdom...to understand her mind.

And strength...to do what must be done.

For what is to come, give...

(Annie hears Jo returning and breaks off.)

Blessed Be.

(Jo comes out with a handmade broom—a craft item—very much what one would expect a witch's broom to look like. She also has a fresh diet soda, the same brand as before. Her mood is sullen.)

JO

This the broom? Only one I saw.

ANNIE

A woman in town makes those. Lots more personality than the store-bought ones.

JO

(She quickly sweeps the step off.)

All right?

ANNIE

Thank you.

(Jo starts to return the broom. Annie stops her.)

Lean it on the wall for now.

(A short pause, as Annie decides how best to continue.)

...Gayle tells me you're doing very well with your art classes.

JO

(Not warming to the compliment.)

It's fun.

ANNIE

How'd you like to do me a big favor?

JO

What?

ANNIE

Friend of mine's an editor in Seattle. They're doing a chapbook of essays by local women writers. She wants to include one of mine.

JO

You're a writer?

ANNIE

I do a little, now and then.

JO

Mama never told me.

ANNIE

She doesn't much care for my work.

JO

How come?

ANNIE

She thinks my... "philosophy" is a little weird.

JO

Is it?

ANNIE

Probably. Here.

(Annie picks up a slim book on the table and tosses it to Jo.)

Decide for yourself.

JO

You wrote this whole book?

ANNIE

(Amused)

All hundred and twenty pages.

JO

Wow.

(She starts to open the book.)

ANNIE

Look at that some other time. I hate to watch people read my work.

(Jo closes the book and puts it down.)

Anyway, some idiot got the bright idea of including a "simple self-portrait" with each piece. "Just a sketch." I can't draw worth a damn. Would you do one for me?

JO

Why not? Got my stuff. We can do it when we get back.

ANNIE

I'd like to get it out of the way.

JO

Thought we were going to the lake.

ANNIE

We've got all the time in the world. I promise you, we'll go swimming.

JO

You keep your promises any better than Mama?

ANNIE

...Take a chance.

(Jo looks at her a moment, deciding whether she believes that. Then she picks up her sketch pad and opens it.)

Thank you. What should I do?

JO

(Her mood begins to improve.)

Sit down, get comfortable. I'll do some quickies. We'll see what happens.

ANNIE

You're the artist.

(Annie moves to the chair at her table and sits. As soon as Annie sits, Jo begins sketching rapidly, moving around, trying different angles, occasionally sipping her soda.)

JO

You may want to read or something. It gets pretty boring.

ANNIE

What's say I read you the piece the sketch goes with?

JO

Thought you didn't like people reading your stuff when you're around.

ANNIE

I'll be reading it to you. That's different.

JO

Whatever.

(Annie picks up a pair of reading glasses from the table and puts them on.)

ANNIE

These things. I hate getting old.

JO

You're not old.

ANNIE

Wish someone would tell my body that.

(She picks up the book, opens it, and finds the article.)

I wrote this...right after I moved up here. THE END, IN A THOUSAND WORDS OR LESS. Essays, stories, even a couple of pretty awful poems. Nothing over a thousand words. A brief catalog of...everything I considered wrong with the world at the time. It'd be a lot thicker today.

JO

Can't believe Mama never told me about you writing.

ANNIE

She did what she thought best.

JO

I'd want to read it, no matter what it's like. You wrote it.

ANNIE

You may not like it. Don't feel you have to read it, just because of me.

JO

I want to.

ANNIE

(She turns to the essay she plans to read.)

The piece they plan to use is called, "The Father, the Son, and the Almighty Dollar". It's about the damage being done by patriarchal attitudes and rampant materialism.

JO

(She didn't catch a word of that.)

...O-kay.

ANNIE

It's about how men, in their uncontrollable lust for money and power, have been ..."fucking" up the world.

JO

(Reacting to the word—looking at Annie suspiciously)

Were you listening to me and Mama?

