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The Candelabra

Katie
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Scene: *Minimal setting, there are three distinct areas: Christmas, the hospital, and a reflective space. Christmas is located in upper stage left, and there is a half-decorated tree with few lights. The hospital is stage right; it is a waiting room, a few chairs facing toward the audience. A florescent light is suspended above the area; the reflective space is center stage without any adornment. At the start, stage should be dark except for a few lights on the tree.*

(GIRL is center stage, standing as lights, except the fluorescents, gradually grow.)

GIRL:

(Happily, but with a sense of nostalgia.)

My sock-monkey slippers always remind me of my grandma, it was one of the last gifts she gave me, during what I later would call the *(with mocking sarcasm, saunters to upper left)* “Tacktacular” Christmas of two-thousand eight. My other gift that year was a candelabra from Better Homes and Gardens with electrical tea-lights.

(Makes a hand gesture, as if to show how “special” it is. GIRL moves candelabra from behind tree, it is lit.)

“So you’ll never be in the dark,” she had said. I hated the thing. It had iron leaves all *(as if searching for the right word, twists and gestures with hands)* twisted and looking for exposure. Mom had laughed at it—she was drunk, Christmas reminded her of all the mistakes she had made the main one being me. I hated it until Grandma died.

(Becoming serious, with a sense of verging panic, GIRL goes quickly to right. As she walks the florescent light buzzes on. She moves one of the waiting room chairs as if it is at the side of a bed.)

She kept lifting her already dead hands to the oxygen mask, trying to tear it off. The mask looked like it was swallowing her already swollen face. The cousins and I took turns holding her hand down *(reaches out)* and pressing cool washcloths to her body. We had to wait, Jake might get emergency leave.

(Takes a deep breath, a pause, as if remembering her original purpose, starts to move toward center stage, but doesn't quite get there.)

The fake leaves on the candelabra weren't very sturdy. They bent when I moved them out of storage, into my room.

(Regressing, slight exhale, eyes move toward ceiling, between center and right.)

I didn't know how bad it was until the cousins got there. I saw it on their faces—all of a sudden red and blotchy. I knew it wasn't the light that made them look that way.

Their hands flew up to cover their mouths *(does the movement)* and they turned toward each other for comfort.

(Turns toward right, there is no one there. Pauses, turns back to audience.)

I held her hand down while they grieved.

(Florescent light dims, GIRL overcompensates, moves toward upper left, sits by tree, reaches to touch the candelabra but stops.)

She *(with emphasis)* always made the same desserts at Christmas: *(gestures, counts them off with hands)* Buckeyes, peanut butter pie, pretzels with Rollo candies on top, and, *(gestures)* not a dessert but it was still always there, pimento and cheese sandwiches. One of the cousins took her peanut butter pie recipe right out of the big book after she died so *(mockingly, as if quoting someone important)* “the tradition could live on.” I noticed how she didn't take the recipe for pimento and cheese sandwiches.

(Touches candelabra as if by instinct, but quickly draws away. Pause, walks in silence to right as florescent comes on.)

The hospital staff forced us to go to this waiting room, *(stares at chairs, but doesn't sit)* instead of sitting outside her door in the hallway.

(Looks up, circles around the chairs, as if avoiding them.)

The cousins and I kept walking out though. We we're all adults, we knew what was best. When they told us she died *(shakily)* we were a howling mass.

(Finally sits, looks up briefly at florescent light.)

They lured us back into a waiting room (this one was nicer), with bags of chips, cookies, soda, and slices of rich chocolate cake. One of the nurses remarked, to a family friend that was there, that *that* was how she got her kids to behave.

(Reflecting, as if realizing wisdom.)

Bribe them with food.

(Gets up suddenly, briskly moves toward center stage.)

I used the candelabra as a table decoration, when I made Monte Christos for the funeral dinner. The ham kept sinking over the side of the bread onto the hot pan, making *(makes flicking hand gesture)* pops and crackling in the grease. It

was one of her favorite recipes. I was outside the room when mom and the uncles decided to take the mask away.