ANNIE

You think I'd do something like that?

JO

Don't know. Would you?

ANNIE

(Escaping back into her article.)

"The male ego is a fragile monster. It is capable of incredible actions, and apparently unaware of its own potential—potential to accomplish monumental achievements, but also potential to reek catastrophic destruction. In his quest for money and power, man has..."

(Jo decides to shift position. She starts to move the soda on the table, but isn't paying attention, and it falls over, spilling on the table. Jo reacts strangely—overly concerned.)

JO

Oh damn! I'm sorry! I'll...

ANNIE

Don't worry. Got a towel right here.

(Still seated, she starts to clean up the mess with a cloth that was on the table. She notices something odd about the liquid. She sniffs the can...then sips. She looks at Jo.)

Was the first one wine too?

JO

(Full defenses up immediately. Nonchalantly.)

Nah. Just the refill.

ANNIE

Is this something you do often?

JO

What? Like that? No.

ANNIE

I mean alcohol.

JO

Some wine. A beer every now and then, with friends.

ANNIE

Does your mother know?

JO

Are you kidding?

ANNIE

(Holding out the can.)

Here, there's some left.

JO

...You mean it?

(After a second, she takes it.)

ANNIE

If you think it's worth hiding, lying—I won't stop you.

(Jo is silent. She picks up her sketching tools. A pause, as Annie decides how to proceed.)

You know it's wrong, don't you?

JO

It's nothing. Not getting drunk or anything.

ANNIE

That's not the point. Your mother had her first taste of wine before she could walk. I gave it to her.

JO

Mama doesn't share your "liberal" views. She'd have a fit.

ANNIE

She should.

JO

Why was what you did right and fine and good when you did it, but what I'm doing is so god-awful bad?

ANNIE

Because you're not being honest. Sneaking around. Hiding. That can will do a lot more damage to your character than it will to your liver.

JO

(Cynical and sarcastic—baiting Annie.)

Oh come on, Grandma.

ANNIE

(Sternly; aggravated)

I'll only warn you once. That's a dangerous tone to use with me. Oh hell. I'm in no mood to sit still.

(Annie rises and moves away from Jo.)

JO

We're not getting off to a very good start, are we?

ANNIE

No, we're not.

JO

(Flippant, not taking it seriously.)

Then let's start over.

ANNIE

(Turning to face Jo. Hard and direct.)

You can never start over.

(A pause, then she softens.)

The best you can do is figure out where you are and go on from there.

JO

That's intense.

ANNIE

(Smiling, her anger gone as fast as it came.)

It is, isn't it? Too intense for our first conversation. Let's get acquainted. Then we can fight. You get any sketching done, before...?

JO

A couple of scribbles. Nothing wonderful.

ANNIE

Let's see.

JO

(Crossing down to her with the pad.)

They're just to start. Nothing's finished.

ANNIE

Not bad. What can you do when you're sober?

(A reaction from Jo)

Nice, even with me as the subject.

JO

You're great to draw.

ANNIE

'Course I am. All the lines are already there.

JO

I didn't mean that. Your face has so much...character.

ANNIE

Years do that...and living.

(Selecting one she likes.)

See what you can do with this one.

JO

Okay. I'll play with it. See what happens.

ANNIE

Need me to sit back down?

JO

Unh-unh.

(She sits somewhere and begins to sketch.)

ANNIE

Then I'll stack some of this wood.

(She crosses to the woodpile near the front edge of the porch, under which she has been stacking the wood. She takes a low stool, sits and begins to stack; in no hurry but getting the job done. She looks at Jo, studying her. After a moment Jo continues.)

JO

You're gonna' tell Mama, aren't you?

ANNIE

She has a right to know.

JO

Know what she'll do?

(Annie looks up, expectantly.)

First there'll be a nice long lecture. Then she'll ground me. Whenever she's home for dinner we'll "talk about it". Our talks are very one-sided. She talks, I listen, supposedly. Then other things will come up and she'll drop it. Except, every time she gets mad at me, she'll ask if I'm drinking again.

ANNIE

Will you be?

Maybe. Probably. JO

Why? ANNIE

Because I want to. JO

Sounds like a first cousin of, "because I said so."
(She mimics the exaggerated way Jo said the phrase to Gayle earlier.) ANNIE

You were listening! JO

Sorry. Seemed like you two had something important going. Didn't want to interrupt. ANNIE

Just a fight. Nothing special. JO

You fight a lot? ANNIE

Good bit. JO

What about? ANNIE

You name it. Cigarettes, guys, clothes, school... JO

Control? Authority? ANNIE

...Yeah, that too, I guess. JO

Pretty normal, at your age. ANNIE

You and Mama do it? JO

(Emphatically) Oh, yes. ANNIE

Who won? JO

...Nobody. We both lost. Big time. ANNIE

How? JO

Things worked out...badly. Jo, whatever happens, trust that your mother loves you. She does. Things can get pretty ugly for a while—that'll pass. But only if you don't hurt each other too much now. ANNIE

Like you did? JO

Afraid so. ANNIE

What caused it? JO

I came up here. ANNIE

That's it? That's all you did? JO

Gayle was about your age. A little older. ANNIE

God, I'd have loved this place. JO

Your mother hated it. Called it, "the far end of the earth."
(A pause to collect her thoughts.) ANNIE
Jo...what do you know of your family? Your father—your grandparents?

Not much. My Dad's a truck driver down in California. He's got a family. JO

ANNIE

Alan was a good kid. Too young to be a father, but a nice guy. In some ways he was a lot like Mike.

(Jo reacts, not knowing what she's supposed to say about her mother's current relationship problems. Annie notices.)

Your mother told me about the separation. I was surprised. He seemed like a decent man.

JO

He's great.

ANNIE

I thought they had a chance. What happened?

JO

I don't know. It was so...incredible—like we were a real family. Last Christmas, you know what he got me? A computer.

(She pauses briefly, to figure out her thoughts.)

But—just before Christmas—something happened. They started arguing. Never around me, but at night, I'd hear them through the wall. Never enough to figure out what was going on—just...lots of anger.

ANNIE

Too bad. I liked him.

JO

Me too. I think Mama misses him. She keeps his picture, right next to you and Grampa.

ANNIE

Wish you'd known my Robert. He was...quite a guy.

JO

Mama said he died in Nam.

ANNIE

She was just a baby when he was killed. The army...

(Those two words convey her disgust with the military.)

But he loved it. Men can be so dumb. He was at Fort Belvoir when we met. Virginia. His first assignment after West Point. We were at Fort Lewis when he volunteered for his third tour in Viet Nam. Didn't even tell me till after he'd done it.

JO

What'd you do?

ANNIE

Threw a fit. Too late. "To make the rank, he had to volunteer, before it ended." He wanted me to be "proud" of him. So off he went, to play soldier.

JO

And he didn't come back.

ANNIE

I worked at a library near the base. One day a friend of ours, Major Johnston, walked in. He looked at me. I knew. Funny thing—I didn't cry. I got mad. Mad as hell. At the army; at Robert—his fault as much as anyone's. The next few years, I kept on working, and slowly pulled myself back together. Not quite the same agreeable little officer's wife, with my club luncheons and my Korean pearls, but able to survive.

(A pause, to decide how she wants to broach this subject.)

Then I met someone special. A teacher. Older than me, and much wiser. Family'd owned this land since people came to the valley, a hundred years ago. When Ed retired from the university we moved up here. Your mother was sixteen—didn't want to leave all her friends. But it was the best thing in the world for me. I'd never been so happy.

JO

What happened to him?

ANNIE

...Died. Little over a year ago.

JO

Mama never said anything about anybody after Grampa.

ANNIE

She didn't really care for Ed.