(Getting stressed, pacing, doubling back once or twice before reaching right.)

I took a double dose of my anxiety medication, my hands shook as they neared my mouth I offered some of it to the cousins. They didn't partake.

(Shrugs, as if it was their loss.)

(Back to center, genuine happiness.)

Grandma was a great cook. Taught me how. While the cousins tried to be boys for grandpa, *(dismissive)* driving the 4-wheelers and snowmobiles, I stayed in the kitchen and learned to cook from her. Mainly desserts. After it was over we went into the room one by one to say goodbye.

I didn't want to go, I didn't want to see. But they said she looked peaceful, more peaceful than she had in years. She didn't even look sick anymore.

(Looks off to the side toward right but doesn't move. There is a sense of paralysis. Pause, comes back.)

I know this is cliché, *(laughs, as to self, moves to upper-left)* but she always wore *(with emphasis)* horrible Christmas sweaters. Bright red with decorated trees and miniature bells, Santa's edged out in gold glitter puffy paint, sequined angels, *(pauses, like it's unbelievable)* even matching earrings. She had a tacky sweater for every occasion. We've decided to do a "tacky sweater Christmas" in her honor this year.

(Shift, walks to right.)

If we actually decide to have it at all.

(Sits in "bedside" chair, speaks to bed.)

Her lips were blue. That's all I remember about my goodbye to her.

(Becomes more frantic.)

I was panicked because her lips were blue, and lips aren't supposed to be that color blue. They aren't supposed to be blue at all. I kept waiting for her hands to move, so that way I could hold them down. I tried to run out of the room but I couldn't. They were blocking the door, and her lips were blue.

(Finally looks up toward audience.)

And that used to be my favorite color.

(Starts to calm down, walks as trying to find peace to center.)

I wanted to paint my room blue, but it didn't go with the mantle where the candelabra would later sit, complete with electric tea-lights. It still has the tag on it, I was going to take it back, but I never had the time.

(Looks down for a slight moment.)

I wasn't sure what to say the second to last time I went in her room *(slowly, begrudgingly, as if not wanting to relive this moment, GIRL moves to right, stands by "bedside" chair)* to say goodbye. I had put on too much chapstick, Burt's Bees, I remember *(touches lips self-consciously, remembering)* and so when I kissed her forehead it felt sticky.

(Moves back, as if fleeing, to center, heartbreakingly.)

She used to play a game called "makeup" to get me to go to sleep. We'd pretend that she was a beautician and I was a movie starlet.

(Poses.)

And she'd get me ready for the big premiere.

(As she describes the game, mimes putting on makeup: pressing on blush, smearing on lipstick, smoothing eyebrows, etc.)

She'd trace out my features with her hands, as if she was putting makeup on me. I'd always ask her the colors, now I know that even they were tacky, Candy-Apple red, Fire Engine red, charcoal.

(As if coming to a long-known realization.)

Lots of red.

(Pause.)

I got there the night before the cousins did.

(Right.)

She was still in the ER and not in the regular rooms, her nurse tried to take her dentures out. She was still conscious then, and tried to bite his hands. We promised to give her teeth back. We never did.

(Forcing positivity, moves to upper left.)

She was so proud when she gave me the candelabra. I wasn't allowed candles in my apartment, so she was pleased when she found the tea-lights. She was so sure that I'd like them.

(Lets her guard down.)

Christmas was always a disappointment for me.

(Walks away carrying the candelabra, hunched over to center. She sets the candelabra down, straightens up and forces herself to go on, nostalgic.)

When she'd cook, she'd hum Elvis under her breath—her favorite. I only knew the choruses *(sound effects: Elvis's "Always on my Mind" plays slowly in the background)* and I'd sing them as I stirred ingredients with my hands *(mimes the mixing movement)* in that green plastic bowl she always used.

(Stops, mournfully.)