JO

How come?

ANNIE

(This is difficult.)

...Well, Jo...Ed and I...

JO

(A realization; super excited; cutting Annie off.)

You never married! You still use Grampa's name.

ANNIE

No, we never married.

JO

You just lived together! That's fantastic. I love it.

ANNIE

(This conversation has taken a wrong turn.)

What makes you say that?

JO

Mama's always giving me so much grief about the guy I go out with. Staying out too late; all that garbage. She's petrified I'll screw up, get pregnant. But you... wow.

ANNIE

That was different. I was grown; been married before. If you get pregnant, it could wreck your whole life.

JO

Haven't you ever heard of abortions?

ANNIE

(Not happy with that comment)

You think that's an easy solution? You get pregnant, you don't want it, you have an abortion? It's not that simple.

JO

You don't think it's right?

ANNIE

When a woman is pregnant with a child she doesn't want, there is no "right" solution.

JO

One of my friends had one. Didn't bother her.

ANNIE

Then there was something wrong with her already! Merciful Mother. Doesn't anyone think anymore? Doesn't anyone feel? We're destroying everything we've built, and nobody cares about anything but themselves.

(A pause. Jo is silent. Annie regains her composure.)

Sorry. I'm not mad at you. It's just that... Ed taught me so much. So much about how stupidly we all live.

(Jo doesn't respond to that and Annie has had her say, so she waits to see what Jo comes up with. There is a silence, then Jo starts, looking for a subject for conversation.)

JO

This Ed; what was he like?

ANNIE

Special.

JO

How?

ANNIE

We had so much in common. Books; a love of nature; a common...outlook on life.

(A chuckle at the memory)

Not when we met, but Ed was very convincing. Turned my whole world around. Gave me a new way of...seeing life, including some fairly unusual ideas.

JO

Such as?

ANNIE

What would you say if I told you I was a Witch?

JO

(Taking it as a joke)

And that's the broom you fly around on when the moon's full.

ANNIE

I'm serious. I'm a Witch; a Pagan Witch.

JO

Oh, Gran, who do you think you're trying to...? ...Really?

ANNIE

Cross my heart and hope to die, which is far more serious than most people think.

(Jo is thrown for a loop. She's got lots of questions, but can't decide where to start. She doesn't want to hurt Annie's feelings, or to sound stupid. She starts several times to ask something. Annie can't help chuckling.)

Sorry, I shouldn't be laughing, but...

(Another laugh, then to herself angrily)

Oh, stop it.

(She finally manages to stop laughing, and then continues.)

When you picture a Witch, what do you think of?

(Jo is silent—angry at being laughed at.)

An old crone? Big nose? With a wart? Black cape, flying around on a broom, turning kids into toad frogs?

JO

...I guess.

ANNIE

That's the Disney version, which unfortunately seems to be the best known. 'Course no one believes in Witches anymore. But we do exist, blessed be the Goddess.

JO

The Goddess?

ANNIE

The Earth Mother—Gaia. Hecate, Isis, Erda, the Goddess of the Moon.

JO

Not sure I understand what you're talking about.

ANNIE

I'm not surprised. It took me years, and I had an excellent teacher.

JO

If you're a witch...what does that mean? What do you do? What do you...believe in?

ANNIE

Intelligence, common sense, consideration. Doing my bit to keep this little planet from coming apart at the seams. Christians don't have an exclusive on the Golden Rule.

JO

Is that what all Witches believe?

ANNIE

Can't speak for "all" of anybody. But I believe I fit in with...mainstream Pagan philosophy, if there is such a thing.

(A pause to collect herself, then she dives in.)

...Jo, are you a Christian?

JO

I'm not much on that stuff. Mike took me to his Mom's church sometimes. Wanted me to know it was there. When he left, that was that. Mama's so worn out by Sunday, she's never up before noon. Then she has to work.

ANNIE

She like real estate that much?

JO

Unh-unh. Says she has to, or they'll get somebody who'll...

(Imitating Gayle's sarcastic version of her boss)

"devote themselves more completely to the goals of the team."

ANNIE

Afraid I'd have to tell 'em where to get off.

(Back to her subject)

I was raised a Christian. All I knew. Everything was the will of God. When Robert died, it was my duty to go on with my life—endure till time to join him in Heaven for eternal bliss. It wasn't enough. But what was the alternative? Atheism?

JO

How about Allah, or Buddha?

ANNIE

(Pleasantly surprised by Jo's knowledge and interest)

What do you know of them?

JO

Not a lot.

(Reaching for something funny)

But I do read, sometimes, when there's nothing on TV.

ANNIE

I never thought of them. Baptists aren't too big on "alternative religions." It's either their way, or else.

JO

(That gets a chuckle from Jo)

What's all this got to do with you being a Witch?

ANNIE

Sorry. If I stray too far off the subject, you pull me back. Okay?

JO

Okay.

ANNIE

Ed helped me work through my questions. Why did God let Robert die? If everything is the will of God, why's the world so screwed up? Eventually you get around to the biggie: Why do I believe in God? "Because the Bible tells me so?" It all comes down to what you've been taught. It's all faith; but not faith in God—faith in your teachers.

JO

You said keep you on track. You still on it?

ANNIE

Before Yahweh—the Hebrew God of the Bible—took center stage and kicked the others off their pedestals, there were lots of Gods. And each had followers.

JO

Like Jupiter and Mars and all those guys?

ANNIE

You know your mythology?

JO

TV's pretty lousy these days.

ANNIE

Tell you a secret: The difference between a mythological God and a real one is how many sheep are in the flock.

JO

That's funny.

ANNIE

Not when you think about it. Now Yahweh—if we had to choose from all the Gods back then, we could have done better. He was a desert war God—stern, demanding, intolerant, cruel...male

(She chuckles)

Just what the doctor ordered for a tribe of desert nomads. But today? The last thing we need is a war God.

JO

I thought Christ came along and changed all that.

ANNIE

You have been reading.

JO

Some.

ANNIE

Lots more than I had at your age.

JO

But didn't he?

ANNIE

Keep on reading, figure that one on your own.

JO

Sounds like a cop out.

ANNIE

Maybe. Maybe not. Either way it's ancient history. I'm worried about today. Don't get me wrong, Jo. Christianity has some great things going for it. The Golden Rule...

JO

"Do unto others?"

ANNIE

That's morality enough for anyone. Then there's: "Judge not, lest ye be judged." The problem is: Too many Christians seem to have turned that one into: "Judge not, unless you're right." And since the Bible proves they're right... (A chuckle) Wish I had a dime for everyone who claims to live by a book they never bothered to read.

(A brief pause as she looks to see Jo's reaction.)

Jo, you have to understand—these are my beliefs. Lots of people don't agree with me. That's fine, as long as they've thought about what they claim to believe. Most folks don't. They rush through life with their brain in neutral. Now I'm your grandmother, but that doesn't make me right. You must decide for yourself what you believe. Promise me you will.

JO

...Okay.

ANNIE

Sound crazy to you, don't I?

JO

No.

ANNIE

Be honest.

JO

(With a grin)

Maybe a little strange.

ANNIE

That's better. Skepticism is an important survival skill. Course all this isn't something I talk about too much. With some of your right-wing fanatics, the will of God can be downright vindictive.

JO

Why don't you turn 'em into toad frogs and be done with it?

ANNIE

If I could, I might, so I suppose it's best I can't. Pagan magic doesn't work that way.

JO

Then how does it work?

ANNIE

Not like people think. Most folks lump magic in with demons and devils—the "Black, Satanic Arts." It's more basic psychology. Common sense. The things I do—my spells, the rituals—they're tools to focus concentration.

JO

I want a spell that'll get Mama the million bucks she's always talking about.

ANNIE

It doesn't work on things like that. My magic doesn't anyway.

JO

What good is it then?

ANNIE

For me, very good. I'd be a different person without it. And I sort of like who I am, the life I live, the world around me—at least the immediate world. An awful lot of folks can't say that.

JO

That's for sure.

ANNIE

Can you?

JO

Guess so. Mostly anyhow.

ANNIE

There's nothing about yourself you'd change? What about the smoking?

JO

It's just a habit. Nothing important.

ANNIE

(With something of an edge in her voice)

A very deadly "nothing important." Once you've watched someone you love die a long and miserable death from lung cancer, or emphysema—like Ed did—you realize that little "nothing important" is something you can damn well live without.

(Jo clams up, becoming defensive again, as she does whenever she feels she's being lectured at. Annie crosses to the table and picks up a box of kitchen matches.)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Got a ritual. I want you to try it, see how it feels. You'll need wooden matches, like these. When you go for a cigarette, take a match and strike it, but don't light up.

(She strikes the match and focuses on the flame. Note: Do not hold the match straight up. It goes out.)

Watch the flame. Concentrate on the fire as it burns down the match. Think of the flame as your life, the energy of your being. Right now you think you'll live forever, but you won't. Watch the fire, watch it burn. For that space of time, think how each cigarette will cut at least that much time off your allotted hours on this earth.

JO

Jesus...

(She blows out the match.)

ANNIE

Then, if you still want to, light up. That's a ritual. It makes you take time to think. If it works, it's done some good—changed your life for the better. That's my magic.

JO

I'd rather have the million bucks.

ANNIE

Why?

JO

(To her way of thinking that's a very stupid question.)

So I could get the good things; not have to worry about stuff.

ANNIE

Magic can do that for you, help you do it yourself.

JO

You just said it couldn't.

ANNIE

I said I couldn't whip up a pile of money. Good things, no worries, that's another matter. Not easy, but possible, especially with someone like you.

JO

Why "especially" me?

ANNIE

You're young, bright—a good combination. Set your mind to it, there's nothing you can't do.

JO

Sounds like one of Mama's pep talks. If I'd just pull up my grades; get in a good college; do this; do that—I could do anything. First woman president of the United States.

ANNIE

Why not?

JO

Why?

ANNIE

(She rises and starts toward the fence.)

Come here. Let me show you something.

(Jo joins her, looking out over the valley—the audience.)

Look out there. What do you see?

JO

(Not sure what she's supposed to say.)

...Mountains...trees...the river...the sky.

ANNIE

Everything you see is yours. It doesn't "belong" to you, but it's yours all the same. Your responsibility—your treasure. These days too many people only think of what they can steal from Old Mother Earth. What they can take and use...sell and destroy. If they're not careful, one of these mornings She'll say to hell with us all. She'll shrug, do something drastic, or more likely just let all the stupid things we've been doing for so long catch up with us. That'll be the end of it. Some of us are working to push that morning as far off into the future as we can. Working with the only thing we've got: ourselves.

(On a lighter note)

A woman president might be just what Old Mother Earth needs. Be nice to have someone on Her side in the White House for a change.

(Serious again)

Your mind is the only thing of value that is yours alone. Use it.

(A pause for that to sink in, and then she breaks the mood.)

Now, the lake. Peanut butter sandwiches? Iced tea?

JO

Sounds great.

ANNIE

Only take a minute. Why don't you wait out here? Enjoy the sun.

JO

Okay.

(Annie starts to the house. Jo takes Annie's book, sits in the chair with her back to the house, opens the book, and begins to browse. At the door Annie pauses and looks back at Jo.)

ANNIE

(Clasping her pentacle with one hand, she smiles to herself, with a small affirmative nod...)

Blessed Be.

(Jo continues reading, oblivious of Annie's actions. Annie watches Jo as the lights fade to black.)

End of Act I